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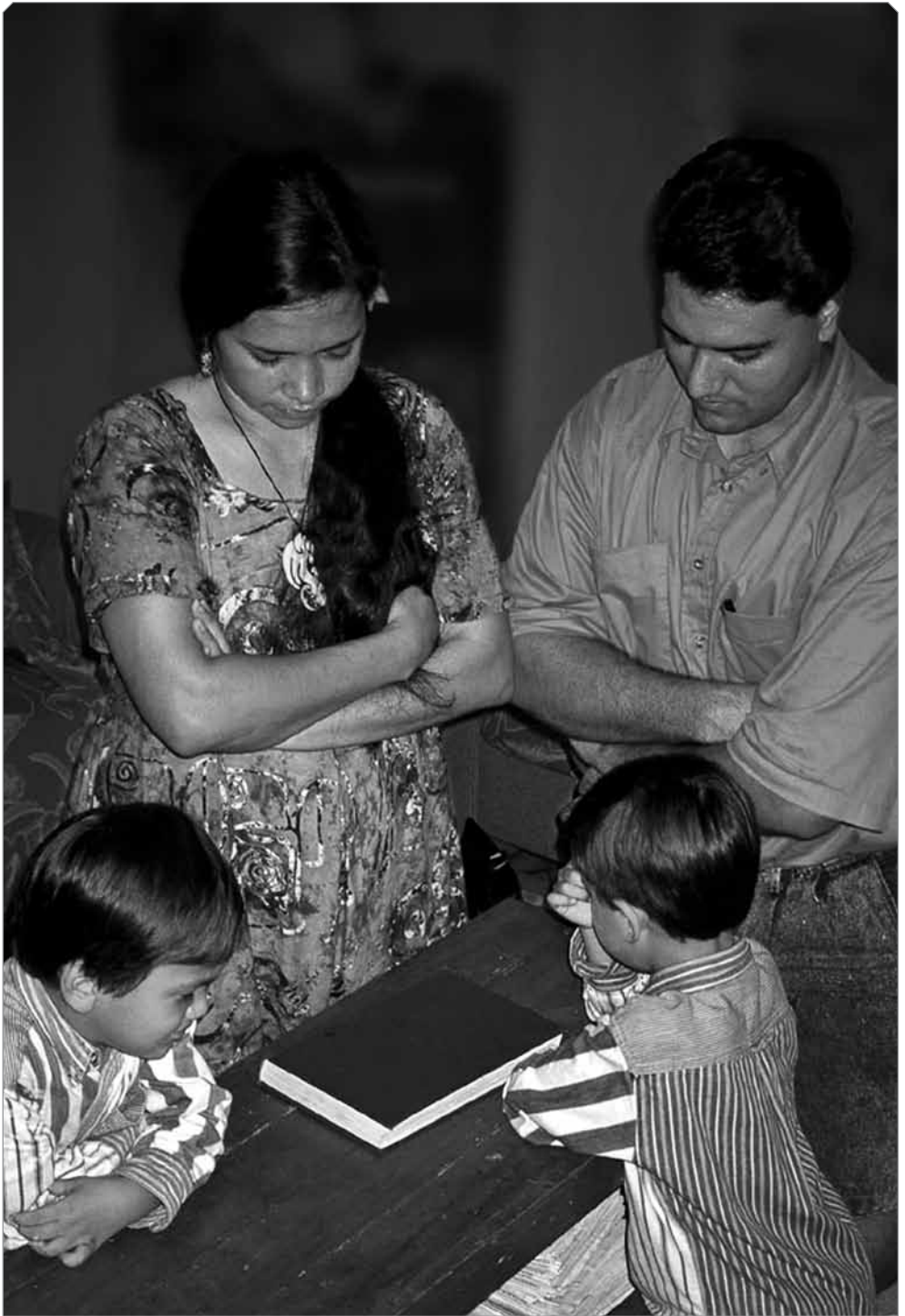
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Building the foundation of our lives on Jesus Christ assures us that we will always have access to the peace and direction of the Lord through the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Faithful Families and Doctrinal Deceptions

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We are blessed to live in what the Lord has called “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 112:30) and what President Gordon B. Hinckley once described as “the greatest season in the history of the Church.”¹ While the Lord and his servants have clearly stated that we live at an extraordinary time, we must also acknowledge that not all is well in Zion nor in the world in general. It is clear from the scriptures, the teachings of latter-day prophets, and even our own experiences that not only are we living in challenging times in the present but also there are difficult days yet ahead. The intent of this article is to articulate a few things the Lord and his servants have taught that will strengthen us as individuals, families, and communities. I will also give special attention to how we can best deal with some of the philosophical distractions, doctrinal distortions, and cultural practices that are weakening marriages and families.

Faith in Christ

President Hinckley, in his October 2001 conference address entitled “Living in the Fulness of Times,” quoted the Apostle Paul’s familiar prophecy “that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). After quoting the Apostle Paul’s description of the evils that would (and do) exist in our day, President Hinckley stated: “We live in a season when fierce men do terrible and despicable things. We live in a season of war. We live in a season of arrogance. We live in a season of wickedness, pornography, immorality. All of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah haunt our society. Our young people have never faced a greater challenge. We have never seen more clearly the lecherous face of evil.” President Hinckley then described the answer to such problems when he said: “Our strength is our faith in the Almighty. No cause under the heavens can stop the work of God. Adversity may raise its ugly head. The world may be troubled with wars and rumors of wars, but this cause will go forward.”²

Our strength *is* our faith in the Almighty. Several years ago when I was serving as a stake president, I met with a member of my stake whose husband had recently confronted her with his intention to end their marriage. Her husband had told her that he did not love her, had never loved her, and their marriage was a mistake from the beginning. As you can imagine, she was devastated. Not only was she experiencing a hurt she described as coming from deep within her soul, but she was also having thoughts of taking her own life.

After counseling with her and making the necessary arrangements to ensure her safety, I was able to contact her husband. Though he was a good man in many ways, it became clear that his heart had become hardened, he had no desire to reconcile, and he was moving forward with his plans to end the marriage.

I was concerned that even though many were doing all that was possible to help this woman, she might sink deeper into despair. However, to my great surprise, when I saw her several days later, her countenance had changed dramatically for the better. I mistakenly thought that both husband and wife had had a change of heart and were in the process of reconciling their differences. When I asked her privately if her husband had returned and if she was hopeful they could reconcile, she again surprised me by explaining that their relationship was actually worse than before. She explained to me that in addition to continuing with his plans for divorce, her estranged husband was also attempting to gain legal custody of their children. I asked her how it was possible for her to be so peaceful and to have gained so much strength in such a

short amount of time even though her circumstances had become even more difficult. She explained to me that while she didn't completely understand her newfound strength, she had rediscovered from whom such strength came. Our conversation led to a discussion of the familiar words of the prophet Helaman to his sons Nephi and Lehi in Helaman 5:12: "And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall." I had read the words of Helaman many times, but this sister helped me come to an understanding of these inspired words that has strengthened my faith in Jesus Christ and increased my desire to more fully align my life with his.

She explained to me that many years earlier, while serving as a full-time missionary, she had begun to understand and experience what it meant to "take upon [her] the name of Jesus Christ" (D&C 20:37). She had learned to make "feasting upon the word of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20) a daily priority in her life. She had also learned to sincerely repent of her sins and to follow the direction of the Spirit. Her mission had been very difficult, but her experiences had helped her lay the proper foundation for her life.

A couple of years after she returned home from her mission, she met and married her husband, and a year or so later they had their first child. She explained that it was at this point in her life when the foundation in Christ she had established began to shift. Without even realizing what was happening, her foundation shifted from the Savior and his teachings to her husband and children. Instead of taking some time each day to strengthen her faith through meaningful prayer and study, her life had become completely consumed with the constant demands of being a wife and mother. As her relationship with her husband deteriorated over the next several years, her foundation (which by this time had become her family) crumbled, and she felt herself falling into the depths of despair.

Even though only a short time had passed since she first called me, she had rediscovered that reestablishing her relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ had miraculous power. Sincere repentance, praying with real intent, and studying (not just reading) the scriptures and the words of the

living prophets had made it possible for her to once again feel the comforting and guiding influence of the Holy Ghost.

Even though this sister experienced a miraculous change of heart, she and her husband eventually divorced. There have been difficult times since her marriage ended, but she has continued to gain strength in the years that have followed. She has truly come to understand President Hinckley's words that her strength is her faith in the Almighty. Once again, she is firmly grounded upon what the Apostle Paul described as "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

An important dimension of the story I have just told you is the fact that part of the collapse of her marriage began when this wife and mother allowed her dedication to her family to distract her from her worship of God. This is a very real challenge for Latter-day Saint families because of our doctrinal teaching that the family is eternal. We must always remember that not only is the content of the following words of the Savior important, but the order in which they appear is vital as well. In answering the question "Which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36), Jesus Christ taught: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

President Henry B. Eyring provided the following counsel concerning the relationship of loving God and loving our neighbor: "Keeping the first commandment [love the Lord thy God] always leads to keeping the second [love thy neighbour], because to love the Father and the Son is to serve those They love. In answer to our prayers for guidance, They send the Holy Ghost to tell us how to help others and to feel at least a part of God's love. So in that service, our love of God increases and the keeping of the second great commandment leads us back to the first, in an ascending circle."³

President Hinckley was an example of a man who understood the importance of putting the first commandment first. His wife, Sister Marjorie Hinckley, described how she learned of his love for the Lord early in their relationship: "As we got closer to marriage, I felt completely confident that Gordon loved me. But I also knew somehow that I would never come first with him. I knew I was going to be second in his life and that the Lord was going to be first. And that was okay. It seemed to me that if you understood the gospel and the purpose of our being here, you would want a husband who put the Lord first. I felt secure knowing he was that kind of man."⁴



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President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.”⁵ As surprising as it may seem, even our families can become idols. We must not allow our families, as precious as they are, to come before our worship of God. The stability of our families in this life and eternal life in the world to come may very well be determined by how well we understand and live this doctrinal truth.

Building the foundation of our lives on Jesus Christ as individuals and as families assures us that even though we will face great losses and disappointments, we will always have access to the peace and direction of the Lord through the influence of the Holy Ghost. Remember the words of Isaiah: “For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee” (3 Nephi 22:10). In other words, we may suffer great loss—the loss of love, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a dream, the loss of health, and so much more—but the Lord has promised that if we are true to the covenants we have made with him, we can have the peace that comes through the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Doctrinal Deceptions

Satan is a master at counterfeit. The adversary will do all he can to destroy elect and faithful families. President James E. Faust once taught: “Satan is the greatest imitator, the master deceiver, the arch counterfeiter, and the greatest forger ever in the history of the world. He comes into our lives as a thief in the night. His disguise is so perfect that it is hard to recognize him or his methods. He is a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”⁶

The Savior and his servants, both ancient and modern, have given sobering descriptions and prophetic counsel concerning the challenges that individuals and families would face in this last and final dispensation. One of the sobering descriptions of many of these latter-day challenges is found in the Joseph Smith Translation of the twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

False Christs

The Prophet Joseph Smith made more textual changes to the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew than any other chapter in the New Testament. The first twenty-one verses of the Joseph Smith Translation of the twenty-fourth

chapter of Matthew pertain to the Savior's prophecy of the events that would occur in Jerusalem shortly after his death. Verses 21–55 contain the Savior's prophecies and counsel concerning the latter days. Verse 22 reads: "For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, *who are the elect according to the covenant*" (emphasis added).

The last eight words of this verse, "who are the elect according to the covenant," do not appear in the King James Version of the text. This addition is significant as it identifies "the very elect" as being a covenant people. Elder Marion G. Romney taught: "Now, those 'who are the elect according to the covenant' are members of the Church, so we ourselves are on notice to beware."⁷ It is important for each of us to understand that it is possible for the very elect to be deceived. Some have been led to believe that they can never be tempted with more than they can bear. They offer the following words of the Apostle Paul as the evidence for their belief: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Compare Paul's words with the teachings in Alma 13:28: "But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and *watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear*, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering" (emphasis added). Alma's words clearly teach that successfully resisting temptation and avoiding deception are conditional blessings we may receive *only* when we are watching and praying *continually*. The Apostle Paul certainly understood this doctrinal principle, but his words to the Corinthians have been misinterpreted by some to mean that we can never be tempted with more than we can bear. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has stated, "If we are not careful, even those who are among the faithful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will fall victim to . . . deception."⁸ The Lord warned the early Saints: "But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also" (D&C 20:32–34).

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22 identifies those who attempt to deceive the "very elect" as being "false Christs and false prophets." While there have

been many individuals over the years who have proclaimed themselves to be Jesus Christ, their proclamations are usually quite transparent. But if these imposters are easily identified, why have authorized servants of the Lord, both ancient and modern, taken such great care to warn us of false Christs? The following statement from Elder Bruce R. McConkie provides vital understanding: “A false Christ is not a person. It is a false system of worship, a false church. . . . It is any concept or philosophy that says that redemption, salvation, sanctification, justification, and all of the promised rewards can be gained in any way except that set forth by the apostles and prophets.”⁹

My own family has felt the deceptive influence of counterfeit religion. In 1836, the Arza Judd family was baptized and confirmed by Elders John E. Page and James Blakeslee. Shortly after gathering with the Saints in Nauvoo, the Judds (with many other Latter-day Saints) faced a terrible crisis in the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the ensuing months, several individuals would vie for the leadership of the Church, including Sidney Rigdon and a man by the name of James J. Strang. Mr. Strang, a charismatic convert to Mormonism, asserted that the Prophet Joseph Smith had appointed him to be his successor and had a document, allegedly from the Prophet, that proved his claim. Some believed Strang’s argument, including Elder Page, the missionary who had baptized the Judd family. Since returning from his mission to Canada, Page had become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and had also become a member of the Judd family when he married Arza Judd’s daughter, Mary. The Judds loved Elder Page but chose not to follow him or the leadership of James Strang. It was their testimony that President Brigham Young and the majority of the Quorum of the Twelve were those whom the Lord had chosen to lead the Church.

While James J. Strang and John E. Page may not have been anti-Christ, the false salvation they promised in what they were teaching led many people astray. We must be wary of those who make similar arguments in our day. We must teach our children to be faithful to the leadership of the Church and to “stand . . . in holy places, and be not moved” (D&C 87:8). The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I will give you a key that will never rust, if you will stay with the majority of the Twelve Apostles, and the records of the Church, you will never be led astray.”¹⁰

False Prophets

While false prophets may be less grandiose in their claims than false Christs, their agendas are similar and oftentimes more subtle. Bishop Richard C. Edgley of the Presiding Bishopric described false prophets as follows: “There are the so-called learned people who have let their intellect undermine their spiritual moorings and who would also attempt to lead the faithful away from those who are appointed by the Lord to lead. There are those who feel that our leaders are out of touch with the realities of the day. They would attempt to lead members by substituting their own knowledge for the revelations from God to His prophets.”¹¹

False prophets can be found in a variety of settings. Many years ago my wife, Kaye, and I were dealing with one of the day-to-day problems experienced by many young parents. Our young son Jake was becoming more and more aggressive with his younger sister, Jessi. We reasoned in part that Jake’s problem could be due to his fascination with the *Masters of the Universe* action figures. When Jake first began to play with these action figures, we were amused as he, playing the role of He-Man, would rescue Jessi’s Barbie dolls from the various villains who had abducted them. But soon our delight turned to distress as Jake became more and more aggressive in his talk and play. He soon changed from acting the part of the hero, He-Man, to the evil villain, Skeletor. Jessi was upset not only because of the rough treatment she was receiving from Jake but because Barbie was spending more and more time as a hostage, for the good guys were no longer winning the battles. It seemed Jake and Jessi were constantly fighting.

I remember one time in particular when I confronted Jake about the way he was treating his sister and said something like, “Jake, I want you to start being nicer to Jessi or else the two of us are going to have trouble.” Jake responded to my warning by saying, “I’m not Jake. I’m Skeletor!” It seemed to me that his very personality was changing, and Kaye and I became increasingly concerned about what we should do.

At the time I was a graduate student studying family science at Brigham Young University and was studying the theories of human behavior and how theorists and therapists understood and treated various problems. As I attempted to apply what I was learning in the classroom to what was happening in my own home, I could see that there were nearly as many theories about what I could do as there were theorists. Some of what I was learning was helpful and some was not. Some of the philosophers, educators, and therapists

whose writings were based on the teachings of Sigmund Freud reasoned that Jake's aggressive behavior was to be expected, and we ought to allow him to work through his inner conflicts through his play.¹² Some suggested that we could help channel some of Jake's aggression into more acceptable behavior like football or soccer.

Those coming from the behavioral perspective made famous by psychologists like J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner encouraged us to identify the behaviors we wanted to "extinguish" and those we wanted to "reinforce." These theorists suggested that we could set up a schedule of rewards and punishments that would help us "manage" Jake and obtain the results we were looking for. Other theorists and therapists explained that Jake's aggression was only a stage through which he was passing and that it would end as he matured. They encouraged us to reason with Jake and help him come to an understanding that his style of play was harmful both to himself and others.

Those coming from an Adlerian perspective, which at the time was especially popular among many Latter-day Saints, encouraged us to identify the goal behind Jake's misbehavior (such as seeking attention). After having identified Jake's goal, we could then set up a series of logical and natural consequences that would help us and Jake deal with what Alfred Adler defined as an "inferiority complex." Family systems theorists explained that Jake was simply the "identified patient" and that his misbehavior could be a symptom of a problem with the way our family system was functioning.

One of our friends suggested that what Jake really needed was an old-fashioned "spanking" (though he didn't use that word) to show Jake who was in charge and that his behavior toward his sister would not be tolerated. Our "politically correct" friends did not allow their children to play with toys that encouraged violence, and they were somewhat disappointed that we did not take Jake's toys away from him and insist that he engage in play that was more acceptable.

I believe that there is some merit in most of the theories and therapies that I have mentioned, but I have also learned that some of these ideas can be distractions. The Lord has warned us that some of what is being taught in the world comes from God, some comes from the mind of man, and other philosophies come from the great deceiver, Satan himself. In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord warned Church members of the dangers of being "seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils" (D&C 46:7).

Sometimes when we speak of false Christs and false prophets, we make the mistake of labeling anything that isn't found in the scriptures or the words of latter-day prophets as false doctrine. It has been my experience that truth can be found in many places and taught by many people. Elder Orson F. Whitney once stated: "God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of His great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous for any one people. . . . We have no quarrel with the Gentiles. They are our partners in a certain sense."¹³

My wife and I responded to our situation with our son by muddling along, dealing with each crisis a day at a time but being greatly concerned about Jake's increasing aggressiveness and resistance and our seeming inability to do much about it. While I attempted to implement some of what I was learning in school, nothing seemed to address our concerns in the ways we had hoped.

One day as I was listening to Jake (a.k.a. Skeletor) and his friends do battle in the living room, which they had transformed into Castle Grayskull, the thought came into my mind that I could simply abandon my "conscientious objector" status and jump in and play with Jake and his friends! What if the battle Jake and his friends were acting out really was a part of a war in which I had been called to participate? How would I and how should I respond to the challenges of war? At first I tried to justify not playing by rehearsing many of the excuses I had used before. I thought of all the other supposedly more important things I had to do at the time and told myself that I really didn't want to give my support to such an abominable marketing charade as the *Masters of the Universe*. But for the first time in this particular sequence of events, my rationalizations were not convincing. I asked Jake if I could play. I don't know if he was more surprised or reluctant, as his expression was a combination of both. He was probably surprised that I wanted to play, and reluctant to allow me to play because I would probably get in the way of the fun he and his friends were having. Whatever his thoughts were, Jake responded by saying, "Okay, Dad, you can be Man-at-Arms." Man-at-Arms was one of the good guys who was not one of the main players—kind of symbolic of my role as Jake's parent at the time.

After a few light skirmishes, I soon found myself without much to do. If you were not in the process of capturing or being captured, killing or being killed, the game was somewhat meaningless. This changed quickly, however, as Skeletor abducted Barbie. I knew it was my duty to rescue her, which, after

a heroic battle, I did. I also captured Skeletor and took him to my newly constructed military prison (Grandma's antique end table). As I was trying to figure out what to do with my new prisoner, a phrase from the Book of Mormon came into my mind. In 3 Nephi we read that after the righteous Nephites "had taken all the [Gadianton] robbers prisoners, . . . they did cast [them] into prison, and did cause the word of God to be preached unto them" (3 Nephi 5:4). I did not realize at the time the lasting impact this verse of scripture would have on my relationship with Jake. Much to Jake's chagrin, I began reading to Skeletor from the Book of Mormon. Jake voiced his protest: "Dad, you can't do that—these guys aren't churchy!" Between thwarting various rescue attempts by Jake and the other disciples of doom, I continued to explain the gospel to Skeletor.

After a few minutes had passed, I informed Jake and his friends that I had great news—Skeletor had agreed to be baptized! Jake continued his protest, but his resistance soon softened as I asked him to fill his mom's large yellow Tupperware bowl with water and invite the other characters to attend Skeletor's baptismal service. We then baptized Skeletor. I didn't actually say the baptismal prayer, as that would have been somewhat of a sacrilege, but we did immerse Skeletor in the water and talk about the baptismal prayer and the importance of baptism. To my surprise, Jake and his friends were fascinated. The spirit Jake and I felt that day helped lay a foundation for a wonderful relationship that has continued to this very day. I gave my heart to him, and he gave his to me. That day certainly didn't mark the end of all our challenges, but I no longer saw Jake as a problem but as my son and brother whom I had the privilege of introducing to *the* Master of the Universe, Jesus Christ.

Lessons of Life

While this story deals with the resolution of quite a simple problem, the experience taught me several lessons that have helped me in dealing with the more complex problems that have followed.

I have learned that I must be discerning as I encounter the philosophies of the world. While each of the theories of human behavior contains elements of truth, we cannot allow them to be a distraction from seeking and following the guidance of our Father in Heaven. Just because an idea is logical, is taught by someone who is well educated, appears to be well accepted by others, and may even be supported by research findings does not necessarily mean that it is correct.

I have also learned that I must always strive to be sensitive to the influence of the Holy Ghost, for the promptings of the Spirit are the Lord's main ways of communicating with me. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

The worship of reason, of false philosophy, is greater now than it was then. Men are depending upon their own research to find out God, and that which they cannot discover and which they cannot demonstrate to their satisfaction through their own research and their natural senses, they reject. They are not seeking for the Spirit of the Lord, they are not striving to know God in the manner in which he has marked out by which he may be known, but they are walking in their own way, believing in their own man-made philosophies, and teaching the doctrines of devils and not the doctrines of the Son of God.¹⁴

This is not to say that reason, research, and intellect should be rejected, only that they should not be embraced without regard to the wisdom of God, of which they are a vital part. The prophet Nephi taught that we should not “hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 28:31). The prophet Jacob taught, “To be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29).

I have also learned the importance of counseling with my companion. I believe there are some questions that can only be answered as we counsel with and learn from our spouse or other members of our family or those who have priesthood keys. If we do not have a husband or wife, we can counsel with our parents or Church leaders. Trusted friends can also be a valuable source of wisdom, but we must be careful as sometimes our friends will tell us what they think we want to hear. Flattery is the counterfeit of praise just as criticism is one of the counterfeits of counsel and correction.

The methods I used in dealing with my son's aggressive behavior were not as important as the change of heart I experienced as I tried to do what I felt to be right. There are no simple recipes for rearing children. Be wary of those who tell you they know what is right for your child or your marriage, especially when it goes against your own sense of right and wrong or what is being taught by the leaders of the Church. President Faust once taught: “One of the most difficult parental challenges is to appropriately discipline children. Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh or what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and

undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment.”¹⁵

I have also learned to be cautious (Sister Judd would say skeptical) about what I read on the Internet, hear on radio or television talk shows, and read in the popular press. Just because something is discussed and promoted by a popular host and endorsed by someone with an advanced degree does not make it right. In fact, I have learned that if something I hear about child rearing or marriage is wildly popular in the world, there is a strong possibility that it has a fatal flaw.

Years ago there was a best-selling book with an even more popular title: *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.¹⁶ Even the title of this publication suggests a problem. If my understanding of doctrine is correct, men aren't from Mars and women aren't from Venus—we are both from somewhere near Kolob. There is some value in this book's suggestion that men and women have ways of behaving and being that are unique; however, we should never allow such descriptions to define who we are or serve as justifications for who we should not be. Such descriptions as being from Mars or Venus, or “color code” designations that describe us as having blue or red personalities may be *descriptive*, but they are not *definitive*. Each of us should strive to repent of our sins and invite the Lord to “make weak things become strong” (Ether 12:27) and not simply accept our own or someone else's description of who we are.

Attempts to categorize people into various stereotypes have an interesting history. In Victorian England, many parents considered their children to have evil natures because they were born in sin as a consequence of Adam and Eve's partaking of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Because of this erroneous belief proposed by Protestant theologians such as John Calvin, many parents believed their duties included providing stern discipline, even to the extreme of beating the devil out of their children.¹⁷ Some historians believe that the phrase “rule of thumb” originated in England, where parents were instructed they could not discipline their children with a rod any larger in diameter than their thumb.¹⁸ The idea that a child is born evil, which some still believe, can lead to harsh, rigid parenting and even outright physical violence in some cases.

Another tradition we find in our midst was first proposed by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau considered children to be born good and simply in need of an environment of freedom. He believed that parents and culture were the problem, and if the child was allowed to be free,

he would achieve his greatest potential.¹⁹ This philosophy can also contribute to serious problems for the family. If the parents believe that a child is naturally good, they will be more inclined to indulge their children by allowing them to have total freedom of choice in their actions. Indulgence, called “free agency” by the indulgent, is the adversary’s counterfeit of what the Lord has termed in the scriptures as “moral agency” (D&C 101:78). President Boyd K. Packer clarified this point of doctrine in the following statement about “pro-choice” philosophy: “Regardless of how lofty and moral the ‘pro-choice’ argument sounds, it is badly flawed. With that same logic one could argue that all traffic signs and barriers which keep the careless from danger should be pulled down on the theory that each individual must be free to choose how close to the edge he will go.”²⁰ It is the parents’ duty to teach their children that moral agency does not simply imply the choice between alternatives but the choice between right and wrong.

The English physician-philosopher John Locke raised concerns about the contradictory philosophies of Calvin and Rousseau and proposed that a child is born neither good nor evil but with a mind that is a *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate.” Locke proposed that children develop and personalities are formed as they are acted upon by the environment. American psychologist J. B. Watson once wrote: “Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.”²¹

Many parents who believe this philosophy believe that if their child is going to amount to anything in life, it is going to be the result of successful parenting. Parents who embrace such an understanding will often attempt to enroll their children in multiple extracurricular activities, demanding excellence in each. One writer described a typical child participating in such a lifestyle as “the hurried child.”²² Such a philosophy is a major contributor to perfectionism, anxiety, and depression in adults as well as children.

Which one of these views is correct? Is a child born evil, good, or as a blank slate? My vote is “none of the above.” The scriptures, while supporting parts of these theories, teach something quite different. From the words of the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (D&C 93:38).

Being “innocent” at birth is being born neither good nor evil but having the potential for both. Some may argue that being born innocent is the same as being born with a blank slate. The difference between these two assertions is found in the fact that as children mature, they are free “to act for themselves and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26; see also Helaman 14:30). While we have the potential to become like God, we also have the potential to become like the devil. Most every human being is born to be an active agent and not a passive object. The choice is ours; we do not have some preformed, predestined fate. Therefore, we must help our children learn to exercise their agency wisely. We must also help them understand that there are limits to their behavior that have been put in place to protect them and to help them discover their divine identity. We must help our children to identify and to fulfill their own unique missions. It is only in fulfilling the measure and purpose of our creation that we will experience the meaning and joy each of us seek.

Avoiding Deception

In addition to warning us of the “false Christs, and false prophets” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22) that would exist in our day, the Savior’s words provide a wonderful key to assist us in avoiding deception. Let’s return to the words of the Savior in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37: “And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived, for the Son of Man shall come, and he shall send his angels before him with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together the remainder of his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” I would like to draw your attention to the first ten words of this verse: “And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived.” One latter-day prophet said that to “[treasure] up my word” means to “not read, not study, not search, but *treasure up* the Lord’s word. Possess it, own it, make it yours by both believing it and living it.”²³

Treasuring up the word of God not only refers to embracing the scriptures and the teachings of latter-day prophets, but also includes the direction we can receive through personal revelation. The prophet Mormon described this source of divine direction when he taught his son Moroni that “the word of the Lord came to [him] *by the power of the Holy Ghost*” (Moroni 8:7; emphasis added). Receiving the word of the Lord through personal revelation allows our Father in Heaven to communicate to us individually and specifically concerning our own unique circumstances. The prophet Nephi taught, the “Holy Ghost . . . will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).



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It is vital that we treasure up the words of God that we not be deceived.

President Hinckley has taught, “The Holy Ghost is the Testifier of Truth, who can teach men things they cannot teach one another.”²⁴

One of the most important things we can do as we attend Church, pray, and study the teachings of prophets, both ancient and modern, is to listen for and write down the impressions that come to us through the Holy Ghost. As someone once said, “The dullest of pencils is better than the sharpest of minds.”

It is also important to remember that as we avoid deception by treasuring up the word of God through personal revelation, the genuine promptings of the Spirit will never contradict the teachings of the leadership of the Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith warned, “Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God.”²⁵ Our Father in Heaven has given us the word of God in the scriptures, the words of living prophets, and personal revelation to help us through the challenges of life and eventually to return to him.

Conclusion

It is vital that we treasure up the Lord’s words that we not be deceived. Elder Orson F. Whitney taught: “We cannot safely substitute anything for the

Gospel. We have no right to take the theories of men, however scholarly, however learned, and set them up as a standard, and try to make the Gospel bow down to them. . . . We should hold up the Gospel as the standard of truth, and measure thereby the theories and opinions of men. What God has revealed, what the prophets have spoken, what the servants of the Lord proclaim when inspired by the Holy Ghost, can be depended upon, for these are the utterances of a spirit that cannot lie.”²⁶

I will conclude with the words of Samuel the Lamanite. His words describe the faithful members of the Church in his day, the faithful Saints in our day, and a summary of what I have attempted to communicate here. From Helaman 15:5 we read:

And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses.

Yea, I say unto you, that the more part of them are doing this, and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth.

We find a remarkable pattern of counsel in verse 7:

And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are [1] brought to the knowledge of the truth, and [2] to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and [3] are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to [4] faith on the Lord, and unto [5] repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth [6] a change of heart unto them. (Helaman 15:5–7; numbering added)

Please remember the words of President Hinckley that “our strength is our faith in the Almighty. No cause under the heavens can stop the work of God. Adversity may raise its ugly head. The world may be troubled with wars and rumors of wars, but this cause will go forward.”²⁷

I bear witness that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I know that God loves each of us and wants us to have joy in this life and eternal lives in the world to come. I testify that living prophets and apostles walk the earth today and are special witnesses of Jesus Christ. I know that as we follow the teachings of the Savior and of His servants we will be able to avoid the doctrinal deceptions of the adversary and strengthen our faith and our families. **RE**

Notes

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