

The Functional Family

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I would like to have a very personal conversation with you about families. It will take the form of a chat, a heart-to-heart talk about families. I would like your permission to tell some personal experiences from my own family—not as an ego trip—but I would like this talk to be first person and not third person. The whole idea of family is so personal that I can tell it that way best. The greatest privilege of my life is to be a husband and a dad in a family. To me it is a sacred responsibility standing above anything else I am asked to do in my life.

We will talk today about FUNCTIONAL FAMILIES. What does that term mean? You hear the term *dysfunctional* a lot—that is one that does not work right. So, a functional family simply means “it works right.” It is not intended to be a perfect family—as a matter of fact, the family is quite aware that is *not* the goal. In this type of family everyone is aware of the existence of weaknesses in the family. Those weaknesses are not considered to be something to hide. You acknowledge them and work on them over time. The functional family is a place where people feel like they can grow together as individuals within the family environment. There is love and unity but also individuality among family members. You like to be there. It

feels good most of the time. There is not a lot of criticism in the atmosphere of the home. People take time for each other and offer support and guidance to each other. The parents care about the family and make its well-being their top priority in life. The parents teach the children and set a good example for them to follow. Again, it is not a perfect family, but it is one where you feel like, with all its ups and downs, strengths and weaknesses, the family is a unified organization which is intended to strengthen each member. There is a substantial amount of consistency in the functional family, but it also has its ups and downs. Any family can get “off track” for a period of time. The functional family sometimes has such difficult episodes in its history, but it can recognize them, join together in problem solving, and offer their best thinking and caring toward producing some redirection so that the family feels better about where it is then going. In the functional family all of this is viewed as part of a long learning and growing process that is experienced together. We learn from our own individual experiences and also vicariously from the learning experiences of others in the family as they are shared with each other. Is your family dysfunctional or functional? Neither, probably. All families have strengths and weaknesses. So, let’s put aside the task of categorizing your family as one or the other. TAKE A TRIP WITH ME—I will share with you a group of characteristics of families that seem to “work right.” What should you do with them? I would encourage you to rate each one on a 10-scale. A higher number (7–10) means you rate yourself highly on that particular characteristic. A lower number (0–4) means you lack something in the area of that particular characteristic. Using a 10-scale is more accurate, and you can follow up better later on hoped-for progress.

Amitai Etzioni, a Jewish writer, once wrote an article entitled “Children of the Universe” in which he said, “Making a child is a moral act... . We must make parenting an honorable vocation again.” I like that.

THE FAMILY IS WHERE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS HAPPEN. The 1995 Proclamation on the Family by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, to me, one of the most timely and truly great spiritual pronouncements of our day. I hope you have all studied it—not just read it—but studied and pondered it. And I hope you have one in full view of all who come into your home.

It shows the dedication of Latter-day Saints to the well-being of the family. The leaders of the Church are asking us to turn to the family while the world is trying to discredit it and make the family unimportant. Latter-day Saints are called upon to step up in front of the world and CHAMPION the family. That is our sacred responsibility.

My comments today on the functional family are my contribution to the Church's interest in strengthening the family. I will describe for you a group of important characteristics of the functional family. Where did I get them? From much pondering about my own experiences growing up, from over 30 years of raising ten children of my own, from my Church leadership experiences trying to help families struggling to faithfully raise their own children, from my over twenty years as a psychologist and marriage and family therapist, and from a number of years owning and running a treatment program for troubled adolescents. From all that I have observed much and thought a lot about what makes families work right—what you will get today is an overview of some of the key characteristics of healthy/functional families resulting from the above personal experiences.

So, let's begin.

Notice that much of the focus of my talk will be on parents in the Functional Family—as they are the key.

1. THERE IS AN INVITING, COMFORTABLE, LOVING ATMOSPHERE IN THE HOME AND FAMILY. It is somewhat intangible but is at the very center of the family soul. It feels good and it feels good to be together. The atmosphere is “easy” and “not tight.” People like to be there. It feels like “family love is in the air.” When you walk into it—you feel it. It is kind of like ice cream—you can't seem to get enough of it! It is interesting to ask each family member to write down five or so words on a piece of paper that describe the atmosphere in the home over a period of time. Then take some time together to sit down and discuss together your “findings” and see what you can learn from each other's observations. In some families, parents try too hard to “produce” a certain desirable atmosphere. They work at it too hard and it produces not what they want but rather an uptight atmosphere that no one likes. Sometimes you

can learn about the type of atmosphere you want and how to produce it by observing pleasing and uplifting atmospheres in the homes of others you know. But be careful not to try to imitate someone else's style too closely. Your own family "style" and atmosphere is uniquely your own.

As we talk about the other characteristics of the Functional Family—you will see that it is because the other characteristics are happening in the family that the atmosphere in the home is what it is.

2. In the Functional Family parents are mostly interested in WHAT THEY CAN OFFER THEIR CHILDREN AND PAY LESS ATTENTION TO WHAT THEIR CHILDREN WILL DO WITH WHAT THEY ARE OFFERED. Surprised to hear me say that? You will be less tense, stressed and troubled when you REALIZE THAT IS ALL YOU CAN DO ANYWAY—OFFER YOUR CHILDREN WHATEVER YOU CAN... .BUT THE RESULTS OF WHAT THEY DO WITH YOUR OFFERINGS IS BEYOND YOU. Since that became clear to me I operate differently in my family. Now, I put my thought and effort into doing my very best to offer as much love, teaching, sharing, concern, help, guidance, and attention as I can to my children and grandchildren AND LEAVE WHAT THEY DO WITH IT UP TO THEM. I just offer all I can to uplift and strengthen my children—but the path they travel after that is their path to choose. I see myself as a teacher, coach, consultant, guide—and NOT as a manager who must get results. If you see yourself as the latter, you will likely try to control your children and will get worse results. IF YOU OFFER FROM YOUR HEART AND LET THEM GOVERN THEMSELVES, I think you will like the results you get even better.

Of course, we all care a lot about what our children do with what we offer them. I care about it a lot in my own family. But I realize I can't control what my children do with what I offer them, BUT I can pay a lot of attention to what I consciously try to offer them.

3. In the FF (Functional Family) parents CONSCIOUSLY and INTENTIONALLY parent. You will see this idea throughout the rest of my talk. You cannot afford to allow your parenting to become casual. You are very serious about it—not uptight—but serious and focused. If I could

convince parents in the Church to do one thing that would make all the difference, it would be to set aside a specific time once a week or perhaps every two weeks (but not further apart than that) to sit down together and discuss family matters. If you are a single parent, I would encourage you to set aside a time to think about each of your family members and overall family needs. Some single parents have taken this advice and joined together at a regular time each week to discuss family issues and help each other. I want to be very sensitive to single parents in this talk. The idea here is that you would not miss the time set aside for partaking of the sacrament at 9:00 a.m. Sunday in sacrament meeting. Then why would you miss the time set aside for thoughtful consideration of each child's needs, overall family needs, marital needs, and the personal needs of you as parents in the family? DO IT! It will make a big difference if you don't give up on it too easily. Intentional parenting means regularly taking some private time to think about each child and what he/she needs.

Let me make a big point here. How can setting aside a time once a week regularly to talk together about family needs, goals, and plans possibly make that big a difference? It does, because parents have no forum for regularly discussing their family needs unless you create one—and this is it! This is the time and place where it can all happen. Please do it!

4. The next characteristic of the FF is that the parents ARE VERY AWARE OF THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON THEIR CHILDREN. They understand their children are like “human blackboards.” It is like they are standing in front of you holding up their personal blackboard, saying, “Write on it what you think of me... Write on it what you want me to think of myself.” This is so powerful. You, as parents, from the minute they are born, begin to write “messages” about them “on their personal blackboard.” There are intentional and unintentional messages written there. I would love to see you write many more INTENTIONAL and UPLIFTING messages on your children's blackboards—regardless of their age! You could be 80 and write a significant message on your child's blackboard who is 50! Unintentional messages may take the form of things like ignoring, impatience, or no time for a child. What is the message that might appear on your child's personal blackboard if you are too busy for them? Could it be “You are not very important to me” or “You are not worth my taking time to show interest in you?” You say—Well, when I am too busy, that is NOT the message I intend to send! True—but it might

be received that way anyway. WATCH OUT FOR PATTERNS OF MESSAGES PARTICULARLY. Don't get too paranoid about all this as if you have to watch every word or deed with your children. You don't need to be that wary, but you do need to watch for PATTERNS. To be too busy once in a while or too impatient occasionally is unlikely to inscribe a negative message on your child's blackboard, but a regular pattern of being too busy or too impatient could.

The big question is WHAT MESSAGE (OR MESSAGES) WOULD YOU LIKE TO INTENTIONALLY WRITE ON YOUR CHILD'S BLACKBOARD? Think of one of your children right now, and write down on the paper in front of you a message you would like to write on her/his blackboard. Now, what could you actually DO soon after you leave here today to help write that message on her blackboard?

An example would be: I have a new grandchild. I want him/her to know how glad I am to have them in our family and how much love I feel for her. So what could you do to "write that message" on your grandchild's blackboard? How about writing the grandchild a "welcome to the family love letter" and sending it to them in the mail so they can see it as they grow up? I sent one to a new granddaughter recently, and her mom later told me she liked it so much "she even stopped eating while I read it to her!" I have written this "welcome and I love you" letter to each of my grandchildren right after they were born and I plan to do it with every one that comes in the future.

Another example. Suppose, because you are leaving for work so early every morning, you never see your children until evening when you return home. You want them to know you are thinking of them and they mean a lot to you. So, on several mornings you make a little sign on colored paper and tape it to the foot of their bed so that when they wake up they see it first thing and it reads—"HEY! DADDY LOVES YOU—SEE YOU AT DINNER! WE WILL EAT LOTS OF CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM TOGETHER!" Wow—you took the time and showed the interest to do that—BIG POWERFUL MESSAGE ON THAT BLACKBOARD.

If you consciously take time to play games with a child, what might you be writing on their blackboard? “You are fun. I like you. You are worth it.” Good messages for a blackboard to receive!

ANYONE THINKING ALREADY TODAY—WOW—THIS GUY WANTS ME TO ACTUALLY THINK ABOUT WHAT I AM DOING AS A PARENT AND WORK AT IT?!!

THAT IS CORRECT!

Parenting is a lot of hard work. But you signed up for it so—do your job! But PLEASE take some regular time for yourself as well—a burned-out and resentful parent is no good to a family.

5. The next characteristic of parents in the FF is that they (you) understand that THE BEST PLACE TO ADDRESS BASIC HUMAN NEEDS (BHN’S) IS IN THE FAMILY. Children believe what they hear and learn in the family—whether it be for good or not. You as parents have a lot of power. Use it carefully. What is a BHN? It is something a human being MUST have to grow and develop and be emotionally healthy. The eternal family, created in the temples of the Lord, is a garden where we grow healthy people (or try to!). So, what basic human needs do we all have? I think there are four: the needs to feel: significant, important, worthwhile, and valuable. What can you do to help your son or daughter feel important? Or worthwhile? Or significant? Or valuable?

One of my colleagues at BYU recently quit a significant career to stay home with her newly adopted son. What does that decision on her part write on her son’s blackboard as it relates to the basic human needs we just identified? Perhaps it says all of them—you, my son, are important, valuable, worthwhile, and significant—that is why I made that decision to stay home with you.

A daughter on a mission becomes aware that her mother stays up late at night into the early morning hours many days doing a home computer data entry job in order to support her on

her mission. What is the message that goes on the blackboard of the missionary daughter?
“You are worth it. You are important to me.”

So, you could leave here today and just decide to go home and seek out a particular child and sit down by them on the couch and talk together and see how things are going for him/her. You decide to do this in advance—It is not coincidental. It is INTENTIONAL, and you do it because you want to put a message on her blackboard that says “You are important and are worth the time for me to stop whatever else I am doing and talk to you and see how things are going for you.” What a great message to put on your daughter’s blackboard.

One of your children might bring home an improved report card—and you take the time to sit down and enjoy it with him. You could even ask if you could share the good news with others in the family. LEARN TO CELEBRATE EACH OTHER IN THE FAMILY! If you can spread the good news around, then many family members can write on the child’s blackboard a message of love and encouragement.

You decide, well in advance, to write a love letter to a family member and mail it to them! Yes, mail it to them even if they live with you! Why? That is a waste of a stamp and money, isn’t it? NO! IT SAYS THE MESSAGE IN THE LETTER IS SPECIAL AND IMPORTANT.

You play a game of basketball in front of your home with your daughter and then tell everyone how badly she beat you! You are trying to build her up in her own eyes. You went out intentionally to get beat so you could invite her to brag about herself! Write a great message intentionally on her blackboard about what a great athlete she is! See—this is all done intentionally, and it deals with the basic human need to feel important. This is not an ego trip, in case anyone is worried about that. To teach your child he/she is better than others is an ego trip. To teach them they are important and significant to you as their parent is to help them feel good about themselves in an appropriate way. Do lots of that.

You put up pictures of your children and grandchildren for all to see in your home. Why put up pictures of them rather than pictures of something else? Because they are more important to you than something else and it writes a message on their blackboard whenever they come into your home and see that you honor and love them that much.

WHAT IS THE PRINCIPLE HERE? YOU KNOW HUMAN BEINGS WANT TO FEEL IMPORTANT, SIGNIFICANT, WORTHWHILE, AND VALUABLE, AND YOU CONSCIOUSLY AND INTENTIONALLY FIND WAYS TO HELP THEM FEEL THAT WAY. Don't just hope they will receive messages like that from people around them—intentionally help them with it. Make sure they know, at least from you, that they are “worthwhile, important, significant, and valuable.” There is no greater gift, in terms of personal well-being, you can offer them. If you look for the opportunities, you will see numerous chances to help your children feel valuable, important, significant, and worthwhile every day. Way down deep inside you have to want to do this. You want to make this type of difference often in your children's lives. And it is fun to do! As a child I knew the pain that accompanied an absence of feeling important and valuable to someone. Don't let that happen to any child in your family. Celebrate your children.

AND AS I SAID BEFORE, YOU CAN HOLD A FAMILY COUNCIL AND TEACH THIS PRINCIPLE TO EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY AND THEN EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE IN WRITING SUCH UPLIFTING AND PERSONALLY ENHANCING MESSAGES ON EACH OTHER'S BLACKBOARDS. It makes so much difference if they become personally aware of the importance of doing these types of things for each other.

6. The next characteristic of the FF is that RELATIONSHIPS ARE OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE. Actually, it is within the context of a good relationship that the blackboard concept and meeting of BHNs occurs. Remember, THE FAMILY IS WHERE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS HAPPEN. The Lord organized it that way and the Proclamation on the Family is designed to get our attention on how important family work is.

You must be willing to assess the condition and needs of EACH relationship in the family regularly. DON'T ASSUME they are okay. I encourage you to rate each one on a ten-scale—a high number representing a strong relationship and a low number a weaker one.

THEN THE IMPORTANT QUESTION BECOMES—HOW DO YOU BEGIN TO IMPROVE A RELATIONSHIP? First, begin by paying attention to the relationship in obvious ways. Talk; play together; spend one-on-one time with the person; send love letters, cards, or notes; give compliments; try some “surprises”; ask for forgiveness; say “I love you or I like you”; listen to the other person; ask for their help in some area of need you have; share personal feelings; and “notice” the other person. You are UNILATERALLY trying to feed or nourish the relationship. You will find that just by paying some attention to it, things will begin to change.

Relationships usually don't improve accidentally. In counseling and therapy I ask clients working on relationships to get a small notebook and keep track of what they DO specifically to enhance the relationship and then share it with me in our counseling sessions. Do that for a month or two on a specific relationship. This will help you stay focused on what you are trying to do and whether or not it is working. Also, remember you don't have to completely “fix” a relationship for it to feel much better to you. Just do something that will alter it or improve it “a little bit” and enjoy that improvement for awhile. Relationships are improved in stages most often.

7. The next characteristic of the FF is that the parents are TEACHERS. They plan what they intend to teach in the family. They consciously and intentionally teach. Don't just hope your children will learn important things—teach them! In your Family Discussion Time ask “What do we want to teach in our family?” “What/where/when/how do we teach?” There is direct and indirect teaching in the family.

First, direct teaching. In a given month you decide specifically what you will teach directly in the family. You plan for it to happen. Remember when I said that I recommend very strongly for you to set a specific time each week for you as parent(s) to think about your family, make plans, solve problems, etc.? Here is one thing you can do during that planning time: You

decide what you will teach, when you will teach it, and who will teach it. No guessing. Be concrete about it. Try it—it will help.

Teach what? **ANYTHING YOUR FAMILY NEEDS TO LEARN ABOUT.** When should I teach it? In family home evening or a family council—you can also do some teaching one-on-one or less formally as the occasion presents itself. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve has been asking the Church members to meet in council together and work and think together for several years now. There is no better place to do what he asked than in a family council! Perhaps in your family you need to **DIRECTLY** teach—from the Book of Mormon or other scriptures, about courtesy, about finances, about getting out of debt, about how to use time effectively, about the importance of education, about mutual respect in the family, about why we need living prophets, about everyone doing their share at home, about honesty, about family history and temples, about how to manage angry feelings, about how you got your testimony of the gospel (give them a written copy of it, too), etc., etc. There are an endless number of topics you could address in the form of a **VERY** short lesson, and then have a discussion where everyone gives a thought and participates as they choose. **WHAT** you teach is not as important to me as **THAT** you teach. **JUST TEACH SOMETHING!!**—and do it regularly.

E-mail teaching is great. There are an infinite number of things you can teach and share quickly through e-mail. It is thrilling to see your children pick up on this wonderful way to share and learn together. My own children just concluded a great “family discussion” on financial planning and investing where they shared with each other all they know about the subject via e-mail. I jumped in and said I was mostly happy to see my family teaching each other and sharing their learning together—please keep it up!

And you also teach **INDIRECTLY**. This means you teach in your family through means other than your own words. This allows teaching to be more consistent and regular. This is the “second tier” of the family teaching process. Tier one is direct teaching and tier two is to teach the same topic you taught directly—but this time you do it indirectly. It is a “double dose” on

the same topic through two different methods. BUT IT ALL HAPPENS IN THE HOME!

Examples of indirect teaching are:

---a picture of the Savior in your home (You would have already taught a direct lesson about Christ.)

---a picture of the temple you were married in (You would have already taught a direct lesson about temples.)

---family pictures of all types (You would have already taught a direct lesson about the family.

---missionary flags of the places where your children served [same direct teaching lesson precedes this one.]

---we once made a sign that read “THE FAMILY IS WHERE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS HAPPEN” and put it on the bulletin board in our kitchen—it was there for a very long time—actually I think it still is.

---My daughter made a computerized composite family photograph of all family members spanning from 1839 to 1997—158 years! We gave one to everyone in the family for Christmas last year. As my wife and I have visited our children and their families, we have noticed that extended family photograph in many of their homes in a prominent place. Message? Well, it has something to do with our large, extended eternal family and that we seem to value it in a special way. We are trying to remember how important our family is to us, even including those members we have never met who are beyond the veil.

---an award or some recognition someone won—put it in a prominent place to be seen.

---share with the family something that someone wrote. My son David recently wrote a paper with his wife that he presented at a conference, and we were able to share it with them via e-mail so we could all enjoy their great accomplishment together.

---on birthdays you can plaster the kitchen with many different happy birthday signs so a family member feels important and noticed.

---via e-mail you can share many ideas and insights you have learned and gained with other family members.

---soft music on the Sabbath can communicate a very strong and profound love of the gospel.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IN THE AREA OF TEACHING IS THAT YOU ASK YOURSELF—WHAT DO I WANT TO TEACH DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY AND HOW DO I PLAN TO DO IT? All teaching in the family must be done intentionally, thoughtfully, and regularly. Remember also that EXAMPLE is one of the best forms of indirect teaching. If you have concluded that “courtesy” is something you want to teach in your family, then hold a family home evening and teach it. THEN after that, ACT COURTEOUSLY in your family relationships, and you will be supplementing your direct teachings on courtesy by acting with courtesy yourself. Challenge others to do it too.

8. In the FF, parents have CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES they mutually agree upon. You need to know what your role or main job(s) is in the family and then accept full responsibility for it. You should sit down together and discuss this and come to an agreement on what your role and responsibility is in the family. If you are a single parent, define what your major roles are so you know what it is you want to pay attention to as a parent. I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT PARENTAL ROLES IN THE HOME. You must do all you can to be psychologically and physically present as much as you can, first of all. Make the well-being of your family your highest priority. Of course that includes your own emotional and physical health as well. If you are not in good shape, you probably won't have much to offer your family either.

I recommend you identify the major needs of the family and then which parent WILL TAKE THE LEAD on each of those areas of need. Who will take the lead on financial support, management of finances, various aspects of home management, teaching different topics, nurturing particular children in need, helping with homework or special learning or training of any type they want to develop? In some cases BOTH of you will contribute to a certain area of need fairly equally. In other areas one will take the lead and the other will serve as backup. BUT, YOU SIT DOWN TOGETHER, ON THAT SET-ASIDE HOUR OF THE SET-ASIDE DAY OF THE WEEK, AND HOLD YOUR FAMILY DISCUSSION TIME. And when you are done, Daddy knows his job and commitments on his role and Mommy knows hers. And then each week at FDT (Family Discussion Time), you assess how you are doing, what help you need, seek feedback from each other, make any changes in roles that are needed, etc. SEE, IT IS ALL CONSCIOUS AND INTENTIONAL—not casual and vague. Don't be vague and casual as parents. What are some examples of roles and responsibilities at home that need to be assigned to one parent or the other?

---who earns the money?

---who handles the bills, books?

---who does the housework?

---who helps with the homework?

---who supervises music lessons?

---who makes sure family home evening and family prayer occur?

GIVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ONE OF YOU AND THEN TAKE CARE OF IT. THESE ARE AS CLOSE TO SACRED COMMITMENTS AS YOU GET, AS THEY HAVE TO DO WITH THE WELL-BEING OF YOUR FAMILY.

Being physically on site to give leadership to the family is a major responsibility. Who will do it? How will you achieve it? This is essential. To protect, teach, guide, set an example, help, assist, or play, **YOU HAVE TO BE THERE ON THE PREMISES**. I am often asked what is my biggest worry about families today. My answer is—**PARENTS ARE NOT THERE ANYMORE. WE HAVE LEGITIMIZED OUR ABSENCE**. Are there legitimate reasons for not being home? Of course. But be sure your absence from your home is legitimate. I sound hard-nosed there and I do not apologize for it. **THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU ARE THERE THAT YOU CAN'T DO WHEN YOU ARE ABSENT**. I sincerely ask both mothers and fathers to discuss the issue of absence from the home in your Family Discussion Time.

I want to share one bias with you about roles. Fathers need to be willing to be nurturers. Some feel that is the woman's or mother's role. **ABSOLUTELY NOT!** Children need to see men, fathers, as nurturers. Actually, **CHILDREN NEED TO SEE THEIR FATHER DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SUPPORT AND RUN THE FAMILY**. Fathers in the FF will read stories to children, help with homework, do dishes, vacuum, change diapers, cook (unless this would be hazardous to the health of the family!), go shopping, get up at night with a sick child, go to Back to School Night and parent teacher conferences, etc. **COME ON, DADS—LET'S GET IN THERE AND SHOW OUR CHILDREN THAT THE FAMILY IS SO IMPORTANT THERE IS NO LIMITATION ON WHAT WE ARE WILLING TO DO**.

The most important thing about parental roles in the family is that you **DEFINE THEM, AGREE ON THEM, AND THEN COMMIT TO DO THEM**—all for the benefit and well-being of your family. Anytime you like you can redefine or reorganize how you do them, but always be clear on who is responsible to do what in the family and do it as happily as you can. Once you two have made an agreed-upon list of the major responsibilities in the family that **SOMEONE** needs to take the lead on, then talk together and actually agree on who will take **PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY** for each of those major responsibilities. Then each week when you hold your regular family planning meeting together, you can each review how you think you are doing in your areas of primary responsibility. (And if you have enough courage, you can ask for your spouse's feedback on how you are doing!)

9. In the FF, parents exhibit **STRONG AND CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP** and **HELP TO DEVELOP A SHARED VISION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE FAMILY**. In terms of my own leadership in my own family, there is **NO QUESTION I ASK MYSELF MORE OFTEN THAN THIS: CAN I RECOMMEND TO MY CHILDREN THAT THEY FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE AND EMULATE HOW I BEHAVE?** Could I ask them to emulate me publicly and privately? What do you want your children to be like? **THEN SHOW IT TO THEM THROUGH YOUR DAILY ACTIONS AND CHOICES.**

---Do you want them to be patient? Then show patience.

---Do you want them to relax, have fun, and learn to enjoy life? Then do it yourself.

---Do you want them to read and love the scriptures? Then sit in an obvious place and read in front of them or read with them!

---Do you want them to see the significance of temple covenants in a covenant-making person's life? Then go to the temple yourself.

---Do you want them to care about family relationships? Then kiss, hug, smile, listen and share personal experiences.

I am making a point of how crucial it is that you do all you can to show strong and confident leadership in your family because **CHILDREN WANT TO FOLLOW THEIR PARENTS—BUT THEY MORE EASILY FOLLOW PARENTS WHO HAVE INTEGRITY AND WHO ARE CREDIBLE PARENTS**. They look at you and they want to see someone who has “a clear sense of direction” on personal as well as spiritual matters.

They look for someone who leads in the family **WILLINGLY AND NOT BEGRUDGINGLY**. They also want clear but not rigid leadership. They want to respect you but

not fear you. Lead them, guide them, but don't drive them. Your leadership needs to be FAIR MINDED, and you should be able to invite the input, thoughts, and recommendations of your children in family council. Invite the help of your children and they will feel more like they are a part of the family team.

Example—One of my older sons once made the observation that because our family was spreading out around the country and even outside the country, we should do a monthly family e-mail newsletter so we could all keep in touch and be closer. We have been doing it now for over a year and it has kept us all in touch with each other—even when we had a daughter in India! And that suggestion came from one of my children—not from me.

On that note, some time ago I began making a list of families I know that impressed me as being strong and healthy. Then I interviewed the parents and found an interesting thing—THE PARENTS TALKED WITH PASSION ABOUT THE FAMILY. The family was A BIG DEAL TO THEM, and along with passion, the parents have made many sacrifices for their families—a testimony to their children of how important the family is to them. And in many cases, this feeling of “how important the family is” rubbed off on the children of that family. THE FAMILY AND THE IDEA OF FAMILY became important to the children too—not in every case, mind you, but over time it did seem to influence the children's value of family as they observed the parental value of family.

10. In the FF, the family DOES NOT NEED TO BE PERFECT. Ah! Put away the whip! Relax, ease up. Give up any need you have to present a perfect family to the world! Children are not driven to perfection. They are “projects under construction.” Although that may sound a little impersonal, it is meant to communicate the idea that in the FF we understand each family member is growing, developing, and learning, as is the purpose of our second estate in mortality. In the FF MISTAKES ARE OK—we expect a certain amount of them. We pull together in dealing with them and learning from them. In the more dysfunctional family, mistakes are bad and are to be hidden from public view, as they are simply embarrassing. In the FF we do not go looking for mistakes and problems, but we understand they are a natural part of the mortal

experience and we love one another and offer support, keeping our heads up, while facing them courageously together as a family.

SOME PARENTS HAVE REJOICED OVER THEIR WORST MOMENTS IN THE FAMILY AS IT BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER, DEEPENED THEIR REAL LOVE FOR EACH OTHER, AND ALLOWED THEM TO SEE THEY COULD HOLD TOGETHER IN LOVE THROUGH THE WORST OF STORMS. Are the best families mistake free? Or are they the ones who face mistakes together arm in arm?

I fear often our children experience too much “pressure to perform flawlessly” so as to make us, as parents, look good! WHAT A BURDEN TO PLACE ON CHILDREN! DON’T DO THAT TO THEM. THEY ARE NOT MERIT BADGES. We need to ease up a little and not push our children so hard. We encourage our children to do good works, learn, and grow and progress BECAUSE OF WHAT IT WILL DO FOR THEM RATHER THAN WHAT IT WILL DO FOR US AS PARENTS. Quit trying to be perfect. Relax a little, loosen up—make life a little easier for everyone in the family. You will all like it more! Be serious about your family, but not so serious that you feel like MANAGERS OF A BUSINESS! Families are not businesses. There are things that work in a business that are inappropriate in a family. Basically, you don’t easily fire family members for not doing their family jobs well enough! You keep working with them and encouraging them. It all boils down to what you believe the FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF YOUR FAMILY IS. I recommend you consider this—“The family is a place where there is love, support, and guidance WHILE each individual in the family goes through ‘project under construction’ experiences. You have to help all family members know you will all try to do your best, but the overall purpose for a family is to give love and support while each member goes through a learning and refining process in their life. Everyone will ‘bump their nose’ a few times and make their share of mistakes. We don’t ‘write them off’ for such, as all that is a normal part of the expected human experience for which we came to the earth.”

11. In the FF, we PLAY AND HAVE FUN! Some of us are too serious too much of the time. Slow down—take it easy—laugh, play games, hold hands, take walks together, and just enjoy

one another. We need to be fiercely serious and dedicated when it is time for that, but some of us do it all the time. Put smiles back on your faces, close your planners, don't answer the phone for a few hours, give up your drive to success long enough for some release of tension and stress to occur. Make sure the ATMOSPHERE in your home/family is not too tight. PLAY—GOOF OFF A LITTLE—RELAX. You will do the important things of life much better if you don't forget to get down on the floor of your family room and chase your kids around on your hands and knees and tickle them! BE SPONTANEOUS—LET YOUR HAIR DOWN—JUST “HANG OUT” TOGETHER WITH NO OBVIOUS AGENDA SOMETIMES. I worry our LDS families are feeling too overwhelmed. So, put down the mop and play together and you will feel better. You might even have a family council together and the subject of discussion can be “What are some ways we could have more fun together?” I bet attendance at that one will be high if you announce the subject of discussion in advance!

Here are some examples of fun things you can do to enjoy one another. Make up stories with your own children as the central characters—they will love it! In family home evening tell the funniest, silliest, or even the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you! And do the “stare til you laugh” game. Two people look into each other's eyes and try not to laugh. If you laugh you are out and the next person steps up to take your place. It is a scream!

Some hold the erroneous belief that spirituality and serious devotion to the “true” objectives of the family are incompatible with fun and frolic in the family. Do you believe that? What does “playing” with each other communicate? I think it says “We like each other!” loud and clear! If you like each other, and it is fun to be together, then you will likely get together more often, and then when the serious times come, you enjoy those, too. Think of the people in your life you have respected and looked up to the most. Did they have a fun side that you enjoyed when it presented itself? Think of how fun President Hinckley is—he has a great sense of humor that makes his serious moments more “hearable” because he comes across as such a normal human being that you can identify with as a person as well as a prophet of God.

12. Lastly, the FF is THE GOSPEL SCHOOL. In rural America some 150 years ago, it was common to have both parents in the home area much of the day. Later, the dads had to leave to

go to the cities to find work and only the mom was left at home with the family. Then the women also decided to go to work away from the home front. Thus, the “family schoolhouse” was left unattended. The students (children) still arrived, but there were no teachers (parents). They were both gone to work. That is largely our condition today in much of the world. Children are left without parents too much of any given day. No one to teach, no one to supervise, no one to guide, no one to listen. PARENTS, WE HAVE GOT TO BE THERE. COME HOME. THIS IS A HEARTFELT PLEA TO BOTH MOTHERS AND FATHERS. Do all you can to be available to your family—and remember that there is nothing you will do of greater importance in your life than to be there for your family—to teach and guide them and help them. And among all the things you can and will do, TEACHING THEM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS NUMBER ONE. Be sure they hear all the basic principles of the gospel from your own lips—over and over again. THERE IS NOTHING I WANT MY OWN CHILDREN TO REMEMBER MORE ABOUT ME THAN MY ABSOLUTE, RESOLUTE, AND UNEQUIVOCAL TESTIMONY OF THE RESTORED GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH. AND I WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT IN THE VERY DEPTHS OF THEIR FATHER’S CONVERTED SOUL ABIDES A TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE SON OF GOD AND SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “With all our doing, with all our leading, with all our teaching, the most important thing we can do for those whom we lead is to cultivate in their hearts a living, vital, vibrant testimony and knowledge of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world... . I would hope that in all we do we would somehow constantly nourish the testimony of our people concerning the Savior. I am satisfied—I know it’s so—that whenever a man has a true witness in his heart of the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, all else will come together as it should... . That is the root from which all virtue springs among those who call themselves Latter-day Saints.”

And in a religion in-service meeting at BYU, where I teach Book of Mormon, Merrill J. Bateman, president of BYU and a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, shared with us this

beautiful testimony of the Atonement of Christ. I read to you exactly from my notes that day (which I sent verbatim to my children later):

“President Bateman taught us in a recent Religion faculty meeting something that I thought you might enjoy. It is one of the most profound ideas I have ever come to understand regarding the Atonement of Christ and the suffering we are called upon to endure in life. He first referred to Alma 7:11–12. ‘And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.’

“I love that scripture, as it captures the essence of the Atonement better than anything else I know. President Bateman said that as he has come to understand the Atonement, he realized that the Atonement was much more than an atonement for sin, but that the Savior took upon Himself, in Gethsemane and on Calvary, all the sins, pains, illnesses, anguish, infirmities, sadness, discouragement, and every thing that could challenge us and bring us down. And He did it for all of God’s creations. So, his conclusion was that in Gethsemane it was not a ‘long line of sins that passed before Him but rather it was a long line of His brothers and sisters with all their personal challenges and their toughest moments—it was people that passed before Him—all of whom are His brothers and sisters and for whom He was willing to suffer these things so that He might understand us in this mortal veil of tears.’

“That is something to ponder. Great insight that will help see us through our worst moments. Love, Dad”

And so I want to be remembered in my family as a parent who taught my children the gospel IN MY HOME. It is more important for YOU to teach it personally in your home and for your children to learn it from you there than for them to learn it any other place. When my days

on this earth are over, I hope one or more of my children will say “Mom and Dad did their best to show us the way home to our Heavenly Father and Mother.” Then I could rest in peace.

There are other characteristics of the FF, but that is all we have time for today. I pray the Lord will lift us up and bless us all so that we may see ways to strengthen our families and bring them unto Christ. There is no more important work that you will ever do than the work you do within the walls of your home and in your family. I hope some of the characteristics of the FF that I have described for you today will give you some insight and inspiration into the great challenge of guiding our families. It is a great responsibility and a great privilege as well. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.