

Mark D. Ogletree

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The Fathering Practices of Joseph F. Smith

“The richest of all my earthly joys is my precious children.”
—Joseph F. Smith¹

Fathers are crucial to the healthy development of their children. Family scholars have documented that a father’s involvement in his child’s life influences three key outcomes: economic security, educational attainment, and delinquency avoidance.² From a gospel perspective, a loving, caring, involved father can affect his children positively in every aspect of their lives, especially spiritually. The impact of a strong father in the lives of his children is immeasurable.

The prophet Joseph F. Smith was an exceptional father and served as a patriarchal role model to the entire Church. Because of his love and kindness, Joseph F. was able to impact his children in many critical areas of their lives. In describing Joseph F. Smith as a father, the following areas will be considered: how he managed demands on his time and schedule, how he showed love and

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care towards his wives and children, how he served as a surrogate father to many other children, and how he taught the gospel in his home.

Father Time

Joseph F. Smith was extremely busy. During his entire tenure as a father, he was also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, where he served until he died. While an Apostle, he was nearly always a member of the First Presidency. Furthermore, during his prime fathering years, he was a member of the territorial House of Representatives, a full-time missionary, a city councilman, the Church Historian, and a recorder at the Endowment House. What little time he had left was divided between his family and his farm.

A day in the life of Joseph F. Smith typically began at four-thirty or five in the morning, when he performed his farm chores. Soon after, he was often found in the Endowment House doing ordinance work. He spent his afternoons attending to his Church administrative duties. When he was able to get out from behind his desk, he often spoke at funerals and administered to the sick. His position on the city council or in the territorial legislature occupied much of his time during the later afternoons and early evenings.

When Joseph F. had free evenings, he often stayed home or took one of his wives to the theater.³ He also enjoyed spending time with his children. He made the rounds each night, tucking his children into bed.⁴ “He took a personal interest in each child, devoting the time necessary to train and counsel within the limits of his crowded schedule.”⁵

He frequently had to perform more farm chores before retiring to bed. In fact, he spent many of his weekends and other spare moments in maintaining his farm. Because of his many responsibilities, Joseph F. had a difficult time keeping up with his farm duties. He lamented once in his journal, “At home, mostly at work about home. I have no one to do anything about my place but myself. My wives have their children to take care of, all of them being small, . . . my oldest boy being 7 years of age. I am not in circumstances to hire help. I am compelled therefore to ‘pitch in’ . . . both morning and evening after the usual labors of the day.”⁶

As an Apostle and member of the First Presidency, many of Joseph F.’s weekends were occupied with stake conference assignments and other ecclesiastical duties. Nevertheless, he understood the need to balance his heavy work schedule with recreation and cultural activities, a practice that was crucial for his

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President Joseph F. Smith in his thirties, the prime of his fatherhood. Photo by C. W. Carter, circa 1874, courtesy of Church History Library.

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own sanity. Historian Francis M. Gibbons reported, “[Joseph] was fond of skating, and during the cold winter months occasionally indulged in this sport. His favorite exercise, however, was walking, and he frequently took long walks that not only were physically invigorating but also had a mentally soothing effect.”⁷ Joseph F. also enjoyed plays, concerts, music, and drama and was fond “of a good story or a humorous joke.”⁸

He spent a healthy dose of time with his children, but it was often in work-related efforts, such as fixing up the home or the farm. Joseph believed deeply in the principle of work and industry. Not only was he a tireless worker, but he taught his children the value of work. He declared, “Labor is the key to the true happiness of the physical and spiritual being. If a man possesses millions [of dollars], his children should still be taught how to labor with their hands; boys and girls should receive a home training which will fit them to cope with the practical, daily affairs of family life.”⁹

For example, on Saturday, May 18, 1872, Joseph F. recorded: “Making a fence at home. Painted and nailed up 215 pickets, six nails in each. Three rail picket fence. Edward assisting me.”¹⁰ Edward was one of Joseph’s adopted children and was somewhat older than his siblings. Therefore, Joseph and Edward did many things together, and Joseph relied heavily on him to help with the farm.¹¹ One of the ways that Joseph F. connected with his children and spent time with them was by working with them. In August 1879, Joseph F. recorded in his journal, “Doing my chores at home. Pulled a large quantity of weeds out of my garden, my children helping me.”¹² The next month, Joseph recorded that he got up early to feed and milk his cows. “I also gathered a couple of buckets of apples for the cows—the children also gathered some for the cows.”¹³ Joseph F.’s children also helped him to mend fences, paint barns, and fix up the home. However, he often tried to balance work with play. Work always came first, but playing seemed just as important.

For example, on the same day when Joseph and his children harvested apples, they later went to Lake Point on the Great Salt Lake (which is about twenty miles west of the present-day Salt Lake City International Airport). Joseph F. took his wives Sarah and Julina and seven of their children. The family played in the lake, went out to eat, and rode the train back into Salt Lake City. As the family settled in for a relaxing evening, Joseph rushed off to a city council gathering, only to have the meeting adjourn shortly after he arrived.¹⁴

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The family also enjoyed swimming at Blackrock,¹⁵ a beach resort on the Great Salt Lake complete with a refreshment stand, picnic bowery, and bath and shower houses.¹⁶ On Friday, August 25, 1871, Joseph F. reported that his family, as well as the Richards family, loaded up their wagons and headed out to Blackrock. They had a picnic there, which included melons, fruit, and wine. “The girls all had baths except Julina who was not well.”¹⁷

Another form of family recreation was frequenting the warm springs north of Salt Lake City, which were often compared to the pool of Siloam and known for their “healing” qualities. Joseph F., his wives, and his children would often picnic at the warm springs, soak in the pools, take baths or showers, and then drive home in their carriage. The Smiths often invited other families to accompany them. When Hyrum Mack Smith turned eight years old, Joseph F. baptized and confirmed him at the spring.¹⁸

The Smith family also enjoyed other activities. Joseph F. often took his wives and children on carriage or buggy rides.¹⁹ Besides riding out to the springs, they would sometimes travel to Fuller’s Hill, which was a pleasure garden, complete with rides and amusements. Other times, when they didn’t want to travel so far, Joseph F. drove the family to the town drug store for soda water.²⁰ Joseph F. also enjoyed taking his children to the fair and to the circus when it came to town. In May 1873, he recorded that he took “Julina and my two little girls to the circus, the children were very much pleased with the animals and birds.”²¹ Joseph F. especially enjoyed being with his children outdoors. They swam in the summer, as previously noted, and in the winter he loved to sled and “frolic” in the snow with his “babies.”²²

Joseph F. Smith was an “intentional” father who found ways to make time for his family. He enjoyed working, playing, and having fun with them. In this way, he helped build lasting memories in the lives of his children. The enjoyable times the family had together also strengthened them as they forged through many trials and obstacles. Contemporary fathers who are extremely busy can learn much from Joseph F. Smith and his priorities.

Patriarchal Love, Care, and Concern

Joseph F. lost his father at age five and his mother at age thirteen. Joseph’s heart must have ached for parental love—especially since he was robbed of it at such a young age. He was very grateful for surrogate fathers like Brigham Young and George A. Smith, who each took Joseph F. under their wing. They literally helped

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Fuller's Hill Pleasure Garden was a place of recreation the Smith family frequented (1887). © 2008 Utah State Historical Society.

save Joseph F. in many ways, and he grieved bitterly when these “giants of men” passed away.

Perhaps by overcompensating, or at least by concentrating on what he lost as a child, Joseph F. Smith was a father who was demonstrative in paternal affection and care. He never wanted his children to doubt his love and allegiance for them. Moreover, he was also in tune with their needs. He demonstrated love to his offspring physically, verbally, and emotionally. He taught parents that

if you can only convince your children that you love them, that your soul goes out to them for their good, that you are their truest friend, they, in turn, will place confidence in you and will love you and seek to do your bidding and to carry out your wishes with your love. But if you are selfish, unkindly to them, and if they are not confident that they have your entire affection, they will be selfish, and will not care whether they please you or carry out your wishes or not, and the result will be that they will grow wayward, thoughtless, and careless.²³

Joseph F. gave nicknames to each of his children. He often referred to his eldest daughter, Mercy Josephine, as “Jodo”²⁴ or “Dodo.”²⁵ His son Joseph Richards

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was known as “Joseph R.”²⁶ while Hyrum was known as “Hyrum M.”²⁷ Donnette was most often called “Donnie,”²⁸ while Mary Sophronia was referred to as “Mamie.”²⁹ Joseph F. called his children by these endearing nicknames well into adulthood. In fact, he often referred to his children as his “babies,” regardless of how old they were.

Another way Joseph F. expressed his love to his children was by purchasing things for them. How he loved to buy things for his children! One Christmas he wept openly when he saw Christmas treasures in store windows downtown, knowing that he did not have the funds to purchase the bare minimum for his “babies.” He reported, “I wanted something to please them, and to mark the Christmas day from all other days but not a cent to do it with! I walked up and down Main Street, looking into the shop windows . . . everywhere—and then slunk out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child until my poured-out grief relieved my aching heart; and after awhile returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with my children, grateful and happy . . . for them.”³⁰

It broke Joseph’s heart that he could not give his children the kind of Christmas he felt they deserved.³¹ Once Joseph was able to obtain a steady cash flow, his journal became saturated with accounts of purchasing his children clothing, gloves,³² hats,³³ skates,³⁴ knives,³⁵ boots,³⁶ sleds,³⁷ and whatever else they may have needed. He especially loved buying his children toys,³⁸ nuts, and candy.³⁹ Joseph’s son Samuel remembered that it was customary for his father to kiss and hug his children when he came home from work; however, the added bonus was the licorice⁴⁰ he shared from his pocket!⁴¹

One of the ways Joseph demonstrated love to his family was by giving gifts. Not only did he enjoy purchasing gifts for his children, but his wives were often the recipients of wonderful gifts. On his missions, it was common for him to send clothing, silverware, or other home decor to his wives via mail. Since Joseph F.’s childhood was deprived of material possessions and even some of the basic necessities, it was imperative for him to put food on the table and meet the basic financial needs of his children. He enjoyed being able to provide material goods for his family—things that he often lacked as a child.

Joseph also showed love towards his children by hugging and kissing them. He was not shy when it came to expressing physical love to his children. On June 27, 1918 (about five months prior to his death), at the dedication of a monument in the Salt Lake City Cemetery to honor his father, Hyrum Smith, Joseph F.

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spoke thus: "I am rich; the Lord has given me great riches in children and in children's children. . . . I want you to just take a look here at a little flock of my grandchildren—right here, every one of them. I love them. I know them all. I never meet them but what I kiss them, just as I do my own children."⁴²

This habit of showing constant physical affection is exemplified in one of Joseph's last memories of his father occurred in June of 1844. Before Hyrum left for Carthage Jail, he gathered his family and prayed with them. He bid each of his loved ones goodbye except for Joseph F., who was out playing. When Hyrum was about to ride away, he saw Joseph F. in the street. He rode over, picked Joseph up, hugged and kissed him, and then charged him to be a good boy while he was away.⁴³ That was the last time Joseph F. Smith saw his father alive; it was a memory engraved into the core of his heart.

Physical affection became important in the life of Joseph F. Since he had lost his father as a boy and his mother as a teenager, he "lavished upon his children all the love and affection of which he was capable. His feelings were shown not only by his words but by his looks and actions."⁴⁴ It was customary for him to kiss each of his children, no matter how old they were, or in the case of his grandchildren, no matter how dirty they were.⁴⁵ Most certainly, Joseph F. missed this kind of physical affection from his own parents, and he wanted his children to know that they were loved.

One of Joseph F.'s sons, Samuel, recalled a time he was serving in the armed forces during World War I. Once he came home on leave to visit his sick father, he surprised Joseph F. by entering the back door of the Beehive house. As Samuel approached, he noticed that his father was standing in his bathrobe with a cane in his hand. Samuel said that "when he saw me, he forgot about the cane and hurried over to me. He took me in his arms, hugging and kissing me, saying 'My boy, my boy.'"⁴⁶ Joseph F. didn't need to say much; Samuel understood how much his father loved him.

Joseph F. and his wives adopted several children and raised them as their own. One such daughter was named Marjorie. As a little girl, Marjorie was extremely afraid of thunder and lightning. Once, during a very terrible storm, Marjorie was crying and whimpering. Joseph F. got up, put on his robe, and came into Marjorie's room, where he tenderly comforted her. Then, he invited Marjorie to put her robe and slippers on, and then they walked out onto the veranda, attached to the second story of the Beehive House. Marjorie then recalled, "He held

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my hand, and that gave me a feeling of security and strength. Still, when the sky would light up, I would tremble. Father explained to me what lightning meant and what made the noise. Then he said, 'See, it will bring the rain that will make everything so beautiful. You must not be afraid.' From that day to this I have never been frightened of a thunderstorm."⁴⁷

On one occasion, Joseph F.'s son Willard was playing in the road in front of the Beehive House. A bully approached Willard, roughed him up, and then shoved his face into the mud, nearly suffocating him. This was in February, and it was very near Valentine's Day. Willard decided to write a valentine card to the bully, including every evil word that he could think of. But Willard inadvertently sent the Valentine card that was intended for the bully to one of his uncles. The wise uncle, of course, passed the note to Willard's father. One morning after family prayer, Joseph F. followed his routine by kissing each one of his children, except for Willard. Instead, he told his son, "I will see you in my office."

Feeling rebuked, Willard went into this father's office and waited patiently as Joseph F. wrote for a while at his desk. Joseph F. then opened a large Bible and said, "Come close, Willard. What does that say?" Willard read, "Swear not at all." Then Joseph F. turned to another passage and asked Willard to read it. Willard reported, "It says, 'Forgive seventy times seven.'" Joseph F. agreed with his son, and then had him read a third scripture, and then a fourth, and then several more. This process of teaching from the scriptures went on for approximately twenty minutes. Finally, Joseph F. said, "Come here, Son." He then embraced Willard and kissed him and that was the end of the lesson. Willard later said that he "never used a bad word again." Joseph had won his son over with love. The lesson of forgiveness and the legacy of physical affection continued through the generations. As a father, Willard R. Smith continued the tradition of kissing his children on the lips, no matter how young or old they were.⁴⁸ Arguably, the following statement on child discipline by President Joseph F. Smith is one of the most incredible declarations given on the topic. He said:

If you wish your children to be taught in the principles of the gospel, if you wish them to love the truth and understand it, if you wish them to be obedient to and united with you, love them! And prove to them that you do love them by your every word or act to them. . . . When you speak or talk to them, do it not in anger, do it not harshly, in a condemning spirit. Speak to them kindly; get them

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down and weep with them if necessary and get them to shed tears with you if possible. Soften their hearts; get them to feel tenderly toward you. Use no lash and no violence. . . . Approach them with reason . . . with persuasion and love unfeigned. With these means, if you cannot gain your boys and your girls . . . there will be no means left in the world by which you can win them yourselves. But, get them to feel as you feel, have interest in the things in which you take interest, to love the gospel as you love it, to love one another as you love them; to love their parents as the parents love the children. You can't do it any other way. You can't do it by unkindness; you cannot do it by driving; our children are like we are; we couldn't be driven; we can't be driven now. . . .

You can't force your boys, nor your girls into heaven. You may force them to hell, by using harsh means in the efforts to make them good, when you yourselves are not as good as you should be. . . . You can only correct your children by love, in kindness, by love unfeigned, by persuasion, and reason.⁴⁹

Joseph appears to have lived exactly how he taught when it came to child discipline. He did not force his children to be good. Instead, he taught them, he wept with them, and he loved them.

Another demonstration of Joseph F.'s love and affection occurred when his children were sick or injured. It seemed that Joseph had a sixth sense when it came to detecting when his children were in trouble. On one occasion, Joseph F. felt extremely depressed and anxious about their well-being. At the time, he was far away from home on Church business. He later learned by letter that the reason for his depression was that "one of his beloved little ones at home lay cold in death."⁵⁰ Another time, while laboring in Scotland in April 1874, Joseph felt some anxiety about his children. He tried to pass his worries off, but could not do it. He learned a little while later that several of his children had scarlet fever. He wrote in his journal, "I have felt some worried about my children Being [*sic*] sick, but I must leave them in the hands of the Lord."⁵¹

Since several of Joseph F.'s children died young, and childhood disease was prevalent, his worry for their health and well-being often consumed him. His journals are replete with accounts of his children's sicknesses. When they were unwell, Joseph F. was deeply involved in their treatment and care. When Mercy Josephine was sick, he wrote, "Waited on my little daughter all day."⁵² Although this was an isolated incident, it was a common practice of his to be up and down

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all night with his sick little ones.⁵³ He would hold his children, comfort them, and medically treat them. Because many childhood sicknesses in his day were respiratory related, Joseph did not feel comfortable sleeping.⁵⁴ He wanted to make sure his “chicks” were breathing free and easy. Therefore, he would stay up into the early hours of the morning—many times not going to bed until three or four in the morning. Often he would only sleep for an hour or two, and then begin his workday.⁵⁵ Charles W. Nibley, Joseph F.’s close friend, observed, “I have visited his home when one of his little children was down sick. I have seen him come home from his work at night tired, as he naturally would be, and yet he would walk the floor for hours with that little one in his arms, petting it and loving it, encouraging it in every way with such tenderness and such a soul of pity and love as not one mother in a thousand would show.”⁵⁶

Another testament of Joseph’s love for his children is found in letters he wrote them while he was away on Church business. On July 3, 1875, he wrote his wife Sarah, “One of the severest trials of my mission is being deprived of the society of my family and the innocent prattle of my little babes.”⁵⁷ He missed his family so much that he often stared at photographs of his children. Occasionally, Joseph F. would talk to the photographs. He wrote to Julina, “When I get time I take my Album and talk to all my babies and call them all the little names I can think of. . . . Please keep my weaknesses over my babies to yourselves.”⁵⁸

On March 30, 1875, while serving as a missionary in England, Joseph wrote to his daughter, six-year-old Mary Sophronia, whom he often called “Mamie.” In the letter, Joseph F. explained why he had been away for such a long time. He also attempted to teach her a few principles, as well as assess her learning. The letter reads as follows:

I am going to write you a letter. I know you will be pleased to get a letter from your Papa. You have wondered many times, no doubt, why I stay away from home so long. You must not think it is because I want to stay away from you, and from your little brothers and sisters; but it is because I am on a mission. I am trying to do what the Lord wants me to do. By and by I will return home. But not until I have filled my mission. You will understand better what a mission is when you get older. I want you to be a real good girl. You must mind your Mamma and Aunties, and be so good to all your little brothers and sisters. I wonder if you know all your letters? How many can you count? You are over

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five years old now. Do you know when you were born? Can you sing any pretty songs? Can you speak some nice pieces? When Mamma writes you must answer me these questions. From your affectionate Papa.⁵⁹

In another letter, he invited Mamie to “pray to the Lord to keep us all from harm until we meet again.”⁶⁰ He then reassured her that “Papa prays for all my little children morning & night & always.”⁶¹ For Joseph F., one of the best ways to stay connected to his children was to view their pictures often, write them letters, and pray for them constantly. He also taught his children to be compassionate brothers and sisters, to help around the home, and how to love the gospel of Jesus Christ. In August 1875, he wrote to his son Hyrum Mack:

You must be a good boy. Take good care of Alvin, and little brother Richards, and little sister Donnie, and never let anybody hurt them. Papa wants his little men to grow up great and good men. Good Latter-day Saints and true to their fathers. Who was the Savior of Mankind? Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Who was one of the greatest Prophets that ever lived and one of the best, and greatest men that ever lived? Your grand uncle, Joseph Smith. And President Brigham Young is another Prophet of God and good man.⁶²

Joseph F. Smith was a kind and affectionate father. When he was away from his children, he missed them terribly. When he was with them, he cared for them and nurtured them as well as any mother could do. Modern fathers can strengthen their relationships with their own children by following the example Joseph F. Smith demonstrated in terms of love and affection.

Surrogate Father

Joseph F. Smith was not only committed to his own family, but to all children, male and female, Mormon and non-Mormon. He treated all children with love and kindness. He adopted several children and took them under his wing. He looked out for children in his neighborhood, bought them candy,⁶³ and occasionally babysat them.⁶⁴ Joseph F. also treated his grandchildren as if they were his own children and loved spending time with them.

Once he held a party for all of his grandchildren. He asked his daughters to take care of the details, such as food and entertainment. However, he was surprised when he walked into his dining room and found his adult children seated

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at the table with their spouses. "Where are the grandchildren?" he asked. The aged patriarch was told that his grandchildren would be eating in another room—the same room they were playing in. Joseph then told the adults, "No. They are to eat in here. You may eat in there."⁶⁵ Joseph F.'s grandchildren knew of his love for them, and they never questioned his loyalty.

Charles W. Nibley, the Presiding Bishop of the Church, remembered that "[Joseph F.'s] love for children was unbounded." Bishop Nibley recounted a trip the two of them took to St. George, Utah. Many little children were paraded before President Smith, who adored them. It was Bishop Nibley's responsibility to get the company going to the next settlement, but it was difficult to pull President Smith away from the children. "He wanted to shake hands and talk with every one of them."⁶⁶

Once, President Smith was riding in a train car that was hot and uncomfortable. Across from him sat a mother with three small children, one of whom was an infant. The children were hot, tired, and upset, the baby was crying, and the mother was exhausted. President Smith approached the mother and asked if he could take the baby and try to get it to sleep. "This he did and rocked the infant in his own arms, crooning to it and gained its confidence while it tangled its hands in his beard, until it fell asleep."⁶⁷

Because of Joseph F.'s love for all children, he could not stand it when they were abused or mistreated. Nothing disturbed Joseph F. more than to see a child maltreated or neglected by its parents.⁶⁸ Once President Smith attended a stake conference and the meeting hall was completely full. With the quarters quite crowded, a large, strong woman came near the front of the meeting room and abruptly jerked a small child from her seat. The woman then took the seat for herself, leaving the small girl standing in the aisle. President Smith directed someone to bring the child to him, and he then invited her to sit by his side on the stand. When it was President Smith's turn to speak, he powerfully taught the congregation, including the woman who took the child's seat, the proper way to respect children and how they should be treated. He explained that "little children were as much entitled to seats in the congregations of the Saints as grown people, especially when they came early and obtained them."⁶⁹

Perhaps because of his own experiences as an orphan, Joseph F. especially looked out for those children or youth who seemed to need help or attention. A teenage girl who was not a member of the Church traveled to Salt Lake City and

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took a job in a downtown hotel. She didn't like her job and decided to quit, leaving with a total of twenty-five cents. She was a stranger in Salt Lake City and had nowhere to go for food or shelter. She walked up the street until she came to the Eagle Gate, where she stopped and observed people going about their work. Everyone seemed so happy, and yet this girl was miserable and in great distress. No one spoke to or noticed her. She was ready to burst into tears when the door of the Beehive house opened and President Joseph F. Smith walked out. He walked past the distressed girl, took a few more steps, and then turned around. He approached her and said, "What is the matter, my girl? You seem to be in trouble." The girl reported that President Smith listened to her as her own father would have. Then he said, "Well, daughter, come with me." He took the girl to his home, presented her to his wife, and said, "Here is a poor, friendless girl. Take care of her until she gets a good place to work." The girl reported that she was taken to the house of President Smith and was treated with much kindness. In time, she found a better situation and moved on with her life. However, she stated, "No, I shall never forget President Joseph F. Smith."⁷⁰ Modern fathers would do well to follow Joseph F.'s example of reaching out to all children—not merely their own offspring.

Gospel Teacher

The gospel of Jesus Christ was the centerpiece of Joseph F. Smith's life. He viewed everything through the gospel lens. His next greatest priority was his family. In fact, the gospel and his family were all that really mattered to him. He wrote to his wife Edna, "I have nothing to live for but my family and the Kingdom of God, as pertaining to this mortal life."⁷¹

Joseph F. felt that teaching the gospel in his home was one of his chief duties. He taught, "Not one child in a hundred would go astray, if the home environment, example and training, were in harmony with the truth of the gospel of Christ. . . . Fathers and mothers, you are largely to blame for the infidelity and indifference of your children. You can remedy the evil by earnest worship, example, training and discipline, in the home."⁷²

He lived what he taught, especially when it came to practicing his religion in the home. One of his daughters, Edith, remembered that the family "would kneel down always in the morning or in the evening and have our family prayer. Many times I actually thought that the Lord was right in the house because of the way Father would talk to him and express his feelings. He was talking to his

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Heavenly Father, and we felt it keenly. Often as a little girl I wanted to open my eyes during the prayer to see which direction the Lord was in because Father was talking to him and we knew it.”⁷³

Not only was it obvious to his children that he had a close relationship with his Heavenly Father, but it was just as apparent that Joseph F. practiced the principles he knew to be true. There was a time in Joseph F.’s life when he was severely ridiculed in the local media. Many things said about him were downright slanderous. Some of these stories and allegations trickled into the schools, where some of his children heard them. Edith came home from school one day, extremely frustrated about the lies being told about her father. Joseph F. looked at her with a smile and said, “Baby, don’t get upset. They are not hurting me one bit; they are only hurting themselves. Don’t you know, Baby, that when someone tells a lie they are only hurting themselves more than anyone else?” Years later, Edith reflected, “That was a lesson I have never forgotten.”⁷⁴

Joseph F. Smith was a powerful gospel teacher. He was also an astute scholar and historian. His children benefited tremendously from his wealth of knowledge and powerful teaching. Joseph Fielding Smith said of his father:

He spent [part of his home time] instructing his children in the principles of the gospel. They one and all rejoiced in his presence and were grateful for the wonderful words of counsel and instruction which he imparted on these occasions in the midst of anxiety. They have never forgotten what they were taught, and the impressions have remained with them and will likely to do so forever. . . . My father was the most tenderhearted man I ever knew. . . . Among my fondest memories are the hours I have spent by his side discussing principles of the gospel and receiving instruction as only he could give it. In this way the foundation for my own knowledge was laid in truth.⁷⁵

Joseph F. Smith constantly lobbied parents to teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ in their homes. In the April 1912 general conference he stated, “It is the duty of Latter-day Saints to teach their children the truth, to bring them up in the way they should go, to teach them the first principles of the gospel . . . that they may walk in the light as Christ is in the light.”⁷⁶

One of the favored memories of Joseph Fielding Smith was studying the gospel with his father. In fact, when Joseph Fielding turned eight years of age, Joseph F. was hard-pressed for money. Nevertheless, he managed to scrape

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some funds together and purchased for his son a defective copy of the Book of Mormon.⁷⁷ After Joseph Fielding's baptism, Joseph F. presented him with the book, accompanied by the invitation to read it. Joseph Fielding went to work and commenced reading. By the time he was ten, he had read the Book of Mormon twice.⁷⁸ He became one of the greatest doctrinal scholars of the Book of Mormon in our dispensation. His love affair for the truth began at the knee of his father. Contemporary fathers can become the spiritual leaders in their homes by following the course Joseph F. Smith laid out. Joseph F. not only taught the gospel to his children—but also lived the teachings of the Savior daily.

Notes

1. Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Life of Joseph F. Smith, Sixth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 449.
2. K. M. Harris, F. F. Furstenberg, and J. K. Marmer, "Paternal Involvement with Adolescents in Intact Families: The Influence of Fathers Over the Life Course," *Demography* 35, no. 2 (May 1998): 201–16.
3. Joseph F. Smith (hereafter referred to as JFS), diary, January 1, 1874 to January 27, 1874, box 3, folder 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
4. Smith, *Sixth President of the Church*, 441–22.
5. Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 191.
6. JFS, diary, August 25, 1879 to September 13, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
7. Gibbons, *Patriarch and Preacher*, 99.
8. Smith, *Sixth President of the Church*, 443.
9. *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 527.
10. JFS, diary, May 7, 1872 to May 26, 1872, box 3, folder 2.
11. JFS, diary, November 2, 9, 28, and 30, and December 14, 1872, box 3, folder 2.
12. JFS, diary, August 21, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
13. JFS, diary, August 25 and September 3, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
14. JFS, diary, September 3, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
15. JFS, diary, August 25 and September 9, box 3, folder 1.
16. Tommy W. Case, "Black Rock," *TWC Transcribing*; <http://www.twc-transcribing.com/greatsaltlake/BlackRockSunsetBeach/Blackrock000.htm>.
17. JFS, diary, August 25, 1851, box 3, folder 1.
18. JFS, diary, March 21, 1880, box 4, folder 1.
19. JFS, diary, March 19, 1880, box 4, folder 1.
20. JFS, diary, June 22, 1872, box 3, folder 2.
21. JFS, diary, August 8, 1872, and May 29, 1873, box 3, folder 3.
22. JFS, diary, January 1, 1879, box 3, folder 11.

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23. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 388.
24. JFS, diary, June 7 and 8, 1870, box 2, folder 6.
25. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks (1875–1917), January 22, 1875 to January 28, 1875, box 30, folder 1, Special Collections, Brigham Young University, 28–51.
26. JFS, diary, December 9, 1873, and July 24, 1879, box 3, folder 5, and box 3, folder 11, respectively.
27. JFS, diary, November 12 and July 15, 1879, box 3, folder 11; Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Hyrum M., August 21, 1875, box 30, folder 2, 138.
28. JFS, diary, February 1 and March 12, 1874, and January 20, 1879, box 3, folder 6, respectively.
29. JFS, diary, March 12, 1874, and March 26, 1880, box 3, folder 6, and box 4, folder 1, respectively.
30. Arthur R. Bassett, “Joseph F. Smith: Families and Generation Gaps,” *New Era*, January 1972, 40.
31. Emerson Roy West, *Latter-Day Prophets* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), 63.
32. JFS, diary, March 25 and 29; April 9, 16 and 30; and June 4, 1874; box 3, folder 6.
33. JFS, diary, May 9, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
34. JFS, diary, December 24, 1879, box 2, folder 5.
35. JFS, diary, May 19, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
36. JFS, diary, November 12, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
37. JFS, diary, December 23, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
38. JFS, diary, December 24, 1869, box 2, folder 5.
39. JFS, diary, December 24, 1869; November 13 (memoranda entry) and December 31, 1873; and March 20, 1880; box 4, folder 1; box 3, folder 3; and box 2, folder 5, respectively.
40. Joseph’s granddaughter Amelia Smith McConkie recalled that when he would return home from the Church offices, his grandchildren always waited for his greeting. But it wasn’t just hugs and kisses he would bring. He also would have a pocket full of candy that he would distribute to them. Amelia Smith McConkie, “Grandpa Joseph F. Smith,” *Ensign*, September 1993, 12–14.
41. Norman S. Bosworth, “Remembering Joseph F. Smith: Loving Father, Devoted Prophet,” *Ensign*, June 1983, 21–22.
42. “Fathers in the Home,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 381.
43. Don C. Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith: Daughter of Britain* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 164.
44. Gibbons, *Patriarch and Preacher*, 88.
45. Smith, *Sixth President of the Church*, 476.
46. Bosworth, “Remembering Joseph F. Smith,” 21–22.
47. Bosworth, “Remembering Joseph F. Smith,” 21–22.
48. Truman G. Madsen, *Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 159–60.
49. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 316–17.
50. Smith, *Sixth President of the Church*, 280–81.
51. JFS, diary, April 28, 1874, box 3, folder 6.
52. JFS, diary, June 4, 1874, box 2, folder 6.
53. JFS, diary, April 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 26, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
54. JFS, diary, December 11, 12, and 14, 1879, box 3, folder 11.
55. JFS, diary, May 29–30, 1879, box 3, folder 11.

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56. Preston Nibley, *Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 213.
57. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Sarah, July 3, 1875, box 30, folder 1, 421.
58. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Julina, January 7, 1875, box 30, folder 1, 6–7.
59. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Mary Sophronia, March 30, 1875, box 30, folder 1, 240.
60. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to “Mamie” (Mary Sophronia), August 21, 1875, box 30, folder 2, 136.
61. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, Letter to “Mamie,” August 21, 1875, 136.
62. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Hyrum M., August 21, 1875, box 30, folder 2, 138.
63. JFS, diary, March 19, 20, and 29; 1879, box 3, folder 11; President Smith seemed to have a fond affection for neighborhood child Harry Lipton. On March 19, 1879, he bought Harry ten cents worth of candy; on March 20, 1879, he sent a doctor to see Harry when he was sick.
64. JFS, diary, October 31, 1864, to May 21st, 1877, box 2, folder 4.
65. Amelia Smith McConkie, “Grandpa Joseph F. Smith,” *Ensign*, September 1993, 12–14.
66. Charles W. Nibley, “Reminiscences,” in *Gospel Doctrine*, 523.
67. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Life of Joseph F. Smith* (American Fork, UT: Grandin Press, 2010), 511.
68. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 511.
69. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 511.
70. As cited in Smith, *Sixth President of the Church*, 183–84.
71. Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, letter to Edna, February 6, 1875, box 30, folder 1, 110.
72. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 302.
73. Bosworth, “Remembering Joseph F. Smith,” 21–22.
74. Bosworth, “Remembering Joseph F. Smith,” 21–22.
75. Joseph Fielding Smith, cited in Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 40.
76. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 291.
77. Joseph Fielding Smith noted that the book was reduced in price because some of the pages were out of sequence. See Smith and Stewart, *Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 57.
78. Smith and Stewart, *Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 57.