Teaching Our Children to Love the Prophets

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Ensign, Apr. 1996, pp. 44-50

In the confusion and commotion of our day, we and our children need the power of revelation from the Lord’s prophets.

A few weeks ago my wife and I attended a beautiful temple wedding. The bride and groom were radiant as they anticipated their life together. The temple sealer assigned to perform the wedding was an elderly, spiritual man and the grandfather of the groom. He, with his wife of fifty years, had lived a life of honesty and service. Now, in the winter of their lives, they spent much of their time serving in the temple.

That day was a very special occasion. For the first time, this patriarch would use his sealing power to perform the sacred wedding ceremony for one in his own family. His humility and gratitude were evident in his aged face.

I anxiously anticipated the counsel from this wise grandfather to the awaiting couple. How much he had lived! How much wisdom he could share with them! After expressing his love, the sealer said that he would share just one bit of counsel with the young couple. “But,” he added, “if you will follow this counsel, it will bring you joy and happiness throughout your lives.” His advice came immediately: “Heed the words of the modern-day prophets. Follow the Lord’s prophets and Apostles who are upon the earth. They will lead you on the path you must follow.”

The counsel was finished. The beautiful ceremony followed, and soon we were exiting the temple. In the weeks that followed, I thought of the wisdom of this loving grandfather and the pearl of great price he had left to his grandson and to the bride. In the years ahead, this couple’s willingness to follow the counsel will make such a difference in their lives.

Perilous Times

Ours is a day long foreseen. We live in the perilous times spoken of by [page 45] the Apostle Paul. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (2 Tim. 3:2). The Lord described the condition this way: “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world” (D&C 1:16).

The world of our teenage children is far different from my teenage life of thirty years ago. Profanity, dishonesty, immorality, and irreverence all tower around them. The influences of the media and a world set on a course we cannot follow push against them. Much of the innocence so precious to youth has been lost.

And yet, we should not be intimidated or overly alarmed. These events have all been foreseen. In this deteriorating situation, the kingdom of God will strengthen. President Brigham Young prophesied, “It was revealed to me in the commencement of this Church, that the Church would spread, prosper, grow and extend, and that in proportion to the spread of the Gospel among the nations of the earth, so would the power of Satan rise” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978, p. 72). Nephi saw that the latter-day members of the Church “were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (1 Ne. 14:14).

Fifteen Men Show the Way

Our challenge as parents is to prepare our homes so that our children might be “armed with righteousness.” In the future, a discernable distinction of the true followers of Christ will be the heed and attention they give to the living prophets and Apostles. As our children listen to these men, they will find their way.

We sustain fifteen men as prophets, seers, and revelators. This calling and ordination is unique among all others. In the Book of Mormon, Ammon explained the role of a seer: “But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 8:17). In the confusion and commotion of our day and of
the days ahead, we and our children need the power of revelation from the Lord’s prophets. The Lord has always revealed his will through his servants the prophets (see Amos 3:7), but as the world’s course diverges even more dramatically from the path of righteousness, our trust in the voice of the Lord through his servants (see D&C 1:38) will be even more critical to our knowing right from wrong.

How do we help our children to love the modern prophets and trust in their words? To love the prophets and seek their counsel is more than silently accepting them from a distance. It is different from being attentive to their teaching in only the most general ways.

We Love Those We Know

I once found myself among a group of deacons in the southeastern United States. The subject turned to the Atlanta Braves. The boys knew each of the players on that baseball team. They knew the starting lineup, the home-run leader, the pitcher with the best record, and those on injured reserve. My questions then turned to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I asked if the boys knew the names of those Church leaders. Silence. Finally the name of the prophet was spoken. With some encouragement, the last name of one of the counselors in the First Presidency surfaced. No other names were known.

Some might say it is not the leaders who are important, but the message they bring. Yet, if our children do not know the names of the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, they most likely will not know their messages either. Others might say there are so many General Authorities that our children cannot know them all. However, our focus must rest with those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. While the Church has grown, that number—fifteen—has remained the same.

Coming to Know Our Leaders

When I was a young boy, I remember Apostles coming to our quarterly stake conferences. Often I would stand with my parents in a long line running down the aisle of the chapel, awaiting the chance to shake an Apostle’s hand. I have never forgotten the feelings I had as I met the Lord’s servants. But with the Church now more than five times the size it was in my childhood, there continue to be only fifteen men sustained as prophets, seers and revelators. While opportunities to personally meet some of these men are limited, taking our children to see and hear them in person, when such opportunities arise, does help our children to know and love their Church leaders.

For most of us, our contact with these servants of the Lord comes through general conference twice each year. Our family has mostly lived in the eastern part of the United States. On the weekend of general conference, we would spend Saturday and Sunday at the stake center viewing the conference by satellite transmission. Sometimes, as our children were asked to dress in their Sunday clothes on Saturday morning, spirits were less than enthusiastic. Few other young children of the stake [page 47] went to the stake center on Saturday to view general conference. Yet it is when children are young that parents must be innovative in helping them develop good habits regarding conference participation. As our children are given opportunities to observe and learn the role of these special witnesses, they will receive a spiritual confirmation of the sacred calling of their Church leaders, and they will feel a deeper love for and interest in these leaders and their message.

Viewing the general conference sessions with our family is not sufficient to bring a love for the prophets. On one occasion some years before my call as a General Authority, I conducted a meeting presided over by one of the Apostles. After the meeting, I asked him about his stake conference talks. “Do you prepare something specific for each stake conference?” I asked. He replied that he generally did not, but relied upon promptings received just prior to and during the conference. But then he added, “But my general conference talk is very different. I will normally go through twelve to fifteen drafts to be certain that it is what the Lord would have me say.” Many times since then I have asked myself, If an Apostle will go through twelve to fifteen drafts, is it pleasing to the Lord if I listen to or read his message one or two times? I don’t think so.

President Harold B. Lee said: “As the Latter-day Saints go home from this conference, it would be well if they consider seriously the importance of taking with them the report of this conference and let it be the guide to their walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, p. 68).

Following conference, the messages of the prophets must continue to be utilized in our families. For example, notes taken in conference can be reviewed in family home evening. In one family, each member has his own copy of the Ensign with the conference talks. With different color markers, they underline special exhortations and promises. Videotapes of each session are checked out from the stake library, and talks by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are specifically reviewed. On one occasion, as the father
paused the videotape at each specific counsel given, one of the teenage sons commented, “Dad, I bet we are the only family in the Church that watches the conference talks with the TV remote control on active alert.” I pray they are not.

**Blessings Come to the Obedient**

As we show our children our personal commitment to listen to and act upon the messages of the prophets, their faith grows in these servants of God. One father was sitting with his family in the stake center watching the April 1986 Saturday afternoon session of general conference. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking of the blessings of giving fast offerings, quoted President Marion G. Romney: “I am a firm believer that you cannot give to the Church and to the building up of the kingdom of God and be any poorer financially. … If the members of the Church would double their fast-offering contributions, the spirituality in the Church would double. We need to keep that in mind and be liberal in our contributions” ([Ensign](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1986/05), May 1986, p. 32).

The words went straight to the father’s heart. He had heard the quote before, but this time the impact on him was much greater. He determined to act immediately. He wrote a check and mailed it to the bishop. He explained his actions to his family, noting the powerful spiritual feelings he had experienced.

The following week brought an unexpected but positive change in a business investment. The father sensed that the material and subsequent spiritual blessings came because of acting on the impressions felt during the Apostle’s message. The family rejoiced together, and the children’s faith in the words of the prophets increased.

While studying the conference talks of October 1991, a family read an interesting admonition and promise from another living prophet, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He spoke of reverence and music and revelation. He said: “When we step into the chapel, we must—each of us must—watch ourselves lest we be guilty of intruding when someone is struggling to feel delicate spiritual communications. … We should sing the songs of Zion—they are an essential part of our worship. We must not neglect the hymns nor the exalted anthems of the Restoration. Read the First Presidency’s introduction in the hymnbook” ([Ensign](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1991/11), Nov. 1991, p. 22).

Later in his address, Elder Packer left this promise: “While we may not see an immediate, miraculous transformation, as surely as the Lord lives, a quiet one will take place. The spiritual power in the lives of each member and in the Church will increase. The Lord will pour out his Spirit upon us more abundantly. We will be less troubled, less confused. We will find revealed answers to personal and family problems without all the counseling which we seem now to need” ([ibid.](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1995/11), p. 23).

After reading the First Presidency’s introduction in the new hymnbook and considering the promises therein, the family determined that they would sing a hymn each night following their family scripture study. Furthermore, they determined they would arrive at sacrament meeting earlier, enter the chapel more reverently, and sit closer to the front. In the four years since the family accepted this counsel from a living prophet, they have unquestionably seen the promises fulfilled. The children’s love for the prophets and their trust in their messages have strengthened.

As a family studied the conference ([page 49](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1986/05)) talks of the prophets and the Apostles, a young teenager fell upon the words by Elder James E. Faust, now a counselor in the First Presidency: “I would counsel all students, if they can, to arrange their schedules so that they do not study on the Sabbath. If students and other seekers after truth will do this, their minds will be quickened and the infinite Spirit will lead them to the verities they wish to learn” ([Ensign](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1991/11), Nov. 1991, p. 34). She determined she would follow the counsel. In the months that followed, she experienced the blessing promised by Elder Faust. She knew the help came from listening to the voice of the Lord through his prophets.

**And During the Last Six Months**

Since the last general conference, what have we done with the counsel and encouragement we received from our Church leaders?

Perhaps the example of one family with one issue might help us see applications for our own families. Last October a father and a mother noted that both President Gordon B. Hinckley and President Thomas S. Monson spoke of missionary work in the priesthood session of general conference. Their oldest son had just turned eighteen. He had always planned to serve a mission, and the parents saw the opportunity to prepare him further and strengthen the faith of other family members as well. The family began with the specific words of President Hinckley: “I throw out a challenge to every young man within this vast congregation tonight. Prepare yourself now to be worthy to serve the Lord as a full-time missionary” ([Ensign](https://www.lds.org/en/ensign/1995/11), Nov. 1995, p. 51).

The parents first complimented their son on his preparation and expressed to the rest of the family how proud they were of him. Next the question was asked, “Why is the Lord asking this of every young man?” To
answer this question the family searched the talks of President Hinckley given at the conference. One family member referred to his remarks in opening the conference: “The little stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands is rolling forth to fill the earth” (ibid., p. 8; see D&C 65:2). Others referred to the prophetic voice of his Sunday morning address: “We have not as yet carried the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. But we have made great strides. We have gone wherever we are permitted to go. God is at the helm and doors will be opened by His power according to His divine will. Of that I am confident. Of that I am certain” (ibid., pp. 70–71). Many other statements were raised and discussed.

In the next family discussion on the subject, the question was addressed, “What does President Hinckley mean by ‘prepare yourself’?” Among other comments, the family turned to the counsel of President Monson. He counseled one prospective missionary’s mother to [page 50] teach her son “how to cook, but more particularly, teach him how to get along with others” (ibid., p. 49). A schedule of friendly cooking classes were arranged between the son and the mother. It was determined that in the weeks ahead, principles of getting along with others would be discussed around the dinner table with examples from daily activities.

Next, a family member read this from President Monson: “Young men, you are preparing for your missions when you learn your duties as deacons, teachers, and priests and then perform those duties with determination and love, knowing you are on the Lord’s errand” (ibid.). The prospective missionary talked about his duties in the priesthood and how he could better perform them in his preparation. During the weeks that followed, more thought was given to these responsibilities.

On a later family home evening, the family looked at the promises given one who serves a mission. In President Hinckley’s talk to the priesthood, the family listed more than twenty-five very specific promises made to a young man who will serve with dedication. They included promises concerning education, vocation, family, and personal qualities of character. Included was this marvelous promise: “You will come to know your Redeemer as your greatest friend in time or eternity. You will realize that through His atoning sacrifice He has opened the way for eternal life and an exaltation above and beyond your greatest dreams” (ibid., p. 52).

In the months since last general conference, one eighteen-year-old feels much more prepared and enthusiastic about his decision to serve a full-time mission.

**The Lord Is Not Silent**

Each April and October we have the opportunity during general conference to sustain the fifteen presiding brethren of the Church, as well as the other General Authorities and Church officers. We begin by sustaining the living prophet as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On the day that the Church was established in 1830, the Lord clearly outlined the sacred role of the prophet and President of the Church. Speaking of the Prophet Joseph Smith, but setting the pattern throughout the last dispensation, the Lord said:

“Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

“For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:4–5).

In that same revelation, the Lord promised his covenant people a marvelous blessing as they diligently followed the prophet: “For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:6).

Next, we sustain fourteen other men as prophets, seers, and revelators: two counselors to the President, and twelve members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The role of the First Presidency among these brethren is very important. Describing these “three Presiding High Priests,” the Lord instructs that they are to be “upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church.” They lead the Church as they “form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church” (D&C 107:22).

At times the First Presidency speaks to us in unison. When they do so, these messages are generally read in sacrament meetings or priesthood leadership meetings. One example is the proclamation on the family, given by the united voice of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see Ensign, Nov. 1995, p. 102). Another example is the recent pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* (1990). Speaking of the messages of the First Presidency, Elder Packer emphasized, “No voice from any organization of the Church on any level of administration equals that of the First Presidency” (Ensign, Nov. 1993, p. 23).

Following their sustaining, these brethren speak to us. What do we do to bring their messages to our children? Do our children see in us the desire to follow the Brethren’s counsel? Do we, together as a family, find
ways to act upon their counsel and receive the blessings they promise?

The scriptures teach us that “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” and that “by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls” (Alma 37:6–7). I return to the advice of the saintly grandfather to his grandson in the temple. “Heed the words of the modern-day prophets. Follow the Lord’s prophets and Apostles who are upon the earth. They will lead you on the path you must follow.”