

SOME THOUGHTS ON MOTHER'S DAY

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**By
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INTRODUCTION

Today being what it is, I have been asked to speak about mothers. I would like to first say a few things about the mothers in my life, then discuss some of the risks and joys of motherhood and then venture hesitantly toward suggesting some things that we who deal with mothers on a regular basis might do to make their lives, and ours, richer. I should also say that the type of mother I am most familiar with is the one who has many household and other responsibilities. As the years pass some mothers reach a stage in life where the number of meaningful things they are called upon to do declines. They face different challenges than the busy young mother I live with. I hope what I have to say will be applicable to some extent to all mothers. However, my comments are aimed primarily at mothers who are in the midst of the home building, child raising, husband pleasing, community serving fray.

MOTHERS AND LOVE

We all know that the thing that sets mothers apart is the love they express for those around them, and in particular for their children. Dwan Young recently said:

In the soft and gentle arms of a mother's love, children can come to know the voice of the Lord.

Because my mother-in-law, Elsie James, is here today, I would like to tell you a story about her love for Juli, my wife. Mom James and I have a good enough relationship that I think it can bear a story of this kind.

My family and Juli's have known each other for many years. Shortly after Juli and I started dating, I was in the James' home one evening for dinner. Mom had just arrived home from work and was busily preparing the evening meal. Juli was off getting ready for the date we were going to go on that evening and I was in the kitchen trying to help. I think I was slicing something. While I sliced, I jokingly told Mom that one of the things that really concerned me about dating Juli was the size of her father and brothers. I thought that if I ever did something mean to her, I might have problems with them. But, I said, even though Dad is big I am sure I can get away from him and so he does not worry me too much. And the same applies to Kevin. At 6'3" - 220lbs or so, he could tear me limb from limb if he got his hands on me. But I am confident enough in my feet that I am not too worried about him. Brett, however, is a different story. He's as big as Kevin or maybe even a bit bigger and

he's very fast. I told Mom that I was worried that I might not be able to get away from Brett. Mom turned to me and without cracking a smile said: "You wouldn't get away from me!". You've heard about "she" bears protecting their young. I had a better understanding of what that might be like after talking to Mom James that evening.

THE MOTHERS IN MY LIFE

While we are here today to especially honour mothers, I would like to broaden the topic a bit. I would like to honour all women who have used their time and energy to nurture others. Russell M. Nelson said:

The spiritual rewards of motherhood are available to all women. Nurturing the young, comforting the frightened, protecting the vulnerable, teaching and giving encouragement need not, and should not, be limited to our own children.

Many women have had a nurturing, loving influence on me. They include my wife Juli; my Mother Katie Paxman McCue; my Grandmother Gladys Marsden McCue who we are fortunate to have with us today; Grandma Lucille Allred Paxman; Margaret Hill in whose home I lived for a semester in high school; Colleen Low, my aunt with whom I lived during the summer Juli and I dated and then were engaged to be married and last but not least, my mother-in-law Elsie. Each has had a profound positive influence on my life and in one way or another has nurtured me. I pay tribute to each of them.

Juli

Of all the mothers in my life Juli is the most important. I plan to be her eternal companion. She has taught me most of what I know about expressing love and how important that is. I count what I have learned with regard to that subject as my most significant learning experience of the past 20 years. Juli is a wonderful mother and wife. I am grateful for her and love her with all my heart. She is in many ways my model Mom.

My Mom

My feelings with regard to my own Mother are perhaps best summed up by relating to you an experience that happened to Juli and I a few years ago. We were asked to attend a Young Women's activity at which the girls had us participate with several other couples in a newlywed game. You no doubt recall that that game involves the wives being asked to predict their husbands answers to certain questions and vice versa. One of the questions for Juli and the other wives was: "If your husband had to choose one woman, other than you, with whom he would spend the rest of his life on a desert island, who would he choose?" To the laughter of the other ladies and the girls, Juli predicted that I would choose my mother. Most of the other wives thought that their husbands would choose someone like Julia Roberts. When I was eventually asked the question, I without hesitation said, "my Mom". She has been a friend and confidante ever since I was old enough to appreciate her

in that regard. Before that she was my playmate and disciplinarian. She taught me how to play basketball and baseball, and could beat me at one on one until I was so old that I am still ashamed to admit just how old that was. And most of all, she loved me and tried to pull me to her through those hellish teenage years when I did so many things that hurt her and would have justified her in pushing me away.

Grandma McCue

I want to especially honour my Grandma McCue who is with us today. One of the things we have immensely enjoyed about living in Calgary is that we see much more of her than we did while we lived in Vancouver. Grandma has dedicated a large portion of her life to loving and gathering her family around her. She did that first with her own four children, then with her almost 20 grandchildren and now with a growing number of great-grandchildren who get to experience her love while missing the experience of having her give them baths and wash their ears. Any brain damage I have is attributable to the way Grandma used to use her finger nails to wash the insides of my ears when I was a little boy.

One of the wonders of parenthood is the manner in which the capacity of love expands as children and others arrive. Grandma's love expands even more quickly than most. As soon as it is rumoured that a great-grandchild might be on its way or indeed that a grandchild is going to get married and therefore great-grandchildren might soon be visible on the horizon, Grandma begins making the baby's first quilt. The service she has given in so many ways to her family is one of our family's most significant heritages.

Grandma's was the first telephone number I learned to dial as a toddler in Lethbridge. I must have been headed toward a legal career at an early age. I was no more than three or four when I first grasped the concept of an appeal to higher authority from decisions that didn't go my way. When my parents "mistreated" me, I called Grandma to complain and asked for her help in getting my parents in line. To my knowledge, these appeals only succeeded in creating minor friction between my loving Grandma and the mother of her first, and I am still convinced, favourite grandson.

I have spent lots of time with Grandma. She is not a "sport", as she puts it. That is, she does not enjoy playing sports or watching them (unless one of her grandkids is playing). Nonetheless, at my insistence she spent hours in her back yard pitching plastic baseballs to me while as a pre-schooler I tried to learn to bat. She would comfort me when after missing numerous consecutive pitches I would throw the bat across the yard and scream that I hated the game and never wanted to play it again. Seconds later after drying my tears she would start pitching balls again. She hates fishing. But if I begged she would take me to Henderson Lake in Lethbridge to catch the "big gold fish" that used to live there. She hates mustaches. Once when a member of her bishopric grew one she went to him after church one Sunday and told him that facial hair of that sort did not become someone who bore his responsibilities. He shaved it off. But when I tried, with only moderate success, to grow a "Fu Manchu" as a 17 year old she only tried 10 or 15 times to get me to shave it off and still loved me when I wouldn't.

I have vivid memories of sneaking into my home very late one night when I was a teenager. I had done some things that night that I knew were wrong. Grandpa and Grandma were visiting us in Victoria at the time. The next morning, Grandma had somehow learned or suspected what I had been doing the night before and came down to my bedroom with Grandpa to talk to me about it. I didn't want to talk to them and so pretended to be asleep even after they tried to wake me. When Grandma was convinced that I must be awake, she proceeded to talk to me while I pretended to sleep. She called me "Big Boy" in those days. "Big Boy", she said with overtones of concern, love and pain in her voice, "What have you been doing to yourself?" She repeated this several times and said a few other things. With each repetition, her feelings of love, concern and fear enveloped me. We knew each other so well that she didn't have to spell out how she felt to convey her feelings to me. Those softly spoken words and her love still echo across over twenty years. I can't think of anything she could have done that would have affected me more profoundly than what she did. That expression of love on her part and similar expressions of love from my parents and others eventually gave me the strength I needed to overcome certain bad habits I had formed. The grasp those habits had on me was so much stronger than I imagined it ever could be when under pressure from some "friends" I took the first "harmless" steps toward developing them.

Many of Grandma's grandchildren, including me, have lived with her and Grandpa while we attended university in Lethbridge. She is still referred to as "Grandma" by many of my friends and the friends of other grandchildren. Bruce Dunham spent a weekend with us in her home when we went to Lethbridge earlier this year to watch the Provincial high school basketball championships. He now calls her Grandma too.

I want Grandma to know how much I love her and to thank her publicly for all she has done for me and for our family. It has been said that a child's knowledge that he is his mother's favourite is one of those magical things that gives confidence and the ability to face life and conquer life's challenges. The same can be said about being a grandmother's favourite. I promise not to burst the bubble of the other grandchildren in that regard if they promise to leave mine alone.

MOTHERHOOD IN GENERAL

I would now like to share some thoughts with you regarding motherhood in general. I will try to include some practical comments with regard to expressing our love for our mothers and others as well as talking about the theory behind these issues. I'll try not to be like Will Rogers. During WWI, Will had a suggestion for getting rid of the German submarines. "All we have to do", he said, "is heat up the Atlantic Ocean to 212°. Then the subs will surface and we can pick them off one by one." When someone asked him how he was going to warm up the ocean, he said: "I'm not going to worry about that. That a matter of detail. I'm a policy man." I will try to say something about the details of motherhood as well as the ideals we all espouse with regard to it.

Balancing Conflicting Roles

Being a mother is a tough job. Mom is pulled in a variety of directions. She is first and foremost an individual. In terms of importance, her second most important role is that of a spouse and sweetheart. In my view, in which I am in agreement with the General Authorities and the scriptures, her third role is that of a mother. She is also often these days her family's provider and in addition a generous giver of time and effort to community and church causes. Balancing these various roles is difficult. Many good people are seemingly unable to achieve this balance. This often results in dysfunctional marriages and family relationships and unnecessary feelings of low self-esteem.

The most powerful and immediate force that acts upon a mother is her feeling towards her children. One writer put it this way:

In the sheltered simplicity of the first days after a baby is born, one sees again the magical closed circle - the miraculous sense of two people existing only for each other." (Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

Another put it this way:

There is an enduring tenderness in the love of mother... it is neither to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by danger... she will sacrifice every comfort to his convenience; she will surrender every pleasure to his enjoyment; she will glory in his fame and exalt in his prosperity; and if adversity overtake him, he will be the dearer to her by misfortune; and if disgrace settle upon his name, she will still love and cherish him; and if all the work decide to cast him off, she will be all the world to him. (Washington Irving)

As time passes, the challenge for a mother with regard to her children changes. In that regard, another writer said:

The mother-child relationship is paradoxical and, in a sense, tragic. It requires the most intense love on the mother's side, yet this very love must help the child grow away from the mother and become fully independent. (Erich Fromm)

Hence, for those mothers who have given themselves completely to their children, there comes a time when as children grow and leave to find their way in the world, the mother may find herself empty.

The everlasting sadness of any mother is that there comes a time when she can no longer bring magic to your life, nor cure to your troubles. (Diana Briscoe)

On a lighter note, Elder Monte Brough indicated that while he was serving as mission president in Minnesota a severe tornado went through the area. It caused enough damage that it was reported on the news nationwide. Immediately his phone started ringing. His missionaries' mothers were calling to find out whether their boys and girls were OK. He thought: "You know those Mormon mothers.

They just won't undo the apron strings. They just won't let their kids go." The next time the phone rang it was his mother calling to make sure he was OK.

A phenomenon similar to that of children leaving their mother occurs when a world class athlete who has dedicated much of his or her life to a sport is injured or retired and finds life empty. Both of these phenomenon are well documented in the psychological literature. The solution to both is to make sure that one's life is not completely dominated by something that will not last forever. Both Mom and the world class athlete should seek a well rounded existence, despite the intensity of their feelings for what dominates the bulk of their time.

Take Care Not to Give Too Much

It is the blinding power of the mother's impulse towards her children coupled with the refining influence of the gospel that results in much of the good mothers do and how motivated they are to sacrifice themselves for their children. This force, and ironically the teachings of the gospel if we are not careful, can also create the imbalances that I described. Carolyn Lynn Pearson has written a number of interesting pieces on this topic, many of which are collected in a book called "The Growing Season". I'd like to read a excerpt to you from a piece entitled "Millie's Mother's Red Dress". Millie and her mother, who is on her death bed, are conversing.

I sat by her bed,
And she sighed a bigger breath,
Than I thought she could hold.
"Now that I'll soon be gone,
I can see some things.
Oh, I taught you good - but I taught you wrong."

"What do you mean, Mother?"

"Well - I always thought
That a good woman never takes her turn,
That she's just for doing for somebody else.
Do here, do there, always keep
Everybody else's wants tended and make sure
Yours are at the bottom of the heap.
Maybe someday you'll get to them,
But of course you never do.
My life was like that - doing for your dad,
Doing for the boys, for your sisters, for you."

"You did - everything a mother could."

"Oh Millie, Millie, it was not good -

For you - for him. Don't you see?
I did you the worst of wrongs.
I asked nothing - for me!

"Your father in the other room,
All stirred up and staring at the walls -
When the doctor told him, he took
It bad - came to my bed and all but shook
The life right out of me. 'You can't die,
Do you hear? What'll become of me?
What'll become of me?
It'll be hard, alright, when I go.
He can't even find the frying pan, you know.

"And you children.
I was a free ride for everybody, everywhere.
I was the first one up and the last one down,
Seven days out of the week.
I always took the toast that got burned,
And the very smallest piece of pie.
I look at how some of your brother treat their
wives now,
And it makes me sick, 'cause it was me
That taught it to them. And they learned.

They learned that a woman doesn't
Even exist except to give.
Why, every single penny that I could save
Went for your clothes, or your books,
Even when it wasn't necessary.
Can't even remember once when I took
Myself downtown to buy something beautiful -
For me.

For those of you who have the opportunity, I recommend reading the entire piece. I recognize that it states an extreme case. But I suspect that most of us can learn something useful from it.

Supermom Does Not Exist

How can we balance and enjoy the powerful feelings mothers have with respect to their children and their natural desire to serve others against their other needs? In my view, the first rule is to acknowledge that "supermom" does not exist. We all have limits as to what we can do and should not feel badly about that. We are taught by the scriptures that we should not try to run faster than

we have strength. The advice in the popular song of a few years ago "don't worry, be happy" is worth following after we have done all we reasonably should. Furthermore, mothers shouldn't be discouraged when their children don't follow their advice. The advice hasn't been wasted. Years later those children will give the same advice to their children.

Meet The Basic Physical and Spiritual Needs

Mom, with Dad's support, must nurture herself in two general ways. First physically and second spiritually. On the physical side of things, adequate exercise, sleep and nutrition are a must. This sounds so simple that some of you may wonder why I bother to say it. Ask a mother who has been nursing a baby who does not want to quit and is keeping her up night after night after nursing is no longer essential to the baby. The easiest thing to do is to keep nursing because the baby wants to continue. Satisfying this unnecessary demand robs Mom of strength and vitality she badly needs for other things. Those of you who know our family may be able to guess that this is an issue of immediate concern to us. Not exercising because it is difficult to find baby sitters or there is housework to be done is another example. It takes effort to decide which things are the first that WILL be done each day and then to do them. I can't overemphasize how important this is. Not taking the time to sleep and exercise will significantly reduce the quantity and quality of our lives. It is like the man who is too busy cutting trees down to sharpen his axe. He wonders why his work seems to get harder and harder, why he feels worse and worse at the end of each day and why work he used to look forward to and enjoy is now only a burden.

On the spiritual side of things we face the same issue. Neglecting to sharpen our spiritual axe will affect us more subtly but in profoundly negative ways. We feed ourselves spiritually by regularly reading uplifting materials for even a few minutes each time, listening to uplifting tapes while we travel to and from, praying daily and allowing for creative outlets whether they be athletic, artistic or other. These things are essential, not optional. One of my favourites in this regard is to purchase a set of the conference tapes after each General Conference and listen to them as I drive to and from work and other places. The constant flow of positive ideas and encouragement, even though it only comes in small doses, has a profoundly uplifting effect on me. Regularity is more important than volume. Just as a little salt can change the quality of a lot of food, a little spiritual nourishment received daily (or almost daily) can change the quality of our entire life.

When I do not listen to this material, it is only a matter of days before I notice a decline in my energy levels and enthusiasm for the things I need and want to be most enthusiastic about. Whenever I do something that exercises my meagre creative abilities I also feel uplifted and energized.

We all have minimum spiritual requirements. Failing to satisfy those minimum requirements exposes us to unnecessary risks. Steven Covey refers to our efforts to feed ourselves spiritually as "spiritual aerobics". Failure to regularly engage in this activity weakens us in ways that are usually not felt until emotional or spiritual stress of some kind is brought to bear on us. Then, if the strength is not there we pay a heavy price. In some cases this costs a marriage, or a relationship with a child or other loved one, or membership in the Church.

In my experience, spiritual aerobics and physical aerobics have other parallels. One of my favourite forms of exercise is riding my to and from work. It takes me about 25 or 30 minutes each way. I ride particularly hard on the way home at night. It is slightly uphill most of the way (you don't notice it in a car, but try it on a bike). I push hard because I know from experience that when I get home after a hard workout, I will experience the effects of the endorphines my body produces when it is put under stress. These little guys make me feel great for about two hours. Then I am ready to collapse into bed and have a good nights sleep. After my work out I have more, not less, physical energy to give to my family or whoever else I will be with that evening. Spiritual aerobics produce much the same effect. Accordingly, neglecting them not only weakens us in the long term, it also robs us of energy which can make our lives richer and more enjoyable on a day to day basis.

What Can Dad and the Kids Do to Help?

There are important things Dad and the kids can do to enrich Mom and give her the energy she needs to blossom. The following is of course an incomplete list. There are millions of things that Dad and the kids can do. Among are the following:

- C They can conspire to encourage her to take time for the things described above.
- C They can arrange baby sitters or baby sit themselves so that Mom can regularly do her own thing.
- C They can praise her when she exercises her talents.
- C They can adopt family hobbies such as biking, jogging etc. that will help her and the rest of the family meet some of their basic needs.
- C They can cooperate to develop a family scripture study program.

Perhaps even more importantly, Dad and the kids need to learn to say "thank you" and "I love you" more. The scriptures indicate that one of the worst offenses in God's sight is ingratitude. To paraphrase a scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants, His wrath is only kindled against those who do not confess His hand in all things. (D&C 59:21) That is, those who do not express appreciation for what He does for them bug Him. I am sure that His sentiment in that regard would apply to those who do not adequately express love and gratitude to their mothers and spouses. Mothers and spouses love us more and do more for us than anyone except Him.

Say No

Mom needs to learn to say no. Particularly to those outside the family but also to Dad and the kids. In a recent General Conference talk, one of the General Authorities indicated that our children are deficient in a key vitamin. That is, Vitamin N. A child receives a dose of Vitamin N upon hearing the word "no". He indicated that in his view many of our children are overindulged as parents make up for lack of time with their children by giving the children lots of things that money can buy.

Never Stop Becoming

One of the best things a mother can do for her children is to let them watch her become, grow and achieve. One of the worst things she can do is let them watch her wear herself out. Why would a young girl want to emulate a mother who is beaten up and worn out by her chosen career of full time mom? Heavenly Father does not expect us to wear ourselves out. He expects us to blossom and flourish. This requires that we feed and nurture each other and ourselves - that we sharpen our axes regularly. The best way for a mother to combat the various pulls on her life at each stage is to nurture a strong sense of self by always spending some time to satisfy her basic minimum physical and spiritual requirements, and by developing talents that are "hers" as opposed to talents she needs to be a better mom, wife, etc. Anything she enjoys and really wants to do will qualify in this regard.

Dealing With Dad

If looking after themselves and nurturing children were the only things mothers did, their lives would be simple. But no, they still have the fathers of those children to deal with. It has been said that when a woman marries, it's like jumping through the ice into a river. You only do it once but you remember it forever. It has also been said that the profession of womanhood is difficult since it principally requires dealing with men.

I would like to relate a story with regard to our four year old son Dallin to help illustrate the tension in a mom's life between children and husband. Juli and I both dislike it when I travel. We both have difficulty sleeping when we are not in the same bed. One of the ways that Juli deals with that problem is to invite one of our children to sleep with her when I am not there. Dallin, our four year old, has lately taken that on as one of his primary responsibilities. One night I arrived home fairly late from a business trip that had lasted several days. I walked through the house carrying my luggage and went up to our bedroom. I put the luggage on the floor and then noticed that Dallin, still awake, was in my place beside his mother in bed. I said: "What are you doing there?" He responded by turning to his mother and whispering: "Let's close our eyes and maybe he'll go away".

Another family has similar problems. Apparently one night a violent thunderstorm struck in their area. A young son awoke and cried out. His mother went to comfort him. After he calmed down, she rose to return to her bedroom. He said, "Mom please stay with me, I'm scared." "You'll be fine sweetheart", she replied, " I need to go back to my room because your Dad needs me." After a moment of silence, he replied with bitterness in his small voice, "The big baby!"

Mom, Dad and Babies

The feelings of love for children come more naturally to many mothers than to fathers. Men and women are particularly affected in different ways by childbirth itself. Once Juli and I were at a wedding reception at which we shared a table with another couple and their strapping sixteen year old son. This boy was at least 6'5" and weighed well over 200 lbs. I complimented him on his stature and wondered out loud whether he was a football player. His mother quickly advised me that he had always been a big boy. In fact, she said, he was 16 lbs when he was born. Juli gasped. "Let me tell you about his birth", his mother continued. "We lived in Duncan, B.C. at the time. All they had there was a little four room hospital. This boy is the last of five children and was a bit of a surprise after a long break between children. He is also the first boy in our family. As the time to deliver approached, I told my husband to take me to the hospital. We got there, settled into the labour room and things started to happen. As the baby was almost ready to be born an emergency vehicle arrived at the hospital. The only doctor and one of two nurses was in with me. The other nurse started yelling from the hallway, 'Doctor, there's a badly injured man here and I think that we are going to lose him if you don't come right now.' The doctor looked up and seemed torn between the baby whose head was now visible and the man suffering in the hallway. I said, 'Doctor, leave me here with the nurse. I know what I am doing and so does she. Tell my husband to come in and put a gown on and he can help the nurse. Between the three of us, we will work things out.' This was back in the days when husbands were not permitted into the labour and delivery room. So that is what happened. My husband came in and helped the nurse deliver our last child. And what a child! He was 16 lbs. and a boy, our first boy. After he had been weighed and checked and everything was found to be fine, the nurse wrapped him in a blanket and put him on my chest. The lights were turned down and my husband and I were left to be alone for a few minutes. After a lengthy silence, my husband, who is not a man of many words, cleared his throat and was about to speak. At that moment, I imagined how wonderful it was going to be to hear him say one of those sweet things that would properly conclude this remarkable day. Our last child had just been born. He was our first son. He was a big, strapping, healthy boy and my husband had helped to deliver him. I was sure this would be one of those moments we would both cherish forever. After clearing his throat my sweet husband said, 'Boy, haven't seen a mess like that since the last time I gutted a moose.' Men just have a different way of dealing with some things. I am sure that man will not be permitted to forget how he fumbled the ball in that delivery room no matter how many eternities there are.

My experience, and this seems to be consistent with what I have heard from many other men, is that the birth of a child produces mixed feelings. During childbirth, you watch while your sweetheart suffers through the very valley of the shadow of death and is eventually rewarded by having a child placed on her bosom. Juli's reaction is always to experience a huge out-pouring of love with respect to the child. Mine is more a feeling of relief that the ordeal is over and that everyone is OK. I feel some pride in being the father again and some feelings of attachment to the child. But the overriding feeling is that of relief. My feelings are nothing like Juli's. She is ready to go dancing and to take on the world! The new baby is the sweetest, most beautiful and probably most talented child in the world! And if anyone, including me, dared dispute it, a fight would be on. At that point she has already made a huge investment in the child. She has carried it for nine months and then gone to

great difficulty to bring it into the world. My investment has only been living with a pregnant wife for nine months. Some of you might say that is a significant investment. However it pales by comparison to Juli's investment. I have found that only after spending many hours comforting the baby, playing with the baby and otherwise investing in the baby, will the feelings of intense love come.

The story is told of a young junior executive husband who is standing beside the crib that held his first baby. The baby was only a few days old. He looked at the crib with rapture in his eyes and a smile on his face. His sweet wife was walking by and noticed him standing there. She walked quietly up behind him and slipped her arms through his. She then asked, "A penny for your thoughts sweetheart?" He replied, "I can't believe that they made this crib for \$39.95." Men and women are geared differently.

Most men don't get married for the purpose of having children. The children are just part of the package deal. They love their children but do not tend to get lost in them in the same way their mother sometimes does. Dad is not around them as much or as focused on them as Mom is.

There was a period in my life during which I spent a lot of time counselling with couples who were having marital problems. Most of those problems were due in large part to the fact that Mom and Dad were not focused enough on each other and were too focused on other things. Often the things that absorbed most of Mom were her children and other good causes, usually including Church callings. Many of these women, when pressed to articulate their feelings, believed that by wearing themselves out for their children and husbands and others that they were doing what was right and that their husbands should love them for it. The husbands did not love them for doing this. Most of them, however, continued to love them in spite of it. On the other hand, when the husbands were required to articulate their feelings, they would often indicate that they would rather engage in their recreational pursuits, whether it be golf or running or model plane building or art collecting or whatever, in the company of their wives than with anyone else. If given the opportunity, they would abandon their buddies and do the things that they enjoyed most with their wives. I recognize that I am in a sense oversimplifying problems that have diverse roots and complex histories. However, it was my view at the time and continues to be my view that many marriages and family relationships could be significantly enriched if Mom and Dad made it possible for Mom to devote herself less to the children and others outside the family and more to herself and developing recreational talents that could be shared with her husband.

Dad's Primary Stewardship

In many cases, Dad is to blame for Mom not moving more in this direction. Carol Lynn Pearson's poem "The Steward" speaks eloquently to this issue.

Heber looked at his lands
And he was pleased.
He'd be leaving them tomorrow,

And his hands hurt with anticipated idleness.
But he knew there was no other way
When a man is seventy-eight and has to make
Two rest stops with a full bucket of milk
Between the barn and the kitchen.
Condominiums - do they have gardens? he
wondered.
His son had arranged the place for them in town
And he was ready. He sat down
On the rock that knew his body
Better than the front room chair.

Could it really be fifty-five years ago
That sitting right there
They had talked?
His father's voice had never left him:
"Heber, I'm trusting to you
The most precious thing I've got.
I worked hard for this land. You know all about
The crickets and the Indian and the drought,
And the buckets of sweat it took
To make what you see today.
I'm giving it to you as a stewardship, son.
And when your time with the land is done
And we get together again
I'm going to call you to account.
I'm going to say, 'Heber, did you make it more
Than you found it? Did you watch it grow?
Is it everything it can be?
That's what I'll want to know."

Heber looked out on the fields
That for fifty-five years had been
Green and gold in proper turn -
On the fences and the barns and the ditches
And the trees in careful rows.
Even his father hadn't ben able to get peaches.
He could hardly wait to report about those.

Margaret was finishing the last closet.
Just a few things were going to the city
And the rest rose in a mountain
On the back porch, waiting for the children

To sort through and take what they chose.
She opened the lid on a shoe box of valentines.
Perhaps just one or two for memory's sake?
But whose - whose would she take?

She put the box aside and reached again.
"What in the world?" In an instant her face
Cleared and in her hands was the old familiar
case.

The violin. She hadn't touched it for forty years,
Hadn't thought of it for twenty at least.
Well, there they finally were - the tears.
Her mother's dishes hadn't done it,
Or the little Bible she had almost buried with
Ellen,
Or the valentines -
But there they were for the violin.

She picked up the bow.
Had it always been so thin?
Perhaps her hand had grown so used to big
things.
To kettles that weighed ten pounds empty.
And to milk cans and buckets of coal.
The wood felt smooth against her chin
As she put the bow to a string.
A slow, startled sound wavered, then fell.
How did she used to tune it? Ah well,
No sense wasting time on moving day.
If Heber should come in, he would say,
"Well, there's Margaret - fiddlin' around
With her fiddle again."
He'd always said it with a smile, though.

"I could have done it," she said aloud.
"And it wouldn't have hurt him.
It wouldn't have hurt anybody!"

He hadn't minded that she'd practised two hours
Every afternoon - after all, she got up at five
And nobody in the world could criticize
The way she kept the house
Or the care she gave to the children.

And he was proud that she was asked
To play twice a year at the church.
And music made her so happy.
If she missed a day things were not quite
So bright around the house.
Even Heber noticed that.

And then she was invited to join the symphony in
town.
Oh, to play with a real orchestra again!
In a hall with a real audience again!

"But Margaret, isn't that too much to ask
Of a woman with children and a farm to tend?"
"Oh Heber, I'll get up at four if I have to.
I won't let down - not a bit. I promise!"

"But I couldn't drive you in,
Not two nights a week all year round,
And more when they're performing."

"I can drive, Heber. Its only twenty miles.
I'd be fine. You would have to be
With the children, though, until Ellen
Is a little older."

"But I couldn't guarantee two nights a week -
Not with my responsibilities to the farm,
And to the Church."

"Heber, there's no way to tell you
How important this is to me. Please, Heber.
I'll get up at four if I have to."

But Heber said no.
What if something happened to the car?
And then it just wouldn't look right
For a man's wife to be out chasing
Around like that. What would it lead to next?
Once in while he read of some woman
Who went so far with her fancy notions
That she up and left her family, children and all.
He couldn't see Margaret ever doing that,

But it's best to play it safe.
Two nights a week - that was asking a lot.

So Heber said no.
It was his responsibility to take care of her.
She had been given to him, in fact.
He remembered the ceremony well,
The pledges, the rings,
And he didn't take it lightly.
She had been given to him,
And it was up to him to decide these things.
So Heber said no.

She had seemed to take it all right,
Though she was quieter than usual
And more and more an afternoon would pass
Without her practising.

He didn't really notice how it happened -
The shrinking of her borders,
The drying up of her green.
If Heber ever thought about it in later years
He marked it up to the twins.
Motherhood was hard on a woman,
And Margaret just wasn't quite the same as
before.

She laid the violin in its case
And rubbed away the small wet drop
On her thin hand.

"I could have done it," she said aloud.
"Heber, you didn't understand.
I could have done it and not hurt anybody.
I would have gotten up at four!"

Slowly she made her way to the porch
And put the violin with the things
For the children to sort through.
"Will any of them remember?
I don't think so."

Heber gave a last look at his lands

And he was pleased.
He could face his father with a clear mind.
"Here's my stewardship," he would say,
"And I think you'll find
I did everything you asked.
I took what you gave me - and I made it more."

He got up and started toward the house,
Putting to his lips
A long thin piece of hay.
"Better get moving'. Margaret with be
Needing me for supper right now."

I must confess that the first time I encountered "The Steward" it flattened me. It is a rich piece of literature that must be read and thought about carefully several times to be properly appreciated. Time does not here permit the analysis it deserves. Suffice it to say that of all the stewardships I have the most important one, and therefore the one I will be called to account for first, is with regard to my wife. Did I help her to become more, to blossom and to flourish? Did I get peaches? or did I wear her out, make her borders shrink and her green dry up? Does she need me for more than supper? Is it motherhood that is of necessity hard on her, or is it me?

At a recent Area Leadership Meeting that our Stake President in Vancouver attended, he was told by a member of Counsel of the Twelve to expect a personal priesthood interview shortly after death with the Lord himself, and to expect that the first series of questions he would be asked would be with regard to his relationship with his wife and the effect he had upon her. The second series of questions would deal with his relationship with his children. Only after those questions had been dealt with would anything be said regarding his responsibilities as a Church leader. I surmise that little would be asked regarding his vocation, how much money he had made or the type of house and cars he had managed to purchase for his family.

In a profound statement of truth, Elder Packer once indicated that there are only three things we take with us when we leave this life. They are our character, our relationships and our knowledge. These come with us whether they are good or bad, healthy or sick. Bearing this in mind as we plan the use of our time is a useful thing to do.

Responsibilities Outside The Family

With regard to church and community service, we have to make realistic assessments of how much we can do after meeting the minimum requirements for the individual's well being, then for the marriages well being and finally for the family's well-being. We also shouldn't forget the effect faith can have on our ability to do things. My capabilities have been significantly expanded on several occasions when I have had the faith to accept callings I did not think I could handle. There are probably more of us who need to try harder to give more service than those of us who need to slow

down. However, there are a few who do need to slow down. Most of us can take time away from television and other non-essential pursuits and spend more of our time giving. This will also improve the quality of our lives. However, it is essential that in our giving we do not neglect the fundamental minimum requirements of self, marriage, and our children. We should satisfy them in that order. Giving to others is not an acceptable excuse for neglecting the first things. After having done first things first, we move on to church callings and community activities.

A former stake president who I know well has experienced the tragedy of watching most of his children become inactive members of the Church. He spent twenty years in significant Church leadership positions, including those of Bishop and Stake President, while his children were growing up. His wife also provided countless hours of church and community service during those years. He and his wife both told me that if they had to do it all over again, they would still give the service they did, but they would not spend so much time doing it. He allowed the weighty church responsibilities he had been given to take too much time from his even more weighty responsibilities at home. He believes, and given what I know I think he is right, that he could have made a difference with his kids if he had been with them more during their formative years. That is not to say, however, that we all need to take responsibility for poor choices our loved ones make.

For those Mom's who also bear part or all of the burden of providing for their families, the challenges I have described are that much greater. Those who don't bear this burden should be grateful. Those who do should make sure that they are doing it to provide necessities and not luxuries, and we should all do what we can to ease the burden they and their children carry. That, in my view, is one of the great functions of the "ward family".

There is another thought that I would like to address in closing. That is the expression of love. Some time ago I had the opportunity to serve as a member of a Bishopric. Prior to receiving that calling, I had served in various capacities in the youth organizations of our Ward and Stake. I accordingly knew well all the young people in the Ward. I had been at their activities, been in most of their homes and felt quite comfortable with them. I was amazed at the change that occurred in my relationships with them as I began to conduct the youth interviews that were part of my calling. The most important part of the interview comes when, provided the feelings are genuine, the person conducting the interview expresses his love for the young man or young woman in question and indicates in specific terms what it is about this young person that is worthy of that love. The interviewer's love may have been evident in the manner in which the interview was conducted. However, there is something about verbalizing it in a sincere way which causes almost magical things to happen. The kids would, generally speaking, light up like candles. It requires a bit of courage to expose one's soft side by expressing love. However, the wonderful feelings that came with it after doing it for the first time in a youth interview made the experience easy to repeat. I looked forward to those interviews more than any other part of that calling.

I had the opportunity to interview the young men and young women in our Ward on average two or three times a year for a period of several years. By the end of that time, parental feelings with regard to most of those kids had developed. I can't see one of them to this day without feeling a rush of

emotion very similar to that which I feel with regard to my own children. I feel this way about many of the Deacons I have the opportunity to serve with in the Glenmore Ward. Since Bruce Dunham has just left the Deacon's Quorum, I want to express my love for him and thank him for the wonderful times we have had together during the last 18 months. He is a fine young man. I will miss being with him as regularly as I have had the chance to for the last while. Without taking over ground that belongs to his parents, I will always feel a little bit like his Dad feels as I watch him grow and do things that make me proud.

The sincere expression of love causes fundamental changes in the relationship between two human beings. I regard the primary responsibility of all Church leader to be the regular expression of love for those they are called to lead. Bishop Peterson is exemplary in this regard. Just as the function of the heart is pump blood to the extremities of the body, the function of the leaders of a quorum, auxiliary, ward, stake etc. is to pump love to the extremities of their organization. Nothing more, nothing less.

If as fathers and mothers, we create opportunities similar to the youth interview that I have described to express love to our children, much greater love will abound in our homes. The thing that I am most grateful for as a result of my experience in the Bishopric was the knowledge I came away with of the importance of youth interviews. Some of the sweetest moments I have had with my children have occurred in the interviews I now have regularly with them. These experiences rank in my books right up there with our wedding, the double overtime NCAA final games I've watched, the birth of our children and other significant life events. I can see my teenage daughter Amanda rolling her eyes right now and thinking, "Boy if that's as exciting as my Dad's life gets, I'm glad I'm not him". Nonetheless, that is as exciting as life gets.

If he wishes, Dad can use the same "interview" formula I've described to enrich his relationship with Mom. When I expressed my love for the kids in our Ward in Vancouver, I was only expressing what I had always felt about them. The only change in what I did with them was to spend a small additional amount of time with them one on one and to express my love for them. However, this small change in procedure completely changed the nature of the relationship. It went from being relatively casual to having a parental intensity. The only reason I had the blessing of experiencing this with those kids is because my calling required that I express my love for them and a structure was provided that made that part of my responsibility relatively easy to fulfil. How many of us are missing wonderful opportunities to enrich our relationships because we do not take the time to update ourselves with regard to what others in our lives our doing and express our feelings for them in clear terms? Dad can learn about the things that are important to Mom and what she has been doing with herself as an individual, then praise her for who she is and what she does, thank her for all she does and finally sincerely express his love for her. If he does this, it will have a magical effect on their relationship.

One of my life's great unsolved mysteries is why I so often drag my feet in doing things I know I will enjoy and will be good for me. For example, I have already indicated that I love riding my bike to work. It makes me feel great and I know it is good for me. However, after I haven't done it for

awhile, even though I have clear memories of how good it makes me feel I have a tough time getting started at it again. Morning after morning I find excuses as to why this is not the day to start. I have a cold. I didn't get enough sleep the night before. The road is wet. It is too cold. However, as soon as I road in for the first day this spring, none of those things slowed me down again and I was sorry I had missed several weeks of riding.

For some reason, most of us have a built in aversion to anything that requires effort, even if we know by experience that the effort is more than worth making. I sometimes do not make the effort I should to create suitable opportunities to express my love for Juli and our children, even though I know the effort should be made and will produce in most cases immediate rewards in terms of positive feelings that make the effort worthwhile on that selfish basis alone. I suspect that most of us struggle with similar feelings. I encourage each of us to simply "do it" today in terms of expressing our feelings of love, and to then set up a private calendar that will help to remind us and encourage us to repeat the experience on a regular basis. It is the regularity, not the length, of my interviews with the youth of our ward in Vancouver that made all the difference. I am grateful for the Church's program in that regard. I have learned important things from it that now make a real difference in the quality of my personal relationships.

CONCLUSION

In summary, I would like to leave you with three thoughts. The first is that us Dads have an important responsibility to help the Moms in our lives flourish and not to let them wear themselves out. This is probably our most important responsibility. The Moms of course have this responsibility too. We need to create opportunities for our Moms and spouses to meet their individual physical and spiritual needs and to continue developing their talents and interests which will become the focus of their lives after the demands of motherhood being to recede.

The second key thought is that if Moms and Dads create opportunities to express love to each other and to their children more frequently in both formal and informal settings, our family relationships will be enriched immeasurably. The essence of our Heavenly Father is love. As we develop the ability to express and project our loving feelings for others, we become more like him and will experience more of the joy he experiences.

The third is that we all must go home and do something today, even if it is small, to move toward the ideas I have spoken about. President Kimball and Michael Jordan say, "Do it!"

I am grateful beyond words for the mothers in my life. Particularly for Juli and my Mom. They have together done far more for me than I will ever properly be able to repay and today I honour them and pay special tribute to them for that. As I said earlier, Juli has taught me most of what I know about feeling and expressing love. This one of her great strengths. She is, I imagine, much like her Heavenly Father in that way.

Learning to feel and express love is at the centre of a fulfilling joyful life. I am especially grateful for the higher plane Juli has shown me in that regard. It is my hope and prayer that on this Mother's Day, we will each take a concrete step toward being more like our Heavenly Father in that way.

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