

# Disciplining Father

“If the home does not develop obedience, society will demand it and get it. It is therefore better for the home with its kindness, sympathy, and understanding to train the child in obedience rather than callously to leave him to the brutal and unsympathetic discipline that society will impose.”

—David O. McKay<sup>1</sup>

**I**t is not easy being a parent. In fact, good parenting is one of the most difficult challenges that most adults will ever face.<sup>2</sup> To be a good parent takes time; it takes effort; it takes patience; it takes consistency; it takes perseverance; and it certainly requires unconditional love. Nevertheless, there are many factors in dealing with children that can be out of a parent’s control. Often, while mothers and fathers give parenting their best efforts, some children refuse to cooperate or comply with their parents’ teachings or values. Yes, there are some children who would give the very best parents a run for their money. Many contemporary children are complex and can have a myriad of issues to contend with. There is no “one-size-fits-all” formula for raising successful and well-adjusted children in our modern era.

Regarding parenting challenges, Elder Bruce C. Hafen shared the following experience:

## No Other Success

I once said in exasperation to my wife, Marie, “The Lord placed Adam and Eve on the earth as full-grown people. Why couldn’t he have done that with this boy of ours, the one with the freckles and the unruly hair?” She replied, “The Lord gave us that child to make Christians out of us.”

One night Marie exhausted herself for hours encouraging that child to finish a school assignment to build his own diorama of a Native American village on a cookie sheet. It was a test no hireling would have endured. At first he fought her efforts, but by bedtime, I saw him lay “his” diorama proudly on a counter. He started for his bed, then turned around, raced back across the room, and hugged his mother, grinning with his fourth-grade teeth. Later I asked Marie in complete awe, “How did you do it?” She said, “I just made up my mind that I couldn’t leave him, no matter what.” Then she added, “I didn’t know I had it in me.” She discovered deep, internal wellsprings of compassion because the bonds of her covenants gave her strength to lay down her life for her sheep, even an hour at a time.<sup>3</sup>

Being tired, worn out, frustrated, helpless, and even hopeless are sometimes common feelings for most parents. Indeed, as Sister Hafen stated, our children can make us into Christians, but they can also make us into something much less. Our challenge is to learn the lessons Heavenly Father intends for us and to become more like the Savior each day.

Furthermore, parenting is more than dealing with multifaceted personalities. To make the parenting issue even more complex, contemporary parents themselves are extremely busy. Between work responsibilities, Church assignments, basketball games, Cub Scout meetings, cheer practice, piano lessons, and swim meets, many Latter-day Saint families are experiencing a time famine. Arguably, both parents and children are busier now than at any time in our nation’s history.

Years ago, a national opinion poll asked the question, “What is most important in life?” Ninety-six percent said, “To have a good family. And in a similar Gallup poll, eight of every ten people said family was one of the most or *the most* important facet of their lives.”<sup>4</sup> Once again, most of us seem to understand what matters most in life. But there is

often a disconnect between what we believe and how we live. And as was previously mentioned, even though most American parents value their families, too many are unwilling to be present with their families and spend time with their children consistently.

There are many consequences that can impact families when both parents and their children are excessively busy. For instance, when families are “over busy” and “over scheduled,” children do not perform as well academically; they do not eat as nutritionally as they should; their self-worth can decrease; and the lack of relationships between parents and children could lead to all kinds of trouble.

However, there is one key consequence that may outweigh the other ones. When parents are busy, discipline, correction, and punishment often go by the wayside. With busy parents and a generation defined by excessive materialism, contemporary teens lack more discipline than any preceding generation. Indeed, discipline often takes a back seat when families are overscheduled and disconnected. Clinical psychologist Madeline Levine explained why:

When time, not money, is the most valuable commodity in a household, then tasks that take a lot of time and effort with little apparent payback are often swept aside. . . . Busy parents already feel guilty about the little time they have to spend with their children. Few of them want to “waste time” in conflict and anger and as a result are often only too happy to sidestep discipline issues. The unfortunate result is that children do not learn how to take responsibility, control their impulses, or be thoughtful.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the discipline of children becomes one of the great challenges of our contemporary era. Too many parents are not willing to invest the time that it takes to discipline their children, nor do they understand how to discipline them. Perhaps some modern parents did not have adequate examples of good parenting, or, as Levine argues, they do not want to spend the little time they do have with their children arguing or fighting over cleaning a room or making a bed.

Unfortunately, this lack of discipline, combined with materialism, is not going to yield a generation of hardworking, productive adults.

Instead, the current lack of child discipline could ultimately unravel society as we know it. Modern children are excessively coddled, spoiled, and lazy compared to previous generations. The painful truth is that the prime responsibility of parents is not to gratify their children but to make certain “that they develop a repertoire of skills that will help them meet life’s inevitable challenges and disappointments.”<sup>6</sup>

President N. Eldon Tanner helped parents understand their duties when it comes to discipline when he stated, “Children must learn obedience, and parents must exact obedience from them. Love your children, let them know that you love them; but remember that it is no favor to a child to let him do things he should not do.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, children need love, but they also need to be taught to be responsible for their actions. *They need to be regulated so they can ultimately regulate themselves.* If parents do not teach or expect their children to be obedient, how will they learn later in life to respect or follow the counsel of their bishop? Their boss? How will they follow the instruction and counsel of their stake president? When their mission president asks them to serve in the most difficult area of the mission with a challenging companion, how will they do it? How will they learn to follow the prophet in these latter days? And perhaps most important, how will they ever learn to follow the quiet whisperings of the Holy Spirit if their parents have not taught them to be obedient? Children will never learn such lessons unless they are taught obedience, respect, and how to work in their own homes.

## The Doctrine of Discipline

Decisions about discipline and how to administer consequences can cause some of the greatest challenges in parenting. The approach parents use to address a child’s misbehavior speaks a great deal about how adults view their role as parents. The discipline methods used by parents are often a product of how they were parented, and they also point directly to what they expect of their children. In the heart of parenting, mothers and fathers must deal with different personalities,

diverse temperaments, gender differences, and a host of other variables. No wonder President James E. Faust once declared:

One of the most difficult parental challenges is to appropriately discipline children. Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh and what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment. Brigham Young counseled, “If you are ever called upon to chasten a person, never chasten beyond the balm you have within you to bind up” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:124–25). Direction and discipline are, however, certainly an indispensable part of child rearing.<sup>8</sup>

The teaching and disciplining of children is something that every Latter-day Saint prophet has addressed since the days of Joseph Smith. In fact, Joseph F. Smith stated that parents should “use no lash and no violence, but approach them with reason, with persuasion, and love unfeigned. The man that will be angry at his boy, and try to correct him while he is in anger, is in the greatest fault. . . . You can only correct your children by love, in kindness, by love unfeigned.”<sup>9</sup> President Gordon B. Hinckley added his sentiment when he declared that “children don’t need beating. They need love and encouragement.”<sup>10</sup>

Elder David O. McKay taught the following in general conference:

Our children are our most precious possessions; and the proper training of youth is the most important duty and obligation of society. . . . True education does not consist merely in the acquiring of a few facts of science, history, literature or art, but in the development of character. . . . True education trains in self-denial and self-mastery. True education regulates the temper, subdues passion and makes obedience to social laws and moral order a guiding principle of life.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, President McKay believed that to discipline was to teach, and that the best teaching was to be done in the home. In fact, he viewed the duty for parents to instruct their children as “the highest assignment which the Lord can bestow upon man.”<sup>12</sup> It was not the duty or obligation of the state, the school, or the Church to discipline children. That duty rested primarily on the shoulders of parents. It was President McKay’s belief that if parents do not teach and require obedience in the home, then “society will demand it and get it.”<sup>13</sup>

## Parental Example

Perhaps more than any other parenting topic, President David O. McKay spoke most frequently regarding the need for parents to set a proper example for their children. It appears that he was keenly aware that teenagers can smell a hypocrite a mile away. President McKay often urged parents to be consistent with what they taught and how they behaved within the walls of their homes. As the President of the Church, he taught:

Remember, fellow parents, that children are quick to detect insincerity, and they resent . . . false pretension. Parents, of all people on earth, should be honest with their children. Keep your promises to them and speak the truth always. Children are more influenced by the sermons you act than by sermons you preach. It is the consistent parent who gains the trust of his child. When children feel that you reciprocate their trust, they will not violate your confidence nor bring dishonor to your name.<sup>14</sup>

President McKay further taught that “behavior is caught, not taught,” and that example is more potent than precept. It is the duty of parents to be what they would have their children become. Especially in aspects of courtesy, sincerity, temperance, and courage to choose the right in every situation.<sup>15</sup> David O. McKay would not teach these principles unless he lived them. Therefore, he would never require his children to do anything that he did not do himself. Because of this, his children admired him throughout their entire lives.



*David O. McKay and family. (Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.)*

President McKay believed that the most effective way to “teach religion in the home was not by preaching but by living. If you would

teach faith in God, show faith in him yourself; if you would teach prayer, pray yourself. Would you have [your children] temperate? Then you yourself refrain from intemperance.”<sup>16</sup> And that he did. We can all learn from President McKay when it comes to example. He never required his children to live a principle or perform an act he was not willing to perform. Furthermore, he lived a life that inspired his children to want to be good. He always maintained a strong relationship with each of his children individually so that he could influence them. He further understood that rules without relationships inspire rebellion; therefore, he had a solid bond with each of his children.

## Communicating Expectations

Perhaps only after the importance of parental example, the next step to successful child discipline is establishing clear-cut expectations. In this area alone, David and Emma Ray were laser focused. Their oldest son, Lawrence, reflected that his parents made their expectations perfectly clear, and they themselves

were so self-disciplined that we were never confused by seeing them behave in a way different from the way we were supposed to behave. . . . Our parents’ expectations provided the path for us to follow, and our love for them provided an irresistible motivation for us to walk that path. We learned to love them because they first dearly loved each other and us.<sup>17</sup>

Lawrence summarized, “Father expected the best. No one ever wanted to disappoint him.”<sup>18</sup> Because of the great love and adoration the children had for their father, they wanted to please him by doing the right things. Often, parents shift the duty of the teaching and training of their children to the Church. However, former Primary general president Coleen K. Menlove reminded parents: “Casual, infrequent family prayers, scripture study, and family home evenings will not be enough to fortify our children. Where will children learn the gospel and standards such as chastity, integrity, and honesty if not



at home? These values can be reinforced at church, but parents are the most capable and most effective in teaching them to their children.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is not the responsibility of institutions, including the Church, to teach and raise our children. Primarily, that job belongs to parents. The purpose of the Church, as Sister Menlove taught, is to reinforce what parents are teaching in the home.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, President David O. McKay declared, “There seems to be a growing tendency to shift this responsibility from the home to outside influences, such as the school and the church. Important as these outward influences are, they never can take the place of the influence of the mother and the father. Constant training, constant vigilance, companionship, being watchmen of our own children are necessary in order to keep our homes intact.”<sup>21</sup>

## Teaching Children Obedience

Aside from the practical experiences of raising seven children, President McKay had the opportunity to travel the world and observe parents from every walk of life. Many of these observations helped him formulate his opinions and passions regarding parenting. For example, on one of his train rides to a stake conference, he noticed the following and wrote to Emma Ray: “There is a lively two-year-old boy here in the car, and a mother who is constantly, constantly, constantly, saying, “Donald! . . . Donald, don’t do that! . . . Donald, dear, come here!” etc., etc. And Donald does “that,” and Donald doesn’t come here, and so another future American citizen gets his first lessons in disregard for law and order. I am so glad for a loving wife who is also a wise mother, and I love her because she is both and more.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps this experience and others like it inspired President McKay to say, “Parents should not fail to teach obedience to their children. Within the last decade there have been some rampant wild theories about the self-determination of children and the preservation of their individuality. Some of these theorists believe that children should be permitted to solve their own problems without guidance from parents. There is some virtue in this, but there is more error.”<sup>23</sup>

The McKays' youngest son, Edward, recalled the time he was playing with matches behind the barn. His parents called him to come in, so he decided to hide the matches in the pocket of his overalls. In so doing, he failed to realize that the matches were visible. When President McKay asked his son what he was doing, he replied that he was simply playing in the barn. Then David asked Edward what was in his pocket. He said, "Cherries." David reached over towards his son and pulled a match out of his pocket. Edward reported, "I got a good spanking, not for playing with matches, but for lying."<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting that David O. McKay had a different way of disciplining each of his children. The children were not "scolded," but Lawrence reported that he and a few other siblings often got "the look." Apparently, David could give a complete sermon with a quick glance. Another brother, Bobby, required "the finger," which meant his father would tap him on the head with his finger and say, "Think about it, boy."<sup>25</sup>

As a father and priesthood leader, David believed that obedience should be taught in the home and that teaching obedience was most certainly a parental duty.<sup>26</sup> He often taught that if obedience was not taught in the home, society would demand it.<sup>27</sup> It would be much better to learn obedience from kind and loving parents by the family fireside, than have it enacted upon them by a police officer, school principal, coach, or any other who would not be as kind or understanding. President McKay further believed that there was a direct link to obedience and happiness. He declared that obedience is "heaven's first law, and it is the law of the home. There can be no true happiness in the home without obedience—obedience obtained, not through physical force, but through the divine element of love."<sup>28</sup> David O. McKay strongly believed that the best time to teach obedience to children is between the ages of two and four.<sup>29</sup> He was fond of quoting the popular proverb: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."<sup>30</sup>

## Teaching the Principle of Agency

Another aspect of discipline was teaching children the proper use of agency. The McKay children were taught true principles, but it was

up to them to incorporate such teachings into their lives.<sup>31</sup> Regarding agency, David O. McKay taught that “next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God’s greatest gift to man. . . . Freedom of choice is more to be treasured than any possession earth can give.”<sup>32</sup> Lawrence shared the following experience:

Father was a firm believer in free agency. I don’t know that there was any proscription against face cards, but we never had any in our home. Llewelyn got a streak of independence when we were in high school and bought . . . a volume of Hoyle’s rules and a deck of cards that he kept in his top drawer. I recall that Father once came in to look for something and found the deck of cards.

“Whose are these?” he asked.

“Mine,” answered Llewelyn.

Father looked at him, put them back in the top drawer, and walked out. He never referred to them or mentioned them again to Llewelyn; but as I recall, they didn’t stay in the top drawer very long.<sup>33</sup>

David’s daughter Emma Rae reported that when she was younger, she didn’t want to attend church one particular Sunday. She asked her father, “Do I have to go to Sunday School?” David answered back, “You don’t have to go! Just hurry and get your coat on so we won’t be late.” On another occasion, she wanted to play in a park on the Sabbath day. Her father responded, “You have six days in the week to play, but on Sunday we attend our Church meetings and do quiet things.”<sup>34</sup> Yes, the McKay children had agency, but David understood that his job as a parent was to help his children exercise their agency in making correct choices!

Even though the McKay children had their agency, they also understood that their parents’ expectations deserved consideration. The children were also keenly aware that there would be consequences for their choices. Even so, they wanted to follow their parents because of the respect they had for them. Interesting, however, was the fact that their father’s Church callings made little difference in the choices the children made. It would seem that with an Apostle in the home, there would be much pressure to conform or to focus on appearance.

However, David O. McKay never expected his children to be perfect because of his high-profile position in the Church.

Lawrence was asked in an interview, “What was it like to be the son of a General Authority? Was that something you were proud of?” Lawrence responded by saying that having a father in the Church’s limelight, or as a General Authority, was never emphasized in their family.<sup>35</sup> Lawrence further explained that his father rarely spoke of the Church or his duties as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve when he was home. It was as if David kept his life in two compartments: his church life and his family life.

It was not that he did not teach his children gospel principles—that surely happened. However, the “nitty-gritty” business details of governing the Church were never discussed. Lawrence explained, “He would never talk to us about Church affairs, but we all felt the importance of Church work.”<sup>36</sup> It appeared that David wanted his children to grow up as normal as possible. He wanted them to have the same kind of life he did as a child—free to be young, to be taught in the framework of the gospel, to have a strong family life, and to learn to work. He didn’t want his calling to cloud or negatively impact his children’s lives.<sup>37</sup>

Through the proper exercise of agency, President McKay’s choice was to be a righteous husband and father. Moreover, his commitment to the gospel, and his example in living it, inspired his children to do the same. Fathers today can make similar choices to bless the lives of their families. Perhaps to spend more time with the family, there is something to sacrifice, a skill or talent to improve upon, or a sin to repent of. There is always room for improvement in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Never Repeat a Clear Command

One of McKay’s core beliefs of child rearing was “Never give a child . . . a command that you cannot immediately see is carried out.”<sup>38</sup> In harmony with that belief, he had another firm rule: “Never repeat a clear command. If you repeat it, the child will always wait for the repetition.”<sup>39</sup> David O. McKay always tried to live the very things that

he taught. Once his son Llewelyn was supposed to meet his father at 12:00 p.m. to go to Huntsville. Llewelyn made the mistake of showing up at 12:05 p.m. His father was gone.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the clear command was never repeated!

Lawrence learned a similar lesson. He remembers a ride to Huntsville in the surrey. He and his brother Llewelyn were sitting in the back seat and were doing what most brothers do—scuffling and goofing around. This was dangerous because such horseplay could lead to a child falling out of the carriage and under one of the large wheels. David O. McKay, with patience and calmness, asked his boys to stop. Unfortunately for them, they continued. That is when David removed his son Lawrence from the carriage. After the carriage moved on, Lawrence recalled:

Walking up the hill, seeing the team and surrey going along, getting farther away by the minute. I was old enough to have walked the rest of the way and was certainly in no danger on the country roads of those times; but Father let me walk just far enough to contemplate the lesson in sufficient leisure, then stopped and waited for me. I was a much-chastened boy when I climbed back into the surrey. There was no more teasing and quarreling.<sup>41</sup>

In another account of the “surrey story” told years later, Lawrence recalled, “Mother prevailed on Father to stop at the top of the hill, I climbed in, and we were quiet from then on.”<sup>42</sup> From that point on, young Lawrence McKay learned that when his father said something, he meant business.<sup>43</sup>

President McKay explained in general conference, “I believe firmly that parents . . . must get obedience from their children during the first five years of childhood. I believe that during that most important period of child life parents sow the seeds of obedience or disobedience. . . . Lovingly, kindly, but firmly, teach the child that there are rules in the house which should be obeyed.”<sup>44</sup>

Even when President McKay was older, he never wavered on his stance. There was an incident where all of the family were gathered in the front room. One of the grandchildren, somewhere between the

ages of three or four, was banging on the piano. Her mother asked her not to do it, but the child continued. That is when President McKay took matters into his own hands. He simply picked up his granddaughter, put her in the next room, and shut the door.<sup>45</sup> The command was never repeated!

## Freedom within Limits

President McKay taught, “The lesson of self-control should begin in childhood, in the home. Little children should have a sense of freedom to do as they wish up to a certain point. Beyond that point they cannot go, and that is when freedom interferes with the rights, comfort or convenience of another member of the family.”<sup>46</sup>

David believed that everyone could learn much simply by observing monkeys. He and Emma Ray were at the San Diego Zoo watching a mother monkey with her newborn babe. She was guarding the baby monkey and protecting it from larger monkeys in the cage. However, the little monkey was free to do as it pleased. This tiny monkey hopped around, weak in its infancy, and began to grip the bars and attempted to climb around. When the baby monkey would reach a certain spot in the cage, the mother would simply reach up and pull the little infant back down to safety. President McKay continued, “When it got into a danger point, the mother instinctively guarded it and by action, said, ‘Back this way.’ And the babe was free again, but only within certain limits. I said to Sister McKay, ‘There is a lesson of life in guiding children.’”<sup>47</sup>

This story helps illustrate David O. McKay’s strong parenting belief: children are free to choose, but there are also boundaries they must respect. He well understood the difference between “agency” and “freedom”—two concepts misinterpreted by many contemporary parents. Freedom is to allow children to do whatever they please. Agency implies that children have choices, but there are consequences for the choices they make. David allowed his children to have their freedom, but there were always positive or negative consequences for their choices.

## The Balance between Mother and Father

It appears that in the McKay household, David was certainly the disciplinarian, while Emma Ray was the nurturer. As with the “surrey story,” it seemed that David was as adamant about having Lawrence “out” as Emma Ray was to having him “back in.” Consider another example:

The boys were playing baseball, not only an American pastime but a McKay family tradition. As will sometimes happen, one of the balls went right through a basement window. The guilty party went directly to his father and told him it was an accident and that he was sorry. David O. McKay replied, “I am sorry, too, but just being sorry will not repair the damage.”

The boy asked, “How much will a new window cost?”

“I do not know,” replied his father, “but we shall have a repairman come up and he can tell us the exact amount.”

The child offered, “I haven’t much money, but I am willing to pay what I have.”

He was allowed to share in the expense, and when his mother remonstrated, “How could you take his money when he has such a small allowance?” David O. replied, “He has received a valuable lesson in the cost of keeping up a home, and now he has a monetary interest in this home which he will protect.” It may have been a coincidence, but there were no more windows shattered by baseballs.<sup>48</sup>

If David needed to rebuke his children harshly, he could do it. However, he usually felt bad afterwards. On one occasion, Llewelyn disobeyed his mother, and David had zero tolerance for such discourtesy. He wrote in his diary: “Because of his disobedience to his mother, I reprimanded Llewelyn more severely than I ever have any other child. It grieved me severely to do it; well—I hope it will do good.”<sup>49</sup> Since David recorded this incident in his diary, it must have weighed heavily on his mind.

At the same time, if a child deserved praise or commendation, David was often quick to compliment. For example, when Lawrence was six years old, he made the decision to cancel Christmas shopping

with his parents to stay home and tend the baby—little Lou Jean. David recorded, “[Lawrence] had looked forward to this day to see the toys with mama and papa; but just at the last . . . circumstances made it necessary for him to stay with the baby. Lawrence is only six years but he will deny himself anytime for his parents. I record this just as one instance out of many.”<sup>50</sup> From this simple reading, it is easy to detect that David was extremely proud of Lawrence for his willingness to sacrifice for his parents.

David believed that it was important to praise children. He adamantly believed that parents should never utter a cross word to each other, or to their children—especially while in public settings.<sup>51</sup> The late Truman G. Madsen—Brigham Young University professor, philosopher, and teacher—reported that he once attended a Sunday School meeting when David Lawrence McKay was serving as the general superintendent of Sunday School. Lawrence shared an experience with the teachers that evening that his father had related to him. Someone complained to President McKay that a particular Sunday School superintendent never began the Sunday School meetings on time. President McKay’s response was to wait until this man *does* start the meeting on time, “even accidentally, and then praise him, fervently praise him for the one time he does it right, and you will see that he will keep doing it.”<sup>52</sup> President McKay understood that rewarded behavior will continue. It was a principle he strongly embraced as a father. As a parent, David learned that if he was ever tempted to say something unkind or thoughtless to his children, he would put his tongue way back in his mouth and clamp his teeth down on it. He added, “And each time I did that, it was easier the next time not to say the unkind, hurtful thing.”<sup>53</sup>

Sometimes the discipline of the children would lean more towards the justice side of David O. McKay, and most often the training and correcting would swing towards the mercy side of Emma Ray. Occasionally, David and Emma Ray would disagree on how to handle the discipline in the home. They never argued in front of the children, but it was obvious that they did have a few discussions behind closed doors.<sup>54</sup> They would come to an agreement and then present it to



the children. This was a practice taught to both of them by David's father, who attributed his success as a parent to never disagreeing with his wife in front of the children. He told Emma Ray, "We go to our bedroom and talk things over, and when we come before our kiddies, we are of one mind."<sup>55</sup>

An example of this concept comes from an experience Lawrence shared:

I noticed what could have been a difference of opinion one time when I saw an advertisement of a bargain joint subscription of *Youth's Companion* and the *Literary Digest*, both of which I wanted very much. I asked mother if we could subscribe, and thought she approved, but she said, "Ask your father." I did, and he said no. Mother looked at me but didn't say anything. I don't know what happened between them, but a few days later Father said, "Lawrence, you were asking about subscribing to the *Youth's Companion* and *Literary Digest*. That will be all right."<sup>56</sup>

One of the greatest revelations a man can receive is to listen to the counsel of his wife. It is a testament to David's character that he was also meek. For as strong as his opinions were, he humbled himself, listened to his wife, and repented of his mistakes. Emma Ray seems to have been able to "smooth him over" and bring him down to reality when that was necessary. Fathers who want to assist the next generation must communicate positively with their children. Strong fathers are not afraid to discipline their children. Instead, they understand that if they do not impose rules and regulations on their children, ultimately, society will. Better to be taught in the home—the laboratory of love—than to have our society impose discipline. President McKay warned "parents who fail to teach obedience to their children." He taught, "If your homes do not develop obedience society will demand it and get it. It is therefore better for the home, with its kindness, sympathy, and understanding to train the child in obedience rather than callously to leave him to the brutal and unsympathetic discipline that society will impose if the home has not already fulfilled its obligation."<sup>57</sup>

## No Other Success

David O. McKay disciplined his children with love, tenderness, and firmness. He is a powerful example of how to teach obedience to children in a loving environment. Fathers today can learn from his courage to discipline. David O. McKay further understood that to discipline is to teach, and that the prime responsibility of fathers is to be teachers and leaders.

Moreover, David O. McKay was a kind and nurturing father. He had a strong relationship with each of his children; he taught them about values and the commandments of God; he laughed with them and cried with them; he missed his children immensely when they left home. What President McKay taught as an Apostle, and ultimately as the President of the Church, about parenting and raising children corresponded perfectly with how he lived. The greatest gift this man gave to his family was his time—something he really didn't have. Yet, by giving his time to his family, he gave everything.

## Notes

1. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1955, 27.
2. Elder James E. Faust once declared, "In my opinion, the teaching, rearing, and training of children requires more intelligence, intuitive understanding, humility, strength, wisdom, spirituality, perseverance, and hard work than any other challenge we might have in life." James E. Faust, *Ensign*, November 1990, 32.
3. Bruce C. Hafen, "Covenant Marriage," *Ensign*, November 1996, 26.
4. Stinnett and DeFrain, *Secrets of Strong Families*, 3–4.
5. Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 153.
6. *Ibid.*, 76.
7. N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, October 1977, 74.
8. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, October 1990, 41.
9. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 316–17.
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Save the Children," *Ensign*, November 1994, 52.
11. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1928, 102.
12. In Conference Report, April 1955, 27.
13. *Ibid.*
14. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1955, 26–27.

15. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1935, 114.
16. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1955, 27.
17. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 99.
18. As cited by Newell G. Bringhurst, "The Private Versus the Public David O. McKay: Profile of a Complex Personality," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Fall 1998): 14.
19. Coleen Menlove, "A Voice of Gladness for our Children," *Ensign*, November 2002, 14.
20. In Doctrine and Covenants 68:25, the Lord instructs parents: "Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion . . . that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents."
21. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1969, 7.
22. David O. McKay to Emma Ray McKay, 22 May 1920, McKay Papers, box 1, folder 7, CHL.
23. Llewelyn McKay, *Home Memories of President David O. McKay*, 214.
24. Edward McKay, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, 30 June 1995.
25. Ibid.
26. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1937, 30.
27. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1967, 135.
28. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, 484.
29. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1955, 27.
30. Proverbs 22:6.
31. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, "Helping children learn how to make decisions requires that parents give them a measure of autonomy, dependent on the age and maturity of the child and the situation at hand. Parents need to give children choices and should be prepared to appropriately adjust some rules, thus preparing children for real world situations." M. Russell Ballard, "The Sacred Responsibilities of Parenthood," *Liabona*, March 2006, 10–17.
32. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1950, 32.
33. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 102–3.
34. Emma Rae Ashton, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, 20 June 1995.
35. David L. McKay, interview by Gordon Irving, Salt Lake City, January–May 1984, James Moyle Oral History Program, MS 200 734, 24, CHL.
36. Ibid., 50.

## No Other Success

37. If there was any pressure to be the “perfect family,” it actually came from Emma Ray. One of her children reported, “Mother always told us that we had to set the example for everybody, because of Father’s position. Father would never say that.” Lawrence actually reported, “I got tired of Mother saying, ‘You have to set an example.’” Perhaps Emma Ray felt more pressure as a parent than David did. *Ibid.*, 22.
38. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 99.
39. Woodger, *David O. McKay*, 96.
40. Gunn McKay, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, 28 July 1995.
41. McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, 100; see also David L. McKay, interview by Gordon Irving, James Moyle Oral History Program, 13.
42. David L. McKay, interview by Gordon Irving, James Moyle Oral History Program, Salt Lake City, Utah, January–May 1984, 13.
43. David L. McKay, microfilm, address at a Luncheon of the 17th Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, 8 May 1982. MS 7013, CHL.
44. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, June 1919, 78.
45. Lou Jean McKay Blood, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, 8 August 1995.
46. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, September–October 1950, 165.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Jeanette Morrell McKay, *Highlights in the Life of President David O. McKay*, 44, 47.
49. Diaries of David O. McKay, August–December 1915, MS 668, box 5, folder 4, Marriott Library.
50. Diaries of David O. McKay, April 1906–June 1907, MS 668, box 4, folder 2, Marriott Library, 105.
51. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1967, 149.
52. Truman G. Madsen, *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 247.
53. As cited in Stephen R. Covey, *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 123.
54. David Lawrence McKay, interview by Gordon Irving, James Moyle Oral History Program, Salt Lake City, January–May 1984, 133.
55. Emma Ray McKay, “The Art of Rearing Children Peacefully,” *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year*, 12 April 1952, 9.
56. David Lawrence McKay, “Remembering Father and Mother, President David O. McKay, and Sister Emma Ray Riggs McKay,” *Ensign*, August 1984, 34–36.
57. David O. McKay, *The Responsibility of Parents to Their Children* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.), 1.