

“More Freedom from Earth-Stains, More Longing for Home”

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About two years ago, Dr. Shirley Klein, Renee Beckwith, and I began a research project initially called “Joy in Mothering.” It seemed to us that there are a lot of grim-faced mothers of preschoolers buzzing about in their minivans and too many sorrowful mothers of sullen teens wondering when they might again feel the love and closeness they felt when they held those children as babes in arms. We thought there ought to be ways of realizing more joy in the journey.

We suspected mothers may feel overwhelmed at the physical care children require (and they do!) and may feel isolated by a seemingly endless stream of diapers and spit up. Some feel looked down on, their homemaking judged as nothing of *real* value, and their children disparaged as “crib lizards” or “vomit comets.”¹

Mothers feel all of these things, even mothers employed outside the home. But as we surveyed the literature, and as we talked with mothers themselves in focus groups, we found that mothers are caught between two contradictory models of mothering. These models also have application for fathers, for teachers, and for general human relations.

Mother as Manager

The first might be called the mother-as-manager model. In this model, task-completion and efficiency are stressed. Sometimes there is even a separation of the means and the ends. By *end*, I mean the goal



Realizing more joy in the journey.

Photo by Annette Nordgren

of an activity. For example, one end sought by a mother I met in a grocery store aisle was to keep her two young children from climbing out of her cart each time she stopped to select an item. The *means*, or method, she used was to threaten ominously that if they got out again she would be very, very mad. Her end, or goal, was probably to keep them safe and to finish shopping before the day was done.

But I am not sure her children understood what the end was. Maybe they thought the end was to keep mom from getting mad, and, depending on the mom, there might be a thousand things other than the children's behavior that could trigger her anger or that could pacify her. Another safety-conscious mother might use the means of strapping the children more tightly in the cart. One efficient mother leaves her children with a friend while she shops; another mother promises a treat if the children are good. Some mothers involve their children in the shopping experience, making it a game of who can spot the oatmeal or guess how many oranges will weigh exactly one pound. The shopping will still get done, but for some of these mothers, the time together will also help build a good relationship with their children.

If ends are separated from means in what might be called a strategic view of mothering, childcare techniques are designed to be applicable to every child. In this view, as Victoria Wynn Leonard points out, the

"tasks of mothering are merely technical procedures, performed by anyone with the requisite skill, much as anyone with the requisite skill can repair an automobile; no relationship with the vehicle is required in order to perform the task."²

With this technique, only the output matters: children are products with self-toileting, self-dressing features. Needless to say, reliance on mother-as-manager techniques of childcare could create a climate in which a particular child's, or a particular mother's, emotional and spiritual needs and abilities are not the primary focus, nor is the refinement of the relationship counted among the outcomes.

Mothering as Practice

Contrasting with the mothering-as-management model is what Wynn Leonard calls mothering as practice. In this model, mothering is more than managing. Both means and ends matter as notions of the good are worked out individually with each child. This is a two-way relationship; neither mother nor child controls it. In this kind of mothering, mothers are attentive to means and ends, understanding that both build their relationship with an individual child. For example, the means used to toilet train a child are tailored by the mother to the individual child. The means of caring for her child matter to the mother and to the child because the outcome is not merely a self-toileting child but also a relationship of trust and sensitivity between mother and child and a reservoir of shared experience.³

I bring before you these two models of mothering, or relationships, because they remind me of what we see in scripture. In the Council in Heaven, the spirit children of God were taught the Father's eternal plan for their happiness.⁴ In the Father's plan, both the means and the ends are of profound importance. As it turns out, the end, "the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), cannot be achieved by the wrong means, such as coercive or manipulative practices.⁵

We were taught the Father's plan, and then Lucifer presented the ultimate management plan: he would "redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1). You and I and all the rest of humanity were going to be Lucifer's trophy kids. Our agency overridden, he would haul us back to heaven, which would then come under new, seemingly more efficient, management.

Had his plan been tried, it would necessarily have involved coercion or manipulation of human agency that would have made our life on earth miserable and meaningless, our choices really his, not ours.

Maybe he just wanted to do a cheap redemption. If he could control us, if we did not sin, it would not cost him very much to redeem us (see Moses 4:1, 3). Satan's plan could never have worked, in any sense. Neither the means nor the end he proposed were in keeping with the work and the glory of the Father.

In contrast to the efficient Lucifer, Christ did not present a plan of His own at all. He offered Himself in furthering the plan of the Father, who knew, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks states, that "in the course of mortality, we would become subject to death, and we would be soiled by sin."⁶ Reclaiming us from death and sin required a Savior willing to pay the high price of his own suffering. He had to be willing to condescend to be born into this mortal world as a vulnerable child (see 1 Nephi 11:16), to enter into the covenant of baptism (see 1 Nephi 11:27), to suffer all our sorrows and afflictions, even death, "that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people" (Alma 7:12). He could not guarantee that each of us would return because we could choose to reject Him at any time.

Relationships cannot be managed nor controlled without doing violence to the relationship and to the person we are in relation with.⁷ Mothering as practice, the willingness to enter into a genuine relationship with each child over the course of our lifetimes, is closer to what the Lord would have us do than mere management. But our eagerness to prevent our children from falling into sin, to make sure our children choose right, may tempt us to manage our relationship with them or to try to manipulate them into doing what is right. We must resist the temptation so that our children may better learn to put their trust in God and to choose good because they love Him. This is not to say we make no rules, or simply believe things will work out without our help. It means, as one of our former stake presidents put it, "we can't do the Lord's work using the devil's tools."

Teaching Our Children

As we consider how to help our children return to God, let us remember what we learned before we left Him:

1. We knew that a body of flesh and bones is a great and powerful gift.
2. We knew that we are agents.
3. We knew that good can be distinguished from evil.
4. We knew that good is stronger than evil.
5. We knew that Christ is our Redeemer; His is the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved.

These are the things we must learn all over again in this life and the things we need to teach our children to keep them as free as possible from earth-stains.

First, we must teach that a body of flesh and bones is a great and powerful gift. There are so many ways to go wrong in teaching about the body. We should not abuse our bodies, neither should we worship them with incessant buffing and gilding. From the early days of childhood, we can teach our children the Word of Wisdom, that alcohol, drugs, and tobacco hurt the mind, the body, and the spirit, and make it harder for us to hear the voice of the Lord. This law of health is also a protection from the evil designs of those who profit from selling addictive substances and who exploit those users.

Because we are embodied beings, our spirit is not more real than our flesh. We are both body and spirit, and the body is not merely an instrument of the spirit, nor, as Arthur H. King pointed out, is the spirit trapped in the body "like a squirrel in a cage."⁸ The human body is, as Robert P. George puts it, an intrinsic good, given to us by God.⁹ Gendered bodies empower us for service within the family. Let us remember that just as Christ's Atonement was the service of an embodied being, much of our service, as mothers and others, will require significant bodily as well as spiritual labor.

Within the family, a child learns the reassurance and joy of appropriate, loving physical contact. A clasp of the hand, a pat on the shoulder, a hug, and a kiss on the cheek retain their power of communicating love and concern throughout our lives. We should use care in disciplining our children and ourselves so that the body is not demeaned in any way.

We can, and do, make what Robert P. George calls prudential arguments¹⁰ about the misuse of the body, warning against the spread of STDs and the carnage of drunken driving, for example. But what we actually want to instill in our children is respect for persons and a deep reverence for human intimacy and the sanctity of human life itself.¹¹ Reverence for the sanctity of the person and for the procreative powers prevents us from laughing at raunchy jokes, from dressing inappropriately, from viewing pornography and violent films, as well as from participating in sexual intimacy outside of marriage, abortion, and so-called mercy killing. In contrast, the managerial approach may use fear and disgust as the driving force for avoiding nonmarital sex and alcoholic beverages. Our task in teaching the Word of Wisdom and chastity is to preempt both negative attitudes and behaviors through positive teachings *and* positive relationships.

Second, we teach that we are agents. Satan seeks to “destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3) and “to destroy the world” (Moses 4:6), presumably by turning our agency awry. Arthur King noted that it might not be necessary for the devil to entice us to do evil, that all he may need to do is distract us with a wide range of entertainment. If much of our time, money, and energy is used up by entertaining fare on the Internet, on video, on audio, in print, or through other media, then we may spend too little time studying scriptures, playing with and teaching our children, serving in the temple, and ministering to neighbors’ needs. We must show our children why such things are not worthy of their time and attention, lest they remain forbidden pleasures for the child to try later in life. That means we do not have hidden forbidden pleasures ourselves either.

As we give our children the rules of life to live by, we ought to be sure that they are inoculated against some of the pernicious theories of our day. While the Lord does take into account each person’s circumstances, we know that each of us is born with the Light of Christ and the gift of agency. That means that we bear some responsibility for our choices. Theories of human personality and child rearing which negate agency are antithetical to the gospel. The scriptural accounts of premortal life, of Adam and Eve, and of their early posterity make it clear that each individual is an agent choosing between good and evil, between serving God and serving the devil. Sometimes merely using the jargon of the social sciences changes how we view our responsibility for our choices. We should take care that we do not view ourselves as incapable of choosing to serve God or as determined by our genes or by our upbringing to commit sin.

For example, after Cain had murdered Abel, creating the first deep earth-stain, the Lord asked him, “Where is Abel, thy brother?” Cain’s answer was flippant, tinged with disrespect: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Moses 5:34). No remorse, no regret, no empathy, no respect for anyone but himself.

Cain became minimally courteous toward the Lord when told that the earth, stained with Abel’s blood, would no longer yield to Cain her strength. Faced with a loss of his livelihood, Cain’s attitude changed slightly. He justified his choices¹² but did not accept responsibility for his exercise of agency. He refused to see the situation truthfully. Rather, he saw himself as a victim of greed and of low self-esteem due to lack of positive reinforcement from God, who did not respect Cain’s offering. Cain suffered from poor anger-management skills. His glorying in sin became the whine of victimization when he said, “My

punishment is greater than I can bear" (Moses 5:38). He then saw his own sin in the face of every man: he feared being killed by a brother as he had killed his own brother. His self-deception was profound and bound him and his posterity in a web of evil relationships that came to be known as secret combinations.

We can surrender our agency to physical or emotional addictions, to evil combinations, or to wrongheaded theories about the nature of human beings; but that, too, is a choice we make as agents unto ourselves. Obedience without agentive choice is, at worst, hypocritical, and at best, temporary. We need to reach the whole child, the soul of the child, not just the child's behaviors. This is a labor-intensive method that has no guaranteed outcome because the agency of the child remains intact. It is sometimes painful; it is always worth the effort.

Third, we teach that good can be distinguished from evil. We live in a time when there is cynicism about whether any idea, person, or entity could accurately be called good or evil. Some doubt whether there could be truth with a capital T, and whether, if there were, we would have the ability to perceive such a thing. The Light of Christ is given to all who enter this world that they may judge between good and evil (see Moroni 7:18–19). God has also sent us messengers such as prophets to help us discern the good. They are willing to tell us the truth, even when we don't want to hear it. That is what parents are for, too. We teach rules, the what-to-dos and the what-not-to-dos of life, but we also teach our children in whom they can put their trust. It is one thing to teach that God forbids a certain action; it is quite another thing to help a child enter into a covenant to serve the Lord.

Covenants are agreements between persons who stand in a specific relationship to each other. Covenants combine both rules and relationships. For example, in baptism, we agree or promise to remember our Savior and to stand as a witness for Him in all times and in all places. In that promise we acknowledge our relationship to Him as one of reliance on His atoning grace. And as disciples in His service, we come to desire good because of our covenantal relationship with Christ.

Simply setting up consequences for good and bad behavior is not enough to teach our children. Adam and Eve, like little children, did not have a full understanding of good and evil when they were first placed in the garden to be proved, to see whether they would do "all . . . the Lord their God [should] command them" (Abraham 3:25). In beguiling Eve, the serpent was far more subtle than simply suggesting she disobey God. Rather, he used a ploy familiar to contemporary rhetoric: he adjusted the definitions. He redefined the consequences

of transgression, appealing to her desire to be like the Father: “Ye shall not surely die, . . . ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Moses 4:10–11). He did not tell the whole truth. Eve would, indeed, know good and evil, but unlike God, she would still lack the wisdom to always *do* good and would lack the power to save herself from the effects of sin.

When Adam and Eve transgressed, God did not simply invoke consequences. That is, He did not say, “I told you if you touched that tree you were dead; and now you’re dead,” sending them summarily into mortality, hoping they would catch on to obedience. They learned from their own experience to choose good, rather than evil, but it was not automatic. We do not necessarily learn what we should from our experiences, good and bad. We need someone with greater wisdom to help us understand our experiences. God did not abandon Adam and Eve in their sins. He called them out of hiding and taught them the plan of salvation (see Moses 6:62) so they could repent, be forgiven, and then enter into the covenant of baptism (see Moses 6:50–53, 64–66).

They learned from their transgression to trust in the Lord and to “lean not unto [their] own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). The lessons they learned in the Garden of Eden gave them a willingness to obey fully, though their understanding was incomplete. One evidence that they learned from their experience is that they obeyed the command to sacrifice before they understood why. Thereafter, they were taught by God and angels to do all things in the name of the Son, to “repent and call upon God in the name of the Son” (Moses 5:8). Doing so prepared them so that by the power of the Spirit their eyes could be opened and their understandings enlightened (see Moses 5:10–11): they could better “see and understand the things of God” (D&C 76:12). They learned to obey the commandments of God, the rules of life, but they also learned about relationships: they learned to trust God and his messengers.

Contrast Cain’s experience with good and evil. Unlike his parents, who transgressed but then repented and turned themselves to God, Cain was counseled by the Lord but would not hearken to the counsel. The Lord was willing to work with Cain, to help him repent from the sinful sacrifice, and to help him turn away from Satan’s employ. But Cain held on to his anger, and his anger separated him from God, his brother Abel, and his parents, just as Satan’s pride and wrath separated *him* from the Father.

When we choose evil, we enter the company of evildoers. Cain entered into relationships based on evildoing. He joined himself to a

wife who loved Satan more than God, and then he entered into a secret oath to murder his brother and to keep the knowledge of it from his father, Adam (see Moses 5:28–31). Those secret oaths and covenants are in opposition to the work of God. Cain gloried in his wickedness, not unlike some of earth's tyrants who have by their secret combinations afflicted entire nations and peoples with misery and death. He rejected both the law and the loving people who would have helped him turn to God.

Fourth, we teach that good is stronger than evil. God is more powerful than the devil, who eventually will be bound (see D&C 45:55). Many today despair at the evil in the world. Evil sometimes seems so pervasive that some begin to believe that if enormous evils exist, good cannot exist. However, both exist, and the existence of one does not negate the existence of the other. Compare the evil actions of those who killed thousands on September 11 with the thousands of good, brave, and kind actions taken by individuals caught in the tragic events of that day. Those good actions, those good people, will have a greater impact over time than will the evil to which they responded.

Satan cannot destroy the work of God. Though he may rage in the hearts of men for a time, he has already lost. One of his names, Perdition, means "lost." Our children need to know that the devil is a real being, but they also need to know that followers of Christ can shun him, and be protected from him. The story of Moses experiencing the power of God and the power of the devil in rapid succession¹³ illustrate the glory and power of God in comparison to the temptations of the devil. When Satan commanded, "Moses, son of man, worship me" (Moses 1:12), Moses looked upon him and said, "Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?" (Moses 1:13). If our children have experienced the goodness of God, it will be easier for them to recognize that by birthright they are entitled to better than Satan has to offer.

Fifth, we teach that Christ is our Redeemer, the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved. Our children must come to know Him not as an abstract entity to whom we submit an application for eternal life, but as the loving being who longs to welcome us home. We cannot force conversion upon our children; we cannot convert them by manipulating their emotions nor by making the gospel more entertaining than other competing activities. We can only encourage them, testify of truth, and enter into a genuine relationship of learning about God with them. They will find through their own prayers, scripture

reading, and receiving ordinances and blessings that the power of God is real and good.

If we try to bring them to Christ by managing them, we should not be surprised if they adopt a philosophy like Korihor's, that it is by the management of each individual creature that we fare in this life. They will have learned about the means—management and manipulation—and that will have destroyed the end—freely loving and following Christ. Or they may suppose they must conquer by their own strength, that all this church stuff is the foolish traditions of frenzied minds, and that no one really can know a being who could redeem them (see Alma 30:12–18).

We teach our children the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, but those truths will enter their souls partly through their relationships with us and mostly through the relationship they themselves have with Christ. If we have respected their agency and have a truthful, genuine relationship with them, I think they are better prepared to choose to have a truthful relationship with Heavenly Father and to be open to His enlightening their understandings.

We do not know the hour nor the day in which our children must call upon Christ with all the energy of their souls, or be lost. And in that day, like Alma, they must trust that they can say within their hearts: “Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness,” (Alma 36:18) and have confidence that He will lovingly “snatch” them too from that awful state that their souls will be pained no more (see Alma 26:17; Mosiah 27:29).

Christ knows each of us and has atoned for each of us. If our children know Him and are walking in His ways, they will look forward to meeting *Him*, not His general manager nor His personal assistant. For *He* is the “keeper of the gate” through which each of us must pass if we are to be saved, and “he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). **RE**

Notes

1. Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, “Caring for Crib Lizards,” *American Prospect*; <http://www.prospect.org/print/V12/01/hewlett-s.html>.

2. Victoria Wynn Leonard, “Mothering as a Practice,” in *Caregiving: Readings in Knowledge, Practice, Ethics, and Politics*, ed. Suzanne Gordon, Patricia Benner, and Nel Noddings (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 127.

3. Kathleen Bahr has demonstrated in her studies of family work how caring for the home and yard can be approached as a means to build good family rela-

tionships, not simply as a way of keeping the dishes washed and the lawn mowed (Howard M. Bahr and Kathleen S. Bahr, "Families and Self-Sacrifice: Alternative Models and Meanings for Family Theory," *Social Forces* 79, no. 4 [June 2001]: 1249).

4. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, November 1993, 72.

5. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 40–41; compare D&C 121:41–46.

6. Oaks, "The Great Plan of Happiness," 72.

7. C. Terry Warner, *The Bonds That Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2001), 83–100.

8. Arthur H. King, *Arm the Children: Faith's Response to a Violent World* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1998), 334.

9. Robert P. George, "A Clash of Orthodoxies"; <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9908/articles/george.html>.

10. George, "A Clash of Orthodoxies."

11. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's *Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments* is a superb treatment of human intimacy (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2001).

12. See discussion in Warner, *The Bonds That Make Us Free*.

13. See also the experiences of Christ, Alma the Younger, and Joseph Smith.