

Families Anchored in the Scriptures

Cheryl C. Lant

This address was given Friday, May 5, 2006, at the BYU Women's Conference

© 2006 by Brigham Young University Women's Conference. All rights reserved

For further information write:
BYU Women's Conference
352 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

One of the most awesome experiences I have ever had was when my first child was placed in my arms. I remember feeling the weight, the warmth, and the dampness of that tiny body. I remember thinking that there had never been a more beautiful little girl. And I remember the wonder and awe of parenthood.

Since that time—and eight more babies—I have come to realize that those first moments of joy and excitement have gotten me into a lot of trouble. Parenthood, once started, never goes away. And it takes a lot of work.

Seriously, there is nothing more beautiful or wonderful than being part of a family. And there is no greater responsibility. Families are at the core of our Heavenly Father's plan. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states, "The family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."¹

Our Heavenly Father intended for families to be eternal, as the proclamation explains: "The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally."

Families, as defined by our Heavenly Father, bring the greatest blessings of heaven. But along with those blessings come great responsibilities. The proclamation states, "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."

These are the words of our latter-day prophets. They are founded in the scriptures.

In Doctrine and Covenants 93:40 we read: “But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.”

Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28:

“And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

“For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized.

“And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands.

“And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.”

This scripture goes on to list other things we must teach our children, including Sabbath day observance, hard work, and avoiding materialism² In fact, as we study the scriptures, we find them replete with admonitions to parents to teach their children. The scriptures give us those principles that we are to teach. They are the word of God, and we are responsible to teach from them.

Now, Satan wants to gain power over our children and our families. In Doctrine and Covenants 78:10 we read: “Satan seeketh to turn their hearts away from the truth, that they become blinded and understand not the things which are prepared for them.”

But the scriptures can protect us from Satan if we know them and if we use them. In Mosiah 1:5, King Benjamin testifies of the importance of teaching our children out of the scriptures: “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, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.”

Isn't it interesting that he says our traditions can lead us astray if we do not read and follow the teachings in the scriptures? Do we have any traditions in our homes and families that would draw our children away from the truth rather than towards it? Do we do anything that would make it difficult for them to accept the truth when they learn it?

Many years ago, when my husband was a seminary teacher, he was teaching to the young people principles of the gospel concerning the Sabbath day. He was using quotes from the latter-day prophets and from the scriptures. In the middle of the class, one young woman burst out, with some emotion, and said, “My dad is a good man; you can't tell me different.” Upon questioning her, he found that her family, though active in the Church, had certain “traditions” that they

always followed on Sunday that were in conflict with what the prophets were saying. These traditions were making it very difficult for her to accept the teachings of the prophets.

When we anchor our lives and teachings in the scriptures, we can be sure we are where we need to be. We can be sure our children have a firm foundation of righteousness.

Now, how do we accomplish this? We may speak of anchoring ourselves and our children in the scriptures, but we know that, in fact, it is often a challenge to keep ourselves engaged in the scriptures, let alone our children. Anyone who has endeavored to have daily scripture study with teenagers can testify of that. But it is worth the effort. In our home we found there were lots of advantages to reading and teaching from the scriptures.

My son who has five young children put it this way: “When we take our children into the scriptures, Jesus can teach them with His own words, through the Spirit.”

Children are smart and strong willed. It is not uncommon for them to question everything their parents tell them. But when you are quoting a prophet or reading directly from the scriptures, it is fairly uncomfortable for them to argue. They may question and want to discuss, but it is not easy to disregard the words of the Lord directly. And as parents, we can find in the scriptures direction and answers to every issue: “For behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.”³

As we teach from the scriptures, it is important that the children have their own set of scriptures so that they can hold them, turn the pages, and read the words of the Lord directly. Having their own scriptures, they can mark them, become familiar with them, and feel the Spirit from them. They need not be expensive books—the simple economy editions contain the same truth as the leather-bound versions—but let them have their own.

As we begin teaching from the scriptures, one of the first things that we must establish is the principle of obedience. Doctrine and Covenants 84:44 teaches, “For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.”

In 3 Nephi 12:20 we read, “For verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you . . . , ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Next, teach that the words of the latter-day prophets are modern-day scripture. In Doctrine and Covenants 1:38 we learn that “what I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.”

And in Doctrine and Covenants 68:4: “And whatsoever [the prophets] shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.”

Another important principle to remember is that of discovery. If there is a question or an issue at hand, go to the scriptures together, with your children, to find the answer. Turn to the Topical Guide, even if you may already know the reference you want. Let them discover the answers they need.

We can be assured that the Spirit will aid us in our teaching. He will help us know what to teach, how to teach it, and where in the scriptures we can find help. He can also witness to our children that what we are teaching them through the scriptures is true. Turn with your families to Moroni 10 and experience the “test” of the Book of Mormon. This witness will strengthen them in their resolve to live the principles they are learning.

The more we turn to the scriptures, the more comfortable we will become in the scripture ourselves, and our own personal lives will be purified. The more we take our children to the scriptures, the stronger they will become. They will have their own strength and testimony, and it will help them make correct choices.

As we teach from the scriptures, we can help our children learn how to apply, or “liken,” the scriptures to their lives. Nephi explains: “For I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.”⁴

When we read a scripture with our children, we might ask the question, “Therefore, what?” They then can relate it to the things that are happening in their own lives and decide what the Lord would have them do.

As we teach from the scriptures consistently, we set a pattern for our children in their own lives. They learn that when there is trouble, the Lord has the answers. They grow in faith and confidence in the words of the Lord.

My husband and I began this process of teaching through the scriptures when our children were very young. We read the Book of Mormon stories to them and talked about the obedience of Nephi, the courage of the stripling warriors, and the love of the Savior. Then as they grew, we tried to meet the daily challenges by turning to the scriptures. Let me give you some examples:

Perhaps, in your family, children want to stay up late at night. Rather than scolding them every night about bedtime, turn to the Topical Guide under the word *retire*. There you will find a reference to Doctrine and Covenants 88:124, part of which says, “Retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary.”

Now, that is great. This tells them not only what to do but also why. Your understanding will increase even more as you read those lines in the context of the entire verse: “Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.”

And greater insight is received as you read the verses before and after it—verses 123, 125, and 126:

“See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires. . . .

“And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.

“Pray always, that ye may not faint, until I come. Behold, and lo, I will come quickly, and receive you unto myself. Amen.”

Then comes the question, “Therefore, what?” What do I need to do?

As I read these verses, I recognize that the counsel about going to bed early can help me as a mother as well as my children. These scriptures also teach me that I must work with my children with love and gentleness. I must pray for my Heavenly Father’s help and then be consistent in my efforts. I must work to create a peaceful, orderly environment in my home. All of these things will help me be a better mother while at the same time they help my children learn appropriate behavior. The scriptures are comprehensive in blessing our lives.

Maybe the challenge you struggle with in your family is children who are constantly fighting and arguing. There is a whole column of references in the Topical Guide under the word *contention*. Third Nephi 11:29 is just one of the scriptures listed: “For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.”

Though we learn a principle from this scripture, the challenge of how to change out-of-control behavior still remains. A scripture that could help is Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

So we see that soft voices might help. Another idea is expressed in Mosiah 4:15: “But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.”

Serving one another within the family will increase the feelings of love. These are things we can do to overcome contention. Then comes the question again, “Therefore, what?” What do we need to do to have sweeter feelings in our family? Whom are we following when we fight and argue? How can we serve one another in our home? Let the children help figure out the answers to these questions and decide what they will do based on the scriptures you have read with them.

Couple the words of the latter-day prophets with the scriptures. Let me give you an example. I love the book *Stand a Little Taller* by President Gordon B. Hinckley. If I were to speak to my children on the principle of choice and consequence, I might use the scripture Moses 6:33, which reads, in part, “Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you.” I would then follow with this quote from President Hinckley’s book:

“Have you ever looked at a great farm gate that opens and closes? If you look at the hinge, it moves ever so little. Just a little movement of that hinge creates tremendous consequences out on the perimeter. That is the way it is with our lives. It is the little decisions that make the great differences in our lives.”⁵

What a great way for us to teach the principle of choice and consequence when our children say to us, “Please, just this once. It’s no big deal.”

This process of solving our challenges in the scriptures fits every time and every age of our lives. Maybe your children are grown and have families of their own. Our responsibility as parents never ends; it just changes. Your children need your love and support as much when they are grown as they ever have. Give it to them through the scriptures.

If you are alone now, you still have questions and challenges regarding your own personal life that can be answered in the scriptures. By feasting upon the words of the Lord, you will find strength, comfort, guidance, and peace.

Anchoring our children in the scriptures will take some time and some effort—especially at first. But as we really make an effort to do this and to be consistent, our testimonies of the blessing it is to our families will increase. We will love the feeling it brings into our homes—the strong and abiding connection with heaven.

Every truth that we need to learn and that we need to teach our children can be found in the scriptures. By teaching from them we lay a foundation for our children that cannot fail them. Even if they stray for a time—and some of them might—they will have that knowledge of the truth to which they can return.

In our family we found a scripture we wanted to use as our family creed. It is found in 3 Nephi 6:14, and we adapted it to read, “[Being] converted unto the true faith . . . [we will] not depart from it, for [we are] firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.”

I truly believe that anchoring ourselves, our children, and our families in the scriptures is the only way we can protect them from the stormy seas of life. It is the only way to get safely back to our Father in Heaven as an eternal family.

I bear my testimony that God lives. He knows us. He loves us. His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior. He has given His word, His gospel, to us through the scriptures so that we might find joy in this life and salvation in the life to come. May we anchor ourselves in His scriptures. May we live by every word that proceeds from His mouth.

References

1. *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
2. See D&C 68:29–32.

3. 2 Nephi 32:3.
4. 1 Nephi 19:23.
5. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 147.