



**FEEL JOY IN THE GOSPEL**





# WELCOME TO OUR SELF-RELIANCE GROUP

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## HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

This manual helps individuals learn and live doctrinal principles that lead to spiritual and temporal self-reliance. It works best when reviewed in a small group of 8 to 10 people or as a family. Each week a different group member takes a turn being the facilitator. The facilitator does not teach. Instead, he or she follows the material and encourages all to participate. Begin each group meeting with a prayer.

## WHAT IS A SELF-RELIANCE GROUP?

Self-reliance groups function like a council. There is no teacher or expert. Instead, you follow the materials as they are written. With the guidance of the Spirit, you will help each other as follows:

- Contribute equally to discussions and activities. No one, especially the facilitator, should dominate the conversation.
- Love and support each other. Show interest, ask questions, and learn about each other.
- Share positive and relevant comments.
- Make and keep commitments.

Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, “There is no problem in the family, ward or stake that cannot be solved if we look for solutions in the Lord’s way by counseling—really counseling—with one another” (*Counseling with Our Councils*, rev. ed. [2012], 4).

WHEN YOU SEE THESE PROMPTS, FOLLOW THESE DIRECTIONS						
Report	Ponder	Watch	Discuss	Read	Activity	Commit
The group shares their progress keeping commitments for 3–4 minutes.	Individually meditate and write in silence for about 2–3 minutes.	The group watches a video.	Share thoughts as a group for about 2–4 minutes.	One person reads aloud for the whole group.	Work individually or together for about 5 minutes.	Each person promises to act on items during the week.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Whether married or single, everyone is part of a family. Families include mothers, fathers, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents, extended family and even other church members.

Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ (The Family: A Proclamation to the World, September 1995). One of these teachings is self-reliance. Self-reliance is the ability, commitment and determination to provide for the temporal and spiritual necessities of life for self and family.

We become self-reliant by putting into practice principles of faith, education, hard work and trust in the Lord. This frees ourselves from crippling dependencies that burden our souls. Our joy increases and we are blessed with greater hope, peace and progress.

Heavenly Father desires that we find true, lasting happiness. Our happiness is the design of all the blessings He gives us—gospel teachings, commandments, priesthood ordinances, family relationships, prophets, temples, the beauties of creation, and even the opportunity to experience adversity. His plan for our salvation is even called "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8). He sent His Beloved Son to carry out the Atonement so we can be happy in this life and receive a fullness of joy in the eternities.

No one should feel burdened by membership in the Church, but we often do. Instead of joy we feel a burden of duty and regimen. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: "The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children might be happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood" ("The Power of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2010).

During the next few weeks this group manual will help you experience greater joy as you learn and apply gospel principles and family relationships.



# 1: THE FOUNDATION OF HAPPINESS: A RIGHTEOUS HOME

## ACTIVITY

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Welcome to this group. Over the next several weeks we will meet together and get to know one another better. To get started, each of you take a minute to introduce yourself by sharing your name and something about you.

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**Read:** The focus of this group is to help each of us experience greater joy in the gospel. No one should feel burdened by membership in the Church; but at times instead of joy, we may feel a burden of duty and regimen. Heavenly Father truly desires our joy and in these lessons, we will explore how His teachings, commandments, and the gift of His son Jesus Christ can help us find more happiness. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught: "Discipleship lifts our spirits and lightens our hearts...it gives us divine power and lasting joy" ("Living the Gospel Joyful," *Ensign*, November 2014).

**Discuss:** As a Church member, when might we feel burdened? When might we experience joy?

**Read:** Real happiness doesn't come by chance; happiness comes from righteous living. The prophet Joseph Smith said, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 255).

**Discuss:** How does righteousness lead to happiness?

**Read:** Heavenly Father has given us a pattern of home and family to help us be happy. When individuals and families strive for righteousness in the home, they will find greater joy. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught, "The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children might be happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood" ("The Power of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2010). President Joseph F. Smith also taught, "There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 382).

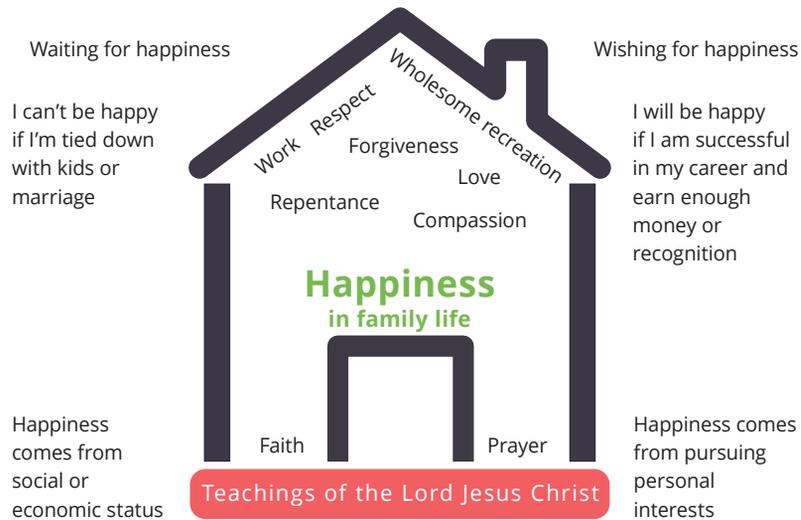
**Discuss:** How are we responsible for our own happiness or lack of happiness?

**Read:** While we know righteousness will bring us happiness, sometimes, we mistakenly seek for happiness in false or even wicked ways. The Book of Mormon declares "wickedness never was happiness" and that those who do not keep God's ways "are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness" (Alma 41:10-11).

## ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** As a group, read the words outside the image of the home. Why is each a false path to happiness?



**Step 2:** As a group, read the words inside the home. Latter-day prophets have taught that “Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work and wholesome recreational activities” (The Family: A Proclamation to the World, September 1995). Discuss some examples of these.

**Read:** As we seek to live righteously in our homes and with our families, we will be happier. “We shouldn’t wait to be happy until we reach some future point, only to discover that happiness was already available – all the time! Life is not meant to be appreciated only in retrospect... You and I are ultimately in charge of our own happiness” (“Of Regrets and Resolutions,” Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *Ensign*, Nov. 2012).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** Take a moment individually to think about your home and what the Lord would have you do to be happier.

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

Look back at the image of the home. Choose one of the principles within the home that you will work on this week. Write when and how you will do it.

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Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.



## 2: MAKING BURDENS LIGHT

**Report:** Last week each of you committed to work on one “principle of righteousness” to bring greater happiness to you, your home, and family. Briefly share with the group what you committed to do, what you did, and the results.

**Read:** Living righteously brings happiness. However, even when we are righteous, we will still experience trials (2 Nephi 2:11). Trials can be an opportunity for growth and strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith, “My son,...all these things [trials] shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

**Discuss:** If given the choice, which situation below would you choose? Why?

Situation #1: The trials, difficulties, and disappointments you have had in the past.

Situation #2: Different trials, difficulties, and disappointments.

Situation #3: No trials, difficulties, or disappointments.

**Read:** We all experience trials. Paul taught, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gave three reasons we may be experiencing a trial:

- “Some things happen to us because of our own mistakes and our own sins.”
- “Other trials and tribulations come to us merely as part of living. We are not immunized against all inconveniences and difficulties.”
- “Other challenges come to us...because an omniscient Lord deliberately chooses to school us” (*All These Things shall Give Thee Experience*, Deseret Book, 2009).

**Discuss:** How do trials give us needed experience on the path to joy and happiness in life?

**Read:** The Savior is the source of hope and healing during trial. When we think of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we often think of how it helps us overcome sin and death. Jesus Christ’s atonement also provides answers to many of our other needs, including every individual trial and struggle we may experience. The Savior has experienced and understands them all and His atonement is our source of power to overcome or perhaps endure our trials.

**Discuss:** How does it make you feel, knowing Christ can help you with any trial?

**Read:** To receive the Savior’s help, we must exercise faith in Him. In Matthew, the Savior stated, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28-30).

## ACTIVITY

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President Henry B. Eyring suggested three ways we can turn to the Savior and receive His help with our trials and burdens (“The Reward of Enduring Well,” *Ensign*, July 2017):

- Pray always
- Keep the commandments
- Serve God by serving others

**Step 1:** Individually write below the greatest burden or trial you are currently experiencing.

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**Step 2:** Now write below how you could apply President Eyring’s counsel specifically to this trial so the Savior can heal you.

How will my prayers change? \_\_\_\_\_

Which commandment will I live more fully? \_\_\_\_\_

What will I do to serve someone? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read:** Whether the healing comes in this life or the next, Christ and His atonement are the answer. The great promise of our Savior is that all our losses will be healed and made up.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson instructed, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ has anticipated and, in the end, will compensate all deprivation and loss for those who turn to Him. No one is predestined to receive less than all that the Father has for His children” (“Why Marriage, Why Family,” *Ensign*, May 2015).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** Individually think about how Jesus Christ has lifted your burdens in the past. What does the Lord want you to learn from your current trials?

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

- In the activity above, you identified three ways to turn to the Lord. Do them this week.
- Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.



### 3: SPENDING TIME ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

**Report:** Last week you committed to seek the Savior's help in your trial through prayer, obedience, and service. Briefly share with the group what you did, and the results.

**Read:** Another way we can improve our happiness is by spending time on what matters most. Life has many demands, and we may become busy with less important things. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has asked, "Isn't it true that we often get so busy? And, sad to say, we even wear our busyness as a badge of honor, as though being busy, by itself, was an accomplishment or sign of a superior life. Is it? I think of our Lord and Exemplar, Jesus Christ, and His short life among the people of Galilee and Jerusalem. I have tried to imagine Him bustling between meetings or multitasking to get a list of urgent things accomplished. I can't see it. Instead I see the compassionate and caring Son of God purposefully living each day... *Why, then, do we devote so much of our time and energy to things that are so fleeting, so inconsequential, and so superficial?*" ("Of Regrets and Resolutions," *Ensign*, November 2012).

**Watch:** "Go Play with the Children," available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](http://ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 10.

**Discuss:** When have you changed your plans to focus on something more important?

**Read:** To ensure we make time for what matters most, we may need to first evaluate how we are using our time. Elder Dallin H. Oaks counseled, "Not everything (that is good) is worth the portion of our life that we give to obtain it. Some things are better, others are best" ("*Good, Better, Best,*" *Ensign*, November 2007).

**Discuss:** What are some examples of the best things people should make sure they make time for? What are some examples of ways people may use their time poorly?

## ACTIVITY

**Step 1:** In the table below, rate the following priorities in order of importance to you.  
**Children, Church calling, Entertainment and recreation, Friends, Service to others, Spouse, Time alone, Work**

**Step 2:** Next to each one, write what percent of your time you spend on each one.

**Step 3:** Ask yourself, "Am I spending my time on what I really value most?" Write the change(s) in the chart in the "% of My Time - Revised" column.

My Priorities	% of My Time Now	% of My Time - Revised
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
	Total: 100%	

**Read:** Seek God's counsel as you try to spend time on what matters most. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "Striking the proper balance is one of the keenest tests of our agency. Therefore, we need to ask regularly for inspiration in the use of our time and in the making of our daily decisions. So often, our hardest choices are between competing and desirable alternatives (each with righteous consequences), when there is not time to do both at once" (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, Deseret Book Co., 1981, p.5).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today's discussion?

**Ponder:** Take a moment to ponder how you use your time and how the Lord would have you change.

**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

Write one thing you will change this week to better align your time and priorities?

Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.

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### **“GO PLAY WITH THE CHILDREN,” RICHARD G. SCOTT, (VIDEO SCRIPT)**



Once I learned an important lesson from my wife. I traveled extensively in my profession. I had been gone almost two weeks and returned home one Saturday morning. I had four hours before I needed to attend another meeting. I noticed that our little washing machine had broken down and my wife was washing the clothes by hand. I began to fix the machine. Jeanene came by and said, “Rich, what are you doing?” I said, “I’m repairing the washing machine so you don’t have to do this by hand.” She said, “No. Go play with the children.” I said, “I can play with the children anytime. I want to help you.” Then she said, “Richard, please go play with the children.” When she spoke to me that authoritatively, I obeyed. I had a marvelous time with our children. We chased each other around and rolled in the fall leaves. Later I went to my meeting. I probably would have forgotten that experience were it not for the lesson that she wanted me to learn. The next morning about 4:00 a.m., I was awakened as I felt two little arms around my neck, a kiss on the cheek, and these words whispered in my ear, which I will never forget: “Dad, I love you. You are my best friend.” If you are having that kind of experience in your family, you are having one of the supernal joys of life. —Richard G. Scott (CR, April 2011)



## 4: MAKING RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

**Report:** Last week you committed to make time for something that mattered most. Briefly share with the group what you did and the results.

**Read:** How we perceive and judge situations and others impacts our happiness. We all make judgments of situations and people, including the actions of family members. How we come to and express our judgements is critical. In the Book of Mormon we read, “Seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged” (Moroni 7:18).

**Discuss:** How does improper judgment hurt those we love and take away from our peace?

**Read:** President Henry B. Eyring shared the following experience: “On another occasion a phone call came when I was a bishop—this time from the police. I was told that a drunk driver had crashed his car through the glass into the lobby of a bank. When the bewildered driver saw the security guard with his weapon brandished, he cried, “Don’t shoot! I’m a Mormon!” The inebriated driver was discovered to be a member of my ward, baptized only recently. As I waited to speak to him in the bishop’s office, I planned what I would say to make him feel remorseful for the way he had broken his covenants and embarrassed the Church. But as I sat looking at him, I heard a voice in my mind say, just as clearly as if someone were speaking to me, “I’m going to let you see him as I see him.” And then, for a brief moment, his whole appearance changed to me. I saw not a dazed young man but a bright, noble son of God. I suddenly felt the Lord’s love for him. That vision changed our conversation. It also changed me” (“Walk with Me,” *Ensign*, May 2017).

**Discuss:** Why is it important to see others as God sees them?

### ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** Pair up with another member of the group and read through the following together:

A wife and her husband plan to celebrate their anniversary by going to dinner this evening at 7:00 pm. The wife has been looking forward to this night out all week. It took a lot of persuasion from her to convince her husband because his employer always requires that he work late. He normally returns home from work after dinner at 9:30 pm. Her husband did not want to be disrespectful to his company. With some extra courage he asked for and received permission to go home early in order to have dinner with his wife.

The husband is also looking forward to the dinner. He loves his wife and feels he does not spend enough time with her. He wants to share this dinner with her as a special anniversary expression of his appreciation for her.

The husband told his wife he had received permission to leave early and that he would arrive home by 6:30 pm. He always calls or texts if he is going to be late. It is now 7:45 pm and the wife has not heard from her husband. She has called and sent texts, but there has been no response.

The husband has missed some previous dinner appointments in the past, instead going with friends who had gotten last minute tickets to see sports events. In those cases, he did not call to explain his absence but later apologized.

**Step 2:** With your partner, discuss the following (Be as creative as you would like):

- What do you think happened to the husband?
- If you were the wife, how would you feel and what you would do?

**Step 3:** Now read below what actually happened:

The husband got off work at 5:30 pm and got on the train in order to arrive home on time. However, a different train that day had an accident, which caused his train to be delayed by more than two hours. Unfortunately, his phone battery was dead and he had no way to call or text.

**Step 4:** Discuss how close your stories were to what actually happened. If the wife had acted on some of the stories you created for her, what would that have done to their relationship? How did your story change once you had more facts?.

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**Watch:** "The Laundry Is Not Clean," available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](http://ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 13.

**Discuss:** How can people apply the counsel of President Monson about judging?

**Read:** The Savior taught, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). As we learn to slow down and seek more information, we will make more accurate judgment, leading to greater happiness.

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today's discussion?

**Ponder:** Individually think about when you judged someone incorrectly. What could you have done differently so you did not judge incorrectly?

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

- What is a common situation where you tell yourself stories and make imperfect judgment? When you are in that situation this week, pause and challenge those stories. Try to delay judgment until you have more facts.
- Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.

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## “THE LAUNDRY IS NOT CLEAN,” THOMAS S. MONSON (VIDEO SCRIPT)



A young couple, Lisa and John, moved into a new neighborhood. One morning while they were eating breakfast, Lisa looked out the window and watched her next-door neighbor hanging out her wash.

“That laundry’s not clean!” Lisa exclaimed. “Our neighbor doesn’t know how to get clothes clean!”

John looked on but remained silent.

Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, Lisa would make the same comments.

A few weeks later Lisa was surprised to glance out her window and see a nice, clean wash hanging in her neighbor’s yard. She said to her husband, “Look, John—she’s finally learned how to wash correctly! I wonder how she did it.”

John replied, “Well, dear, I have the answer for you. You’ll be interested to know that I got up early this morning and washed our windows!”

Tonight I’d like to share with you a few thoughts concerning how we view each other. Are we looking through a window which needs cleaning? Are we making judgments when we don’t have all the facts? What do we see when we look at others? What judgments do we make about them?

Said the Savior, “Judge not.” He continued, “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Or, to paraphrase, why beholdest thou what you think is dirty laundry at your neighbor’s house but considerest not the soiled window in your own house?

None of us is perfect. I know of no one who would profess to be so. And yet for some reason, despite our own imperfections, we have a tendency to point out those of others. We make judgments concerning their actions or inactions.

There is really no way we can know the heart, the intentions, or the circumstances of someone who might say or do something we find reason to criticize. Thus the commandment: “Judge not” (“Charity Never Faileth,” *Ensign*, November 2010).



## 5: RIGHTEOUS COMMUNICATIONS

**Report:** Last week you committed to stop creating stories and delay judging someone until you had more facts and a clear understanding. Briefly share with the group what you did and the results.

**Read:** Our words can be powerful and should be used for good to help and build others. Consider how the Lord speaks to His children: “And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul” (Helaman 5:30). Satan, however, spreads contention (3 Nephi 11:29).

**Discuss:** Why is contention so destructive? In what ways is there contention in homes?

### ACTIVITY

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Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has counseled and admonished husbands, wives and children about how they speak to each other (“The Tongue of Angels”, *Ensign*, May 2007). Read and discuss Elder Holland’s counsel together.

**Step 1:** Speaking to **husbands and brothers** he said, “A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If it is possible to be more condemning than that, we speak even more vigorously against all forms of sexual abuse. Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be.”

**Discuss:** How is unkind speech hurtful and abusive?

**Step 2:** Speaking to **wives and sisters**, Elder Holland said, “In that same spirit we speak to the sisters as well, for the sin of verbal abuse knows no gender. Wives, what of the unbridled tongue in your mouth, of the power for good or ill in your words? How is it that such a lovely voice which by divine nature is so angelic, so close to the veil, so instinctively gentle and inherently kind could ever in a turn be so shrill, so biting, so acrid and untamed? A woman’s words can be more piercing than any dagger ever forged, and they can drive the people they love to retreat beyond a barrier more distant than anyone in the beginning of that exchange could ever have imagined. Sisters, there is no place in that magnificent spirit of yours for acerbic or abrasive expression of any kind, including gossip or backbiting or catty remarks.”

**Discuss:** Why is gossip and speaking unkindly of others so destructive?

**Step 3:** Elder Holland also provided counsel for **how we speak to children**. He said, “We must be so careful in speaking to a child. What we say or don’t say, how we say it and when is so very, very important in shaping a child’s view of himself or herself. But it is even more important in shaping that child’s faith in us and their faith in God. Be constructive in your comments to a child—always. Never tell them, even in whimsy, that they are fat or dumb or lazy or homely. You would never do that maliciously, but they remember and may struggle for years trying to forget—and to forgive. And try not to compare your children, even if you think you are skillful at it. You may say most positively that ‘Susan is pretty and Sandra is bright,’ but all Susan will remember is that she isn’t bright and Sandra that she isn’t pretty. Praise each child individually for what that child is, and help him or her escape our culture’s obsession with comparing, competing, and never feeling we are ‘enough.’”

**Discuss:** Why must we be especially careful about how we speak to children?

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**Read:** When we struggle, praying together will provide the power necessary to strengthen and maintain marriages and families. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, “I believe that that one simple act of going to our knees and holding hands and calling down the blessings of God into our homes and into our marriages can do more than all of the counseling that might be made available to us. Why? Because God is our Father. We are His children. He loves us. If we show our faith in Him by calling down the blessings of heaven into our marriages, every single night, He will help us get from where we are to where we would like to be. At least, that has been my experience. When a couple comes to me for counsel relative to various struggles in their marriage, one of the first questions I ask them is, “Do you kneel together at the end of the day and hold hands and say your prayers?” ...Then I suggest, “Will you please go home and do that for the next thirty days? Then you can return and we will talk again.” Almost always the couples come back and, with tears in their eyes, share with me the sweet feelings that have returned to their marriages and how they think, at last, that they are going to make it” (*When Thou Art Converted: Continuing the Search for Happiness*, Deseret Book M. Russell Ballard, 2001, Chapter 11).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** Individually think about how you communicate with others. Are your words filled with faith, hope and charity?

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

- Review Elder Holland's counsel. How will you obey the counsel that applies to you?

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- If married, pray with your spouse over your marriage and family for 30 straight days.
- Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.



## 6: SEEK NOT TO EXCUSE YOURSELF

**Report:** Last week you chose a specific way to apply Elder Holland's counsel on communicating in your homes and with your families. Briefly share with the group what you did, and the results.

**Read:** Satan tempts us to blame others for our troubles or shortcomings. When Laman and Lemuel did not want to follow God's way, they told their brother Nephi "the Lord maketh not [His ways] known unto us" (1 Nephi 15:9). Nephi responded by asking them, "How is it ye will perish because of the hardness of your hearts?" (1 Nephi 15:10).

**Discuss:** Why does Satan want us to blame others for our mistakes?

**Watch:** "The Parable of the Giraffe," available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](http://ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 19.

**Discuss:** What are the "low bridges" we blame for the mistakes or events in our lives?

**Read:** In the book of Luke, we read about a lawyer who knew the commandments, but was not living what he knew. In Luke 10:25-29 we read, "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readeest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Christ knew this man was not living these commandments he had just rehearsed, so He then invited him to do so. "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:25-28). Rather than accept this invitation to repent, the lawyer tried to rationalize not living these commandments, "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

**Discuss:** How are we sometimes like this lawyer, trying to justify ourselves?

### ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** Divide into two small groups and read through the following story:  
Haruto made a commitment to Heavenly Father to follow the prophet's counsel and have family scripture study and prayer every day. But his kids have early morning seminary and school activities. He also has to commute a long ways to work. Haruto therefore decided the best time was in the evening. However, he kept getting home late from work. When he arrived home, everyone was already in bed or he was just too tired. As a result, Haruto blamed all the things his family had to do every day for the fact he only did family scripture study and prayer once or so a week.

**Step 2:** Write down all the reasons that keep you from holding daily family prayer and scripture study. Discuss whether any of these reasons are justified?

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**Step 3:** What could you do to overcome each obstacle that is preventing you from daily family prayer and scripture study?

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**Read:** Elder Quentin L. Cook warned, "When we rationalize wrong choices, big or small, which are inconsistent with the restored gospel, we lose the blessings and protections we need and often become ensnared in sin or simply lose our way" ("Choose Wisely," *Ensign*, November 2014). By acknowledging our rationalizations or self-justifying behavior, we can begin to change and repent. As we do so, our Heavenly Father will forgive us and help us change, and we will be happier.

**Discuss:** Why must we overcome self-justification of sin and blaming others for our weaknesses?

**Read:** To the Nephites the Savior said: "I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings [your self-justifying actions]...ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9: 19-20). Gospel scholar, C. Terry Warner, has added this insight: "Self is the great burden. Constant concern about the self is bondage.... There is all the difference in the world between a change in behavior and a change of heart. A change of heart is the only change that counts. No change will make a fundamental difference until the self-justifying story is abandoned" (*Bonds of Anguish, Bonds of Love*, The Arbinger Company, 1995).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today's discussion?

**Ponder:** Individually, take a few moments and examine yourself. Ask yourself: Do I seek to justify and excuse my mistakes and inappropriate actions? Do I blame my weaknesses on other people or other things?

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

Choose something you need to change that you have been justifying or rationalizing. What will you do this week to take ownership of the problem or behavior? Ask Heavenly Father to forgive you and to help you change.

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Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.

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### **"THE PARABLE OF THE GIRAFFE," ROBERT C. GAY (VIDEO SCRIPT)**



In South Africa one day a man was driving along the highway with two giraffes in his truck. As he traveled he came to a bridge that went over the highway. As he came to the bridge one giraffe was too tall and his head hit the bridge. That giraffe died instantly and fell into the bed of the truck. As the driver continued on his journey another driver in a car saw the truck that now had a single giraffe and thought what a beautiful sight. Later that night the driver in the car was watching the news and saw a report how a giraffe had been killed on the highway

that day. He saw the truck with the giraffe he had seen on the highway but then learned there were actually two giraffes that day. When the driver was asked why he had caused the giraffe's death, he said: "It's not my fault. They built the bridge too low."

My question today is, "How many of you are transferring the blame for your life challenges to things like low bridges? Are you justifying not moving ahead in education, marriage, service to others by blaming the situations in your life on others?"



## 7: WHAT LACK I YET?

**Report:** Last week you committed to change something that you had been justifying or rationalizing. Briefly share with the group what you did and the results.

**Read:** One of the ways Heavenly Father tries to help us be happier is by lovingly helping us see what we need to improve in our lives. In the New Testament, we read of a young disciple's interaction with the Savior, "...there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

"...And Jesus said unto him...thou knowest the commandments...

"And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

"Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest...

"And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved" (Mark 10:17-22).

### ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** Think about the interaction of the young disciple with Christ. The disciple "came running," "kneeled to him," "observed the commandments from his youth" – he was good and faithful.

**Step 2:** As a group, discuss each of the questions below.

- Do you think perhaps the young disciple desired to hear something like, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant?" Why?
- Why do you think it was hard for him to hear, "One thing though lackest"?
- When we are often trying so hard to be good and faithful, how would it also be hard to hear, "One thing thou lackest"?
- What do you think may have happened for this young disciple if he had been able to receive and follow the Lord's counsel? What does that mean for us?

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**Watch:** "What Lack I Yet?" available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](https://www.ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 22.

**Discuss:** How can you be prepared to hear responses that you may not want to hear? How can you prepare to act on those responses?

**Read:** The Lord is willing to give us personal counsel if we are willing to ask and listen. In addition to asking the Lord for this counsel, we can also ask others to help us improve by asking them, "What Lack I Yet?" For example, one could ask his wife, "How can I be a better husband?" One could ask her boss, "How can I be a better employee?"

## ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** In this activity you will individually practice asking “What Lack I Yet?” to Heavenly Father and others who love you. First, decide when and where you will ask Heavenly Father, “What Lack I Yet?” It may be in your prayers this evening or during the sacrament this week. Write your plan below.

When I will ask Heavenly Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Where I will ask: \_\_\_\_\_

How I will prepare to hear and act on the response:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2:** Choose someone to whom you will ask “What Lack I Yet?” (It may be a spouse, a fellow member of the Church, a child, a coworker, a parent, a friend). Decide what and when you will ask them. Write your choices below:

Who I will ask: \_\_\_\_\_

What I will ask: \_\_\_\_\_

When I will ask: \_\_\_\_\_

How I will prepare to hear and act on their response:

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Read:** Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught, “Being conscious of that which we yet “lack” becomes an additional test and spur-along with the keeping of the commandments and the performance of our duties. Though we may have already proved we can play checkers, are we now ready to play chess? Are we willing to let the Lord lead us into further developmental experiences or do we shrink back? There isn't much growing in shrinking!” (“The Christ-Centered Life,” *Ensign*, August 1981). The Lord’s tender correction is an example of His love for us, “Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** How is becoming aware of what we “lack” a demonstration of God’s love for us? Are you willing to be tutored by the Lord??

\_\_\_\_\_

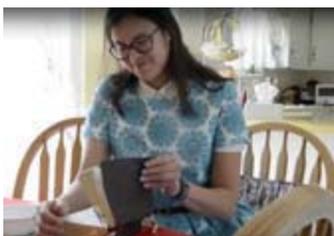
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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

- Commit to do what you planned in the activity by asking both Heavenly Father and someone else to help you see what you might yet lack.
- Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.

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## “WHAT LACK I YET?” LARRY R. LAWRENCE (VIDEO SCRIPT)



President Harold B. Lee taught, “Every one of us, if we would reach perfection, must [at] one time ask ourselves this question, ‘What lack I yet?’”

I knew a faithful mother who humbled herself and asked, “What is keeping me from progressing?” In her case, the response from the Spirit came immediately: “Stop complaining.” This answer surprised her; she had never thought of herself as a complainer.

However, the message from the Holy Ghost was very clear. In the days that followed, she became conscious of her habit of complaining. Grateful for the prompting to improve, she determined to count her blessings instead of her challenges. Within days, she felt the warm approval of the Spirit.

A humble young man who couldn’t seem to find the right young woman went to the Lord for help: “What is keeping me from being the right man?” he asked. This answer came into his mind and heart: “Clean up your language.” At that moment, he realized that several crude expressions had become part of his vocabulary, and he committed to change.

A single sister bravely asked the question: “What do I need to change?” and the Spirit whispered to her, “Don’t interrupt people when they are talking.” The Holy Ghost really does give customized counsel. He is a completely honest companion and will tell us things that no one else knows or has the courage to say.

One returned missionary found himself stressed with a very heavy schedule. He was trying to find time for work, studies, family, and a Church calling. He asked the Lord for counsel: “How can I feel at peace with all that I need to do?” The answer was not what he expected; he received the impression that he should more carefully observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. He decided to dedicate Sunday to God’s service—to lay aside his school courses on that day and study the gospel instead. This small adjustment brought the peace and balance that he was seeking.

Years ago I read in a Church magazine the story of a girl who was living away from home and going to college. She was behind in her classes, her social life was not what she had hoped for, and she was generally unhappy. Finally one day she fell to her knees and cried out, “What can I do to improve my life?” The Holy Ghost whispered, “Get up and clean your room.”

This prompting came as a complete surprise, but it was just the start she needed. After taking time to organize and put things in order, she felt the Spirit fill her room and lift her heart.

The Holy Ghost doesn’t tell us to improve everything at once. If He did, we would become discouraged and give up. The Spirit works with us at our own speed, one step at a time, or as the Lord has taught, “line upon line, precept upon precept, ... and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, ... for unto him that receiveth I will give more.” For example, if the Holy Ghost has been prompting you to say “thank you” more often, and you respond to that prompting, then He may feel it’s time for you to move on to something more challenging—like learning to say, “I’m sorry; that was my fault.” (“What Lack I Yet?” *Ensign*, November 2015)



## 8: CHARITY AT HOME

**Report:** Last week you committed to ask Heavenly Father and someone else “What lack I yet?” Briefly share with the group what you did, and the results.

**Read:** President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught: “Whatever problems your family is facing, whatever you must do to solve them, the beginning and the end of the solution is charity, the pure love of Christ. Without this love, even seemingly perfect families struggle. With it, even families with great challenges succeed. “Charity never faileth.” It is true for saving marriages! It is true for saving families!” (“In Praise of Those Who Save,” *Ensign*, May 2016).

**Discuss:** How do you show charity at home? What does it mean “charity never faileth”?

### ACTIVITY

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**Step 1:** Read the following scripture and quote together as a group. As you read them, underline the various attributes of charity.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:1-7).

“Perhaps the greatest charity comes when we are kind to each other, when we don’t judge or categorize someone else, when we simply give each other the benefit of the doubt or remain quiet. Charity is ... resisting the impulse to become offended when someone doesn’t handle something the way we might have hoped... and being willing to forgive someone who has hurt us. Charity is expecting the best of each other” (“The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword,” Marvin J. Ashton, *Ensign*, May, 1992).

**Step 2:** Individually use the attributes of charity to evaluate yourself. Mark “O” on the attributes you do well. Mark “Δ” on the ways you can be more charitable.

A CHARITABLE PERSON...	O or Δ	A CHARITABLE PERSON...	O or Δ
suffers long		rejoices not in iniquity, but in truth	
is kind		believes and has hope in all things	
does not envy		bears and endures all things	
does not boast		does not judge or categorize others	
does not behave unseemly		gives others the benefit of the doubt	
seeks not her own		remains quiet	
thinks no evil		is not offended	
is not easily provoked		forgives those who hurt them	

**Watch:** “More Diligent and Concerned At Home,” available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](http://ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 25.

**Discuss:** Why are words and actions both important to show love for family members?

**Read:** Charity should be demonstrated in our homes and with our families. President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, “Let us deal in kindness and with appreciation with those for whom the Lord will hold us accountable. I never get over the depth of meaning of the words President McKay often quoted, ‘The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother’” (“Reach Out in Love and Kindness,” *Ensign*, November 1982). Demonstrating charity at home will bring us greater happiness.

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** Consider the members of your family. What would the Lord have you do to treat them with more charity?

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

Choose one person in your family or home. Write one action you will do this week to demonstrate greater love.

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Share your commitment with another member of the group. Promise to keep your commitment. Next week you will report on your commitment.

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## **“MORE DILIGENT AND CONCERNED AT HOME,” DAVID A. BEDNAR (VIDEO SCRIPT)**



Sometimes in a sacrament meeting talk or testimony, we hear a statement like this: “I know I do not tell my spouse often enough how much I love her. Today I want her, my children, and all of you to know that I love her.”

Such an expression of love may be appropriate. But when I hear a statement like this, I squirm and silently exclaim that the spouse and children should not be hearing this apparently rare and private communication in public at church!

Hopefully the children hear love expressed and see love demonstrated between their parents in the regular routine of daily living. If, however, the public statement of love at church is a bit surprising to the spouse or the children, then indeed there is a need to be more diligent and concerned at home.

The relationship between love and appropriate action is demonstrated repeatedly in the scriptures and is highlighted by the Savior’s instruction to His Apostles: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Just as our love of and for the Lord is evidenced by walking ever in His ways so our love for spouse, parents, and children is reflected most powerfully in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds (see Mosiah 4:30).

Feeling the security and constancy of love from a spouse, a parent, or a child is a rich blessing. Such love nurtures and sustains faith in God. Such love is a source of strength and casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18). Such love is the desire of every human soul. We can become more diligent and concerned at home as we express love—and consistently show it. (“More Diligent and Concerned at Home,” *Ensign*, November 2009)



## 9: PUSH BACK AGAINST THE WORLD

**Report:** Last week you committed to showing greater love and charity towards a family member. Briefly share with the group what you did and the results.

**Read:** Heavenly Father wants us to be happy. He has given us the gospel to help us live in a way that will bring happiness. Satan, however, wants us to be unhappy and he uses many tools to deceive us and rob us of happiness. One of Satan’s tools can be false traditions. Joseph Smith taught, “I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all” (HC 5:402; 4:478–79, 6:184–185).

**Discuss:** How have you seen Satan use traditions to deceive and mislead people?

**Read:** Sometimes we don’t realize that some of our traditions are harmful. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught: “I...speak of some elements of national and ethnic cultures, and even family cultures that come from the traditions and practices of men. When the practices of these cultures are contrary to gospel covenants and culture, we must push back” (“Push Back Against the World,” BYU-Hawaii Commencement, Feb 25, 2017). In the Book of Mormon we find multiple instances where the wicked Lamanites were “convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers” (Alma 23:3) and changed. As they did so, they were greatly blessed.

### ACTIVITY

**Step 1:** As a group, read below some traditions of men contrasted with God’s way. Discuss the long term impact when you do not follow God’s way.

TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES OF MEN	GOD’S WAY
Seek and obtain entitlements or live off the labors of others.	Work; Provide for self and family and become self-reliant.
Avoid or delay marriage and raising a family.	Marry and have children where able; Know that Family is ordained of God.
Measure success based on school, job, position, fame, the amount of money earned and the brands owned.	Measure success by how well one strives to follow God’s will.
Look to and indulge the desires of the flesh — immorality, substance abuse, consumerism, etc.	Overcome the natural man – be chaste and virtuous, live the Word of Wisdom, avoid debt.
Gossip and speak ill of others.	Do not bear false witness.
Use Sunday as a day of recreation, sports and shopping.	Keep the Sabbath day holy.
Spend free time texting (Line, Kakao, etc.), gaming.	Use our time wisely in righteous endeavors.

**Step 2:** Individually re-examine the traditions of men listed in the chart and circle any that are a part of your life.

**Step 3:** Individually re-examine God’s way listed in the chart and circle any you would like to improve in your life.

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**Read:** Righteous traditions are consistent with the gospel, are incredibly powerful, and can help us experience greater happiness. Things like regular scripture study, personal and family prayer, service, or temple worship can become holy habits and righteous rituals which bring many promised blessings.

**Discuss:** How have righteous traditions been a blessing to you or to others you know?

**Watch:** “Small and Simple Things,” available at [ldschurch.jp/srs](http://ldschurch.jp/srs). If no video, read on page 28.

**Discuss:** What was the blessing Sister Bednar and her family received as she diligently worked to do the “small and simple things”?

**Read:** “The challenge to each one of us, a challenge we came to the earth to experience, is to choose between good and evil. Many traditions in our societies lead us to sin, while others lead us to righteous conduct. If we place ourselves on the side of righteous traditions and if we allow them to have an influence in our lives, we can be strengthened in our testimonies and in our receptivity to the Spirit. If, however, we give ourselves over to the wicked influence of evil traditions, we make it more difficult for the Spirit to find a place in our hearts” (“The Traditions of Their Fathers,” James T. Duke, *Ensign*, November 1972).

**Discuss:** What are the most important things you learned from today’s discussion?

**Ponder:** Individually think about one tradition in your family or culture that needs to change so you can all come closer to God.

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**Commit:** Commit to do the following during the week. Check the box when you complete it.

From the traditions activity above, choose one thing you will do to start a new family tradition that will help you better follow God’s ways.

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Complete the final exercise on pages 29 and 30.

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## “SMALL AND SIMPLE THINGS,” SUSAN K. BEDNAR (VIDEO SCRIPT)



Today, I've felt that I should share a simple yet great lesson learned during our time spent in Indiana that has continued to bless my life in countless ways. Come with me to my busy life as a young wife and mother. Elder Bednar was enrolled in a demanding doctoral program at Purdue University, far away from our families. We had an energetic two-year-old—energetic's kind of a mild word for the way he was—and a very young baby, very little money, and hardly any time to spend together as a family. As we struggled to balance family responsibilities, the rigors of school, and Church callings, I became more and more

overwhelmed with my duties as a stay-at-home mother and wife. Many of you may have experienced some of these same emotions and frustrations.

After considerable pondering about my situation, I asked my husband for a priesthood blessing. I was promised in the blessing that if I would exercise, get more sleep, eat regular meals, have meaningful prayer morning and night, and engage in more purposeful and consistent scripture study, I would receive the physical and spiritual tools to better cope with my circumstances and the discouragement I was feeling. The reason I remember this blessing so clearly is because afterwards I thought: “Doing this is going to solve my problems? These are typical ‘Sunday School’ answers.”

In my prideful state of mind, I rationalized why I didn't need any more exercise because chasing little boys around all day was exercise enough, why I couldn't get in more sleep because of their young ages, and why I couldn't eat properly every single day because I was just too busy taking care of their needs, and frankly, I forgot to eat breakfast sometimes, and then macaroni and cheese didn't sound very good for lunch. Since I was already saying my prayers and reading my scriptures most of the time, that part of the blessing was not even applicable to me...

I'm sure if I had been directed to do some great thing like go on a relaxing Hawaiian cruise, or enroll in an evening art or music class, or pamper myself with a new hairdo and a pedicure, I would have seen the wisdom in responding to that kind of inspiration. But the small and simple steps that were required to receive the promised blessings seemed so mundane to me.

Thankfully, humility took root.... Over the years, I have found that retiring earlier at night and arising earlier in the morning invigorates the mind and the body (D&C 88:124). Regular exercise lifts my spirit, clears my mind, and gives me added energy to meet the demands of my busy schedule. I can “run and not be weary, and ... walk and not faint” (D&C 89:20). Proper physical nourishment is an important key to unlocking spiritual “treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 89:19)...

I know and testify that I have heard the voice of the Lord speaking to me through the scriptures as I have paid the price of more diligent, meaningful, and consistent gospel study (D&C 18:34–36). I have felt the power and the strength of Christ's word in me as I have faced the challenges and vicissitudes of life (Alma 26:12–13).

I know by sad experience how easy it is to nudge off our plate of daily responsibilities these small and simple things that can make such a great difference. I know as we apply these powerful principles, the blessings come. “By small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). (“Small and Simple Things,” BYU Women's Conference, 2011)

## FINAL EXERCISE

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**Complete these last two exercises with your group or at home in a family council.**

**Exercise 1:** We can't change all of the demands on our time, but we can often find ways to adapt to make sure we still do what matters most. There is not one perfect way. Read and discuss the examples below of how families or individuals adapted to obey gospel teachings and experience happiness.

**Example 1:** The Takeda family began struggling with family prayer and scripture study when their kids became teenagers. It seemed like no one was ever home at the same time so praying together was difficult. They began using video chat to hold family prayer in the mornings. Sometimes the father was already at work, and had to find a quiet place to step away for a few minutes, others were still having breakfast, or were studying before school. They started using text for their scriptures. The mother sends out a scripture, and everyone reads it and texts back their thoughts. This is working for them and they are feeling the blessings of family prayer and scripture study.

**Example 2:** Brother Nakamura began studying his scriptures at his morning meal. It was a quiet time and it helped him be consistent. For him, it worked better than before when he tried to study before he went to sleep.

**Example 3:** The Ito family is trying to find time for family home evening. Monday night has not been working because of some work and school commitments. Sundays are much better, so they started doing family home evening on Sunday evenings just after dinner. This works better for them.

**Example 4:** Family history always seemed overwhelming to Sister Kobayashi. But now she has learned it can be as simple as sharing family stories and pictures with her kids. Each week she shares a simple story from her life or about an ancestor. Her kids like the stories and she feels closer to her family.

**Example 5:** Yuna found that the best time for her prayers and study is on her way to work. She rides the train and can put in her headphones and listen to good music while reading talks from General Conference. She says a silent prayer. It is working for her.

**Example 6:** Brother and Sister Watanabe found that praying as a couple right before they went to sleep wasn't very effective. They were tired and sometimes forgot. Instead, they decided they would pray together at 7:00 each evening. They feel their prayers are more effective and now they rarely forget.

## FINAL EXERCISE

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**Exercise 2:** Read, ponder and discuss each scripture below. What do each of these scriptures teach about finding joy in the gospel?

- 2 Nephi 2:25 – “Men are, that they might have joy”
- Psalms 146:5 – “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help”
- Doctrine and Covenants 11:13 – “My Spirit ... shall fill your soul with joy”
- Job 5:17 – “Happy is the man whom God correcteth”
- Proverbs 16:20 – “[He that] trusteth in the Lord, happy is he”
- Proverbs 3:13 – “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom”
- 1 Nephi 8:10 – “Whose fruit [of the tree of life] was desirable to make one happy”
- Alma 40:12 – “Righteous are received into a state of happiness”
- Galatians 5:22 – “[The] fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace”
- John 13:17 – “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them”







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