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## By Divine Design: Best Practices for Family Success and Happiness

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*By Divine Design: Best Practices for Family Success and Happiness*, edited by Brent L. Top and Michael A. Goodman (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014)

In *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaim that the responsibilities and joys of marriage, parenting, and family life are given to men and women “by divine design.” Using this phrase to set the tone for their edited volume, this book’s editors further subtitle this selection of twelve articles a compendium of “best practices” designed to promote family success and happiness. The edited collection was developed under the guidance of Brent L. Top, dean of Religious Education and professor of Church history and doctrine, and Michael A. Goodman, associate professor of Church history and doctrine, both of Brigham Young University.

“Best practices” in fields ranging from education to management refer to principle-based approaches that are useful, enduring, and meaningful in facilitating growth and success. Many a spouse or parent has wondered how best to resolve an interpersonal conflict or provide helpful support to a family member in times of difficulty. In this volume, the authors were encouraged to draw upon and integrate essential teachings from scripture and prophetic leaders with sound findings from social science to make clear and apply such best practices to family life. The contributors include a range of scholars and educators from marriage, family and human development, sociology, psychology, and religious education at Brigham Young University.

This collection of twelve articles has been edited carefully, and each chapter

presents an accessible, interesting, and practical profile of its family topic, enriched by color photos and relevant summaries of scientific data or gospel-related teachings. The volume opens with a chapter on a common family struggle, seeking harmony in family life in a busy, chaotic world. The next three chapters focus on sustaining a healthy marriage, with articles that address the role of faith and commitment in marriage; time challenges and couple rituals in marriage; and marriage, divorce, and covenant-keeping in the LDS community. The remaining eight chapters explore multiple dimensions of the parenting experience. One chapter on parenting provides an in-depth discussion of raising children based on the key principles of latitude, limits, and love. Other chapters explore the unique roles of women and men as parents, with one focused on the mothering experience in our modern world and its key contributions, while the other addresses “faithful fathering” and vital elements of how fathers can reach for success in family life. Another chapter explores the transmission of faith to children and best practices in cultivating a healthy religious environment in the home that will bless children. The last four chapters focus on parenting teenagers and young adults, and include explorations of specific and proactive parenting practices for teens, raising teens to overcome selfishness and indulgence, helping young adults transition into the key domains of adult life, and selected parental practices for navigating the challenges of raising “emerging” adults.

In a world where trustworthy information can be difficult to find, this volume presents a useful compilation that blends spiritual perspectives with sound research findings. If readers are indeed interested in finding “family success

and happiness,” this book will provide them with an understanding of contemporary challenges in family life and a broad set of “best practices” that can be understood and applied in strengthening marriage, improving parenting, and enriching family relationships.

—Sean Brotherson

*The First Vision: A Harmonization of 10 Accounts from the Sacred Grove* by Matthew B. Christensen (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2014)

The First Vision of Joseph Smith is one of the defining moments in the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With it began the Restoration of the gospel and the reopening of the communication between God and his children. Even after the contributions of scholars such as Milton V. Backman, James B. Allen, John W. Welch, and Steven C. Harper, most Latter-day Saints are familiar with only the canonized account of this vision recorded in Joseph Smith—History in the Pearl of Great Price. However, there are other accounts of it recorded by Joseph Smith as well as other secondary sources.

In this short book that is also filled with beautiful illustrations, Matthew B. Christensen attempts to do something that many agree is long overdue: harmonize ten different accounts of the First Vision into one comprehensive account. He begins his book by providing certain criteria that helped him decide which accounts he should or should not use in this harmony. Basically, he chose to use only those that were recorded during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, resulting in ten accounts. He then goes on to summarize each of them, briefly discussing their origins, authors, and content. After these summaries, he describes his method

of bringing the accounts together into one, and his organizational plan, which is essentially to keep the canonized version as the “core melody,” and to have the other nine accounts as “accompaniment” in the “harmony” (9). He also notes the limitations to such a task, and comments that though he has tried to ensure a fair portrayal of all the accounts, he is aware that there may be some human error evident in the final outcome.

After these introductory sections, Christensen provides the reader with a color key, which assigns a specific color to each of the different accounts so as to aid the reader when going through the harmony. The next pages contain the harmony itself, and it is in these pages that the reader will be able to read the many different accounts of the First Vision as one flowing version. After this harmony, he offers a short conclusion, including a small section with an invitation from Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon with their promise of a personal witness to the truthfulness of their testimonies.

Those interested in a better understanding of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, member of the Church or not, will find this an informative read. It offers a new approach to all of the various accounts of the First Vision and uncovers some of the lesser-known details and thoughts of Joseph before, during, and after the event. As a result, it is more varied than the canonized version and even includes a section where all of Christ’s words from the different accounts are together at one time. Visitors at the new exhibition in Salt Lake City at the Church History Museum entitled “The Heavens Are Open” will also encounter a shorter but similar harmonization in the dramatic presentation of the First Vision there.

While it is helpful to see the various accounts harmonized as one, readers will also benefit from Christensen’s