As we take a long, hard look at the world today, it is becoming increasingly evident that Satan is working overtime to enslave the souls of men. His main target is the fundamental unit of society—the family.

During the past few decades, Satan has waged a vigorous campaign to belittle and demean this basic and most important of all organizations. His success is becoming increasingly evident—the grim facts are seen, reported, and heard about daily and involve the collapse of many family units. With the decay of the family, we see the terrible effects on our society—increased crime, behavior disorders, poverty, drug abuse, and the list continues to grow and grow.

It appears to me that the crosshairs of Satan’s scope are centered on husbands and fathers. Today’s media, for example, have been relentless in their attacks—ridiculing and demeaning husbands and fathers in their God-given roles.

**Examples from the Scriptures**

It may be useful to counter the portrayal of husbands and fathers in the media with the scriptures. There we have so many great role models.

**The Father and the Savior.** In the New Testament we have a glimpse of the Savior’s relationship with the Father. One of the most vivid of these glimpses is in the garden just before His betrayal:

> “[Jesus] kneeled down, and prayed,
>   “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

**Moses and Jethro.** We have the example in Exodus of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, observing how he was governing the children of Israel:

> “And when Moses’ father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?
>   “And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: …
>   “And Moses’ father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.
>   “Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone” (Ex. 18:14-15, 17-18).

Then Jethro taught Moses how to delegate this responsibility by calling able men who would fear God and letting them judge as rulers in Israel:

> “And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee” (Ex. 18:22).

**Alma.** In the Book of Mormon, we have the account of Alma, the son of Alma, being numbered among the rebellious and doing all manner of iniquity. Alma the father prayed with much faith that his son would come to a knowledge of the truth—a prayer which was answered in a very special way:

> “And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, … the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder … ;
>   “And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.
>   “Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.
>   “And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith” (Mosiah 27:10-14).

When Alma the Younger recovered from this experience, he was a changed man.

**The Diminishing Role of Fathers**

Satan, in his carefully devised plan to destroy the family, seeks to diminish the role of fathers. Increased
youth violence, youth crime, greater poverty and economic insecurity, and the failure of increasing numbers of children in our schools offer clear evidence of lack of a positive influence of fathers in the homes (see David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* [1995], introduction, 25–48; David Popenoe, *Life without Father* [1996], 52–78). A family needs a father to anchor it.

Surely we have learned by now, from the experience over centuries, that the basic family provides the most stable and secure foundation for society and is fundamental to the preparation of young people for their future responsibilities. We should have learned by now that alternate styles of family formations have not worked and never will work. This was stated plainly by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

“We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. …

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. …

“… By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. …

“We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.” (*Liahona*, Oct. 1998, 24; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102; emphasis added).

**Father’s Roles**

Given such urgent warnings about the future of our Father in Heaven’s children, fathers and mothers must search their souls to be certain they are following the Lord’s direction in building up eternal families. Focusing on fathers, what does the Lord expect us to do?

Once a family has been established, the father’s roles include the following:

1. **The father is the head in his family.**

   “Fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership. It has always been so; it always will be so. Father, with the assistance and counsel and encouragement of your eternal companion, you preside in the home. It is not a matter of whether you are most worthy or best qualified, but it is a matter of [divine] appointment” (The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, *Father, Consider Your Ways: A Message from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* [pamphlet, 1973]; reprinted in *Ensign*, June 2002, 16).

   Your leadership in the home must include leading in family worship.

   “You preside at the meal table, at family prayer. You preside at family home evening; and as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, you see that your children are taught correct principles. It is your place to give direction relating to all of family life.

   “You give father’s blessings. You take an active part in establishing family rules and discipline. As a leader in your home you plan and sacrifice to achieve the blessing of a unified and happy family. To do all of this requires that you live a family-centered life” (*Ensign*, June 2002, 16).

   As President Joseph F. Smith counseled: “Brethren, there is too little religious devotion, love, and fear of God, in the home; too much worldliness, selfishness, indifference, and lack of reverence in the family, or it never would exist so abundantly on the outside. Then, the home is what needs reforming. Try today, and tomorrow, to make a change in your home” (“Worship in the Home,” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1903, 138.).

   Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. As President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught: “In this Church the man neither walks ahead of his wife nor behind his wife but at her side. They are coequals” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 49). Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity (see Gen. 2:24). Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united
together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.

2. The father is a teacher.

President Joseph F. Smith’s counsel applies today: “Do not let your children out to specialists … , but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth” (Improvement Era, Dec. 1903, 138).

“When you recognize the importance of teaching your children, you become humble, because at once you realize that this is accomplished by precept and example. You cannot be one thing and effectively teach another. You must live and study and pray for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. You must purify and organize your life so that your example and leadership reflect the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“You must plan your day as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, earnestly seeking your own welfare and the welfare of your family before other cares blind you to these first responsibilities. As we have been taught by living prophets, ‘No other success in life can compensate for failure in the home’ (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 5; quoted from J. E. McCulloch, Home: The Savior of Civilization [1924], 42)” (Ensign, June 2002, 14).

3. The father is the temporal provider.

President Ezra Taft Benson expressed it clearly: “The Lord has charged men with the responsibility to provide for their families in such a way that the wife is allowed to fulfill her role as mother in the home. … Sometimes the mother works outside of the home at the encouragement, or even insistence, of her husband … [for the] convenience[s] that the extra income can buy. Not only will the family suffer in such instances, brethren, but your own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 60—61; or Ensign, Nov. 1987, 49).

Fathers, by divine decree, you are to preside over your family units. This is a sobering responsibility and the most important one you will ever assume, for it is an eternal responsibility. You place the family in its proper priority. It’s the part of your life that will endure beyond the grave. I testify that the following statement is true:

“The position which men occupy in the family, and especially those who hold the Melchizedek Priest-hood, is one of first importance and should be clearly recognized and maintained in the order and with the authority which God conferred upon man in placing him at the head of his household.

“… There is no higher authority in matters relating to the family organization, and especially when that organization is presided over by one holding the higher priesthood, than that of the father. … The patriarchal order is of divine origin and will continue throughout time and eternity. There is then a particular reason why men, women, and children should understand this order and this authority in the households of the people of God, and seek to make it what God intended it to be, a qualification and preparation for the highest exaltation of His children. In the home the presiding authority is always vested in the father, and in all home affairs and family matters there is no other authority paramount” (Joseph F. Smith, “The Rights of Fatherhood,” Juvenile Instructor, 1 Mar. 1902, 146.)

Now, I have used several quotes which I have not identified. I have done it for a purpose. They will be clearly noted in the Ensign and Liahona magazines in the coming May editions. I invite you to study them and review these conference messages. They are wonderful magazines and surely should be in every home. Then the spirit of this conference can live all year long in the pages of these magazines.

May we heed the voice of the prophets, who, from the beginning of time, have warned us about the importance of fathers in the home. May we determine more fully to fulfill our duties and responsibilities that the Lord has given to us as fathers in Zion is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.