

Father, Come Home

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I extend to you my warmest love and prayers for your happiness and well-being. I want to share a few thoughts that may strengthen the most important of all institutions -- the family.

In recent times, society has been plagued with a cancer from which few families have escaped. I speak of the disintegration of our homes. Immediate corrective treatment is urgent. In what I have to say, I do not wish to offend anyone. I affirm my profound belief that God's greatest creation is womanhood. I also believe that there is no greater good in all the world than motherhood. The influence of a mother in the lives of her children is beyond calculation. Single parents, most of whom are mother, perform an especially heroic service.

I hasten to acknowledge that there are too many husbands and fathers who are abusive to their wives and children and from whom the wives and children need protection. Yet modern sociological studies powerfully reaffirm the essential influence of a caring father in the life of a child--boy or girl. In the past twenty years, as homes and families have struggled to stay intact, sociological studies reveal this alarming fact: much of the crime and many of the behavioral disorders in the United States come from homes where the father has abandoned the children. In many societies the world over, child poverty, crime, drug abuse, and family decay can be traced to conditions where the father give no male nurturing. Sociologically, it is now painfully apparent that fathers are not optional family baggage. We need to honor the position of the father as the primary provider for physical and spiritual support. I state this with no reluctance because the Lord has revealed that this obligation is placed upon husbands. "Women have claim on their husband for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken." Further, "all children have claim upon their partents for their maintenance until they are of age." In additions, their spiritual welfare should be "brought to pass by the faith and covenant of their fathers." As regards to little children, the Lord has promised that "great things may be required at the hads of their fathers." (D&C 83:2,4-84:99-29:48)

It is useless to debate which parent is most important, No one would doubt that a mother's influence is paramount with newborn and in the first years of a child's life. The father's influence increases as the child grows older. However, each parent is necessary at various times in a child's development. Both fathers and mothers do many intrinsically different things for their children. Both mothers and fathers are equipped to nurture children, but their approaches are different. Mothers seem to take a dominant role in preparing children to live within their families (present and future). Fathers seem best equipped to prepare children to function in the environment outside the family. One authority states, "Studies show that fathers have a special role to play in building a child's self-respect. They are important, too, in ways we really don't understand, in developing internal limits and controls in children. Interestingly, fatherly involvement produces stronger sexual identity and character in both boys and girls. It is well established that the masculinity of sons and the femininity of daughters are each greater when fathers are active in family life." (Karl Zinsmeister)

Parents in any marital situation have a duty to set aside personal differences and encourage each other's righteous influence in the live of their children.

It is not possible to give to womankind all of the rights and blessings that come from God and legal authority without diminishing the nobility of God's other grand creation, manhood? Eliza R. Snow stated in 1872, "The status of women is one of the questions of the day. Socially and politically it forces itself upon the attention of the world. Some...refuse to concede that woman is entitled to the enjoyment of any rights other than..the whims, fancies or justice...men may choose to grant her.

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The reasons which they cannot meet with argument they decry and ridicule; an old refuge for those

opposed to correct principles which they are unable to controvert. Others...not only recognize that woman's status should be improved, but are so radical in their extreme theories that they would set her in antagonism to man, assume for her a separate and opposing existence; and...show how entirely independent she should be. "Indeed, she continued, they "would make her adopt the more reprehensible phases of character which men present, and which should be shunned or improved by them instead of being copied by women. These are the two extremes, and between them in the "golden mean." (*The Women's Exponent, July 1872*)

I urge the husbands and fathers of this church to be the kind of a man your wife would not want to be without. I urge the sisters of this church to be patient, loving, and understanding with their husbands. Those who enter into marriage should be fully prepared to establish their marriage as the first priority in their lives.

It is destructive to the feeling essential for a happy marriage for either party to say to the other marriage partner, "I don't need you." This is particularly so because the counsel of the Savior was and is to become one flesh.

It is far more difficult to be of one heart and mind than to be physically one. This unity of heart and mind is manifest in sincere expressions of "I appreciate you" and "I am proud of you." Such domestic harmony results from forgiving and forgetting, essential elements of a maturing marriage relationship. Someone has said that we should keep our eyes wide open before marriage and half shut afterward. (Magdeleine de Scudery) True charity ought to begin in marriage, for it is a relationship that must be rebuilt every day.

I wonder if it is possible for one marriage partner to jettison the other and become completely whole. Either partner who diminishes the divine role of the other in presence of the children demeans the budding femininity within the daughters and the emerging manhood of the sons. I suppose there are always some honest differences between husband and wife, but let them be settled in private.

The importance of this subject emboldens me to say a word about covenant breaking. It must be recognized that some marriages just fail. To those in that circumstance, I extend understanding because every divorce carries heartache with it I hope what I say will not be disturbing. In my opinion, any promise between a man and a woman incident to a marriage ceremony rises to the dignity of a covenant. The family relationship of father, mother, and child is the oldest and most enduring institution in the world. It has survived vast differences of geography and culture. This is because marriage between man and woman is a natural state and is ordained of God. It is a moral imperative.

What, then, might be "just cause" for breaking the covenants of marriage? Over a lifetime of dealing with human problems, I have struggled to understand what might be considered "just cause" for breaking of covenants. I confess I do not claim the wisdom nor authority to definitively state what is "just cause." Only the parties to the marriage can determine this. They must bear the responsibility for the train of consequences which inevitably follow if these covenants are not honored. In my opinion, "just cause" should be nothing less serious than a prolonged and apparently irredeemable relationship which is destructive of a person's dignity as a human being.

At the same time, I have strong feelings about what is not provocation for breaking the sacred covenants of marriage. Surely it is not simply "mental distress," nor "personality differences," nor "having grown apart," nor having "fallen out of love," this is especially so where there are children.

In my opinion, members of the Church have the most effective cure for our decaying family life. It is for men, women, and children to honor and respect the divine roles of both fathers and mothers in the home. In so doing, mutual respect and appreciation will be fostered.

I plead with you, Fathers, come home. Magnify you calling; bless your families through this sacred influence, and experience the rewards promised by our Father and God.