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Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children: Nurturing the Next Generation

Although other forces threaten our children, the Spirit of Elijah is turning many fathers toward nurturing their children, fighting abuse and childhood diseases, and caring for the environment.

Alan J. Hawkins, David C. Dollahite, and Clifford J. Rhoades

The Old Testament opens with an account of God creating order from chaos to provide an earth on which his children could dwell. Through disobedience, however, the children of Adam and Eve turned their hearts away from their Father; consequently, they separated themselves from God, and the ground has been periodically cursed. Interestingly, the Old Testament concludes with the Lord telling the world through Malachi that if there is not a returning of children's hearts to the fathers and of fathers' hearts to the children the earth will again be cursed or destroyed:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (Mal. 4:5-6; see also D&C 27:9, 110:15)

Malachi's prophecy is one of the most far-reaching and profound prophecies in the scriptures. This article explores some of the multiple messages embedded in the prophecy of Elijah's latter-day mission. In a recent address, Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that an important aspect of Latter-day Saint scripture study is an understanding that many scriptures have multiple meanings and messages. He included the prophecy of Malachi as one example.¹ The sealing powers restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith by the hand of Elijah

BYU Studies 33, no. 2 (1993)

have broader application than temple ordinances performed for the living and by living proxies for the dead, although this is unquestionably the central function of the sealing powers. The Spirit of Elijah is further manifest in building and strengthening links between fathers and children in time as well as eternity. In this article, we reflect on how the powers associated with the Spirit of Elijah seem to be turning many living fathers' hearts to their children for the benefit of all.

We offer one caveat before proceeding, however. The prophecy of Malachi uses the term *fathers*. The scriptures often use male gender terms such as *father*, *son*, and *his* when referring to both men and women. No doubt most of our reflections on the meanings of this passage of scripture apply to both men and women, fathers and mothers. Still, as we shall argue, the use of the specific term *father* may be appropriate because generally the connections of fathers to their children are weaker than those of mothers. Thus, without diminishing the roles of women, we focus in this article mostly on men's hearts and fathers' connections to children.

Fathers and Children

Malachi's prophecy refers to two kinds of connections, or more specifically, to connections going in two directions. One connecting direction is that of children to the fathers, a link that points the current generation back in time to their predecessors, both living and deceased. Latter-day Saints employ this aspect of Malachi's prophecy to explain labors in family history, genealogical research, and proxy temple work. Turning the hearts of the children to the fathers may also refer to relationships with living family members. For example, children are admonished to respect and honor their parents (Ex. 20:12) and to care for aging parents (Gen. 45:7-11).

The focus of the present article, however, is on the second connecting direction in the prophecy, one on which we seldom reflect—that of fathers to the children. This link points forward in time, suggesting a concern with our children and our children's children. President Harold B. Lee taught that the full mission of Elijah involves the turning of parental hearts to the children here and now:

[It] applies just as much on this side of the veil as it does on the other side of the veil. If we neglect our families . . . how could we feel that we are doing our full duty in turning the hearts of our children to their fathers. . . . So, the hearts of you fathers and mothers must be turned to your children right now, if you have the true spirit of Elijah, and not think that it applies merely to those who are beyond the veil.²

It is time for us to think of turning the hearts of parents to children now while living, that there might be a bond between parents and children that will last beyond death. It is a very real principle, and we should consider it.³

Similarly, in a recent conference address, Elder James E. Faust taught:

Perhaps we regard the power bestowed by Elijah as something associated only with formal ordinances performed in sacred places. But these ordinances become dynamic and productive of good only as they reveal themselves in our daily lives. . . . This sealing power thus reveals itself in family relationships, in attributes and virtues developed in a nurturing environment, and in loving service. These are the cords that bind families together.⁴

In this article, we attempt to build on the foregoing principles of familial relationships and to explore their implications. First, we use the Greek and Hebrew texts of Malachi's prophecy as a way of identifying additional meaning in that scripture. Next, we provide a historical overview of the changing relationships of fathers to their children. Then, we develop in both scriptural and secular terms the concept of *generativity*, which refers to a turning of hearts to nurture the next generation. With this base, we then suggest that, although there are powerful forces trying to destroy connections between family members, the Spirit of Elijah in the last days is influencing Latter-day Saints and others to help build stronger, more intimate relationships between fathers and their children; promote a greater sense of community in which we are concerned about our neighbors' children as well as our own; improve the status and well-being of children; and preserve a healthier natural environment for future generations.

Greek and Hebrew Texts

Studying the earlier versions of biblical passages often opens our understanding to additional meanings in particular scriptures.⁵ In this case, the breadth of meaning in the texts of Malachi 4:5–6 is

richly consonant with the truths preached by President Lee and Elder Faust. The ancient Greek Septuagint and Masoretic Hebrew texts of the Old Testament illustrate the breadth of Malachi's prophecy. While the King James Version speaks of *turning* the hearts of the fathers to the children, the Greek text speaks of *returning*, stating that Elijah will "*restore* the heart of father to son and the heart of man to his neighbor, lest [the Lord] come and smite the earth grievously" (LXX Mal. 4:3; italics added). Furthermore, the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Masoretic Hebrew version of this passage reads: "He shall *reconcile* fathers with sons and sons with their fathers, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction."⁶

Neither of the earlier versions implies that Elijah will be establishing the father-child connection for the first time or that the scripture is exclusively concerned with genealogical matters. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *apokatastesei*, which means to turn again or to restore, suggesting that Elijah will assist in "bringing people back into the relationships of love and concern that once prevailed."⁷ The Masoretic text employs the Hebrew verb *shûb*, which is one of the most frequently used verbs in the Old Testament and has rich meaning.⁸ Linguistically, *shûb* connotes restoring or returning, even bringing home again,⁹ often with a strong sense of repentance, both of turning away from evil and of returning to the good.¹⁰ Accordingly, both the Septuagint and Masoretic texts of Malachi 4 suggest that Elijah's task will be to restore relationships between fathers and children to the way they once were, perhaps in the premortal state or at some earlier point in human history.

In addition to addressing the father-child relationship, the Greek text of Malachi adds another dimension to Elijah's mission: restoring the heart of man to his neighbor. This suggests that the Spirit of Elijah will not only seek to reconcile fathers to their own children, but also strive to restore a sense of responsibility of fathers to all children, thus restoring a deeper sense of community among all people on earth.

Recent Historical Perspectives

In a spiritual sense, the hearts of children are turned away from their Heavenly Father through sin. But our Heavenly Father's

heart is always turned toward his children (2 Ne. 26:24–28; 3 Ne. 9:14; Matt. 23:37; D&C 43:24). By contrast, however, many mortal fathers have turned their hearts away from their children.

The past two hundred years of western civilization have seen dramatic changes in family relationships, resulting mainly from the twin forces of industrialization and urbanization and the radical individualism that accompanies these forces. Looking only at the latter half of the twentieth century, it is tempting to conclude that women's roles in the family have changed the most as mothers have dramatically increased their participation in the paid labor force. In comparison to family life in preindustrial times, however, it is the role of men rather than of women that has been fundamentally altered.

For the majority of people two hundred years ago, women's *and* men's labor was domestic; both played essential, although different, roles in the domestic economy that sustained family life. Skilled maternal and paternal labor was required to turn raw materials into domestic goods for consumption. When harvest time arrived, the laborer's gender and age were of little concern—all were needed. Moreover, in an agricultural and rural setting, both mothers and fathers were intimately involved in the daily lives of their children. Sons worked long hours alongside their fathers, while daughters worked primarily with their mothers.

In addition, fathers were directly charged with the moral and spiritual rearing of their children. If fathers were literate, they were also responsible for teaching their children to read and write. Clergy delivered child-rearing advice to fathers, who were seen as having the main responsibility to guide their children through the harsh realities of the adult world.¹¹

As industrialization and urbanization gained momentum during the nineteenth century, most fathers became increasingly separated from their children. Most fathers left the home and farm to work in factories for long hours each day, six days a week. As a result, the paternal role was redefined as economic provider, while mothers assumed full responsibility for the domestic tasks of child rearing and housework. Notions of the abilities of mothers to properly raise their children shifted to meet these changing economic circumstances; mothers became the guardians of the domestic realm,

keeping children sheltered from the harsh and immoral realities of the economic realm in which the fathers were forced to participate.¹²

The spatial and temporal separation of fathers from children seemed to precipitate a growing sense of psychological and spiritual separation of fathers from children as well. Even today, while fathers work fewer hours than their grandfathers and great-grandfathers did and mothers often work outside the home, most fathers still spend little time with their children.¹³

When the recent data on divorce and nonmarital childbearing are added to this portrait, we see fathers as increasingly on the periphery of children's lives. Demographers now estimate that more than half of first marriages will dissolve and two-thirds of children in the United States born in the 1990s will experience the break-up of their parents' marriages.¹⁴ Nearly 90 percent of children remain in the custody and care of their mothers after divorce. Moreover, only about 25 percent of children see their noncustodial fathers on a regular basis. One-quarter of children are currently born to unmarried mothers, and many receive very little paternal influence.¹⁵ The demographic evidence is clear: American men, in general, are spending less and less of their adult lives in households with children.¹⁶

Furthermore, the current hegemonic virtue seems to be individual freedom, not concern with the well-being of one's own children or those of one's neighbors. The doctrine of individualism insists that individuals must be unfettered to pursue personal courses of self-fulfillment. Connections to other people and institutions are valued not in and of themselves, but only as they add to the bottom line of self-fulfillment. When these human or institutional connections begin to constrict self-fulfillment, then virtue, as the doctrine of radical individualism defines it, demands that individuals loose themselves from such bands. Thus, radical individualism argues that relationships that restrict are wrong; they must be changed into or exchanged for relationships that energize and support self-fulfillment.¹⁷ Even familial relationships are to be based on self-fulfillment, not anachronistic folk notions of traditional family obligations.¹⁸

Note the contrast between this philosophy and important parts of the Savior's teachings. Whereas the Savior taught that the self is found

indirectly through service to others (Mosiah 2:16–19), disciples of individualism preach that the self is discovered directly by pursuing one's own course, using relationships and institutions as convenient stepping-stones toward some individualized, imagined end.

The dominant ethos of individualism affects not only family relationships, but relations among unrelated people as well. People today often know more about their neighbors on the other side of the planet than they do about their neighbors next door or down the street. The weakened sense of neighborhood or community seems to have stemmed from the West's conversion to the secular gospel of individualism over the past few centuries. Many believe that everyone watching out for himself or herself will eventually produce a society in which everyone is taken care of. But having freed themselves from the bonds that selfless caring for others necessarily brings, people may find themselves so disconnected from familial, community, and institutional relationships that their unfettered self-fulfillment feels like desperate loneliness.¹⁹ Such a world might well be described as “cursed.”

These trends clearly indicate there has been a significant turning of paternal hearts away from their children. But is it possible that the Spirit of Elijah in this last dispensation is exerting a counterforce to the momentum of those powerful forces? The Spirit of Elijah may be doing much more than influencing people to search out genealogical records and provide saving ordinances for their ancestors. It may be manifest in the lives of men and fathers when they turn their hearts to nurture the next generation in a variety of ways. Latter-day Saints note how genealogical interest increased dramatically after Elijah restored the sealing keys. Similarly, it is becoming increasingly accepted that children also need greater nurturance and gentle guidance.²⁰ In secular circles, the process of nurturing the next generation is referred to as *generativity*.

Generativity: Secular and Sacred Perspectives

Developmental psychologists have found that nurturing the next generation is important to adult psychological health.²¹ Erik Erikson, an influential theorist of human development, first articulated this concept in his theory of healthy development across

the life-span. He hypothesized that a person must develop three fundamental characteristics to become psychologically healthy and mature: hope, fidelity, and care. The development of each of these characteristics takes center stage at one of the major periods of the life-span: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, respectively.²²

First, children must develop a basic trust that the world is a safe, good place to live. Next, adolescents need to develop a sense of their own identity and a fidelity to that identity.²³ Last, the primary task of adults is to develop generativity, which Erikson defined as learning to care for and nurture the next generation. The primary locus of this developmental process is in the family (although Erikson allowed that generativity could also be developed in other settings like teaching or coaching where one is investing in some productive activity centered on nurturing the younger generation or creating a better world for future generations).

Failure to develop generativity in adulthood results in pursuing false forms of intimacy, self-absorption, and isolation.²⁴ Interestingly, Erikson himself noted the similarity of his three major life-span developmental tasks to the Christian virtues of hope, faith, and charity.²⁵

Sustained nurturing involvement in the lives of children provides potent inoculations against the pathology of egocentrism. Children have a way of making people around them grow up and become less self-centered. They deflate the adolescent preoccupation with self that is often carried into adulthood in a self-centered culture. Of course, the nurturing of children requires tremendous energy and effort; it can drain emotional reserves and restrict personal freedom. But it is also liberating, as parents come to realize that their own needs are not nearly as demanding as they once thought. Moreover, parents come to develop an additional kind of love for each other, one that is more Christlike than romantic. Parents gain a sense of their capacities to give and love without regard to a “return on their investment.”

In developing Christlike family relationships, parents come to understand their Father in Heaven in a way that was previously beyond their comprehension, and sense, possibly for the first time, their divine parenting potential as they identify with God, who is engaged in the same work they are. They come to “behold” the nurturing of God, who said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring

to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Ultimately, parents can come to the knowledge that God’s cosmic career centers around caring for his children. Accordingly, godhood is about nurturing children; generativity, the nurturing of children, is the beginning and end of godhood. Hence generative sacrifice brings forth not only the blessings of heaven, but also a deeper sense of heavenly possibilities.

God the Father’s nurturance for his children is powerfully exemplified by his relationship with his Only Begotten Son. Jesus on numerous occasions describes the relationship with his Father as complete oneness (for example, John 17:3). Only once during his mortal life, briefly at the end, did the Son feel distant from his Father (see Matt. 27:46), but even this painful experience at Golgotha was necessary for the Father to glorify his Son.

In addition, note the nurturing introduction from the Father each time he introduces his Son to an individual or a group: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17; see also 3 Ne. 11:7; compare JS-H 1:17). Mark and Luke render this paternal passage even more personally: “Thou art my beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11; compare Luke 3:22). In these communications, the Father speaks openly of his love for his Son, of their emotional connection, and shows his pride in and approval of Jesus’ behavior. These nurturing words are a divine pattern all fathers should try to emulate.

Emerging Evidence of the Spirit of Elijah Turning the Hearts of the Fathers

Encouraging signs that many fathers are responding to the Spirit of Elijah and turning their hearts to the children include the following: (1) a small but growing number of fathers are becoming more involved in the daily care and nurturing of their children, (2) the status of children is improving, and (3) people are showing greater concern for the natural environment that will be passed on to future generations.

Greater Paternal Involvement. As discussed earlier, too many fathers are disconnected from their children. Yet there is an emerging consensus in Western countries that such disconnection

is not good. Family researchers have found that most men and women now believe that fathers should be intimately involved in the daily care of their children.²⁶ Although some researchers have measured only small increases in the amount of time American fathers are devoting to child care, other researchers are finding a small but growing number of men, especially younger ones, who are reshaping their occupations and identities to accommodate higher levels of involvement in their children's daily lives.²⁷ The results generally have been positive for men, their wives, and the children they care for *together*.²⁸

The Prophet Joseph Smith believed that fathers should be involved in the daily family work. An early Latter-day Saint, Jesse Crosby, once observed Joseph doing "menial" tasks in his home, including some child-care tasks, and expressed his disappointment that one with such a high calling would be involved in such lowly labor. Joseph kindly responded, "If there be humiliation in a man's house, who but the head of that house should or could bear that humiliation?"²⁹

Every LDS Church President since President David O. McKay has echoed the ninth President's words that "the most important of the Lord's work you and I will ever do will be within the walls of our own homes."³⁰ Elders James E. Faust and Carlos Asay have recently urged husbands to be more helpful in sharing household tasks and caring for children.³¹ Elder G. Homer Durham counseled, "Man . . . has obligations to learn the difficult art of fatherhood in home-making."³² President Benson also believes husbands should participate in domestic duties:

Flowers on special occasions are wonderful, but so is your willingness to help with the dishes, change diapers, get up with a crying child in the night, and leave the television or newspaper to help with the dinner. Those are the quiet ways we say 'I love you' with our actions.³³

Some of the recent institutional changes in the Church reinforce the concern of Church leaders that fathers move from the periphery of daily family life to its center. For instance, the consolidation of Sunday meetings stemmed in part from a concern for giving fathers more time to be with and guide their children.³⁴ In addition, fathers are constantly urged to exercise their priestly functions

as spiritual leaders in their homes.³⁵ In a First Presidency letter (August 1993), Church leaders stated, “Because this responsibility for our children is so important, we must rededicate ourselves to nourish and bless them temporally and spiritually.”³⁶

These injunctions have little to do with reasserting dominion in the domestic realm (see D&C 121:35–46) but everything to do with properly nurturing children. Prophetic counsel to have family home evenings, family scripture study, and family prayer is not given simply to move the location of religious activities from church meetinghouses to family dwellings. Instead, this counsel is given to encourage fathers to return their hearts to their children.³⁷

Temple-based priesthood ordinances indicate that sacred ritual, in sacred places for sacred purposes, can be a powerful aid in turning the hearts of fathers to children (and vice versa). Perhaps this is why Church leaders stress home-based family worship and the performance in the home of sacred functions such as fathers’ blessings, dedication of homes, and blessings of healing, comfort, and counsel. Priesthood blessings and ordinances can help seal the heart of a father to his child because they involve the father touching his child and expressing Spirit-guided thoughts and heart-felt feelings.

Children’s Improving Status. Without question, many troubling societal trends affect children’s lives. Neglect, abuse, family dissolution, addiction, poverty, and pornography are only the beginning of social problems that harm increasing numbers of children. Yet the social landscape for children in some ways has improved over the last two centuries. For instance, although studies estimate that 2.5 million children in the United States are abused in some way each year, mostly by their fathers and mothers,³⁸ some historians argue that abusive treatment of children by parents has declined significantly over the last few centuries. Such practices as killing female infants, swaddling, and wet nursing, common in families until a few centuries ago, are now almost extinct in the West.³⁹ Furthermore, the nineteenth century evidenced a dramatic increase in societal concerns over nurturing and educating all children.⁴⁰

Of course recent trends, such as drug addiction among young mothers, have tragic consequences for many children, and current notions of what constitutes proper parenting are far from perfect.

But there is little doubt that the West has at least succeeded in diminishing many developmentally brutal practices common and accepted only a few centuries ago.

More evidence that the hearts of the fathers may be returning to their children comes from an increasing condemnation and intolerance of child abuse and neglect, serious sins condemned by the Lord (see Matt. 18:4-6). President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

I am glad there is a hue and cry going up against the terrible evil [of child abuse], too much of which is found among our own. Fathers, you cannot abuse your little ones without offending God. . . . Any man who beats or in other ways abuses his children will be held accountable before the great judge of us all.⁴¹

In addition, significant strides have been made in reducing debilitating and deadly childhood diseases throughout the world and toward educating the young. Unfortunately, the United States lags behind the other industrialized countries of the world in terms of investing in the human resources of the next generation.⁴² Yet prominent American voices are beginning to call for parents to “move children up the scale of adult priorities”⁴³ and for greater individual and collective “responsibility for the next generation.”⁴⁴ Additionally, emerging social and political movements in the United States place at the center of their platforms a warning that individual adult rights must be checked by a more prominent sense of responsibility for children.⁴⁵

Caring for the Environment. Immense changes to the earth and people’s attitudes toward it have been brought about by industrialization and urbanization. As industrialization progressed, industrialized societies began to view the earth as an inexhaustible mine of resources to be removed, processed, used, and discarded as quickly and efficiently as possible. This view renders many nonrenewable resources unavailable to the next generation and leaves the earth scarred, diminished, and unsafe.

However, turning the hearts of the fathers to the children is also evidenced in the emerging recognition of the need to take better care of the natural environment that sustains life on earth. Probably the most tangible inheritance one generation passes on to the next is the condition of the natural environment; the conscious

protection, care, and nurturance of the earth in order to provide one's children and grandchildren with a safe and pleasant habitation is a further manifestation of generativity. Embedded in such a concern is the principle of stewardship: people are entrusted to care for and "replenish" (Gen. 1:28) the earth for their children and all God's children.⁴⁶ Thus, the hearts of today's fathers and mothers are turned to the children when they begin to care about what kind of natural environment their descendants will have.

"Cursed" and "utterly wasted" (Mal. 4:6; JS-H 1:39) are accurate descriptions of what the earth will look like if practices of reckless disregard for the natural environment continue. Eastern Europe, where extensive disregard for the environment over the past sixty years has occurred, provides a sobering warning; fortunately, even though financial resources are severely limited, many Eastern Europeans now recognize that economic progress must include cleaning up and preserving the environment.⁴⁷

The 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil, despite its shortcomings, was momentous in its symbolism that the quality of children's lives depends on the ability of adults to sacrifice some of their current short-term and shortsighted economic policies for policies that will preserve the goodness of the earth.⁴⁸ Indeed, in his opening address, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said, "We are doing this not for us but for future generations, for our grandchildren."⁴⁹

In Doctrine and Covenants 59, the Lord revealed to the Saints who came to the land of Zion that the "good things of the earth" are included in their inheritance (v. 3), that the "fulness of the earth" is given to "please the eye and gladden the heart" (vv. 16-18), and that, although the things of the earth are given to benefit mankind, they are to be used "with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" (v. 20).

President Kimball recommended "to all people that there be no undue pollution, that the land be taken care of and kept clean, productive, and beautiful."⁵⁰ Brigham Young similarly stressed that the proper relationship with the earth grows out of a sense of stewardship; the earth is not the property of man, but of God.⁵¹ President Young emphasized the concept of stewardship—caring for and improving the earth—as a significant duty of the Saints.⁵²

Thus, it appears that the Lord expects the Saints to play an active role in assisting him to fulfill the prophecy “that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (A of F 10). Heavenly grace in assisting mortal efforts to care for the environment may be directly related to the mission of Elijah.

It seems fitting that Elijah, who exercised priesthood power over the elements, who stopped the Jordan River so that he could walk across on dry ground (2 Kgs. 2:8), who called down fire from heaven (1 Kgs. 18:38), who sealed the heavens for three years so that they refused to give rain (1 Kgs. 17:1, 18:1), and who was fed by ravens during those drought years (1 Kgs. 17:4-6), was among those who restored the keys essential to latter-day work. Although the fullness of the prophecy of Malachi will not be realized until the second coming of Christ, Latter-day Saints should recognize their stewardship in assisting the Lord in this cleansing of the earth. And since the restored gospel involves the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), it seems natural that the Spirit of Elijah would impress upon current fathers and mothers the desire to help restore the earth to the purity and beauty of Eden in preparation for the return of the Creator.

Brigham Young also saw a connection between desecrating our souls with sin and our environment with pollution. “For Brigham, moral and physical cleanliness and pollutions are no more to be separated than mind and body.”⁵³ Nibley has shown how the scriptures and the prophets often link the building of Zion with the care and nurturing of the earth.⁵⁴ The ancient Book of Mormon prophet Moroni saw the last days in vision and said that there would be “great pollutions upon the face of the earth” (Mor. 8:31). The term “pollutions” may refer to both physical and spiritual/moral impurities since the verses preceding this statement refer to physical calamities (for example, fires and vapors of smoke) while the verses immediately after it speak of spiritual corruption.

The link between spiritual and environmental pollution has also been noted by President Ezra Taft Benson:

Again, physical and spiritual laws are interrelated. Pollution of one’s environment and moral impurity both rest on a life-style which partakes of a philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry”—gouge and grab now, without regard to the consequences. Both violate the spirit of

stewardship for which we will stand accountable. . . . The Church has urged its members to be efficient users of our resources, to avoid waste and pollution, and to clean up their own immediate environment or that over which they have control.⁵⁵

Disrespect for the earth, President Benson says, comes from a hedonistic philosophy of concern only for the present moment and the pleasures it can yield to the individual. In contrast, when people show concern for the future environment of their children, they yield to a higher law that emphasizes concern for others as well.

Many Latter-day Saint fathers and mothers teach their children by example and precept the principles of personal stewardship for the earth through gardening, food storage, conservation, and recycling.⁵⁶ Thus, the hearts of the parents are turned to the children in preserving the earth in preparation for the return of the Creator to his creation. This is one of the most concrete ways that the generations work together to avoid the curse spoken of by Malachi.

Conclusion

Malachi's prophecy refers to the second coming as the "great and terrible day of the Lord." The last days are also both great and terrible days for fathers and children—a time of great polarization between good and evil. Much of what the media reports are the terrible aspects of economic and emotional neglect of children or the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse perpetrated by destructive parents. But there are also great improvements in the way many fathers treat their children and the children of others. More men are spending substantial time with children, both working with them in the home and assisting them in their various activities. Many fathers have learned more constructive and effective methods of disciplining children that avoid the evils of abuse. And more and more fathers are striving to do less harm to the Lord's creation to insure future generations of children will enjoy a healthy, abundant life.

We hope to have shown that the prophecy of Malachi has rich meaning in addition to that of genealogical research and temple work in the latter days. The Spirit of Elijah motivates living fathers and mothers to turn their hearts to nurturing the next generation,

rather than “turn[ing] every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). The Spirit of Elijah influences fathers to become more involved in the daily care and nurturing of their children and strengthening them through sacred ordinances, blessings, and activities; it encourages society to eliminate child abuse and to promote child rearing in developmentally appropriate ways, and it fosters global concern for the natural environment that generations of children will inherit.

In this article, we have only begun to reflect on the range of rich meanings that may be embedded in the prophecy of Malachi. Those meanings can be a source of great comfort in these challenging times when so much is going in the wrong direction. Part of our fascination with Malachi’s prophecy comes from a perception that it is one of the most powerful scriptural prophecies that heralds “glad tidings” in the days preceding the “great and dreadful day of the Lord.” While most prophecies of the last days warn of spiritually and temporally destructive forces that will endanger souls and cause men’s hearts to fail them (D&C 88:91) or foretell calamitous events (Matt. 24:7, 30), Malachi describes a divine, subtle power in the last days that can influence people to walk in the paths of righteousness. Fathers (and mothers) must walk that path, not alone, but hand-in-hand and heart-to-heart with children.

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NOTES

¹Dallin H. Oaks, “Scripture Reading and Revelation,” address given to the BYU Studies Academy, Provo, Utah, January 29, 1993.

²Harold B. Lee, address given at the Priesthood Genealogical Seminar, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, August 3, 1973; quoted in L. G. Otten and C. H. Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 2 vols. (Springville, Utah: LEMB, 1982-83), 2:16.

³Boyd K. Packer, “The Family and Eternity,” *Ensign* 1 (February 1971): 11.

⁴James E. Faust, “Father Come Home,” *Ensign* 23 (May 1993): 37.

⁵John W. Welch, “New Testament Word Studies,” *Ensign* 23 (April 1993): 28.

⁶*The Prophets: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978), 898; italics added.

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⁸R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:909.

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³¹ James E. Faust, "Becoming 'Great Women,'" *Ensign* 16 (September 1986): 20; and Carlos Asay, *Family Pecan Trees* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 240.

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³³ Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Fathers in Israel," *Ensign* 17 (November 1987): 50.

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³⁵ Faust, "Father Come Home," 35.

³⁶ The First Presidency to General Authorities; Regional Representatives; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops; and Branch Presidents, August 1, 1993, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

³⁷ J.M. Heslop, "2,700 at Genealogy Seminar," *Church News*, August 11, 1973, 14, quoting Harold B. Lee.

³⁸ E. Mavis Hetherington and Ross D. Parke, *Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 433-34.

³⁹ Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd deMause (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 1-73.

⁴⁰ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 11-12.

⁴¹ Gordon B. Hinckley, "To Please Our Heavenly Father," *Ensign* 15 (May 1985): 50.

⁴² Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks*, 41-76.

⁴³ Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks*, 123.

⁴⁴ Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks*, 35.

⁴⁵ *The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities*, Communitarian Network, 714-F Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶ John J. Berger, *Restoring the Earth: How Americans Are Working to Renew Our Damaged Environment* (New York: Anchor Press, 1987); Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988); Wendell Berry, *The Gift of the Good Land: Further Essays, Cultural and Agricultural* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981); and Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Brigham Young noted,

There is only so much property in the world. There are the elements that belong to this globe, and no more. We do not go to the moon to borrow; neither send to the sun or any of the planets; all our commercial transactions must be confined to this little earth and its wealth cannot be increased or diminished; and though the improvements in the arts of life which have taken place within the memory of many

now living are very wonderful, there is no question that extravagance has more than kept pace with them. (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855], 13:304)

⁴⁷ “Poland’s Industrial Showcase Leaves Legacy of Pollution, Deformed Children,” *Provo Daily Herald*, September 7, 1991, A-6; Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, “Pollution from across the Danube Started Bulgarian Revolution,” *Provo Daily Herald*, September 3, 1991, B-4.

⁴⁸ Gregg Easterbrook, “Why Rio Will Make History,” *Newsweek*, June 15, 1992, 33.

⁴⁹ Paul Raeburn, “Earth Summit Opens with Plea for Future,” *Provo Daily Herald*, June 3, 1992, A-1.

⁵⁰ Spencer W. Kimball, “Why Call Me Lord, Lord, and Do Not the Things Which I Say?” *Ensign* 5 (May 1975): 5.

⁵¹ Hugh W. Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” in *To the Glory of God: Mormon Essays on Great Issues—Environment, Commitment, Love, Peace, Youth, Man*, ed. Truman G. Madsen and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 7. President Hinckley has said, “This earth is [Christ’s] creation. When we make it ugly, we offend him” (Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted by Kristen Rogers, “Stewards of the Earth,” *This People* 11 [Spring 1990]: 16).

⁵² Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” 7.

⁵³ Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” 4. President Young noted, “The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy, wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the human family” (Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:79).

⁵⁴ Hugh W. Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989), 341-77.

⁵⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 644-45; also see Kimball, “Why Call Me Lord, Lord”; and Spencer W. Kimball, “God Will Not Be Mocked,” *Ensign* 4 (November 1974): 4.

⁵⁶ See “Using Earth’s Resources Well,” *Ensign* 23 (September 1993): 54.