

Love within the Family

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"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"
(John 13:34).

We should nourish the love in our families.

Love in the Home

Through the prophet Malachi the Lord said, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6). While the family history message is clear, does the scripture not also include the turning of the hearts of living family members to each other? What would bless the lives of all and make heaven on earth more than family members sharing genuine love with each other?

Two elders were asked to conduct a religious service in the female section of a prison. For their opening song they chose to sing "Love at Home." As they were singing the first verse, one by one the sisters in the prison stopped singing; their voices were choked, and tears began streaming down their faces. By the time the second verse was finished, none of the women were singing. All were weeping softly. The elders tried to sing the third verse by themselves, but their hearts became swollen with emotion, their eyes filled with tears, and they were unable to finish. After regaining composure, they concluded the service. Afterwards they talked with many of these women. The inmates spoke of the great spiritual experience they had. But one by one they also stated, "There was no love in our home."

Nurturing Love in the Family

Families generally begin in love. A man and woman fall in love, they get married, and out of their love come children. The problem is how to keep this love alive and growing, for love requires constant attention. Unless it is nourished by constant care, like a plant without water it will shrivel and die.

The most important thing we can do to nourish the love in our families is to live the first great commandment: "Thou shalt love

the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). Our Heavenly Father is the source of all truth and all love. By loving him we draw close to him and become more like him. As that happens, we receive from him the knowledge and power to love each family member, to better nurture their love, and to meet the daily challenges in our homes. The Savior taught, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Note the reason for the love shared by the Nephites during the two hundred years following Christ's visit to them: "There was no contention in the land, *because of the love of God* which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (4 Nephi 1:15; italics added). If we love God, he gradually teaches us and gives us the power to love as he loves.

The Savior defined the second great commandment as "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). Our closest neighbors are the members of our own families. And yet we sometimes fail to treat them with the same courtesy and kindness that we grant to strangers.

Elder Russell M. Nelson declared: "The family has been under attack ever since Satan first taunted Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3; Moses 4). So today, each must guard against the hazard of contention in the family. . . .

"The home is the great laboratory of learning and love. Here parents help children overcome these natural tendencies to be selfish. In rearing our own family, Sister Nelson and I have been very grateful for this counsel from the Book of Mormon:

" 'Ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, . . .

" 'But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another' (Mosiah 4:14-15).

"And I might add, please be patient while children learn those lessons.

"Parents should be partners to cherish and protect one another, knowing that the aim of the adversary is to destroy the integrity of the family" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, p. 86; or *Ensign*, May 1989, p. 69).

Showing love for our own parents is also important to nourishing love in our families. We cannot expect our children to love and respect us if we do not show them that we love and respect our own parents. Loving our parents is necessary not only in nurturing

family love and unity, but in loving God. We honor him when we honor those whom he sustains as our parents.

Paul gave wise counsel to the Galatians about showing love for our children and our brothers and sisters: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2). This may be difficult to do when a family member angers us. One way to control such a response is to remember that this person is an eternal friend. We should then be able to soften our hearts and respond with love as Paul taught.

Four Questions

As a way of learning how to nourish and express the love we feel for the members of our families, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Do I really listen to each family member? To be truly listened to is to feel loved. Do I listen to friends, neighbors, and co-workers more readily than to the most important people in my life—the members of my family? Do the concerns of my family receive as much of my attention as the concerns of others? Do I make time to listen to the members of my family regularly?
2. Do I spend time with each family member? Developing love, harmony, and unity in a family takes time.
3. Do I help each family member feel needed? To feel useful and appreciated is a basic human need. We can help family members fulfill this need by giving them opportunities to help us and then letting them know that we appreciate their help.
4. Do I have the pure love of Christ, or charity, described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8? "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. Charity never faileth."

As you study these verses, look up the unfamiliar words and cross-references. You may want to write the verses in your own words to better understand their meaning. Examine your relationship with each member of your family in light of this scripture. Commit yourself each morning in prayer to your Heavenly Father to use these principles in dealing with at least one member of your family that day. Review your commitment with your Heavenly Father each evening in prayer; then plan improvements the next morning. Think about these verses as

you do routine activities (see Deuteronomy 6:6–7). As you study and apply these and other scriptures on love, you will find yourself developing greater love for all members of your family.

It takes time to learn Christlike love, so we must be patient with ourselves. It may be well to remember the words of Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "Eternal things are always done in the process of time. . . . Direction is initially more important than speed" (*Of One Heart* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975], p. 35).

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Ask: Why are loving parents such an important element in nurturing love within a family? What are ways in which you can make children, teenagers, or husbands feel needed and loved?
2. Point out that the first step in nurturing our love for each other is to love God. Love for God, in fact, is the greatest commandment and includes all other commandments. Ask: How is love of God related to loving others?
3. Read Galatians 6:1–2. Ask: Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive and love family members when they offend us? How can we cultivate the spirit of meekness that Paul admonishes us to have? Tell of a time when you or someone else responded with love instead of becoming angry. Describe the effect that this response had upon you and the others involved.
4. Have sisters share experiences they have had with someone really listening to them. Ask: What did this experience mean to you? How did it increase your love for that person? Do I listen carefully to my family members, thereby showing them that I love them?
5. Assign a sister to read 1 Corinthians 13 to the class. Describe the challenge in the lesson to study these verses and commit to using them with family members. Ask the sisters to accept this challenge.