Mother’s Care: “Are You There, Mother?”


In my childhood, we had mottoes hanging on our walls, sometimes embroidered, sometimes painted, for decoration and for inspiration. One I remember read: “What is home without a mother?”

From my infancy, every time I entered the house, I called, “Mama,” over and over until I found her. Totally satisfied in the security her presence afforded, I ran again to play. Just to know she was there! That was all.

When I was eleven, Mother passed away and from my aching heart came numerous times, “Mama,” as I entered the house, but these were only mocking echoes of emptiness.

Later the void was filled when our stepmother gave presence to the home, and again through my youth, I called and found my security in the welcome answer, “I am here, son.”

It was the same brick house through the days of security and the days of desolation, the same shelf-lined pantry, the same wood stove and water tank, the same parlor with its rug carpet, and the same old clock ticking away the hours and days and years, but stability and sureness and peace were there when Mother was there; security was there, and the house breathed belongingness.

A few years ago on Labor Day, 2,000 young people converged on the little resort town of Seaside, Oregon, smashing windows, ripping street and shop signs down, and requiring 100 policemen plus National Guardsmen to quell the rioting. I wondered if the 2,000 homes from which they came were normal ones with a mother at home who could answer, “I am here, son.”

The news reported 30,000 teenagers rioting on a California beach, filling beer cans and bottles with sand and throwing them at police, boys stripping girls, and sex indulgence common and unabashed.

How many of the 30,000 mothers were making homes and how many making money?

How can mothers justify their abandonment of home when they are needed so much by their offspring? Rationalization must take over as they justify themselves in leaving home and children.

Of course, there are some mothers who must work to support their children, and they are to be praised, not criticized, but let every working mother honestly weigh the matter and be sure the Lord approves before she rushes her babies off to the nursery, her children off to school, her husband off to work, and herself off to her employment. Let her be certain that she is not rationalizing herself away from her children merely to provide for them greater material things. Let her analyze well before she permits herself away from her children to support them.

Do not these absentee mothers and millions of approving fathers know that basic attitudes toward standards, morality, the church, and God are developed in the family circle and are quite well set while children are still small? It is said: “Give me a child until he is seven and then do with him what you will.” These first years are so vital.

The Lord said: “My sheep know my voice.” So do the little ones respond to their own mothers. The maid, the neighbor, the sister, the grandmother may clothe and feed and diaper the child, but no one can take the place of mother. The six-year-old who got lost from his mother in a large supermarket began to call frantically, “Martha, Martha.” When the mother was found and they were reunited, she said, “Honey, you should not call me Martha; I am ‘Mother’ to you,” to which the little fellow rejoined, “Yes, I know, but the store was full of mothers and I wanted mine.”

Children need security, special love, and to be wanted.

At a distant conference, my plane brought me to the city many hours early. The stake president met me at the airport and took me to his home. Having important work to do, he excused himself and returned to work. With the freedom of the house, I spread my papers on the kitchen table and began my work. His wife was upstairs sewing. In mid-afternoon, there came an abrupt entry through the front door and a little fellow came running in, surprised to see me. We became friends; then he ran through the rooms calling, “Mother.” She answered from upstairs, “What is it, darling?” and his answer was, “Oh, nothing.” He went out to play.

A little later another boy came in the front door calling, “Mother, Mother.” He put his school books on the table and explored the house until the reassuring answer came from upstairs again, “Here I am, darling,” and the second one was satisfied and said, “Okay,” and went to play. Another half hour and the door opened again and a young teenager moved in, dropped her books, and called, “Mother.” And the answer from upstairs, “Yes, darling,” seemed to satisfy and the young girl began practicing her music lesson.

Still another voice later called, “Mother,” as she unloaded her high school books. And again the sweet answer, “I am up here sewing, darling,” seemed to reassure her. She tripped up the stairs to tell her mother the happenings of the day. Home! Mother! Security! Just to know Mother was home. All was well.

A child is happy if he feels that he is wanted and enjoyed by his parents. He needs to feel that his parents will be there, especially in a crisis.

This mother, too, could have had a job. Her children also could use more things that her wages could provide. She could have rationalized that two salaries could give her children more advantages, more outings, travel, and vacations, more clothes, gifts, and luxuries. But this mother knew well that a child needs a mother available more than all the things which money can buy.

An article in Parents *Magazine* pointed out that the feeling of security is the core and foundation for good mental health. Most of the married women over 35 in the labor force are working not because their families really “need the money,” but in order to maintain a higher standard of living, get away from some housework, and lead, as they suppose, a more interesting and richer life.

Tens of millions of women in the United States now work outside the home, and the large majority of them have husbands who work, too. A large share have children still at home. There are millions and millions of children who have mothers who leave them needlessly, in order to go to work.
How nearly perfect can a mother be who rushes in the morning to get everybody off for the day, herself included, then returns weary after a hard day of employment to a tired husband and to children and youths with problems, and then to her homemaking, cooking, cleaning, and then to a full social calendar. From such homes come many conflicts, marital problems, and divorces and delinquent children. Few people in trouble ever ascribe their marital conflicts to these first causes but rather blame one another for the problems that were born and nurtured in strained environments. When the relationship of father and mother is harmonious, the children can feel secure.

General Relief Society President Belle S. Spafford has said: “Children should be cherished with the strongest bonds of affection…. No effort should be too much, no sacrifice too great to protect them from evil and preserve them in righteousness…. The love and the sanctity of the home should be zealously safeguarded.” And she speaks of mothers’ obligations “to make all else in life subservient to the well-being of our homes and families.”

Always in the Church, people have been admonished to marry in the house of the Lord, to establish homes, and bear and rear children in righteousness.

Brigham Young said: “It is the calling of the wife and mother . . . [to tie] her offspring to herself with a love that is stronger than death for an everlasting inheritance…. (Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 307.)

An authority on child rearing said: “The more the parents approve of each other, the more the child will be welcome — the most important single factor in the development of the child is the emotional climate prevailing between his parents.”

Are music and dancing lessons and camps and clothes justified when it may mean the sacrifice of the home and mother on the altar of employment?

One girl said, “I really don’t want to go to the girls’ camp. I’d rather stay home with Mother, but Mother is not home to stay with.” Are we glamorizing out-of-home activities for our children when they should be home helping or off to work themselves?

Absenteism of mothers is often linked with idle youth — delinquent youth.

When we read of the destructive escapades by tens of thousands of high school and college young people on their mass invasions of resort towns, we wonder: Who are they permitted leisure until they become sick with boredom? Home is drab so they resort to resort towns, we wonder: Who are they permitted leisure until they become sick with boredom? Home is drab so they resort to destructive and immorality.

One judge said: “These mad vacations make their biggest appeal to youngsters who have too little to do…. We never have any trouble with kids who have real interests, real hobbies, a radio ham, or a real athlete.”

The idle generation! Hours each day and nothing to do. Saturdays and nothing to do. Three long months of school vacation and nothing to do.

No one has found a truer adage than this: “The idle mind is the devil’s workshop.”

Another judge states that too many kids are loafing. Parents do not make children get jobs. And, this helps them into trouble…. there is an alarming lack of employment among our young people . . . and [much] idleness among those who come before me….

He is not talking about the pallid, spindly urchin working twelve hours a day in coal mines, but of the hulking youth sitting around while his hard-working, doting parents support him. It is foolish to expect an energetic exuberant youth to live normally when he has his free time largely to himself including three idle months of summer vacation. The judge continues:

As I see young people of what I consider an employable age sitting around drive-ins or malt shops, on park benches, cruising around in cars or hanging around on the street corners at all hours of the day and the night, I am amazed at their ability to stay out of trouble as well as they do…. idleness is a prime factor in most juvenile misbehavior. . . . I find the average parent of the average employable but unemployed youngster to be weak, overprotective and over-indulgent. Both he and his wife work to afford their child the niceties of life which they now consider necessities. All the comforts of home plus car and a gasoline credit card.

A woman who had not been able to hold a job in spite of the fact that she was well-trained and highly educated explained: “Oh, it’s not odd at all. My parents never expected me to work and for that reason I never expected to either.” She seemed to feel unabashed.

The judge proceeds:

This type of parent blindly accepts Junior's plaint: “I can’t find a job.”

Can’t find a job! Well, Junior, I have news for you! . . . A whole generation of us grew up during the depression when there were no jobs, but we found jobs anyway. Oh, they weren’t good jobs but they were jobs. There were always jobs—mean, disagreeable, back-breaking jobs. And many of these jobs didn’t pay very much and they were hard.

Some judges give arrested youth a choice to get a job within thirty days or be locked up. They seldom have had to lock up any. If the alternative is unpleasant enough, somehow Junior finds employment.

To this philosophy, there are rejoinders from many sources that cry there are not enough jobs to go around and that a job for a youngster means a job lost to the head of a family. And the answer of the judge to this is:

Get women out of the factories and put them back into the home where they belong . . . cooking, sewing, cleaning house, and doing the traditional woman's work. It would do both for them and their neglected youngsters a world of good.

If a few million working mothers who need not work were to go home to their families, there might be employment for men now unemployed and part and full-time work for youth who ought to help in family finances and who need occupation for their abundant energy.

The judge gave good advice in the following vein:

“When I can’t find a job,” they say. Why, bless your souls, the world is crying for helpers. Have we spoiled our children paying them for every effort?
They cry, “Where can we go?” Listen, youth, go home, roll up your sleeves; pick cotton, hoe the corn, thin the beets. Yes, before and after school and Saturdays and vacation days. It won’t hurt you to store your ball and bat and hiking togs. Hang the storm windows, paint the fence, wash the car, pick the fruit, mow the lawn, repair the screen, plant a garden, cultivate flowers, trim the trees. A majority of youth wish responsibility and will thrive on it.

“What can we do?” they ask again.

Do the shopping, work in the hospital, help the neighbors and church custodian, wash the dishes, vacuum the floors, make the beds, get the meals, learn to sew.

Read good books, repair the furniture, make something needed in the home, clean the house, press your clothes, rake the leaves, shovel the snow, peddle papers, do baby sitting free for neighbor mothers who must work, become an apprentice.

One parent wrote to youth:

Your parents do not owe you entertainment; your villages do not owe you recreation facilities; the world does not owe you a living; you owe the world; you owe it your time, your energy, your talents, yourself. In plain, simple words, grow up, get out of your dream world; develop your backbone, a backbone not a wishbone…. 

Lawmakers in their eagerness to protect the child have legislated until the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. But no law prohibits most work suggested above.

President David O. McKay said:

We are living in an age of gadgetry which threatens to produce a future generation of softness. Flabbiness of character more than flabbiness of muscle lies at the root of most of the problems facing our American youth.

Do the families of juvenile delinquents kneel in prayer night and morning before the depredations committed by their children? Do they have family home evenings, family picnics, vacations and entertainment together? Do the parents of such hoodlums exercise discipline in the home, or are the children emancipated from restraint, from duties, and from controls?

To slow down this ever-increasing rate of juvenile delinquency, there is a growing cry: We must have more detention homes and reformatories. We need more public money appropriated for better facilities, more highly trained specialists, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. We need larger jails, more police.

Certainly, it must be apparent that all this is but an attempt to control the malady without dealing with causes. Isn’t it time to come back to fundamentals? “We need more money,” they say, but money is not the answer. Surely we must realize that an ounce of prevention is worth tons of cure.

The Lord indicated long ago the perfect pattern. He organized the family. It takes no great wisdom to know where the error lies and that the cure is prevention. With the home a religious one with discipline and love and parental bliss and sweet parent-child relationships, there would be few, if any, prodigals. Reformatories and correctional institutions could close; social agencies could lock their doors; jails would have few prisoners.

All this could come by the building of the homes of the people into spiritual fortresses. If fathers would give themselves to their families and if all mothers who can would come home from employment to be real mothers, then delinquency would be greatly reduced.

Let us organize our families properly and discipline our children wisely, thus creating the kind of homes our Heavenly Father desires for us.