

Committed Father

“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.”¹

—David O. McKay

The late Dr. Paul Pearsall, neuropsychologist, author, and popular lecturer admonished to all parents, “I warn you that if your family does not come first, your family will not last.”² Strong fathers understand that their family must top their priority list, regardless of other responsibilities. Committed fathers dedicate their time, talents, and resources to building and strengthening their families. Besides being willing to make sacrifices, committed fathers are involved, available, and accessible. *They put their family first.* Unfortunately, we live in an age where there are many distractions that compete for our time. For example, consider the television. Unlike a generation ago when most families had access to three channels, today there are literally thousands of channels to choose from. The average American family has their television set on approximately seven hours per day.³ One study documented that American men spend fifteen hours per week watching television, while women spend almost seventeen hours per week in front of the tube.⁴

Other media sources that compete for our time include computers, the Internet, music, social media, cell phones, text messages, video games, and Netflix. Many American men spend inordinate amounts of time on their smartphones, surfing the Internet and playing video games. According to a recent Nielsen survey, men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four are the most prevalent users of video games, with 48 percent of men using a video console each day, averaging 2.5 hours daily.⁵ No wonder family expert Dr. William Doherty warned, “The more we wire our houses, the less we connect with one another in our families.”⁶

However, being “wired” is only part of the problem. Many children today are overscheduled with competitive sports, club teams, tournaments, lessons, friends, parties, school activities, games, and performances. Not that any of these activities are bad, but too many activities can cause both children and parents much unwanted stress. It seems that life has become more complex than it probably should be. In fact, some modern parents feel that their children are busier than they are. Being busy has become the new status symbol, and the trophies now go to the busiest.⁷

With all of the contemporary distractions, a father’s commitment will be challenged, or at least interfered with. If fathers are to be effective, they must have clear priorities. Their family must come first in their lives. If we were to survey one thousand Latter-day Saint fathers and ask them, “What is the most important thing in your life?” it seems safe to assume that over 98 percent would say, “Family.” That is a very popular answer. However, there is often incongruence between what we say and what we actually do. For example, if we were to ask those one thousand Latter-day Saint fathers in our imaginary survey, “So, if your family is so important, how much time did you spend with your family this week? Last week? Yesterday? Last night?” it is possible that the percentage that would report significant time spent would drop drastically. Being a committed father requires more than mere lip service. Many of us will say that our family is our first priority. However, our priorities are determined by where we spend our time—not necessarily by what we verbalize. Dr. Stephen R. Covey—educator, author, and consultant—taught, “If you really want to prioritize your family, you simply have to plan ahead and be strong. It’s not enough to

say your family is important. If ‘family’ is really going to be top priority, you have to ‘hunker down, suck it up, and make it happen!’”⁸

To be a committed father is to literally bind ourselves to our children in a relationship.⁹ Commitment is the foundation stone on which successful fatherhood rests. Without commitment, there is no influence or effectiveness in fathering. Research from the National Study of Families and Households revealed that when fathers are committed and engaged, their children experience fewer behavioral problems and anxieties, get along well with others, and are much more responsible when compared to children who have fathers that are not committed or involved.¹⁰

Marriage Is the First Commitment

For a father, the first point of commitment in family life is to the marriage. Roman statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero said, “The first bond of society is marriage.”¹¹ Not only is marriage the first bond of society but it is certainly the prime relationship in a family. As the marriage goes, the family is sure to follow. It would be difficult for any father to be successful without a strong marriage relationship. As even the most casual Church historian will know that David O. McKay had a solid relationship with his wife, Emma Ray. Latter-day Saints who lived during President McKay’s tenure as the President of the Church were eyewitnesses to the love that this couple publicly demonstrated to each other. It was President McKay who taught, “A father can do no greater thing for his children than to let them feel that he loves their mother.”¹²

It was clear that President McKay loved Emma Ray and wished to be with her as often as possible. When he had to travel, he would attempt to take her with him any chance he could. Early in their marriage, when David served in the Weber Stake Sunday School superintendency, she would travel many miles with him in a horse-drawn buggy in the open air, holding their baby on her lap. All this was done so that she and David could spend time together. She once confided in a friend, “I have a husband who wants me to be with him, and I’m glad to do what he wants me to do.”¹³ And when David was required to travel alone as an Apostle, his letters to Emma Ray were filled with his deep love, loyalty,



David O. McKay and wife, Emma Ray. (Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.)

and commitment. He was constantly pledging his love, support, and admiration. He would often assure her, “My soul is with you.”¹⁴

Perhaps there is no more poignant tribute than the letter he wrote to all of his children, dated 25 October 1934, just after David was called into the First Presidency of the Church. In the letter, he gave every ounce of credit for his new calling to Emma Ray. He wrote of her:

Willingly and ably she has carried the responsibility of the household.

Uncomplainingly she has economized when our means have been limited—and that has been the case nearly all our lives.

Always prompt with meals, she has never said an unpleasant word or even shown a frown when I have kept her waiting, sometimes for hours.

If I had to take a train at midnight or later, she would either sit up with me or lie awake to make sure that I should not over sleep.

If duty required me to leave at five o'clock in the morning, she was never satisfied unless she could prepare me a bite of breakfast before I left home.

It has been mother who remembered the birthdays and purchased the Christmas presents.

Since January 2nd, 1901, the happy day when she became my bride, she has never given me a single worry except when she was ill and that has been, with few exceptions, only with the responsibilities of motherhood. . . .

Sometimes I have come home tired and irritable and have made remarks provocative of retaliating replies; but never to this day have you heard your mother say a cross or disrespectful word. This can be said truthfully I think of but a few women in the world. . . .

To her we owe our happy family life and whatever success we may have achieved.

I know you love her and, oh how she loves each one of you!¹⁵

Without question, the children in the McKay family were the beneficiaries and the witnesses of their parents' strong and happy marriage. The strength and commitment of their marriage carried over into David's role as a father. His strong relationship with Emma Ray gave him the power, wisdom, confidence, and fortitude to be an effective parent.

Generally speaking, a father can demonstrate his commitment by investing much of his time and energy to family life. Being committed to the family implies staying steadfast, enduring trials, remaining sexually loyal in the marital union, sacrificing, giving the most to those who matter most, and having common goals. Basically, commitment means that the family comes first. Throughout his life as a parent, David O. McKay not only demonstrated his commitment to his own children but to other children as well.

Family First

David O. McKay was always an extremely busy man. From the time he graduated from college and began teaching at the Weber Academy, he seemed to travel at Mach speed. His life was full with his teaching career, Church duties, farm responsibilities, and a young, growing family. He married Emma Ray Riggs on 2 January 1901 at the age

of twenty-seven. Before they had been married a year, on 30 September 1901, Emma Ray gave birth to their first child, David Lawrence McKay.¹⁶ Not long after Lawrence's birth, David had a Church meeting to attend to. He had been called as the second assistant to Thomas B. Evans, the Weber Stake Sunday School's superintendent. The McKays' first major quarrel occurred when David was leaving to attend the meeting. "As he started to put on his hat and coat, Ray had thought, 'Surely you aren't going to a meeting tonight.' As if reading her thoughts, David turned and looked at her for a moment, and said, 'Have you forgotten that it is Sunday School Board Meeting tonight?' There was no warmth in her kiss as she bade him good-bye. The closing door wakened the baby. Still weak, she sat and rocked the crying baby while tears of weakness, frustrations, and hurt welled down her cheeks." Emma Ray decided that scene would not be repeated, and the McKays learned to balance family and busy schedules.¹⁷

Like all new parents, adjustments would need to be made, and sacrifices on the part of both parents would be offered. David would also have to learn to adjust his priorities. After all, he would be the one to later quote J. E. McCullough's famous statement: "No other success can compensate for failure in the home."¹⁸ David would eventually discover that being a righteous father was actually much more important than attending to his Church duties.¹⁹ He would also come to understand that to be an effective father, he would have to be present at home. Elder Harold B. Lee taught:

Sometimes as I go throughout the Church, I think I am seeing a man who is using his church work as a kind of escape from family responsibility. And sometimes when we've talked about whether or not he's giving attention to his family, his children and his wife, he says something like this: "Well, I'm so busy taking care of the Lord's work that I really don't have time." And I say to him, "My dear brother, the greatest of the Lord's work that you and I will ever do is the work that we do within the walls of our own home." Now don't you get any misconception about where the Lord's work starts. That's the most important of all the Lord's work. And you wives may have to remind your husbands of that occasionally.²⁰

Like most fathers, David would come to learn the balance between Church work and family work. He would also learn to recognize that the most important of the Lord's work he would ever do were within the walls of his own home. Ultimately, Emma Ray and the children came to believe that they were most important in David's life. But this endeavor would take time.

A Busy Schedule

When he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in April of 1906 at the age of thirty-two, he and Emma Ray were seasoned adults and mature beyond their years.²¹ Nevertheless, their family was quite young. At the time of his call to the Quorum of the Twelve, they had two children under the age of five, and they were soon expecting a third.²² Moreover, when David was called into the Quorum of the Twelve, he maintained his position as principal of the Weber Academy for two more years. Therefore, David would work a full day at the academy and then catch a train in the middle of the afternoon to head to Salt Lake City to work as an Apostle. He would often return home to Ogden around midnight or shortly after. Then he would wake up the next day before 5:00 a.m. and begin the entire routine again. On a typical day, his schedule could look like the following:

- 7:45 Rhetoric class
- 8:40 Faculty prayer meeting
- 8:45 Devotional
- 9:15 Theology class
- 10:30 English class
- 11:20 General school work
- 12:10 Dinner
- 1:15 Board train for SLC
- 2:30 Committee meeting
- 3:30 Special Sunday School work
- 5:30 Committee arrangements
- 7:00 General Sunday School board meeting

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11:45 Board train home for Ogden

1:30 a.m. Retire²³

Sometimes, David would be so tired that he would actually secure a hotel in Salt Lake City late at night in order to rest.²⁴ Unlike most busy fathers today, David didn't have weekends to recover from the weekly grind. Instead, he fulfilled his duty as an Apostle, visiting stake conferences all throughout the United States. Sometimes, his apostolic assignment would require him to be gone for weeks at a time. This was a huge challenge for such a young family. In one account, he reported, "Returned home at midnight and met Ray for the first time in two days."²⁵ After one long trip, David returned home and complimented Emma Ray on a wonderful evening dinner. His daughter Lou Jean, who was four years old at the time, spoke up and said to her father, "Come again sometime."²⁶ Even his children understood that their father simply was not home much.

Single Parenthood

Consequently, Emma Ray became the primary parent, and the lion's share of the family load fell upon her.²⁷ Besides being a "single mother" who was burdened with the responsibility of raising seven children with their father away most of the time, Emma Ray was also David's personal secretary. While David was away on Church business, he asked Emma Ray in many of his personal letters to take care of some of his business affairs at the Weber Academy. For example, in a letter dated 8 June 1907, written from St. George, David asks Emma Ray to go to his office at the academy, get an address out of his desk drawer, and craft a letter to a woman who had applied for a teaching position, telling her the position had been filled.²⁸ In many of his personal letters to Emma Ray, it is not unusual to find instances of David asking her to take care of Church-related issues, make phone calls, submit manuscripts, transact academy business, or even meddle with farm business while he was away.²⁹

David recognized the additional weight Emma Ray was carrying, and he often worried about her health and her ability to deal with

the added pressures. In a letter to his beloved wife, he closed, “Ray, dearest, the Lord bless you and keep you always, and strengthen you in carrying the added responsibility that comes to you because of my continual absence from your side!”³⁰ He prayed to the Lord that she would become equal to the tasks and responsibilities they both had been given.

The double burden of being a single parent and a private secretary made Emma Ray just as busy, if not busier, than her husband. Nevertheless, Emma Ray bore the responsibility well. She enjoyed motherhood and seemed to have a great time with her children. Lawrence described his mother’s taxing load and her good nature:

So it was Mother who had much of the responsibility of rearing the family. Mother was the one who taught us all to pray at our bedsides and to rely on our Father in Heaven. It was mother who told us we couldn’t play baseball on Sunday. She was a great companion. There was no generation gap. She went to movies with us; she enjoyed John Bunny and Fatty Arbuckle as much as we did, and finally convinced Father that there was humor in a Mack Sennett comedy. She read good literature to us and told us stories and sang to us at night. . . . She loved games, too. Rook, Pit, and backgammon were popular in our home. Father often joined us in evenings of fun.³¹

No wonder David O. McKay later taught, “By nature the true mother is self-sacrificing. She is ever giving something of her life to make another either happier or better. Dying and giving—giving and dying—the two great elements that make the truly heroic—these are the Christian virtues that make motherhood sublime.”³² David must have had Emma Ray in mind when he stated these words.

Family State of Mind

Although David O. McKay was an extremely busy man, his commitment to his family never wavered. Just because David was away from home so often should not imply that he was an absentee father. Of course, he wasn’t home physically, but emotionally he was present.

Many of his personal letters to Emma Ray reflect that his family was constantly on his mind while he traveled, especially on those long train rides to stake conferences. In a letter he wrote on a train in southeastern Arizona, he said, "I pray constantly that you and our little ones will be kept in health and happiness. The strongest desire of my life is to have a pure, happy home—and ideal family."³³

He closed many of his letters with phrases like "love and kisses to you and the boys,"³⁴ "thinking of you and the babes,"³⁵ or "how are the boys and the baby?"³⁶ In many of David's letters to Emma Ray, he would go into more detail about his concern for the children. For instance, in a letter dated 27 July 1907, written from what David referred to as "Nearly off the earth," which was somewhere near Durango, Colorado, he wrote, "Physically, I am over a thousand miles away from you, but there is not an hour [that] passes without my seeing every one of you in our lovely home. My soul is with you. When in imagination I hear those little ones coughing, and see your worry, my whole being is wrung in sympathy."³⁷

There are indications that David wanted to be home more often and perhaps felt guilty that he was gone as much as he was. On 6 February 1907, speaking of his family, he wrote in his diary, "I feel that I am away from them too often."³⁸ He seemed to covet more time with his family, and wished he had more resources to do fun things with his children. In another letter, dated 13 March 1909, from somewhere near Rawlins, Wyoming, David wrote:

My Dearest Sweetheart:

I am wishing we had money—a pile of it. And I have wished so continually nearly all day. Lonesomeness has produced the wish—a longing lonesomeness that only one can dispel, and she my sweetheart—Ray. I have been thinking that if we had a large income, you and the babes and a girl to take care of them in hotels could all go with me on these little trips. Then I could attend to my duties, and be at home also; for home is anywhere if loved ones be there.

Well, we have not money, so we can go together only occasionally. Such trips, then, become oasis and trips like this today, sandy deserts. . . .

Yes, I wish for money, but not because I don't feel rich. With you and the boys, and "papa's tomboy"—"papa's girl" and our happy home surroundings, with papa still with us, . . . with the bright prospects in life, and our membership in the Church—with all this wealth and more, I feel the richest man in the world! But I wish you were with me just the same.

Lovingly,
Your own Dade
xxx Kisses to Lawrence, Llewelyn, and Lou Jean³⁹

In another letter from St. Johns, Arizona, David wrote, "O if I could only step in the dear old dining room tonight—just long enough to carry my boys on my 'Sodjers' [shoulders], kiss them and Lou Jean good night; and then sit down with my sweetheart—on my knee and her soft arm around my neck, and talk over our blessings, our duties, or visits, or even our debts, how happy I should be!"⁴⁰

Therefore, when David arrived home from his travels, he made his time count. He would attempt to spend as much time with his family as he possibly could. Moreover, if he could share or remove some of the constant burden that Emma Ray felt, he tried to do so. His diaries from 1908 capture how he treasured his rare and precious time with his precious ones: Wednesday, 1 January 1908: "Spent the first day of the year with my family at home"⁴¹; Sunday, 31 May, 1908: "Spent this day of rest with my family"⁴²; Friday, 10 July 1908: "Took the children to Huntsville . . . Returned home in the evening"⁴³; Tuesday, 3 November 1908: "Spent the day with Ray and the babes"⁴⁴; and Friday, 25 December 1908: "At home all day. Spent a happy time with the children."⁴⁵

He Would Rather Be Home

When some members of the Church read and study the travels of David O. McKay, they may become jealous. Perhaps they too wish they could travel and see the world, as did this young Apostle. If given the choice, however, David would have rather been home with his family

than traveling the world. In fact, leaving home for long periods of time was an extremely difficult task for him.

David, along with Hugh J. Cannon, went on a world tour from 1920 to 1921. David understood how difficult it would be to leave his young family for such a long time. He worried about Emma Ray, the children, and even their animals! On the day he left, he wrote in his diary:

Saturday, December 4th, 1920: A telephone call at 6:30 a.m. from my Scotch friend and brother, William Kenly, who just wanted to say good bye, started me out with the full realization that this would be my last day with my loved ones for perhaps eight or ten months—probably longer. As the morning hours lengthened into day, this realization became more intense and my feelings more tender. The press of packing and attending to a hundred eleventh hour duties proved to be a good channel into which my thoughts and feelings were diverted. . . .

Parting from those we love is never an easy task; but today it seemed more difficult than ever. Every little household duty when performed seemed to say, this is the last time for a while; even the fire in the furnace looked gloomy when I threw in the last shovelful of coal.

However, I kept my feelings pretty well under control until I began to say good bye to the children. Baby thinking I was going to coo to him looked up and gave me his sweetest smile. The beautiful, innocent radiance of his baby face will be a treasured memory all during my missionary tour.

Then came Ned, my sleeping companion and affectionate tender boy. He couldn't realize why his daddy was sobbing. His tear dimmed eyes and inquiring expression revealed the emotion in his little soul! What a blessing that it would be but transient in his childish nature!

The parting moment with my Sweetheart and true devoted wife, my life's companion and Joy, I cannot describe. Such sacred scenes, anyhow, are not for expression in words—they find expression only in the depths of a loving soul.

Emma Ray, Lou Jean, and Llewelyn accompanied me to the train—Emma Ray, the Sunbeam; Lou Jean, the Rosebud; and Llewelyn, the Leader, who in his young manhood, in the absence of his brother and father, must assume all the duties of the farm and the household heretofore carried by the three of us. No father can be prouder of his children than I, nor more confident of their fidelity and desire for success. Parting from them at the station stirred my feelings wholly beyond control. I left them, though, having the comforting assurance that each would be a sweetheart to Mama and life for her comfort and pleasure.⁴⁶

These words leave little doubt that it was simply heart-wrenching for David to leave his wife and children for this extended period of time. To add insult to injury, he departed on this journey the first week of December, just as the Christmas season was ramping up into full gear. To be away from his family during Christmas would be especially difficult. The next day, 5 December, he wrote in his diary, “Any thought of Christmas this year makes me homesick.”⁴⁷

Once on the ship, his homesickness continued. He wrote, “There are more babies and children on this vessel than there were on [the previous ship he was on], but they keep their nurses and mamas pretty busy. After all, babies are better off at home. And so are their Daddies!”⁴⁸ Obviously, as a father himself, David would have preferred home life to cruising the Pacific.⁴⁹

On another occasion, after a long trip to eastern Canada, he once wrote to Emma Ray, “You need not send any letters after you receive this, as I shall be somewhere on my way home—Home! Blessed haven of happiness and contentment! I would not exchange our ties of companionship and true affection for each other, our ideals as exemplified in the lives of our children, for all else this old world can offer!”⁵⁰

In March of 1921, David was able to come home from the world tour for a short respite. It was his good fortune to be home for a period of two weeks before he had to leave again. Therefore, he viewed time with his family as precious. He wrote in his diary: “I’m glad to have had the privilege of spending these last two weeks at home, even though nine-tenths of my time has been given to the public, and

only one-tenth to my family. Even the one-tenth made matters a little easier, I think, for Ray, who is worrying considerably over our perplexing financial difficulties. Old 2071 Madison is a plain, old-fashioned house, but with the sweetest wife and the dearest kiddies in the world, living in there, it is a Paradise to Me!”⁵¹

David O. McKay’s paradise is comparable to George Bailey’s (from *It’s a Wonderful Life*) feelings about Bedford Falls! Despite financial troubles or other challenges, David’s home in Ogden, complete with a wonderful wife and happy children, was a utopic delight—especially when compared to his global travel schedule and sleeping in a different bed as often as he did. Consequently, David learned to appreciate his home life more than most. He did not take his wife and children for granted. And when he was home, *he was home*. And when he was away, he wanted to be home!⁵² David would have understood the truth of a statement made by President Boyd K. Packer. After traveling the world and visiting many exotic places, President Packer was asked if he could travel to any place in the world, where would he go? He replied, “I would go home.”⁵³ David, too, wanted to be home as often as he could, and it broke his heart that he had to be away as often as he did.

Home Sweet Home

Despite his travels, there were many periods of his life when David was home. When on his “home turf,” he could demonstrate his commitment as a father by his actual presence and the decisions he made as the leader of the home. For example, on one occasion, when Llewelyn was the student body president at Weber Normal College, an idea was formulated to place a steel flagpole on the top of Mount Ogden. Llewelyn discussed the proposal with the school president, Aaron W. Tracy, and received permission to hike the entire student body to the top of the mountain to install the flagpole. Because of his great respect for his father, Llewelyn asked him, “What do you think of the idea of placing a flagpole on the top of Mount Ogden, and thereby initiating an annual trek by the whole student body to unfurl ‘Old Glory’ there?” David responded to his son, “It seems like quite an undertaking to haul

sections of a steel pole besides cement, sand, water, and other necessary equipment to the top of that mountain, but if the administration is behind the project and the students are enthusiastic, I am sure it can be done successfully.”

After all the plans were laid out, the assignments were made, and the specific details of how to hike over one thousand students to the top of a mountain were set forth, the editor of the school newspaper resigned. This was a huge disappointment for Llewelyn. It was through the school newspaper that all the instructions were to be communicated for the hike, not to mention to light a figurative fire in the hearts of the students to get them excited for the project. So much depended on the school newspaper! Llewelyn was crushed. That night at dinner, David noticed his son’s downcast countenance. He asked,

“What’s the matter, you act as if you had lost your last friend?” I told him of my predicament and my fear that I would have to give up my objective relative to the Mount Ogden trek.

“Never give up, my boy,” he said, “difficulties will always come in your way. With the help of your classmates put the paper out yourself. You know . . . ,” and a twinkle was in his eye, “I rather look forward to going with you to participate in the event!”

That was all I needed. The next day I rounded up my best friends, and we got busy writing the needed edition of the paper. We even put the resigned editor’s name in it, hoping that it would encourage him to come back on the job for the following issue; and this turned out to be the case.

I think every riding horse from all surrounding towns was brought in for the occasion, and the hundreds of students who could not obtain horses hiked to the top of the mountain, led by Dr. Lind.

How happy I was when the signatures of the faculty and of the student officers were added to a document which was placed in a bottle and sealed in the cement at the bottom of the flagpole, because father’s name headed the list. At that moment I came to the realization that had father not stated: “I’ll take part with you,” I would have given up the venture.

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The flagpole still stands on the top of Mount Ogden. It is nothing more than a steel flagpole to many people, but to me it is a symbol of how important are a few appropriate words of a father to his son, and especially of how significant is the encouraging statement: "I'll go along with you!"⁵⁴

Without question, here is an example of a father who was committed to his son. He was also committed to his son's success.⁵⁵ David O. McKay was willing to put his son before his own needs and schedule. Because of his father's influence in the Ogden area, not to mention the entire Church, Llewelyn was able to carry out a task that seemed insurmountable. Not only that, but he also learned of his father's unwavering support and commitment. From that moment on, Llewelyn knew that regardless of how "unimportant" something in his life was to the rest of the world, his father would always be there to show his love and support.

Surrogate Father

David O. McKay was not only committed to his own family but his commitment was to all youth of the next generation. Strong fathers are not only committed to their own children but to nieces, nephews, neighbors, friends, fellow ward members, and citizens of the community.⁵⁶ Aaron W. Tracy, who was mentioned previously in this work, was the president of Weber Normal College when Llewelyn was the student body president. However, years earlier, Aaron was on the verge of dropping out of school because of his financial situation.

He approached President McKay, who at the time was the president of Weber Academy, and related to him his plight. He said, "President McKay, it looks as if I shall have to withdraw from school for a while, for I am unable to make ends meet financially. I shall return again later, however, because I am determined to get an education. For the time being, I shall have to find full-time work." David learned that Aaron was an orphaned boy who lived alone in a small back room of someone's home. He walked miles to school each day and provided his own food, clothing, and tuition costs by accepting odd jobs. Sensing

Aaron's concern and perhaps realizing his potential, David said, "My boy . . . you are absolutely right in wanting an education, and if you are determined to continue until graduation, let us see if we can't work something out. Now my wife needs someone to help out around the house, and we have a spare room upstairs in our home where you can sleep and thus save room rent. Why don't you move in with us?"⁵⁷

Llewelyn reported that Aaron was grateful for the opportunity. He moved into the McKay home the next day and became part of the family. He helped Sister McKay with the household chores during the week, and, on weekends and in the summer time, he worked on the McKay farm in Huntsville. David would say of him, "I like that boy; he always does the job right. He is determined to make good; you mark my word, he will reach his goal with such determination." Aaron did reach his goal. As he attended classes at the academy, under the tutelage of master teacher David O. McKay, he decided that he wanted to become a teacher himself. After graduation from Weber, he continued his schooling. Years later, he became the president of Weber Normal College. Aaron Tracy was remembered by his students as one of the great teachers of the college.⁵⁸

Aaron wasn't the only student who reaped the benefits of David O. McKay's kindness and commitment to the youth of the Church. His daughter Jeanette McKay Morrell reported, "Besides rearing and educating their own family, the McKays invited many students to live in their home, and these they assisted in their efforts to secure an education. These young people, now with families of their own, still sing the praises of this ideal home which they were permitted to share."⁵⁹

Generativity, which is caring for and contributing to the next generation, is the term Erik Erikson used to describe the primary task of adulthood. Erickson further argued that "generative fathers" create, nurture, care for, and promote the development of other children, not merely their own.⁶⁰ David O. McKay seems to fit that term perfectly. Because of his ability to see beyond his own family and meet the needs of the next generation, he most certainly was a generative father.

Furthermore, a strong father keeps the promises and commitments he makes to his children. Not only would President David

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O. McKay keep the commitments he made to his own children and grandchildren, he would do the same for other children as well. The prophet was a strong advocate of keeping promises. He believed that if you say something or make a promise, you must carry it out no matter what!⁶¹

Consider the following example: As the President of the Church, he once promised two children that he would meet them in his office one morning at 7:00 a.m. Unfortunately, the day prior to the visit, Sister McKay became ill,⁶² and President McKay would not leave her bedside. Clare Middlemiss, President McKay's secretary, was prepared to cancel the appointments. On the morning of the visits, however, President McKay called Clare and told her not to cancel the appointments, saying that he would not disappoint the children; he would keep his promise. His visit with the two youngsters and their parents was life changing.⁶³

President McKay was consistent in the things that he taught and the way he conducted his life. As a father figure to not only his own children but to all children, David O. McKay demonstrated an unwavering commitment and loyalty to the next generation. He seemed to be able to balance Church work with family life, and the older he became, the more crystalized were his priorities.⁶⁴ Contemporary fathers would do well in following David O. McKay's example of being a committed father.

Many years ago, President McKay, in speaking to a group of Church employees, put into perspective where fathers' priorities should be. He said:

Let me assure you, brethren, that someday you will have a Personal Priesthood Interview with the Savior Himself. If you are interested, I will tell you the order in which He will ask you to account for your earthly responsibilities.

First, He will request an accountability report about your relationship with your wife. Have you actively been engaged in making her happy and ensuring that her needs have been met as an individual?

Second, He will want an accountability report about each of your children individually. He will not attempt to have this for simply a family stewardship report but will request information about your relationship to each and every child.

Third, He will want to know what you personally have done with the talents you were given in the pre-existence.

Fourth, He will want a summary of your activity in your Church assignments. He will not be necessarily interested in what assignments you have had, for in His eyes the home teacher and mission president are probably equals, but He will request a summary of how you have been of service to your fellowmen in your Church assignments.

Fifth, He will have no interest in how you earned your living, but if you were honest in all your dealings.

Sixth, He will ask for an accountability on what you have done to contribute in a positive manner to your community, state, country, and the world.⁶⁵

Notice the emphasis on the relationships we have at home. For men, our priorities should be laser focused on our wives and children. Our actions should demonstrate our commitment. David O. McKay was an example of the rock-solid commitment that successful fathers must have in order to influence their children in positive ways that matter. David lived as he taught on this principle of commitment. There is little doubt that his family was his first priority and that he would rather be home than anywhere else. Although he traveled the world, he never felt complete without Emma Ray at his side and his children close by.



David O. McKay with two kids. (Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.)

Notes

1. *Father, Consider Your Ways*, 4–5.
2. Paul Pearsall, *The Power of the Family* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 18.
3. M. Russell Ballard, “The Effects of Television,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 19.
4. Kimberly Fisher and John Robinson, “Average Weekly Time Spent in 30 Basic Activities Across 17 Countries,” *Social Indicators Research* 93, no. 1 (2009): 249–54.
5. William J. Bennett, *The Book of Man: Readings on the Path to Manhood* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), xxii.
6. William J. Doherty and Barbara Carlson, *Putting Family First: Successful Strategies for Reclaiming Family Life in a Hurry-Up World* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 101.
7. Doherty and Carlson, *Putting Family First*, 10.
8. Stephen R. Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997), 113–14.
9. David C. Dollahite, Alan J. Hawkins, and Sean E. Brotherson, “Narrative Accounts, Generative Fathering, and Family Life Education,” in *The Methods and Methodologies of Qualitative Family Research*, ed. Marvin B. Sussman and Jane F. Gilgun (New York: The Haworth Press, 1996), 356.
10. R. Koestner, C. Franz, and J. Weinberger, “The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A 26-Year Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 4 (April 1990): 709–17.
11. As cited by Brent A. Barlow, “Marriage is Ordained of God,” in *Brigham Young University 1999–2000 Speeches* (Brigham Young University Publications and Graphics, 2000), 51.
12. As cited in Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 201.
13. John Stewart, *Remembering the McKays* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 24.
14. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 January 1907, David O. McKay Papers, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Hereafter, Church History Library will be cited as CHL.
15. David O. McKay to David L., Mildred, Llewelyn, Alice, Lou Jean, Russell, Emma Rae, Edward, and Robert, 25 October 1934, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 6, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. Hereafter, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, will be cited as Marriott Library.

16. Hereafter, David Lawrence McKay will be referred to as Lawrence in body text and David L. McKay in endnotes.
17. Mary Jane Woodger, *David O. McKay: Beloved Prophet* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 72.
18. J. E. McCullough, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* (Southern co-operative league, 1924), 42, quoted in Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1935, 116.
19. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “Fathers, yours is an eternal calling from which you are never released. Callings in the Church, as important as they are, by their very nature are only for a period of time, and then an appropriate release takes place. But a father’s calling is eternal, and its importance transcends time. It is a calling for both time and eternity.” Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Fathers of Israel,” *Ensign*, November 1987, 48–50.
20. Harold B. Lee, address to Seminary and Institute personnel at Brigham Young University Summer School, 8 July 1966; see also Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 248–49.
21. Francis Gibbons wrote that “their mutual love of music, good books, and beautiful decor gave assurance that their home would be one of culture and refinement. And their shared convictions about the divinity of the restored Church and their faith in God introduced a spiritual quality into the home that manifested itself in regular family and personal prayers and in love, kindness, and forgiveness.” Francis Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 61–62.
22. Woodger, *David O. McKay*, 91.
23. McKay Microfilm, 19 March 1907, reel 3:429, CHL.
24. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 1, Marriott Library, 78–80.
25. Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 75.
26. David L. McKay, microfilm, address at a Luncheon of the 17th Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, 8 May 1982, MS 7013, CHL.
27. Jeanette McKay Morrell, “Life of President David O. McKay: A Few Highlights of a Busy Life,” *Relief Society Magazine*, November 1953, 733.
28. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 June 1907, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
29. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 14 June 1906, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 3, Marriott Library.

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30. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 December 1910, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 3, Marriott Library.
31. David L. McKay, "Remembering Father and Mother, President David O. McKay and Sister Emma Ray Riggs McKay," *Ensign*, August 1984, 34–36.
32. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 455.
33. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 December 1910, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 3, Marriott Library.
34. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 15 June 1907, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
35. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 11 June 1907, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
36. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 June 1907, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
37. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 27 July 1907, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
38. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 1, Marriott Library, 85.
39. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 13 March 1909, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
40. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 20 May 1909, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
41. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 2, Marriott Library, 78–80.
42. Diaries of David O. McKay, March 1908 to March 1909, MS 668, box 4, folder 3, Marriott Library, 78–80, 63.
43. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 2, Marriott Library, 78–81.
44. Diaries of David O. McKay, March 1908 to March 1909, MS 668, box 4, folder 3, Marriott Library, 78–80, 139.
45. Diaries of David O. McKay, March 1908 to March 1909, MS 668, box 4, folder 3, Marriott Library, 157–58.
46. Diaries of David O. McKay, December 1920, MS 668, box 6, folder 11, Marriott Library; emphasis in original.
47. Diaries of David O. McKay, December 1920, MS 668, box 6, folder 11, Marriott Library; emphasis in original.

48. Diaries of David O. McKay, January to February 1921, MS 668, box 6, folder 14, Marriott Library; emphasis in original.
49. Shortly after boarding the ship for his world tour with Hugh J. Cannon, David sat down and began writing letters to his family, who he already missed. He wrote: “Before and after dinner, I spent every moment in the reading room writing letters to friends and Loved ones at home. When the moment came to leave dear old America—even Canadian America, there were some pretty lonesome feelings tugging away at my heart-strings. . . . Up to the moment of boarding the ship, I seemed to be imbued with the feeling that I usually have when attending a quarterly conference—at the conclusion of which I would board the train and return to home and loved ones; but when the boat begins to move . . . thousands of thousands and tens of thousands of miles of ocean travel lay between home and me, I feel downright gloomy.” Diaries of David O. McKay, March 1908 to March 1909, MS 668, box 6, folder 14, Marriott Library.
50. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, D.O., 7 June 1929, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 4, folder 3, Marriott Library; emphasis in original.
51. Diaries of David O. McKay, February to April 1921, MS 668, box 6, folder 15, Marriott Library.
52. After the first part of the world tour was completed, David and Hugh Cannon met their families in San Francisco. It was the first time David had seen Emma Ray and the children for months. It was a quick meeting before their boat left port again. He wrote in his diary: “If only life could be made up of happy meetings, and there were no partings. [What a blessing] life would be! After all, this is just what our concept of heaven is. Parting from my Sweetheart and dear kiddies was quite as difficult this morning as if it was Dec. 4, 1920!” Diaries of David O. McKay, February to April 1921, MS 668, box 6, folder 4, Marriott Library.
53. As cited by J. Ballard Washburn, “The Temple is a Family Affair,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 12.
54. Llewelyn R. McKay, *Home Memories of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 139–41.
55. President David O. McKay taught that “men today in far too great an extent are . . . spending their time with things which have no permanent value,” in Conference Report, October 1942, 67. As a father, David understood this concept, and, undoubtedly, so did his children. They were the beneficiaries of his belief that children have permanent, lasting, and eternal value.

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56. Once, when traveling as an Apostle to southern Utah, David had dinner at the home of Brigham Young Jr.'s widow, who was living in the San Juan Stake at the time. David wrote in his diary, "After dinner played ball with her boy Walter and some of his companions." *Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907*, MS 668, box 4, folder 2, Marriott Library. For this Apostle of the Lord, playing ball with a fatherless son was not beneath his dignity. In fact, he may have even felt some responsibility and even privileged to play ball with Brigham Young's grandson.
57. Llewelyn R. McKay, *Home Memories of President David O. McKay*, 136–37.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Morrell, "Life of President David O. McKay," 47.
60. John Snarey, "The Next Generation of Work on Fathering," in *Generative Fathering*, ed. David C. Dollahite and Alan J. Hawkins (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), ix.
61. David Lawrence McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 99.
62. In the newspaper, a notice appeared that Sister McKay had been seriously injured. Morrell, "Life of President David O. McKay," 285.
63. Morrell, "Life of President David O. McKay," 285–86.
64. Historian Francis Gibbons observed, "At an early age he was disciplined to the juggler's art—the skill of keeping many balls in the air at once without allowing any of them to fall to the ground. It required a deft touch, supreme concentration of effort, and adroit maneuvering so that nothing was left unattended despite the strict economy of time imposed on any one activity." Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 76.
65. This statement was given in June 1965; from the notes of Fred A. Baker, a managing director of the Church's Department of Physical Facilities, as cited in Alexander B. Morrison, *Feed My Sheep* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 156.