

# Consecration and Sacrifice

“No man or woman can create a true home who is not willing in the outset to embrace life heroically, to encounter labor and sacrifice. Only to such can this divinest power be given to create on earth that which is the nearest image of heaven.”

—David O. McKay<sup>1</sup>

Consecration involves “the call and capacity to dedicate one’s time, talents, resources, and energies to the well-being of the next generation.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense, for fathers to be consecrated means they are wholly dedicated to their families and willing to make the necessary sacrifices for their children. And although it may surprise some, most children want to have a relationship with their fathers.

It is interesting to note that in 1924, 63 percent of teenagers in a major city reported that the most desirable attribute in a father is that he spends time with his children; by 1977, that figure rose to 68 percent. Unquestionably, children appreciate and desire fathers who will take time to be with them and invest in them.<sup>3</sup> Some of the most cherished memories for children and their fathers include going on family vacations, camping together, making pinewood derby cars, and hanging the Christmas lights. When fathers can spend one-on-one time with their children, they send a powerful message regarding what the father values the most. Elder Dallin H. Oaks shared the following experience:

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A friend took his young family on a series of summer vacation trips, including visits to memorable historic sites. At the end of the summer he asked his teenage son which of these good summer activities he enjoyed most. The father learned from the reply, and so did those he told of it. “The thing I liked best this summer,” the boy replied, “was the night you and I laid on the lawn and looked at the stars and talked.” Super family activities may be good for children, but they are not always better than one-on-one time with a loving parent.<sup>4</sup>

Strong fathers do not leave family togetherness to chance. They make things happen, and they make time for their families. Unfortunately, many American fathers have accepted the phrase, “Well, it’s not the *quantity* of time I am spending with my children, but the *quality* of time.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, such fathers have justified their absence in the name of quality activities each month. Unfortunately, such an investment yields mediocre results at best. A notable family therapist, George Rekers, has explained the quantity versus quality dilemma in a striking way: Imagine that you have gone to a very nice gourmet restaurant to treat yourself to a steak, even though it costs \$18.00. The steak arrives on an expensive china plate, served with flair by an impeccably dressed waiter. You note with shock and dismay that the steak is a one-inch cube. In horror, you question the waiter, who assures you that the quality is what counts and this steak is *the best*. But if you’re hungry, you’ll know that the quantity also counts.<sup>6</sup>

In reality, strong fathers agree that there must be both quality time and quantity of time devoted to children. However, the quantity must be there for the quality to have an impact. President Howard W. Hunter taught fathers in a priesthood session of general conference, “Effective family leadership . . . requires both quantity and quality time. The teaching and governance of the family must not be left to your wife alone, to society, to school, or even the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

Relationships cannot be built while constantly checking the clock, nor can they be developed on the father’s schedule alone. Often, children approach their parents at the most inopportune times. Effective and nurturing fathers will make time for their children, even if it is not convenient for them to do so.

## Love Spelled T-I-M-E

One of Satan's greatest tools among active and faithful Latter-day Saints is distraction. If he can pull us just a few degrees off course, he could gradually wreak havoc on our lives. In describing the busy and chaotic world in which we live, Sheri Dew explained:

Lucifer works hard to undermine our innate tendency to nurture and care for others. He wants us to become separated from each other. Voice messaging and pagers are efficient, but they don't replace a listening ear and a caring heart. If the adversary . . . can keep us so busy running from one commitment to another that we no longer have time for each other, he has made great strides towards neutralizing the strength and influence that we have. We need each other. We need each other's testimonies and strength, each other's confidence and support, understanding and compassion. . . . Lucifer would have us so busy—with the details swirling around family, friends, careers, and every soccer league in town—that there's not time to actually live the gospel. No time to fast and pray, to immerse ourselves in the scriptures, to worship in the temple—all the things we need to do to “study for our mortal test.” In other words, he wants us to be a little more concerned with the world than with the gospel, a little more interested in life today than in life forever.<sup>8</sup>

If we are not careful, busyness can destroy our family relationships and erode our souls. David O. McKay provides a tremendous example of how fathers can balance their lives and consecrate their efforts towards their children. Despite his busy schedule, President McKay was a father who found ways to make time for his children. He understood that to be an effective father, he would often have to sacrifice his time and his interests. In a general conference, President McKay explained, “Children take time, trouble, and more patience than we usually have. They interfere with freedom, good times, and luxury, but children are the real purpose behind marriage.”<sup>9</sup> Although parenthood does require time, trouble, and patience, President McKay recognized that children are our most important possessions.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, he tried

his best to spend time with his own children. Although this was not easy to do, President McKay found ways to make it happen.

## Taking His Children on Church Trips

Perhaps the most significant way David O. McKay was able to spend time with his children was by taking them with him on his stake conference assignments. This was a practice he engaged in as often as the occasion permitted. For example, on Friday, 22 March 1907, David was on his way to a stake conference in Cache Valley. He wrote in his diary, “Took Lawrence my little boy with me. This was his first initial trip. I hope to take him as often as I can.”<sup>11</sup> After the conference concluded, David reported, “We had an excellent conference. Lawrence has been a little hero.”<sup>12</sup> It appears that David and Lawrence traveled to Logan by carriage, because he reports that Lawrence survived the wintery ride all right.<sup>13</sup>

Because Lawrence behaved so well, it appears that David became quite daring about two months later. On Sunday, 26 May 1907, he reported that he boarded the 12:10 p.m. train for Logan to attend the baccalaureate exercises at Brigham Young College. “Took Lawrence and Llewellyn with me. They were intensely interested as well as interesting.”<sup>14</sup> Even though David points out that his boys were “interesting,” they must have been quite well-behaved, because he continued to take them on Church assignments throughout their lives.

Lawrence further explained, “Because the railroads offered half-priced tickets to children under the age of eight,<sup>15</sup> Father made a point of taking one of us children with him on his conference assignments when it was practical.”<sup>16</sup> On these trips, David had plenty of time to connect with his children. He would also use these outings to teach his children as much as he could about the Church, the gospel, and even about the world in general. He also enjoyed taking his children to historical sites and other places of interest.

In August of 1910, just before the start of the school year, David took Lawrence with him to a stake conference in Taber, Alberta, Canada. On that trip, Lawrence wrote home to his mother and reported that he was having a great time fishing and camping with his

father.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, on their way to Canada, the train made a stop in Butte, Montana. This gave David and his oldest son an opportunity to attend a circus while they were passing through town.<sup>18</sup>

In October of the same year, David took Llewelyn with him to a stake conference in the San Francisco area. David made the time to take his son to the Golden Gate Park, where they saw buffalo and slid down a slippery wood slide together. They also went down to cliff rocks, where they saw big sea lions and seagulls. They visited the library and studied animals by looking at their pictures in encyclopedias and other books. Afterwards, they went to the zoo and located the very animals they had studied.<sup>19</sup> On this same trip, David wrote to Emma Ray and gave her this report:

Llewelyn is fine, and enjoying his trip immensely, as you will see by his letter. He is a great boy and attracts people to him, even in the street car, when there is no occasion to notice him. Night before last in the barber shop, he was the center of attraction. Almost as soon as I was in my chair, he had been invited to sit in another, and was given an electronic massage and a hair comb. . . . Here at the hotel, yesterday, the manager of the café made this remark to Pres. Robinson, referring to Llewelyn: "He's the best trained kid that was ever in this hotel; I'll bet that he has a fine mother! When this was told to me, I answered, "You are right—he has a fine mother, the best in the world."<sup>20</sup>

## Trips to the Farm

It seemed that David made it a practice to take a child with him wherever he traveled, whenever he could. This rule not only applied to stake conference visits but even when David was home. For example, he would often take his children with him on personal trips—especially when he had to check on the farm. While home one weekend, he recorded in his journal, "Drove to Huntsville. Cut hay. Took Llewelyn with me and we stayed overnight."<sup>21</sup> He was constantly taking his children, most often one at a time, with him to Huntsville. David also enjoyed taking his children to the circus, on joy rides in the car, and on vacations.<sup>22</sup>

Historian Francis Gibbons commented on David's priorities:

Often a man confronted with such multiple demands on his time will sacrifice family needs to other responsibilities. David O. McKay never did so. He endeavored to interweave his church, professional, and business activities with those of his family. This he did by taking family members with him when he performed other duties, as we have already seen, and as we shall see him do in his later career to even greater degree. And the time he did spend with his family was always quality time with recreational activities being planned so as to involve the entire family, if possible.<sup>23</sup>

President McKay didn't seem to believe in relaxing much. When he had any free time, he bolted for the family farm in Huntsville, seizing opportunities to work with his boys. He even reminded Emma Ray in a letter that if the choice was between working at the farm or going to the Saltair (a resort on the banks of the Great Salt Lake) to enjoy some leisure time, he would choose the farm—and he did on many occasions.<sup>24</sup> Lawrence recalled that they only went on one camping trip:

The only "camping" trip I recall was one July when the General Authorities had their vacation, and Mother, for some reason, needed to be in Ogden. He took Llewelyn and me, then in High School, on what he called a picnic. He put hay and quilts for bedding in the wagon and drove us to Dry Hollow. We worked all that day, slept at night in the wagon, and worked the next day, bringing a ditch from the spring down to the farm. When we were digging potatoes with him, he sang the beautiful Samoan farewell song, "Tofa My Felina" (Good-bye, My Friend), one of the cherished souvenirs he brought with him from his tour around the world. We also played hard on the farm. It was a tradition to make hay on the Fourth and the Twenty-fourth of July. We would begin early in the morning, work hard, eat a gigantic dinner at midday and, later in the afternoon, play an all-family baseball game with everyone—even little children participating.<sup>25</sup>

## Modeling Consecration and Work

David O. McKay believed that one of the greatest legacies he could pass down to his children was a strong work ethic.<sup>26</sup> He wanted his children to consecrate their lives to the cause of the family and the Church. He taught, “This religion teaches men to work. The idler has no place in the Church.”<sup>27</sup> David did not need to preach many sermons to his children on the subject of hard work; instead, he set an example by his strong work ethic. He worked beside his children and grandchildren and taught them how to work hard. In fact, he connected to his children through working. As his two oldest sons approached adulthood, he wrote the following to Lawrence. At the time, David was in the First Presidency, and he was writing from Santa Monica, California:

I am glad you are looking after matters in Huntsville. That was good work you and Llewelyn did in shutting out the cattle from the self-feeder. It is a source of true satisfaction to see you boys go right ahead with the work without being told. With the amount of other obligations and duties on my hands now, I think I shall have to shift the running of the farm on the shoulders of my boys. I am mighty thankful, too, that we have boys intelligent and industrious enough to run it.<sup>28</sup>

As was previously mentioned, President McKay continued to work hard on the farm even in his twilight years. He would take his younger children, Emma Rae (20), Ned (16), and Bobby (11), to Huntsville to “enjoy the winter snow and to work off some of their nervous energy.”<sup>29</sup> After his older sons were gone from home, President McKay would take Ned and Bobby to the farm where they would work long days.<sup>30</sup> On one of these weekend “respites,” they planted “three-fourths of an acre of potatoes.”<sup>31</sup> Like other men who became prophets, David O. McKay seemed to relax with his children by working with them. However, besides reading to them and working with them, he enjoyed playing a good game of baseball with them when he could.<sup>32</sup>

## Living the Law of Sacrifice

David O. McKay made sacrifices for his children so that their lives would be better and happier. This was a man who rarely did what he wanted to do, with the exception of farm work. There is little evidence that David O. McKay golfed, fished, or pursued hobbies, though he very well could have. Similarly, there is little evidence that he spent much of his time in idle pursuits. Instead, his family was his hobby and his first priority. No wonder he taught, “When one puts business or pleasure above his home, he that moment starts on the down grade to soul ruin. The loss of fortune is nothing compared with the loss of home.”<sup>33</sup> This was a man who strived to never put anything before his wife or children. Work was one of the ways he connected with his children.

When he was not engaged in his heavy work responsibilities, he was with his family. If he was not with his family, then most likely he was involved in his work responsibilities. Those seemed to be his only two options. David O. McKay understood that children are what family life is all about. This man always longed to be with his family.

On the night of 7 December 1920, he wrote from a ship to his Emma Ray, “My most fervent prayer to our Heavenly Father is that He will keep you and our beloved children in perfect health until we meet again. To be reunited as a loving family, each one healthy, virtuous, and true, is the one great blessing I pray to enjoy!”<sup>34</sup> It seemed that President McKay closed most of his letters with similar sentiments.

As President McKay taught, successful fathers find ways to spend time with their children. They make the necessary sacrifices so that they can be involved in their children’s lives. Contemporary fathers would do well to adjust their schedules and determine how they can be more involved in the lives of their children. If fathers choose to ignore this responsibility, they must be prepared for the consequences that will inevitably follow. Michael Gurian, the author of *The Wonder of Boys*, explained, “If the father, tired from work, spends just ten minutes with the boy, or a half hour, both will feel refueled. If, whether in the boy’s infancy or later in life, the father doesn’t spend the minimal amount of time with his child, he’ll actually end up spending more than that



amount of energy dealing with his son's anger, rejection, and abandonment throughout an evening, weekend, or lifetime."<sup>35</sup>

To be a parent is to make sacrifices. Wives and children need to know that their husbands and fathers are willing to give up their own interests and pursuits for their well-being. These sacrifices will often include time, energy, and means. Such sacrifices are often as simple as attending children's activities, coaching their teams, or taking trips together. Sometimes, fathers will be required to place much more on the altar. Some men will turn down job opportunities or give up their personal interests or hobbies so their families can flourish. Years ago, the First Presidency declared to fathers, "As a leader in your home, you plan and sacrifice to achieve the blessing of a unified and happy family. To do all of this requires that you live a family-centered life."<sup>36</sup> David O. McKay understood the need to make sacrifices so that his family could thrive. Mostly, he gave of himself. This man never seemed to mind making sacrifices for his family.

## Notes

1. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1945, 144.
2. Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson, "Fatherwork: A Conceptual Ethic of Fathering as Generative Work," 31.
3. James Garbarino, "Reinventing Fatherhood," *Families in Society* 74 (January 1993): 51–54.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, "Good, Better, Best," in Conference Report, 6–7 October 2007, 111.
5. Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, *Secrets of Strong Families* (Little Brown & Co., 1985).
6. *Ibid.*, 83.
7. Howard W. Hunter, in Conference Report, October 1994, 68.
8. Sheri Dew, *No Doubt About It* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 97–98.
9. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1956, 9.
10. He declared in his inaugural year as the President of the Church that "our country's most precious possession is not our vast acres of range land supporting flocks and herds; not productive farms—not our forests; not our mines nor oil wells producing fabulous wealth—our country's greatest resource is our children, our

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- young men and women whose characters will largely determine our nation's future." David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1951, 5.
11. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 1, Marriott Library, 109.
  12. *Ibid.*, 113.
  13. *Ibid.*, 114.
  14. *Ibid.*, 137.
  15. In another interview, Lawrence reported that the half-priced rates were for children up to twelve years of age.
  16. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 45–46.
  17. David Lawrence McKay to Emma Ray Riggs, 20 August 1910, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
  18. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 16 August 1910, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
  19. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 26 October 1910, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
  20. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 26 October 1910, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
  21. Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 75.
  22. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906 to June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 2, Marriott Library, 37.
  23. A favorite group diversion in 1907 was buggy riding. On 17 July 1907, David wrote, "In the evening took Ray and the Babes out buggy riding. Later we packed up ready for my trip." Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 76.
  24. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 15 September 1921, David O. McKay Family Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 6, Marriott Library.
  25. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 65–66. The song is titled "Tofa Mai Feleni."
  26. At the October 1909 general conference, David taught that one of the predominating elements of salvation was work. "Work in the home! Work; legitimate work, in the avenues of life! Work, legitimate work in the social world." David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1909, 90.
  27. David O. McKay, *Instructor*, July 1962, 218.
  28. David O. McKay to David Lawrence McKay, 7 December 1918, David O. McKay Family Papers, 1897–1954, MS 21606, box 1, folder 1, CHL.
  29. Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 131.

30. At this point in his life, David O. McKay was nearly sixty years old. There are not many sixty-year-old men today who could work as he did.
31. Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 143.
32. Woodger, *David O. McKay: Beloved Prophet* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 94.
33. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1935, 115.
34. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 8 December 1910, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, box 1, folder 4, Marriott Library.
35. Michael Gurian, *The Wonder of Boys* (New York: Putnam Books, 1996), 116.
36. *Father, Consider Your Ways* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), 4–5.