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## SUCCESSFUL MORMON FAMILIES

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William G. Dyer, PhD  
and Phillip R. Kunz, PhD

Current literature on the family indicates that we deal heavily with problems. As social scientists we talk a lot about divorce, drugs, child abuse, suicide, incest, premarital pregnancy, and so on. We wanted to examine families from a different perspective. Our question was, what goes on in families that are successful, or in families that are trying to be successful and for the most part are succeeding? In those families what do parents and children do that builds cohesion and harmony in the home and results in children who stay out of trouble, becoming good candidates to be the parents of families like they were reared in?

We were influenced in the format of our research by an amazingly successful book, *In Search of Excellence* by Peters and Waterman (1982). These consultants identified what they felt were the eight conditions that approximately twenty successful American companies had in common. This structure seems to be a reasonable approach to look at the family—certainly a critical organization. We felt that by looking at strong Mormon families in America we would be able to ascertain some of the activities and attitudes that build family solidarity. Effective families from other subcultures could have been studied, but we decided to study the families we knew best.

While Mormon families have a different theological base from other families, we suspect that they are very much like non-Mormon families. Except in Utah and a few scattered communities in some of the surrounding states, Mormons are a minority—they work, go to school, participate generally in the activities of their communities, and we assume they are very similar to other families.

With this orientation in mind, we sent a letter to Mormon church leaders in various parts of the United States and asked them if they

would supply us with a list of 15 families in their stake that they assumed to be the best—the most effective or most outstanding. The definition of “best families” was left up to these stake presidents. We found afterwards as we interviewed them, however, that many of them assumed that success should be measured by relationships between the husband and wife and the parents and children. We assume that church activity had some part to play in that evaluation as well. In addition, we asked the stake presidents to include only those families where there was at least one child still living at home. We did not want the family to remember how it was; we wanted them to still be living as a family. We also wanted them to have a child old enough to have left home for school, for a mission, for marriage, or for some other purpose. We were not looking at families that were newly starting, although many of them still did have infants in their home.

The sample was drawn from the United States; we do not know if the families here would be representative of Mormon families in Germany, Peru, and China. We expect in some ways they would, perhaps not in others. In most of the families surveyed there was both a husband and a wife; some of them had been widowed and had remarried. We also had some single parent families. The stake presidents judged them to be among the most successful families in their stakes; being single parents didn’t preclude them from this definition.

From all the lists we got from the stake presidents, we then sampled 200 families. If you were not selected as one of the families in the study, perhaps it is not because your stake president didn’t choose you; it may be that we didn’t choose you in our sampling process.

We sent out a very lengthy questionnaire. As it turned out, we coded 490 variables from the questionnaire. In addition to answering the questions we asked, many of the respondents wrote in the margins, on the back of the questionnaires, and some typed additional pages. Some wanted to amplify what they were doing and how they did it. In addition to the information obtained from the questionnaire, we supplemented the study with interviews, not with all of the families, but with many of them.

We found 12 conditions that we identified as significant to successful Mormon families.

### Condition One

The parents had a high commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the restored Church. In the survey we asked, “What do you consider has been most important in making you a strong family?” The overwhelming response from these families included some statements like this:

We as parents are absolutely committed to the gospel. We as parents are in love and absolutely committed to each other. We work hard at teaching our children what is right and helping them to channel what we respect in terms of their own free agency.

Commitment to the Church was most apparent in three areas where virtually 100 percent of the parents complied: attendance at church meetings, full payment of tithing, and accepting church positions.

One family said:

The thing that has been most important to us in our family is the great feelings we have about the gospel. We know what the purpose of life is, and we know that our children are important. Our whole life revolves around the Church. Heavenly Father is a partner for us, and we certainly count on him to assist us after we do our part.

We can forego a lot of things the neighbors have because we know that helping a child is so much more important—much more important than a house or a boat. We just think that missions, temple marriage, and sticking close together is what it's really all about.

Another family said:

In looking back, we find that church activity has been a great help—good seminary teachers, good MIA teachers. For a time we lived over 25 miles from the nearest church. Our daughter used to get up in the early morning to go to seminary. She walked across the frozen snow for two miles to catch a ride. Sometimes we used to feel bad when it was so cold out, but we knew that it would all turn to her good in this life and even hereafter.

As part of the study, we included interviews and questionnaires with some not-so-successful families, families that had real problems. One of the things that we noticed in terms of these families was a lack of their commitment or a lack of involvement in the Church. For example:

We've had our share of problems as a family. My wife and I have not always been able to get along like we should. Some of our kids have acted out, and this has brought a lot of embarrassment to us. I see families who seem to have things together, and I wish we could be more like them, but we don't know how. I guess we've made our bed and now we have to sleep in it. All of my sisters' families did pretty well, and my wife's brothers and sisters, but we've just had a hard time. I don't know how we would do any different. Mother said we're not what you'd call a special family. In almost every way we've botched it. Our family fights a lot, and the marriage has about come apart for a number of reasons. I doubt we'd do any better if we were starting over again. Nobody taught us to be parents and we certainly didn't get it from instinct.

One more example:

I don't know, but we were just at that stage where we had several teenagers and they were acting about the way we did when we were younger. We've attempted to fix the problems up but it never worked as good as we hoped it would. I guess we'll just have to live with it and maybe the kids will shape up when they get married. That's all we can hope, I suppose.

The differences between the highly effective families and these less effective families, particularly those who have some degree of church activity, seem to be one of degree. The committed families were totally involved; 48 percent usually had family prayer together. When we looked into the matter of family prayer a little closer, we found that many of those families who said they only have family prayer occasionally said so because they did not define it as family prayer unless everyone was there, and schedules sometimes precluded that.

One family said,

We have family prayer once in a while but it's hard to do since our children work out of the home. We're seldom home at the same time. Sometimes there are only four or five of us at a time, sometimes two or three. But on Sundays we always have prayer together.

We looked at family home evening. Many of these families had already been launched far into their family life before the family home evening program came out, but even though some did not hold family home evening on a formal basis, they had a rough equivalent to it.

You might ask, "Where does religious commitment come from for these effective parents?" Do all these parents come from strong LDS families where they were taught to love the gospel, went on missions, graduated from seminary? The answer to all of these questions seems to be "no." There was no clear evidence from our data that effective families are replications of their own parental homes. Many of them were converts to the Church. Less than half of the fathers in our sample went on missions. Less than half graduated from seminary. A little over 20 percent were baptized after they were the age of eight. Of course, there were a lot of these parents who did come from active families. Some of those had traditions of several generations in the Church, and they talked about those traditions and how important they were in terms of how they reared their children.

The crucial thing seems to be, however, that at some point these couples made a commitment that they were going to have an active home, that they were going to have a successful family. Some of them sat down and talked about it and made that sort of commitment with each other; others just sort of grew out of an unconscious interaction from their socialization with their families.

## Condition Two

Next to the powerful influence of the Church in their lives, these families identified the feelings of love and unity as the thing that had helped them most. Love and unity. We might ask, are they inherent in families, are they a result or are they born there, or do these people do something that brings about that kind of love and feeling?

Love, support, and family unity do not come automatically for most families but result from planning and efforts the parents make initially. Thus, parents may encourage all of their children to attend ballgames where a brother or sister is playing. Other times they may go to a symphony where a sister is playing. A parent may say to a child who goes out of his way in that kind of a supportive activity, "Thanks for going to Sarah's concert. It means a lot to have the family support her." They constantly try to reinforce family ties and what the children are doing.

One family has had scrapbooks for the children in which they included the programs where brothers and sisters had participated. The children kept these and treasured them as family momentos. It was a way of not being competitive as brothers and sisters, but of being mutually supportive.

Even in these effective families the children sometimes fight. The parents indicated that they certainly hadn't arrived at perfection. No parent likes to have children fight, but in the process of growing up some amount of teasing and fighting may exist. Overcorrecting this and stressing the fighting rather than the positive interactions of the children may not decrease the fighting but may bring even more undesirable consequences into the family.

One parent said:

We feel that the children love each other and we attempt to have them do all kinds of positive things. We have noticed that some of the other family members (our brothers and sisters) spend a good deal of time talking about their fighting children. I don't think they fight any more than other families, but they keep focusing on it rather than on the good things that happen. Life is pretty much what you make it. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The feeling of unity and support is developed early in the family experience. Anyone who has attended "Back to School" nights, for example, will oftentimes see both parents there. Sometimes you see one parent who is sort of conned into doing his or her duty. Other parents never go at all. The children are aware of the kind of support parents give them. Obviously, parents cannot always do everything

they would like to, but these parents try to be supportive even in those cases where they cannot do something.

For example, one mother said:

We have a fairly large family . . . and sometimes we can't attend the games or the meeting where our daughter is speaking, but we go out of our way to say something like, "Brother Briggs told me you really gave a good talk."

Again, the reinforcement.

Church was not the only source of family interaction. These people did a lot of things in the home, working together and playing together. Family vacations became a unifying experience. Let me just read a quote from one family:

One thing in which we invest heavily in the family is the vacation. We go somewhere every year, just our family. Perhaps the neighbors have wondered why we don't do more things with them, but we have such a good time on the vacation. We have a few cross words—sometimes we go a few miles without anyone speaking to each other—but that soon heals. We do a lot of singing and playing and telling jokes; we don't have interruptions from the telephone or television; we always try to visit some place that will be educational or spiritual, or near relatives. We take a lot of pictures and do other things. The children remember these pictures. Hardly a week goes by that they don't talk about some place they've been. That, we think, is important.

Well, the sharing of these activities together often results in the kinds of feelings that these parents identified as important.

### Condition Three

The families had a vision and goals. We mean a vision and goals in terms of knowing where they were going, not some kind of crazy picture in their head.

These people talked about being together as a family, not only in this life but as a "forever family." They had a vision about being married and sealed together in the temple and being with each other forever. This vision was translated into certain specific goals that had been identified, and the parents and children were able to articulate these quite well. Most of these families had a plan of action on how they were going to obtain those goals and how they were going to achieve that vision.

Families in this study placed high priority on service, for example. Many of them mentioned that as a family they had done service projects for neighbors or for other people who needed help. Thus charity, in a gospel sense, seemed to be a fundamental part of these people's

lives. While they had personal and family goals, these goals were set in an atmosphere of living in society and being responsible for part of that society. They had high goals regarding education, missions, and temple marriage. With many of the families there was a rather constant evaluation process that took place—how well are we doing? If they felt as if they needed to do something to change direction a little bit, they might plan a special family home evening around that. Or sometimes if it was just one child causing some difficulty, the parents might plan a sort of mini family home evening around that child and give some direction.

#### Condition Four

These parents spent a good deal of time talking with their children, trying to teach them, helping them to cope with personal problems and concerns. In other words, the parents were doing things with and talking with their children.

One family said:

The fact that we have been able to talk freely with each other and our children about feelings, problems, goals, hurts, and joys has been our greatest asset. We talk together while we're working or playing. Sometimes at mealtimes, which are always a sit-down-around-the-table-all-together times, we may stay an hour after the meal talking. We may look things up in reference books, share it with the family, read aloud to each other, tell jokes.

Another family said:

We are a happy family, finding fun in work as well as play. We laugh, sing, and talk when we're canning beans or cleaning or gardening. My husband and I had a goal when we were married, which is the key I think, to have a large family and to teach them to be happy. In most cases we have succeeded, but in one area I think we have failed. We have been so content as a family that they are not very outgoing and aggressive as sometimes is necessary in the business world.

In this group of successful families we found parents who made the most possible use of the various social institutions. They did not "stay to themselves" but they got out into the schools and the community groups, the Little League and the Boy Scouts, the symphony, and so on. The parents indicated they had made a commitment to their family and that involved a lot of sacrifices. They did not look at institutions as having the primary responsibility. The parents assumed that responsibility but they used whatever additional help they could get.

A wide variety of activities existed in the home where the children learn. The parents were role models. They structured teaching activities



such as family home evening and informal teaching moments (which many of them stressed), monitored what the children watched on television and read, supported formal programs in school or church, and participated in various family projects.

One son indicated:

When we go out to build fences or work with machinery, we talk together as father and son. Sometimes we talk about the gospel and my mission. Sometimes we talk about political issues, sometimes just about things that are happening around the world. Sometimes we just work.

Family night was identified as an important learning situation for two-thirds of these families, but regular scripture reading appeared to have been a vital experience for only about a third. Even that, however, varied a great deal among families.

One father said:

Our stake president used to talk in stake conference about how each morning they would get up as a family and read the scriptures. We felt like we should do that, too, as a family, but we didn't have time for it. So we got together as parents and children, and we decided that if we got up every morning ten minutes earlier we could read the scriptures. We read about four or five days a week now. So far we have read the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and are now reading the New Testament. We start reading sometimes while my wife is still frying the eggs. But that works pretty well.

There are also the formal teaching periods in the home. One quote from a father said:

There is an old saying in the Church that the family night is the only family fight that is opened and closed with prayer. That is not exactly how our family home evening sessions should be, but sometimes they are like that. The best lessons in our home are given by our children.

Talking seemed to be the glue that bound these people together. The one factor in family life most often identified in popular literature as characteristic of the problem area of modern families is the lack of communication, particularly between parents and children. The modern home is portrayed as a place where people eat and sleep but do very little else together. Parents are seen as being too busy for their children; children, likewise, have no interest in what their parents are doing. We didn't find this in our sample of successful families.

One father put it this way:

I would say if there was one thing that has made a difference in our family it has been that we have always talked together. When our children were little they would all come and climb into our bed and we would talk. The children loved to hear about how we met and got married

and how they were born and the circumstances surrounding our lives. That's continued, even after they have gone to college and married. Sometimes we talk about sports or gospel issues or current events or personal concerns, but we talk.

We found that these people really did spend a lot of time talking together. Part of this learning experience involved good books. These families indicated that when they compared their libraries with the libraries of their neighbors, they thought theirs were better. They assumed that they used them better. Ninety-seven percent of these families subscribed to the *Ensign* magazine, and most of them took the *New Era* and the *Friend* if they had children of that age. In addition, they had magazines like *National Geographic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Reader's Digest*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Seventeen*, and *Popular Mechanics*; they subscribed to a lot of magazines and read them.

We surveyed television watching. We asked them, "How much, on the average, per week do each of you spend watching television, each of the parents and the children?" Comparing these figures with a national sample from the Gallup poll, we found that these families watched television *less than half as much as the national sample*, even controlling for the amount of education they had, because educated people do not watch quite as much. When we asked them, "Do you control what television your children watch?" most of them said that they did; but control meant all kinds of things to them. For some it just meant that they gave some rough guidelines and pretty much allowed the children to do what they wanted.

One parent said:

When our twins were asked what their favorite T.V. show was in a school survey, they wrote, "The news." They were eight years old. This was probably because we all watch the news together and discuss the day's events.

It's impressive how the various activities of these families were intertwined and structured together so that one thing reinforced another. Their library reinforced their values and goals of education. The use of a library by having assignments in the family and talking about issues got the children into the books, helping them in school but also bringing about interaction between parents and children.

### Condition Five

We found, much to our surprise, that these families had few rules but high expectations. We found almost all of the families had three rules, or some variation of them. One, treat each member of the family with respect. Two, let your parents know where you are and when you're

going to be back. And three, be honest and dependable—do what you say you will.

Despite the number of these formal rules, hardly any of them said they had lists posted on the refrigerator or cupboard or anywhere. Instead, they had a built-in structure, a control that the children had learned in the process of socialization so that they knew what the parents expected.

One young man said:

I remember when one of my friends was over to our house on a Saturday night and asked if I'd like to go to a movie with him on Sunday afternoon. Of course I said no, and he wanted to know why. He asked me if that was one of our rules. As I thought about it, it suddenly dawned on me that it was one of our rules except nobody had ever told me that. It's just one of the things that our family would never do.

We saw that sort of thing occurring over and over again. Somehow they got the rule built in so it became an inherent part of their family life. Nevertheless, children don't always behave well and parents then have to figure out some way of disciplining, an area which we'll talk about in a moment.

The rule, "Where are you going and when will you be back?" seems to say to the child, "You are important; we want to know where you are."

One mother said:

Whenever my children come home late at night they have to come to my bedroom and kiss me goodnight. That serves several purposes. First of all, I know they are home safe and don't have to worry about them. Secondly, it assures the children that I'm interested in their well-being. And third, I think that the children were not tempted with the Word of Wisdom because they knew that when they kissed me goodnight I would be in a pretty good position to smell any deviation.

The third step was that of integrity. These people talked a lot about honesty—doing what you said you would do, even if you don't enjoy it—following through on your word, keeping your commitment.

If we left the kids with the cow-milking, we just assumed that it would be done; the milking had to be done and there was no room for any kind of excuse. They knew that if they were detained somewhere for some important reason those cows still had to be milked. They had better get in touch with the neighbor and make sure the neighbor got over and started the milking. The children are taught the idea of dependability.

### Condition Six

These parents disciplined by talking, not by spanking. When they found that the children didn't do what they were supposed to, they had to do something with them. What they did was talk with them. They tried to reason through. If that didn't work, they backed off a step and talked to them. If that didn't work, they scolded. If that didn't work, they generally withdrew privileges of some type or another, and eventually they would spank, although that would occur more with younger children, we suppose, than the older ones. But the parents indicated that discussion was the primary disciplinary mechanism. Instead of a punishment for disobedient behavior, they tried to reinforce and use positive kinds of things to get the children to do what was appropriate. They would reward them in some way by praising or giving them some privilege if they provided good behavior.

### Condition Seven

These families thought that they were open with their expressions of love and praise of worthy action. However, just as disapproval was likely to be met with a period of talking rather than spanking, approval was likely to be rewarded by praise rather than kissing. These people were huggers more than kissers. One mother said, "There is a lot of good feeling between our boys and their dad. They may not kiss or hug much but they wrestle a lot in a fun sort of way." Ninety-seven percent of these people said that the family told each other frequently that they loved one another. Ninety-six percent said they expressed love by doing special things for each other, ninety-four percent by hugging, eighty-five percent by kissing. Again, that seemed to be a little more frequent with younger children. Interviews indicated that these families varied in the way and the ease with which they expressed openness and love. One mother said, "In our family we have a 'me too' thing. If I tell my husband I love him, he says, me too." Some parents were able to tell their spouse they loved him or her in testimony meeting more easily than they could around the family. But these parents seemed to do a great deal of hugging, touching, and loving.

### Condition Eight

Strong families give support during times of adversity. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of effective families is the way the family works together to deal with problems.

These families all had problems and afflictions and difficulties. Just because they were effective didn't mean they didn't suffer. But instead

of the families breaking up under adversity, they seemed to coalesce and grow together. Most of them had experienced a great deal of adversity, as we indicated. But some of them didn't really define it as adversity. They would tell us about problems which we would define as real misery, but they would say, "Well we're not as bad off as Joe was," or something like that. They would have death, financial problems, fire sometimes, and so on to deal with.

One father said:

We have had a number of family problems. I have had a heart attack, but I recovered. We had to take care of aged parents for many years. My wife's brothers and sisters have had a number of divorces, but most of our kids have fulfilled missions, so we don't count any of those problems as adversity.

Another man said that he had lost three wives in succession. Each of them gave birth to a number of little ones and then died, leaving the small children. Some had a lot of accidents on the farm, a lot of crop failures, but no real adversity.

One parent said:

Our son eloped and our youngest daughter was discovered to have cancer; we had a boy who started drinking and who got on drugs; and then the business partnership went sour and the other partner pulled out, leaving us all the debts to pay.

But again, they did not really list this as adversity.

We asked these families, "How did you handle the adversity? What did you do when you had problems?" Most of them replied: "We turned to the Lord in prayer and fasting, exercised our faith, girded up our loins, developed patience, called our children together, discussed the problems." Very few of them went to social agencies, and in fact very few even went to their bishops with the adversity. "We called on our family." One quoted Ether 12:27:

*And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*

And some of these people who have had lifelong adversities still believed the strength to deal with them came from their families.

### Condition Nine

These families had a base of support larger than their immediate family. This involved their extended family, grandparents, cousins, and other relatives, as well as older children who had married and left

home. These effective families stayed connected with these relatives—they identified with them.

We asked them, “Who are your family heroes?” You know whom they listed most often? President Kimball. And right after President Kimball were grandparents and cousins. Others were Johnny Miller, Steve Young, and Danny Ainge. They had some heroes like that, but most of them were family members, except for the prophet.

One said:

We all follow BYU sports and identify with various figures but the children look up to their grandparents more than anyone else. They were strong, exceptional people. Even our married children talk of them and their ideals and their sacrifices for the Church in their early days.

It says something about the family that has grandparents or other family members for heroes. These families are reinforced constantly with the terms, “My grandfather, our parents, our cousins.” One family was listed in *Who’s Who in America* and the children delighted in showing that entry to everyone. “Family” meant scrapbooks, photographs, reunions, visits, histories, a pride in that extended family.

In addition, of course, these children had many friends. We found out how much time they spent with their friends and how parents controlled that, and we found that these parents said friends were very important but the parents had control of who the friends were. They did that mostly by having parties in their own homes—inviting their children’s friends to their house so they would become acquainted with the friends, know who they were, how they behaved, and what they were doing.

### Condition Ten

Home was a busy place. Everybody in these families was involved in a variety of activities in the home, work, school, and church. They were not isolating themselves from the world and trying to hide together in a coalesced little family but were working to help each other in all kinds of activities: music, drama, debate, clubs, dating, dancing, working outside of the home. They got involved in a number of activities, some more in music, some more in sports, and some in other kinds of activities.

One mother observed:

With all of our boys in Little League sports we spent every summer for 10 years just going to baseball games, followed by football and basketball. And I believe most of the time every family member that could would be present at those games to support them.

The thing that jumps out at you from the data is that there was a tremendously high level of activity. Everybody was doing something.

They were actively engaged not just in the home but outside the home as well.

These parents used some sort of reward system within the family to maintain control. They set up schedules. They used rewards to help their children achieve certain things that they would like to do. But we found that there was no common reward system. These parents very seldom had allowances for children, for example. When they discussed the topic of money, they said it was something to be used, a tool. Any member of the family could have whatever money was necessary as long as it was available. They had jobs: they had to work in the home or outside of the home. But money was not really seen as the end; it was only a tool within the system.

### Condition Eleven

Family members worked. Almost all of these parents indicated that their children had to work in the household. They had to help with the family. They had to help around the farm, the yard, or whatever they had. It was a rare family that said they were not concerned with the work habits of their children. They wanted to build good work habits. They saw that as important in terms of the children's later life.

But the work was not an overpowering demand either. The father was supervisor, and everybody had work assignments; work could be adjusted. Anybody in the family who had a good excuse could get out of work and the rest of the family would fill in for him because they saw a lot of things as equally important or more important than work. These parents did not seem to be workaholics. They used flexibility and adjustment in terms of their time.

One father said:

The Bible teaches that man is to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and we have taken it upon ourselves to teach this to our children. A lot of the problems in the world of work result from people who never learned how to work or never learned dependability. It is not as easy for us as it was for our parents who lived on farms. When we were young the jobs never ended, but here in the city the jobs end sometimes. We as parents have to scout out work for our children. Sometimes a couple in the neighborhood is glad for some yardwork, and our daughters all babysat to earn money, but it takes special efforts. Jobs don't come easily all of the time. We have to help the children sometimes by putting up signs and letting others know that our children can babysit and so on. Some of the kids have delivered newspapers and worked in special Scout programs or something like that.

## Condition Twelve

The Mother and Dad love and support each other. When asked to rate the happiness of their marriage on a scale from 1 to 9, with 9 as the high, the average score for these families was an 8.5. Nearly three-quarters of the parents said their marriage was a 9.

In these families there was a general acceptance of the traditional roles between husbands and wives. Most of the men were the wage earners, although a number of the women also worked out of the home. Women took the primary responsibility for the home. Both girls and boys did duties in the home. It was surprising how many of the boys indicated they had to help clean the house and take care of the dishes, particularly for those who were on the nonfarm part of our sample.

These families described the husband-and-wife relationship as a good team. They pulled together. These parents had common goals for themselves and their children. It was important for them to have a close family.

We fell in love a long time ago and made a commitment to team up in this life. Some of the time we have had difficulties, but we've worked at it, and we love each other more as the years go by. Some of the hardest things were when most of the children were starting to get older, but we stuck it out. We really do love each other, and our children sense that. We talk and share; we pray together and do a lot of planning about our family. We think the Lord helps us in our family and with our children.

Well, the generally high score that these parents reported for their own happiness as spouses was supported by those judgments of the stake presidents, who saw them as the successful families. It is important to stress that these couples had many similar interests and goals. You knew they were committed to a good family orientation.

These parents spent a good deal of time talking to and teaching their children. It was honestly their goal to rear a good family. They tried to prepare as much as they could for a celestial heritage. All of these families acknowledged weaknesses and shortcomings; none claimed to be perfect. Many indicated that they were not sure they were successful. They said, "Wait until our grandchildren are raised." But the essence of their lives was clearly that they were trying to live as close to the standards and values as they could. They want to be close and unified as a family.

When parents are truly committed to the above-stated goals, they are happy in their marriages, they believe they are accomplishing something good, and they sense a real commitment and contentment in their lives.

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