

Relief Society Lesson 15: The Sacred Callings of Fathers and Mothers

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This is a LONG lesson ([lds.org text is here](#)). I do not think you will be able to cover all of the material in the lesson, or in this lesson plan. But because teaching typical/gendered model-based lessons is difficult, I tried to be inclusive of all women, including childless women, those who are in a mixed faith marriage or those who are single parents. So- let's get into it:

Introduce the term, "Family." I have written about the term previously [here](#), and highlight this quote as a way to model inclusiveness:

*Family is a rubbery term at best; even within the church, the definition of family comes in varied terms of a mortal family, an eternal family, a heavenly family, a ward family (wherein the bishop is the father of a ward) and for those in University wards, you may get "assigned" membership in FHE family groups. Even at work or in sports, a branch or a team can be described as a family unit. In consideration of this, you can see why I prefer the mathematical definition of the term "family": a group of curves whose equations differ from a given equation in the values assigned to constraints in each curve. In applying this concept to the more common definition of family, I am comfortable in defining family like this: **A group of individuals who share values assigned to and within the constraints of a common group.***

Print out some of these quotes as relate to the women in your class. (*I have added descriptors in italics at the front of each quote, you are not obligated to read or include these*) . Have members of the class each read one. I would not encourage discussion at this stage (timing!), but rather, invite the women to adapt the idea of mothers and fathers to be inclusive of **all** church members in all walks of life:

(widows or divorcees) A woman in the role of single parent, whether widowed or divorced, has a very special calling, and she will be held accountable before the Lord for what she does with her stewardship. Although her spouse is absent, she stands nonetheless commissioned by the Lord to perform the charge he issued to all parents: “And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.” She may feel at times that she carries a disproportionate share of that responsibility, yet she has the Lord’s assurance that he will prepare a way for her to accomplish her task. - [Maren Eccles Hardy, This You Can Count On, Ensign, September 1990.](#)

(Mixed Faith Marriages): The fact is, many of us will never see our spouses join the Church. But we must continue to follow what we know to be true. We will not be held accountable for their salvation, but we *will* be held accountable for our own actions—how brightly we let our own light shine. Understanding this truth has relieved us of a great burden; in a very real way it has set us free to find contentment, joy, and growth in our part-member marriages. - [Kristin Sandoval and Susan Heumpreus, When Your Spouse Isn’t a Member, Ensign, March 1990.](#)

(teachers/childless women) Letters (from women who I taught when they were Young Women) usually came with the announcement of an important event, maybe a new little baby. But the message was different this time, like the answer to a long forgotten prayer. She wrote: “I would like to share with you some of the feelings I have at this Mother’s Day time... not only did my thoughts reflect back to mothers of blood but to a special, beautiful person who so touched my life as to make me always love and respect her as certainly a mother to me in all the special qualities that go with the word. If you would only know the number of times just thinking of you softened a sometimes hardened heart or helped me to my knees when our Heavenly Father’s guidance was so needed.” My heart was full to overflowing as my eyes filled with tears of gratitude and so blurred my vision that I could read no further. As the tears quietly rolled down my cheeks, I thought of the privilege that had been ours to

touch in a meaningful way the lives of ... precious souls we have loved so deeply.

– [Ardath Kapp, *Ensign*, October 1975.](#)

(*fatherless children, preparing parents*) Steven tried really hard to not cry—but he could still hear the other kids singing...Mum pulled him in for another hug, and Steven let a few more tears soak into her shirt. “I’ll talk to the Primary president. You don’t have to sing if you don’t want to. But hey—I have an idea.” Mum looked straight into his eyes. “This year we won’t celebrate Father’s Day—we’ll celebrate *Future* Father’s Day!” She smiled, and he stared back.

“Huh? Celebrate *what*?”

“Future Father’s Day—we’re going to celebrate how amazing you and your brother are going to be as dads someday. We’ll have presents and a cake and your favorite soft drink!”

Mum kissed his forehead and then tried to fix his mangled tie. “You, Steven, are going to be a *brilliant* dad—I can tell already. Because you are already thinking about what you are going to do with your kids and planning what kind of dad you’ll be.” – [Kellie George Purcill, *Steven’s First Future Father’s Day, The Friend*, June 2015.](#)

(*single parents*) My message is for the single parents in the Church, the majority of whom are single mothers—you valiant women who, through the varying circumstances of life, find yourselves raising children and running a home on your own....Please never feel that you are in some kind of second-tier subcategory of Church membership, somehow less entitled to the Lord’s blessings than others. In the kingdom of God there are no second-class citizens. – [David S. Baxter, *Faith, Fortitude, Fulfillment: A Message to Single Parents, General Conference*, April 2012](#)

This lesson is comprised of a series of President Benson’s talks and sermons, wherein he has created lists of 10 items for mothers and 10 items for fathers. The manual catalogs the fathers’ checklist first with the mothers’ checklist second. I took the content of each list putting the "mothers" list in the first column, the "fathers" list in the second column and left the third column for my (and your) notes.

Go through each item topically, and invite the women to discuss their thoughts on the suggestions of President Benson, reminding them that President Benson described these as **SUGGESTIONS**. Remind the sisters that we each have [the gift of personal revelation](#) in which we can use the spirit to help us apply, dismiss or adapt to our individual circumstance and that we are often in position as visiting teachers and friends to be able to parent each other.

Mothers item and number	Fathers item and number	Suggested discussion points
<p>Intro:With love in my heart for the mothers in Zion, I would now like to suggest 10 specific ways our mothers may spend effective time with their children.</p>	<p>Intro:With love in my heart for the fathers in Israel, may I suggest 10 specific ways that fathers can give spiritual leadership to their children.</p>	<p>“Mothers in Zion”- Zion is described as a place for the “pure in heart.” How can we better be pure in heart?“Fathers in Israel” invokes patriarchal priesthood lineage. President Dallin H. Oaks has reminded us that priesthood authority is for both men and women, “Priesthood power blesses all of us. Priesthood keys direct women as well as men, and priesthood ordinances and priesthood authority pertain to women as well as men.” How can we set an example of spiritual leadership to our children?</p>
<p>Fourth, take time to pray with your children. Family prayers, under the direction of the father, should be held morning and night. Have your children feel of your faith as you call down the blessings of heaven</p>	<p>2. Personally direct family prayers, daily scripture reading, and weekly family home evenings. Your personal involvement will show your children how important these activities really are.</p>	<p>The common points here are to have: Family Prayers and Family Home Evening.Why do you think that it is listed as two separate items for women, but one item for men? What can you do in your family to</p>

<p>upon them. ... Have your children participate in family and personal prayers, and rejoice in their sweet utterances to their Father in Heaven. Fifth, take time to have a meaningful weekly home evening. Have your children actively involved. Teach them correct principles. Make this one of your family traditions. ...</p>		<p>share the responsibility of organizing family prayer and FHE?</p>
<p>Eighth, take time to do things as a family. Make family outings and picnics and birthday celebrations and trips special times and memory builders. Whenever possible, attend, as a family, events where one of the family members is involved, such as a school play, a ball game, a talk, a recital. Attend Church meetings together, and sit together as a family when you can. Mothers who help families pray and play together will [help them] stay together and will bless children's lives forever.</p>	<p>3. Whenever possible, attend Church meetings together as a family. Family worship under your leadership is vital to your children's spiritual welfare.</p>	<p>The common advice here is to: Attend church as a family and do things together as a family, especially in support of each individual person. (You might share or ask someone to share a time in childhood or as an adult when the entire family went to support them. Why was this important to the child? Why was this important in your family?)</p>
<p>Second, mothers, take time to be a real friend to your children. Listen to your children, really listen. Talk with them, laugh and joke with them, sing with them, play with them, cry with them,</p>	<p>4. Go on daddy-daughter dates and father-and-sons' outings with your children. ... 6. Have regular one-on-one visits with your children. Let them talk about what they would like to. Teach them gospel principles.</p>	<p>The common advice here is to: Spend one-on-one time with the important people in your family: each child, your spouse, each woman you visit teach, a friend.</p>

<p>hug them, honestly praise them. Yes, regularly spend one-on-one time with each child. Be a real friend to your children.</p>	<p>Teach them true values. Tell them you love them. Personal time with your children tells them where Dad puts his priorities.</p>	
<p>Sixth, take time to be together at mealtimes as often as possible. This is a challenge as the children get older and lives get busier. But happy conversation, sharing of the day's plans and activities, and special teaching moments occur at mealtime because parents and children work at it.</p>	<p>5. Build traditions of family vacations and trips and outings. These memories will never be forgotten by your children.</p>	<p>I combined these because they key message is about spending quality time together as a family, and building shared memories. I think it is also wise to note that President Benson was often gone from his home with work, so family meals were not a daily event for him and his wife and children. Class members may have adaptations that work for them about quality family time, so this might be a good time to share these adaptations.</p>
<p>Third, take time to read to your children. Starting from the cradle, read to your sons and daughters. ... You will plant a love for good literature and a real love for the scriptures if you will read to your children regularly. Seventh, take time daily to read the scriptures together as a family. ... Reading the Book of Mormon together as a family will especially bring increased spirituality into your home and will give both parents and</p>	<p>8. Encourage good music and art and literature in your homes. Homes that have a spirit of refinement and beauty will bless the lives of your children forever.</p>	<p>I grouped all of the reading admonitions together to highlight that a broad menu of both literature, arts and scriptures are important enough to be suggested by Benson. In this thought: What arts do you encourage in the home? In addition to the scriptures, what else do you read or what kinds of music do you listen to as a family? Do you attend school plays and musicals as a family? How has this brought</p>

<p>children the power to resist temptation and to have the Holy Ghost as their constant companion. I promise you that the Book of Mormon will change the lives of your family.</p>		<p>a spirit of refinement into your homes?</p>
<p>Ninth, mothers, take time to teach your children. Catch the teaching moments at mealtime, in casual settings, or at special sit-down times together, at the foot of the bed at the end of the day, or during an early-morning walk together. ...A mother's love and prayerful concern for her children are the most important ingredients in teaching her own. Teach children gospel principles. Teach them it pays to be good. Teach them there is no safety in sin. Teach them a love for the gospel of Jesus Christ and a testimony of its divinity. Teach your sons and daughters modesty, and teach them to respect manhood and womanhood. Teach your children sexual purity, proper dating standards, temple marriage, missionary service, and the importance of accepting and magnifying Church callings. Teach them a love for work and the value of a good education. Teach them</p>	<p>7. Teach your children to work, and show them the value of working toward a worthy goal. ...</p>	<p>In the last few items in the suggested list for mothers, Benson became more detailed in his instruction to women. I suspected that this was because his own wife was often the only parent present for their children because he was away with work, engaged in political or social groups or away fulfilling church callings, so he may have felt more involved in the family by giving her assignments. Regardless, the overall theme here is to teach. In this, I like this quote by Matthew O. Richardson: While we are all teachers, we must fully realize that it is the <u>Holy Ghost</u> who is the <i>real</i> teacher and witness of all truth. Those who do not fully understand this either try to take over for the Holy Ghost and do everything themselves, politely invite the Spirit to be with them but only in a supporting role, or believe they are turning all their teaching over to the Spirit</p>

the importance of the right kind of entertainment, including appropriate movies, videos, music, books, and magazines. Discuss the evils of pornography and drugs, and teach them the value of living the clean life. Yes, mothers, teach your children the gospel in your own home, at your own fireside. This is the most effective teaching that your children will ever receive. ...

when, in truth, they are actually just “winging it.” All parents, leaders, and teachers have the responsibility to teach “by the Spirit.”²They should not teach “in front of the Spirit” or “behind the Spirit” but “by the Spirit” so the Spirit can teach the truth unrestrained. – [General Conference, October 2011](#)

[First,] whenever possible, be at the crossroads when your children are either coming or going—when they leave and return from school, when they leave or return from dates, when they bring friends home. Be there at the crossroads whether your children are 6 or 16. ...

1. Give father’s blessings to your children. Baptize and confirm your children. Ordain your sons to the priesthood. These will become spiritual highlights in the lives of your children.

Okay, I know this is an odd juxtaposition, but hear me out: Each of the things that Benson has itemized in this is a type of crossroads: the start of dating, the start of church membership, etc. Therefore, I think we can group these together with the concept of being present in our children’s lives when they have life events. There will be some women who will feel hurt at being unable to participate in any of the church ordinances for their children. If we were to label meeting a child after school as “just as important as” ordaining a child to the priesthood, both tasks are minimized rather than celebrated. Try to direct the conversation about how to be present in another’s life: how can you be there for your

		<p>children so they are comfortable in asking personal questions? How can we support the sisters we visit teach who might not have family support when they have career promotions, challenges in callings, etc.</p>
<p>Tenth and finally, mothers, take the time to truly love your little children. A mother’s unqualified love approaches Christlike love. Your teenage children also need that same kind of love and attention. It seems easier for many mothers and fathers to express their love to their children when they are young, but more difficult when they are older. Work at this prayerfully. There need be no generation gap. And the key is love. Our young people need love and attention, not indulgence. They need empathy and understanding, not indifference from mothers and fathers. They need the parents’ time. A mother’s kindly teachings and her love for and confidence in a teenage son or daughter can literally save them from a wicked world. “Take time to read to your children.” Do you know one reason why righteous mothers love their</p>	<p><i>(I did not find a similar listing in the men’s suggestions for this topic, interestingly, he includes “mothers and fathers” in part of this suggestion, implying that this advice is for both parents.)</i></p>	<p>How can both mothers and fathers express love to their children? Clearly Benson sees that reading is important enough to include it yet again here, making it the 3rd time he is suggestion to mothers that they read to their children (3rd, 7th and 10th in the mothers' list).</p>

<p>children so much? Because they sacrifice so much for them. We love what we sacrifice for and we sacrifice for what we love.</p>		
<p><i>(I did not find a similar listing in the women's suggestions for this topic, but this advice can also be taken as general advice for both parents to attend the temple.)</i></p>	<p>9. As distances allow, regularly attend the temple with your wife. Your children will then better understand the importance of temple marriage and temple vows and the eternal family unit.</p>	<p>Not everyone is comfortable with, eligible for, or able to attend the temple. With this in mind, I suggest listing some of the basic principles taught in the temple that would be important to impart to children: marriage to an equal, sealing of children, eternal connections, atonement, etc.</p>
<p><i>(I did not find a similar listing in the women's suggestions for this topic, but clearly women serve in church callings so can also apply this advice as general advice to both men and women.)</i></p>	<p>10. Have your children see your joy and satisfaction in service to the Church. This can become contagious to them, so they, too, will want to serve in the Church and will love the kingdom.</p>	<p>This can be tricky because callings can be hard and draining. But the past conference, I fell in love with a talk by Kevin W. Pearson. In his talk, he itemizes the importance of the tree of life, and discusses endurance through trial. Most importantly, he used these words: “Several years ago, Sister Pearson and I were called to preside over the Washington Tacoma Mission...” I think many of us feel like when a spouse has a calling, we share that calling, even when it is not extended to us. I love how Pearson emphasized that he and his wife were “called to preside” together, rather than</p>

		his being called as a Mission president and she happened to tag along. How can we set the example of equally presiding in our homes and in our callings? Why would setting this example and expressing joy in this motivate our friends and children to seek opportunities to search in the church?
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Close by bearing your testimony of the important of all families, no matter what they look like, and even when we do not have children. Invite the class to open the “spirits that have entered our homes” to friends, women we visit teach, or anyone who we have the opportunity to share our lives with, in addition to any children we might parent.

“May we be faithful to this great obligation of parenthood, this sacred obligation, that we may build our homes solidly upon eternal principles, that we may have no regrets. May we never be recreant [unfaithful] to the great trust which has been imposed in us. May we always keep in mind that these spirits that have entered our homes are choice spirits.”