

Establishing a House of Order

Matthew O. Richardson

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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>

Occasionally, our family takes what we call: “a homes of the heart” tour. We typically begin with the *modest* basement apartment south of the Brigham Young University campus that we called *home* as newlyweds and work our way to our present home in north Orem. On the “homes of the heart” tour, we visit all the homes that have once housed the hearts of the *Richardsons*. Our children dutifully place their hands over their hearts as we pass by.

The notion of home has always been something special to us—just like it has to most people. It isn’t so much the structure or even the geography that designates a place a “home” as much as the connection a place has with our heart. Home is typically a place of refuge and familiarity; a place that we can call “ours” and as a result, it defines us just as much as we define it.

Areas that are intolerable but bear the title of home have claimed the sweat and the blood of its inhabitants. Thus, no one should ever discount another’s home. Nor should we take our own home lightly. From history we have learned that home isn’t just where we hang our hat, it is where we plant our heart. No wonder that even ward boundary changes trigger weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth and cause us to wonder: “Can things ever be the same?”

I believe that the quest of establishing a home is part of human nature: the quest to have a place of our very own—a place where we truly belong. Perhaps, however, it is more than human tendencies that cause mankind to long for, establish, and fight for a place he can call home. Perhaps it is an extension of our spiritual self—a Godly trait, for He too, has a keen interest in “home.”

God's idea of home is simple. It is where He (God) dwells, and it reflects Him.

Joseph Fielding Smith said that the key to the meaning of eternal life is: "It [the key to the meaning of eternal life] is to be dwellers with God, that is, to have a place in his presence, to be like him, possessing the same kind of life which he possesses, and with him be one." (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *The Way to Perfection*, p.331)

The type of home that exhibits God on earth is described in Moses chapter 7 and was called "Zion" (Moses 7:19).

Even though Enoch and his city of Zion were "taken up into heaven" (Moses 7:21,23), the Lord still wanted others to establish Zion, or the home of God.

Zion—The Earthly Home of God

In the summer of 1831 the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith the location of a new Zion (D&C 57:3). We must be clear on an important point here. Zion was not merely a geographical location that miraculously transformed sinner to saint by crossing the border.

Thus, Zion is not a place where the curious come to see God or just want to "check it out." I doubt that many realtors in the city of Enoch heard "We'll get back with you" after showing a home in the city of Enoch. Zion is not territory for tourists hoping to catch a glimpse of a celebrity (like God), only to rush back to where they came from and eagerly share the tales of their trip (often with slides) with friends. You see Zion doesn't attract those who are merely "passing through." It attracts settlers.

Zion is where we check "natural man" at the door and enter humbly waiting for new instructions. In this way, Zion is a *new beginning*. This is what Benjamin was trying to teach as he stated that we "putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint" (Mosiah 3:19).

Zion is a place where those who have seen God, even in the smallest way, come to be closer to Him, to be more like Him, and, of course, to be full-time residents with Him.

Establishing such a home requires an organized effort, not just shooting from the hip. No wonder the Lord told the Saints in December 1832 to "organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing" (D&C 88:119).

It seems that the Lord requires organization in his estate, mansion, or house.

- D&C 132:18—"My house is a house of order."

Now, before the micromanagers stand and cheer or before we develop the "Enoch Day-Planner," we might step back and see what the Lord has in mind when He states, "My house is a house of order." For example, while some think that a house of order is a nice scriptural passage to be penciled atop the "chore chart"—after all, an ordered house is a "tightly run ship"—others

believe a “house of order” is a “tidy” house with placards of “Cleanliness Is Next to Godliness” posted throughout. While both perspectives possess important practices, they do not reflect the governing principle.

- Mosiah 4:27—“See that these things are done in wisdom and order.”

Where on earth can one find things done in both “wisdom and order?”

We return to D&C 88:119—“Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119).

Throughout history, the Lord has instructed the Saints to build His house (a temple) as a “house of the Lord (D&C 57:3). It is the house of the Lord where Zion is established, maintained and cultivated.

Although the Saints were driven out of Missouri in 1839 and Zion was not established, as many had thought, the Saints today are still striving to build Zion and the house of the Lord.

“We ought to have as our greatest object the building of Zion” (Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, p. 160.)

Some mistake the Saints’ enthusiasm for building temples as our “greatest object.” But the reason we build temples is because Zion is dependent upon the house of the Lord. Wherever you find Zion, you will find evidence of the house of the Lord.

“The Lord’s standards for building a temple apply also to building a spiritual strength in our homes. . . . We would do well to build our homes according to his plan, or they are destined to fail” (Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, May 1993, p. 69).

According to Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, a Latter-day Saint home should follow the pattern of the temple. After all, it is the template of Zion (the very meaning of the word temple). With this in mind, let’s return to the general template for our homes: “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119).

Can you see how the principles of Zion directly apply to our homes? Buying a house does not establish a home anymore than kneeling across an altar makes a couple one in heart, might, and mind. Foolish are those who think that bearing or adopting children make them good parents, or that a couple becomes one simply by finding someone to say “I do.” In fact, Elder Wirthlin reminds us, “Membership in the Church is no guarantee of a strong, happy family” (Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, May 1993, p. 69).

We can determine the outcome, as Brigham Young taught, “We can make Zion, or we can make Babylon, just as we please” Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 5:4).

Thus, it is up to us to determine the model of our homes. “Together with your wife, you determine the spiritual climate for your home” (Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, November 1994, pp. 49–51).

By using the temple as the model of an organized house, we find that “in the well-ordered home we may experience on earth a taste of heaven” (David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1969, p. 5; or *Improvement Era*, June 1969, p. 2).

House of Order: Putting Things in Order

- Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 14:40—“All things . . . be done decently and in order.” (emphasis added).

“In Order”

In order is very significant. For example, my wife and I have been helping our five-year-old son (and kindergarten student) learn to count for the past year. For the longest time he counted: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 . . . 14, 18, 17, 19.

11? 14? 18? 17? 19? I was astonished. Not that he did it out of order, but that he did it out of order exactly the same way—*every* time. I felt that Tyler had it in his mind that if he could do it the same way every time, the numeric order would somehow be transformed to 11, 14, 18, 17, 19 as if—in the words of Elder Neal A. Maxwell— “frequency somehow conferred respectability!” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 1993, p. 76).

I believe that most of you participating in this conference have a reasonable grasp on what is necessary to succeed in establishing functional families, a good family, even a gospel (Zionistic) family. While we came here to this conference to learn something new, I suspect most of you haven’t considered topics like family prayer, fidelity, respect, charity, or family home evening as epiphanies—revolutionary new tactics in family sciences. I suspect that most of you are somewhat like Abraham—a “follower of righteousness” and “desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge” (Abraham 1:1–2). I realize that some of you will humbly balk at being compared to Abraham while others may scoff: “If I were as righteous and knowledgeable as Abraham, I certainly wouldn’t be spending my precious time at a conference” (unless, of course, I was teaching it).

But it is because you *are* like Abraham that you are here today for he too desired to be “a greater follower of righteousness,” and to possess a greater knowledge. Thus, it must be true that most of us have a good foundation on the basics of family living—even gospel family living. After all, we have the “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” that was neatly framed at a family, home and personal enrichment activity hanging on our wall.

Still, most of us are struggling with implementing the principles we already know, practicing what we preach. We are like Pierre of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and lament “Why is it that I know what is right and I do wrong?”

Maybe we came here because we think like the 15th-century scholar (confusion) Wang Yang Ming (I know you are thinking that I made that up.) who once taught: “There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know.” (Wang Yang Ming, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action*, p. 9.)

Maybe we hope that we will discover a secret formula—one that solves all our problems: “How to Have the Ideal Family: The Four Easy Steps Toward Perfection.” We fear that it is because we don’t know the right things that our marriages and families teeter on the brink of disaster. While there may be some truth to this, I think that for many of us we do know certain things—and we know them well. I hope you know that I would never suggest stopping or even diminishing a quest for knowledge. I do, however, think that we often waste what we do know—or worse yet, we don’t value what we do know.

Maybe the problem is we have forgotten the proper order for things we know dealing with our lives. We have established a house of learning but somehow things of lesser importance have been inserted in our daily curriculum. In some cases, we have not only lost the order of curriculum but the curriculum altogether.

Distractions

Elder Richard G. Scott recently taught that “Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction” (Richard G. Scott, *Conference Report*, April, 2001, p. 6).

Distraction comes in many forms. In fact it really doesn’t matter what it is—as long as it distracts. Thus, even a virtue can become a vice. A favorite poem of mine illustrates this principle well.

Excess Express—Peter G. Czerny

He worked out for years, to reduce all his fat.
His muscles were firm and his stomach was flat.
He jogged nights and mornings to keep himself trim.
And still found some time to play tennis and swim.

He drank protein drinks, and ate health foods galore,
Then weight lifted, cycled, and lifted some more.
He told wife and kids that it gave him a “high,”
They said not a word, as he pecked them good-bye.

“If things work out right,” he yelled back from afar,
“I’ll make *Healthworld’s* cover! I’ll be a big star!”
But, why could he not see the truck up ahead?
One thud—and his beautiful body lay dead.

And then he saw something that filled him with fright—
His spiritual body was one sorry sight!

A skeleton, covered with nothing but skin,
He got up to heaven . . . but didn't get in.

“Another soul's mine!” Satan started to scream,
“Give man something nice, and he'll take the extreme!
O.K. I'll admit it . . . I'll outright confess—
For the fast way to hell, take the *Excess Express*.”

To this, I add Elder Maxwell's recent comments: “Ironically, inordinate attention even to good things can diminish our devotion to God. For instance, one can be too caught up in sports and the budding forms of body worship we see among us. One can reverence nature and yet neglect nature's God. One can have an exclusionary regard for good music and similarly with a worthy profession. In such circumstances, the weightier matters are often omitted.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *April General Conference 2002*.)

I assume most of us here today are “good people” and doing reasonably “good” things. I fear, however, that we may not be ordering the better things from the good things in our lives—especially in our marriages and families. We are busy—most of us with good things. But in reality we may be chasing things that will not (cannot) build homes of Zion.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle told of a story about greyhounds in Britain who don't know a real rabbit when they see one. These hounds had chased a mechanical rabbit around the racetrack for so long, that when a real rabbit bounded across the track, the dogs didn't even give it a second look. Of this experience, Ashley Montague wrote:

Stupid, eh? But sad too, this perverting of the natural instincts. . . . We chase mechanical rabbits, too. We chase *paychecks*, and don't give a second look to the glint of the rising sun on a snow-topped peak. We chase our way through the *appointments* of a crowded desk calendar, and fail to take time to chat with the next-door neighbor or to drop in on a sick friend. We chase *social pleasures* on a glittering, noisy treadmill—and ignore the privilege of a quiet hour telling bedtime stories to an innocent-eyed child. We chase *prestige* and *wealth*, and don't recognize the real opportunities for joy that cross our paths. . . .

Montague then concluded:

Race on, you poor, blind over-civilized hounds. You'll never catch your rabbit until you learn to recognize a genuine one. But, you'll have company in your race; the company of unnumbered men who'll never catch the joy they chase until they, too, learn to recognize a genuine one.

This points up our challenge: See “that the things that matter most . . . are not at the mercy of things that matter least” (Ashley Montague as quoted by A. Theodore Tuttle in *Conference Report*, Oct. 1971, p. 95; or *Ensign*, Dec. 1971, p. 90).

In this way: “Too often we are involved in the thick of thin things.”

Perhaps this is what Daniel meant when he described the last days as a time where “many shall run to and fro” (Daniel 12:4). Daniel did say, however, that with such people their “knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4).

Our problem is not the increasing our knowledge as much as what type of knowledge we gain. Long ago, Paul described this situation as people who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). If we are not careful, we not only confuse the thick with the thin but even more dangerous, we begin to lose sight of the things that matter at all. President Hinckley taught that: “It is in the homes that we learn the values by which we guide our lives” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Walking in the Light of the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 1998, p. 97).

Not only do we learn values in the home, but we also learn to value in the home. Somehow we have replaced that of *great* value with things that have *some* value. We tend to value the things of man more than things of God, and as a result we find ourselves in many ways better off than some but still lacking those things that make us more.

Elder Scott warned that Satan “would have good people fill life with ‘good things’ so there is no room for the essential ones” (Richard G. Scott, *Conference Report*, April 2001, p. 6). In other words, we have failed to learn the lesson because our hearts “are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men” (D&C 121:35). It is sad that even after all these years, there is still “no room in the inn.”

In short, we are selling our birthright for the world’s pottage, and most of us don’t even see that we sold out. Wordsworth described this situation as follows: “The world is too much with us: late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

The world’s approach is described by Elder Eyring this way:: “It is presented incessantly and attractively. It doesn’t even look like a sea of filth to the young people swimming in it. In fact, they may not even be swimming, because the presentation is so incessant and so attractive that they may not notice that there is a need to swim” (Henry B. Eyring, CES Symposium 1984, p. 9).

This statement reflects the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset: “We do not know what is happening to us and that is precisely what is happening to us—the fact of not knowing what is happening to us.” J. Ortega y Gasset, *Man in Crisis*. (I know that you are thinking that I made this statement up as well.)

Somewhere we have bought into the notion of “having it all.” This philosophy is subtly satanic at best and unabashedly satanic at worst. In other words, it is conceived by the “father of all lies.” But look at how this lie affects us:

“Sometimes there is a temptation for us to forget who we really are and what we really are all about. Satan would have us think that we can dance and dine in the great and spacious building without letting go of the iron rod. Unfortunately, there are far, far too many of us who want to be a “chosen generation” without being a “peculiar treasure”—we want to be good, but not too good

and we want to be bad, but not too bad” (Brent Top, BYU—Hawaii Devotional, February 21, 2002. The time has come for individuals, married couples, and families to reconsider how they put things in order. What Zion needs (requires) are more houses that are *in* order.

Warning: As we begin reconsidering the order of things, we must realize this may be an exercise of futility if one is not honest in his/her evaluation. More often than not, we need a different perspective to help us see (prophets, seers, revelators). May I offer a few suggestions that might help us set our houses *in* order?

1. It takes time to put things in order. Thus, take the time necessary to see where you are so you can set the course for where you should be.

The attitude demonstrated by the apostles when it was revealed that one of them would betray the Christ is applicable in this situation. Astonished by the news, they humbly asked: “Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:23; Mark 14:19)

When making assessments of how you place things in your life and home *in* order, a good way to accurately assess the ordering of things in your life, marriage, and family is to consider the use of your time (especially your discretionary time). Please keep in mind that little things do make big differences. “Our priorities are most visible in how we use our time” (Dallin H. Oaks, *Conference Report*, April 2001, p.109).

Some of you are probably thinking: “What’s wrong with looking nice, working out, having a successful career, working on a degree, enjoying hobbies, having the traditional guy’s or girl’s night out, scrapbooking, helping my children excel in sports, academics, dating, etc?”

I want you to know that I realize I might have touched a nerve or two or prodded a couple of sacred cows with my comments. Please remember that these are not activities of the devil, but, if we are not careful, they can become activities used by the devil—to distract us from things that are far more important and good.

2. Use a good standard to guide your order.

President Hinckley taught that when we stand before the judgment bar of God, there will be little mention of wealth or honor. But there will be searching questions concerning our domestic relationships. (Priesthood Session, April 2002.)

In June 1965, with the upstart building division of the Church, David O. McKay warned the new members of the committee that their new assignment would stretch them to the limits of time and effort. He then told them that the things of most importance must not be sacrificed for the things of least importance. He asked the new members if they would like to know what Christ would ask them at their judgment. The first two questions offered by President McKay were these:

1. Give an accounting for your relationship with your spouse.
2. Give an accounting for your relationship with each of your children.

The other questions were: 3. What have you personally done with the talents given you in the premortal existence? 4. How did you fulfill your stewardship in Church assignments? 5. Were you honest in all your dealings? 6. What have you done to make a better city, state, and community? [Fred Baker (who was present at this meeting), personal interview with author, 1995].

3. Little things are often the greatest offenders in gospel-oriented family living.

- Danish Bald Å. Holy Ghost vs. Holy Duck.

A unique letter to the Danish alphabet is the “bald å.” It is an “a” with a dot above it. While the Danes also use an “a” without the dot atop, it is important to differentiate between the two letters. Some missionaries scoffed and thought that the dot above the “a” was such a “little thing” and that it wouldn’t be such “a big deal.” As a result, they became careless in their speech. In Danish, however, it was a big deal—especially for missionaries.

The word for Holy Ghost in Danish is “Helig Ånd” (note the dot on top). Many missionaries carelessly said “Helig And” (without the dot on top) instead. Unfortunately, the word “and” in Danish means “duck.” Needless to say, it was awkward when a missionary would announce that the special feeling an investigator was having was due to the “Holy Duck.” While our knowledge and even our desires may be right, our true self is exposed by the choices we make—even by the little ones.

4. Establish an order by developing a “trade mentality.”

“It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*). It is important that we remember that choosing not only means that we choose something, it also means that we are *not* choosing something else.

Every year my wife and I fill out a grid for the “March Madness” college basketball tournament (she typically wins). In tournament playoffs, two teams are paired against each other, and one will be declared the winner. Thus, my wife and I try to pick the winner before the actual contest. I realize this concept is simple, but bear with me. If you predict Indiana as the winner in the regional playoffs, that also means you are predicting Duke to be the loser. You cannot pick Indiana, Duke, Kansas, and Maryland as tournament champions. In tournament brackets, you are forced to choose between two teams.

Although most of us ignore this mentality, life is similar in many ways. If, for example, we choose to go golfing, scrapbooking, read, or whatever the activity may be, we are—at the same time—choosing *not* to do something else. The trick is to recognize what the pairings are in the brackets of life. While one activity may not be *bad*, when placed in competition with something else, it becomes a *bad choice*. To this the Lord offers the simple (yet profound) advice: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Notice the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 6:33: “Wherefore, **seek not the things of this world** but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (emphasis added).

Seeking first things first? “If we don’t choose God’s Kingdom first, it will make little difference in the long run what we have chosen instead of it.” Thus, we would do well to never trade something better for something worse. We must think ahead to see what the brackets of choice really hold. For example:

- At the age of sixteen, I had to choose between having a 1967 Mustang and my free time, spending money, and effort (to fix and maintain the car). I weighed the choices and chose the Mustang.

Sometimes the brackets hold hidden choices that we don’t immediately see. For example:

- My wife and I had the opportunity to travel to Europe. I realized what it would cost, and I bracketed for my wife what I perceived to be the competing choices. I explained that using the money to go to Europe meant we wouldn’t be using our money to buy other things. I remember listing examples like 3,485 Happy Meals, 125 pairs of shoes, etc. etc. etc. (I meant to put that many et ceteras because I think I remember going on and on!) My wife patiently listened and that said something that I didn’t even consider as a “competing choice.” She looked at me and said what has become one of my most favorite quotes. “Matt, we are not collectors of things, we are builders of memories.” This completely changed my choices and my perspective—we went to Europe.

It is interesting how we forget that some choices we make continue to compete against (or, at least, influence) other choices in our future. For example:

- My Mustang from my youth eventually came into play many years later. When I met the woman of my dreams and hoped she might accept a proposal of marriage, I realized I needed to buy an engagement ring. Being a poor (understatement of the year) college student, I hadn’t a spare dime to buy food let alone a diamond. But I did have a Mustang (now a classic). I paired up the choices: ring and Mustang. It really didn’t take much thought, and I sold the Mustang to buy the ring. It was one of the best as well as most significant trades I have made in my life. No regrets. I knew exactly what I was trading for.

Thus, with this simple (yet profound) trading perspective, consider this comment by President Hinckley: “I hope that the women of the Church will not slight their greatest responsibility in favor of a lesser responsibility” (Gordon B. Hinckley, Heber City/Springville Utah Regional Conference, May 14, 1995). Obviously this statement has equal relevance to the men of the Church.

Thus with a “trade mentality” who ever would trade:

- Fidelity for Filth
- Family for Fraternity
- Exaltation for Excellence
- Trust for Titillation

I learned an important lesson from a sign posted on our refrigerator door as I was growing up. This phrase became indelibly inked in my mind and has served me well—temporally and spiritually. As a result, I knew my mother possessed the wisdom of Solomon and the inspiration of Deborah (prophetess) to place such a sign on our fridge. It read: “Far too often, we trade what we want most for what we want for the moment.” My mother later revealed that she had placed the sign on the fridge during a “dieting phase.” So much for the “wisdom of Solomon and the inspiration of Deborah!” It still, however, holds the same applicable power.

5. Know the difference between an event and an experience.

There is an odd distraction in properly ordering our houses that occurs when we confuse an “event” with an “experience.” For example, I remember a student once telling me that they had to have a boat in order to have a good family. He recounted fond memories of family boating outings and how important that was to him and his family. This student linked his happy family memories with the boat and the boating adventures. He then told me that he could never be happy without a boat and that the only real families were those who had boats. After all, “the family that boats together, stays together.” I didn’t know if I should laugh, cry, or be offended. (My family does not have a boat—ergo we are not a “true family.”) I do remember that he didn’t laugh—he was deadly serious.

We must be careful not to allow an activity, a geography, a tradition, or an event become the experience. In other words, I believe that families are not happy because of a boat but because they are together. Laughing, playing, sharing, and spending time *together*. They are happy because they are *experiencing* each other. The boating (or whatever the event) is only a catalyst. Far too often we confuse the event for the experience, and as a result, we are misguided and eventually lose the power of the experience. *Real* families can be happy regardless of the event. When the event becomes the focus, it, like drugs, requires a new event that is bigger and better than the previous. Happy are couples and families that can be happy at home or in Paris.

Good families are founded on experiences. They not only remember the experiences, but they know the difference between events and experiences.

I often think of a statement made by Elder Russell M. Nelson when he was a student working on his doctoral degree in medicine. Those were lean years when his daughter slept on army cots instead of a bed. But he fondly recalls: “We had everything money could not buy” (Russell M. Nelson).

Please consider Lisa’s statement again: “We are builders of memories, not collectors of things.” Please do not assume that our house is devoid of things. But with my wife’s wonderful perspective, the “things” in our house are reminders of experiences. More than décor, they are reminders of walks, talks, laughing, spiritual experiences, etc. of our marriage and family.

6. Be wary of “exceptions to the rule.”

Far too often the exceptions to the rule become the rule. Remember that without the rule we can never know the exception. This is the spirit of the law combined with the essential letter of the law. Elder Maxwell taught: “One of the most subtle forms of intimidation is the gradual normalization of aberration . . .” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 1993, p. 76).

7. Setting a house in order also establishes a unique confidence that stems from order.

Just as important as it is to order our houses properly, it is equally important that those who live in our homes feel that they are a priority. This creates a powerful peace.

Breaking promises. When we break promises, it is more than the disappointment of the cancellation of the event that often sours us. The larger problem may be the nagging thought: “Is the reason for cancellation more important than me?” Remember “exceptions to the rule.”

Consider the perspective of others—not just your perspective. I remember my wife coming to see me play in a ward basketball game. Even after 18 years of marriage, I find I am still trying to impress my wife with my (questionable) athletic prowess. After scoring a basket or even running down the court without falling over (it is amazing how other things seem so impressive as my age increases), I would immediately glance in Lisa’s direction to see if she was watching me. I was sad when she seemed to be talking with the other women in the ward who “supposedly” came to see their gladiators as well. After the game, I walked to the car with Lisa trying to catch up. She immediately realized something was wrong. As stupid as this sounds, I was hurt that she didn’t see me score. (This is a rare occurrence and to some may be considered a sign of the times.) But what was more bothersome was the feeling that the other women in the ward were more important to her than me. She assured me that was not the case and that she didn’t realize that I would even think such thoughts, because she didn’t think such thoughts. She then realized the importance of seeing things through others’ eyes. She saw something (as odd as it seemed) through my eyes.

Inclusivity and Exclusivity. Sometimes we try so hard to include everyone that we send a message that individuals are not important enough or less valued. Likewise, being too exclusive may prohibit others the benefits and joys of communities. What is important is the impression left with our family members.

The fear of being too exclusive in our relationships may cheapen the benefits that come from being inclusive. We may sacrifice the potential strength of our marriage because we are spending all our time with our children, or we may sacrifice the strength of relationships with each individual child by only allowing time only for the group of children.

Some feel that it is best to “err” on one side rather than the other. But it seems to me that it really doesn’t matter which side you choose to “err” on—for either way, you still “err.” Finding balance in complementing individual time with group time rather than competing individual time against group time is the key

Remember that Christ taught there are times when we must leave the “ninety and nine” for the “one” (Luke 15:4). Sometimes prices must be paid individually. (Spouses really do need to spend time together alone; fathers really do need to go on daddy-daughter dates, hold personal interviews, and share special experiences together.) Strong personal relationships create foundations for strong group relationships. By avoiding special time to make room for all often sends an unintended but loud message: You are not a priority to me (even if it isn’t true).

For example, a parent might have an opportunity to spend “special time” with a child but feels every child must be included so they won’t feel left out. This attitude may cause a child to feel he/she is not important enough to be treated special every once in awhile or that another sibling is “more favored.” The best way to avoid such conflicts is to spend enough “together time” that “special time” does not *steal* the experience of “together time.”

I cannot imagine that God has a child that he loves above the rest. I am grateful that there are moments when I pray to the Father that I feel He is listening to me alone rather than being relegated to a divine “party line.” I often feel that I am a priority to Him even though I know all His children are His priority. He has made me feel special while still including all His children in His love and interests. (See Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s April 2002 conference address).

How do we start?

Elder Scott suggested: “Find a retreat of peace and quiet where periodically you can ponder and let the Lord establish the direction of your life. Each of us needs to periodically check our bearings and confirm that we are on course.” He then said: “In a quiet moment write down your responses. Analyze them. Make any necessary adjustments. Put first things first. Do the best you can while on earth to have an *ideal family*.” (Richard G. Scott, *Conference Report*, April 2001, p. 8.)