

What Matters Most Is What Lasts Longest
M. Russell Ballard, Nov. 2005

1. Public opinion surveys indicate that people everywhere in the world generally consider the family as the highest priority; yet in recent years the broader culture seems to ignore or misdefine the family. Consider some of the changes of the past decade
2. Many larger national and international institutions that used to support and strengthen families now try to supplant and even sabotage the very families they were created to serve
3. In the name of “tolerance,” the definition of family has been expanded beyond recognition to the point that “family” can be any individuals of any gender who live together with or without commitment or children or attention to consequence.
4. Rampant materialism and selfishness delude many into thinking that families, and especially children, are a burden and a financial millstone that will hold them back rather than a sacred privilege that will teach them to become more like God....
5. The world needs to know what the proclamation teaches, because the family is the basic unit of society, of the economy, of our culture, and of our government. And as Latter-day Saints know, the family will also be the basic unit in the celestial kingdom.
6. In the Church, our belief in the overriding importance of families is rooted in restored doctrine. We know of the sanctity of families in both directions of our eternal existence. We know that before this life we lived with our Heavenly Father as part of His family, and we know that family relationships can endure beyond death.
7. If we live and act upon this knowledge, we will attract the world to us. Parents who place a high priority on their families will gravitate to the Church because it offers the family structure, values, doctrine, and eternal perspective that they seek and cannot find elsewhere.
8. Our family-centered perspective should make Latter-day Saints strive to be the best parents in the world. It should give us enormous respect for our children, who truly are our spiritual siblings, and it should cause us to devote whatever time is necessary to strengthen our families. Indeed, nothing is more critically connected to happiness—both our own and that of our children—than how well we love and support one another within the family.
9. President Harold B. Lee spoke of the Church as a crucial “scaffolding” that helps build the individual and the family (see Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 107). The Church is the kingdom of God on earth, but in the kingdom of heaven, families will be both the source of our eternal progress and joy and the order of our Heavenly Father. As we are often reminded, we will be released one day from our Church callings; but if we are worthy, we will never be released from our family relationships.
10. Joseph F. Smith said: “There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home, and every effort made to sanctify and preserve its influence is uplifting to those who toil and sacrifice for its establishment. Men and women often seek to substitute some other life for that of the home; they would make themselves believe that the home means restraint; that the highest liberty is the fullest opportunity to move about at will. There is no happiness without service, and there is no service greater than that which converts the home into a divine institution, and which promotes and preserves family life” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 382).
11. Now, one may ask, How do we protect and preserve and strengthen our homes and families in a world pulling so hard in opposite directions? Let me make three simple suggestions:
12. Be consistent in holding daily family prayer and weekly family home evenings. Both of these invite the Lord’s Spirit, which provides the help and power we need as parents and family leaders. The Church curriculum and magazines have many good ideas for family home evening. Also consider holding a family testimony meeting where parents and children can express their beliefs and feelings to each other in a private and personal setting.
13. Teach the gospel and basic values in your home. Establish a love for reading the scriptures together. Too many of our parents are abdicating this responsibility to the Church. While seminary, auxiliaries, and priesthood quorums are important as a supplement to parental gospel instruction, the main responsibility rests in the home. You might want to choose one gospel subject or a family value and then watch for opportunities to teach it. Be wise and do not involve children or yourselves in so many activities out of the home that you are so busy that the Spirit of the Lord cannot be recognized or felt in giving you the promised guidance for yourself and your family.
14. Create meaningful family bonds that give your children an identity stronger than what they can find with their peer group or at school or anyplace else. This can be done through family traditions for birthdays, for holidays, for dinnertime, and for Sundays. It can also be done through family policies and rules with natural and well-understood consequences. Have a simple family economy where children have specific chores or household duties and receive praise or other rewards commensurate to how well they do. Teach them the importance of avoiding debt and of earning, saving, and wisely spending money. Help them learn responsibility for their own temporal and spiritual self-reliance.
15. In today’s world, where Satan’s aggression against the family is so prevalent, parents must do all they can to fortify and defend their families. But their efforts may not be enough. Our most basic institution of family desperately needs help and support from the extended family and the public institutions that surround us. Brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins can make a powerful difference in the lives of children. Remember that the expression of love and encouragement from an extended family member will often provide the right influence and help a child at a critical time.