Strengthening the Family: A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers

Jane C. Beuhring

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Mormon Studies Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4527

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Strengthening the Family: A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Family Sciences
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Jane C. Beuhring
December 1984
This thesis by Jane Chatterley Beuhring is accepted in its present form by the Department of Family Sciences of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

Terrance D. Olson, Committee Chairman

Robert F. Stahmann, Committee Member

Dec. 7, 1984

Date

Robert F. Stahmann, Department Chairman
Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation is extended to those who supported and encouraged me through this project: my family—my mother, Lillian Chatterley and my sister, Phyllis Chatterley—friends—especially Wanda Allen and Dell Allen, Mary Lois Gunnell and Kay Davenport—and my committee chairman, Terrance Olson. My most humble appreciation goes to my family—Sheli, Kelley, Ryan, Jacob, Daniel, Nathan and Micah. They not only encouraged me, but they lovingly tolerated me, and demonstrated support through many hours of mother absence. Lastly, to my husband Ryan for his unrelenting confidence in me, and his willingness to edit the manuscript, and most of all for the kind of person he is.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................. 1
   Justification of the Study .................................. 2

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ....................................... 6
   - The Single Parent Home--Dysfunctional? 6
   - Concerns of the LDS Single Parent 7
   - More Single Parents 8
   - Strengths of Single Parent Families 9
     Relations with Absent Parent 10
     Relations with Children 14
   - Use of Social Networks 21
     Management/Personal Outlook 23
   - The Empirical and the Religious in
     Family Life Education 32
   - Motivational Theories 32
   - The Parallels between "Scientific"
     Philosophy and LDS Beliefs 38
   - A Proposal 40

3. PROCEDURES .................................................... 43

4. STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY: A GUIDE FOR
   LDS SINGLE PARENT MOTHERS .................................. 51

   FOREWORD ...................................................... 52

## CHAPTER:

1. Principles to Live By ....................................... 54
2. Unfinished Business ......................................... 71
3. Building Family Unity ....................................... 82
4. Parenting Single Style ...................................... 99
5. Gospel Oriented Teaching
   Moments .................................................... 123
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER:</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Principles to Live By</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unfinished Business</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Building Family Unity</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parenting Single Style</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gospel Oriented Teaching Moments</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

A recent report in *U.S. News and World Report* (Oct. 1984) states that thirty percent of all children will be living in single parent homes by the year 1990, the majority of which are headed by the female parent. This increase in the number of single parent homes is of great concern, particularly to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), a religion which espouses eternal union for righteous families. This concern is caused by the slow but steady increase in the number of single parent families within the LDS Church. Although members of the LDS Church have a markedly lower rate than the national average, nevertheless, the numbers are increasing (Ensign, July, 1984).

The causes which bring one to the status of single parent are unfortunate--death of the spouse, divorce, or unwed childbirth. Each of these causes has the potential to create emotional distress and even mourning (Pais and White, 1979). For an LDS parent, the death of a spouse, though emotionally painful to the surviving spouse, is (usually) the most socially
acceptable way to "become" a single parent. If the LDS single parent has been divorced he or she may suffer additional emotional distress from feelings of guilt as well as a unfounded fear of being denied eternal companionship and family relations.

In addition to the emotional trauma accompanying divorce, the single parent (who is typically the mother), is left with the responsibility of providing both the emotional and practical support for the children. She must manage the home and perform a variety of maintenance tasks, many of which were previously the responsibility of the husband-father. Often she must do this in addition to her full or part-time job, which becomes necessary to provide for the needed, and often inadequate, financial support for her family (Clayton, 1971; Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974).

Justification of the Study

The problems of the single parent are of vital concern and should be addressed. They do seem to face more intense challenges, and more frequently, than dual parent families. But attempts to help single parents by exaggerating or encouraging their differences or problems may not be helpful. It is the purpose of this thesis to focus on a means for strengthening these families rather than just enumerating their problems.
While single parenting is not easy, and although this family structure may not be ideal, it is not a sufficient condition to produce problem children. Even Nye's (1957) landmark work on broken families and delinquency found that the majority of children from single parent families were, in fact, not delinquent. So help offered single parents need not start with the presupposition that their hopes for success as families are unrealistic.

The book written as part of this thesis was designed to offer single parents hope (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981) and to invite professionals and the lay public who wish to help single parents, to use a positive approach to single parenting.

A review of literature revealed a lack of information addressing the emotional and practical needs of the LDS single parent family. Although some books have been written describing traits of healthy twoparent families (Curran, 1983; Lewis, Beavers, Gossett & Philips, 1976), the literature addressing the healthy functioning of the single parent family is limited (Barry, 1979).

Although many of the traits of successful families would apply to both the dual and single parents, the single parent, especially the single mother, has some obvious challenges which set her apart
from the traditional two-parent family. For instance, she alone carries the family responsibilities which are shared in two-parent families. Moreover, she usually does not command the salary levels comparable to that of single fathers with custody (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974).

**Problem Statement**

The lack of information on the subject of strengthening single parent families, including those with an LDS foundation, means generally that each LDS single mother is left to discover her own best way to approach single parenting. Therefore, the intent of this thesis was to collect and organize information which reflected the LDS point of view and could assist the LDS single parent, in particular the LDS divorced mother, in more readily coping with single parenting.

**Justification**

One goal of family life educators is to reach those families most in need. In order to reach the LDS single family, this thesis has been focused on providing information on quality family living based on the concepts, teachings, and principles already established as part of the LDS religion. This is compatible with academic goals because the professional literature has produced data which support various aspects of LDS family philosophy. Most of the concepts discussed are
supported in the academic literature, and their meanings and applications have been translated into an LDS framework to better meet the needs of the LDS single parent.

Research also suggests that the very philosophy or attitudes held by single mothers is an important facet of her capacity to succeed. Therefore, it was determined that the LDS single mother would benefit from a compilation of concepts, teachings, and principles consistent with her religious values. It is the purpose of this thesis to meet that need.

It has been shown that by strengthening the family the members of the family become more capable of coping with the challenges of life (Stinnett, et al, 1979). To assist in this strengthening process a book entitled, "Strengthening the Family: A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers" has been written which comprises Chapter Four of this thesis. It is the product of the author's research.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

A recent report on the future of the American family stated that 30 percent of all children will be in single parent homes by the year 1990. The report noted that half of all children in the U.S. will have spent some time in a single parent family before they are grown (U.S. News and World Report, Oct. 15, 1984, p. 26).

As the frequency of single parent families steadily increases, society is taking a closer look at the challenges faced by the one parent family (Weiss, 1979). The strengths and weaknesses of such families have been identified by researchers.

The Single Parent Home--Dysfunctional?

Single parent homes are often referred to as "broken", "disorganized" or "disintegrated" (Cavan, 1964). Children raised by female heads-of-house have been regarded as being from families which are deviant and pathological (Glasser & Navarre, 1964). Historically these families have been labeled as inevitably dysfunctional (Mendes, 1979). Children raised in single parent homes are more likely to have social and
A family can be stigmatized by being labeled dysfunctional. Such labels invite negative reactions from the public which can affect the entire family (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974).

Brandwein, et al., (1974) pointed out that single parents themselves often believe that society sees them as abnormal. Recent studies affirm that low self-esteem, social stigma and perceived societal rejection are frequent difficulties in one-parent homes (Brown, Fieldberg, Fox & Kohen, 1976). Often single parents, especially single parent mothers, accept these labels and assume that they are inadequate as parents.

**Concerns of the L.D.S. Single Parent**

For the Latter-day Saint woman, the anxiety accompanying divorce is further compounded by the fear of alienation from LDS church members, release from church callings and guilt for the dissolution of the complete family unit with its implied eternal negative consequences (Morris, 1980). In addition to the labeling and stigma attached to the dissolution of the intact family, the single parent mother usually experiences a reaction similar to that of the mourning process--denial, depression, anger, reorientation and acceptance (Pais &
Apart from this emotional trauma, the single parent mother is left also with the responsibilities of providing emotional and practical guidance for the children, while having to cope with home care and maintenance functions, many of which were previously the responsibility of the husband-father. As a single parent she may also be required to seek full or part-time employment in order to provide the necessary finances to support her family (Clayton, 1971). In many ways, the L.D.S. single parent faces the same challenges as do single parents in the general population.

**More Single Parents**

The proportion of women facing the tasks of life as a single parent is increasing, and many are not content with the economic servitude experienced by the single parents of previous decades. As the demand of single parent women for economic opportunities, child care facilities, low cost housing, and social acceptance accelerates, public awareness increases. As a result of this public awareness, the single parent family is gaining recognition and acceptance (Sussman, 1971; Barry, 1979). Schlesinger (1980) has suggested that it is time to pay even closer attention to the single parent family. One sign of this attention is the appearance of books and articles directed to this specific audience.
Most publications available to the single parent focus on problem areas such as celibacy (or sex), working versus welfare, child care alternatives, loneliness, dating, etc. Usually the intent of these publications is to provide insight into the problems of the single parent, reassure them that their problems are shared by others, and suggest, based on the experiences of others, how they might cope with their problems (Hope & Young, 1976). Though the goals of the books are appropriate, the underlying assumption nevertheless, is that single parents are isolated from the mainstream of society, and are therefore deviant in nature. It is this very assumption that precipitates many of the negative attitudes that the single parent mother has about herself (Brandwein, Brown, Fox, 1974).

Strengths of Single Parent Families

Tolstoy once wrote, "All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion" (Curran, 1983 p. 3). If all happy families resemble one another, then by identifying those traits which contribute to their success, others may be able to model those traits and thereby experience greater success within their own family (Stinnett, 1979). With this in mind the author set out to discover what, if any, research had been done on those characteristics
or traits associated with successful single parent families.

Although some books have been written describing the traits ascribed to healthy two parent families (Curran, 1983; Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, and Phillips, 1976; Stinnett, Chesser, DeFrain, 1979), very little can be found that describes those traits ascribed to healthy single parent families. To date, only one major study has been done that deals with successful single parent families (Barry, 1979).

Barry's (1979) study was designed to learn more about variables associated with successful single parent families. She selected 25 single parents who reported their families as being successful. She sought information concerning the following six categories: (1) relations with absent parent, (2) relations with children, (3) use of social networks, (4) management/personal outlook, (5) ages of family members, and (6) educational level/income.

This review will be organized around Barry's study. It is comprehensive and describes the major issues associated with the strengths of single parent families.

Relations with Absent Parent

According to Barry (1979), the amount of involvement successful single parent families had with the
absent parent varied from a frequent, meaningful involvement to virtually no contact. Her study revealed that 40% of the respondents who rated themselves as successful had excessive to frequent contact with, and cooperation of the absent parent. This contact is assumed to be more supportive of the single parent family than destructive. This is consistent with the work of Weiss (1979). He reports the involvement of the absent parent as beneficial. He found that children are better able to adjust to living within a single parent family when they witness cooperation between their parents, who are also adjusting to new life styles.

Sometimes ex-spouses who do not have custody of their children are seen as being "footloose and fancy free" or as "having a free ride". Such labels assume these parents have no real commitments to their children. Yet, research suggests that, more often than not, these parents do grieve the separation from their children (O'Connell & O'Connell, 1980).

Barry's study was general in the discussion of the absent parent. She referred primarily to the presence or absence of co-parenting and cooperation. Nothing was reported in regards to visitation rights. The literature seems to be vague when discussing the absent parent's visitations privileges. The literature also refrains from being specific in setting forth
guidelines for visitation. In addition, there was a noticeable void of information relating to the ex-spouse's extended family.

However, studies indicate that unless the father has played an active role in care-taking activities of the children, his absence will have little consequence to the family in terms of establishing appropriate role models (Kohlberg, 1966; Aldous, 1972). Further, it may not be so much the absence of the father, but the increased role strain on the mother, and the physical and/or emotional absence of the mother which creates difficulties for the single parent family (Brandwein, Brown, & Fox 1974).

In the past, the literature has suggested that there is psychological damage to children whose father is absent. Yet, several studies have shown that the damage, if present, is much less than has been assumed popularly. Burchinal (1964), Landis (1960), Nye (1957), Despert (1953) and others have found that a happy one-parent family is certainly no worse off, and in fact may be better off, than an unhappy two-parent family.

Not surprisingly, the lack of contact with uncooperative spouses also contributed to the success of single parent families. A high number of single parent families (60%) who had experienced little to
no involvement with the absent parent, also reported
themselves as successful (Barry, 1979). This would
seem to indicate that although cooperation and involve-
ment of the absent parent can be beneficial to the
success of a single parent family, it is comparably
beneficial to have little or no contact with an uncooper-
ative absent parent.

The success of the single parent family may be
threatened if relations between the parents continue to
be turbulent after divorce (Brandwein, Brown & Fox,
1974). Satir (1972) reports that when there has not
been a healthy separation with the necessary adjust-
ments, the parents often attempt to punish each other.
She notes that punishment may take the form of withholding
visitation rights, child support, or a variety of other
similar attempts to "get even" with the ex-spouse. For
example, the absent parent may try to form an alliance
with the children and use that alliance against the
other parent. Sometimes the children will be caught in
what is often referred to as the "lollypop war". This
occurs when one parent attempts to "win" the children's
loyalty through gifts and/or entertainment knowing that
the other parent will not or cannot compete in the same
way (Satir, 1972; Getty and Humphreys, 1981).

As long as unresolved feelings and competition
exist between the two parents there will be tension
and failure on the part of the parents as well as the children to successfully adjust to their imposed life styles. When the children are involved in such tensions, the successful functioning of the family suffers (Pais and While, 1979; Brandwein, Brown, and Fox, 1974). Therefore, to be free of negative input from the absent parent can actually contribute to the successful functioning of the single parent family.

This research is consistent with Barry's (1979) findings that positive interaction with the absent parent is the most beneficial for the family (Peterson & Cleminshaw, 1980). But if the relationship with the absent parent is negative, then the family functions more successfully when there is no contact.

**Relations with Children**

Barry (1979) found that successful single parents viewed themselves as successful primarily because they perceived an unusually positive relationship between themselves and their children. The four characteristics most often associated with successful parent/children relationships are: (a) a good rapport with their children, (b) open communication within the family, (c) a sense of sharing and working together, and (d) the ability to accept and support one another in a loving manner (Barry, 1979, p. 67).
A further review of research on this subject gives strong support to Barry's findings (Lewis, et al, 1976; Stinnett, 1979; Curran, 1983). This research indicates that individual reports of successful interaction seem to be good predictors of successful parent/child relationships and of the accompanying signs of healthy functioning families. For example, when there is positive rapport there is good communication. Good communication is often a result of sharing and working together. Sharing and working together are often a result of acceptance and support from one another. Acceptance and support are often a result of positive rapport. Thus, we have a cycle that has no predetermined beginning or end. In order to better understand these signs of successful interaction, how they contribute to successful parent/child relationships, and to positive functioning in families, each set of traits will be discussed.

Rapport may also be characterized as warmth, trust, and respect, all characteristics common to successfully functioning families (Nelson & Banonia, 1981). Stinnett (1979) noted that the quality of appreciation was an important characteristic of successful families. Members of such families report feeling cared for and enjoy being together.
In a long term study of optimal families (Lewis, et al, 1979) the term "closeness" was used. It referred to family members with clear ego boundaries who demonstrated their closeness, harmony, or affinity by choice. So rapport is associated with strong or successfully functioning families.

Open Communication Within the Family. Stinnett (1979) noted that making the time available for talking is an important prerequisite for communication. Several authors have counseled that communication should be direct, clear, specific, and congruent in order to create an environment where all members of the family system may flourish (Satir, 1972; Mishler and Waxler, 1968).

In addition to providing time for communication, members also need to be good listeners. O'Connell (1980) noted that listening with focused attention communicates respect and increases self esteem in the one who is speaking (Stinnett, 1979). In contrast, Lewis, et al, (1979) noted that poor communication in dysfunctional families was masked by family members who jump to conclusions, resort to mind reading and frequently respond with sarcasm.

However, it should be noted that even when good communication skills are employed, conflict and disagreements occur, even in strong families. The
difference between strong families and dysfunctional ones lies in the way conflict is handled. Strong families discuss conflict openly (Stinnett, 1979; Blum, et al, 1972), without fear of reprisals or alienation from family members (Lewis, et al, 1979; Nelson and Banonis, 1981). Each member is encouraged to be responsible for his or her own feelings, thoughts and actions (Lewis, et al, 1979; Mishler and Waxler, 1968). As a result, blaming and accusing (most commonly found in dysfunctional families) are minimized (O'Connell & O'Connell, 1980).

In strong families conflict becomes an opportunity to solve problems. Family members are encouraged to give input, explore alternatives, and contribute to a solution that is best for all those concerned (Stinnett, 1979). When consensus cannot be reached, strong families recognize and respect the authority of the parent to make the final decision (Lewis, et al, 1979; Nelson and Banonia, 1981; and Barry, 1979).

Generally, though, conflict is avoided in strong families because of the establishment of rules agreed upon by all family members. Satir (1972) stated that such rules should be explicit, up-to-date, and subject to change when outdated or when circumstances warrant. Families that possess healthy communication
skills have the ability to adapt to new input and, when appropriate, the freedom to disagree and not be disabled by differences. This adaptability can be growth producing for individual family members and is particularly necessary for the healthy functioning of the family as a whole.

**A Sense of Sharing and Working Together.**

Spending time together and sharing one's feelings is important in building family unity (Stinnett, 1979; Nelson & Banonia, 1981). As family members share their feelings with one another their sensitivity to the needs of others increases. When these needs are met both the giver and receiver benefit and their relationship is strengthened. Often, when one family member sacrifices his or her own desires for the good of the family or for another family member, the whole family is strengthened (Nelson & Banonia, 1971).

Stinnett (1979) noted that time spent eating, working, and playing together also strengthened the family. However, Stinnett (1979) pointed out that this time together doesn't just happen. It needs to be planned. This is because families often become too fragmented by outside demands. The strong family will periodically evaluate its priorities and eliminate those activities that interfere with the family. The strong family invests its energies in establishing
and maintaining traditions reflective of the family's values and often will include extended family members in their traditions (Nelson & Banonia, 1981).

Sharing also occurs when family members work together. In a study conducted to determine capabilities of children as an untapped resource for strong families, Cogle and Tasker (1981) noted that when children perform household tasks they are within close proximity of the parent. Working together then becomes reinforcing and serves as an opportunity for spontaneous communication (Stinnett, 1979).

The benefits of working together not only reduce the workload of the parent but diminish the parent's resentment when feeling overloaded. It also strengthens the family because it creates a sense of unity and purpose, especially when the children feel genuinely appreciated for the work they do (Stinnett, 1979). Providing children with work experiences also benefits them. It teaches them responsibility, clarifies their values in life, equips them with useful skills, and increases their feelings of self worth (Cogle and Tasker, 1981).

The Ability to Accept and Support One Another in a Loving Manner. To be loved, in this context, is to experience the nurturing--touching, caring--of a significant other. In a study by Goldfarb (1945), the
development of infants in a foundling home were studied. The number of infants was high compared to the few caregivers employed by the foundling home. Therefore, these infants received little attention and handling. As a result, the infant showed an increased loss of appetite, little interest in their environment, developmental retardation and sleeping problems. They were generally passive and apathetic to their environment. The symptoms experienced by these infants were attributed to the lack of sufficient love, as characterized by the nurturing, touching, and caring of a significant other.

In recent years much attention has been focused on "touching" or "stroking" as a means of conveying a caring attitude. The acknowledgement of the individual, whether by physical touch, listening attently, showing understanding and empathy, or by giving support in difficult times, is strengthening to a relationship (Nelson & Banonis, 1981; Rogers, 1961; Satir, 1972).

Acceptance of individuals, through genuine caring and concern, creates a climate in which the individual can then be himself (Roger's, 1961). In the family the feeling of belonging and unconditional acceptance frees family members to develop individual autonomy (Lewis, et al, 1979). As family members develop individual autonomy they also develop a stronger commitment to their family. When they are given a
choice between fulfilling a self-interest and doing what is best for the family they choose the latter (Nelson & Banonis, 1981).

**Use of Social Network**

There is an increasing interest among researchers to understand why the same stressor event produces dysfunction in some families (or individuals) and not in others (Adams, 1975; Burr, 1976; Hill, 1949). What these investigators seem to suggest is that strong relationships within the family system (Burr, 1973; Hansen & Hill, 1964; Hill, 1949) and supportive interaction and shared information between family members and others in the community are protected against the adverse consequences of life stress (Cobb, 1976). In a study conducted to assess the role of support systems in strengthening families, Attneave observed that "no family is really, even in its strongest definition as a unit alone, able to survive without the context of other people, with whom there are exchanges, and from whom resources are drawn and to whom it gives things" (1982, p. 309).

The single parent family is no exception. In fact, relying on a social network for support is vital to the success of the single parent family (Barry, 1979). Goode (1956), Sussman (1971), and Winch (1971) agree that the family network serves to protect and
support family members. Barry (1979) noted that the source most frequently utilized for support are members of the single parent's extended family. Bernard (1964) found in a study of single parents living in England that none of his respondents were without some assistance from kin, however minimal. There are others who also serve as alternative surrogates for the absent parent, such as siblings, friends, peers or teachers (Peterson & Cleminshaw, 1979).

The social network serves several functions. It provides support in the form of financial assistance, child care relief and practical help (Barry, 1979; Peterson & Cleminshaw, 1982). Although this type of help is vital, of equal, if not greater importance, is having people who can give advice, encouragement and understanding. Without this emotional support a single parent can feel isolation, depression and a sense of hopelessness while struggling to maintain a family alone (Bernard, 1964).

Raschke (1977) reported evidence showing that social participation among divorcees reduces their level of stress. Social organizations also serve as a support system for the single parent. They offer opportunities for receiving services, information and therapeutic support by reducing social isolation and providing single parents with a reference group
(Leavitt, Davis, Maloney & Maloney, 1983; Blechman & Manning, 1976). However, many of these organizations, such as Parents Without Partners, or programs offered by Family Life Counselors and religious groups, are not available to all single parents. Many of these social organizations can only be found in the larger urban communities (Clayton, 1971; Weiss, 1973).

Employment is considered another type of support system for the single parent. It serves as a significant vehicle for making social contact and an important source for building self esteem (Barry, 1979).

Social networks play a vital role in contributing to the successful functioning of families and, in particular, the successful functioning of the single parent family.

Management/Personal Outlook

Management. Properly managing a family is a challenge, especially for the single parent. Fatigue, lack of time, scarce child care resources, household tasks and financial pressures are common sources of difficulty (Barry, 1979; Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974). However, those single parents who consider themselves successful involve their children in the management of their home (Cogle and Tasker, 1981).

Satir (1972) suggested that tasks assigned to children be made on the basis of ability as well as
interest. Although most tasks require a certain level of ability, selecting tasks that the child is interested in may be more fun for them and therefore insure a greater likelihood that they will stay with the task until it is completed. Making a game of household tasks is often a fun way of getting the job done. However, Slaugh (1982) argued that the "funness" of the job should not be a necessary requirement of good parenting. She contends that children should be taught that "the reason for doing the work should be to contribute to the well being of the family" (Slaugh, 1982, p. 12). If love and appreciation are shown to the children, they will continue to want to help because they will feel rewarded for their contribution to the family (Stinnett, 1983). Additional reinforcement is received as jobs are accomplished. Family members observe the overall effectiveness resulting from family cooperation and gain a sense of pride and satisfaction in belonging to the family unit. This sets in motion a process that Weiss describes as "a kind of benign cycle ... in which successful management of responsibilities leads to enhanced self-confidence, which in turn make easier further management of responsibility" (1979, p. 288).

Sharing household tasks is also beneficial in many other ways. Cogle and Tasker (1981) noted
that housework is often a child's first employment. Attitudes, values and responsibility are acquired in the home. Woods (1972) in a study of unsupervised children of working mothers noted that children who were required to assume household and child care responsibilities within the family showed a high degree of intellectual maturity, cognitive ability and social adjustment. When teaching children how to perform tasks a parent soon learns it takes more time and patience than originally planned. Though the parent strives to achieve high performance from the children, there must be a willingness to accept a standard of performance beneath the parent's own performance level. The parent may be more willing to teach the children when it is realized that sharing housework is an opportunity to assist them in developing skills useful outside the home (Cogle and Tasker, 1981).

The additional benefit of strengthening the parent/children relationship can occur from spontaneous communication and personal interaction (Stinnett, 1983). It may well be that the process of working together is a greater benefit than the accomplishment of a specific task, particularly if the parent is employed and time together is limited (Slaugh, 1982).

The decision to work outside the home can be a very difficult decision to make. There are many
factors to take into consideration: Will working solve enough of my financial strain to be worth my while? How will my working affect my family? Will there be child care available? If there is an expense for child care, will it outweigh the financial returns from work? Will the social contact gained from working offset costs to the family and to the individual? Would a compromise of part-time employment better meet my present needs? Given the age of the children, would it be better to stay home and seek help from the government? (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974).

These are just a few of the questions a single parent may face when deciding whether or not to go to work. To minimize some of the stress involved in making a decision the single parent can involve the family and thus arrive at a decision that the family will support. Research indicates that the motive for seeking work directly influences the degree of satisfaction derived from that work (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974). Thus, if working is by choice, a higher degree of satisfaction exists than for those forced to work out of necessity.

Similar attitudes were shared by the children of working mothers. If the mother receives satisfaction from working her interaction is more positive with
the children, if not, the family as a whole suffers (Woods, 1972).

Single parents faced with the dilemma of working and needing adequate child care, or not working and being dependent upon welfare, are seeking new alternatives. Some have turned to living in apartment homes while others choose to share households (Bernard, 1964). Communes are another alternative (Kantor, 1972). Other types of informal organizations include play groups and baby-sitting cooperatives (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974). However, the most frequent source of child care continues to be relatives and schools.

Yet a single parent's difficulties do not end there. Even if the child care problem is resolved there remains the financial burden of providing for the family. If the single parent relies on the government it is usually insufficient. If the single parent is female and works, she rarely commands a salary sufficient to meet her needs (Brandwein, Brown & Fox, 1974). Nevertheless, despite the level of income, those who consider themselves successful single parents learn to live within their means (Barry, 1979). Being a strong family means adopting a healthy, realistic attitude toward their financial situation.

Brigman (1982) gathered information to identify family strengths during economic crisis. He found that
families that fare best will probably have or be able to develop the following characteristics or skills:

1. Commitment to the family as the central theme of life.
2. A philosophy of life that values persons and relationships more than material things.
3. The ability to perform family roles feasibly and adapt to change.
4. The ability to find satisfaction of interests and needs within the family relationship.
5. Maturity and responsibility in group problem solving.
6. Ability to mobilize personal and community resources for the good of the whole family.
7. Unity in family objectives and the ability to place family needs and objectives above individual goals.
8. Good family and financial management skills.
9. Ability to use crisis as a means of growth with and through other persons (p. 468).

Single parents also utilize outside resources. By doing so they experience greater success in identifying alternatives and solutions to the everyday challenges of single parenting.

It seems apparent that in order to succeed, the single parent must have a pervading attitude of determination to succeed. There must be a willingness to explore alternatives and give oneself credit for one's accomplishments. The single parent may even devise mental strategies that provide a means to cope with the everyday challenges of single parenting (Barry, 1979). These are all a part of the final topic to be discussed.
**Personal Outlook.** In Barry's (1979) study, successful single parents demonstrated a healthy attitude toward their circumstances. They were equipped with a philosophy of life and healthy attitudes which contributed to their success. For instance, they took responsibility for their actions. They took problems in stride, faced them realistically, did the best they could and refused to feel guilty or resentful for what could not be changed. They experienced personal growth and observed growth among family members as they displayed determination and commitment to make the best of their circumstances. In short, when they experienced a crisis they dealt with it in a positive, productive manner.

Stinnett (1973), in a study of 130 strong families, notes that one major characteristic of strong families is the ability to deal with crisis in a positive manner. He uses Waller and Hill's definition of crisis as "any change or disruption in the family which places an unpleasant emotional, financial, or physical burden on members of the family" (Waller & Hill, 1956, p.67).

In a follow-up study involving 66 strong families who had experienced a crisis, Stinnett, et al (1966) collected additional information about how these families coped with their problems. The major contributor to their survival was the support, concern, and types of help given by family. Friends and relatives, too,
provided similar kinds of support. Acts of kindness involved performing necessary maintenance tasks, offering financial assistance, and other similar practical help. More frequent were expressions of love, concern, encouragement, comfort, and understanding through cards, phone calls, and visits. Families in crisis noted that it wasn't so much what people said or did that made a difference, but the fact that they cared.

In addition to external support, strong families in crisis mentioned the comfort they received from their religious beliefs. They spoke of prayer as the primary factor. They had faith that "by working together with faith in God, all things can work for the best. It may not always be the answer we want, but the right one" (Stinnett, et al, 1981, p. 162).

The importance of religious commitment is also supported by Otto (1975) in a research study which indicates that strong families have a high degree of religious orientation. MuCubbin continued this theme in his work on family stress, when he stated that "religion and/or religious beliefs play an important role in the family's ability to manage stress, particularly in the more severe situations" (1979, p. 238).

Stinnett (1983) noted that strong families had a high degree of religious orientation well
established before the crisis situation occurred. He reports the following:

[Many of these families had] an awareness of God or a higher power that gave them a sense of purpose and gave their family a sense of support and strength. The awareness of this higher power in their lives helped them to be more patient with each other, more forgiving, quicker to get over anger, more positive, and more supportive in their relationships. Many of the values emphasized by religion when put into action can certainly enhance the quality of human relationships (p. 28).

Though Barry's study (1979) did not reveal, in and of itself, a religious philosophy of life used by successful single parents, nevertheless it did show that successful single parents possess a philosophical approach to their circumstances which can be supported by theorists in the academic world. Many of the concepts developed by such theorists have counterparts within the field of religion.

**The Empirical and the Religious in Family Life Education**

One of the implications of the empirical literature is that a philosophy of life and religious beliefs are important factors in successful families. There are also theoretical concepts in the academic world which are related to religious values.

But despite how good empirical or philosophical ideas for successful living might be, there is often a large gap between knowing something and doing it. It
may be that only when knowledge becomes a part of a person's value system, is it translated into meaningful behaviors.

A variety of theories have attempted to describe what is needed to motivate change. The following is a brief review of some of these theories. Both professional family life educators and religious leaders seek the secrets of such motivation. The educator may draw upon theory, the religionist upon religious philosophy and doctrine. The two sources of knowledge may be compatible in offering a foundation of help for single parents.

**Motivational Theories**

People-oriented professionals have attempted for decades to teach a variety of philosophies to assist the public in meeting many of life's challenges. Maslow (1954) identified a hierarchy of needs which he believed had to be met in order for an individual to be successful with life's challenges and arrive at self-actualization. Maslow stated that before the individual can move to a higher level of actualization, needs must be met at the lower levels. He asserts that when the individual experiences unconditional positive regard, he lowers his defenses and resistance and is then free to become self-actualized. That is, he truly becomes confident.
The idea of self-actualization was similarly espoused by Carl Jung (1964) who referred to the individuated man and by Carl Rogers who called his subjects fully functioning persons. In each case individuals are interpreted as having the capacity to be real—without facades, masks and contrived personalities—they are authentic (Jourard, 1971).

In an effort to help the individual, Rogers (1954) attempted to unveil one's core values and beliefs. Through acceptance and encouragement the individual begins to unmask his contrivances and thus dares to be himself. He no longer exerts useless time and energy trying to be something he is not. Only then does he begin to realize his full potential—to be an agent unto himself. He has a better grasp of how to face life's challenges because he views life's circumstances more honestly—more realistically. He takes responsibility for himself.

Glasser suggested that fulfillment comes from accepting responsibility in such a way as to be worthwhile to oneself and others. He noted, "happiness occurs most often when we are willing to take responsibility for our behavior" (1965, p. 29).

More recently, self-limiting attitudes have been examined in such a way as to give hope to those who are feeling trapped by their circumstances (Warner,
1982). In this view, blaming our situation for our unhappiness is an attempt to absolve ourselves from the responsibility to act upon our circumstances. It is to actively refuse to see life as an experience where we can take action. Feeling helpless may at times be an attempt to justify ourselves in our own irresponsibility. This philosophy advocates the importance of discovering that it is possible to give up feelings such as unhappiness, some forms of depression, hostility, etc. Warner and Olson (1981) have shown how giving up such feelings is a logical possibility, but such an idea runs counter to some personal and professional philosophies.

Nevertheless, this possibility has been hinted at by other points of view. Some draw upon the saying, "time heals all wounds." If that is true, then notice that this thought claims we can be healed of emotional pain without changing the circumstances which produced the hurt. Note that the circumstances which created the "injury" remain. The individual can do something to be healed, irrespective of the circumstances. Only time is needed. They are in the past, the same as before the healing. If people can become actualized or authentic or "real"—given time— it may not be that the circumstances were responsible for the wounds
in the first place. Perhaps they have willingly let
go of the aversive feelings.

The ability to let go of self-defeating feelings
such as anger, depression, blaming and resentment is
described by others as a result of the meaning one
gives to life's experiences. Viktor Frankl (1962)
asserts that one can suffer any ordeal if there is a
self transcending purpose to living—to find meaning
outside oneself:

We who lived in concentration camps can
remember the men who walked through the
huts comforting others, giving away their
last piece of bread . . . . They offered
sufficient proof that everything can be
taken away from a man but one thing, the
last of the human freedoms—to choose one's
attitude in any given set of circumstances,
to choose one's own way (Frankl, 1962, p. 65).

To give meaning to life's circumstances is
reflected in the classic oft-quoted account of Frankl
treating a seventeen-year-old Jewish youth who had
been through Nazi persecution. The youth was unable
to reestablish himself in any normal pattern of life,
blaming God for making him different. Frankl helped
this young man to see his plight in a meaningful light.

What Frankl did for the boy, as described
in psychological terms, was to reframe his circumstan-
ces. That is, he showed him another way of perceiving
his experiences. He gave him hope—faith, if you
will—that there was purpose or meaning to his
affliction. Frankl showed him that even though the circumstances were in the past and could not be altered, he was in control, and always had been in control of how he chose to view his situation. The boy then could recognize that he was responsible for his life. He came to recognize that he was an agent unto himself.

Many philosophies have been developed to assist man in his journey through life. Many therapies, such as those from Frankl, Glasser, Rogers, Jourard and Maslow have drawn upon philosophical assumptions. Many such approaches on how to meet life's challenges have similar ideas. The differences are often a matter of semantics, in the emphasis of an ideal, or possibly a value judgment of priorities. But if such philosophies are to be beneficial to the general public, it is important to use words, ideas and symbols that have meaning to those audiences.

**Therapy and Religious Beliefs**

A family life educator can help clients by teaching them these academic philosophies, but may be equally effective drawing upon philosophies already held by the audience she is trying to serve. One such audience consists of the religiously committed. Could religious philosophy be drawn upon to strengthen such people? The helping professions traditionally have been skeptical of theology as a means of helping
the individual (Bergin, 1978). Since some therapies have drawn upon quasi-religious philosophies (Frankl and Glasser are examples), it might be assumed that professional skepticism has applied to their work also. Bergin (1978) related encounters with several leading psychologists—Bandura, Skinner, Sears, Rogers, etc.—each of whom declared their lack of interest in or support of a religious or philosophical approach to psychotherapy. Bergin concluded that:

... they were promoting something without being explicit and honest about it. They were implementing something through their professional work which people being influenced by them were unaware of. And it's only after reflection that we recognize that it isn't really a scientific theory so much as it is a personal philosophy being expressed in a language that sounded authoritative and scientific, but which is, in reality, when reduced to its elements, a personal belief system (Bergin, 1978, p. 4).

In recent years there has been increased interest in integrating psychotherapy and theology as a means of addressing problems (Beck, 1980; Bergin, 1978; Finch, 1980; and Strong, 1980).

For those of the Latter-day Saint religion, there are principles, teachings, and symbols which may have more meaning to them than to the general population. If much scientific theory is really a presentation of philosophies or personal belief systems, then religious philosophies are as legitimate as any other philosophies in helping people. It would seem
appropriate that for one desiring to address the problems of a specific group within a specific religion (L.D.S. single parents), it would be most beneficial to use the ideas, principles, philosophies and concepts with which those individuals have already become familiar.

The Parallels between "Scientific"
Philosophy and LDS Beliefs

Some of the ideas and principles in L.D.S. theology have their counterparts in the motivational theories which have been reviewed. For instance, the concept of agency is held sacred by the LDS religion. It defines the individual as possessing the power, capacity and freedom to make his own choices. More specifically, one can choose to give meaning to life's experiences as hypothesized by Frankl (1962), Jourard (1971) and others, or they can choose unhappiness and misery (Helaman 14:30). In either philosophy the power to choose one's attitude toward any given circumstance lies within the individual.

When one attaches meaning to life's experiences he is able to see purpose in his afflictions. To see purpose in affliction is to have faith that the experiences of one's life are for one's good and are thus growth producing (D & C 122:7; Ether 12:4; Frankl, 1982).
Frankl (1982) called such a view self transcending. That is, to give oneself to something more than self (Mosiah 2:17), is to see purpose in events. He suggested that rendering service is a means of getting outside oneself. Maslow also noted that the self-actualized individual is concerned with the welfare of mankind and that he may even feel committed to serving humanity as a mission for life.

One concept common to all the theorists reviewed was the idea that man must be willing to let go of his mask, facade, pretense, contrived personality, his untruthfulness, his self-deception. In theological language, he must repent (Ezek. 18:30-31; 1John 1:8-9) and become congruent and authentic.

Rogers (1961) tells us that the individual is most likely to let go of his facade (and repent), when he feels unconditional acceptance or love. When the individual feels this type of love, there is no longer a need to resist—to cling to pretense. As he begins to let go and realizes that he is loved for himself then he is more willing to place confidence within himself and within his value system. His values and core beliefs which give meaning to his life are examined and the individual begins to recognize and have a yearning for truth (Rogers, 1961).
Both science and religion often assert that all truth is based upon laws of the universe. One will be rewarded to the degree that he lives in accordance with those laws. Therefore, it would stand to reason that those who seek truth, whether extracted from the literature in the profession, or found in the scriptures, will reap the accompanying rewards if they live by, or are obedient to the truth they have found and understand (D&C 130:21).

A Proposal

If scientific study of families is to be worth anything to those families such study must produce an understanding of what makes a strong, healthy, positive family. And if religious people, especially L.D.S. families, are happy in part because of their religious philosophy, then what science knows and what the religious beliefs are, must be related. If there are guidelines for living which can produce strong families, then both science and religion should have discovered them.

The empirical research of the profession, as conducted by people such as Barry (1979), Stinnett (1979, 1981) and Lewis, et al (1976) is interpreted by theory and philosophy of other professionals such as Glasser, Frankl or Rogers. Empirical findings are compatible also with religious philosophy.
It is the purpose of this project to provide information designed to strengthen the L.D.S. single parent family. Although most of the concepts used can be supported in the empirical literature, additional concepts suggested either by academic theory or religious philosophy will also be utilized to produce a book for the L.D.S. single parent. Because of the spiritual nature of a religion, many ideas cannot be substantiated through typical research. But this same difficulty faces academic theorists in search of empiricism. Suffice it to say that both Family Science and L.D.S. theology acknowledge that a positive philosophy of life is related to quality family relationships.

The concepts, ideas and principles found in the review of literature will form the foundation for writing the treatise "Strengthening the Family: A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers." However, that is not to exclude theoretical or religious concepts which are logically related to strong family relationships.
Chapter 3

Procedures

The concept for this book evolved from the author's previous experience as an LDS single parent. The need to write such a book was reaffirmed by the frustration and pain witnessed in the lives of other single parents along with their plea that such a book be written.

It is a cumulative effort of both personal experiences and scholarly research. A series of progressive steps were followed in researching material for the book:

Step 1. A general study of traits associated with successful and unsuccessful two-parent families laid a good foundation for a comparison of traits one should expect to find in similarly identified single parent families.

Step 2. Research was then narrowed to studying single parent families. Much of the literature on single parent families dealt with their problems, circumstances and the supposed causes of their difficulties. However, very little research was directed toward the necessary coping behaviors or solutions.
Step 3. As pointed out by Tolstoy, "All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion" (as quoted in Curran, 1983, p. 3). Most single parent families are all too aware of this. If this book was going to be of any value to single parents it would need to address realistic ways of achieving greater happiness, fulfillment, and purposeful direction in their lives, instead of dwelling on the all too obvious disadvantages and troubles inherent in their current lifestyles. The major study which identifies traits of successful single parents was done by Barry (1979). This study provided a means for an even greater focus on ways of developing and nurturing successful single parenting traits and skills.

Step 4. Data from Barry's (1979) study was used as a criteria for the literature review, and laid the framework for the subsequent manuscript. The topics examined were: (1) age of family members, (2) education and income, (3) relations with the absent parent, (4) social networks, (5) relations with children and (6) personal outlook and management.

The study revealed that there was a broad range of ages of parents and of children. Research generally indicates, however, that the young mother and young children, and the older mother have more difficulty adjusting to the role of father absence. Barry's study
(1979) would seem to indicate that though the age of family members may create additional challenges, age alone did not prevent a parent from achieving success.

Likewise were the levels of income and education varied among the respondents. Some were unemployed with no job skills and at poverty level incomes, while others were employed professionals. Again, both extremes were living what they determined to be the life of a successful single parent family.

Since the ages, incomes and education levels of single parents did not seem to dictate success or failure, and since these characteristics do not relate to the quality of everyday parent-child interaction, it was decided that they would not be discussed in the book designed to strengthen the single parent.

Step 5. The remaining four areas examined by Barry (1979) [(3) relation with absent parent, (4) social networks, (5) relations with children and (6) personal outlook and management] were then researched. Each topic became the object of a literature review. Empirical and theoretical studies were examined to lend support and credence to Barry's findings. The findings of this research can be found in Chapter 2—Review of Literature. Also, it should be noted that personal outlook and management was divided into two separate areas of research.
Step 6. Since the intent of this book is to address a specific audience with a particular philosophy of life, motivational theories that are philosophically oriented were reviewed. It became clear that professionals draw upon a philosophy of life to give meaning to their data. Thus a few major theorist/philosophers were noted. Those reviewed were Maslow, Rogers, Glasser, Jourard and Frankl. Seeing what these authors had done to encourage or motivate people, affirmed this author's goal of teaching about the "meaning of life". That is, if major theorists, in attempting to help the public, draw upon philosophical frames of reference, then help offered single parents should include more than empirical reports.

This point became fundamental in constructing the book. The book should not be just a series of empirical studies translated for public consumption. Rather, the concepts and principles documented by the literature on family strengths should be woven into a philosophy of life meaningful to the single parent seeking help.

Since LDS single parents subscribe in some fashion to a religious philosophy, it was decided to draw upon that very philosophy in writing the book. In presenting principles and skills related to successful single parenting, an LDS religious foundation was used.
Step 7. Finally, since many of the characteristics identified by the motivational theorists were correlated with both empirical research and principles and concepts of LDS philosophy, it was possible to address an LDS population on their own philosophical ground, without ignoring academic research.

Step 8. After integrating the various bodies of research, a final draft was made in which a majority of the concepts, theories, and practices were converted into LDS terminology and examples. The final product resulted in the book entitled, "Strengthening the Family: A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers." The book was organized into chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Principles to Live By

A single parent's personal outlook has a tremendous influence on success in raising a family (Barry, 1979). Chapter one is devoted exclusively to this theme. It serves as a basis for preparing a single parent in the acquisition and development of attitudes helpful in successfully raising a family. Although the principles included in this chapter apply to all members of the family, the parent will be best able to teach these principles to the children as well as benefit from them personally if they are first applied in the single parent's own life. These principles include agency, faith, repentance, forgiveness and love and serve as a
foundation for the proper development of one's personal philosophy of life or personal outlook.

Chapter Two--Unfinished Business

A common and usually disquieting challenge inherent in raising a family as a single parent is appropriately handling anticipated and unanticipated encounters with the ex-spouse. Learning to act rather than react is vital to a single parent's success as a person as well as a parent. The material on personal attitudes and religious philosophy apply here. Also, understanding how to relate to ex-in-laws needs to be understood and dealt with successfully to manage the tension and awkwardness experienced by in-laws and members of the single parent family.

Chapter Three--Building Family Unity

One of the most basic elements necessary to successful relationships, be it one-on-one or as a family unit, is a genuine love and concern for the well-being of one another. One should not only seek opportunities to communicate love and concern for another but also be able to communicate similarly felt needs. What are some ways this may be done? This chapter addresses this question and offers some suggestions for building family unity.
Chapter Four--Parenting Single Style

Perhaps the most necessary, yet frustrating need identified with single parenting is the ability to maximize communication opportunities. Communicating love, responsibility, cooperation, values, etc., is essential in maintaining a successful family. Identifying and utilizing communication opportunities greatly strengthens the single parent's influence on the children while increasing the development of a healthy functioning family. By involving the children in the communication process rather than simply communicating at them, the single parent reduces and in some instances eliminates frustrations that normally arise in parent/child relationships. When these opportunities are utilized they can also serve to encourage the children to accept more responsibility for their own choices and the subsequent outcomes.

Chapter Five--Gospel Oriented Teaching Moments

It is important for the LDS single parent to realize how the gospel can be applied to everyday events. The use of parables and other gospel concepts are related to common family situations. The LDS single parent's responsibility to those who are available to serve the family will be discussed as well as ways to involve the family in the many dimensions and programs of the church. Ways of implementing gospel teachings
with family practices will be emphasized, accompanied by a suggested list of activities and guidelines.

Organization

The rationale for organizing the chapters this way is to assist the single parent in developing healthy attitudes by which the other aspects of her life will be influenced. Chapter one lays a foundation for a healthy, purposeful attitude. All the following chapters will be more meaningful in light of the message of chapter one.

Chapter two is directed specifically to the divorced single parent. The principles of forgiveness and agency discussed in chapter one prepare the reader for some of the information contained in this chapter.

Chapter three, four and five deal directly with the parenting role of the LDS single parent. Since research indicates that rapport is essential to positively influencing a child, chapter three discusses a variety of ways to build unity and love.

Chapter four builds upon chapter three by discussing specific ways of carrying out the parenting role of communication, problem-solving and discipline.

Chapter five concludes with specific ideas for integrating gospel teachings, activities and the church organization for the benefit of the family.
CHAPTER 4

Strengthening the Family:

A Guide for LDS Single Parent Mothers
Foreword

This book was written for the LDS single parent for whom I feel a particular kinship. My years as a single parent were difficult. The years before and since have also held their own unique challenges.

Being a believer that there is purpose to life and being stubborn enough to want to turn "my afflictions to my good," I determined to find better ways to meet the challenges I faced as a single parent. I found great joy and happiness as a single parent when I discovered: (1) that there are answers to life's problems (they can be found in the gospel); (2) my role as a parent was my first, and most rewarding priority; and (3) my responsibility for finding an eternal companion rested with me becoming the kind of person I wanted to find, then placing my trust in the Lord as to whom and when that might be. I had to be willing to walk by faith regarding what my future might be.

This book is a result of researching traits of successful single parent families, taking those traits and applying them to the LDS single parent, and writing about them by using experiences of single parents and others who have had success in various aspects of their
parenting role. I share these with you, the reader, in the hope that you may: (1) glean from them something that will meet your needs; (2) stimulate you to seek alternatives for your individual challenges; and (3) provide you with the realization that it is possible for you to be a happy, productive and successful single parent.

Sometimes I have used other people's stories of success, not to illustrate that meeting life's challenges is easy, but that it is possible. I have relied on gospel principles, not because they are idealistic, but because I see them as the most realistic foundation on which to build family success.
CHAPTER 1
Principles to Live By

"Build upon my rock
which is my gospel"
(D & C 11:24)

The Purpose of Life

"It's not fair" is a familiar lament of single parents who view the loss of spouses as inequitable when measured against what others have. Fair? What is fair? Often we perceive our challenges in life as being greater than someone else's. However, along with the greater challenges come greater opportunities for growth and development. Perhaps a more appropriate question would be, "Is life fair (by the world's definition) to anyone?" Of course, we know that we came to this earth knowing beforehand that we would experience challenges and opposition in all things and yet sometimes we forget that as we face the challenges of every day life. One single parent shared the following story of an incident which helped put things into perspective for her and her daughter:

One evening my twelve-year-old daughter approached me with some concerns that were real to her. She was just beginning junior high and was very concerned about feeling equal to her friends. Usually she was supportive, helpful, and unselfish, but this night she felt cheated. It wasn't fair that she
had to do without things her friends' dads did with and for them. I had no answer.

Whispering a silent prayer, I listened as she shared her feelings. I felt hurt and guilty for not being able to give her the things her friends had. Her requests were reasonable, but they were impossible for me to meet. There was a pause, then I expressed similar feelings to her. I, too, wanted the things her friends' mothers had—a home, a husband, and an opportunity not to have to work. I paused... then a new thought: "You know, I can think of someone else who could have said life wasn't fair. He couldn't live an ordinary life with his family and loved ones. He didn't hurt anyone. He strived only to build the Lord's kingdom. Yet Joseph Smith was jailed and martyred." Another pause, and then: "I can think of another who was perfect—without sin. I guess I don't think it was fair that He was rejected, that he was nailed to the cross and scourged in many ways, that to this day few recognize his mission and divinity." Soon our tears of resentment turned into tears of humility and gratitude.

How easy it is to lose our perspective of the purpose of life when we become consumed with the concerns of the world. Likewise, how blessed we are to have the restored gospel to help us deal appropriately with our concerns and lift our sights to loftier purposes. The gospel assures us that if we exercise faith on the Lord, Jesus Christ, He will consecrate our afflictions and our efforts to our good (2 Nephi 2:2). Is there any other way?

As a Man Thinketh

Another person in a similar situation might respond quite differently. She may see herself as a victim of circumstances. She may become bitter, angry,
and resentful. These negative feelings, when allowed to persist, become self-defeating. They affect the way the individual responds to those around her, and thus, the way she is treated in return. As these events occur she may find fault in others and begin blaming them for her unhappiness. Her own behaviors and attitudes will likely be rationalized and justified as she avoids doing what must be done to halt the downward spiral of spiritual destruction. The only way out is to recognize her own part in her misery. She must become aware of the great power of agency. For it is within her power to be happy or to be miserable. In the Book of Mormon we read:

> Whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free (Helaman 14:30-31).

An example of one who was above affliction is found in the book, *Man's Search For Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl. Frankl (1962) related how, as one of many prisoners of a Nazi prison camp, they were stripped of all human dignity and suffered terrible afflictions. There were no choices allowed to be made by the prisoners. All possible choices were made by the guards and those in charge. Each day that passed some died, either from their physical condition or by being sent to the gas chambers. As he witnessed the differences
in how people responded to their situation, he noted on the faces of some, fear, horror, and distrust. In contrast, others were seen comforting the fearful and giving their own food to another. Peace was reflected on their countenances. Those who were at peace had discovered a great secret—that real peace comes from within. They came to know, as did Frankl, that the one thing that could never be taken from them was "the last of human freedom—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (Frankl, 1962, p. 65).

Agency

James Allen says it well:

They themselves are makers of themselves by virtue of the thoughts which they choose and encourage; that mind is the master weaver, both of the inner garment of circumstances, and that, as they may have hitherto woven in ignorance and pain they may now weave in enlightenment and happiness (Allen, p. 7).

As we become an agent unto ourselves we may once again recognize the power within us to free ourselves from the emotional bondage of our circumstances. We are able to find meaning in our trials and find purpose in our lives. We will experience the growth which accompanies overcoming challenges, and recognize that ultimately our afflictions are for our own good. As we give purpose to our struggles we begin to develop faith. To have faith is to act on the belief that all
things will work out for the best, while exercising our patience. Elder Neal Maxwell tells us, "Patience is not indifference. Actually, it is caring very much but being willing, nevertheless, to submit both to the Lord and to what the scriptures call the process of time" (Maxwell, 1981, p. 59).

Faith

Submitting ourselves to the Lord requires a great deal of faith. We may feel prompted to take steps into previously uncharted territory.

Elder Boyd K. Packer learned the lesson of walking by faith. He relates the following account:

I had been called as an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, and we were to move to Salt Lake City and find an adequate and permanent home. President Henry D. Moyle assigned someone to help us.

A home was located that was ideally suited to our needs. Elder Harold B. Lee came and looked it over very carefully and then counseled, "By all means, you are to proceed."

But there was no way we could proceed. I had just completed the course work on a doctor's degree and was writing the dissertation. With the support of my wife and our eight children, all of the resources we could gather over the years had been spent on education.

By borrowing on our insurance, gathering every resource, we could barely get into the house, without sufficient left to even make the first monthly payment.

Brother Lee insisted, "Go ahead. I know it is right."

I was in deep turmoil because I had been counseled to do something I had never done before—to sign a contract without having the resources to meet the payments.

When Brother Lee sensed my feelings he sent me to President David O. McKay, who
listened very carefully as I explained the circumstances.
He said, "You do this. It is the right thing." But he extended no resources to make the doing of it possible.
When I reported to Brother Lee he said, "That confirms what I have told you."
I was still not at peace, and then came the lesson. Elder Lee said, "Do you know what is wrong with you--you always want to see the end from the beginning."
I replied quietly that I wanted to see at least a few steps ahead. He answered by quoting from the sixth verse of the twelfth chapter of Ether: "Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith."
And then he added, "My boy, you must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and perhaps a few steps into the darkness, and you will find that the light will appear and move ahead of you."
And so it has--but only as we walked to the edge of the light . . .
I am confident that as we move to the edge of the light, like the cloud that led the Israelites, or like the star that led the wise men, the light will move ahead of us and we can do this work (Packer, 1980, pp.184-185).

So often we are fearful and apprehensive to follow a prompting. As with Elder Packer, it may not contain any element of logic and yet if we know it is right and yield ourselves willingly, our faith will increase as we participate in the unfolding purposes of the Lord.

Even Joseph Smith besought the Lord in a time of trial, not understanding the purpose of the conditions he and the saints suffered. In answer to his pleading the Lord responded:

... if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters;
and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can't you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? and if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb; And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good (D & C 122:6-9).

To exercise the type of faith that will turn our afflictions to our good and cause us to submit ourselves to the Lord's promptings we must follow the instruction the Lord has given on this matter.

In Lectures on Faith we learn that in order to exercise real faith we must first know that He exists. Second, we must know of His attributes and characteristics; and third, we must know that the course we are pursuing is in accordance to His will.

We come to know of Him by studying the scriptures, pondering upon them, praying to Him, and, above all, being obedient to the light and truth we receive. As we continue to do these things we feel the peace and assurance that comes through obedience to such truths.
Nevertheless, struggling to overcome the weaknesses we possess, we seem to fall short daily of achieving goals to perfection.

James 4:17 tells us that "he that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin." Each time we resist doing what we know is right we may be taking what appears in the moment to be the easy way. Convenience and ease never took a climber up a mountain side, only downward. "And others will he (Satan) pacify and lull them away into carnal security . . . and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell" (2 Nephi 28:21).

Daily we fall short in living what we know, in overcoming weaknesses. That may be why in the Bible it says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (John 1:8). But the Lord knows our struggles. He knew we would fall. That does not mean to say our fall would be predestined, only that God knows our natures. We are meant to succeed. Often in the process of learning we make choices which could lead us from God. But, even "wrong" choices can help direct our path back to Him if we use mistakes to learn and grow from.

The struggle is all within the soul. Others may not recognize our struggle. We, ourselves, may not recognize it. Nevertheless, as long as there is a gap
between what we know and what we do we have need of repentance. That is why the atonement is such a blessing in our lives. It provides us with a way to put ourselves back on the path that leads to godhood.

**Repentance**

To the degree that we are not living up to what we know, we carry that burden around with us. No one may know the burden. We, ourselves, may not recognize the degree to which we are being untrue to ourselves. But to the degree that we are, we are weighted down and less free to feel peace and comfort from the Lord.

For some, repentance takes place in the privacy of one's heart. For others, the privilege to be free of one's burdens involves a cleansing and purifying process that can only be complete with the help of a bishop or stake president. In the following illustration Elder F. Burton Howard relates how the repentance process works:

A few years ago I was asked to speak to a group of young men. I don't remember now exactly what was said, except that near the end I made the statement that no one, but no one, present had done anything for which he could not be forgiven.

After the meeting was over one of them came up to me and said, "I just have to talk to you."

"Did you really mean it? Did you?" he asked.

"Mean what?" I said.

"The part about how none of us had done anything that could not be forgiven," he replied.

"Of course I did," I said.
Through his tears his story came . . . .
"So there you have it," he said. "I have not sinned again. I have attended my meetings. I keep the Word of Wisdom. Why is it that life seems empty? Why do I feel somehow that the Lord is displeased with me? How can I know for sure I have been forgiven?"
"Tell me what you know about repentance," I said.
He had obviously done some reading on the subject. He spoke of recognition, remorse, and restitution. He had resolved never to sin again.
"Let's see just how those principles apply to you," I said. "Let's begin with recognition. What is the best indicator that someone recognizes he has done wrong?"
"He will admit it," was his reply.
"To whom?" I asked.
He was thoughtful. "To himself, I guess."
"Men sometimes view themselves in a most favorable light," I said. "Wouldn't better evidence of awareness of wrongdoing be to tell someone else?"
"Yes, of course," he answered.
"Who else?" I insisted.
"Why, the person wronged," he said, "and . . . and maybe the bishop."
"Have you done this?" I asked.
"Not until now," he replied. "I've never told it all to anyone but you."
"Maybe that is why you have not ever felt completely forgiven," I responded.
He didn't say much.
"Let's look at the next step," I said.
"What does it mean to feel remorse?"
"It means to be sorry," he answered.
"Are you sorry?" I asked.
"Oh yes," he said. "I feel as if I had wasted half my life." And his eyes filled again with tears.
"How sorry should you be?"
He looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"
I said, "Well, in order to be forgiven, a transgressor must experience godly sorrow. (See 2 Corinthians 7:10.) He must have anguish of soul and genuine regret. This sorrow must be strong enough and long enough to motivate the additional processes of repentance, or it is not deep enough. Regret must be great enough so as to bring forth a changed person. That person must demonstrate
that he is different than before by doing different and better things. Have you been sorry enough?" I asked again.

He hesitated. "I've changed," he said. "I'm not the same as I was before. I keep all the commandments now. I would like somehow to make it up to my parents. I have prayed for forgiveness. I apologized to the person I wronged. I realize the seriousness of what I have done. I would give anything if it hadn't happened. Maybe I haven't been as good as I could be, but I don't know what else to do. But I didn't ever confess to anyone."

I said, "I think after this meeting we can say you have even done that."

Then he said, "But after all of that, how can I ever know the Lord has really forgiven me?"

"That's the easy part," I replied. "When you have fully repented, you feel an inner peace. You know somehow you are forgiven because the burden you have carried for so long, all of a sudden isn't there anymore. It is gone and you know it is gone" (Howard, 1983, pp. 78-79).

For some the repentance process is longer and more involved. The nature of the transgression may require being disfellowshipped or even excommunication. A fellow who was once a member of the church, and who had held responsible positions, transgressed and was excommunicated. He wrote a book telling of his struggle to return. He counseled:

Re repentance takes time. All change and improvement take time. Finding forgiveness requires time, often a considerable amount of time. There are no short-cuts on the pathway back from sin. The truly repentant person will focus his attention on the repentance rather than the length of time. If one's heart is in the right place, the time will take care of itself. If one is preoccupied with how quickly penalties are to be removed, if his heart is all tangled up in how quickly he can
rush through the probation, he will be easily
distracted from the changes which must take
place before it is appropriate to remove
the penalties" (Cramer, 1983, p. 120).

Those who follow all the steps of repentance
and experience the mighty change "that they had no more
desire to do evil" (Alma 19:33), will come to know the
meaning of the Savior's words, "Come unto me, all ye
that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you
rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Forgiveness

To feel the rest the Savior spoke of, the peace
that comes when one is forgiven, is a very humbling
experience. Yet, how often do we become as the debtor
in the parable of the creditor and the debtor (Matthew
18:23-35). We want to be forgiven or, as stated in the
parable, we want to be shown mercy. Yet, when we are
in a position to forgive, or give mercy to another how
often do we withhold it? The scriptures command:

Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to
forgive one another; for he that forgiveth
not his brother his trespasses standeth
condemned before the Lord; for there remain-
eth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord,
will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you
it is required to forgive all men" (D & C
64:9-10).

Sometimes we fail to see the damage we do to
ourselves by bearing grudges and being unforgiving.

Let me illustrate by sharing the following experience:

One morning a sister called to tearfully relate
some concerns. As she concluded she said in
a resolved voice, "I deserve better than to be asked to endure such trials." She was expressing anger, bitterness and resentment. There was no answer that would satisfy her. What had happened to her could not be changed. The person could not be changed. As I hung up the phone, able to do nothing more than to provide a listening ear, I recalled a poem I had once heard:

Here lie the remains of John O'day
Who died maintaining his right-of-way.
John was right as he sped along
But he's just as dead as if
He'd been wrong (Author unknown).

Yes, she was right, she was "justified" by the definition of the world. But could it be she was jeopardizing spiritual death in order to "maintain her right-of-way"? How close do we come to spiritual death by harboring destructive thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors?

On the other hand the following incident illustrates how one woman (who could have been justified in her bitterness) faced a similar challenging situation. She was a dignified, older woman whose children were married and had families of their own. Her former husband was a physician who was well established in the community.

Tearfully she related how her husband had returned home from work one day and without warning announced to her that he wanted a divorce. "At first I felt shocked and dismayed, then angry and resentful." Then her voice took on more confidence and resolve, "I
finally decided that I wasn't going to let him, or my circumstances, change me into a bitter woman!" Her demeanor then brightened, her voice lifted almost to exuberance, "I realized that I would have more time to devote to temple work and genealogy. And I've always wanted to learn another language. And do you know what? I've been called to work in the extraction program, and I am learning Spanish!" She recognized the danger of bitterness and decided to act rather than react to her unwelcomed predicament.

**Love is the Key**

Too often we have such a superficial understanding of the principle of love. Yet, on this one principle hang all the other commandments:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, 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 neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:36-40).

By experiencing the pure love of Christ—even momentarily—we are able to see a vision of the connectedness of the gospel that we may not have heretofore understood. For example, by nurturing a pure love of Christ all the other laws, principles and commandments will be a part of us as a by-product of the first commandment. The observance of each law would not be
an entity in itself but would fit into the whole. To further illustrate, when one gives love she/he is free to be her/himself, free to repent, free to serve, free to forgive, free to obey, free to yield to the enticings of the spirit. Why else would Christ say, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you?" (Matthew 5:44). The love we give not only lowers the barriers in personal relationships with one another, but more importantly weakens resistance to truth. Each of us is born with the light of Christ within us. Our purpose for coming to this earth in our second estate is to seek truth, and when discovering it, being obedient to it. Trials are placed in our path--sometimes by divine design, other times as a result of our own action--all fulfilling the purpose of proving us. "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abraham 3:25).

We are here with a unique challenge. We can succeed and prove ourselves worthy of his presence. For it is with the attitude of love for God, ourselves, family and mankind that will help us succeed.

Single parent status does not place us beyond this call to love, nor beyond the reach of the Savior. If we do not discount ourselves or gospel principles as
of little consequence, we still stand on the foundation of successful living. What follows in the remainder of this book will be of little value if one does not feel love in her heart. On the other hand, if one feels love continually, then she probably has no need for what follows. What we usually experience is some of both conditions. For, while we are all trying to perfect ourselves, we all fall short, and we all benefit from the love, acceptance and encouragement of one another in our hopes to succeed.

Below are listed several statements that apply to the material you have just read. Ponder each of the statements to evaluate how you may be doing:

(1) Am I choosing my attitude toward my situation?

(2) Is there purpose in my life?

(3) How am I working daily to overcome my weaknesses?

(4) Do I forgive others?

(5) When do I experience the peace that accompanies the feeling of love?

For some statements, you may want to reevaluate your priorities and possibly establish some new goals.
For additional insight you may want to refer to these books:

Allen, J. *As a man thinketh.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.

Covey, S. *The divine center.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1983.


Maxwell, N. *All these things shall give thee experience.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 198.

CHAPTER 2

Unfinished Business

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12)

Many divorced single parents find themselves in a "lollipop war"—struggling for the loyalties of their children or using them to "get even" with the ex-spouse. However, we should be aware of some other considerations.

Some divorced fathers may say: "I miss my children terribly. When I have them with me, I just can't seem to do enough to show them how much they mean to me. We usually spend our time together doing fun things like going to the zoo, the movies, or the park. We eat out and buy lots of treats and usually a toy or two."

Another father might say, "At first it was fun. It seemed like the only way to let them know I still love them. Now they seem to expect it, even demand it. I've become just the 'candy man' to them. What a hollow feeling! All I really want to do is to be their dad—to tuck them in at night, help them with their homework, play ball, and bandage scratched knees."
The parent with custody can at least offer compassion to the former spouse. Fortunate indeed are the divorced parents who have been able to work out a cooperative relationship. More fortunate are the children who have parents that are sensitive to their childrens' needs, who love and desire to be with them, and are willing to ensure that their relationship develops in a healthy way (Barry, 1979).

Frequently, the visiting parent is in a more advantageous position financially and therefore more able to shower the children with gifts and attention. This parent usually does not have to be involved in the discipline nor the ongoing responsibilities of caring for the children's everyday needs. This tends to create some problems for the custodial parent, who is often seen by the children as "nagging" and "not as much fun" as the visiting parent. The custodial parent may eventually begin to resent, even dread, visitation days. However, the custodial parent will usually be more successful in developing healthy relationships with the children by remaining consistent in enforcing previously established rules and by not allowing the "spoiling" of the children by the visiting parent to become an emotional issue.

Many times the visiting parent's motives for "spoiling the children" stem from wanting to subdue
feelings of guilt, and/or to "get even" with the ex-spouse by trying to win the children over. In either case, when the custodial parent resists the temptation to retaliate or overreact the visiting parent's behavior will most often diminish.

However, for some single parents cooperating with the ex-spouse's visitation privileges poses problems. Emotions tend to surface and communication between them is strained and unnatural. Nevertheless, the children belong to both parents, and each parent has a natural and usually legal right to spend time with them. Even if the motives of the ex-spouse are selfish it is usually to the benefit of the custodial parent and the children to continue working for a more cooperative relationship. Though neither spouse can change the motives of the other, a sincere effort on the part of one increases the likelihood that the other spouse will eventually let go of selfish motives and inappropriate behaviors.

There is some reassurance in knowing that the passage of time has its own healing power (Goldsmith, 1980). In the meantime, it is helpful to remember who we are and what we are committed to, so that our own salvation is not jeopardized by abandoning gospel principles and substituting inappropriate attempts to "get even" with the ex-spouse. It is more difficult
to follow through with these resolves than we may expect. It is easy to make such resolves, but usually one of the biggest challenges in keeping such resolves is to resist the temptation to react to that which we feel is unjust, misrepresented, demeaning to ourselves or to those we love. Yet, when we react with heated emotions and accusations, we reinforce our own weaknesses and retard our spiritual progress (Kelly, 1980).

Unfortunately, children are often the ones who suffer the most from the trauma of divorce, particularly concerning visitation privileges. There are many variables here that may affect the children negatively.

Establish Rules

To minimize visitation difficulties it may be important to clarify the expectations of both parents. If both parents keep in mind the best interests of the children, then their expectations are not likely to be unreasonable.

The following are some ideas to consider when determining the visitation needs of the parents and children:

(1) Do not speak badly of the other parent to the children. Children are a physical offspring of that parent. Sometimes they may begin to see themselves as "bad" because they are a part of that parent.
(2) Determine an appropriate visitation schedule. The nature of the relationship between the parent and children prior to the divorce should be considered. If there was a close relationship it might be advisable to allow more frequent visiting privileges. If a distant relationship existed, the need for visits is possibly not as great for either the parent or the children.

(3) Identify suitable activities for each child. The age of the child may suggest the availability, the type of care, and activities that would be most appropriate during the visit. For instance, an active son may want more physical activity than possibly a feminine daughter would want.

(4) Consider the proximity of the absent parent. This will often determine the length and frequency of visits. Trips across the country may result in longer visits, but these visits will also be less frequent.

(5) Consider what is best for the children--rather than what is most convenient for the parent. Too often both parents violate this guideline by using visits to win the children away from the other parent or use them as a source of information concerning the activities and life style of the other parent. Each parent should resist the temptation to excessively
question the children about the other parent. It is very hard on children to be informants. Children soon find themselves torn between loyalties for the two parents (Satir, 1972).

**Conflict of Values**

Sometimes the parents simply have a difference in values. It is important to be true to one's own value system while allowing the children to be exposed to the differing values of the ex-spouse. Helping children realize why parents separate and divorce will help them to adjust better to their situation. Also, helping them to accept the idea that they can be loyal to both parents may decrease the competition often exhibited by both parents.

One mother found herself in a very difficult situation--difficult because of the internal conflicts experienced by her children following each visit with their father. The visitation schedule was such that the children spent every other weekend with the father. As a result, their participation in their church obligations suffered, particularly for the son. In one ward the son was allowed to pass the sacrament, in the other ward he was not. He was anxious to participate in a leadership position, but was prevented because of his intermittent attendance in his own ward.
Because of the different values of the father, the children refrained from discussing activities related to the church. Spiritual experiences and feelings were withheld from the father out of fear of being rejected or belittled.

Occasionally, the father had to leave town during the days he had visitation rights. Rather than allow the children to stay with their mother, he had them stay at his home with a baby sitter. When the mother asked him why, he replied, "This is my time to have the children, and you're not going to have them, even if I can't be with them." Obviously, his motives were selfish and therefore not in the best interest of the children.

Rather than express bitterness and anger, the mother showed reasonable support and encouraged the children to make the best of the circumstances. She was, in fact, showing her children a more Christlike example of how to face adversity. As a result she was able to draw her children closer to her. The most powerful influence a parent can demonstrate to the children is one of love and example. The children will have a chance of choosing from the example of contrasting values.

Of course, it's hard not to want to hurt back when we have been hurt. It's hard to forgive when no
forgiveness has been requested. It's hard not to feel bitter and angry when things have fallen apart. But to give in to these negative feelings ultimately hurts ourself more than anyone else and puts our own eternal salvation in jeopardy.

If we remain consistent in our application of righteous principles our children will learn from our example. They will also have a unique opportunity to evaluate contrasting values in their own parents. Remember, children have their own agency and ultimately they will choose the direction they will take in life. All we may be able to do is to follow the counsel given by Joseph Smith when asked how he gained so many willing followers, "I teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves" (Joseph Smith, 1851, 13:339).

When In-Laws Become Out-laws

The children of divorce are the most obvious "innocent victims" of divorce. Those not so obvious may be the extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Not only do the spouses experience confusion as how to relate to their "ex-in-laws" but these ex-in-laws may question the role they now play in the lives of the divided family.

Many divorces are fraught with anger, bitterness and resentment. Usually both spouses feel wronged and the parents of the spouses customarily side with their
own sibling. If a bond did exist with the in-laws, the effects of the divorce can be a source of additional pain and anxiety. The grandparents too, may feel the same pain and anxiety as they sense the pending loss of their grandchildren.

"Do Unto Others . . ."

In times of crisis it is critical (though difficult) to step back and view a situation with understanding and compassion. With this in mind let us consider the following:

(1) The children are the posterity of both sides of the family. It is important that every effort be made to accommodate a healthy association with all previously established relationships. Remember, we are taught to honor our parents and this applies to our grandparents too.

(2) Avoid dumping grievances on the ex-in-laws. Differences that brought about a divorce should be kept between the spouses to the degree that it is possible. "Unloading" may bring short term emotional relief at the expense of the long-term relationship. More importantly, one may be creating potential conflict between others when it is unnecessary.

(3) If anger and hostility exist, go the extra mile. Avoid "getting even". To "get even" only serves
to perpetuate further competition and grief and keeps us from developing our eternal potential:

Occasionally I am hurt by the actions of others, by the pain of being misused by someone else . . . But I know only one agony, and that is to know that I have hurt or offended someone else (Packer, 1982, p. 258).

(4) Encourage children to respond to their grandparents. Teach them how to avoid taking sides by being loving and understanding rather than by condemning and placing blame.

In short, we may need to put ourself in their situation and ask ourself how we would want to be treated and then respond accordingly. This idea is best stated in the scriptures as, "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (3 Nephi 14:21).

Checklist

Below are listed several statements that apply to the material you have just read. Ponder each of the statements to evaluate how you may be doing:

(1) What am I doing to foster cooperation with my ex-spouse?

(2) When do I resist the temptation to try to "get even" with my ex-spouse?
(3) When do I encourage my children
to continue their relationship
with their father?

(4) Is it appropriate to encourage my
children to continue their
relationship with our ex-in-laws?

For some statements, you may want to reevaluate
your priorities and possibly establish some new goals.
For additional insight you may want to refer to these books:

Dunn, P. & Eyre, R. Relationships. Salt Lake City:
Bookcraft, 1975.

Kimball, S. Miracle of forgiveness. Salt Lake City:
Bookcraft, 1969.
CHAPTER 3

Building Family Unity
"And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another... having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another" (Mosiah 18:21)

A few years ago, while attending a gathering for a group of single parent mothers, one of them expressed concern about something that had bothered her for quite some time. This concern was her confusion about the definition of herself and her family since the death of her husband. Her confusion began several years ago when a woman, prominent in the church and community, told her that she and her children were no longer considered a family, but rather just a group of people living together. For years this thought greatly troubled her. She did not realize at the time that such an idea was not only inaccurate, it was absurd. She and her children had always been a family. However, such reassurance may have come too late. By now most of her children were grown and married. Even had she been divorced she need not have become estranged from extended family, friends or church affiliations. It simply becomes a matter of being willing to reach out
to others, rather than waiting for others to reach out
to you.

Being a single parent still provides opportunities
for preparing to become a celestial family. Many
single parents have been successful in raising children
who have gone on to greatness while making vital contri-
butions of their own to society and church alike.

Though single parents have unique challenges it
is encouraging to observe the success of others in
similar circumstances. We are the ones who determine how
we respond to challenges. We determine whether we will
rise or fall. As the familiar motto states: "United
we stand, divided we fall." The emotional strength
needed to handle the challenges of life emerges when
the single parent builds unity and oneness within the
family.

**Family Unity**

One of the first steps in building family unity
is appropriately demonstrating unconditional love for
each member of the family. As a result the family
functions better. Family members become more willing
to cooperate, sacrifice and understand one another when
there is an atmosphere of unconditional love. A single
parent should continually seek to maintain a loving
atmosphere in the home so that family members may
continually draw upon that unconditional love and in
turn be able to appropriately demonstrate love for others. A family which functions primarily from unconditional love prepares themselves to live in the world but not become part of the world. As that love is nurtured, faith and trust are developed. Harmony is fostered. They are less likely to take offense because of the words or actions of another. They are more likely to be forgiving, understanding, and compassionate toward others. More importantly, when differences arise a foundation of trust and mutual respect will already be established.

The goal is to avoid or at least minimize problems, rather than to get caught in a cycle of accusation and blame. However, a strong, unified family doesn't just happen. Effort must be made to spend time together in positive, meaningful interaction if this type of love and commitment are to exist.

Spending Time Together

It is often thought that spending time together means participating in an activity of some kind. Though activities are important, the single parent may have limited resources, in terms of time and money. Sometimes activities may even hinder opportunities to engage in meaningful conversation. The single parent may also discover that sharing events of the day is helpful in establishing mutual understanding and unity
within the family. What is shared may not always be exciting; it could be used as a time to express fears or concerns.

It becomes easier to express ourself and to make changes in behavior or attitude when our problems and feelings are shared and understood by the family. All too often we become involved in our own problems and make judgments based on the emotions and frustrations we have experienced during the day. For example, when our children return home from school or play we frequently fail to realize that they too may have experienced their own frustrations. When this occurs we need to take time out to understand each other's feelings. By being sensitive to one another's feelings we can turn frustrations into an opportunity to share experiences and show compassion. The challenge is to be willing to let other things go. This becomes necessary sometimes, in order to meet a need and to take advantage of a moment to share. Jesus once illustrated this idea when He returned to the home of Mary and Martha. While Martha busied herself with meal preparations for the Savior, Mary sat at His feet to listen to Him. Martha wished for the Savior to reprimand Mary for not helping but He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; But one thing is needful:
and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

In the April 1982 conference, Barbara Smith shared a story of another "Martha" who came full circle and recognized her priorities:

Right after my divorce, I determined that I was going to give my children the best of everything . . . . I would provide well for them . . . . I would substitute in every way for their father. I would take them on picnics, build them a tree house, and play baseball with them. I would not allow them to suffer because of our divorce.

I baked, sewed, ran, played, wrestled. I cleaned, I ironed. I was busy being both mother and father for them.

One evening I put the three of them in the bathtub together while I finished a chore. Then I came back, soaped the youngest, rinsed him, lifted him from the tub, and stood him on a bath mat while I wrapped a towel around him. Then I carried him off to the bedroom to put his pajamas on and tuck him into bed. I repeated the process with his brother and then his sister.

As I bent down to kiss them goodnight, my older son said, 'Sing us a song, please.'

'Which one?' I asked.

"Rudolph!" said the youngest immediately.

'No, "Johnny Appleseed,"' said his brother.

Then their sister said, 'Sing, "Stay Awake."'

'I can see if I stay to sing one song, I'll be singing for an hour, and I don't have an hour to spare. So goodnight.' I turned off the lights.

'Please sing just one song, Mommy. You can choose the song.'

'What about our prayers?'

Firmly, I replied, 'I said goodnight and I mean goodnight.'

As I walked back to the bathroom to tidy up, I thought of how grateful they would be someday when they were old enough to understand how much I had done for them!
As I entered the room I stopped short. There on the bath mat where three perfect sets of damp footprints. For one brief moment I thought I saw standing in the footprints the spirits of those precious children I had just tucked into bed. In that instant I saw the foolishness of my ways. I had been so busy providing for the physical needs of their mortal bodies that I was neglecting their spirits. I knew then that I had a sacred obligation to nourish both. If I were to clothe them in the latest fashions and give them all that money could buy and fail to tend to their spiritual needs, I could not justifiably account for my awesome responsibility as their mother.

Humbled, I went back to their bedroom. We knelt together in prayer. We all four climbed up on the boys' big bed and sang song after song until I was the only one awake to sing (Smith, 1982, p. 115-116).

How easy it is to become consumed in the daily tasks of maintaining a home, while inadvertently neglecting the promptings of the Spirit.

Traditions

Often we don't realize how many traditions we may have already established within our family. The traditions may be simple things such as reading or telling stories before bedtime, kissing the children goodnight, spending time with each child regularly on a one-to-one basis, family vacations, singing when everyone is together in the car or regular family councils (Dunn & Eyre, 1974).

Special days and events are also opportunities for establishing family traditions. The blessing of a baby, baptisms, and confirmations provide occasions for
doing something special, such as giving a Book of Remembrance or a set of scriptures.

Occasionally, a tradition may emerge that is unique to a family. This might include making a family flag. It is not only fun but serves to unify the family by representing their particular interests and values. Individual flags may also be made to represent special accomplishments—perhaps when they are baptized or when they are ordained in the priesthood.

The "firsts" tradition may be used whenever a member of the family does something special for the first time. This may include such things as tying a shoe, starting school, or giving a talk.

Gifts of Time

One single parent has a tradition that begins at Christmas. She calls it "Gifts of Time". Prior to Christmas she selects activities for the upcoming year that she thinks will be meaningful to each of her children. She then makes reservations or purchases tickets, if necessary, to assure the date. She represents each activity on a card, attaches them together with a ribbon, and gives them to her children as part of their Christmas. The "calendar" of special activities is then hung in a obvious place where it serves as a reminder of the upcoming events for the year. Gifts of time are often those activities that may not be econom-
ically feasible for the whole family, but are fitting for one particular child. Selecting activities that have particular meaning for a child is an act of love.

Games of Love

Other ways of showing love may take the form of games. "I love you 10" is a game played to signal to one another across the room, in a crowd, or even at the podium at church, how much they are loved (10 being the highest number). On occasion I have inquired how much I was loved only to receive a two finger rating! After a surprised look, it was quickly followed by all ten fingers and a few giggles.

One sister shared the experience she had with this game:

I remember arriving home late one evening. The children had all gone to bed. I was tired and longed for some interaction with them--hugs, kisses, and romping. But, was it really fair to awaken them?

Quietly I walked into the bedroom where my four-year-old son was sleeping. I kissed him on the cheek and whispered, "How much do you love me?" Slowly out came ten chubby little fingers. I smiled. Once they found their way back under the covers I couldn't resist the temptation to inquire, "How much do I love you?" The expression remained the same--out came those same ten fingers from beneath the covers. This time my smile was accompanied with tears of joy.

Another way to show love is through treasure hunts. They require a little preparation but are fun for both the giver and the receiver. The treasure may be nothing more than a stick of gum or a love note.
Whatever it may be it is intended especially for that member of the family.

"You are special" nights are another way to express love through games. It is intended to focus on one member of the family and may occur for no particular reason. The night is designed especially for the needs of the member being featured. One of my children was surprised by having his favorite meal--hamburgers and milk--served by candlelight, with china and crystal!

On another occasion a family may go to a park, sit in a circle on the grass, and take turns being the focus of attention. The one being focused gets to stand while all the members of the family take turns telling what they love most about that person. By participating in activities such as this we not only strengthen the individual but the family as well.

**Sharing Friends**

Friends are an important aspect of our lives. Often the children have their friends and the parent has her friends. However, an added dimension of unity occurs within the family when friends are shared. For instance, there's nothing quite like sharing fresh homemade bread or cookies with neighbors and friends. This not only increases the bonds of love and unity but the children get a real thrill from dropping off the goodies anonymously.
Inviting other families to join in a picnic or activity at the park builds bonds of love and unity with the family you invited. As a single parent there is a tendency to feel we should only associate with those in similar circumstances. However, it is also important to establish relationships with two parent families. Such friendships fill an emotional as well as social need for us and our children. One way to begin such a friendship is to invite the family over for family home evening or to attend social events together.

These types of interactions with other families serve as a good opportunity to teach children the importance of first being a friend if they expect to have friends. As our children make new friends it is helpful to introduce ourselves to the parents of their new friends. This allows us to learn more about our children's friends and their families, as well as to help their parents know us better.

**Sharing Work**

Working together at household tasks can be a fun and unifying experience for each member of the family. Family responsibilities are selected commensurate with a family member's ability to perform them. Working along side the child, or even in the same room,
not only allows for proper training of the specific tasks but also allows for one-on-one time as well.

Children must learn the balance between work and play. If play is allowed to overshadow work children may soon develop misconceptions about responsibility in life. When daily routines are established and assigned duties are completed other events take on new significance.

Children, as well as adults, develop increased feelings of worth and satisfaction as difficult tasks are completed and proper recognition is given. School-work, practicing a musical instrument, and developing other talents can be part of the daily routine. A wise mother will teach her children that success comes at a price—time, effort, and sacrifice. Even a working mother can help her children develop personal discipline by allowing them to participate in family and personal responsibilities, and then showing appreciation for their efforts (Smith, 1982).

It is helpful to provide an area where children can work on projects. By providing the space and opportunity for children to work on projects shows that the parent places value on work and also allows the child to see that work can become a creative and rewarding experience.
By working with our children we can teach them integrity and the importance of doing an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. They learn to take pride in their accomplishments and develop attitudes of success.

**Self-reliance**

In single parent families children's contributions to their families--financially, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually--may be necessary for its very survival. All too often the children of today have little need to make such contributions. Sufficient resources and modern conveniences in many intact families, often provide convenient excuses for making little, if any, such contributions to the family's well being. As a result, the need for children to share and sacrifice becomes minimal, and may even result in selfishness and self-indulgence.

During the November 1982 Welfare session of General Conference Barbara Smith, President of the Relief Society of the Church, shared the following story about a single parent family who demonstrated self-reliance:

One such family was left by the father when the youngest child was four months old. It was a traumatic time with a difficult divorce, but the courageous mother was full of faith and determined that she would do everything she could to succeed as a single parent. She found, as many do, that the gospel, when translated into action, not only provides
a key to solving many welfare problems, but it can also prevent them. Difficulties that could lead to dependency can be resolved and bring, instead, strength and happiness.

This mother gathered her children about her and explained their situation. There were back payments due on the house, current bills of every sort, and no income. They could turn to others for help; but if they were willing to work together as a family, she thought they could keep their house and make it, once more, a happy home. They were willing. Every child who was old enough found a way to help earn some money. They cut lawns, delivered papers, tended babies, collected aluminum cans, did housework. One of the older children took the responsibility for the gas bill, another for the lights; the mother put her earnings toward the house payments. They limited other spending to bare necessities.

In time, the house payments were caught up. They were able to meet their other obligations and actually invest in some small, inexpensive properties they could fix up to generate income. This enabled the mother to be at home. With these ends achieved the children no longer needed to contribute all their earnings to the family's physical requirements. With freedom from financial threat, the mother now suggested to her children that if they wanted to continue to work they could attend college, go on missions, and even travel and see the world together.

... all this has been done while fulfilling their Church obligations. They are quick to testify that the greatest reward they have received from the experience of the past few years has been their spiritual growth. Putting such principles as love, work, service, self-reliance, and consecration into practice has brought to the family the dignity of accomplishment, a unity of purpose, and a closeness to one another and to the Lord that is immediately apparent when one is in their company.

In the midst of challenges it may be difficult to recognize blessings. Certainly the principles this
family learned are important for all of us to learn. Brigman (1982) suggests the following characteristics or skills as essential for a family to fare well in an economic crisis:

1. Commitment to the family as the central theme of life.
2. A philosophy of life that values persons and relationships more than material things.
3. The ability to perform family roles feasibly and adapt to change.
4. The ability to find satisfaction of interests and needs within the family relationship.
5. Maturity and responsibility in group problem solving.
6. Ability to mobilize personal and community resources for the good of the whole family.
7. Unity in family objectives and the ability to place family needs and objectives above individual goals.
8. Good family and financial management skills.

**Spiritual Involvement**

Sharing spiritual experiences and, more importantly, involving children in those experiences, is a unifying force and a great blessing in our lives. Children receive their own confirmation of gospel principles such as faith, self-reliance, fasting, prayer and tithing as they apply the knowledge that is
taught in church and by example at home. They know the blessings that come from uniting together as a family for a specific purpose. They begin to build their own repertoire of spiritual experiences.

Family home evening is an opportunity to increase knowledge and testimony of specific principles. Requesting special blessings from the priesthood or uniting together in faith and prayer builds spiritual depth and family unity. Take for example the following experience shared by a single mother:

My daughter had an opportunity to sing with her primary class in General Conference. The morning of the long awaited event arrived. However, my daughter had become ill the night before and it looked as if she would not able to go. She asked if the home teachers would come over and give her a blessing. When they arrived they briefly visited with my daughter. They blessed her that she would recover and remain well, at least long enough for her to attend conference.

Uniting the faith and prayers of the family with those of the home teachers my daughter recovered long enough to attend conference and participate in this special event.

Though this experience may not seem dramatic, it proved to be a unifying experience for the family and served to reconfirm some basic gospel principles—faith, prayer, and the gift of healing and the power of the priesthood.

These experiences provide the binding force which carries the family through times of frustration, disappointment, and even tragedy. For this reason it is
important that opportunities for spiritual experiences be structured within the family lifestyle. Opportunity should also be sought to discuss these experiences among one another.

It is important to remember that we can be one in purpose even though we may have different means of accomplishing that purpose. We can be one in our desire for truth even though we may pursue it in our own time and in our own way. All of our efforts that unify us, that contribute to a feeling of oneness, also contribute to our spiritual growth. Ideally, we will eventually become one with the Savior, therefore qualifying to remain an eternal family unit!

**Summary**

In order for unity to exist in the family, love, acceptance, and support must be abiding feelings. Beyond the verbal expression of love and appreciation there must follow acts that demonstrate love—spending time, playing, and working together. Sharing spiritual experiences and overcoming challenges as a family not only teaches and reinforces correct principles but develops bonds of love and unity that cannot be broken. The Savior has said, "If ye are not one, ye are not mine" (D & C 28:27). By developing bonds of unity and love a family can experience this oneness.
Below are listed several statements that apply to the material you have just read. Ponder each of the statements to evaluate how you may be doing:

(1) Do I demonstrate love to my children in varying ways?
(2) What family traditions have we established?
(3) How do we sacrifice and share as a family?
(4) When do we work and play together?

For some, you may want to reevaluate your priorities and possibly establish some new goals. For additional insight you may want to refer to these books:


CHAPTER 4

Parenting Single Style

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."
(Proverbs 22:6)

Love Them, Simply Love Them

President Joseph F. Smith wrote:

If you will keep your (children) close to your heart, within the clasp of your arms; if you will make them . . . feel that you love them . . . and keep them near to you, they will not go very far from you, and they will not commit any very great sin. But it is when you turn them out of the hole, turn them out of your affection . . . that (is what) drives them from you . . .

. . . if you wish your children to be taught in the principles of the gospel, if you wish them to love the truth and understand it, if you wish them to be obedient to and united with you, love them! and prove . . . that you do love them by your every word and act toward them (1966, pp. 282, 316).

This follows the Savior's admonition when He said, ". . . upon this commandment hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Too often, we fail to realize that loving consists not only of affection, support and encouragement, but also purposeful and meaningful interaction.
Loving consists of using those oft heard words "I love you," but it also consists of using the word "No" when appropriate.

If we expect to be successful in influencing the behavior of our children, the first change in behavior must be our own. Establishing better ways of responding to our children is sometimes a long and difficult process. As we do, we gain increased appreciation for what is required of them when we ask them to change their behavior.

The first step in gaining cooperation might be to establish a positive loving relationship between us and children. There are four elements suggested by Dinkmeyer and McKay (1976) which are fundamental to this relationship:

**First.** Develop mutual respect. How often do we feel that our children don't demonstrate much, if any, respect for us? Maybe the first question we should ask ourselves is, "Have I taught them how to show respect by my example? Do I treat them with respect?" My experience has taught me that children tend to live up to how they are treated. If we treat them as "brats" or as "brains", "responsible" or "negligent", a "blessing", or a "problem", the label will often influences their behavior.
Second. Take time for fun. Joseph Smith gave us an example by the rollicking and arm wrestling he participated in prior to soliciting help from the brethren. Too often we are so anxious to get something accomplished that we force our children to comply rather than earn their cooperation by first doing something they enjoy. Each day our children can have a few minutes of our undivided attention.

Third. Provide encouragement. We all achieve more when someone believes in us. As parents we are the primary source of encouragement for our children. When they are experiencing negative influences outside the home we may be the only one's to help them. Encouragement often consists of minimizing the mistakes while recognizing the assets of the child.

Fourth. Communicate love. Actually, the previous suggestions are themselves acts of love. They are an expression of our attitude toward our children, both verbally and non-verbally. Some non-verbal signs, such as pats, hugs or kisses, especially when unexpected, are extremely important. Despite what we may think we are always communicating to our children. If our words are not congruent with our actions then they will be confused, apprehensive and distrustful.
Communication

Communication skills in the academic literature, when broken down into components, are essentially gospel principles. For instance, we are encouraged to be clear, direct, and congruent in expressing ourselves. To be clear, direct, and congruent is to be honest, not rude, we simply represent what we are saying accurately. Too frequently we say one thing verbally while feeling something quite different inside. We may think no one can tell, but our actions, and feelings will eventually reveal our incongruency. Sometimes, we even deceive ourselves. If we habitually rationalize, justify our own behavior, or blame and find fault in others these are sure signs that we are deceiving ourselves. Until we are able to resolve our incongruency we will frequently have difficulty communicating clearly and openly with others.

Open Communication

Open communication means expressing ourselves without fear of rejection, alienation or reprisals. We are able to express ourselves openly because we feel confident that our opinions and feelings will be respected. There is a feeling of acceptance, support and unconditional love which frees us to be ourselves. Though the actions of another should not inhibit our
agency, we will not likely express ourselves freely around those who are critical and judgmental.

Be Responsible

Another aspect of communication associated with agency is the idea that we should speak only for ourselves. We can never say for sure what another person's actions, motives or feelings are. Therefore, we should not judge (condemn) another by speaking for them. However, when we express ourselves by talking about our feelings, it allows others to understand us better.

Listening with the Heart

True understanding comes from listening with the heart. Too often we are preoccupied with thinking about what we are going to say. Listening with the heart is diligently seeking to understand the other person's thoughts, feelings, and actions. We should seek first to understand and then seek to be understood.

The theories of men, though helpful in adding to our knowledge and understanding about communication, may cloud our thinking if totally relied on. Such reliance also inhibits our ability to respond to the Spirit. The following story illustrates compassion, mercy and forgiveness—great principles for a child to learn from experiences:

One summer morning . . . I told my mom I was going out to the playground. She said okay,
but told me not to come running back in with muddy feet because she was in the middle of washing and waxing the floor. She repeated the statement again for emphasis as I scampered out the door in a pair of cutoffs, barefoot and shirtless. I must have played for an hour, and at least half of that time was spent in the mud. Then, knowing my mom would probably be finished with the floor and would read to me, I ran home full of boyish excitement and vigor. That same vigor kept me and my mud-covered feet going right up the steps, through the door, and halfway onto the nearly finished wash-and-wax job my mother was still stooped over.

Not waiting for a reaction and not wanting to leave my sin half finished, I ran across the rest of the floor, into my parents' room, and slammed the door shut. Not knowing if I should jump out the second-story window or if just hiding under the bed would do, I burst into tears and hurled my small body onto the bed and prepared myself for the possibility of meeting my great-great-grandfather sooner than I had expected.

I heard the door open quietly and looked over. Oh, good, I tough. She wasn't carrying a heated poker (paddle; switch; anything). Before she could say anything, I cried out, "Mom, you don't love me." To which she replied, "I do love you, and I'll do anything to prove it." She then picked up my filthy, muddy feet and kissed them. Needless to say, that experience taught me a great deal about the meaning of repentance and forgiveness . . . (Holland, 1983, p. 54).

To be truly sensitive to the needs of a child comes as a result of following the spirit. Logic and reasoning are not enough to suffice—the willingness to love and to care.

Love is essential to communication. Even in times of conflict and anger love opens rather than closes doors:
One day when circumstances made it necessary for me to be at home at an unusual time, I witnessed from another room how our eleven-year-old son, just returning from school, was directing ugly words towards his younger sister. They were words that offended me—words that I had never thought our son would use. My first natural reaction in my anger was to get up and go after him. Fortunately, I had to walk across the room and open a door before I could reach him, and I remembered in those few seconds I fervently prayed to my Heavenly Father to help me to handle the situation. Peace came over me. I was no longer angry.

Our son, being shocked to see me home, was filled with fear when I approached him. To my surprise I heard myself saying, "Welcome home, son!" and I extended my hand as a greeting. And then in a formal style I invited him to sit close to me in the living room for a personal talk. I heard myself expressing my love for him. I talked with him about the battle that every one of us has to fight each day within ourselves.

As I expressed my confidence in him, he broke into tears, confessing his unworthiness and condemning himself beyond measure. Now it was my role to put his transgression in the proper perspective and to comfort him. A wonderful spirit came over us, and we ended up crying together, hugging each other in love and finally in joy. What could have been a disastrous confrontation between father and son became, through the help from the powers above, one of the most beautiful experiences of our relationship that we both have never forgotten (Busche, 1982, pp. 96-99).

Opportunities to teach our children may come upon us unexpectedly. We cannot wait until such moments present themselves. We must be spiritually prepared for them to occur every day. However, we need not only prepare for the unexpected. We should actively seek to make opportunities to communicate with each member of the family.
Family Home Evening as a Communicating Experience

If we are diligent in our commitment to hold family home evening once a week we will find it to be a rewarding experience for the entire family. Presenting lessons, participating in activities, playing together, even just being together can help develop bonds of love and provide opportunity for meaningful communication. The more time spent together in an atmosphere of love and understanding the more such togetherness will be valued by all family members.

Family Councils--A Forum for Discussion

Holding family councils on a regular basis provides an opportunity for family members to plan goals, activities, and fulfill unexpected assignments within the family, church, or community as well as discuss family concerns. Sometimes an individual in the family will want input from the family concerning a personal problem. Resolving concerns or problems are often accomplished by using the following steps:

Problem Solving

Problems are a daily part of family life. Consider the following approach to solving problems the next time the family meets together:

(1) Identify the problem clearly.
(2) Brainstorm ideas to solve the problem (even illogical suggestions should be voiced for they may inspire better ideas).

(3) Evaluate the proposed solutions and identify the three most likely possibilities.

(4) Select the solution most likely to succeed.

(5) Implement the solution.

**Personal Talk Time**

In addition to family council some families have found it helpful to schedule personal one-on-one time with each child. Time may be spent together at a movie, over an ice cream, or simply at home. The purpose is to listen, give encouragement, and express love. When appropriate such time should conclude with prayer.

**Discipline**

Sometimes it is necessary to discipline children. If a child needs discipline we should be sure our motives are to help the child, not vent our frustrations. To be sure that we have the right motives we should first examine our relationship with our Heavenly Father; second, evaluate our relationship with important others in our life; and third, examine our relationship with the child before the incident. Usually, if these relationships are in order we can be fairly sure that
our motives for disciplining the child will be for the child's own good.

If we fall short in any of these relationships we should consider doing what one single parent mother did:

Up to the time I obtained a divorce my ex-husband had been the primary source of authority in our home. He was accustomed to obtaining obedience from the children through physical force and punishment. I realized that emotionally I couldn't bring myself to discipline my children the way he had and spiritually I knew there must be a better way.

Consequently, I decided to find a better way to obtain obedience from my three children. I decided to try cooperation rather than fear. "Fear and force have no place in the kingdom because they do not produce moral actions and are contrary to God's gift of free agency" (Packer, 1982, p. 253).

Cooperation Through Incentives

I began by giving the children nickels when they demonstrated sufficient cooperation. The nickels they earned were then placed in the children's jars (missionary fund). When they had saved a specified amount of money they were allowed to remove $1.00 to spend on themselves. This was a beginning and it seemed to have several advantages: (1) it helped them to think more in terms of cooperation; (2) they were learning how to save their money; and (3) they had begun their missionary funds.

However, this method also presented some problems. Since I worked much of the day my children had
to wait until I got home before receiving their nickels. Sometimes too long after the act to be reinforcing. I also found it difficult to keep a sufficient supply of nickels on hand.

I decided to find a better way. I substituted the nickels with coupons I created from ideas suggested in a Family Home Evening lesson. That way each child could be rewarded more immediately for their cooperation and the supply of coupons would be easy to maintain. When at work I would call home, sometimes three or four times throughout the day. If all was well each child received a coupon. At the end of the day I would exchange their coupons for nickels. This seemed to increase their cooperation even more. However, I soon became concerned: "Were they really learning the right principles?" "Were they expecting monetary payment every time they did that which was good?" My concern soon became a reality. They began asking for "coupons" for everything they did. I needed to find a better system.

I was beginning to feel overwhelmed by the many roles I was playing--mother, father, worker, student, etc.--and now I was struggling with how I was going to maintain the order and cooperation I was just beginning to establish in our family.
I would often come home tired after a day's work, dreading the thoughts of having to be the disciplinarian--of having to deal with arguing, complaints, demands and various forms of misbehavior. I found myself ignoring my real stewardship as a mother. Torn between having to be a disciplinarian, and yet wanting to be liked, I found myself not following through with family rules. I reasoned, "After all, I am with them such a short period of time each day. I don't want my interaction with them to be all scolding and correcting." I felt guilty that I had to be away so much, that they didn't have a dad, and that they didn't have a lot of things that their friends had. I discovered that my guilt was setting me up to be manipulated by my children. It didn't take me long to realize that if I allowed my inconsistencies to continue my children would become frustrated and eventually resentful toward me. Another concern came to me, "What are my children learning from their experiences during the hours that I am gone each day?"

Plan, Carry Out and Evaluate

I wanted to have input as to what my children were learning whether they were at the babysitters, at school, or at home. This prompted me to seek a better
way to teach them correct principles, especially during the time that I was away from them.

I recalled a three step learning process taught in a teacher development course: (1) plan; (2) carry out the plan; and (3) evaluate. I wanted to teach my children how to implement this learning process themselves to help them understand how to make better choices when I wasn't with them. It would also serve as a way to show them how their behavior directly affected themselves and others.

Every evening, prior to family prayer, we would talk together about the events of the day. The first question I would ask was, "What was the most fun thing that happened today?" Each child was given a turn to respond as we all relived the joy and excitement of the day's events.

Next I would ask, "Was there anything you could have done to make the day better?" or, "Was there anything that happened today that wasn't very pleasant?" There seemed to always be an assortment of problems that had occurred. By sharing their problems and discussing them openly the children began to understand how their attitudes and behaviors affected them and their relationships with others.

The next question I asked was, "If the same thing were to happen tomorrow, how would you handle it
differently?" We then discussed specific alternatives. They began to understand that they had more control over what happened to them then they first realized and that they were largely responsible for the outcomes of their choices.

We would then plan the upcoming day. Our discussion revolved around which clothes to wear, homework to be done, appointments to be kept, and other duties and responsibilities necessary for making the next day a good one.

Sometimes, as we would discuss the upcoming day, I would learn of a particular concern which had not been mentioned earlier in our discussion. When necessary I would provide one-on-one time to discuss apprehensions, give encouragement, and when appropriate, we would even role play a solution to a potential problem.

The following morning, just before family prayer and breakfast, I would briefly review with each child their particular goal for the day. To reinforce what we had talked about I would call out as I left for work, "Remember, make it a good day!" That evening we would begin the process all over again--evaluating successes, reviewing concerns, and again discussing alternatives.
It may seem like this would involve a lot of time but once we got into the habit of doing this every day we realized it took much less time than we expected. We also realized that sharing our experiences, planning and discussing things as a family was well worth the time and effort.

**Involve Children in Making Decisions**

Of all the approaches I used to encourage cooperation, I found that involving the children in making decisions to be the most successful. Whenever we needed to plan or solve a problem I found the children eager to contribute their ideas and more willing to cooperate if they were allowed to have input in the decision. I was also often surprised at the creative suggestions they were able to come up with. More surprising was the change in their attitude as their ideas and suggestions were used.

One one occasion I approached my children about a decision that would affect the whole family. I had just been paid. There was enough money to pay the rent and tithing but we would be left with only $11.00 to live on for the next two weeks. Gas for the car would cost $8.00 a week. I assured the children that we could pay tithing with the second check and asked them what they thought we should do. I was surprised at their response. Without hesitation each agreed that we
should pay tithing first. I wrote the check out and placed it in the tithing envelope while whispering a small prayer. I prayed that the children's faith in the principle of tithing would be confirmed.

Little did I expect the confirmation to be so immediate. Within twenty minutes the mail arrived. In the mail was a letter from my parents along with $20.00! The children were pleased—I was thrilled! I don't think it even occurred to them that it could have possibly turned out otherwise. This experience not only reconfirmed my faith in the law of tithing, but my confidence in my children's ability to make good decisions.

Not all of our decisions were as clearly defined or easy to make as this one. Sometimes, in order to ensure my children's success in making decisions, it was necessary to provide them with choices defined within certain limits. This gave them greater direction while allowing them the opportunity to make a decision that would likely succeed. For instance, when purchasing clothing I would select several items that would be acceptable—both in appearance and within our budget—and then allow them to make the final selection.

Teaching Responsibility

While making decisions we also discussed the responsibility which accompanies the decision. In
that way, each child learned to accept responsibility for the success or consequences of the decision. This approach is sometimes referred to as natural and logical consequences (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976). This helps teach children responsibility based on correct principles. Teaching children responsibility is also an act of love.

The following is a summary of Dinkmeyer & McKay's application of natural and logical consequences:

1. Natural and logical consequences require children to be responsible for their own behavior.
2. Natural consequences are those which permit children to learn from the natural order of the physical world—for example, that not eating is followed by hunger.
3. Logical consequences are those which permit children to learn from the reality of the social order—for example, children who do not get up on time may be late to school and have to make up work.
4. For consequences to be effective, the children involved must see them as logical.
5. The purpose of using natural and logical consequences is to motivate children to make responsible decisions, not to force their submission. Consequences are effective only if you avoid having hidden motives of winning and controlling.
6. Be both firm and kind. Firmness refers to your follow-through behavior. Kindness refers to the manner in which you present the choices.
7. Talk less; act more.
(8) When you do things for children that they can do for themselves, you are robbing them of self-respect and responsibility.

(9) In applying logical consequences:
   (a) Provide choices and accept the child's decision. Be a parent of good will toward your children.
   (b) As you follow through with a consequence, assure children that they may try again later.
   (c) If the misbehavior is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child tried again.

(10) Be patient, it will take time for natural and logical consequences to be effective (Parent's Handbook, 1976, p. 83).

   Of course, we cannot always anticipate children's behavior. Even though fundamental rules are established and clearly understood our children may choose to act against what they know to be acceptable. The following experience serves as a good illustration:

One Sunday morning as the family was preparing for Church my four-year-old daughter refused to put on her shoes. She decided she didn't want to wear shoes to church today. Having recently been schooled in the merits of natural and logical consequences I decided to put them to the test. Cheerfully I ushered the family to the car. Noting that it was a warm spring morning I pretended not to notice my daughter wasn't wearing her shoes. I parked the car so that we had to walk across some gravel before reaching the smooth pavement. Though other parents and children commented on her not having shoes I simply smiled and continued cheerfully into church. When church was over we returned home. I still hadn't mentioned the shoes. I figured my daughter had already reaped the natural consequences of her choice. There was no need to scold or mete out punishment. Doing so may have brought some disapproval from other well-meaning parents but my greatest concern was to allow my daughter to learn
from natural and logical consequences from an experience that was relatively safe.

Of course, nothing should be done that would seriously jeopardize a child's physical or emotional well-being. As stated earlier, the consequences should be natural and logical. It is up to the parent to decide what is reasonable and correct, even if it may deviate from the "shoulds" outlined by the experts.

Summary

Once again we return to the theme that love is the variable that determines the degree to which we are able to succeed as a parent. We must follow the golden rule, especially with our children—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." By treating our children with love and respect we are more likely to receive the same from them.

Our communications should express love, by the choice of words, tone of voice, and posture we use. Listening with a desire to understand expresses real caring. The way we correct and teach our children should reflect true principles, such as patience, cooperation, and love. There are times when we must discipline our children but we must also remember that fear and force have no place in the kingdom (Packer, 1982). It is important to allow for free agency while teaching correct principles. As parents we should realize that our desire, our willingness to succeed as
a parent may be more important than worrying about obtaining specific parenting skills or abilities.

The following story illustrates courage, respect, trust, and love between a child and parent, and may serve as a reminder of the principles discussed in this chapter:

THE RACE

by Dee Groberg

"Quit! Give up! You're beaten!"
They shout at me, and plead
"There's just too much against you now,
This time you can't succeed."

And as I start to hand my head
In front of failure's face
My downward fall is broken by
The memory of a race.

And hope refills my weakened will
As I recall that scene,
For, just the thought of that short race
Rejuvenates my being.

A children's race, young boys, young men.
Now, I remember well,
Excitement, sure! But also fear.
It wasn't hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope
Each thought to win that race.
Or, tie for first, or if not that,
At least take second place.

And fathers watched from off the side
Each cheering for his son.
And each boy hoped to show his dad,
That he would be the one.

The whistle blew, and off they went
Young hearts and hopes afire
To win, to be the hero there
Was each young boy's desire.
And one boy in particular,
Whose dad was in the crowd,
Was running near the lead, and thought:
"My dad will be so proud!"

But as they speeded down the field
Across a shallow dip
The little boy, who thought to win,
Lost his step, and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself,
His hands flew out to brace,
And 'mid the laughter of the crowd,
He fell flat on his face.

So, down he fell, and with him hope
--he couldn't win it now--
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow.

But, as he fell, his dad stood up,
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
"Get up and win the race."

He quickly rose, no damage done,
--behind a bit, that's all--
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.

So, anxious to restore himself
--to catch up and to win--
His mind went faster than his legs;
He slipped and fell again!

He wished, then, he had quit before
With only one disgrace.
I'm hopeless as a runner now:
I shouldn't try to race."

But, in the laughing crowd he searched,
And found his father's face.
That steady look that said again,
"Get up and win the race."

So, he jumped up to try again
--ten yards behind the last--
"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought
I've got to move real fast."
Exceeding everything he had
He regained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead,
He slipped and fell again!

Defeat! He lay there silently
--a tear dropped from his eye--
"There's no sense running any more;
Three stikes, I'm out, why try?"

The will to rise had disappeared
All hope had fled away
So far behind; so error prone
Closer all the way.
I've lost, so what's the use," he thought
"I'll live with my disgrace."
But, then he thought about his dad,
Who son, he'd have to face.

"Get up!" and echo sounded low,
"Get up, and take your place
You were not meant for failure here,
Get up, and win the race."

"With borrowed will get up," it said,
"You haven't lost at all.
For, winning's no more than this;
To rise each time you fall."

So, up he rose to run once more,
And with a new commit,
He resolved that win, or lose,
At least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now
--the most he'd ever been--
Still, he gave it all he had,
And ran as though to win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling.
Three times he'd rose again.
Too far behind to hope to win
He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner,
As he crossed the line first place,
Head high, and proud, and happy.
No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster
Crossed the finish line last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer  
For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last,  
With head bowed low, unproud,  
You would have thought he won the race  
To listen to the crowd.

And to his dad, he sadly said,  
"I didn't do so well."  
"To me, you won!" his father said,  
"You rose each time you fell".

And now, when things seem dark and hard  
And difficult to face.  
The memory of that little boy  
Helps me in my race.

For, all of life is like that race  
With ups and downs and all  
And all you have to do to win,  
Is rise each time you fall.

"Quit! Give up! Your're beaten!"  
They still shout in my face.  
But, another voice, within me says:  
"Get up and win the race!"

Checklist

Below are listed several statements that apply  
to the material you have just read. Ponder each of  
the statements to evaluate how you may be doing:

(1) When do we communicate well  
as a family?

(2) When do I really listen to  
what my children are saying?

(3) Do I involve the children  
in solving family problems?
(4) Do we hold family council regularly to plan activities, solve problems and set goals?

For some, you may want to reevaluate your priorities and possibly establish some new goals. For additional insight you may want to refer to these books:

Beckert, C. *So you want to succeed as a parent.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982.


Flake, L. E. & J. S. *Punishment or Discipline? The ensign*, October 1983.
CHAPTER 5

Gospel Oriented Teaching Moments

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."
(3 Nephi 22:13)

Many single parent mothers are faced with the challenge of providing for both the spiritual and temporal welfare of their families. More often than not these demands seem to oppose each other. However, both these demands can be met. Consider what one single parent mother did to meet this challenge:

The decision to move had seemed right. In fact, I knew it was right because of the way opportunities had been presenting themselves to me. Yet everything seemed so overwhelming. Here I was, recently divorced, in a new community, with a new job. The children had no new friends, and I had to be away from home for more than nine hours a day.

The challenges before me were tough ones. How could I raise my children when I wasn't home? How could I teach them values, responsibility and the gospel when the short time I had at home was taken up by the necessary tasks of preparing meals, housekeeping, shopping, mending, car maintenance and so forth? These pressures alone created frustration for me. I felt a loss of patience, spoke angry words and had anything but the spirit of peace and love that I wanted to give my children.

In their young lives my children already had experienced many changes--several moves, new friends, different teachers and new church leaders. Of course, the most significant change was the divorce. I realized I would be the only constant influence my children would have in their lives.
But since I had to be away from home so much, I was afraid I would not be a constant influence. I worried about what would happen to them, both physically and spiritually.

Then I realized that there was someone who could always be with them, someone they could always depend on—the Savior. I made sure that when I was home I helped them develop a constant, undeviating reliance on Him. As a result I felt better about their well-being while I was gone during the day, though I still wished I spend my time at home instead of work.

I didn't really know my efforts were having any impact on my children until one day when I stayed home from work because I was not well. About 2:30 p.m. my son arrived home from school. He called out a greeting from the kitchen and informed me that he was going out to play. A few minutes later I heard him come back into the house. Since he often had a friend with him I called, "Is anyone with you?"

"Yes," he said.

I listened for a moment but didn't hear any talking, just the typical sounds of a hungry boy—opening of the refrigerator, the chair being moved across the kitchen floor, and the cupboard doors opening and closing. I called out again, "Is Bryce with you?"

"No," he replied.

"I thought you said you were not alone."

"I'm not... Jesus is with me!" he said in a tone that hinted of impatience. It was almost as if he were saying, "You should know, you were the one who taught me!"

From this experience I learned that we can make the Savior a real part of our lives. What better model could I use?

The Savior represents all that we can become.

It is especially easy for children to relate to the Savior. To reinforce their relationship with the Savior we should share with our children the many stories and parables about Him found in the New Testament.
Learn the Parables

Familiarizing ourselves with stories from the scriptures is helpful to draw upon when teaching moments present themselves. One of the best ways for us to become familiar with these parables is to read them to our children, in simplified form, during family home evening, family scriptures, or at bedtime. In this way everyone gains a mutual understanding of the parables and stories concerning the Savior. When a teaching moment presents itself the appropriate parable or story only needs to be mentioned to make the point. In fact, it is probably by such preparation that we ourselves can create or recognize teaching moments when they come. Teaching moments may be more in our hearts than in our circumstances. When we teach we are sharing more than knowledge, we are sharing ourselves.

For example, when a child misses a meal (a natural consequence for being late), you can empathize with our child, and then remind him of the story of the ten virgins--five of whom were prepared, five who were not. A statement such as, "Think how fortunate you have been to have learned this lesson by only temporarily missing out on a small blessing (dinner) rather than permanently losing an important blessing." You can then teach them more about preparation or commitment.
Teach By Experience

"Children under the age of six learn best through first hand experience. For example, a young child who tramples the neighbor's flowers could earn money for seeds and help plant them. This experience could provide a foundation for a fuller understanding of restitution and repentance" (1982, Relief Society Manual). Sometime simply asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" is enough to teach a lesson or caution a child.

Such teaching moments present themselves daily. Asking our Heavenly Father to help us become more aware of these teaching moments and for the inspiration necessary to teach our children effectively will bring a feeling of joy and spiritually into our lives and the lives of our children.

Through these opportunities we teach our children of the Savior's love. They learn the importance of the sacrifice He made in our behalf. We can encourage them to nurture the desire to once again live with Him. More importantly, we provide them and ourselves with the perfect model to exemplify:

One evening in early spring, my five-year-old son and I were watching television. Suddenly, a newscaster interrupted the program. A severe storm was moving in and a freeze warning was issued.

We hurried outside to see what the weather was like. It was getting cold quickly. We decided we had better cover our garden before
the weather turned any worse. As we were studying the situation a neighbor saw us and offered to help us cover our garden. He suggested we buy some black plastic to use as covering. We hurried down to the store and purchased the plastic from the outdoor nursery. After briefly speaking with the clerk we hurried home.

With our neighbor's help we covered the garden and went inside. At my son's suggestion we made some hot chocolate to share with our helpful neighbor who was still working outside in the cold.

Then my son got another idea: "Let's take some hot chocolate to the clerk at the store!" Now I must admit, I wasn't too fond of the idea, but his enthusiasm won me over. We prepared the hot chocolate and drove back to the outside nursery.

When we got there I stopped a few yards back from the entrance while my son hopped out of the car carrying a cup of hot chocolate in his hand. He marched through the open gate and up to the clerk. The clerk was clearing out the cash register while two other fellows were quickly closing the nursery, since the storm was moving in so rapidly.

From my position I could see the look of surprise and pleasure on the face of the clerk. The wave of his hand meant a lot, but it was nothing compared to my son's demeanor as he was returning to the car. He was walking with a lilt in his step that literally took him off the ground. He was beaming from ear to ear. His whole body was smiling! As he swung open the car door and hopped inside he captured the true essence of what he had just done when he said, "Golly, this must be what it's like to live with Jesus". My children were learning what I hoped they would learn.

Influencing Through Visual Stimuli

There are many fun and creative ways to influence the lives of our children, which require little effort, yet create a feeling of spirituality in the home. For example, pictures from primary, Sunday School, or
family home evening lessons should be given recognition and a special place. Charts constructed for a lesson could be left up for some time to reinforce the principle taught:

I remember one particular chart I used in a family home evening lesson to portray good and evil. One half of the chart was painted black—representing Satan's influence. The other half was yellow, representing the light of Christ. I used feet cut out of construction paper with the name of each member of the family written on them. When a problem arose, all that was needed was to ask, "Are your steps walking toward the light or away from the light?" The point was made simply, yet vividly.

Influencing Through Music

How influential can music be?

I am comforted by the assurance that there will be beautiful music in heaven, and for that I am most grateful. Some say there will be no music in that other place—but then some sounds that pass for music probably belong in that other place! (Kimball, 1982, p. 4).

Much has been said about the use and abuse of music today. It is critical that we increase our awareness of the kind of music our children listen to and its effect on them.

In the early days of the church, music was used to lift the spirits of the saints. The Lord has said, "My soul delighteth in the song of the heart, yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D & C 25:12). Most of the hymns in the LDS Church contain
valuable messages. Many of them are sermons in themselves:

"A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief"
"I Stand All Amazed"
"I Know That My Redeemer Lives"
"Oh, My Father"

Some songs are meant to inspire:

"Come, Come Ye Saints"
"Let Us All Press On"
"The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning"
"We Thank Thee Oh God For a Prophet"

Other songs encourage righteous habits:

"Choose The Right"
"Have I Done Any Good in the World Today"
"Ere You Left Your Room This Morning"
"Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words to Each Other"

For youngsters there are many uplifting songs learned in Primary. Children love to sing them. They are especially thrilled when given the chance to perform them for the rest of the family:

"I Am a Child of God"
"Jesus Once Was a Little Child"
"Book of Mormon Stories"
"I Want to Live the Gospel"

Additional songs can be found in other church publications, such as the Family Home Evening Manual, The New Era, and The Friend. Also, private enterprises are publishing a wide variety of songs which teach gospel principles. When desired, these tapes and records may be used to supplement or replace "rock music" or watching television.
There is still another way to provide good, wholesome music in the home. How? Compose your own! All that is necessary is a little imagination and a lot of desire. Children love to hear their names in a spur-of-the-moment song that is made up just for them.

Influencing Through Structured Experiences

We have talked about creating teaching moments through sight and sound, now let us consider experiencing it through structured experiences. If children do not want to sing, or if they simply need a little more variety, involve them in dancing:

Music also may be used to involve small children through dance. 'Dance sad,' the little one might be told, 'because that's how the Nephites felt when they disobeyed the Lord,' . . . 'Now they have repented . . . so dance happy, the way the Nephites felt when they obeyed' (Card, 1977, pp. 66-73).

Many families have yearly traditions. For example, Christmas celebration can include acting out stories from the scriptures, such as the birth of Christ:

As the children get older, the stories and the actions can be a little more sophisticated. Laman and Lemuel must be sullen and unresponsive. Joseph Smith must be on fire with indignation as he rebukes the guards in Missouri. Ruth must be loving, and Naomi is kind as she tries to turn her daughter-in-law away. A lot can be learned by improvised role-playing. Just select the issue, or subject and let them play it out (Card, 1977, pp. 66-73).
Consider using as many of the senses as possible--sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. By doing so, acting becomes more fun and more impressionable.

**Gospel Influences in Solving Problems**

How often do we wish that we didn't have to nag our children to get them to do what is right? If only we could find another way, one which put more of the responsibility for doing what is right on our children rather than on us. Consider the approach this one mother used:

Some time ago a friend gave us a white, concave plaque of the Savior's face. This plaque provides a rather interesting optical illusion. No matter where we are in the room, the gentle, loving eyes of the Savior seem to follow us. It serves as a good reminder to us. We do not display this plaque as a symbol of worship but rather to represent our need and desire for His presence in our home and in our lives.

Occasionally when harsh words are being spoken or when there is arguing or bickering, all that is needed is a reminder of our "visitor." The children know that we are responsible for the peace and cooperation in our home, especially if we are going to be worthy of His presence. Asking the question, "Could Jesus come into our home today?" causes the children to pause and reflect on the attitude in our home. Obviously, if we referred to Him too much then such a statement would soon lose its impact. Therefore, it is necessary to be selective when referring to Him in this way.

Humming or singing a song such as, "Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words", can also get the message across without saying any more. Sometimes, humor is more effective than a lecture. What is important to remember
is to do what is right for the moment. One mother shared a solution:

One day I overheard my two young daughters quarreling over the use of their toys. After thinking a moment, I entered their room and had them tell me the name of their best friend. When each had replied, I introduced them to each other as their best friend, using the names they had given me. Amazingly, they played contentedly the remainder of the day. They treated each other as if they were playing with their best friend. At the end of the day we discussed the importance of treating everyone in our family as our best friend.

Being imaginative may take more time, but it is often the most effective and rewarding way to teach children. Remember, feelings of love, unity and harmony are nutrients that feed the blossoming child. In return we reap a happy, confident child who is better prepared to face the challenges of life.

The Influence of Prayer

Granted, we won't always have the answers. Sometimes the lightness of songs, humor or pretending will not be appropriate in a sensitive moment. The following illustrates a problem that was not to be taken lightly, but was resolved with prayer:

One afternoon when my son arrived home from school it was wet and wintery. As I looked down at his feet I noticed the shoes we had purchased for him only two months earlier and had totally fallen apart. The soles had cracked and the seams were coming apart. His feet were wet and he looked totally dejected. Then he began to cry—-not a whimpering cry, but a cry from the heart. "When will I be able to get some good shoes?" he asked. My heart
ached for him as I struggled for an answer.
"As soon as payday arrives," I answered.
"Right now we only have $6.00 to last until
the end of the month."

Just then his sister reminded him that he
had received a letter from Gramps. He had
signed a contract with Gramps earlier that if
his writing improved he would be awarded
$10.00. He rushed to the kitchen to get the
letter. Sure enough it contained a letter of
congratulations and the coveted $10.00. that
was a start. Now we had $16.00. I knew
that to get a good pair of leather shoes for
winter we would need about $20.00. His
sister offered to lend him the $5.00 she had
earned babysitting. We now had $21.00. That
was enough to go shopping, so off we went.

We pulled up in front of the first shoe store
and began to get out. Then I hesitated. I
felt impressed that we should say a word of
prayer first. I told my son to get back in
the car. I informed him that we were making
a pretty important decision—we needed to
make the best choice possible concerning the
quality of the shoes and at the price we
could afford. I suggested that we have a
prayer before going in.

I began to offer the prayer. I had no more
than addressed Heavenly Father when suddenly
I knew, without a doubt, that my son should
be the one offering the prayer. I turned to
my son and shared my feelings with him.

He told me that he just couldn't pray. He
was really struggling to hold back the tears.
I told him that we would wait until he was
ready. I explained why I couldn't do it for
him. It wasn't my place. The Lord wanted to
hear from him. We sat there for a few moments.
I was just about to give up, when I heard my
son offer a meek humble prayer for the guidance
we needed. We went inside, and began comparing
quality and prices at several stores. We
finally decided to buy a pair of shoes that
cost, with the tax, (5¢ less than what we
had).

As I began to pay the clerk I commented about
our bad luck with the last pair we had pur-
chased. He hesitated and then suggested that
we try to return them to the store we had
purchased them from—he lost a sale! We had
never thought about doing that. We rushed
home to get the ruined shoes and returned
them to the store where we had purchased them. They exchanged them for a good pair of leather shoes and we paid the difference . . . $3.14!

As we search for ways to be creative in teaching our children to use gospel principles, we will also find answers to our own questions in life.

The Organization of God's Kingdom

From time to time I have heard the statement, "I can't have family home evening because I don't have a priesthood bearer in my home!" If that is the way we think, we are probably looking for an excuse. We don't need to have a priesthood bearer in our home in order to have a gospel centered family.

The organization of God's kingdom may be compared to a large family unit comprised of smaller family units. This would include such units as the immediate family, extended family, the ward family, the stake family, and so on, with the purpose of providing support, guidance and growth for each individual, and most importantly . . . priesthood stewardship.

Begin with Ourselves

Is it possible that because we have heard the scriptures about the priesthood being responsible to "care for the needs of the widow and fatherless" that we are sitting back waiting for that to occur? If so, we should also remind ourselves of the Lord's admonition to become self-reliant. Actually this does not have to
be an either/or choice. Both of these principles work well together. First, we do all that we can for ourselves; then, seek assistance if it is still necessary.

Our attitude toward our circumstances and others often influences their attitude toward us. However, if we are willing to give service to others, to reach out with a hand of friendship, then we will eventually receive in kind. We will also feel more comfortable receiving help when it is offered or needed.

**Become a Part of the Ward**

A single mother told the following account of her experience:

When I first moved into a new community, following my divorce, I was all alone. My children were staying at their grandparents while I was getting settled in a new apartment and a new job. The first Sunday I was there was Fast Sunday. I felt particularly blessed because of the direction and help I received from the Lord over the preceding month. Many events had occurred which were a witness to me of how willing the Lord is to answer personal prayers. I felt particularly humble and grateful. I hesitantly took the opportunity to bear my testimony in the new ward. In my testimony I expressed my eagerness to serve, and expressed appreciation for the assistance I had received from the Elder's Quorum. In short, I opened myself up to not only receive love, but also to give it. From that time forward the ward members enveloped me with a caring I had not known before.

This ward became my "family," my support and foundation for feeling the confidence needed to utilize its "family" resources, such as emotional support, counseling, legal advice, car repairs, gardening advice, health blessings, etc. However, I made it a point, as much as
possible, to do all that I could for myself before asking for assistance. When assistance was given, as in the case of car or household repairs, I took the opportunity to learn about it so that in the future I might be able to do the repairs myself. Also, whenever service was rendered, I would express my appreciation, and then follow up with a fresh loaf of bread or cookies (letting my children help me, of course).

For example, consider the proper use of home teachers. Most home teachers desire to be helpful, but many of them don't really know what to do or say other than, "Call me if I can do anything for you." When home teachers were assigned to us I "trained" them by telling them what our needs were. I told them how much I appreciated and needed them and that they represented the priesthood in our home and how we looked to them for an example. I informed them that we would be calling on them for health blessings, school blessings, and emergency blessings. As a result, our home teachers became a very meaningful part of our lives. They would take my son on the father and son outings, and my daughter to father and daughter parties. They, along with their families, participated with our family in picnics and outdoor activities. One home teacher even shared part of his garden plot with us. Another home teacher used to take my son fishing with him.

Of course, not all home teachers were equally committed. During these times we turned to others with whom we had developed a good relationship. From all this we found that the bonds of love are developed more deeply when we make opportunities to serve one another.

**Service Projects**

Single parent families should not consider themselves exempt from having the blessings of service. There is nothing quite like the invigorating freshness of early morning air while picking cherries or apples along with the ward members at the church welfare
farm. More important is the comraderie our children developed with other ward members, while learning to serve the Lord. When service and enjoyment are paired together they develop a healthy attitude toward work. Other opportunities to serve are constantly available if we just make ourselves aware of them.

Obedience

Participation in church meetings, social activities, genealogy, temple work, emergency preparedness, family preparedness, etc. are available to all members of the church. Our lives are blessed in proportion to the light and truth we obey.

There is no justification for not implementing the gospel in our lives. We tend to make time for what is important to us. True, we usually need to adjust our lifestyles, but the eternal (and temporal) rewards are worth it.

If we are diligent in our desire to implement the gospel into our every day life we will find ways to do so. Consider the following suggested schedule of activities:

Daily: prayer - personal and family
       scripture study - personal and family
       journal writing

Weekly: family home evening
       family council
church attendance
fulfilling church assignments
acts of service
Monthly: temple attendance and genealogy
interviews with children
payment of tithes
family preparedness evaluation and goals
visiting teaching or home teaching
Yearly: tithing settlement - ward
budget, etc., a year's supply of food,
emergency preparedness missionary
opportunities/activation/fellowship

These are merely the observable behaviors of living the gospel, but the real living of the gospel occurs within ourselves. It is as much felt as it is seen. It radiates from our countenance and cannot be imitated or contrived. It is simply a matter of becoming what we believe. And why not? We are anyway!

The aim is to make our actions and our feelings congruent. The goal is to identify principles to live by and then implement them in our lives. To do this we should remember to utilize the resources available within our own "family"-immediate, intermediate, ward, stake . . . .
Checklist

Below are listed several statements that apply to the material you have just read. Ponder each of the statements to evaluate how you may be doing:

(1) Do I teach my children how to depend on their Heavenly Father?

(2) What methods do I use to instill gospel principles in my children?

(3) How do I seek inspiration to recognize and utilize teaching moments appropriately?

(4) What does a picture of the Savior, and/or a picture of a temple in our home represent?

For some you may want to reevaluate priorities and possibly establish some new goals. For additional help you may want to refer to these items listed below:


Music by: Lex de Azevedo

Janeen Brady

Mormon Tabernacle Choir

Janice Kapp Perry

Doug Stewart

Others

Games: Forever Families

Count Your Blessings

Quest

On Our Way to Perfection

Stepping Stones & Stumbling Blocks

Celestial Pursuit

Others
REFERENCES


Allen, J. *As a man thinketh*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.


The development of sex differences.  


Smith, B. (April, 1982). *Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, pp. 113-117.


STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY: A GUIDE
FOR LDS SINGLE-PARENT MOTHERS

Jane C. Beuhring
Department of Family Sciences
M.S. Degree, December 1984

ABSTRACT

Raising a family as a single parent is difficult at best. As an LDS single parent, these difficulties take on a unique challenge. The purpose of this project is to offer specific, LDS related guidelines to assist the LDS single parent mother in strengthening her family and thus acquiring the skills needed in handling the unique challenge of raising a family in a gospel oriented society. A variety of resources were used to include theorists, practitioners, scriptures, and personal experiences. Examples and case studies demonstrate the integration of gospel principles and family practices as they relate to LDS single parent families.

Terrance D. Olsen, Committee Chairman

Robert F. Stahmann, Committee Member

Date: Dec. 7, 1984

Robert F. Stahmann, Department Chairman