

“Embers of Faith in the Hearts of Our Children”

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Sister Wixom:

We have looked forward to this day to be with you. We love BYU Women's Conference. And we're going to share a secret with you—we don't always wear black skirts and nylons!

In addition to being the Primary presidency, we too are grandmothers, we're mothers, we're sisters and we're daughters. We love children and families—they are close to our hearts. Our love for children has expanded to children all over the world. Our eyes are drawn to them. We watch them when we see them in Primaries when we visit, when we go to the grocery store, when we're shopping. We watch them in your arms as you hold them. Could they be looking at us and asking the question, “Will you teach me?” We are learning from them, and we're learning from you. And we want to express our gratitude to you, for you are marvelously loving and teaching the children.

So, let's begin by stepping back in time—about 30 years, in fact. Do you remember 1980? All right, let's remember together all the mothers who never failed us.

[*Homefront* video clip: “Mother, You Never Failed Me”]

Sister Wixom:

Don't you love it? Don't you wish those hairstyles would come back?
It's true—you don't have to be everything to be everything to a child.

Sister Stevens:

But in our hearts, we know there are some essential things that really matter. With a woman's God-given gift to love, and with the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, we assist in the Lord's work “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Sister Esplin:

This sacred work begins in our homes. Two years ago when we were called to this presidency, we listened to that general conference with our focus on children, and the messages were loud and they were clear. That's when Elder Neil L. Andersen said, "We hold in our arms the rising generation. They come to this earth with important responsibilities and great spiritual capacities." And then he said, "We cannot be casual in how we prepare them." He continued saying, "Our challenge as parents and teachers is not to create a spiritual core in their souls, but rather—to fan the flame of their spiritual core already aglow with the fire of their premortal faith" ("Tell Me the Stories of Jesus," *Ensign*, May 2010).

Sister Stevens:

What do you think of when you hear Elder Anderson's analogy of a fire? We've all sat around a fire. Think of the glowing embers of a fire. What does it take to have it burst into flame? After they do, is that enough? Will it last?

Sister Esplin:

Oh, don't we wish! We have to constantly be tossing a piece of wood on that fire to keep it burning. It's the same with faith—it needs to be continuously fed and nourished. While this earth life is a time to remember what we once knew, it's also a time to walk in faith and grow in faith.

Sister Wixom:

And while we're walking—let's take ahold of each child's hand and walk that path together. I'm sorry—can you tell I'm passionate about this message? The precious soul of each child really matters, and the greatest thing that we can do is to help ignite the embers of faith that are in their hearts.

Sister Esplin:

I loved those years when we were raising our children. I just didn't realize then how fast they would go by, or how really important those years were. Children are so believing, so receptive to the truth, so eager to learn. They can feel the Spirit. We can't be casual in how we prepare them. For all you mothers of young children—enjoy them! Don't make it harder than it is. Just seize that moment while they are young, and remember it's never too late to begin teaching our children.

Sister Stevens:

Life was so different when we were children. It was what we saw on TV—*Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. It's such a different world now. Children today need resilient faith. Elder Russell M. Nelson said, "Difficult days are ahead. Rarely in the future will it be easy or popular to be a faithful Latter-day Saint. Each of us will be tested" ("Face the Future with Faith," *Ensign*, May 2011).

I remember Elder Nelson concluded his thought with something that really painted a visual for me. He said that, “Persecution can either crush [us] into silent weakness or motivate [us] to be more ... courageous.”

As persecution increases, we need to be prepared ourselves and prepared to help our children.

Sister Esplin:

President Monson asked this question: “Do we have the moral courage to stand firm for our beliefs, even if by so doing we must stand alone?” (“Dare to Stand Alone,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011).

So we ask ourselves: Are we willing to stand apart from the world in teaching our children? Sometimes it’s difficult to insist on family prayer when the children are late for school and the horn is honking outside, or to have family home evening when it isn’t convenient.

Sister Wixom:

And guess what, it’s *never* going to be convenient.

Sister Esplin:

When we were growing up, the world shared similar values, but the world today for our children is different.

Sister Stevens:

Seven years ago, President James E. Faust said, “I wonder if having casual and infrequent family home evening will be enough in the future to fortify our children.” And then he asked this question: “Where in the world will the children learn chastity, integrity, honesty, and basic human decency if not at home?” (“The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990).

Listen to what Elder Perry said recently in general conference about our unique role as mothers in teaching our children.

[Video clip from “Mothers Teaching Children in the Home,” April 2010 general conference]

Sister Wixom:

Protecting our children from those worldly influences takes planning. One day I was visiting with Sister Julie Beck when she told me the story of her parents, the Bangerters, when they were newlyweds driving along on their honeymoon. They asked themselves the question, what is the vision for the future of our family? Where do we want our family to be, say, 20–30 years from now? They decided to write down their thoughts. Not having a notebook or a piece of paper handy, Sister Bangarter resorted to recording their plan on a lunch sack. They wrote what you and I would probably write. Their words described the hopes and dreams they had for their children. They wrote things like, get a

good education, being faithful in the gospel of Jesus Christ, going on missions, getting married in the temple, and living the gospel in their homes. Then they asked themselves the hard question: So what do we do now, to create that future we hope for?

Here we are today in the Marriott Center. You may not have anything on your lap but a lunch sack. Let's stop right here and answer that same question. Will you take a few seconds and write down what you will do now, daily, to create the future that you hope for, for your children? You may begin!

Sister Esplin:

Now the Bangerters actually did something with their list. What could you do with yours?

Sister Stevens:

You could post it on the refrigerator. Isn't that what refrigerators are for?

Sister Esplin:

The other day as I was driving home, I heard a discussion on the radio about increasing the "language immersion programs" in some of our elementary schools. I learned that this is a program where young children learn a foreign language by being immersed in it at school. Much if not all their school curriculum is taught in that foreign language. The children become fluent as they hear it spoken and as they speak it themselves. Experts were praising this method as the best way to teach a foreign language.

Could this be the best approach and the best way to fan that flame of faith in our children? We can immerse them in the gospel of Jesus Christ in our homes, where they hear it, see it, live it, and it becomes a part of them. This happens best when we also immerse them with love and with the Spirit.

Sister Wixom:

I saw a beautiful example of this in the Philippines in the town of San Pablo. There, Sister [Ann] Dibb and I met Aurelia. To get to her home we walked through a grove of mahogany trees. Aurelia is a petite, agile, hardworking mother with dark hair and brown eyes. She has created a beautiful home for her 10 children; five of those children are still living with her. They live in a clearing in a grove at the top of the hill. Now when I say "beautiful home," I do not refer to the "things of the world." The walls of her home are simply plywood, and the structure itself is not more than 10 feet square. This family lives most of each day outside. They share this space with a few chickens and animals. The sky is their ceiling and the earth is their floor. They're not far from the fields where Aurelia plants pineapples to support her family. Her husband passed away two years ago, just two weeks before one of their sons, Jeffrey, left on his mission. He just returned this month. This young man's faith was strong, and he was ready to serve. Her daughters are beautiful young women, and little Joseph, age 8, is bright and happy. We talked of how we all once lived with Heavenly Father and now we're living on this earth following His plan. With her children, her daughter-in-law and other grandchildren

joining us, we stood in a circle and sang “Families Can Be Together Forever” (*Hymns*, no. 300). I will always remember the feelings I felt that day.

As I bent down to pick up my scriptures, I saw a little kitten nestled on my bag. I felt the harmony of a peaceful, faith-filled home in the grove of mahogany trees. It’s really true—only our homes can compare with temples in sacredness.

Sister Stevens:

When you think of our homes like that, it really helps you see things with more of an eternal perspective. When we look at each child and ask, “Who will he become?” it gives us more purpose to what we are doing today. Does that same eternal perspective change how we feel about the importance of family prayer or family scripture study? The priorities of today profoundly affect our future.

When I think of priorities, I remember what Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught about good, better, and best. What he said made me realize that we need to carefully consider the time we spend in sports, lessons, and other activities so that they don’t come at the expense of the things that really matter eternally. Elder Oaks said, “We have to forgo some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families” (“Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007).

Sister Esplin:

Take it from three seasoned mothers of 16 children and 38½ grandchildren who have learned that teaching moments can come when we least expect them, and the most important lessons are taught when we respond to the Spirit.

Richard Hinckley, the son of President Gordon B. Hinckley, had this kind of experience in his home. When he was a child, his father was seriously ill, diagnosed with bronchial pneumonia. He lay in bed for a month. One evening, after the family doctor had examined his father, the doctor said to his mother, “Marge, I have done all I know how to do. I know of nothing more I can do. I would like to give him a blessing.”

Richard said his mother didn't cry, but her worry and her anxiety were obvious. When a neighbor arrived to help assist with the priesthood blessing, his mother took Richard and his little sister in hand to the other end of the house and said, “Let's pray for your father.” Richard said, “So we knelt in that room—two little kids and their mother—while Mom poured out her heart to the Lord. I don't remember what she said, but I remember the feeling of desperation and the pleading in her voice, her reliance on the Lord. I will never forget it. Dad got better and was never again that ill until the day he died” (Richard G. Hinckley, “My Mother, the Great Affirmer,” in *Life Lessons from Mothers of Faith: Inspiring True Stories about Latter-day Moms*, comp. Gary W. Toyn, Deseret Book, 2012).

Sister Wixom:

Can you picture what happened there in the Hinckley home? A mother, who in the anguish of the moment thought to gather her children and take them with her and include them in her pleading to Heavenly Father to bless her husband.

Now when you picture that scene, it's a visual for one of our favorite Primary songs. And as a Primary presidency we can't speak without including Primary music. We're going to ask you to join with us today, for we're going to begin humming a Primary song. When you recognize the melody, please join in the words and sing with us.

["Love Is Spoken Here," *Children's Songbook*, 190]

Sister Wixom:

That was a chorus of angels. Thank you!
What else brings the Spirit and increases faith and testimony in our children?

Sister Stevens:

Certainly scriptures would be high on our lists.

Sister Esplin:

Oh, I remember those days with our children. We would just get a pattern that was working, and then somebody's schedule would change or we'd have a new baby.

Sister Wixom:

The biggest adjustment for me was switching from the school schedule to the summer schedule.

Sister Stevens:

Or maybe another challenge for some of you would be what it was for me, and we have a wide range of children. I remember having a 15-year-old and a two-year-old. It takes some creativity to make family scripture study meaningful for all.

Sister Esplin:

We just have to do our best, don't we?

Sister Wixom:

A favorite Primary song comes to mind here. It ends with three words ... try, try, try.

Sister Stevens:

I will never forget an article I read in the *Ensign* by Brother Brent Cooper about how his family started family scripture study and stopped feeling guilty.

He said the scripture that tells us to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22) was making him squirm. Knowing that [his] family should study the scriptures but doing nothing about it made [him] feel guilty."

So the Coopers set about to make a plan so that scripture study became a priority. The week before Easter, they had an experience that took their scripture study from being routine to an experience they would never forget.

As they as they were reading the scriptures together, Brother Cooper recalled that he

“was reading of the Savior’s ordeal in the Garden of Gethsemane and suddenly felt such an outpouring of the Spirit that [his] eyes filled with tears and [he] had to stop reading. In an effort to regain [his] composure, [he] asked [their] nine-year-old daughter sitting beside [him] a question.” She didn’t answer, and he turned to see her eyes full of tears. He then asked their six-year-old daughter the same question, and she too was silent. He looked at her to see that she was also overcome with emotion.

For them, it was “a precious moment of sharing the same feeling, and [Brother Cooper] felt prompted to talk about it. [He] asked them why they were crying, and they said they didn’t know.

‘Are you sad?’

‘No.’

‘Do you feel good?’

‘Yes, we just feel happy.’”

They “spent the next 10 minutes discussing how our Heavenly Father lets [you] know that something is true. Three weeks earlier, [Brother Cooper] had floundered through a discussion with [his] six-year-old on how she could tell if she had a testimony. [He] hadn’t been able to describe the feelings you have when the Holy Ghost touches your heart. By sharing and identifying this precious moment, [he] knew that [he] was helping her know how the Spirit felt” (Brent D. Cooper, “How We Started Family Scripture Study [And Stopped Feeling Guilty],” *Ensign*, Jan. 1980).

Sister Wixom:

This won’t happen every time you gather your family and read scriptures. But there is value in consistent scripture study because we don’t know when the words will jump off the page into the hearts of our children and they will feel the fire of their faith. It could even be years later. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “Be thankful for ... the small successes in your home” (“Forget Me Not,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011).

[Video clip from “Forget Me Not” talk]

Sister Wixom:

Yes, and those long-term results can affect our families for generations. That’s what Elder Nelson referred to when he said, “Our faith now becomes part of our posterity’s faith later” (“Face the Future with Faith,” *Ensign*, May 2011).

Sister Esplin:

This has happened in our family. My husband’s grandmother, Miranda Sorensen, left us a legacy of faith and courage. Her husband was killed when a bank of dirt on a creek caved off, burying him while he was irrigating in his field. Hans was Miranda’s eternal companion, her childhood sweetheart. She had waited for him while he served a mission to his native homeland of Denmark. When his lifeless body was brought back to their home, Miranda desperately tried to revive him, to get him to talk to her. Finally, when she could see there was nothing more she could do, she gained control of herself, picked up the chip bucket, and went to the woodpile to get wood chips to start the fire for their evening meal.

Vilate, one of the youngest of her 10 children, wrote of this experience, “With the reality of my father’s death, I felt the whole world had come to an end, yet seeing mother’s courage I began doing something too.” For almost 40 years, Miranda went forward alone, raising her family with very little means except her own strength.

This story has been passed down through generations. One great-granddaughter, who recently has been facing a difficult time, told her mother, “I am just going to pick up that chip bucket, swing it over my head, and move forward.”

Miranda’s faith and the story of the “chip bucket” has left an indelible impression that is blessing generations with faith.

Sister Wixom:

It’s blessing our Primary presidency too, because many times, when we have a moment of discouragement, we say, “Where’s that chip bucket?”

Sister Stevens:

All the little things we do to instill faith in our family *do* make a difference. We don’t have to be everything to be everything to our children. We don’t have to try to do everything at once. The Spirit will guide us and help us know what matters the most right now with our own family. Elder L. Tom Perry taught that it happens “one family prayer, one scripture study session, one family home evening, one book read aloud, one song, and one family meal at a time” (“Mothers Teaching Children in the Home,” *Ensign*, May 2010).

Sister Wixom:

And all those ones add up to an eternal family. As mothers we form an eternal partnership with God, and our persistent efforts to teach our children can make a difference in their faith.

Sister Stevens:

In the words of Elder M. Russell Ballard, “Clearly, those of us who have been entrusted with precious children have been given a sacred, noble stewardship for we are the ones God has appointed to encircle today’s children with love and the fire of faith and an understanding of who they are” (“Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, April 1994).

Sister Wixom:

We are not alone in this work. This is the Lord’s work, and He cares deeply for each one of His children. He Himself has given us this promise, “I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). Because of Him, “There is hope smiling brightly before us” (“We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, no. 19).

Now remember that list we asked you to make? Don’t forget it. Make it a part of your daily life.

In closing, we testify of Jesus Christ and of His love. You, each one of you, are so loved!
We will end this brief message with a video from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[Mormon Messages—“Motherhood: An Eternal Partnership with God”]