

Teach the Children

SHARON G. SAMUELSON

We are grateful to be with you as we begin a new fall semester together. We hope that the summer has been as good for you as it has been for us.

The year 2008 has been very special for our family. Since the end of April we have added four new grandchildren, who, frankly, have been the focus of our thoughts and prayers. While absolutely wonderful in the broad sense, we have had a few challenges and concerns that accompany the perilous adventure of our mortal experiences.

Although I will share a little about our situation, I want to emphasize what a great blessing it has been for us to have these four little ones born into the families of three of our children. Our situation is not unlike many of yours: A few of you might already know—and a few of you will yet learn—that children don't always come when you put in the order. Often there is significant disappointment, frustration, and even grief. We have been very fortunate, but we recognize that there are many, including some in our own community, who have not and will not have the blessing of children in this life.

Happily, the scriptures and prophets have promised that if we do our very best in keeping our covenants and the commandments, all

of the blessings Heavenly Father has promised His children will be made available to us eventually, including intact families, even if they are not experienced in this life.

In late April, twins were born to our elder daughter, Becki, and her husband, David. This was a special blessing, because these two went through their entire BYU experience unable to have children. Finally, with some special help, they had a beautiful little girl born 18 months before the birth of their twins. These two little ones were so anxious to begin their mortal sojourn that they arrived at 30 weeks. These precious premature babies spent a couple of months in the newborn intensive care unit of their local hospital, and after a number of slightly frightening adventures are now home and doing well.

The births of the other two grandchildren were less eventful in terms of timing and challenges, but all are loved by their parents, older siblings, and especially their grandparents! I mention these personal accounts because they have provoked not only tender feelings of love and gratitude but also concerns, prayers, and

Sharon G. Samuelson, wife of BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson, delivered this devotional address on 9 September 2008.

considerations about our grandchildren’s lives and particularly about our responsibilities to them.

We pray that at some point in the not-too-distant future all of you will experience the joy and growth that come from being parents and that eventually you will also have the tremendous blessings we now enjoy as grandparents. In that spirit I would like to share with you some of my reflections with the hope and faith that they will be of some benefit to you as you think about your exciting futures.

First, I am now able to bear a strong testimony that children, in fact, “are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3; see also “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102). What is meant by “an heritage”? It is something that comes as the result of inheritance or especially a unique gift, tradition, or responsibility. Since we understand that we are all, including our biological babies and children, spiritual progeny of our Heavenly Father, we also must understand that He shares in the responsibility to love, nurture, teach, protect, and encourage His own most precious possessions: His literal spirit children.

Thus, while we commonly think of children born or adopted into our families as our own, we need to consider carefully this fundamental truth: We are really agents of God the Father in providing these precious little ones the very best mortal experiences possible. This means, of course, that there is much more to our parenting responsibility than feeding, clothing, and making sure that proper dental and medical care are provided. And while music, dance, athletic, and other lessons and experiences are desirable in moderation—and when possible and practical—there is still much more that is expected and required.

Let me share some of these needs of our little ones and the resultant responsibilities of parents that deserve our very best attention. All might be found under the heading “Teach the Children.”

In the first chapter of the book of Mosiah, we find an account of the parenting efforts of King Benjamin with his three sons. Let me share part of it with you as I focus on verses 2 through 7:

And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord.

And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief. . . .

O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may

profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers. [Mosiah 1:2–7]

I believe this is a wonderful summary of what we as parents, grandparents, and teachers of children and young people need to do. As I conclude, let me refer again to six parenting guidelines from King Benjamin.

First, he saw that his children were properly educated in language, reading, and the world around them.

Second, he saw that his sons were taught about the prophecies and teachings of the prophets of God.

Third, he not only taught these youngsters from the scriptures but also taught them about the scriptures and why they are vital and necessary for everyone.

Fourth, he not only consciously and thoroughly taught them about these truths but also had confidence that they, in turn, would be able to teach their children—his grandchildren—the same truths.

Fifth, he bore strong, direct, and specific testimony of the truthfulness of the things he taught them.

And sixth, he taught them the importance of keeping the commandments of God so that they might receive the special blessings Heavenly Father had in store for them.

I believe this is a wonderful and applicable pattern for all of us to follow as we prepare to teach our children, whether we have them now or whether that remarkable blessing and responsibility comes to us in the future.

I have a testimony that assisting our Father in Heaven in teaching children to love and serve the Lord is one of the most important blessings and responsibilities He has given us. The Savior loved and taught the little children, and we are to follow His example. The adversary recognizes the power in good families and is attacking them. I am confident that each of you, whether a parent at this point or not, can and must teach your children, your siblings, and other children with whom you have contact to walk uprightly before the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.