

Accentuate the Positive

Mary Ellen Edmunds

This address was given at the 1999 Family Expo Conference

© 1999 by Brigham Young University,
Division of Continuing Education
All rights reserved.

For further information write:

BYU Family Expo,
136 Harman Continuing Education Building,
Provo, Utah 84602.
(801) 422-3559
E-mail: conferences@byu.edu
Home page: <http://familyexpo.byu.edu>

On the 18th of March, about a month ago, I was headed for Atlanta from Salt Lake City. I was sitting in 23F by the window. I had my pillow and I had taken my Dramamine, and I was settling down for my little nap. Across the aisle from me was a little boy named Ryan, about five years old. Sitting across the aisle from him, closest to me, was his mother. I wasn't asleep; I was listening, and this is what I heard:

"Ryan, don't yell. Ryan, quit kicking the seat. Ryan, don't play with your seatbelt. Ryan, quit whining. Ryan, don't put your elbows in the aisles. Ryan, lower your voice. Ryan, stop it."

I was thinking about this talk. I was thinking about accentuating the positive. At one point the mother said something like—and her voice was softer—

"Ry-Ry, would you like to color?"

He didn't say anything. A few minutes later I heard him ask, "Mommy, do you call me Ry-Ry?"

She said, "Yes, sometimes I do."

He was quiet for a few more seconds and then said, "I want you to call me Ry-Ry all the time."

The only positive comment she made during the time that I was listening and watching was, "Ry-Ry do you want to color?" A little later, Ry-Ry moved over to 23E, and we had a wonderful time on our way to Atlanta, so much so that when we landed, he wanted me to go on to Orlando with their family.

How do you respond when someone is negative with you, when everything they say is "don't" and "no?" How do you respond when someone is positive with you? This incident took place in a crowded airplane, and I doubt Ryan is treated this way all the time at home—at least I hope not. What about in your life? What about in your home?

Do you remember some of those Homefront ads that they used to play on television? They still do, but some of the older ones they've quit playing. One that I remember was about a little boy running home and coming through the front door screaming, as he held a little piece of paper, "Dad, Dad, I got an A!" You hear his dad from someplace else in the home shouting, "How many times have I told you not to slam the door!" Then you see the little boy's face fall and his hand holding the little paper with one A on it. That's always been an "ouch" for me when I've seen that ad.

One of my favorite movies is one called *The Human Comedy*. It's from a book by William Saroyan. There's an incident in the book where a little boy named Ulysses is watching the train go by. I don't know if he has a penny on the tracks or not (to make himself a little necklace or ring), but some men have jumped aboard the train and he's calling out and waving to every single one of them. One waves back and he hears him singing:

Weep no more my lady, O weep no more today.
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,
For the old Kentucky home far away.

I think that's a sweet melody. (It wouldn't be if I sang it to you.) But I love the melody that goes with those words. I can remember in second grade we had a lady who would come and play the piano for us. We'd have our little dance routine; we'd line up on either side of the room, and you'd see the boys counting and trying to get out of line so they didn't have to dance with me. But I remember that the lady would play that melody, "My Old Kentucky Home," and for some reason, even though I wasn't sure what the melody was at that time, it gave me a nostalgic feeling in my little heart.

Well, the man waves back to Ulysses and then he calls out, "Going home, boy, going back to where I belong." In the movie, not in the book, the little boy Ulysses runs home to his mother and asks her what the man meant about home and about going back to where he belonged. I love the book and the movie. They remind me of a Zion society.

Once when I attended a party, one of the games was to fill in blanks and see if you had the same thing somebody else had written down. One of the questions went something like this: "If you could go anyplace in the world for a vacation or a getaway, where would you go?" In my blank I wrote "home" because I'm not there a lot, and I love being home. I didn't ever find anybody that had the same answer as I did. They had Hawaii, Nevada, or something like that.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *home*? It's a tender word really, the word *home*. One of the worst feelings I've ever had was homesickness. In fact I hold a record for homesickness. When I went on my mission, I went as far away as I could go without starting home again. I really didn't know where I was going because when my call came, it said "Southern Far East." I said, "Mom, I'm going to Florida!" She said, "I don't think so."

The first place I was assigned was Taiwan, and this was before any language training. This was a long time ago! I went there not knowing any Mandarin, and I was so homesick. I think that was one of the reasons, because I couldn't understand what people were saying. During our sacrament meetings I would have my little hymnbook in English, and I would open it to the song or hymn we were going to sing and I'd whisper along in English. One day we were singing the hymn "More Holiness Give Me," and we came to the phrase "more longing for home." I thought, "If I had more longing for home, I'd perish."

Have you felt it? Do you know what I mean by that longing for home, that feeling of homesickness? What makes home such an important place and feeling? One of the things I have felt is that as time goes by we remember positive things. And perhaps, hopefully, we forget some of the negative things about our home. One day, in my imagination, which is very active, it was as if someone had called me up and said "Edmunds, we'd like your home to be in the Parade of Homes." I promise it never will be. But then the feeling was, "So, you get to help write the description for the brochure." So I started writing things like, "Sorry about no sidewalk in the back; it fell out when they put in the sewer last year. I'd tell you about the peach tree, but the snow took it down." And then the little impression in my imagination was, "No, no, not that part of it, not the *house* part of it. Describe the *home* part of it." I've done that with the home where I live now, with the home where I grew up, and with other homes where I've lived. It's quite a thing. I encourage you to do that. Write about your home for the Parade of Homes—not the one they do where they want to see the latest dishwasher and "PV-4010 Shower Curtain," but just the one where you feel safe and comfortable.

A few years ago my sister Charlotte and I were in Cedar City; that's what I consider my hometown. I lived there from the time I was three years old until I was seventeen. Those were formative years, and I got to have a childhood. I wish every child could have a childhood, but not exactly like mine; I would hope there wouldn't be that many mean children in the world. A childhood provides a chance to exercise imagination, to play, to dream, to look at the stars at night, to find one that no one has ever seen before and, with your friend, to name that star. Well, a few years ago when Charlotte and I were back in our hometown of Cedar City in southern Utah, the people who purchased our home still lived there, and they asked us if we would like to go through our home. We had always wanted to, but we felt awkward asking, "Can we come in and walk through your house?" We just felt awkward about it, but for some reason this particular day the woman who, with her husband, had purchased the home let us go through every room. Both the husband and wife were there and they took us through the whole home. It had been almost 40 years since we had been there, and it was a wonderful experience. Every room just brought back a flood of memories—some of them funny, some of them tender, all of them bringing warm feelings to our hearts. It was almost as though I could hear the home whispering to me, "Where have you been? It's been a long time." I remember when I moved, I promised that home I'd come back and get it back someday. I don't know if that will ever happen, but what a good feeling.

What kind of a home are you creating? What's the feeling in your home? Is it safe? Do those who live there have a sense of belonging? How can we accentuate the positive and increase the love in our homes? Much of it begins right in our own hearts; you realize that as much as I do. What kind of a person are you? Are you a positive person? Are you mostly happy? Are you pretty optimistic? If I asked someone who knew you well to tell me about you, what would they say? Would they say, "He's mostly happy?" Would they say, "She's mostly a positive person?" Or would they say something different? Are you the reason somebody in your neighborhood got caller ID? "Can't handle it today."

If you feel you're too negative, if you feel you're unhappy most of the time, if you're too pessimistic, can you change? Can you become different and create a different feeling in your home? I think that's the whole message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can change. We can get better. We can become who we really wish to be. William James said, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives, by altering their attitudes of mind." "As

a man thinketh so is he." We can help children believe in themselves and change in their home, in our home.

I consider myself an optimist. One day when I was praying, and this was just a few weeks ago, really without thinking, all of a sudden I thanked Heavenly Father for a cheerful disposition, for an optimistic soul. I had never thanked Him for that before. It stopped me in my tracks. Then I thought about it, and I said to myself, "Self, that is one of the best blessings Heavenly Father gave you, to be generally optimistic, happy, and positive." The kind of person you are has much to do with the kind of atmosphere and feeling you create, and contribute to, in your home. I believe that so strongly. Otherwise, we are saying, "Do what I say and not what I do. Don't follow my example, just heed my words." I believe children—and all of us—follow better if the example is set, something we can follow. We all need others in our lives who praise us for our efforts, our successes, however small, however far apart, and accentuate the positive.

Who does that for you? Do you do that for you? Sometimes we don't even do that for ourselves. Sometimes we are so hard on ourselves. Sometimes we even get to a point where we think God is mad at us. That's not fair, is it? He loves us because we are His children. He loves us all the time. He wants us to be happy. He's given us a plan of happiness which will lead us to that happiness. President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, "Never forget, my brothers and sisters, that there is something of divinity in each of you. You are a son or daughter of God, and you have a wonderful inheritance. I hope you will never belittle or demean yourself. Some of you may think that you are not attractive, that you have no talents. Stop wandering around in the wasteland of self-pity." That's a prophet speaking.

"When I was much younger, there was a popular song which said, "Accentuate the positive." Attitude has more to do with personality, with attractiveness, with getting along with others than does any other attribute (*Church News*, 28 September 1996, p. 5)." Obviously, that's where I got the title for my remarks, "Accentuate the Positive." I think the song says, "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with Mr. In-between." Then you go tra, la, la, la, la, la, la.

The scriptures are the best books I have found for ideas and suggestions on how to be positive in our families—and all of our relationships. I love the scriptures. There was a long time when I didn't know that they contained a lot of information about how to be positive in homes, how to be positive with family members and others, and how to be positive in all of our relationships. The scriptures are full of that. I have found other good books, and I want to tell you about one today. It's called *What Kids Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids* (Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith, and Pamela Espeland. Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 1998). I just happened upon this book a couple of months ago in an assignment I have for community service. It's a book which talks about suggestions for a common-sense approach to raising young people who become competent, contributing, responsible, and compassionate adults. I really have enjoyed looking in this book and trying to put it into practice. In my feeling, what the book teaches is to accentuate the positive. Look for the good in others, especially in our own children, in others' children, and in those around us. Help them to know that they matter to us and that they make a difference for us, whether they live in our home or someone else's. I also ran across some wonderful suggestions in the *Church News*. I like those next-to-the-last pages where every week they have some questions: "How did we do this in our family, in our life?" I found one once that was a suggestion for being positive with children. (You may hear some things more than once. As the Filipinos say, "Don't be anxiety." Maybe a repeat will just put it more deeply in your heart

and give you a suggestion of something you may try at home.) Some of these you may already be doing; many of these you may already be doing.

- Make regular dates to spend time alone with children. (I didn't mention that the person who gave these suggestions was Sue Osborn, a retired teacher and elementary school librarian. She sounds like a wonderful person from Waveland, Mississippi.) Talk about things the child likes and is interested in. Focus on him/her. Do you notice a difference when you do that—when you focus on the little person and ask more questions, and they don't have to reach up and turn your head back toward them?
- Avoid criticizing.

Then she says, "Accentuate the positive, call attention to the smallest successes."

- Tell children you love them. Sometimes parents say, "Well, they know I do." Even so, tell them. Say it out loud. Say their name. Tell them often and in creative ways.
- Help them feel like a valued member of the family, whose help you need and appreciate.
- Use family home evening to help children practice talking to a group, in a comfortable home setting. Help them succeed in any assignment you might give for that purpose.
- Display items in the home, in the office, in the car—wherever—that show children's successes, such as artwork or well-done schoolwork. Make sure people who come to visit your home notice them.
- Allow children to spend time with grandparents and other older members of the family and neighborhood. They make great noncritical listeners.
- Take advantage of all the opportunities that the Church offers children and youth. This includes such things as group activities, giving talks, sharing time in Primary classes, dances, youth conferences, and other things.
- Take an active interest in children's schoolwork and activities. Many times there are opportunities to ask their teacher how they're doing and how you might help them.
- Offer the child lessons in areas of interest, if you can afford it. Or encourage participation in the school band, chorus, language club, or some sports team they are interested in.
- Encourage writing and journal-keeping at the earliest possible age.

Then she said, "I know from personal experience that this helps children work through and sort out their feelings" (Adapted from "Helping Children Overcome Shyness," *Church News*, 17 February 1996, p. 15). One of my brothers and his wife have helped their four little children do this from the time they were making noise (you know, e-er-e-er, what would you like me to write in your journal today? E-er-er-e-er).

One of the things I love to do with children of any age is this. I was at a bookstore or an office supply or school store one time. You can get a lot of tickets and things that give praise, and one I found was "Caught you being good." I love to hand those out. It is so much fun. You can just hand someone one of these things on an elevator. Maybe they look kind of sad today, and you just hand them one of those. It could really wake them up; it could really change their day.

A man named Gordon Allport said, "One of the most certain findings of modern science is the children who are rejected at home, who have no trustful confidence in their parents' affection, who do not know where to turn for emotional anchorage, make wretched citizens in later life."

Then he said, "Whatever improves the quality of parenthood and the firmness of family life the world over will improve youth's ability to cope with its problems" (quoted in Obert C. Tanner, *Christ's Ideals for Living*, Deseret Sunday School Union Board: Utah, 1955, pp. 249–250).

President Hinckley again—I love to quote President Hinckley because he is so positive. At the same time he is positive, happy, and cheerful, there is no one on earth who understands more deeply the sorrow, the heavy burdens, the loneliness, and the troubles. He said:

I hope that you're enthusiastic . . . because there is a terrible ailment of pessimism in the land. It's almost endemic. We're constantly fed a steady and sour diet of character assassination, fault finding, evil-speaking one of another. The snide remark, the sarcastic jibe, the cutting down of [others]—these too often are of the essence of our conversation. In our homes wives weep, and children finally give up under the barrage of criticism leveled by husbands and fathers. Criticism is the forerunner of divorce, the cultivator of rebellion, [and] sometimes a catalyst that leads to failure. Even in the Church, it sows the seed of inactivity and finally, in many cases, apostasy.

What's the feeling in your home? President Hinckley continues:

What I am suggesting and asking is that we turn from the negativism that so permeates our society and look for the remarkable good in the land and times in which we live; that we speak of one another's virtues more than we speak of one another's faults; that optimism replace pessimism. We are the creatures of our thinking. We can talk ourselves into defeat or we can talk ourselves into victory. Let me urge you to desist from making cutting remarks one to another. Rather, cultivate the art of complimenting, of strengthening, of encouraging. It is a responsibility divinely laid upon each of us to bear one another's burdens, strengthen one another, to encourage one another, to lift one another, to look for the good in one another and to emphasize that good. There is not a man or a woman . . . who cannot be depressed on the one hand, or lifted on the other by the remarks of his or her associates.

Is that true for you? It certainly is for me. And I think one of the elements of peacemaking in a home or anyplace in a society is speaking good of others, to others. When you hear something good, pass it along. Are there sources of help for us as we work to make our home a positive, happy, safe place to be? There certainly are. I doubt there's any organization on the face of the earth more concerned with helping and strengthening families and relationships within families than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I wonder if we've come close to understanding "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." I like it that they have put this in a little pamphlet form because it's wonderful to hand out to people.

Have you ever tried to underline the proclamation? You can't underline it! It's like every word, every sentence, every phrase has been carefully, carefully put together. I was in a stake in Arizona a few months ago, and the stake president had invited the people in the stake to memorize this proclamation. The people in the stake said that since they've been doing that they notice changes in their homes, their hearts, their lives, and their relationships. This is true in the whole stake because everybody's doing it, everybody's working on it. In stake conference apparently the stake president had a six-year-old boy come up and repeat it from memory (show

off, show off!), but the family had decided to do that. It needs to be more than something that hangs on the wall somewhere in the home. It needs to be something we become very familiar with and begin applying. We need to find the truths in here that make a difference for us as we begin applying what is in that proclamation. There ought to be something wonderfully, significantly different in homes where that proclamation is an important document. There ought to be something significant and positively different in homes where there is the knowledge that families can be together forever. There ought to be some kind of a covenant living that's different from just people thrown together by circumstance.

One time I was in the Salt Lake Temple for the sealing of a wonderful family I had known in the Philippines, one of the early families to join the Church there. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, now President, was the one who performed the sealing. Not all of the nine children were there. Some of the children had been born in the covenant because the mother and father had been to the temple before all of the children were born. But those who were there and sealed to them were so joyful.

I heard one boy say to his parents, "Now you cannot be rid of me anymore," with a smile.

There are so many fundamental things that we have been invited to do for a long, long time, which make such a difference—especially as we learn how to do them better. I've just made a list of some of these. Here are some ideas for creating a positive, caring and encouraging atmosphere in our home, and again, I encourage you to carefully read the messages of this recent conference and every general conference:

Scripture reading, prayers, hymn singing, family home evening, family council, individual time with children, individual time with parents, with each other, positive comments, sharing, responsibility, chances to succeed, unconditional love, opportunity to develop and display talents, individuality, encouragement to participate in new experiences, clear rules and consequences, kindness, effective listening, safety, security, places and time to study, the Golden Rule, effective communication, interdependence, genuine compliments and praise, honesty, optimism, traditions, a sense of belonging.

Don't let little things come between you and your children. I have seen pride—almost like it was competition between a parent and a child—keep them apart until it was almost too late to repair.

One time my younger sister, Charlotte, the perfect one in our family, and I were discussing how we wished we could be our mother's friend and not her daughter. She overheard us and asked "Why?" We said, "Well, you can just be hollering at us and telling us what to do when the phone rings. You pick it up and say, 'Hello, oh yes, Bernice, I'd love to. Thank you, Bernice.' Then you say, 'Now you girls get back there!'" So we said, "We just wish we could be your friend once in a while."

Use humor as you can to keep things from getting too intense. Follow Elder Oscar Kirkham's counsel; it was mentioned in conference by Elder [Cree-L] Kofford. "Your name is safe in our home" (*Ensign*, May 1999, p. 82). Let's make our homes places where people's names and their reputations are safe, where we don't talk unkindly or unfairly about others. It's important to say good things.

Use the good dishes. I've had so many people say to me, "We've begun using our good dishes for our family." It seemed that the good dishes, the cleaning of the house, and the preparing of fancy good food was always saved for company or guests, for visitors instead of for the family. Don't give the impression that the family isn't as important as company, as visitors.

Respect your children and ask them for their counsel. You probably do this, but ask them, "What do you think? Well, why do you ask?" Family council is a wonderful time to allow children to express their feelings. Also, interviews with them are a wonderful time to say, "Well now, what do you think? What do you think we ought to do? What do you think about this?"

One time there was a young girl who shared with me an experience she had. She had studied ballet since she was a little girl, and one of her dreams was to participate in *The Nutcracker* at Christmastime. Then came the call, one year, that she got to participate in *The Nutcracker*. She didn't have a leading role; she was going to be one of the dancing children, but she was absolutely thrilled. She went to the first practice and meeting and came home very troubled. Her parents asked what was wrong, and she said, "Most of the practices are on Sunday." Now this, I think, was an interesting, wonderful way for these parents to handle the situation. I think it showed a great deal of respect, trust, confidence, and love in this little daughter of theirs whom they'd been teaching for about 14 years. They said, "Wow, what are you going to do?" And I said, "They said that to you?" She said, "Yes!" Then she said, "They encouraged me to pray and think about it and decide what I wanted to do, and they told me they would support me in my decision." She said, "It really didn't take very long, and I came out of my bedroom and said, 'I'm not going to be in *The Nutcracker* this year.'" She said, "I could tell by their response that they were so proud of me—so happy at my decision about what I had decided I would and wouldn't do on the Sabbath day." She said, "When I went to tell the man in charge, he was shocked 'cause he knew how much I wanted to be in it. He asked why and I told him. The next year he called me to ask me if I would participate that year in *The Nutcracker*. Then he paused and said, 'We won't have any practices on Sunday.'" Good for her. Good for her and the effect she had on him.

Ask Heavenly Father to help you know something about who your children really are. Wouldn't it be fun if Heavenly Father showed us His home movies of our children? "Why, Ralphie, I have a new respect for you." Promote the tradition of gathering, families gathering for events. Just about ten days ago we had a gathering for an Eagle Scout Court of Honor for one of my little nephews. I say little; he's kind of tall at 13. I got there a little bit early, and it's kind of hard to describe the feeling I had as I watched the family gather—my brothers and sisters, their children, and their children's children. It was a marvelous feeling to see the look on that young man's face as his family gathered to honor him when he received his Eagle Scout Award.

Seems to me there's increasing emphasis in the Church, by Church leaders, on the family, and the family being the focus of what we do in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I want to share some things by President Boyd K. Packer. These are from the *Ensign* in November 1998. This was from his conference talk in October 1998. "Parenthood stands among the most important activities to which Latter-day Saints may devote themselves. Many members face conflicts as they struggle to balance their responsibility as parents together with faithful activity in the Church. . . . The whole curriculum and all of the activities in the Church have been restructured and correlated with the home."

I think we've all noticed this. There have been so many things happen, like the consolidated meeting schedule, the change from "ward teaching" to "home teaching," family home evening emphasized, temples, the proclamation. Back to President Packer's remarks.

Can you see the spirit of inspiration resting upon the servants of the Lord and upon parents. Can we understand the challenge and the assault now leveled at the family. In providing out-of-home activities for the family we must use care. . . . How easy it is . . . to overlook the responsibilities of the parent and the essential need for families to have

time together. We must be careful lest programs and activities of the Church become too heavy for some families to carry. . . . In Church we are taught the Great Plan of Happiness. At home we apply what we have learned. Every call, every service in the Church brings experience and valuable insights which carry over into family life. Would our perspective be more clear if we could, for a moment, look upon parenthood as a calling in the Church. Actually, it is so much more than that, but if we could look at it that way for a moment, we could reach a better balance in the way we schedule families. . . . Every time you schedule a youngster, you schedule a family—particularly the mother. . . . Some mothers become discouraged—even depressed. I receive letters using the word *guilt* because they cannot do it all.

Attending church is, or should be, a respite from the pressures of everyday life. It should bring peace and contentment. If it brings pressure and discouragement, then something is out of balance. . . . If we teach parents to be responsible and allow them sufficient time, over the long course their children will be at home. There, at home, they can learn what cannot be effectively taught in either Church or school. . . . As the world grows ever more threatening, the powers of heaven draw ever closer to families and parents. . . . most of what I know about how our Father in Heaven really feels about us, His children, I have learned from the way I feel about my wife and my children and their children. This I have learned at home.

Then a quote from Spencer W. Kimball:

Church programs strengthen individuals and families. Our success individually and as a church will largely be determined on how faithfully we focus on living the gospel in the home. Priesthood quorums and auxiliary organizations—even wards and stakes—exist primarily to help members live the gospel in the home. People are more important than programs. And church programs should always support and never detract from gospel-centered family activities.

Now based on those comments, I want to give two announcements in church. And maybe you've heard the first one a little bit more than the second one, unfortunately. The first announcement goes something like this: "We want all of you to come out and support us in this activity." Have you heard announcements like that in church? The second goes something like this: "We want this activity to support you. We've thought about it and prayed about it and feel that we have an activity that will strengthen us in our ability to live the gospel of Jesus Christ in our homes." People are more important than programs, activities, organizations, and procedures.

I would like to share some invitations, in no particular order of importance. Maybe you'll pick one, maybe you'll pick none. Don't try to do them all this afternoon. One invitation is based on not just the experience I had in Arizona, but now I've read things in the *Church News* and in the *Ensign* on this subject. Memorize the proclamation, or at least become very, very familiar with it. Have it as a topic of discussion in your family home evening and/or family council.

Go outside and take a look in. What do I mean? Go outside your home (some of your neighbors may wonder what you're doing). Stand outside and look in. Look at you, and look at your relationships. How are you doing? Are there things you'd like to change? How can you do that a little bit at a time? How can you try a little harder to be a little better as the prophet has asked? Go outside and look in.

Don't just judge yourself; don't just be critical. Part of what I'm trying to say about accentuating the positive is do that for yourself; don't leave yourself out of this. Be positive as you go outside and look in. "Well, I do pretty well with this and this and this; I could do better at this." Pick something that you would like to change and work on it. When was the last time you told everyone you loved them? Maybe an effective family home evening would be looking in 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7 and discussing why "charity never faileth." Considering some of the specific aspects of charity discussed in those verses could help us make a difference in our families, in our homes, and in our relationships.

Bear your testimony to your children. Sometimes that seems a little awkward at home. But what a wonderful thing for a family to have a testimony meeting. Give family members a chance to share their feelings, but not by force. Maybe there is someone who doesn't feel like they can do it right now, but for those who wish to and feel comfortable doing so, what a wonderful thing to do at home.

Mention your children in your prayers with them listening. Express gratitude for them, the hope that they'll be good children, and that you'll be good parents and know how to take care of them. Pray for your children individually in your personal prayers, asking Heavenly Father what He wants you to say to them, how He wants you to treat them, and what things specifically they need from you as a parent. I must pause here in brackets—I'm a single person; I live alone, but I put myself in a parental role in that I try to nurture and be positive and influential in the lives of other people's children. So I'm not leaving myself out. If there's anyone here who doesn't have children, please don't feel like I'm leaving you out, but pray for children individually. I've done this for nieces and nephews and neighbors (the three N's), hoping that Heavenly Father would guide—and He does, He will. He will answer that prayer; these are His children.

What does He want us to do for and with His children? What kind of a relationship does He have with His son, and with us, that's teaching us? His Son is out on a busy day creating light from darkness and water from land. He comes home, and His Father says, "Good job. Looks good, I like those hippos you did today." Positive, positive things. And when He introduces His Son on a few special occasions, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Very positive, very, very positive.

Give words of praise, say positive things, accentuate the positive. Here is one of the most important invitations I want to share with you today and I hope many of you would choose to do this. Think of someone in your life, particularly in your family and maybe in your home, with whom you've been too negative—someone who has waited too long to hear you point out something good, something positive. Make a plan with your Heavenly Father's help, with your companion's help, with all that you can bring forth from your heart, and be positive. Make a change. They'll be ill at first; they will faint, and they may run a fever, but I've just had a feeling as I've prepared for today to offer that as an invitation. When was the last time you told a son or daughter or a spouse how grateful you are to have them as part of your family, in your home?

Several years ago President Howard W. Hunter shared some suggestions for Christmastime, at the end of 1994, which was actually just a few weeks before he went home. I think these suggestions are so wonderful and would be so helpful in the home or any relationship.

Mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust. Write a letter. Give a soft answer. Encourage youth. Manifest your loyalty in word and deed. Keep a promise. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Apologize (when you have apologized to your

children, can you see what it does for them? Have you had that opportunity ever? Or have you never made a mistake? Apologizing is a wonderful part of forgiving, and asking for forgiveness). Try to understand. Examine your demands on others. Think first of someone else. Be kind. Be gentle. Laugh a little more. Express your gratitude. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and the wonder of the earth. Speak your love, and then speak it again. (Adapted from an unknown author. As quoted by Howard W. Hunter in "The Gifts of Christmas," *First Presidency Christmas Devotional*, Salt Lake Tabernacle, 4 December 1994.)

I'm so grateful for the ways in which my parents have been positive with the eight of us. Our home wasn't perfect. In fact, my mother and I were laughing yesterday about an incident with my perfect sister, Charlotte. I guess she wasn't absolutely perfect because she had so much trouble with tithing. I can remember when she was turning eight and she was going to be baptized, Mom and Charlotte were in the library with the door closed. "Now, you have ten pennies; how many pennies do you give to the Lord?" Long pause, "Four?" "No!" That happened over and over and over. Then one day I heard, "Now you have ten pennies; how many pennies do you give to the Lord?" I can hear little Charlotte's voice after quite a long pause (sniff). "He can have all the pennies! I don't want any pennies." The thing that makes it even funnier in the remembering is my mother had a big stroke several years ago, and now Charlotte's helping her with pennies. What goes around comes around. What is it that little poster says, "Be nice to your children; they'll choose your nursing home." Our home certainly wasn't perfect, but I think of so many positive ways in which our parents encouraged us and allowed us to be individuals. We weren't exactly alike. Charlotte's dolls went to dances and mine went to war. I would climb to the top of a tree with my doll and then let it go. The eyes would spring out, and the arms would fall off. I would race down the tree, drag the body and parts off the battlefield, and try to put them back together again. Meanwhile, Charlotte's little dolls were just dancing in their little dresses.

I've talked of many things which can help us create a positive and optimistic attitude and feeling in our home. I've offered a few suggestions and ideas and invitations, but the most important one is this: Our Heavenly Father will help us if we desire to have a more positive, happy, loving feeling in our home. He will help us to do that. Some of the reminders or guidance He might give may be a little painful. It may be painful to realize that we are too negative or too pessimistic. Or that we do talk unkindly about others, and our children overhear and get that feeling of, as President Hinckley called it, character assassination. From Proverbs 3:5–6 we read: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Elder John K. Carmack has said, "More than positive thinking, faith taps into divine sources and manifests unity and partnership with the Lord. 'Even the ideas and words formulated by faith come by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the power to accomplish the word formed by faith comes from God'" (*Church News*, 10 April 1993, p. 15).

Elder Oaks spoke in the Young Women's meeting in 1994 in the springtime. He spoke to them about one of their values being faith, and he taught them that it is not just faith—it is faith in someone. It is faith in Jesus Christ. Then he taught:

If we think we have faith, we should ask, faith in whom or faith in what? For some, faith is nothing more than faith in themselves. That is only self-confidence or self-centeredness. Others have faith in faith, which is something like relying on the power of positive thinking or betting on the proposition that we can get what we want by manipulating the powers within us. Faith must include trust. When we have faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ, we must have trust in Him. We must trust Him enough that we are content to accept His will, knowing that He knows what is best for us. The kind of faith that includes trust in the Lord stands in contrast to many imitations. . . . When we have that kind of faith and trust in the Lord, we have true security in our lives. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ prepares you for whatever life brings. This kind of faith prepares you to deal with life's opportunities—to take advantage of those that are received and to persist through disappointments of those that are lost. Most importantly, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ opens the door of salvation and exaltation, "for no [one] can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name" (Moroni 7:38). (*Church News*, 2 April 1994, p. 3).

Your Heavenly Father knows what's happening in your life right now—what's happening in your heart, in your home, in your relationships. He knows your heartaches and your joys. He knows that child so well who may have left home, who wasn't invited to leave, or was invited to leave. He knows everything. He and His Son and the Holy Ghost can help if we will allow them to do so.

Have they whispered something to your heart today or yesterday that can make a difference for you? Something comforting—not just reminders of what you're not doing or what you ought to be doing, but comforting feelings that you're doing the best you can and that He knows that, He knows that? Even our dear Father watched a third of His children make a terrible choice. They chose the plan of misery over His great plan of happiness. That must have been very, very difficult, and it must continue to be difficult. These are His children too. President Hunter again:

Every person can and must make spiritual progress. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the divine plan for that spiritual growth eternally. It is more than a code of ethics. It is more than an ideal social order. It is more than positive thinking about self-improvement and determination. The gospel is the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ with His priesthood and sustenance and with the Holy Spirit. With faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to His gospel, a step at a time improving as we go, pleading for strength, improving our attitudes and our ambitions, we will find ourselves successfully in the fold of the Good Shepherd. (*Church News*, 26 June 1993).

May we be willing to exercise the discipline that it takes, the will that it takes, the faith, the trust that it takes, and keep the Spirit in our hearts and our lives and our homes. In Matthew 25 the Savior teaches what will qualify us to be on His right hand and to hear someday these most positive and wonderful words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

May we respond to those for whom we have responsibility or for whom we can have any opportunity of influence as they are hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and imprisoned and feeling like strangers, not feeling like they belong. May our responses to them be such that we are not just doing things for Jesus as his disciples or asking in our heart what would Jesus do in this moment. He teaches in Matthew 25, and in other places, that we will recognize, in some holy and special way, our service is not just for Him but is to Him, that we may someday hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.