

The Home as a Learning Center

"Study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people" (D&C 90:15).

The Lord has designated the home as a place for family members to teach and learn many good things.

Introduction

As recorded in the Book of Mormon, Mosiah "made a proclamation throughout all the land" that all the people were to gather together at the temple "to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them. . . . And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another.

"And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them" (Mosiah 2:1, 5-6).

These were families—parents, children, and grandchildren—gathered together to be taught the word of God by their prophet-king. The parents were taking advantage of an unusual opportunity for their immediate family to be taught important truths. With this arrangement they would be able to learn in their own homes, which just happened to be tents at that time.

Home Is a Center for Learning Many Things

The Lord desires that our homes be "houses of learning" (D&C 88:119) where spiritual truths and moral values are taught. With gospel principles as a foundation, we can learn in our homes to grow and progress in all areas of our lives. In our homes we can learn to be productive, contributing individuals in society as well as valuable servants of the Lord.

We can make any home in which we live a place for personal enrichment. Elder Carlos E. Asay explained: "A learning center is more than a collection of books and pencils and desks. It is a place where truth is cherished, honest inquiry encouraged, and uplifting dialogue exchanged in a congenial atmosphere. Some consider the teaching in the home complete if family home evening is held routinely. Actually, family home evening is only a part of the teaching that needs to take place if learning is to become centered in the home. Some very important teaching occurs when family members discuss a Sunday School lesson around the dinner table, when parents assist a child in preparing a talk or fulfilling an assignment, when someone seizes an opportunity to teach a spontaneous, practical lesson, and when all within the household take delight in reading a good book in some quiet corner" ("For the Perfecting of the Saints," *Ensign*, Jan. 1986, pp. 18-19).

In our homes we teach and learn both spiritual and secular information. We also convey attitudes to each other. Through interaction all family members can increase skills as they practice what they learn. Thus, parents and children alike can benefit.

The guiding principles of personal and family welfare are subjects that could receive our attention at home. Some of these are (1) education, (2) health, (3) employment, (4) home storage, (5) resource management, and (6) social, emotional, and spiritual strength.

Within these six general areas are many specific subjects that we could teach or practice at home. Some of these include the following: basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills; vocational skills; social skills and courtesy; good health habits; talents; goals; good work habits; service; decision making and problem solving; basic homemaking and home management skills (for men and women); coping with changes; civic responsibilities; and self-reliance. Daily living in the home provides opportunities for teaching and learning these skills. Teaching need not always take place in structured situations.

"Parents are teachers, for they impart to their children, directly or indirectly, the fundamentals of living. Showing their children such simple things as table manners, or imparting to them high moral standards, requires teaching. For most of us, our habits and lifestyles have come from teachings we received at home" ("Every Member a Teacher," *Church News*, 22 Dec. 1985, p. 16).

We Can Create an Atmosphere of Learning within Our Homes

All of us, with or without children, need to assess the physical atmosphere of our homes to see if it is conducive to fostering our

own and our children's learning. Is there time and place to think? Great ideas may be found in good music, art, and literature. Do we foster the cultural aspects of our lives?

President Gordon B. Hinckley has spoken about creating "an atmosphere of growth." "What a marvelously interesting thing it is to watch young minds stretch and strengthen. I am one who greatly appreciates the vast potential of television for good. But I also am one who decries the terrible waste of time and opportunity as children in some homes watch, hour upon hour, that which neither enlightens nor strengthens.

"When I was a boy we lived in a large old house. One room was called the library. It had a solid table and a good lamp, three or four comfortable chairs with good light, and books in cases that lined the walls. There were many volumes—the acquisitions of my father and mother over a period of many years.

"We were never forced to read them, but they were placed where they were handy and where we could get at them whenever we wished.

"There was quiet in that room. It was understood that it was a place to study.

"There were also magazines—the Church magazines and two or three other good magazines. There were books of history and literature, books on technical subjects, dictionaries, a set of encyclopedias, and an atlas of the world. There was no television, of course, at that time. Radio came along while I was growing up. But there was an environment, an environment of learning. I would not have you believe that we were great scholars. But we were exposed to great literature, great ideas from great thinkers, and the language of men and women who thought deeply and wrote beautifully.

"In so many of our homes today there is not the possibility of such a library. Most families are cramped for space. But with planning there can be a corner, there can be an area that becomes something of a hideaway from the noises about us where one can sit and read and think. It is a wonderful thing to have a desk or a table, be it ever so simple, on which are found the standard works of the Church, a few good books, the magazines issued by the Church, and other things worthy of our reading.

"Begin early in exposing children to books. The mother who fails to read to her small children does a disservice to them and a disservice to herself. It takes time, yes, much of it. It takes self-discipline. It takes organizing and budgeting the minutes and hours of the day. But it will never be a bore as you watch young

minds come to know characters, expressions, and ideas. Good reading can become a love affair, far more fruitful in long term effects than many other activities in which children use their time. It has been estimated that 'the average child on this continent has watched something like 8,000 hours of TV before he or she even starts school.' A very large part of that is of questionable value.

"Parents, work at the matter of creating an atmosphere in your homes. Let your children be exposed to great minds, great ideas, everlasting truth, and those things which will build and motivate for good" ("The Environment of Our Homes," *Ensign*, June 1985, p. 4).

Conclusion

Learning for each of us begins at birth and continues throughout life. It never ends. The home, therefore, becomes a great teacher. Regardless of our family's circumstances and the type of home we live in, we can make our home a place where effective, useful, and enriching learning takes place. As President Hinckley expressed, "I pray that we shall make an effort to improve the environment in which we and our children live" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, p. 63; or *Ensign*, May 1982, p. 42).

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Ask: What are some opportunities we have to teach and learn in the home? Point out that most learning in the home does not take place in structured, planned situations but is a result of taking advantage of teaching moments.
2. Review the guiding principles of personal and family welfare. Ask the sisters to suggest ways in which they could teach these principles in their homes. You may want to ask sisters to discuss ways they have taught the principles in their homes.
3. Discuss President's Hinckley's statement about creating an atmosphere of growth. Ask the sisters to suggest ways in which they could put his suggestions into practice in their homes.