

NURTURING CHILDREN

by Mavis Stevenson

When we play a game, or write a talk, accept a calling or take on employment, that task is easier and we can accomplish that task with confidence if we understand what will be expected of us, if we know the rules that we are going to play by, and the guidelines that will apply to the situation. The Lord, through his Prophet and the leaders of the church have given us a clear guideline and warned us of the consequences that will follow, both for good and ill concerning the Family.

To issue "A Proclamation To the World" is a very bold thing to do. When I first read through this proclamation, I thought this is really great, then I really didn't think much more about it until I was asked to speak to you this evening. This past week as I read and reread the proclamation and put some time into pondering its significance I have learned a few things and have reaffirmed many principles that need to be apart of my life. I would like to quote a few select sentences from the Proclamation. " Husband and Wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives - mothers and fathers - will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities." It is specifically mentioned, and I quote "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children." Wow, there is a lot of information and so pretty heavy obligations outlined in those last few sentences. I would like to take just the last sentence, concerning Mothers and nurturing and spend the next few minutes addressing that subject. After having read that sentence I thought, I know about nurturing, it is the heart of motherhood and that is the most fun part of being a mother, it requires a huge unselfishness, a truly Christlike attitude toward all, specifically our spouse and children. It is the basic instinct, the feeling part of motherhood.

Then I wondered if what I felt about nurturing was really what nurturing was all about and if I could convey that meaning, that feeling to someone else. So I started with the obvious, the dictionary, a scholarly place to start, right?, well ... Here is what I found. Nurture- the noun form, means warm and affectionate physical and emotional support and care. Then moving on to the verb - to nurture, which means to feed and protect or support and encourage. 2. to bring up; train; educate. Those descriptive words just defined what motherhood is all about.

And that is what we should spend the majority of our time doing. These are the tasks that we can not allow ourselves to become too busy or too distracted to accomplish.

If we start with the part of the definition of nurture, which is to feed. I think that family breakfasts and dinners should be the norm and not the exception. I know that during some seasons in our lives it seems impossible. But I also know that sometimes we can drift into the habit of eating catch as catch can, or whatever and we miss out on this wonderful time together. Sometimes it takes a concentrated effort to eat meals together but the time together is well worth

the effort. As we feed our bodies we can hear the stories of the day. We can encourage and receive encouragement from the whole family. I have some wonderful memories of my father sharing stories from his mission, and his father and mother's missions. And stories about he and his brothers' service in the military and how his sisters all worked to help the boys pay for their missions. Stories about how neighbors helped and lessons learned from caring neighbors when my father's father died and stories about David O McKay and other church leaders who visited the ancestral home that I grew up in. This time spent together is the developing of roots in growing a strong family unit.

Another part of nurturing is to teach, to train, to bring up.

Albert Schweitzer said "There are only three ways to teach a child. The first is by example. The second is by example. The third is by example." We are all probably familiar with the article by Dorothy Law Nolte, titled Children Learn What they live. A few excerpts "If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn, if a child lives with praise, he learns to be appreciative, If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself, If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those about him, I think it's a good idea now and then to review what kind of an example we are setting for our children. We must live the way we teach. Our every act must be a sermon to our children. Melvin J. Ballard said, "The greatest sermon any of us will ever preach will be the sermon of our lives." The Savior set the pattern when he said, "Come, follow me...." In Palestine, visitors are impressed when they notice that there the shepherd walks ahead of his flock.

As parents we are busy with the cares of supporting and caring for a family, and sometimes don't have all the time we would like to teach our children. But teaching through example requires no time. It takes no longer to be a good example than to be a poor one. Another attribute of example is that we don't influence just one, but many. A story is told about a stranger traveling through a dense London fog was unable to find his way back to his hotel. He met a young boy and said, "Show me the way back to my hotel and I'll give you a shilling." The young boy replied, "follow me and my light, sir, I know my way well." Following the steady beam of the boy's light, they walked single file to the hotel. "Thank you," said the traveler, Here is your coin. You've earned it." And here is my coin, said the second voice from the darkness, Here is mine, too, said a third person, "I saw your light and believed you knew where you were going."

President David O. McKay said: If I were asked to name the world's greatest need, I should say unhesitatingly, wise mothers." A mother must have the patience, the perseverance, and the know-how to bring a tiny baby to a full expression of its talents and capabilities. I think that sounds like a pretty tall order. Mrs. Klea Worsley a counseling psychologist has said, "even if you haven't read the books and don't know all the rules - even if you make every blunder - your children will probably come through it all right if you love them and they feel that love. She says the two most important keys to handling children are to love and to listen. (That nurturing thing) Mrs. Dorothy Corkville Briggs a child guidance author has said, "raising children is the most important job in the world." and that enough evidence has been gathered to give a success formula: If your child has high self-esteem, he has it made." A caring parent, a nurturing parent must help a child to a firm and whole hearted belief in himself (of course not to be equated with conceit, which is but a whitewash to cover low self-esteem) "Strong self-respect is based on two main convictions: 1st -I am lovable. I matter and have value because I exist. and 2nd I am

worthwhile. I can handle myself and my environment with competence. I know I have something to offer others. Countless authorities on child guidance have found that self-esteem effects the child's stability, integrity and his creativity. It is the most precious gift a parent can give his child, because it is the mainspring that slates every child for success or failure as a human being."

There are so many things that need to be taught, obedience and the why, the reasons behind the law. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "Teach people correct principles and then they can govern themselves." Isn't that what we want for our children, to be happy, confident adults who are able to make wise decisions based on gospel principles. Therefore we must teach them gospel principles. Children can very easily feel the spirit. Our attitudes will greatly influence our children and what they will learn during home evening, sacrament meeting, seminary or any of the other meetings they might attend. When we take the spirit to a meeting and seek to learn, much will be accomplished. When I have been involved primary I have observed children who are a part of what is happening, they are involved. Then there are other children who are putting in their time, and counting the minutes until they will be released, they have a vague idea of the subject that was covered but can give no details and are unable to share a feeling about the meeting they have just attended. As parents our lives must be gospel centered if we expect to pass on a gospel centered legacy to our children. We must give our children all the spiritual nourishment we can so that they can be strong when hard times come along. And hard times come in every ones life at one time or another.

I just wanted to throw in this one thought about the physical nurturing of a child that relates to their emotional and trust development. Babies and children need to be held and loved, carried, sung to and talked to, played peek a boo with and read to. There are many little mothers helpers on the market today made of molded plastic. I think a baby should spend more time in his mothers arms than he does in the infant carrier, the car seat, the stroller, the baby swing in front of the TV or the little bouncing chair that hangs from the door frame. Babies, Children and teens need our attention, our time and lots of hugs and reassurance of our love for them.

If we have never had children, or when our own children are grown, the nurturing goes on. There are grandchildren who need that nurturing, children in our ward who need our love and nurturing, there are many children who are in desperate need of someone to recognize them and say a kind word to them. We as mothers, we as followers of Christ have this wonderful privilege to nurture children and our fellow earthlings. I am thankful for the gospel of Jesus Christ and for my membership in his church. For the principles of the gospel that guide me each day in the decisions I make and the rules that I live by. I bear testimony that God lives and loves each one of us. I am thankful for the opportunity to be a mother and to have the opportunity to learn the skills of nurturing. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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