



OPENING THE DOOR TO
FAMILY
REVELATION

RICHARD AND LINDA EYRE
WITH SAYDI EYRE SHUMWAY

Opening the Door to
FAMILY REVELATION

Receiving Divine Answers for You and Your Children



By New York Times #1 Bestselling Authors

Linda and Richard Eyre

With Saydi Eyre Shumway

Netboox Edition

This is a book-in-progress. It is not yet finished. We want your help in doing that finishing.

Just like Netflix is a way to bypass theatres and get movies directly to you, Netboox is a way of bypassing publishers and getting books directly to you. And rather than giving them to you as finished and “completed” projects, we want to share them in their draft form, asking you for your inputs and suggestions before the book is complete. Since it has not yet undergone final editing, you may also find typos and mistakes.

Please email your thoughts, corrections, ideas, and additions to us at eyres1@comcast.net so that we can continue to modify and enhance this book and make it the best that it can be.

We feel that the Netboox concept is particularly relevant on this book, since it is about receiving divine guidance for our families—and since every family is different and needs to think about and apply the concepts individually.

Thanks, Linda and Richard Eyre, and Saydi Shumway

Much has been written in the on seeking divine help and guidance, what we call Personal Revelation. Far less has been written on finding higher help with our marriages and families, what we call “Family Revelation.”

Another way to say it is that we have abundant council on *how* to seek and receive divine guidance or revelation, but not nearly enough on *what* to seek that revelation *for*.

The biggest “what” of course, is our families. Our roles as parents, and as husbands or wives are the most important and lasting relationships of this life and the most integral to God’s eternal plan of happiness and salvation. It is these family callings, from which we will never be released, that are the most critical stewardships on which to seek and receive revelation.

This book, as the cover art proclaims, is written from a Christian perspective, but we believe it will be helpful and acceptable in all of its concepts to anyone who believes in the divine or even in any form of higher intelligence with the capacity to influence or inspire us.

There has never been a more challenging time
in which to raise righteous and responsible children
and to form and maintain lasting marriages and strong families.

Churches and other larger institutions may support us as “scaffolding,”
but the real stewardship falls to us as parents, and to meet the challenge we need...

Personal Family Revelation

which is available to all who truly seek it;
and comes in a wide variety of ways
that always involve agency and asking.

Before we even get to the introduction and chapters,
may we use these opening pages
to center ourselves,
to make clear the purpose and intent of this book,
and to ponder some brief case studies
and think about some questions
(and even a beautiful piece of art)
which can set the stage
and get us mentally and spiritually ready
to ponder the questions of Family Revelation.



He stands at your door,
With a light,
Holding what your family needs.

He knocks,
He, the Savior of the world knocks,
And even gently presses on *your* door,

Ready to help you with your children,
With your marriage,
Ready to listen, ready to answer,
Ready to help you return.

But He will not enter until you unlock,
Unlatch,
Pull open from the inside.

It is a heavy door,
Not always easy to open.

Case Studies on Family Revelation

A mother, deep in prayer about a rebellious teen, receives the distinct impression to take her along on an upcoming business trip where there will be ample time for one-on-one talks and for trust to build.

A wife goes on a hike to ponder what to do about a deteriorating marriage and an unfaithful husband, feels prompted to call an old friend who she has not seen in years, and finds that the friend had a similar situation and can shed light on her options.

A grandfather, seeking guidance about how to draw closer to
A grandson, suddenly remembers distinctly something that his own grandfather once said to him, and realizes it changed their relationship forever.

A dad, deeply troubled by learning that his young son is being bullied at school, has gone to speak with the school counselor; and though it is not mentioned in their conversation, he feels direct revelation telling him to go and meet privately with the father of the boy doing the bullying.

While meditating, the single mother of an entitled, unmotivated, video-game-addicted 19 year old son, who she has been pushing to go on a mission, has the distinct impression that sending him on the study abroad program that he is arguing for will give him the independence and new environment to develop his own perspective.

A mom who works full time by choice is fasting for an answer, and instead receives a clear question.
The question, fully formed and instantly in her mind, is
“Is the extra money I am bringing into the family right now worth as much as additional time spent with my two young preschoolers?”

A young married couple, praying together about their inability to conceive the child they desperately want, feels (each of them feels) a powerful answer that they should apply to adopt.

A father, burdened by worries about a son who lacks confidence and gives up easily is sitting humbly in his den when he suddenly knows that he has to tell his son more stories about his grandparents and ancestors and their resilience; and as he does so, he begins to see a new light and determination in his son's eyes.

A full time mom feels “sandwiched” between her five small children and her ageing mother who, recently widowed, has just moved in with them.
She goes prayerfully to the temple and while sitting in the waiting room, suddenly sees a vision of how her mother can feel worth by helping with the kids in a way that benefits both generations and lightens her own parenting burden at the same time.

A couple, on a date together and reviewing the progress of four young kids one at a time, feels impressed that they all have too many lessons and games and activities on their schedule and that they need to cut back and have more unscheduled family time.

A single dad, out on a run with classical, baroque music in his earbuds, and thinking about his daughter and her fickle friends,

forms a clear mental picture of her spending time with a one-year-older cousin and he knows instantly that getting them together will lift his daughter's confidence.

A mom and dad feel impressed to call their three adolescent children together in a family council to ask them what they think about the need for more communication and less screen time in their home. During the council, the eldest son, to the parents' surprise, suggests a new router that will turn off the wifi for an hour to allow a nightly dinner discussion

The Beginning Point

You are a spiritual being here on a physical earth, veiled from prior memory so that you can learn this new dimension and obtain, as God has, the joyful merger of spirit and matter, even becoming, like They, parents of other eternal beings who are your greatest stewardship.

The spiritual realm is your natural, eternal habitat, and you can, despite the veil, return to it at any time through prayer, and by going to both inner and outer spiritual places. And you can take the asking initiative that opens the door to all that God wants to give.

Personal revelation, particularly for your family stewardship, is your entitlement—it is attainable and is always available. But this physical place, and the adversary's opposition, not only undermines family, but distracts and deceives and disconnects us from our divine tether, making it necessary and essential to deliberately and devotedly seek family revelation.

How to do so is the subject matter of this book

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Introduction

Receiving Family Revelation Finding the Joy of Mortality's Greatest Stewardship

This is not a book on parenting. It is on seeking and receiving personal revelation for and about your family. The goal is not to give you prescriptive child rearing or family building advice but to strongly suggest that the best help (by far) that you can get for your family is not from a parenting book or from the advice of experts or even the examples of other families. The best help you can get for your family is from God through personal Family Revelation.

No other family is just like yours. No other child is just like your child. No one knows enough about your unique situation and your particular family to be more of an expert on your children than you are.

No one, that is, except God who is the true and eternal parent of the child or children you are raising or will raise, and who knows those children better (and know you better) than you do. Your parental stewardship entitles you to direct Family Revelation from God concerning your children, your home, and your marriage.

We are so happy to be assisted in writing this book by our daughter Saydi who will lend her vibrant voice as the 24/7 real world, in-the-trenches mother of four wonderfully rambunctious children ranging from the age of accountability to the age of adolescence.

Family Revelation is a specialized and acutely important form of personal revelation. It is the direct guidance that we need as we seek to do God's will in raising His children—our spiritual brothers and sisters—who have been entrusted to us as our greatest earthly stewardship.

Family Revelation is also about the inspiration we need in our marriages—to make them strong enough to last for eternity and to develop them into partnerships which become the perfectible entities that can inherit heavenly glory.

Family Revelation also encompasses spiritual help on all of the other familial relationships we have on this earth, as siblings, as aunts and uncles, as grandparents, as cousins, and as children of our parents. Each of these relationships can also be eternal, and the love and effort and spiritual work we put into them measures into our own Exaltation.

Here is a glossary or definition of terms that will help clarify what you will read next.

RECEIVING: Spiritually, this is not a passive noun, but an active verb that suggests effort—grasping, grappling, drawing down, wresting and wrestling for. Receiving divine guidance does not just happen, and Receiving revelation for your family implies deep asking and hard work.

FAMILY: The basic unit of society and of eternity is not the individual, it is the family, and *we all have families*. Individual inspiration and improvement is important of course, but chiefly because it will help us build toward the only perfectible entity in the universe—the family.

REVELATION: Nudges, prompts, hunches and all kinds of inspiration are beautiful gifts from the spirit, but it is *revelation* that makes things clear, that opens up and reveals to us what we need to see about the *why* and the *how* as well as the *what* of our lives.

JOY: Joy is what God wants for all of His children, and it is not only the purpose of this earth, but the *reason* for it. Joy includes sorrow as well as happiness—and it emanates largely from the familial relationships we form here on this earth.

FOREORDINATION: The belief that we lived before this life as literal spirit children of Heavenly Parents who sent us here to become more like Them, even assuming their divine role of parent; and who foreordained each of us to do certain things here, commensurate with the gifts and capacities we had developed as spirits and Their desires for what we should become.

MORTALITY: This pivotal present, where we all now exist (balanced between the forever back of our pre-mortal life and the forever forward of our eternal destiny) is where we make the shift from being children in God’s family to having families of our own that are part of His family.

STEWARDSHIP: Since we own nothing but our agency, and God owns everything, it follows that our bodies, our minds, and all that we have are stewardships, and the greatest stewardship is the entrustment of our spirit brothers and sisters into our family care.

ETERNAL: Our two-way eternity gives us long-term perspective and faith in God’s fairness; and assures us that the sequence of each necessary step along the covenant path is not as important as taking all those steps during the course of our “eternal progression.”

(Saydi adds) As a mom in the thick of parenting right now, I'd like to propose that we commit to making this book a "Guilt Free Zone."

As parents it's easy to feel guilty for what we haven't done, guilty that we didn't always get it right, guilty that we didn't notice problems sooner, guilty that we aren't measuring up to our expectations or to those of the people around us, guilty that we have not sought or received the family revelation that we needed.

As we will talk about later, guilt is one of the main obstacles that gets in the way of our receiving Family Revelation, so let's just get it off the table!

Guilt and shame can make you feel unworthy and discouraged—which keeps you from even asking for the revelation that you need. Instead, be assured that you have always basically done the best you could, given what you knew and who you were at the time. We are here to work and fail and try again—this is where and how we progress. God knows we won't always get it right. Christ made up for our shortcomings. He will fill in the gap.

We have told the following story in other places, but it is particularly relevant here, at the beginning of a book written to parents, who seem to feel more guilt than any other people in the world, because it reflects a pre-mortal and post-mortal eternity that all of us should be aware of and take into account as we parent our children.

We slipped in anonymously at a small rural church in Idaho one Sunday while we were traveling and found ourselves in a Sunday School class where the lesson was on parenting. There was another visitor there, a city guy who seemed to have all the answers. Every time the teacher asked a question, this guy raised his hand and told his ideas and how well they had worked. "My son the valedictorian..." Or "my daughter the student body secretary..." Or "my other daughter the seminary president and captain of the team..." And "how perfectly they all support each other and bear their testimonies each month..."

After about the tenth time that he had all the answers and that all his kids were perfect, it just got to be a little too much, and a quiet farmer near the front of the class raised his hand and stood up and turned to face the big bragger and said "Excuse me sir, but God must not have thought very much of you as a parent—sending you all them easy kids."

I squeezed Linda's hand and whispered "Amen."

We've never forgotten that little experience, because not only did the farmer capture perfectly what a lot of us were thinking, he hinted at some very special doctrine—namely that we believe our children are already who they are when they come to us, that they are not sent to us randomly but for a reason, and that each of our stewardships are unique.

And if what that farmer said was true, then its flip side would also be true in other situations, "God must have thought quite a lot of you as a parent, sending you that very difficult child."

Because this is a book about finding answers—your own answers, each of the five sections is titled with a question. They are family questions that we should all ask ourselves. Because questions are the first step toward answers, and questions can be the keys that open the door to Family Revelation. There are also questions at the end of each chapter for you to ponder individually or with others.

Before you start, you may be interested to know that, originally, we thought we would write a short, basic book on seeking and receiving Family Revelation—essentially section one (question one) of this book.

But as we wrote, we became ever more aware of the obstacles that could block the personal revelation we need for our families, so we explored these obstacles and sought for antidotes in section two—thinking that would conclude the book.

But we realized that this had to be more than the theories of seeking and receiving—it had to be about implementation and include enough examples and stories to show readers that it is possible and to prompt and motivate them to seek for themselves. Would that (section 3) complete the book?

Perhaps, except for the yearning that every parent feels—to see her children’s beliefs develop and then grow and then stay by the same power of personal revelation—so we added section 4 and again thought we were finished.

But surrounding us, and sometimes reading our early drafts, were families facing crisis—from addiction to mental illness to death; and we realized that the book would not be complete without a deeper look (section 5) at receiving Family Revelation at the times we need it most—in our darkest, hardest days.

Lest there be any doubt about our personal conviction on the subject of this book, let us add one last introductory sentence:

“If someone were to ask us if we have a belief in Family Revelation from God, we would answer that we believe in God because of Family Revelation.”

Question One:

How do I* Seek and Receive Family Revelation?

Understanding What it is and How to Go After it

*The word “I” is used in this first question, because Family Revelation is available to each of us individually; but if you are a married, and if you are a two parent family, change the word to “We” because couples should seek Family Revelation jointly, as a partnership, and receiving the same answers, or coming together on answers, is part of the confirmation process and is the way that Family Revelation works. If you are a single parent, you have full access to the same Family Revelation and perhaps even to additional help as you shoulder the stewardship alone.

Dickens said, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, that it was “The best of times and the worst of times.” The same could be said in evaluating today as a time to raise children and create families. It is a wonderful time in the sense of having access to all kinds of information and every imaginable resource to help our families. Yet there has never been a time when creating and maintaining a lasting marriage and a strong family was harder; and there has never been an age when raising righteous and responsible children was more difficult.

We may get some help from family councilors or parenting experts or personal mentors, but the problem is that each of our families is unique, each of our situations is different, and each of our children is one-of-a-kind. General advice and the examples of others can be helpful, but as mentioned, the simple fact is no one really knows as much about our own individual children or our own particular families or our own unique challenges as we do.

With one exception. God knows more about our families, and about us, than we do, and they love our children and our spouse even more than we can.

Thus, it follows that the best advice, the most useful council, the most clear and specific help for our family challenges will not come from a mortal, earthly source, but from a divine source—from our Heavenly Parents, from our Atoning Eldest Brother, and from the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. Our most relevant and useful and saving help will come from Family Revelation.

And the first question of this book is how to get it—and how we can receive more of it.

But this How question has to be accompanied by some other questions about When and Where we can best seek revelation, about Who we need to be to receive it, and perhaps most importantly about What the objective of Family Revelation is—about precisely what it is that we are asking for.

The eleven chapters in this section look deeply into these questions, beginning not with speculation or opinion but with God’s own formula for asking and receiving, and progressing through the many and varied ways in which Family Revelation is sought and received—and the keys to keeping our door always open.

Chapter 1: God's Formula, and Our Faith and Agency

The Savior Himself gives us the formula for Personal and Family Revelation:

Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened, ask and ye shall receive. Draw near to me and I will draw near to you.

The initiative is on us....*seek, knock, ask, draw near..*

When we do these things with a sincere heart and with real intent, the promises of what He will do in return are clear and absolute...ye shall find, receive, have things *opened* to you and have Him *draw near* to you

There are no caveats or exceptions or small print. The promises are bold and clear and powerful.

We can seek and knock and ask for Family Revelation—each of us can. *It is God's invitation.* And we will find and receive. *It is God's promise.*

Knowing this is true is the first step in Receiving Family Revelation.

Have confidence in yourself and faith in your ability to Receive Family Revelation.

(Saydi) In the thick of parenting sometimes we often feel like we're just not getting it right.

Often, we're running so ragged, with so many plates spinning that it feels like stopping to seek direction might just be the thing that makes them all come crashing down. In addition, it is natural, as we think about the needs and challenges of our family and our children, to think about the things we have done wrong and all the things we should be doing better. It helps me to instead focus on the things that I'm getting right.

Even at this moment you are concerned and conscientious enough as a parent to search and to want to improve and to pick up and read this book. You have, whether you realize it or not, always done the best you could with what you had and what you knew at the time. Parenting and marriage are, neither one, a game of perfection. They are divinely designed to be messy and challenging, sometimes excruciating. They are the crucible by which God refines us into who he wants us to be and the way by which He brings us and our children closer to Him.

Agency and Asking

Our Heavenly Father, of course, knows our children because they are His children, and knows us as well, better than we know ourselves. He knows our needs and He also knows our gifts, our potential, and our foreordinations.

And He wants us to know all of these things, but is constrained from manifesting them to us by His commitment to our agency.

Agency lies at the central core of the Gospel and the Lord's Plan of Salvation.

Agency distinguished that plan from the opposite, coercive approach of the adversary.

But agency is given to all—and sometimes, to parents, it seems more like a curse than a blessing because children use it to act out, to rebel, and to make bad choices large and small.

And it is our own agency that can prevent God from giving us the answers we need for our families until we take the initiative to ask.

Asking breaches and bridges agency, making it work for us rather than against—
Providing the initiative from our side that opens the door so that He, without violating our agency, can do what he always wants to do, which is to give us all He has including the precise personal revelation we need to help and serve our families, to raise our children.

But asking is not always as simple as it sounds, it needs the right time and the right place and the right questions—It involves preparation and study, and sometimes it requires the drawing of our own conclusions to take to Him for confirmation. Most of all, it requires faith, the thing Joseph defined as “mental effort”—the effort of asking and seeking and exploring, and receiving;

May we think of agency not a barricade but an entry point, not a denial but an invitation.

Christ stands at the door, but there is no latch or handle on His side. His knock is our invitation to open the door from the inside so that His influence, His Spirit, and His revelation can enter.

Chapter 2: Alternative Reality

Lately, there seems to be a lot of fictional stories, movies, and TV series about “alternative realities” or “alternative universes”—about another realm that we can’t see but that exists right next to ours.

Maybe one reason that these stories resonate with us is that there really is an alternative reality—a Spirit World, right here, coexisting with our physical world. And there is a spirit within each of us that coexists with our physical body and brain.

Perhaps another way of stating the couplet “Be in the world but not of the world” would be “Don’t get so wrapped up in one world that you forget about the other one.”

Or,

“Love both worlds, but remember which one is our true home.”

...The physical and the spiritual, both realities existing together, each accessible from the other...

The same veil that separates these two worlds, to some extent also separates our own spirits from our bodies. But it is sometimes very thin and can occasionally allow us to feel the full depth of who we really are and sense the myriads of spirits and the spiritual universe that is always around us. Perhaps that sometimes-thin veil is the reason we relate to the statement of Pierre Tellhard de Chardin, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Sometimes the veil thins a bit when we are in the Temple, or in nature and in touch with the natural world which also has a spiritual dimension. Some people seem to naturally have a thinner veil than others, but we can all penetrate it by asking for and receiving personal and Family Revelation. We know it is there. Our concern should be how to tune in. As Elder McConkie put it,

To navigate through this physical world, we use our five senses, and thus the easiest reality to accept is the physical reality that we perceive through our eyes and ears and physical feelings. Yet there are times when we are aware of the alternative spiritual reality that surrounds us and that is in us—the reality that we can ask for and receive through personal and Family Revelation.

And this spiritual reality, even though obscured by the veil, is the larger and longer reality and the one that will lead us back to God. Acknowledging this spiritual reality is the first step in looking beyond or through the veil and receiving the revelation that can guide our lives and give us what we need to succeed in the stewardship of our families.

“The spirit and the body are the soul of man”

The Power of the word Revelation

Far from being a rare thing, revelation, like the spirit world, is all around us. It's light and current is everywhere and we need only to plug into it.

To many, revelation is a more complete word than inspiration, and while we all would love to have more of both, it is useful to think of insights and inspiration as the beginnings of revelation which not only makes us aware of something that is true, but *reveals* to us what to do about it, and how to do it.

We asked our 15 year old grandson what he thought the difference was between inspiration and revelation. He thought for a moment and said "I think inspiration just hits you sometimes, like an idea or a warning or a prompting of some kind. But you have to ask to get revelation."

And it is so personal and individualized! Our personal Family Revelation is not about our religion or the world or the families of the world or the children of the world. It is about *our* children, and *our* families, and it comes individually tailored to our own unique needs and would not necessarily be applicable to other families in other situations.

Family Revelation is specific not only to you for your family, but to you for each separate and different child. This is easily illustrated for those who have more than one child. You may have thought that you figured it all out on the first child, and that the second one would be easy because of all you learned on the first one. What an awakening when the second one came along and everything was different! These children are eternal. They have been becoming who they are for an eternity. And no two of them are alike. Family Revelation is available to us as parents for each of them, but never think that it will be the same for two of them!

Another way to think about it is that personal Family Revelation is the precise, polar opposite of Social Media. Social Media is about other people, and it comes from other people, it is about gossip, about opinion, about how many people it can reach and how many will "like" it. Revelation is about you, only you, and it comes from God, and it is specific and doesn't apply or even reach anyone else. And instead of coming in words and pictures, it comes in feelings—often complete, full feelings that help you to know things in your soul that words and pictures could never fully describe and that no one else could fully understand.

And there are no "links" or "shares" and the only "likes" that matters are you and God.

Shared Revelation

(Saydi) It's important to note here that, in a two parent family, Family revelation should be something that both parents agree with and feel good about. Each may receive guidance in a different way, but the directions and conclusions should be the same.

Occasionally the same revelation will come to both parents and it's crystal clear what God is trying to communicate. But more often in my experience, revelation comes to one of us and as we discuss and explore the question or decision further until we both come to a place where we

feel good about our next steps. Please note what this does not mean that one spouse receives revelation and then unilaterally dictates the course of the family.

It is when we are equally yoked as parents, together and with God that He can reveal important truths, big and small, about how to guide our families.

I think we can safely say that this also applies to Family revelation. "Control of the [revelation] by one spouse as a source of power and authority causes inequality in the marriage and is inappropriate. Conversely, if a marriage partner voluntarily removes himself or herself entirely from family {revelation}, that is an abdication of necessary responsibility."

While much of family revelation comes to one parent or the other individually, when we're attempting to make important family decisions or solve complex problems affecting the whole family we can come together, either with our spouse or with a trusted parenting partner or mentor to seek guidance from God.

Chapter 3: The Five W's of Family Revelation

Perhaps the best entryway into this whole topic is the asking and answering of the five W questions that form the parameters of any subject. If we can first answer Who, What, Where, When and Why, we will have the basic directions and dimensions for going deeper into Family Revelation.

WHO? You and only you. Because family revelation does not come in general terms or one-size-fits-all advice from a parenting book, and the answers are different for each parent and each child and each marriage. We may get prompts or ideas from others, but we need the tailor made guidance that can come only to us and only by Family revelation.

WHAT? God's answers—directly from His Spirit to our spirit. Because what we are looking for in Family Revelation is not only insight and solutions, but the divine strength and motivation to implement them. What we are really asking for is His will for us and for our lives and for our children. The objective is to find out more fully who we are and who our children are and what God wants us to do and to become.

WHEN? Always. Because we don't understand enough even to know just when we need help. If we can plead for Family Revelation not only while we are on our knees asking for it, but at the very moments and in the very situations when we need it most, we open ourselves not only to the guidance of God, but to His timing.

WHERE? To our minds, but also to our hearts. Sometimes Family Revelation comes as a mental idea, illuminating our brain to clarity and deeper understanding, but it also comes to our hearts, prompting us to love more unconditionally. And it can come in any physical location, but most often in places that are, in one way or another, holy places.

WHY? Simply because we can't succeed as parents or marriage partners or in any familial relationship without help. None of us are wise enough or capable enough to fully know a child or his needs, or to anticipate dangers, or to have full empathy for another family member without some kind of help or guidance or support from a higher power—without some form of Family Revelation. The simple answer to *why* is “because we desperately need it.”

Stewardships and Mantles

A further answer to the why question involves the beautiful concept of stewardship.

Our children are actually our spirit brothers and sisters, and somehow, by the wisdom possessed only by God, we came to earth two or three decades before they did and now have the awesome stewardship of caring for and raising them, and of teaching them how to live.

Within this stewardship lie the greatest joys and the greatest challenges of mortality.

There is a mantle of stewardship and access to revelation that goes with each calling, and the calling of parent is no exception (though it is exceptional in that it is the one calling from which we will never be released.)

Joy

Joy is the ultimate reason for seeking and finding Family Revelation. Our families and our children are our greatest sources of joy, and seeking and receiving the inspiration we need to guide and raise them, and to make our families into eternal institutions is the very core of the joy process.

There is nothing on this earth like the moment a new baby enters the world. For a moment time stands still. The veil between us and another world is so thin that if we are in tune, we can feel angels in the room.

Like us, most parents have gazed into an infant's eyes and sensed an older soul, and we know that each child comes, as Wordsworth says "not in entire forgetfulness and trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home;" and we might add "and bringing a distinctive nature, personality and character that has already developed over an eternity." Our job as parents is to discover that unique nature and spirit in each child and parent him or her accordingly.

We are awestruck when the soul of this beautiful baby immerses from heaven and alights in this unknown world, usually crying lustily from the trauma of the entrance. It is an ethereal, surreal moment. Very soon though, the real world settles around us and we realize that every child also brings a startling new beginning for us as his or her parents. As we get into that new reality, often it is ourselves that feel like crying as we embark on the joyful but sometimes heart-wrenching journey of raising a child. As new parents, we have no idea what joys and sorrows lie ahead but we go forward with faith that we will be inspired to know what to do, and know that with urgent requests for help, we'll discover *who this little child really is* and how we can help him or her with the life-journey ahead.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, every child has his or her own "package." Each one is unique. That makes life a lot more complicated! As parents of nine children, we firmly believe that our children joined us in this world from another exitance with individual, eternally-developed souls of their own. *And they come who they are!* Those of you who are parents of two or more know that two children raised in exactly the same environment and from the same gene pool still come with very different personalities, intellects, passions, needs and spirits. Some have naturally believing hearts and others struggle to find truth and light the hard way.

Life's journey with all its joys always includes the best teacher: adversity. Every family struggles with something. From the misery of a baby with colic to the heartbreak of a child suffering with an addition or who has left the church and so many things in between, we all experience sorrow. But sorrow is a component of joy and adversity is part of God's plan and is the greatest tool to teach us and our families how to beg for inspiration and revelation as our trials stretch us to the depth of our souls.

As you read and as we write, know that we are fellow strugglers right along with you, trying our best to create a conduit to heaven that is firm and strong. We are certainly not presumptuous enough to think we can provide answers for you, but we will try to present ideas and questions that may help lead to your own answers.

Because we have been blessed to travel all over the world and have spent so much time teaching incredible Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh families as well as those of many Christian faiths and good people who don't claim any religion, we have found many who may be more "in tune" with the spirit than we are as they have shared experiences of receiving revelation for their families. The light of Christ that provides inspiration and revelation abides everywhere!

Our greatest gift in our journey of joy with our own beautiful children sent from heaven for their turn on earth-is the knowledge that our Heavenly Parents and our Savior Jesus Christ love them even more than we do. They want to help us but we have to ask for it. As stewards, it is daunting to know that we are here to help our children find their foreordinations and to-find joy. Most importantly, our journey in life is about having the privilege of helping our families to understand that life's most precious gift is the life of our Savior Jesus Christ and that through his teachings and his Atonement we can return to Heaven with a glorious understanding of the joys of eternity.

Since there is no set roadmap for this new personal journey as parents and marriage partners, we need to make full use of the spiritual GPS of Family Revelation.

Foreordination

Perhaps the deepest part of the WHAT question is

“What is the *objective*? What are you seeking personal family revelation *about*?”

And perhaps the simplest answer to that question is,

“About my foreordination and that of my family and my children.

Another synonymous way to answer the same question is,

“About God's will for me.” Because the whole point of Family Revelation is to get us and our families operating on God's agenda rather than on our own.

Someone once said “Each of us were given a specific foreordination for this life, and for one who finds and fulfills it, he will have it in the hereafter as his greatest joy; and for one who fails to find it, he will have it in the hereafter as his greatest...embarrassment.”

The last word is fascinating. Embarrassment. Imagine the feeling of thinking you lived a good life and did your duty and pursued your goals and then finding out that “your ladder had been

leaned against the wrong building” and what you accomplished, though perhaps good and noble, was not the thing you had been foreordained to do.

Now it is only speculation just how specific our foreordinations were, but we really don’t need to worry about that, because if we seek and receive revelation for ourselves and our families about what God foreordained for us and for them, we will have as much information as God desires us to have—and if we are sincere and have real intent in our asking, those answers will become invaluable guides for our life goals, for our marriages, and for our parenting.

God will not turn down or ignore one who is seeing His will, both for himself and for his family stewardship.

Our daughter Saren’s experience on her families latest move illustrates the kind of Family Revelation we all hope will come regarding location, career, and all the things we hope to get right for our families and for our service to God:

“Praying for guidance on where to relocate and raise our children, we got an unexpected job offer in Ogden, Utah where we had never imagined living. The move didn’t make sense when we analyzed it, but still, as we prayed, we continued to feel prompted to move forward and make the move. There were problems with the job and with the house we found and for a while we were having trouble making sense of it.

“After living here for about a year, the stake president invited Jared and I to come and meet with him. He call the Jared to be the bishop of our very diverse and struggling inner-city ward. While the call felt somewhat shocking at first, we both very quickly felt a strong sense of peace about it.

“For the next five years, Jared was stretched and grew in wonderful ways as he served as Bishop of our Ward and was able to be a real instrument in the Lord's hands. The kids and I had opportunities to learn a great deal as we got to know wonderful people from all walks of life and Jared example of selfless service became a pillar of our family. We have so many crazy stories and tender stories from that 5 years!

“I'm so grateful for the Lord's clear but somewhat confusing promptings that led us to this place and all the experiences and opportunities it has offered.”

We think of the similar experiences of our other children as they have negotiated their marriages, their parenting, their choice of where to live and what careers to pursue, and we are overwhelmed with gratitude for the Family Revelation they have sought and received. Our son Josh, succeeding in one career path but inspired to drop it and become an elementary school teacher; our daughter Charity knowing when she had found the right guy, even when their relationship had broken off for a time; our son Tal, finding a job against all odds that allowed he and his wife to move to Switzerland where her ageing parents live; our son Eli, guided to take the risks of living in Manhattan and start a new business with his brother Noah. With hindsight, it is impossible to imagine living our lives without the Family Revelation we need at every stage and at every junction.

Revisiting the five Ws

Let's revisit and reconsider the five W questions again, and this time, instead of asking them about the subject of Family Revelation, let us ask them about our own lives. Because these are the very questions that we each need to ask in deepest prayer if we are to draw down the light and guidance of our Heavenly Parents concerning the path and destiny of our families. In that context, the W questions take on a whole new light and start to look like this:

WHO does the Lord want me to be and who does he want each of our children to become?
WHAT are the things that He wants me to do with my life—what are my foreordinations?
WHERE does God want me to live and work and raise our children?
WHEN should we have another child, or change jobs, or re-locate, or take a new path?
WHY am I doing what I'm doing now, and shall I to continue it or try something different?

Socrates famously said
"The unexamined life is not worth living."

We might expand that spiritually and say
"The life unquestioned and un-prayed-about will not be the life that God wants for us and could create for us if we were to ask Him."

Of course all of the five W questions of this chapter in both of their iterations lead up to the much bigger and more complex H question of the following chapters: *How?* How does Family Revelation come? How do we seek it? How do we recognize it? How do we capture it and remember it and implement it? How do we magnify it and increase its frequency?

Chapter 4: How does it come? And How is it Sought? The Many Portals of Family Revelation

Revelation or direct Spiritual Guidance or Inspiration, for ourselves and for our family comes from God and His messengers in a wide variety of ways. Knowing of this variety is important, lest we have too limited a view of revelation, or think it can come in only one certain way, and begin to doubt ourselves because we have not received it in that particular way.

If we think that answers or revelation only come through a voice or a vision or a “burning in the bosom,” we may miss or overlook the more common and varied methods or ways in which the Spirit communicates with our spirits.

(Saydi) It’s particularly important that we don’t put our own limits on the ways in which God will communicate to us in our callings as parents. God is infinite and vast and can speak to us in a myriad of ways if we are open to them.

When we open our eyes and minds to look for and recognize revelation we start to see and hear God’s voice and guidance in sometimes the most unlikely of places. The more I’ve thought about and sought revelation the longer and more extensive this list becomes in my own life.

Portals

As we wrote this chapter, we asked friends and focus groups the simple question, “How do you Receive Personal Revelation for your Family? Here are some of the leading answers: (Most will be further developed in the chapters to come.)

During “*Wrestling, Listening Prayer.*”

Through peaceful *Meditation.*

Via “*Nudges*” or “*Promptings*”

Through Spiritual *Discernment*

During *Family Councils*

Through *Sudden bursts of unexpected inspiration*

As I think about my own *Resolutions* and goals.

Through *Music.*

Through *Nature.*

Through *Exercise* and Physical Activity.

Through deep *discussions* with those I trust and love.”

Through regular *Interviews* with my kids.

Through *Advice* from Mentors or Grandparents

From the *Notes* I make during prayer

Directly or indirectly through the *Scriptures*.

Through *reflecting* on an “asking journal” where I keep track of what I have asked God for

Through spiritual *warnings* or forebodings I feel.

While *testifying or teaching*.

Through *dreams*.

From a *simple clarity* that suddenly comes into my mind.

Through a feeling or a message conveyed by a departed *ancestor*.

By seeing patterns or answers *in what has already happened*.

In the quiet house when I rise early to *think*.

As I make notes in my gratitude *journal*

Through *Fasting* and the more humble petitions that result from it

The fact is that there are an almost unlimited number of ways in which to *receive* revelation, depending on how and where the Lord chooses to answer and on how our own unique individual spirits feel The Spirit. These range from intense burning to total calm, and from some kind of a miracle or sign to a still small voice that is sometimes so still and small that we just feel rather than hear it, deep within our own spirit.

Be assured that you can find for yourself the best way for your own unique spirit to receive revelation

Seeking and Receiving

The responses above were to the question “How to you *Receive* Family Revelation?”

What about the other key “How” question?

“How do you *Seek* Family Revelation?”

There is a fascinating interplay between how we *seek* family revelation and how we *receive* family revelation. How we seek it is up to us, and how we receive it (or how it is given to us) is up to God. But the seeking and the receiving are always interconnected, and sometimes intersect directly. The very vehicle through which we seek guidance often become the channel through which we receive it. Other times we may seek it in one way and receive it in another completely different way. The channel going up and the channel coming down may be the same or may be separate. They may be simultaneous or in different timeframes. Perhaps this mix-and-match is one of the beauties of Family Revelation.

From this chapter’s list of how Family Revelation is received, let’s take a closer look at the “ways of receiving” that can also be “ways of seeking.” Let’s dig deeper and try to understand more fully how we can *seek* or *open the door* using many of the same channels through which we *receive*. To do this, we will divide the seeking into five categories: In the next chapter: 1. Seeking through prayer, And in coming chapters: 2. Seeking through the precursors and aftermaths of prayer, 3. Seeking through the enhancements and extensions of prayer, 4. Seeking through our own Awareness and Perspective, 5. Seeking through Holy Places and Holy Sources, and 6. Seeking through Priesthood and Blessings.

We begin with prayer, because as mentioned, all Family Revelation is triggered and released by some form of asking.

Chapter 5: Seeking Family Revelation Through Prayer

Of course, the first and prime way of Opening the Door to Family Revelation is prayer. But there is much to think about when we say this, and many different aspects of or kinds of prayer to consider.

Wrestling, Listening Prayer

Scripture speaks of “wrestling” for answers from the Lord, suggesting real energy and emotion in asking for and almost but not quite demanding inspiration from God on personal matters of great importance. Nothing is more important to us and to our happiness and to our stewardship and to our exaltation than the well-being of our family members and of our relationships with them. If an answer doesn’t come quickly, persist, go deeper, ask harder. Think it through and try again—humbly study it out, and come to your own decision and then take that decision to the Lord for confirmation. Get in the habit of having a pen and a notebook by yourself as you pray, and take “prayer notes” on the guidance that comes or the ideas that spring up.

(Saydi) I remember once at the conclusion of a general conference session President Hinckley said a prayer that stopped me in my tracks. As he prayed I could feel that he really knew God. That he was truly having a conversation with someone he knew intimately, the kind of conversation I’d have with my husband or a dear friend. There have been times in my life when I’ve prayed mostly just to check it off my list, a way to feel good about myself before drifting off to sleep. These prayers are such a contrast to a true connection with God. I’ve found that if I just tweak a few things then instantly prayers can become a real source of divine connection and revelation.

(Saydi) Stay on your knees for just 60 seconds and listen. When I do this I rarely get a big puzzle solving answer to a big question, but I ALWAYS feel the spirit, the reality of a God awake and aware. It takes just 60 seconds of the day to feel that divine power in my life and when I do I notice that I am more able to tune in throughout the chaos of the day.

When we pour out our hearts to God on behalf of our children and our family, we are engaged in a wonderfully unique form of communication—that of an earthly parent seeking help and guidance from a Heavenly Parent. Nothing could be more natural and more effectual. Sometimes the Heavenly Parent will answer by revealing to the earthly parent what he or she needs to know or to do about the child. And other times the Heavenly Parent will intervene, based on the faith of the earthly parent, and solve the problem or give the blessing directly.

Asking what to pray for and Seeking His Agenda

Sometimes we know exactly what to pray for. A need is so clear in our family or the crisis so real with a child that we simply beg for help and guidance and intervention. Other times we know we need help but are not sure we know enough about a situation or a need to know exactly what to ask for. At times like this, the first thing we should ask for is to know what to ask for. If

we let Him, Heavenly Father can structure our prayers and guide us into the specifics of what the real needs are and how to pray about them.

Guidance comes when we rely on God and give up our own visions of how we think things should be or how we think the answers to prayer should unfold. When the objective of our prayers is to know and do His will and understand His agenda rather than ours, we enter into the true spirit of prayer and put ourselves in position to truly begin to receive Family Revelation

An interesting and true conclusion that can be drawn might be said like this: “Just start praying, and keep praying and asking to know God’s will, and your prayer will, sometimes gradually and sometimes abruptly, come around to what He wants you to ask for in your family. You will then be well on our way to receiving Family Revelation.

Prayers for Confirmation

A very powerful and infinitely valuable form of Family Revelation lies in the sure confirmation we can ask for and receive on important choices or decisions that we have carefully and prayerfully made, but for which we need affirmation from God. Particularly for the big decisions of marriage, additional child, career decisions, and so on, it is vital that we study it out and come to our own tentative choice and then take our decision to the Lord and receive a “second-guess proofing” confirmation.

As a love-struck young 24 year old, I recalled an earlier time during my time in New York when I had picked up a wonderful mentor (we will call him Mr. James) at JFK airport and driven him to his appointment in the City. During the drive he mentioned that I should come and see him if there was anything he could do to help me after I returned home. I’m sure it was something he said routinely to many young associates that he met, but to me at that moment, in my love-and-fear paralysis of trying to know whether to ask Linda to marry me, I took his invitation literally and drove to his office and walked up to his secretary.

He was awaiting an appointment that was late in coming, so he had a moment and I found myself seated opposite the great man “What can I do for you Richard?” (his secretary had apparently given him my name, but in my confused state I believed that he remembered me).

“Well, I need to know if I should get married” I blurted.

Amused, he said “Well, that’s easy, you SHOULD!”

“No”, I stammered, “I mean, I need to know if I should marry this one particular girl.”

Really enjoying himself now (he had met other love-struck young men) he said “Well, can she bake a cherry pie?”

Too earnest and confused to get the humor, I said I didn’t know but I knew her mother was a good cook.

Then he turned serious. “Have you prayed about this?”

I found my voice a little bit and told him that I had been asking for days—weeks—and that God had failed to tell me what to do.

He turned the scriptures on his desk around to face me and had me read aloud from the 9th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants ... Study it our in your mind... I’ve done that, I said, in fact I think of nothing else all day every day.

Then he told me something I have never forgotten, “God won’t make this decision for you—you have to make it for yourself and then take it to Him for His Confirmation.”

His appointment had come and was waiting. We stood and he came around the desk and put his arm around me and I remember what I believe were his exact words, “You look to me like you are deeply in love and have already made your decision. I usually don’t advise fasting for more than a day, but you are a strapping lad—fast for one day and part of the next and take your decision to God and ask for his confirmation and I promise you that you will have a wonderful spiritual experience.”

I did, and I received a confirmation witness so sure and so clear and so strong that I have never doubted or questioned or second-guessed it in what is now 50 years of marriage.

Even Confirmation comes in Different ways to Different Souls

It’s important to note here that not all decisions for our lives or for our families are going to get a burning confirmation from God. In fact, many won’t, and that doesn’t mean that we are not receiving or action on revelation.

(Saydi) Growing up my parents did a great job of teaching us about decision making, detailing for us that same pattern of— study it out, decide, pray for a confirmation, receive either confirmation or confusion. I used this formula to decide where to go to college, what post college job to take, if I should serve a mission, who I should room with, where I should live.

Then one day I found myself in love with Jeff and, having heard this story many times about my dad’s experience, I once again put this pattern to the test to decide if he was the one I wanted to marry. This decision was huge and complicated and suddenly the system felt busted

Looking back I realize that maybe it was me that was a little busted.

I was paralyzed by the scale and consequence of this choice. There were so many unknowns down the road and so many emotions jumbled up inside me that coming to my own decision to seek confirmation on was harder than it ever had been with other choices.

Stuck in indecision, I found myself sort of faking a decision and going to the Lord in prayer. “God, I love Jeff and I have decided I want to marry him.” And then waiting. No burning, no stupor, just more confusion. So, I’d try the other decision: “I love Jeff but I guess he’s not the one for me.” Still no burning, no stupor.

Finally I realized (likely through revelation) that God really was expecting me to make this choice, and to prove that I was the one choosing, on my own, I needed to take a leap of faith.

I needed to choose for myself, exercising my brain and heart to really weigh things out in my mind and make a real, hard, scary choice. It was only after I mustered up the courage to tell Jeff, with my own certainty, “yes, I want to marry you. I love you. I think we are right for each other. I want this.” that the confirmation from God came.

Seeking family revelation does not mean that we wait for a green light before we make any decisions or guide our family in a certain direction. If this was God’s formula we’d spend a lot of time stalled or immobilized. And we wouldn’t learn the important lessons with agency that we were sent here to learn.

(Saydi) Some of my most powerful prayers have been written. Although a little unconventional, it’s such an interesting exercise to write a prayer, almost like a letter to God. It makes you think hard about what you are praying for, why, what questions you’re asking, what you’re thankful for.

I’ve been trying to start my prayers with praise, not just gratitude, but real praise. Thinking through the wonders of the atonement, the beauty of Jesus, the blessings God has bestowed. This puts me in a different place and sets a totally different tone for my prayers. I’m not sure exactly why it works, but starting with praise and gratitude helps me to see more clearly as I pray and feel more immediately connected to God.

Chapter 6: Seeking Family Revelation through Preparation, Contemplation, and other Enhancements of Prayer

It is not only directly through prayer that we can seek and receive Family Revelation. Often, it is the things we do prior to and following our prayers that get us where we need to be spiritually in order to ask the right questions and receive the right answers. And there are many things we can do to enhance and improve the ways in which we pray. We should learn to think of the improvement of our prayers as the improvement of our abilities and capacities to receive Family Revelation.

Pondering or Meditating

While prayer is the most direct way to ask and to surrender our agency to the Lord in pursuit of revelation, it is sometimes in the quiet pondering that precedes or follows prayer when our seeking and asking become more refined and when Family Revelation can come. When we are able to quiet our minds and center ourselves, even for a few moments, we open ourselves to the Spirit and become more receptive to the truths that are always available to us through the divine channel.

(Saydi) Prayer doesn't have to be on our knees. Lately I've found myself praying in all kinds of places and situations. I've had some of my most powerful prayers after a yoga class lying in shavasana, while seeing or smelling or experiencing something beautiful. At night, lying in bed just before sleep takes over I've been trying to feel my spirit inside of my body, and feel a connection with God and just this act has felt like a powerful prayer.

A Monthly "Five Facet Review"

One of the most deliberate ways we know to seek family revelation is to have a regular, monthly two-parent meeting—perhaps at dinner on a “date,” where you go brainstorm together the five aspects of each child and ask yourselves the questions, “How is Elle doing physically? How is she doing mentally? How is she doing socially? How is she doing emotionally? And how is she doing spiritually? Sitting there together, focused on your most important stewardships, having prayed before starting, is a powerful way to draw down Family Revelation. And it is also an effective way to think about and know more specifically what questions you need to ask in prayer about each child.

Have a special notebook that you bring along each month and record the inspirations you get and the things you decide to do with and for each child. Review those notes the next month during your next Five Facet Review and see how you did and what you have to continue. If you do this faithfully each month as a couple, it will become a steady source of Family Revelation, and if you are a single parent, you can do it with a grandparent or someone else who knows and loves your children.

Regular Interviews with your kids.

Sometimes Family Revelation comes from the very people you were seeking it for. Sitting down with a child one-on-one and asking thoughtful questions and focusing on how he or she answers, even with body language, can be a way of seeking.

We have one friend who faithfully interviews each of his children each month on Fast Sunday. “Interview” may be the wrong word, because what he says and asks does not put pressure on his kids or feel like an inquisition; rather, it is “their private time with their dad” and his questions are filled with real interest and support and even the right kind of pride. This makes the kids want to tell him how they are doing and how they are feeling, and as he listens, he says he gets spiritual impressions about what they need.

The cultivation of Humility

Recently in the course of a single week, we happened to spend time with two couples who had very different family situations. One had several crisis situations going on, including a son getting a divorce and a daughter who was clinically depressed and contemplating suicide. They also told us that there were such rifts between some of their children that they never spoke to each other. The interesting thing was their response to it all. “It makes us so humble, and so aware of our inadequacies and so grateful that God entrusted us with this kind of challenges.”

The other couple, on the surface, seemed like the exact opposite as they told us that each of their children had strong testimonies, were doing well in their work and in their marriages, and that they all loved each other and had no jealousy among them. We asked them how they felt about that and if they knew how rare that was—that they were probably one couple in a thousand that could say what they just said—and we expected they would say they felt proud, or gratified, or at least happy. But they didn’t say any of that—they said “humble.” They said, “We are just so grateful, and we take no credit because the Lord just chose to send us this type of spirits. Perhaps He didn’t think we could handle anything else.”

Humility should be the core of what all of us feel about our children...about the easy ones as well as the hard ones. We need to remember not to judge others or ourselves by the “results” of our children, and to remind ourselves that they come as who they are—as the result of who they have been coming for a premortal eternity—and they come to us in the wisdom of God; and we need to seek and pray and work HARD to be worthy of the blessings and to overcome the challenges that they present.

The cultivation of humility helps us to remember that our Heavenly Parents, our Savior Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are all there, (all here—by us—all the time) ready to inspire us and give us personal revelation. And it truly is revelation! The root of that word, of course, is reveal, and whenever we ask, and open ourselves up to spiritual answers, things become more defined and clear and are revealed to our conscious understanding.

Fasting

Most of us know how much the humility of fasting can impact and improve our prayers. We can each hold our own special fast at any time when we feel an intensified need for guidance with our children or our marriage or the whole infrastructure of our family.

As mentioned earlier, the “alternative universe” of the Spirit World that surrounds us is the place where Family Revelation resides and fasting can thin the veil that separates the two worlds and put us in a more spiritual frame of mind that allows Family Revelation to flow more freely.

One of the healthiest trends in society today is the greater involvement of dads in the parenting of children. Our son Jonah wrote, “I seem to enjoy and excel at my relationship with my younger kids but my relationship with my teenagers is strained at times, so I was fasting last Sunday about my relationship with Ana (17) I got in the car with her to drive to 8am church and let her know how sad I was that she was snotty when I had said “be safe” before she left for her junior prom the night before and then responded to my question the next morning “did you have a nice time” with “it was my prom, what do you think”. She was silent and I wondered if I should have brought it up. But later that night she said, “I just want you to know that I am a teenager and there are some things I do that I just can’t seem to control. If I am unappreciative or snarky, that is not how I really feel. I could never. Ever. EVER. Explain how much I appreciate that I come home to a family that loves me and that we all have such great relationships and love each other so much. So that’s it.” I’m quite sure that I’ve never felt better than right then. Perhaps I’m doing ok as a dad. I really need moments like this and God provides.”

And our son Noah relates, “I’d been fasting about a better spirit in our home and then we got home one night when Lyla (10) hadn’t done anything she was supposed to do around the house. I was upset much more than I should have been and I was not handling it well - as a result Lyla got all clammed up. Arms folded and eyebrows lowered. I picked her up and put her on my lap though she didn’t want to be there. I took a breath and tried to see the bigger picture. In that moment I got some revelation - to change my tone. I felt I was upset for good reason but listening to the revelation I said look at my eyes Lyla. Reluctantly she looked at me out of the corner of her eyes facing forward still arms folded. I said Lyla you are full of light. You are a powerful wonderful girl filled with goodness and you make mistakes. I make mistakes too. In fact I have made almost the exact same mistakes you just made tonight many times. We all make mistakes. And we have the Savior to overcome our mistakes and you are filled with goodness and light and you and I can correct mistakes with His help and about halfway through what I was saying Lyla’s stiff arms loosened up and she put her arms around me for a hug. we can get guidance for what we should do in THAT specific situation with THAT specific family member in that specific moment.”

Resolutions and Journal Writing

Often it is while reflecting or setting goals or writing in our journals that inspiration and family revelation comes, and we should think of this pondering and writing as a way of seeking further insight and revelation.

Here are some inspirational thoughts from the journal of our oldest daughter Saren at the dawn of a New Year's Day:

I came downstairs to the bright sun and sparkling snow and worked with mom and Isaac and his friend Brooke to make a big breakfast for everyone and then headed out on a brisk cold walk/hike. I was planning to go alongside dad and Shawni and Saydi who were skiing but I got ahead of them and ended up hiking with Scout dashing about gleefully while I thought about what I want for my life and my family in the new year. The snow was so sparkly and things felt sharp and clear. I want to put my life in the Lord's hands by turning to Him many times a day, asking for direction, becoming a better instrument in His hands, figuring out his will and acting on it every day and every hour. I'm determined to learn to love the scriptures more and develop a deeper relationship with Christ. I know that doing better at this will go a long way in taking care of everything else, including the needs of my family.

(Saydi) Let me add some lines from my own journal last Christmas and New Years—both to illustrate some of the ups and downs and to think about how inspiration comes when we are doing the thinking that goes into writing:

Oh man, I thought I was doing so well, then life just explodes and suddenly more than two weeks have passed. Got to get into a better routine for this new year. Here are some thoughts/memories of the past two weeks, though most of it is already squashed up into a Christmas craze blur.

Christmas is a crazy time for a mom, all the consuming and trying to make things fair and everyone happy all within a budget is pretty tricky in the best moments and borderline nauseating/crazy in the worst. It's just a constant brain challenge. So many moving parts, so many good and fun things that I want to do while I'm being pulled at the same time by all of the other things I need to do to make the season magical and then the underlying things that always have to be done year round regardless the season just to keep life going.

It's hard to have them all piled up into such a short time and to feel the burden of also wanting to be still and quiet and joyful while running around with my head cut off. The little magical moments usually make the head being cut off worth it, but this season I had quite a few little nudges telling me to step back and reevaluate how our family does things. I did step back a little, and think the result was pretty good, but next year I'm determined to do a total overhaul so that my brain doesn't have to be so wrapped up in all the wrappings and can be more focused on the joy and peace and wonder surrounding the season.

Our family went to the Carol Service at the Cathedral of the Madeleine. This was the very best part of Christmas for me. I asked all the kids (some who weren't excited to go) to just come with me and be happy and sit in peace while I took a moment for some silence and reflection and Christmas spirit with them. They did great, especially Hazel who sat next to me and took it all in. I love that I know she feels these things as deeply as I do. I also loved looking back and seeing Peter sing every word of the congregational hymns. A few times I swear I could see a little golden halo around his angel curls. It was also fun to have mom and dad there and process all that beauty with them afterwards.

Here are some of the lyrics that made me tear up: "With the poor and mean and lowly, lived on earth our Savior Holy...for He is our childhood pattern, day by day like us He grew... He was little, weak and helpless, tears and smiles like us He knew: and He feels for all our sadness, and

He shares in all our gladness...When she carried her child through the wood roses bloomed on the thorn bushes...Child, for us sinners, poor and in the manger, we would embrace thee with love and awe...Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?..Oh come let us adore Him."

For me, this was family revelation at its finest!

Prayer notes

I saw a magnificent example of this many decades ago:

I once had a prayer with a respected mentor of mine--he asked me to pray. I did so, trying to be thorough in his presence, but about half way through my prayer, I heard the unmistakable sound of a pencil writing rapidly on paper.

When I finished and opened my eyes, I saw that he had covered the top page of a yellow legal pad with scribbled writing. I didn't dare ask out loud, but he sensed my question and gave me an answer I have never forgotten. "I find that when God tells me things I need to write them down, Otherwise I might forget the details."

Can we make prayer that real? Where we ask, and He answers, and we take notes so we won't forget the details?

Family revelation sometimes comes from reviewing old answers that you have received previously. Sometimes, if we are not careful, we forget some of the Family Revelation we have received and ask the same questions all over again. Whenever we feel the spiritual influence of insight or inspiration, we should record it—perhaps in a special book dedicated to that purpose, a “prayer notes book.” As the years go by, we can often find the revelation we need right there in our own notes!

(Saydi) At the beginning of a day or week instead of just rattling off a to do list and dumping all the tasks crammed up in her brain down onto a page, a good friend of mine instead says a prayer and asks God to make a to do list for her first. He listens and reviews his day prayerfully and then writes down a list of things to do. Of course, he recognizes that lots of the things on the list might not be actually inspired by God, but the list is much more divinely appointed than it would have been had he just jotted down the pressing needs in his head.

Gratitude Journal

Another way to make prayer more meaningful and, frankly, to feel and experience more joy, is to keep a gratitude journal wherein we write, as often as possible, the things we are grateful for, the things we have received. “Gratitude,” as we have said in another book, “is not the path to happiness, it *is* happiness in its most obtainable form.”¹ And, we might add, it is the most natural way to establish direct contact with God before asking for His help.

1. The Thankful Heart, 2015

Ask Journal

Besides keeping track of our gratitude, we should all, in some way, keep track of the requests we make of God, of the things we ask for, and of how and when they are received. The answers are not always the ones we wanted, but all sincere prayers with real intent are answered in some way at some time. That is God's promise, and He keeps it.

A young man experiencing serious doubts and something of a faith crisis once asked me how I knew for sure the existence of God. I didn't have a lot of time to think about the question so I simply answered with the first thing that came to my mind. I told him about a special felt-bound journal that I have had for more than 50 years that I call my "Ask Journal" in which I have written down the major things I have asked God for in prayer. And I told him that every one of those prayers had been answered. I told him that I knew God existed simply because He had repeatedly answered my prayers.

Keeping this type of ask journal also allows us to reflect back over the things we have asked for and see not only His answers, but the patterns in which we ask and in which He answers—patterns that may be a form of Family Revelation for our future needs and requests.

Benjamin Franklin said that everyone should carry two books with them, "the one they are reading, and the one they are writing." We might modify this a bit and think in terms of having a notebook of Family Revelation where we keep track not just of the questions we have asked or the blessings we have asked for, but also of the answers we have received and any insights or inspiration we have gained about any of our family stewardships.

And in today's world, perhaps right in your smart phone, with one of the notebook apps, might be a more convenient and always-present place to keep this kind of spiritual record.

Physical Exercise

Who knows if it is the endorphins or the solitary conditions or just the stretching of body and mind, but for many, there is no better conductor of family revelation than exercise, especially if we go into it having thought and prayed about a family challenge or need. Particularly if preceded by prayer, physical exertion can be a way both of seeking and receiving.

We know one father who is a runner and who feels that his running is as much mental and spiritual as it is physical. While he runs, he focuses his mind, one at a time, on each of his children, visualizing, thinking about them and about their gifts, their progress, their needs, their worries. He says that this is where he gets most of his Family Revelation and the answers to his recent prayers. He tells us that he carries a little notebook while he runs because impressions often come to him with such force that he has to stop for a moment and write them down.

(Saydi) Praying while running: When my kids were younger and I was training for a half marathon I made a playlist with a song for each child. For Charlie it was Bach's cello concerto, for Peter it was the Immigrant Song by Led Zeppelin, for Hazel it was Chopin's piano concerto and for Emmeline it was the calmest song I could find (to somehow calm my nerves when

thinking about all her craziness!). As I ran and each song played I tried to get my mind to think deeply about each child, I tried to see them from God's perspective and to feel His love for them. I went through what they needed, what questions I had about their lives, how I could better help them become who they are to become. I had some of my most direct and powerful revelations during these runs. Sometimes I stopped the second I came in the door to write these things down, other times I let the feelings and thoughts just wash over me, and sink into my soul, or breathed them out into the universe, trusting they'd find their way to each child. I've thought about doing the same thing, only a song for each problem/focus/concentration I'm currently wrestling with. There's something magical about movement and music that helps me really tune in.

Partnership Prayers

Early in our marriage, whenever it was my (Richard's) turn to say our evening prayer together, I would forget to bless Linda's mother, or her visiting teaching, or her violin practice or some other equally essential omission. One night, instead of whoever's turn it was, we decided to each say a verbal prayer. In future nights, we combined our two prayers, with the one who opened the prayer, "Heavenly Father," squeezing the hand of the other when he or she was through, and the other carrying on the prayer and closing it at the end, "Amen."

As it evolved further, there was always a hand squeeze when one of us thought we had finished and the other would carry on with the partnership prayer, and back and forth until the final squeeze when neither had anything more to say and the prayer was closed.

It began to feel more like a meeting between the two of us and our heavenly parents and we have continued it to this day as our modus operandi for our evening couples prayer.

Chapter 7: Seeking Family Revelation through Awareness and Perspective

God's desire to inspire us on things relative to our families is so great, and the Spirit World and its influence are so all around us, that sometimes all it takes to receive Family Revelation is to be in tune and to raise our conscious level of Awareness and Perspective.

To do this, we need to be “fully present” and have a part of our minds, even when we are busy on other things, remain attuned to the Spirit and to any spiritual impulses or insights that may occur. These include nudges, promptings, sudden clarity, discernment, and warnings. All of these can come to us via spiritual feelings that we have to tune in to receive.

“Nudges” or “Promptings.”

The Spirit is always present in the sense that Family Inspiration is always available, and sometimes there are little taps or promptings that come, seemingly from nowhere that can move us in the right direction. If we ignore these, they grow gradually fainter and harder to hear, but if we notice them, value them, pray about them, and act on them, we tune in and over time they become more distinct and easier to recognize. Closely related are the *Feelings* that sometimes come over us when we are with or thinking about our families. They can be feelings of joy or of longing or of anxiety or even of guilt. If we brush these aside or just try to get past them, they are usually fleeting, but if we learn to respect them and plumb their depths, they often reveal Family Revelation to us. Ask yourself why you are feeling something. Think about it, pray about it, see if you can develop it into some kind of recognized Family Revelation. And if you can't, try again next time the feeling comes.

Discernment is a very real and valuable form of Family Revelation and a gift of the Spirit that we can ask for and cultivate. Recognizing something quickly as good or useful or personally applicable (or not so) is a very useful kind of spiritual guidance. If you are reading a scripture or listening to a conference talk or even reading through a list of parenting ideas or marriage tips, the Family Revelation of discernment can help you to recognize what would work in your family and what wouldn't. When you see something or hear an idea and your spirit discerns that it something you need or something of potential value for your family, this is a form of Personal Family Revelation.

We hope that you, the reader, will use this form of Family Revelation throughout the time you spend reading this book. Pray for and develop this spiritual gift and use it on every page and you will know, often instantly, whether or not a particular idea or approach would work in your family with your kids.

Sudden bursts of unexpected insight and inspiration.

Just holding a hope or a need in our minds about something we have prayed about or asked for can be a way of further seeking, and can lead to flashes of simple insight about our children or our homes or our marriages.

To illustrate, our quite incredible daughter-in-law Julie lives in a five story walk-up on the upper west side of Manhattan with our son Eli and their three young children. She had been reading late at night and early in the mornings to meet the Read-the-Book-of-Mormon-by-the-end-of-the-year Challenge that President Nelson had given in the Women's meeting at Conference. She had just returned home from a family wedding and she recorded this wonderful story in her journal:

I struggled this week getting back into the flow and not totally getting mad at little Zara and Dean for adding so much chaos (and sass and disobedience) to my life that already often feels out of control. I decided to repent and get up with a fresh start this morning. It was a pretty good day where we were all very positive. But at dinner Zara started to complain about the food, again, like every day. We normally play this game where we go to "Monkey Land" and we go on an animal adventure to the jungle or ocean and with each bite, I tell more of the story. All to entice them to just eat.

So tonight I was about to the start the same thing, but I had the thought to do "Imaginary Story; Sunday edition." I decided to pretend we had landed on the Jeradite barge. And I opened the scriptures and started reading and paraphrasing the story. Zara just loved the description of the boats and she and Dean helped figure out what the three problems are with boats that are tight like unto a dish. We had the best 15-minute conversation about what happened but also the way God answers our questions. Honestly, nothing like that has ever happened in our home and it was magical. I consider that a small miracle as a result of reading the scripture these last several months. I had so many stories in my mind I could tell, but also I realized I forgot a lot and want to start reading again so I could share more scriptural stories with the kids

Warnings

When we are in tune, the Spirit can warn us of physical and spiritual dangers, and these warnings are another form of revelation. Sometimes these warnings can be pretty dramatic. Right after such an experience may be a wonderful time to seek additional Family Revelation and ponder why you were warned and what the warning may mean.

Sometimes these warnings come to us as we contemplate a present or future action, and if we heed them, we can save ourselves from paths that lead in the wrong direction.

The warnings can come very suddenly and miraculously.

While living in London, we often had meetings and conferences at a chapel on Exhibition Road in the West End of London. One day, hurrying from the Tube stop (subway) to the chapel, I was waiting impatiently for the stoplight at an intersection just down the street from there. I saw the light change and was stepping off of the curb when I felt a hand grab the back collar of my overcoat and jerk me back up on the curb. Just then the red blur of a London double-decker bus flashed past my vision, inches away. I looked back over my shoulder to thank whomever had saved me, and there was no one there.

Through Ancestors

Our son Noah's experience illustrates how important our awareness of our ancestors and of their interest in us can be in receiving Family Revelation:

Kristi and I were anticipating the birth of Mila and our minds were swimming with all of the emotions surrounding her birth because she had a complicated heart issue that would require immediate operation after birth. As we knelt down to pray one night, Kristi said "I think we should invite our ancestors to be a part of this." As we prayed that night and connected with God about our hope that our ancestors could be involved with this experience the Spirit filled the room with emotion and a surety that they were indeed involved and had been all along. Who better to be involved with the family revelation we seek than our own family who have passed on! I asked Kristi what prompted her to bring that up and she talked about various experiences leading up to that day when she felt our ancestors (especially the women in this case) connecting with her and our unborn daughter. So grateful for revelation that can widen our perspective and help us see our deep family connections working beyond the veil.

Through Feelings, not words

It is so important to remember that most Family Revelation is neither loud nor dramatic. It comes as quiet, subtle feelings when we are thinking or praying about our children or our marriages or our families.

Usually we must initiate and activate guidance by asking for it, but occasionally, when God wants us to know something about our child or our spouse that we don't know enough to ask about, he will "press just firmly enough for us to pay heed" or to notice, but it is then up to us to continue to "come seeking and listening." This is a comforting thought. When there is something we have not thought to ask for or to ask about, and when we are aware and perceptive enough to be watching for the specific answers to our more general prayers, God will nudge us in the right direction and toward the correct insight, but we still need to be spiritually aware enough to notice and have enough spiritual perspective to grasp it and pursue it and ask for more about it.

It is interesting that we have old sayings like "seeing is believing" or "I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes or hear it with my own ears." Yet in fact, of all our senses or ways of learning or knowing, it is our eyes and our ears that are most easily tricked and most often wrong. How many times have you "thought you saw something" or heard something, but there was nothing there. The receptor that is the hardest to fool, and the hardest to forget, is a deep, clear feeling, or a thought that enters directly into your mind, so it is no wonder that this is the preferred method of Family Revelation.

By Joy

How wonderful it is that Family Revelation is often accompanied by, and even recognized by feelings of Joy. And why shouldn't it be? After all, it is the most joyful kind of communication (God to man) about the most joyful thing (our children and our marriages) and He is happy that we asked, and we are happy to receive.

Chapter 8: Seeking Family Revelation through Holy Places and Holy Sources

Since the Family Revelation we need and the Spiritual Truth we are seeking already exists in the spiritual reality around us, sometimes all we need do is be in the right places and with the right people to perceive and receive it.

Spending more time in holy places and with holy or spiritual people, and being “with” the spiritual sources of scripture and other inspiring writing.

Scriptures

The Holy Writ, of course, is a prime source of Family guidance. When we are concerned about a problem with a family member, the answers are almost univariably somewhere in the scriptures. And often just reading or studying any scripture acts as a trigger that allows some seemingly unrelated thought or answer to come spiritually into our minds. This is true particularly when we read the scriptures with that concern in mind.

Of course “scripture” is not limited to ancient texts. Much is written today that uplifts and inspires and that can become a trigger to additional divine guidance for our families.

Nature.

For many of us, being alone, out in nature, creates an atmosphere of revelation. And nature, small and large, is everywhere. If we live where we can take a walk in the woods or mountains or on a beach, we are very lucky, but if not, sometimes just standing by a tree or pondering a flower or looking up at the clouds provides the same restful, revelatory response.

Angels and Ancestors

We believe in Angels, and we know that our ancestors “are not far from us” and that their spirits can sometimes communicate with ours. It is up to the Lord and not to us whether we will see or hear from our ancestors or from angels in response to our requests for Family Revelation, but just knowing that they are there can be a motivation and an assurance as we seek and ask for insight and light with regard to our families.

Advice

We should not overlook other mortal beings as a source of Family Revelation. A spirit does not have to be disembodied to be able to give us clear and good guidance about our children or our marriage.

Having mentors or grandparents or wise leaders, and asking them the questions of our hearts is sometimes the most personal and direct path to the answers we need.

And while you are the prime recipient of Family Revelation for your family, others, particularly when asked by you, can also receive inspiration on your behalf and in response to your requests. Our own parents and siblings (our children's aunts and uncles) may have insights about our children and our families that are more objective than the way we see things, and being asked to give advice is a complement to them and is so much more pleasant, for them and for us, than when advice is given unsolicited.

And mentors, leaders and respected friends often have thoughts and ideas that can be enormously helpful, and all we have to do to avail ourselves of their perspectives is to ask.

Music.

We usually don't think of music as a "holy place" but we should never underestimate the inspiration-drawing effect that sacred or classical music can have. Sometimes just replacing the clamor and chaos of a normal day's soundtrack with something beautiful in our ears is enough to trigger insight and inspiration. With the right mind-set, this is another way of seeking and of receiving Family Revelation.

(Saydi) Of course revelation cannot be constrained to a short list of times and places. When we structure our lives in a way that enables us to be close to the spirit, to be aware of God and be seeking, then God can and will reveal things to us in sometimes the most unexpected ways and places. It is often more about attuning our ears to hear him than putting ourselves in the right place, although one can certainly help with the other.

Chapter 9: Deepening, Lengthening and Fine-Tuning our Prayers

Sometimes we may ask, but without sufficient energy and effort to know if we are asking exactly the right question or to be able to visualize the answer.

Once while living in London, a humble, faithful older widow who we called Sister Brackpool telephoned me one night in hysterics. “Pray for me Richard,” she whaled, “I’ve fallen and cut my leg.”

My response was more practical than spiritual, “How bad is it? How much are you bleeding? Have you called the Doctor?” Everything I said seemed to make it worse. “It’s gushing—pray for me—please!” I told her I would call her back and then I called the Ambulance, and then the phone rang again. “Richard, PLEASE pray for me.”

So I finally did. I prayed hard and I focused on the question of what, specifically, I should ask for; and I began to see her situation in my mind and asked with all the faith I could muster, that her blood would clot and that peace would come to her mind. The phone rang again, and now the voice was calm. “Thank you, thank you for praying.” The bleeding had slowed and she was able to wrap it and stabilize until the ambulance arrived, just as I had seen it in my mind.

Asking is hard spiritual work. Finding the right questions takes spiritual effort. And when we do it—when we really ask, we pull that big, heavy door open, and find the light we need, and the revelation we crave awaiting us on the doorstep.

And when that door is open, and when He sends in answers and faith and hope, we find that the guilt and fear and comparing and feelings of inadequacy that we had been holding inside—go rushing right out of that open door.

Prayer as an Offense and a Defense

All of us seem to find it easier to pray “fervently and with a sincere heart” when we face a crisis or deep need of some kind. This is true of everyone and leads to clichés like “there are no atheists in foxholes.” But it is particularly true of parents. When one of our children is ill, or in trouble, or rebellious, or having a faith crisis, our prayers quickly become urgent and earnest.

We could think of this as praying on the defense....trying to defend and to react to an urgent need or crisis.

But what about an offense? What about the thought that “The best defense is a good offense.” What about the idea that we should pray just as hard about building a lasting marriage and a strong family and raising responsible, righteous children when things are going reasonably well as in times of crisis or trouble. What if praying before the storm is what makes us strong enough to get through the storm (and sometimes even to know enough to go around or avoid the storm)?

Asking the right question is important both in prayers of defense and in prayers of offense. When we are in the storm, on the defense, facing some kind of family crisis or trouble, we need to ask what to ask for and avoid just asking for a miraculous way out instead of for insight on what is really happening and what to do about it. And when we are in the sun, on the offense, trying to find ways to build more strength and unity, we need to express more gratitude and then seek ways to sure up our families and make both our marriages and our children more faith-filled and resilient for the unknown challenges that lie ahead.

One kind of question is how to *solve* (defense) and the other is how to *build* (offense) and often the latter can become preventative medicine for the former.

Keeping the Door Open

We don't want to put time limits on God for when he can reveal insight and answers. One goal of praying for revelation is to keep the door open all the time and to look for answers and guidance and insight in all things and to have asked the questions clearly and deeply enough that we recognize the answers when they come.

There is no redundancy in asking the same question or praying for the guidance on the same matter over and over. Often our prayers become more defined the more we ask them. And even though we may conclude each prayer in Christ's name and with the word Amen, it doesn't mean that that prayer or that question or that door has been closed—we can leave it open all day and all night and always, holding our minds and our spirits ready to watch for and receive nudges, prompts, insights, feelings, and answers.

We must follow the counsel to “*pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night*” (2 Nephi 9:52).

Two-Way Knocking and Answers that Come before Their Questions

It is interesting that the Lord admonishes us to “knock and it shall be opened unto you,” but that he also says “I stand at the door and knock.” So who is the knocker, and who is the opener?

That question leads to a wonderfully comforting and encouraging answer. It is Christ who holds the light and stands at our door and knocks, patiently waiting for us to exercise our agency and open ourselves to Him and to His guidance and revelation. But He also wants us to knock at His door—to visit Him where He is, to seek His presence, to come out of our own house and seek to enter His and to ask for the answers and the revelation that comes from where He is and who He is.

We knew that to write a book on family revelation, we would need a lot of revelation! So we began asking for it each writing day, but it was hard sometimes to know just what specific questions to ask and exactly what kind of guidance to ask for. So we often just asked to be led where He wanted us to go, and in the process we learned an important lesson—that if we want and need them bad enough, and if we consciously open our door, sometimes the answers can

come before we know enough to ask the questions. Some mornings we would wake up with answers or directions already formed—in full sentences in our minds and have to grab the notebook by our bed and capture them before they slipped away.

Why We May need a Church

Some might ask, if it is possible to get direct revelation for our children and our families—guidance and answers that come straight to us rather than through some organized religion or its programs?

But it's an easy question, because the answers start coming to mind as soon as the question is asked: We may need a religion to help us know how and for what to ask. We may need a church because it is often part of the answers we get and often the source of the answers we get. And we probably need a church because it supports and backs up and reinforces everything we seek to teach our children.

Chapter 10: If You are a Grandparent

The stewardship word applies better to parenting than to grandparenting. Parents have the direct calling, the mantle, the awesome stewardship to raise their children, just as their parents (now grandparents) had and still have the parental stewardship for them. Generation one always has stewardship for generation two. But what is generation one to generation three? What is the responsibility of Grandparents, and what is their access to Family Revelation for their grandchildren?

For what it is worth, we think grandparents should think of themselves as “consultants” to their children regarding their grandchildren, remembering that consultants don’t set the goals or the agenda, but respond and try to help with the goals and agendas of the clients (the parents).

Remember though, that your stewardship (and your access to direct Family Revelation) for your children, though they are grown and may be parents themselves, continues uninterrupted. In some ways, we feel even more need for inspiration for our grown-and-gone kids—simply because they are gone and now so much less under our care and personal supervision. (see our earlier book *Life in Full*)

And even though you are not the steward over your grandchildren, you can still be what we call “proactive grandparents”. As I (Richard) said in an earlier book to grandfathers,

When we ask “Who is going to teach this generation of children the values, the character, the family narrative, even the street smarts that they will need?” most would say that the ideal answer is “the parents.” But in today’s world, where most parents work full time, and where life’s options and challenges seem to be increasing exponentially, who is to say that parents will find the time or the means....So who else can possibly do it? Who will give kids the confidence, the identity, and maybe help them with the resources they need to become all they can be? Grandparents! There can be an incredible connection, even a symbiosis, between generations 1 and 3. It is a connection that can preserve traditions, that can build character, and that can bring joy to both sides. Being a Proactive Grandfather, Familius Publishers, 2018

And as I (Linda) said in an earlier book to grandmothers (we decided to write them separately because there is quite a lot of difference between grandmas and grandpas),

It is said that “Parenting is an investment and grandparenting is the return on the investment.” Taking that one step farther, how much time and thought and effort we invest in grandmothering can eventually produce substantial returns. Maybe we don’t start out thinking about leaving a legacy to these beautiful little people who bring so much light to our lives. As time goes on though, we realize that the legacy that we leave to our grandchildren probably won’t end with a monument built of brick or stone or even a bronze plaque dedicated in our honor. What we leave will be invisible. It will be a monument of love and understanding and integrity and courage inside their minds and hearts that will stand forever. Grandmothering, Familius Publishers, 2018

Question One Conclusions

Family Revelation is remarkable in that it is available to all yet tailored specifically to each individual family's needs and situations. We all have the power to tap into it, yet how we seek and how we receive will be personal and in accord with our own natures and our own channels.

Because God wants to give us all He has, he stands at the door and knocks, but because of His commitment to our agency, He waits for us to unlock and unlatch and open.

Our objective in seeking Family Revelation is that we and our children become what He wants us to be, and that we find what He has foreordained us to do.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Does this section (Question 1) feel like the heart of the book and the mirror of the book's title? How and why?
2. Did you relate to the "5 W's" of Family Revelation and did they serve as a good run up to the key question of How?
3. Which of the listed methods of receiving Family Revelation spoke most forcefully to you and reflected your own personal ways of seeking and receiving Family Revelation?
4. Did you think of other ways that family revelation can come—beyond those that were listed here?
5. What examples or illustrations do you know of relating to actual case studies of seeking and obtaining Family Guidance or Revelation?

Question Two:

What Obstacles can Block me from Receiving Revelation for my Family?

Adopting Practices that Drive out Fear and Guilt and Draw in Confidence and Faith as We Tune our Spirits to God's Frequency

If, as the first section of this book indicates, family revelation is as accessible to us and available in so many ways, then why don't more of us receive it more regularly and more consistently?

The answer, in a word, is *Adversity*. Adversity means essentially "things that work against us." And when it comes to receiving revelation, there are a lot of things working against us—from the distractions and interruptions and little crises that pop up every day to the guilt and fear and feelings of inadequacy that creep into our lives and suck away the energy we need to seek guidance and inspiration.

Adversity and the Adversary

And there is a twin word, with just two letters changed: *Adversary*. It's not just the world and its cares and distractions that passively pull us away from revelation, it's also the reality of a dark force that actively tries to block us from God and from divine guidance.

AdversITY
AdversARY

One way to think about it is by considering and juxtapositioning these two very similar looking words. They are the same except for the “IT” in one and the “AR” in the other. The IT in *adversity* could symbolize the obstacles that come from being fallen people living in a fallen world. AdversITY in this mortal life, both in the world around us and the natural man within us is part of God’s plan. IT provides us with the messy, agency-laden playing field on which we can learn and grow and progress toward being more like God.

IT is this carnal and fallen world where we are distracted by so many things, burdened by our own and other’s agency; and prone to compare ourselves with others, to feel guilty about things we have done or things we haven’t done, and often to feel inadequate and fearful. In other words, part of the problem or the obstacles to receiving revelation is in and around us. As the saying goes “We have met the enemy, and it is us.” Pogo in the comic strip by Walt Kelly

But there is another enemy when we change the IT to an AR and get *Adversary*. And this enemy is far more subversive and sinister than the first one—darker and more dangerous than our own natures. As C. S. Lewis teaches us in his *Screwtape Letters*, there is a dark force that is proactive and hostile to our receiving of revelation and does all it can to prevent it.

Since our clear communication with God concerning our families is so essential, it is one of this adversary’s prime targets. It wants us feel overwhelmed and discouraged, it is happy when we feel guilty for things we have or haven’t done in the past, or like we don’t measure up. It relishes it every time we compare ourselves with others and feel deflated about our well thought out and executed, but seemingly inconsequential efforts. It wants to trick us into thinking that we have to get it all right all of the time. It rejoices when we give up.

Peter warns, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Adversity is part of God’s plan and when we cling to Jesus and seek to understand and use the enabling power of His atonement adversity becomes an advantage in our lives. In Isaiah we are promised that Christ will give us “beauty for ashes”, and the “oil of joy for mourning.” Christ can miraculously take the ugliest, most burnt up, mournful and useless parts of our lives, the hardest of our adversities and transform them into something beautiful and joyful. Through the enabling power of the Atonement all adversity can be used for our betterment and joy and ultimately our beauty and wholeness.

However, on the flip side, when we succumb to the powers and deceivings of the Adversary, that same adversity can be the source of our ruin.

If we’re not careful, these two obstacles of Adversity and Adversary can make it seem virtually impossible to become clear enough to seek and receive the Family Revelation we need to raise our children and keep our marriages and families strong.

It seems impossible *Until* we realize that we have both the power and the resources to overcome these obstacles, and until we understand that “they who are with us are more than they who are against us.” (2 Kings, 6:17)

Overcoming

The good news is that we have power over both Adversity and the Adversary. God did not send us here to fail. King Benjamin teaches us that if we “yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” we can conquer the natural man and become saints. We have holy and divine DNA in our souls and God has embedded within us the power to turn to Christ and use his atonement to overcome adversity.

As we examine these obstacles that can block revelation, we find that many of them are a combination of adversity and the adversary. They are things that happen to us or enter into us partly because of the natural man and the natural world and partly because the adversary uses them as his tools.

One of the crucial keys to overcoming the obstacles to all the family revelation that God is ready and eager to give is *not* to ignore them or deny them, but to be aware of what they are, what triggers them, where they come from and how we can recognize and get around them. Some of the main obstacles are:

- Failure to Ask
- Misunderstood Agency
- Guilt and Fear
- Comparing and Inadequacy
- “Perfection”,
- Discouragement or Giving Up
- “Business” and Trying to do too much
- Mistaking the urgent for the Important
- “Static” and Distraction

In this section we’ll first explore these obstacles, what they are, where they come from and how and why they make it hard for us to connect to Heavenly help. We’ll then explore the practices, personal qualities and regular spiritual rituals that we can adopt to help us to have souls that can more easily tune into God and open the door wide to Family Revelation.

Since we are all so unique with such singular situations we all will identify with different obstacles and different solutions. And of course, this isn’t meant to be an exhaustive list.

What we will find is that we overcome these obstacles not so much by removing them, but by building our own immunity to them by clearing our hearts and minds and tuning our spirits so that they can receive Family Revelation despite the static and opposition—despite the adversity and the adversary.

The first five chapters (11-15) of this section are about the obstacles that block revelation and the following five chapters (16-20) are about how to either clear them aside or immunize ourselves against them.

Chapter 11: Obstacle One: Misusing Agency, and Not Asking

With all those ominous and glaring obstacles, like guilt and fear and discouragement you may be surprised to realize that the biggest obstacle to receiving Family Revelation is the most basic and subtle one: Simply failing to ask. When we fail to make positive use of our agency by asking, our chance for Family Revelation is doomed. even before we get to the adversity and the adversary.

We live in a world that holds independence up as a virtue and a goal—which conditions us into thinking of needing help as a weakness. And we get so caught up in the day-to-day that we don't take the time. And so we don't ask. And so we don't receive.

Trying to “go it alone” is generally a mistake in most matters, but nowhere more-so than in the matter of raising of our children and the strengthening of our marriages. A positive can-do attitude doesn't get us very far in something as complex and complicated as raising unique and strong willed children in a world that seems to work against their becoming what we wish them to be. What we need is a “positive can't-do attitude” where we recognize our need for help and grasp the power of asking for it.

We need to understand the power of our applied agency and the promise Christ gives “Draw near to me and I will draw near to you.” James 4:8 But we also need to understand that without the asking, there is no power. Without our unlocking the door, in respect of our agency, He cannot come in. Once we unlock our door by faith and hope, He can not only knock, but press gently on the door as a further invitation for us to open it by seeking and asking.

During our time in London, we loved to visit St. Paul's Cathedral, one of the great religious edifices in the world, designed by the brilliant Victorian architect Sir Christopher Wren. Below the magnificent dome, as an altarpiece in the Cathedral's Middlesex Chapel, hangs the painting “The Light of the World” (this books Cover art) by William Holman-Hunt, a pre-Raphaelite painter who paid remarkable attention to detail and who said “I painted the picture with what I thought, unworthy though I was, to be by Divine command, and not simply as a good Subject.”

Often called a “sermon in a frame” this painting is filled with symbols, the most important of which is the latchless door which can only be opened from the inside and the underlying message that the Savior of the World is alive and will dwell in the hearts of those who admit him. Under the painting are the words from Revelation 3: *‘Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me.’* Also quoted is John 8:12 *“I am the light of the World; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of Life.”* When the painting was installed at St. Paul's, the choir sang psalm 119 which includes the verse : *“Thy word is a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my path”*. tpauls.co.uk

To us, the underlying message of the painting is the powerful principle of agency, and the truth that the Lord will not violate our agency by opening the door Himself—yet He waits, He knocks, and in various ways He asks us to ask Him in; and He is always there. He entreats us, “If you

love me, keep my Commandments” but He does not force or coerce, so the best definition of “commandments” is “loving council from a wise Father.”

Agency and Joy

When God says “Draw near to me and I will draw near to you,” He is not playing some demanding game where we are forced to take the initiative, He is pleading with us to open the door, to unlock the access to His Spirit, to permit Him to give us all that He wants to give without violating our agency or superseding the very power of choice and responsibility that makes mortality work and allows us to “work out our own Salvation.”

In this universe where God owns all, and we are mere stewards, there is only one thing that we actually own, and that is our agency which He has given us and which He will never take away—and which no one else can take away. This is the core point of Victor Frankel’s classic book *Man’s Search for Meaning* where he relates that even as a Jew being subjected to medical experiments in Hitler’s concentration camps, he still had the agency or the power to choose how he would react, how he would respond—whether he would hate or love, whether he would condemn or forgive.

We know that agency began in the pre-mortal world where we chose it even though we were fully aware of its risks. We know few specifics about that phase of eternity, but scripture does tell us that we “shouted for joy” at the prospect of earth and mortality.

We have wondered if, after the initial elation of hearing about this adventuresome mortality, there may have been a letdown or discouragement as we understood that it was an adventure from which none of us could return, because we would all sin and fall short, and “no unclean thing can enter into the presence of God.”

But then our Eldest Brother, by the incomprehensible power of His perfection, offered to ransom Himself for our sins, and perhaps it was at that moment, realizing that we could experience mortality *and* return, that we shouted for joy. It was at that moment that we understood that we could have this learning, empowering, earth life, have the god-like mortal roles of parents and family, make the mistakes that all mortals would make, and yet, miraculously, because of Christ’s offered atonement, still return to our Heavenly Parents after it was over.

So now, here we are, right in the middle of this muddled, messy, maddening mortality, facing opposition and family challenges that none of us are equal to, but with faith that there is help that is divine, and that we can actually give our agency to God through the promises and commitments of His Covenant Path. We remind ourselves that He has not only paid for our sins, but for our mistakes—as parents, as siblings, as uncles and aunts—and that if we can ask the right questions, we will get the right answers, and receive the help we need not only to return, but to return *with* those we love most.

Not asking is the biggest block or obstacle to opening the door, and to windows of heaven to our families.

Chapter 12: Obstacle Two: Guilt, Shame, and Fear

As parents it's easy to feel overwhelmed, and to feel a hefty amount of guilt or shame for the things we *have* done, the things we have *not* done, the things we *should* have done better, the things we *didn't realize* in the moment, the *limited vision* we had. We live in a fallen world, it is part of the plan for us to make mistakes. These very mistakes are what make it so critical to tune into God, to be close to Him, to access Family Revelation and make use of the Power of Christ's atonement.

The adversary's purposes thrive on us feeling shame and guilt. He wants us to feel like we just don't measure up, like we're unworthy of God's guidance. He wants us to feel out of step with God, to take us out of God's frequency to a place where we feel alone with our own meager efforts that don't match up to the tasks of raising God's children.

Of course, there is a place for guilt, for properly placed guilt that pushes us towards repentance and progression. But misplaced guilt and feelings of inadequacy and shame distance us from God.

Guilt is one of the dark force's favorite tools, because it becomes progressive. Once we say things like I shouldn't have done this, or I should have done that, or why can't my family be like that family or my marriage like that marriage, or I've already blown it—satan has an easier time telling us Yep, you're already a failure, so why even try. And when we find ourselves in that cycle, flailing and feeling inadequate, the channels of revelation are muddled. We lose faith in our own ability to open the door, or in God's willingness to walk in.

Whenever we feel guilt (and also whenever we feel pride) concerning our children or our parenting, we have a mistaken notion of control. The fact is that we do not have control of who our children are. We try to influence them for good and teach them truth, but ultimately they are not within our control, and never have been.

The lesson is that, with our knowledge of the premortal life and the eternal nature of the soul,, we should never judge ourselves or another parent by how well a child is doing. If they are doing well we should not be proud of our efforts, if they are doing poorly we should not feel guilt.

Instead, we have to remind ourselves (over and over again) that we are not perfect. We usually do the best we can with what we know at the time and with the unique and particular challenges and opportunities we have been given through the families we have and the children that have been sent to us.

These souls *come as who they are*, it is our to job seek God's help as we do our best to help them become who He knows them to be.

We need to face that challenge with confidence and faith, not guilt and fear. Paul wrote to Timothy, *“For God hath not given the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*

We need to trust God, trust where He has placed us and what He has given us, both in terms of our blessings and our challenges, and our children which are a combination of the two. And we need to trust that, because of the stewardships He has given us, He will also give us the personal, stewardship revelation that will help us do the best we can with what we have.

So, again, make your reading and your pondering a guilt free zone. Consider ideas without the burden or the guilt of thinking you have to bring them all to life in your families. Read with the perspective that we are all different, that some things may apply and be within your bandwidth, some may fit nicely into your unique situation, but many may not and that’s OK. In fact, that is exactly as it should be.

As you cast out guilt, you will find that you are also getting rid of a lot of fear; and fear, like guilt and doubt, are tools of the adversary and need to be recognized as coming from his dark purposes, and then thrown out.

Chapter 13: Obstacle Three: Comparing, Inadequacy, and “Perfection”

Comparison is another major barrier to seeking and receiving revelation. When we compare we are working under the premise that we are all on a level playing field. That we are all handed children and situations and abilities that are equal and comparable. This perspective is contrary to what we learn about the individual and unique nature of our spirits. When we compare our efforts and outcomes to other’s efforts and outcomes we are working under the paradigm that there is one universal answer, removing from the equation God and His ability to reveal unique truths tailored to our family.

On the other hand, when we are in a space where we are recognizing the uniqueness of each families’ experience— then we are more likely to seek individual, tailored revelation.

Compare, Compare, Compare

It is a natural tendency to compare the success of our efforts to those around us, especially given the tight knit community the Church provides. Why don’t our efforts at teaching in the home yield children who have all the Articles of Faith memorized like the Smiths? Why does my son resist coming to church with us while the Walker boys always seem so eager and engaged? Why isn’t our daughter thinking about going on a mission like her best friend is? We’ve tried to do everything right, even better than some of our friends, but our children haven’t embraced the gospel like we hoped they would. Why is my teenager so distant and struggling when I seem to be working harder than some of the other parents I see around me? Why does my marriage seem so much harder to navigate than my sisters’? Why are all my nieces and nephews thriving on their missions while my son is coming home due to anxiety?

In today’s world of social media we are constantly invaded by images of perfection.

Photographs (bless them!) block out all the noise and imperfection of a moment and capture a shutter second of beauty. You can’t see in the photo the heartache that people are carrying, you don’t see the few minutes of chaos right before or the tantrums right after. You can’t smell the dirty diaper or hear the crying baby. You can’t feel the stress that might be raging behind that smile, or the tension that might have built up and exploded right after. This is why we should love photographs. They strip life down to the raw beauty of a 1/100th of a second shutter snap. But pictures can become problematic when we take someone else’s perfect second and compare it to the complexity of our entire life.

Theodore Roosevelt said, “*comparison is the thief of Joy.*”

Perhaps the biggest danger with getting caught in the “compare snare” is that it can rob us of the drive to seek revelation from God. When we are discouraged and feeling down about our efforts we tend to turn inward instead of upward, there’s a part of us that loses the confidence that fuels our efforts to connect with God for guidance. When we feel deflated in our efforts it’s easy to want to give up the fight since our failures will never match up to people’s best successes, so why even try? In this emotional state, this small inwardly focused and insecure mode, it’s hard for us

to attune our souls to God. Our vibration is off and not compatible with the frequency God is broadcasting. In this space it's hard to hear God, seek His will and see His bigger picture.

When we compare ourselves to others we lose faith that God has a plan for us, that our children were sent to us for reasons, for our specific abilities and talents. We forget that really what our children need and want more than anything is for us to be the full expression of who we are, not who we want to be based on the pictures we've seen on Pinterest. Our children don't care nearly as much about perfection as they do about connection to real, vulnerable, loving parents.

Still, all of the comparing leads to feelings of inadequacy. I can't handle this child. Why did I get this one? Why does my family seem so much harder than other families? How am I going to do this? Why isn't what I do ever enough? Why do I feel that everyone is watching me and judging me?

Sometimes the inadequacy is just a manifestation that we are asking too much of ourselves, and somehow, in the Church, we all seem to be trying for a perfection that is not there.

The quest for perfection puts us out of tune with God and his desire for wholeness.

We live in a fallen world, but somehow, we still have this paradigm (particularly in religion) that we should be able to do things perfectly. After all, didn't Christ tell us to be perfect? The greek translation of the "perfect" Christ used in this admonition is "whole" or "complete" or "the act of reaching a distant object." This eternal wholeness is what God wants for us, but not right now, not in this moment, not during mortality. We are here to experience imperfection, opposition, failure, grief. This messiness is part of God's plan, in fact, it is His plan. We know that a plan void of failure and full of perfection is what Lucifer fought for. We know that God sent us to earth to fail, to fall short, to be mortal, to feel the pains and joys of a fallen world. This is where we learn, this is how we become whole and eventually like our Heavenly Parents.

Aiming for perfection can do the same thing to our progress and ability to receive revelation as does Guilt and Comparison. Since perfection is out of our reach, a quest for it leaves us feeling like we don't make the cut. Since it's so unattainable, it can make us feel like giving up. In this space it is hard for us to feel motivated to ask God the right questions or worthy to receive the answers.

The way to access God is to be real, to fail, to fall short. Teddy Roosevelt said: in the battle of life...the credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena, whose faces are marred with dust and sweat and blood, who try and fall short again and again, who are daring greatly so that their place will never be among the cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

It is in the arena where we get to really know God. It is only through our striving and correcting and repenting and putting our efforts out there that we put our lives in God's hands and feel the thrill of him working through us.

This whole hearted way of living is not just good for us, it's good for our children. When they see us being real, vulnerable, raw and imperfect it gives them courage to dare greatly and put

themselves in the arena. It is real life modeling of how to grow and progress that matters to our children.

If we try to approach parenting and marrying with a perfection perspective then we will fail. We will either desperately try in vain to fit our family to meet our own unattainable expectations and ideas about perfection or we will give up entirely.

Revelation comes when we let go of our expectations of perfection and embrace the messy reality of our fallen world. It is only in this place that we are reliant on God enough to see the beauty only He can unfold. This is the magic place where God can turn the ashes of our lives into something beautiful.

Chapter 14: Obstacle Four: The “Static” of Distraction, Technology and Consumption

(Saydi) As a mother with young demanding kids clinging to my heels at every turn I spend much of my time hassled and harried. With everything on my plate I feel like I’m constantly saying “I don’t know (even when I do know) don’t ask me right now, can’t you see my hands are busy, when you see me stop then it’s time to talk to me!” Somedays I wonder how my children are supposed to get a word in? Often they physically grab my face and turn it towards them. Other times they throw a little tantrum to get my attention. On those days it must feel very difficult for them to get through to me. When our lives are crammed I think God may feel the same way.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to hearing God in our lives is not giving him any space to speak to us. Family life these days is so easily overstuffed. There are demands on our time, our energy, our minds from the minute we wake up until we drop into bed. These demands usually feel like worthy, good things to be doing, and often they feel essential to making our families function. We can have so many plates spinning at times that we feel like stopping for a pause will make everything come crashing down. However, in reality just the opposite may be true. If we don’t pause to breath and connect with God we don’t have the capacity to keep the critical plates spinning. When we do connect with our Heavenly Parents they help us to see which plates can stop, which can go slower, which can crash, and which we need to keep spinning.

(Saydi) I should probably leave this analogy to my husband Jeff since I am not a very scientific person and most of technology feels like magic to me. But what I do know is that when I’m driving our awesome old 1985 Toyota truck and trying to listen to the radio it’s tricky to tune into the right radio station. Everyone around me is dialing into their favorite tunes, I know they’re being broadcast, but the antenna is broken on the truck and it has an old radio that has to be carefully tuned to the right number on the dial. If I go slow eventually i can tune into a clear broadcast.

I deeply believe that God can speak to us on an individual level daily. My mom has always reminded me that He wants to be in the details of our lives. He is always broadcasting the big Truths of salvation, but he is also broadcasting to us truth with a lowercase t. He wants to communicate to us our truth. He wants to tell us how to respond to a toddler who is biting, a teenager who is riding an emotional roller coaster, a spouse who is depressed, a sibling who is struggling with their faith. He wants to help us know what tweaks we can make in our own behavior to help those around us feel more loved and supported, to help us feel more valued and strong, to help us find more joy in our familial roles.

I love this analogy of tuning in because it is concerned more with who we are than what we do. Of course, there are practices and habits (that we’ll discuss at the end of this section) we can adopt that help us to tune our spirits into God’s frequency, but the goal isn’t the habits. The goal is the state of our Souls, the ability to find God’s frequency and tune ourselves in. When we are tuned in all that we do is a revelation. When we are tuned in the door is open wide and the flow between us and the Divine is strong and drives our actions.

I have found that in this mortal world it’s nearly impossible to operate in this holy space all the time, but when we taste it and know what it feels like we crave it and search for it, and getting in tune becomes easier and easier.

The trouble is, there's so much static in our world that it's getting harder and harder to find just the right spot on the dial to hear what God has to say to us. One of Satan's greatest strategies today is to fill up our lives with static, things that aren't God. Some are good things, but not God things. Some are just static: the constant buzzing of text messages, the pull of Instagram or Facebook just so we can sit and veg out for a bit, the pull of business and consuming and getting things to look or be just perfect.

The adversary knows that if he throws so many signals down there then there is so much static that we can't tune into God and the revelations he has for us. And without these revelations we are lost.

It's hard to tune into much besides static if we are too busy, and it's so easy to fall into a place where we are impossibly busy. It feels unavoidable, but it's a trap that we all are constantly falling into. Darkness gets us to a place where we feel we have no choice and we slide into the vortex of busy parent life that seems impossibly hard to climb out of. Now, of course there are times that really are unavoidably busy, and we can learn to find God in those busy times. But if we let them make up the bulk of our lives we forget how the whisperings of the spirit sound.

Inability to say no

One of the reasons our lives are filled with static is our inability to say no to things. Maybe you are good at this, but many of us find it takes MAJOR discipline to not let your life fill up. Part of what God can reveal to us is what we fill our lives with and how we keep some margins. I have gone to him with this question before and slowly it has become clear what I need to focus on and what I can let slide.

(Saydi) Sometimes it's not so much about saying no as it is about saying no to doing everything perfectly and full tilt. I grew up with my mom flipping the old adage and reminding me often: "If a thing is barely worth doing, then barely do it." When we are intune with the spirit He can help us know what is really worth doing well, and what is barely worth doing. A good friend once reminded me that saying Yes to something always means saying No to something else and visa versa. We have to be intentional about what we say yes and no to or our lives can be overcome by every need, demand and good intention that comes our way.

Technology and Media

Technology is both a gift and a curse. There have been times when it has been a source of revelation, where God has answered a prayer through a post or an article, where we feel closer to the divine through something beautiful posted or receive an answer to prayer through someone else's writings and experiences. But more often these things distract us from being plugged into God.

We've all been there, we're running and running to make it through a day and then we finally fall to our knees, say a quick prayer, or maybe even a long one, and then fall into bed, tucked in

with our phone checking to make sure we've managed all the logistics for the next day, sending off the last few emails, ordering the last item for the birthday party the next day, then a quick catch up on Instagram until our eyes get too heavy with sleep and we drift off. Then the alarm rings at 6am and we're off running, our phone right there waiting with a few unlistened-to messages, a few unanswered texts, a list of to do's flooding in with our first waking thoughts. In this scenario, where is the space for God to communicate to us? How can he elbow his way into this crowded brain space.

When we're not managing technology and social media well we feel a constant tug towards it in a way that fills our souls with static. In that space we are pulled by constant tug to check email, Instagram, messages etc. When we step away from it seems so absurd that a little device could keep us from seeing the beauty that's happening in the moment.

But those powerful little devices and platforms also have the strength to pull us out of painful moments when life isn't especially beautiful. They create for us a very handy alternate reality, free from our current worries and challenges. Our phones and computers and TV's give our brains a way to veg out and disengage. To not feel what is happening in the moment. Of course there is a place and time to disengage. But when we habitually turn to them we are turning away from mortality, away from what is real, away from God and the help and growth he has for us.

The only way through pain and hardship is through the messiness of it all. And in that messiness God can help us better than a virtual escape. In order to tap into God's whisperings we need to constantly check in to make sure that our devices aren't filling us with static. To make sure we can still find a clear signal.

Consumption

Another more subtle source of static in our lives is consumption. We live in a consumerist society, one where, in an effort to drive sales and promote products, the commercial world is constantly telling us that we're not good enough, we don't have enough, we don't look right, we need more. It looks as if there is abundance all around us, but somehow this same message leaves us feeling like we're on the raw end of the deal, stuck with scarcity.

The consumer heavy world that we live in is also constantly cramming our lives with an overload of choices. On the internet we have endless options at our fingertips. When your dishwasher dies you could spend days researching different options, reading reviews, searching for deals and coupon codes. When you go to the grocery store there are 17 different kinds of milk, 34 different types of mustard, 16 different types of olive oil, all with their labels screaming at you that they are the healthiest, full of good fat and flavor. And then there are more substantial choices that we have to make for our families. Which activities should our kids be involved in? What school should they attend, what instrument should they play. How will they keep up.

It is easy to be sucked into this trap of constant consumerism. When we're not careful about how we use our resources and time we can inadvertently close the door to God as we get more and more sucked into the things of the world.

We're not saying here that we should swear off all consumerism and live as monks, but we should be aware that in imbalance of these pursuits can fill our lives with static and slowly and subtly take us away from the glorious things God has in store for us.

Chapter 15: Obstacle Five: Neglect of Spirit or Body, and Giving Up

In order to tune into God's frequency it's important that we take care of our bodies and our spirits. If either of these two parts of our soul is neglected it is hard to be attuned to God's grace and guidance.

There are endless books and articles written on how to take care of the physical body, how to keep it fit and strong and in shape. We learn about it in middle school health class, there are reality shows about it, we see people all around obsessing about it or rebelling against it. Diets and Fitness are multi-billion industries.

More important, God has always placed strong emphasis on the importance of caring for our physical bodies, or the temples of our spirits

And just as our physical bodies need to eat good food, exercise, drink water and sleep in order to thrive and be healthy, our spirits need daily things to keep them healthy, strong, fed and most importantly, in tune.

While the push to keep our physical bodies in shape is all around us, we live in a world where we don't talk much about the care of the soul. In our obsession to look perfect and consume and compete we are forgetting about the soul and neglecting the things of the spirit.

This care of the soul is what Jesus is talking about when He asks us to hunger and thirst after righteousness. When he tells us that he is the living water and the bread of life.

Flat or Vibrant

Our spiritual life ebbs and flows, it is the nature of a fallen world, of the natural man. God has planted deep inside of us a desire for Home, a yearning to be fully awake spiritually. If we give life to this desire we are more easily propelled towards things that help us feel closer to God and open the doors to revelation. We've all gone through those times when our spirit feels a little flat, a bit one dimensional. We've also had times when it feels vibrant and in tune and connected.

During those times when our spiritual life feels flat it seems impossible to regain the full color version of ourselves. And it can fall flat so quickly. When our spirits are flat it's so easy for us to become "careful and troubled about many things" to let the natural man take over, to stop listening to the still small enticings of the holy spirit, to stop hearing the knock, the hum, to be blinded to the bigger picture: *To be unhappy*. We forget what it felt like to have that full, vibrant, connected, tuned in spirit. In fact, sometimes there is such a stark contrast that the other one seems like it never was truly ever real.

It's easy to feel discouraged, like we'll never regain that connection with God, so why try. It's also easy to forget how wonderful that full spectrum spirit was.

There is a parallel in our physical bodies. When we're not taking great care of our bodies physically it seems impossible to get to a place where we will ever feel healthy and strong again. It is all too big to grasp from the place we are in the moment.

Many of the practices suggested later in this section are the means by which we can care for our spirits. Just being aware that our spirits needs as much nourishment and muscle-building and training as our bodies do can help us form habits and practices that will strengthen our souls.

(Saydi) I've found if I just pick one little thing and commit to it, really commit, then other things follow. Same with habits—research shows that it's easier to build new habits if we connect them to other habits that we're already doing naturally. In the big picture this is just a tiny step, but like Elder Ukdorf reminds us that these small steps are what it's all about. The magic happens in these small, seemingly insignificant “trajectory correction.” We are promised that good things will follow.

So if your soul feels flat, and you feel unplugged from God and your life is crowded with things you are careful and troubled about, just pick one little course correction. Resolve to stay on your knees for 30 more seconds when you're done praying, or to set aside 30 min to read and write in a spiritual space. I've found that when I commit to doing one of these things than others follow and my soul rounds out, wakes up and feels connected.

Giving Up

It's a freeing thought to remember that the only way we fail as parents is to give up. When we give up we close the door to revelation.

We had just given a presentation on parenting to a large audience and were standing at the front of the hall greeting individuals who had come up to say hello. Several places back in the line was a woman who was sobbing and I was wondering if I had said something that offended her or hurt her. When she got up to us she was almost hysterical. “I've lost my son” she sobbed, “He's gone. I don't even know where he is.”

“What happened” I stammered, at a loss for how to console her.

“He ran away—he's of legal age so the police won't help—all I know is that we found drugs in his bedroom and now he's been gone for three months....I had been fighting with him for so long about his choices, and the last thing he had said to me was ‘I hate you.’”

Almost overcome by her intense grief and wanting to commiserate somehow, I blurted out “So you have given up?”

Then something amazing happened. This small woman, who a moment before was a puddle of tears and fears and utter discouragement, suddenly stopped crying and drew herself up straight, “Given up? What did you say” Given up? I will NEVER give up. He is my SON.”

It was a total transformation. The woman was now powerful. She was suddenly resolved and completely committed and determined. She didn’t know where her boy was and she didn’t know what to do, but she knew one thing, and that was that she would never give up.

Inspired by her strength, I knew in my soul to make her a promise. I put my hand on her shoulder and looked deep into her still moist but now lighted eyes and said. “You will find your son, and you will resolve and repair your relationship. I don’t know if it will be in a month or in a year or in ten years or in 100 years, but you will find him.”

Then I thanked her for teaching me a powerful lesson—that the only way to fail in parenting is to give up. And as long as we do not give up, we WILL succeed.

It will be ok in the end, and if it’s not ok, then it’s not the end

Life is long, eternity is long. Parenting is hard, but it’s also eternal. When we feel like we’ve come to the end of our ropes, we have to hold on, stay the course, keep loving and praying and wait on the Lord. In the gospel we are promised that the covenants we make and keep with God are binding. They not only bind us to God, but also our children. We need to have faith in these covenants, and seek to see the bigger, more eternal picture.

It seems that all of the tactics of the adversary aim at getting us to give up. If we lose our motivation and faith in who we are and who God is, then Satan has won. If he can get us to that place where we don’t feel up to the challenge anymore, when we throw in the towel he rejoices.

Sometimes giving up is a gradual process, we slowly give into guilt or comparison or fear or shame. We slowly stop doing the things that help us to be in tune with God. We let the adversary’s flaxen cord slowly and carefully bind up our efforts and energies. Other times giving up is a sudden choice. We close the door.

Sometimes we feel like we’ve given up when everything inside of us is just screaming for a breath. It may look or feel like we are giving up when really we are just taking a much needed little break. A pause to get our bearings straight and gather new strength. If we don’t listen to this call for air then we can run ourselves out of breath, to a place where we really might give up.

Let’s be clear though, this doesn’t mean that we all won’t have moments where we feel like giving up, even many moments where we do momentarily give up. Sometimes it looks or feels like we’re giving up when we’re really just shifting our energies to another battle. We may be experiencing inner turmoil through other big challenges that take our whole souls, maybe a bout of depression, maybe some anxiety, maybe a tangled problem that’s calling on everything we have. That’s OK, that is part of this messy fallen world. If we do what we can to stay close to God through the down times, the confusion, the frustrations, the mess—He has the power to hold things together until we can again.

At this point, having reviewed some of the main obstacles that Block Family Revelation, we now turn to some key Practices that we can adopt to drown out the static, care for our spirits and most of all to become more clear and receptive and tuned-in—thus immunized to the effects of the obstacles.

Chapter 16: Practice #1: Carve out time and space to *Be Still* and spend time with God.

“Be still and know that I am God”
Psalms 46:10

God can't speak to us if we don't give him space in our lives. In order to be in tune and hear God whisper in our ears we need to spend time with Him and proactively work to do things that feed, nourish and fine-tune our spirits.

Remember writing papers back in 7th grade? When you wrote them up by hand you had to be sure to keep the margins clear so that there was room for the teacher to write comments. Similarly, we need to make sure to keep margins in our own lives. If we pack them all the way to the edges God doesn't have any room to write, to help us know when we're on track, to encourage us, to direct us, and perhaps most importantly, to communicate His love to us.

Remember the scripture quoted under the painting: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any one hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* Who doesn't want to invite God in to sup? Wouldn't that be a relief, to sit with Him and see clearly the path ahead through our messy lives. He asks us to be still, to know that He is God.

He asks us to quiet our lives enough to recognize that He is in our boat, deeply caring if we feel we are perishing, ready for us to wake him up and hear him bring peace and stillness to the storms in our lives.

(Saydi)I have to be honest, a push for simplification and quiet always make me start to feel a little anxious. How can we be still with all the demands of parenting, relationships, work, living, supporting a family, serving in the church, obeying the commandments, being perfect. Can we live a life of stillness?

I don't think that God means for us all to retreat to the mountains and take vows of silence (though I really do want to do that one of these days).

But he does want us to find moments of stillness. It is one of the paradoxes of the gospel, that in stillness comes movement, movement in the right direction. Without stillness we are running and exhausted, but we're going in aimless circles, like chickens with our heads cut off.

Find space and quiet that works in your unique situation

In order to get this right we have to spend time communing with God in whatever way works best for us. As we explored in part one, there are a myriad of ways to spend time connecting with God. It may be through prayer and scriptures, it may be through journaling or writing, it may be through meditation or soaking in beauty, it is likely a combination of these things. But we need to seek and guard this time and space to commune with God.

(Saydi) I can't lie, there are lots of weeks, even months, sometimes whole seasons when I haven't gotten this right. When I haven't been in a regular habit of stopping to connect with God because I feel like I have to keep running on the treadmill for fear of falling on my face. It's normal for all of us to go through seasons like this, and when we are still living under a big umbrella of faith and hope in God I believe that he is with us through these episodes, that He is awake and aware and doing what he can to insert Himself and fill in essential gaps.

In moments of doubt and amidst feelings of inadequacy I compare myself to others and wonder why it seems easier for them. I have to remind myself then that there are as many ways to connect with God as there are different personalities. How we find this connection will differ from one person to the next, and from one season to the next. This is another reason why it's so important that this be an individual process, and not measured by or compared with others' paths.

This communion with Heaven may look different at different times in our lives. A few babies into motherhood I began to really long for those pre-children days when I had more time to sit still with God. Days where sometimes I could take whole afternoons to listen to beautiful music while reading the scriptures and soaking in nature and writing in my journal. And then one day while struggling through the intense physical demands of raising small children it hit me that spirituality and communion with God looks different depending on the season of life you're in.

During those years where babies seemed to be constantly crawling on me and interrupting any semblance of solace, my connection with God came largely in action: serving Him via sacrificing for my children. All that pre-parenthood communion built spiritual strength within me to put my faith into action for that messy motherhood season. As I put my own needs behind me I found holiness in the chaos and gained spiritual insight as I realized first hand what Christ had meant by losing your life and finding it.

Now that my kids are a bit older and less physically demanding I'm finding a need for a totally new kind of connection with God. Divine guidance seems critical to understanding and responding to the emotional complexities of this parenting stage. I'm finding it essential to carve time out of my regular routine to connect with God in a more urgent way than I've ever felt before. And I'm sure another season is right around the corner where I'll find and need that connection to God in ways I haven't even considered yet.

The point is, our spirituality and mode of personal revelation will ebb and flow as we move in and out of different seasons of our lives. And it's ok if it looks different at different times as long as we're looking towards heaven with our questions and striving to build a connection to the Divine.

If we spend time with God He will show us what we should prioritize

Spending time with God gives us the perspective we need to see clearly where we should put our limited resources of time and energy. Like the primary object lesson trying to fit rocks and sand into a cup, when we put the big stuff in first then the little stuff all falls into place. In reality, it doesn't always all fit in nicely, but the important things are in place, and that's what matters.

If we carve out time and put in the effort to tune into God *first* then we can get to work knowing that God will direct us to be anxiously engaged in the *best* causes. We can combine the good natures and desires of both Mary and Martha: going through our lives being careful and troubled

about things while knowing that God is with us in our efforts as we put the “one thing” that is truly needful first: connection with God.

Set aside time to connect; and guard against busy-ness creeping in

In order to be sure we have margins in our lives we need to be aware of what is filling up the empty spaces. Like a basketball player defending his hoop we need to box out those distractions and fight for space.

This process may be as simple as making a firm goal to set aside 15 minutes every day to spend with God. Maybe it means taking a little inventory on the Sabbath to assess how much time you’ve given to the Lord that week. It may be more complex, like sitting down with your spouse and really figuring out where you are overscheduled and where you can cut back as a family or individually to have more space for God. It may mean figuring out what kind of emotional anxiety or anguish is crowding in.

If we can see where our busyness and static is coming from we can’t understand how to keep it at bay. In today’s world it’s easy to get addicted to being busy. Busyness tricks us by making us feel productive, and important and feeds our egos. On the other hand, the work required to tune in doesn’t usually feel productive, it doesn’t make it onto our to do lists.

(Saydi) I’ve found that most of the important elements of parenting are often unmeasurable, hard to plan and we rarely get patted on the back for them.

We don’t plan a time to stop and look into our searching daughters eyes and listen to the questions heavy on her heart. We don’t put “stop and help Emmeline work through her worries about her new dance class” on our to do list. I’m just teetering on the edge of full blown teenage parenting and I’m realizing that often when I’m getting it right it feels a little like being in a waiting room. I have to make sure I’m not too busy to be available for them, and that means having more space in my life.

I have to clear things out emotionally and physically to be available when they need me, when they’re ready, on their terms.

This is good practice for making space for God. But it goes against our natures. In our fast paced world we are conditioned to think that if our schedules are packed and busy we are more worthwhile. We need to learn to be ok with being still - aren’t we told to WAIT upon the Lord?

We have to be OK with being a little bored sometimes, to see the value in having margins in our lives, in having a day that is not packed full of busyness. We can’t be afraid of silence or being alone with our thoughts. It is in these blank spaces that God can get through to us. When we can carve out these spaces and tune in, *then* God is able to speak to us even in the messy chaotic times.

Set aside Time to be Still and connect with God

It might be helpful to set aside specific rituals, times of the day or week or month where you can be still. Here are some examples, but of course you don't need to do all of these every day.

Likely there will be different rituals for different seasons of life, but the goal is to form a habit, built into what you're already doing so that you have a few spaces of stillness intentionally carved out as a place for God to speak.

(Saydi) Some things that I've found helpful are as simple as taking a moment right after brushing my teeth, closing my child's bedroom door at night or turning off the key to my car to take a few deep, conscious breaths. There was a time when I got up in the morning and immediately did a little yoga sun salutation stretch, just 30 seconds ending in child's pose and connecting there for a minute with God. (really, only a minute or else I'd fall back asleep!) I've had seasons where getting up first thing and writing a few stream of consciousness pages of blah has helped me to clear space.

It may help to keep a gratitude journal, before going to bed, documenting a few lines each day of how you've seen God act in your life. Or perhaps just commit to spending 30 more seconds on your knees before bed listening for a message from God and writing it down.

Maybe you could do a short mindfulness meditation right after your lunch break. Or spend a few minutes each day before starting your car thinking about Jesus and asking in prayer to feel close to him.

(Saydi) I've found magic in my life when I set time limits on my phone and set specific times of the day where I will not go near a screen. I especially have found the windows of heaven open and pour out revelation if I charge my phone far from my bed. Those last few moments of consciousness and the first few after waking are where God can so easily speak if we listen.

Finding this connection doesn't take hours of uninterrupted time, but we need to pause long enough to be able to hear God's whisperings. It seems nearly impossible to stop the engines of family life long enough for this kind of pause, but when we build little breaths into our daily routines everything else we're trying to do either comes into focus, or falls away in unimportance.

When we nurture our souls through a deep relationship with God we banish guilt and shame and are filled with love

It's important to make space for God not just to hear his direction for you and your family, but also, and perhaps most importantly, to feel His love. God's love does the hard work of scrubbing out our shame and guilt and fear. We learn in Timothy that "perfect Love casteth out fear" and in Isaiah that nothing can separate us from the Love of God. It is always there, available, waiting to encircle us. No matter what! When we spend time with God we feel it and it has power to melt away any negative emotion that might make us feel unworthy to seek and receive guidance from God.

When we feel close to God and know that He knows and loves us then the channel to His vision, inspiration and guidance is free of static. We become clear, confident vessels, able to move forward and choose and feel blessed and aided by the almighty.

I've noticed that when I have invested in my relationship with God and feel close to Him then he helps me to see when I get things right. And boy, does that feel good. It's not a feeling of pride, more a feeling of praise and gratitude for the joy and peace that comes when I'm in tune and trying to follow the Spirit.

Conversely, when I'm close to Him and get things wrong, instead of feeling guilt and shame God holds me together until I can come through and try again.

Chapter 17: Practice #2: Learn how to be Present; And Embrace the Messiness.

Consider the Lilies of the Field. Give no thought for the morrow

It is only in the present that we can receive revelation. It is only in the present where we can tune in. We need to learn how to be present and how to live in the present.

We love what the writer Anna Quindlen says about parenthood and being in the moment: *the biggest mistake I made is the one that most of us make.... I did not live in the moment enough. This is particularly clear now that the moment is gone, captured only in photographs. There is one picture of the three of them sitting in the grass on a quilt in the shadow of the swing set on a summer day, ages 6, 4 and 1. And I wish I could remember what we ate, and what we talked about, and how they sounded, and how they looked when they slept that night. I wish I had not been in such a hurry to get on to the next thing: dinner, bath, book, bed. I wish I had treasured the doing a little more and the getting it done a little less.*

It's easy to be distracted by the getting things done and forget to be aware of the doing. Life as a parent is busy, but if we're able to train our brains to be present and slow down a little through the busyness than it is in mess and chaos that God will speak to us.

Be fully present in the now

It is important to find a way to embrace reality as it is so that we can live in the present. It is in the present, disconnected with past or future where we can hear God's whispering, where we can connect with the spirits within our bodies. It is in the present that we feel the divine child of God inside of us. It is in this space where we can communicate spirit to spirit. This is where all revelation is found.

In his book, *The Power of Now* Eckhart Tolle talks about becoming an observer of our thoughts. He teaches that we are not our thoughts, that there is something apart from our neurons firing that makes up who we actually are. Translated into gospel language, this existence apart from our thoughts is our spirit, our spirit connected with The Holy Spirit, reminding us of the divine substance of our soul, of our eternal identities. Who we really are. When we can train our brains to watch the other creeping thoughts of mortality we can better connect with the Spirit and hear His whisperings.

Tolle says: *Pay attention to the gap -- the gap between two thoughts, the brief, silent space between words in a conversation, between the notes of a piano or flute, or the gap between the in-breath and out-breath. Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger. One day you may catch yourself smiling at the voice in your head, as you would smile at the antics of a child. This means that you no longer take the content of your mind all that seriously, as your sense of self does not depend on it.*

There is a key here to revelation. When we can quiet our minds, through prayer, meditation, breathing, being present, yoga, and so on we are training our spirits to take over, to tap into God and put us on a divinely guided path.

Again, God doesn't talk to us in the past or in the future. He speaks in the present.

Ideal vs. Real

In order to keep ourselves in the present and put ourselves in sync with God and open the door, we have to give up on getting everything right all the time. First, this would be impossible. We are imperfect beings. And second, it would miss the point of God's plan. The imperfection of life is what makes it interesting and beautiful and worthwhile. When we wholeheartedly embrace life as it comes our way, we are open and clear conduits to God's spirit and direction.

Don't we sometimes feel like we were much better parents before we had kids? We had it all figured out in our heads, so many great ideas, so much energy and drive to love and teach and learn as a parent. When children were just figments of our imaginations, a part of our future vision, they never got in the way of our brilliant plans. And then real live kids came along, not the American Girl Dolls we were imagining, and totally threw things off! It turns out they have their own ideas, desires, short attention spans, struggles and resistance. Ironically, it often feels like our children get in the way of our parenting!

This feeling applies to most of what we do in this life. We make plans to study, to work, to form new habits, to eat well, to be a certain kind of person. And then real life comes along, complete with all of its complexity and it so often throws us for a loop.

The trick here is to embrace the messiness of this fallen world. To realize that life wasn't meant to be the flat, black and white, single dimension that it is as we envision and plan. Although it might feel more manageable in those moments before it becomes real, it is lifeless and has no power to move us, to enlighten us, to bring us closer to God. Just as it is the darkness and contrast that gives art its beauty, it is the jumble of life, the color, the multi-dimension of struggles and challenges that makes it stunning, that gives it the power to change us and bring us closer to the Divine.

So, if you're feeling like your approach is messy and imperfect, carry on! This is what the path towards God feels like.

(Saydi) I woke at 5 am this morning to Peter's pleas for milk and walked out all bleary eyed and stepped on some sharp legos before tripping over three huge piles of unfolded laundry piled up in baskets in my hallway. They've been there for almost 3 whole days. It seems like 80% of my life I'm stumbling through piles of clean laundry waiting to be folded and put away.

There's just something about the laundry. It's always there. I've been obsessing lately about how nice it would be if my kids just didn't have to wear any clothes ever. No clothes shopping, no clothes rotating and storing and picking up, no laundry.

Tell me it's not just me. Do we all wake up one day to little ugly, difficult details of our lives and ask ourselves, "Is this really my life? This isn't exactly what I had in mind." Maybe we were just dreaming of something a little more extraordinary, a little less mundane, a little more adventurous, a little more glamorous or recognized. Maybe we were just dreaming of a different kind of motherhood: thoughtful, balanced, loving, patient, ordered, peaceful. Happy kids, a clean house, folded and put away laundry.

And then we wake up to reality. The grouchy (grouchy, grouchy) kids. Our tired (tired, tired) body. The rubbed-in spit up stains on the couch. The dried mac and cheese under the high chair. The never shrinking (no matter how hard you tackle it) to do list. The mounds of clean laundry. (always the laundry!) The squalid reality of a real life. Wait, a real life?

The life in my dreaming wasn't fettered with all these nasty little details.....but it also wasn't one bit real.

Over and over again in life there comes a point where we must banish our ideals and move on to what is real. It is in this present space, this space of reality where we can plug into God and find all the glory He has in store for us.

I really struggled when I was deciding if I should marry Jeff (which now seems totally absurd). He was amazing. I was in love. But there was a problem. He didn't match the image of my perfect husband, the one I had carefully crafted in my head using all those lists written during Young Women's lessons. Sure, he had loads of assets that I'd never thought to include in those lists.....attributes and qualities that would really complete me, but for some silly reason they didn't seem to matter, he didn't look the same as the Mr. Perfect I'd dreamt up. And then, one blessed day it hit me. Mr. Perfect wasn't real. He was made up in my mind. He didn't exist. I decided that I'd rather live my life with something real and solid and amazing than hold on to this imaginary perfection in my head.

Sometimes we have to step back and take a few moments to recognize those silly ideals in our heads, to kill them, to mourn their loss for a moment and then shake our heads to see how much more beautiful reality is. Reality can be much harder to live in, there are a lot of messy details, but it's only there that we really are living. And it is only through reality that we can feel a connection with God.

The tricky thing is that the beauty of reality is in the fleeting present. The moments that so easily get stamped out and trampled over by all the details and clutter and busyness in life. The ones that get buried in all those piles of laundry. Over and over again my goal is to clear out my life, all that clutter in my brain, widen my margins and grab on to reality. It's in that reality where change happens, where God works with us to help us to become who He needs us to be.

Chapter 18: Practice #3: Recognize your Stewardship, Celebrate your Unique Situation, and Repent Daily

One key to driving away comparison and feelings of inadequacy is to remind ourselves often that our children did not come to us by chance but as stewardships for which we were specifically selected by our Heavenly Parents themselves, the true parents, and that we are entitled to revelation and guidance from Them.

In this mortality where we own nothing and God owns all, we are given certain stewardships, the greatest of which is the children sent to us. God is their true parent, as he is our parent, and we are the stewards or “baby sitters” of these children, just as they would be ours had they come to earth a generation before rather than a generation after us. Thus we need to respect them as our equals and our brothers and sisters even as we guide them as our children.

I (Richard) was reminded of that one day by our five year old daughter Charity. It was a Sunday afternoon and reading comfortably at home until she pulled my magazine down and got into my face with a startling statement, “You’re not really my daddy.”

“What,” I said, “what are you talking about?”

“Well, my Sunday School teacher told us that we are all brothers and sisters, and Heavenly Father is our real daddy.”

Somewhat relieved, I patted her head. But little Charity wasn’t finished, “And, I’ve been thinking about it Dad, and I really think that I am your big sister and you are my little brother.”

She went on about something her teacher had said about the most noble or mature spirits being saved to come to earth last, and I basically just stared at her, thinking that she was probably right.

It is the *asking* of the true Father that yields revelation and answers to we, the baby-sitters or the stewards. This is a unique and powerful kind of prayer “How do we take care of this, your child...?” “What would you, the real Parent, have me do for this brother or sister entrusted to me...?” “Help me to understand this child and come to know who he or she really is and what she or he really needs...?”

And the other side of asking is *receiving*. To ask is the most frequently repeated admonition in scripture, and it is almost always followed with the promise “and ye shall receive.”

But is “receive” just a promise, or could it also be another, separate admonition? We are told to *receive*, and as mentioned earlier, it is an active, not passive word.

Some would relate to the metaphor of a receiver in football. It is the quarterback who throws the pass, but the receiver is not passive—he has to run, to reach his spot, to get his hands on the ball,

and to hold it. Even the most perfectly thrown pass has no value or impact and makes no forward progress until it is *received*.

Another reminder: Any specific ideas or how-tos that you find in these pages are given only as *examples*, not as one-size-fits-all solutions. Because, other than God, YOU are the only expert on your own children, and something that works for some other parent with some other child may not work for you. But examples can stimulate us and make us think about what will work in our own unique families; and one form of revelation is *discernment*, or recognizing what is or isn't right for your family, and re-shaping an idea to fit, or being motivated by something one family did to create a very different and unique way to do it yourself.

Understand that there is no "Randomness" in the Family You Came To or in the Children who Come to You. There are reasons, and you can gain insights into those reasons through revelation.

We are all on a journey to feel more comfortable and more confident in our familial stewardships, and to learn to open the agency-locked heavens by becoming better *askers*, more specific and more mindful; and to help us become better *receivers*, more attentive, more listening, more persistent, more active. Because in these two interrelated spiritual skills (of asking and of receiving) lie the secrets of family revelation.

Repent!

In order to tune into God's frequency we have to consistently repent and work to make our spirits clear and able to be in sync with God.

As we become more humble and capable in our own repentance, it will also rub off on our children.

(Saydi). My husband tells this incident with our adolescent son: When Charlie was eleven, we were taking a year off from normal life, living on a farm, and homeschooling the kids, with only some rough thoughts about where we'd end up next. It was a crazy, unstructured, wonderful time. But we were all struggling with the ambiguity of where we'd end up next and that took a toll on my relationship with Charlie specifically. He was being a pretty normal pre-teen boy, but with perhaps a little more than normal swagger, confidence, and (on occasion) a tendency toward a very vocal sense of entitlement. Add to this the usual lack of follow-through and obedience you find in most kids his age, and I was rapidly losing patience with him. I responded to his complaining or pushing or begging pretty firmly, letting him know where I thought he was out of line, taking too much leeway, or not obeying his parents.

I was commuting a long distance into San Francisco, trying to start a new office at work, and generally not terribly involved in the rest of the family's efforts at farming. I started trying to listen to a conference talk every day before switching over to sports radio. One day while driving home over highway 92, I was coming into Half Moon Bay and was listening to a talk called 'The Righteous Judge', by Elder Lynn G. Robbins. As the talk came to a section on parents as judges, and the need to use love even as we discipline.

As I listened, I had a distinct prompting to be 'softer' or 'gentler' with Charlie as a parent. More than that, I needed to repent, and tell Charlie that I was repenting, and ask his forgiveness. So

that night, as I was putting Charlie to bed, I told him that I had been too hard on him lately, and that I was repenting, and I apologized. He immediately said 'that's OK dad', and went to bed as usual. It wasn't a huge moment, neither of us were particularly emotional, and I wouldn't say it was a spiritual experience--I was just trying to execute on what I had been prompted to do.

The next night, I was again putting Charlie to bed. And this time, Charlie was clearly a little emotional. When I asked him what was going on, he said he needed to repent, and told me about an incident from a few months ago with a friend. He had made a mistake, and he knew it, and he wanted to fix it. We talked about how to repent, what the steps were, and what it meant to truly repent.

At this point, the light bulb went off for me. This was an extraordinary experience for me in how direct and clear the message was. I believe that I received this prompting not only to improve my parenting (which has lots of room for improvement), but also because Charlie needed an example of repentance at that point. As a favorite stake president pointed out in a talk a few months later, kids need to see their parents using the gospel like they use a knife in the kitchen, or a tool in the garage. Gospel principles are meant to be used to improve our lives, and without that repeated, regular example in the home, the gospel can easily seem irrelevant to our kids. This prompting gave me a perfect opportunity to show Charlie that the gospel was active in my life and could have a great impact on our relationship.

Constant, regular repentance, and asking forgiveness from God and from our spouse and from family members brings two incalculable blessings. 1. It cleanses us and clears us and tunes us in to Family Revelation—immunizes us from its obstacles. And 2. It respects our spiritual-sibling children and teaches them by example how to do likewise.

Chapter 19: Practice #4 Find entrances to holiness everywhere

Don't be hesitant to seek revelation everywhere. God is not limited to prayer and scripture study and the temple. A Jewish teaching tells us that there are "doorways to holiness everywhere." If we only look for them in our little boxes then we are missing out. We learn in the 13th article of faith that we believe that God has many great and important things to reveal to us. God doesn't just have great and important things to reveal to the church, but also to us, in our lives. Mormon admonishes us to "lay hold upon every good thing." We need to be open to finding answers and truth in all good things.

When we turn off the distractions of the world and tune in *first to God*, when we take time to make space for God to speak to us *then* we find entrances to holiness everywhere.

God indeed speaks to us in "spiritual" moments. But if we carve out time and space to connect with Him then He also speaks to us through not so "spiritual, but "mundane" moments. Even the most ordinary of tasks can become holy. With faith and God's help we can make the mundane parts of our lives into holy spaces where we can commune with God.

(Saydi) I've found that I can take even the most unholy parts of my day and make them holy.

The three things I dislike most about life as a mother are the never ending piles of laundry, the ever present task of buckling kids - often screaming and arching their backs - into car seats and the tedious job of putting kids to bed at night again and again and again when my patience is spent and my energy is depleted.

A friend once challenged me to identify the least enjoyable and holy things in life and find a way to make them holy. While I never actually found nirvana in these tasks, I was guided to a few solutions that did flip them into tasks that brought me closer to my children and to God.

My sister in law taught me to fold laundry like you would do a meditation. To take each article of clothing and to think about the person it belonged to as you methodically folded it. To press love into the onesie or the socks as you tried to cast aside any bitterness or anger. I learned to turn buckling seat belts around, from a chore, to a chance to love and connect with each child as I snapped each buckle. And bedtime slowly went from horrific, to tolerable, to enjoyable. On the best nights it became a holy time, sitting bedside, trying to pull out any of their worries and press my love into them, a time to apologize for things I got wrong and say a little prayer, connecting us both together to God.

Of course the laundry is most of the time just piled up laundry, I still lose my temper when the kids get out of bed for one more demand, and even though they now they buckle themselves in, I still find myself resenting all the driving around I do as a mom. But occasionally I get it right and these are holy markers in the mundanity of life.

This exercise taught me that, if we let him, God really does have the power to insert himself into even the most unlikely places in our lives. He has the power to make our weaknesses our strengths, to give us beauty for ashes.

Julie B. Beck taught us: *Revelation can come hour by hour and moment by moment as we do the right things. When women nurture as Christ nurtured, a power and peace can descend to guide when help is needed.*

Pure love/charity as a conduit for family revelation

When we make space for God than all that we do becomes a sort of Revelation. Especially our loving acts of selflessness and service. Real charity is one of the most powerful channels to tune to. When we feel love for others God is pulsing through us. We feel His thoughts, we are never more completely in tune with God than when we are loving others. Charity is defined as the pure love of Christ. For years I focused on the task of “developing” charity. Of making my love for others similar in nature and strength as Christ’s love. And then one day I realized that Charity might be more about being a clear vessel through which Christ’s love can be channeled. When we feel Christ’s love moving through us then we know what it is to love as our Heavenly Parents do, because we feel their love coursing through us.

This may be the most powerful form of revelation. We’ve felt it before, and crave to feel it more, that feeling of pure love for a child or a spouse that comes from someplace besides me. It is in this space that God gives us visions of who these people are that we are loving and what they need.

Chapter 20: Practice #5: Asking: How Good Questions Lead to Good Answers

This section will end where it started—with the need to ask. As we think about all the ways in which we can seek and receive Family Revelation, we must never forget that they are all tied to asking and to exercising our agency to open the door to Christ and to The Spirit. If we don't ask then we can't receive.

As we have explored, there are a limitless number of ways that we can each receive guidance and revelation from God. However, none of these ways are automatic. They all require mental energy and faith, and they all require and involve some kind of asking. And they are all more effectual and result-producing when we approach them with well-formed questions already in our minds.

During our mission presidency, we had one statistically-inclined missionary, and this is before the days of computers and easy searches and calculation, who asked us an intriguing question: “What do you think,” he said, “is the most frequently repeated admonition in scripture?” Our first thought was that it was to love, or perhaps to keep the commandments.

No, he said, those are second and third. The most repeated admonition is to “ask.”

Our knowledge of the plan of agency causes this to make sense. Christ stands at the door and knocks, but we have to open the door, and we open it by asking. He knows all—certainly all we need to know about our children and our parents and our cousins and nieces and nephews and every other family member—but we have to ask to open agency's door.

“Seek” is the scriptural version of “ask” and it implies looking, desiring, energetically trying to draw down inspiration and revelation by summoning and asking the right questions.

We live in a world where answers are easy and cheap. We can get as many answers as we want just by Googling. Answers are a dime a dozen. However, just like with Google, in order to get the right answer we have to ask the right question. A good question is a priceless thing, particularly a good spiritual question, because it leads us to divine answers.

Answers (revelation) are always the response to questions.

God could have just laid out the restoration in a perfect, logistical sequence, but in taking the initiative to do so He would have violated our agency and taken away the opportunity for the hard mental energy of faith. Joseph said “when a man works by faith, he works by mental effort rather than physical force.” His own mental effort led to the questions that prompted the revelations that became the restoration.

Family Questions

And so it can be for each of us in our own families. If we apply our faith or mental energy to understanding the needs and natures of our children, we will be led to the right questions to ask God, which will draw down the right answers through the Spirit.

The answers will not always come immediately, but if we keep working on the right questions we will be drawn closer and closer to the divine answers. Sometimes there is great joy and faith in “Asking it well and waiting” for the answer to come in the Lord’s way and in His timing. This is part of what it means to “wait before the Lord.” As we wait, we watch for the answers. These two “w” words, watching and waiting, are often the bridge that connects our questions to God’s answers.

Knowing the right question is not always easy, and sometimes the first question we ask is the wrong one. One mother asked the question why is my son so rebellious and obstinate, and “Can you please fix him?” but as she prayed, it came to her that what she should be asking was “How can I love this boy unconditionally and better understand the feelings of his heart?”

Rather than worry and fret when we are not sure what the right question is, use it as the perfect starting point by asking what to ask for. A trigger point for revelation is the simple question “Lord, I ask thee to help me know what to ask.”

In asking, “Mental energy” is the key. The results we get and the awareness and perspective we have is usually in direct proportion to the amount or percentage of our mental energy devoted to whatever the subject is. If we spend ten times as much time and mental effort on our job each day than on our family, we are likely to get ten times more job insights than family insights.

But, luckily, it is not just a matter of time, because many of us are required to spend eight or ten hours at work each day and can’t possibly be with our families for that amount of time. But if our mental energy, our priority, our thought pattern, is oriented first to family, it can overcome the time imbalance and draw down the inspiration we need.

Often, in our speaking to business and professional groups, we focus on the deeper meanings of “priorities” and on the need to think first about our family relationships, even if we are required to think more about our jobs and work responsibilities.

Sometimes, when we are presenting fairly basic family communication or parenting ideas to these audiences, people are more impressed than they should be and ask us where we came up with all the ideas. We try to explain that all parental ideas and insights come from the expending of clear, prioritized, mental effort. And we often suggest that perhaps the reason they are so advanced in their professional or career thinking and so elementary and undeveloped in their family thinking is that they are putting so much more mental effort into the former than to the latter.

It actually amazes us, and gives credence to the reality of an adversary that is out to destroy families. Because it is not easily explainable why these smart, logical people, who say that their family is their priority, actually don’t expend much mental energy on it. It underscores that there

is a very real, anti-Christ force that is actively working to distract and dim and discourage people's attention from those they love the most.

There are so many good parents and good marriages in the world—among people of all faiths and people of no faith. Our observation is that it is the ones who devote a significant percentage of their mental energy to these priorities who succeed. The key to devoting more mental energy to our families is to think hard about the challenges and the specific questions we have about our families and individual family members, and to ask those specific questions directly to God.

A wise woman once said, “A question is like the hook at the end of a fishing pole. (Ardith Kapp?) Anyone who has ever been fishing can imagine how useless it would be to go fishing without a hook at the end of the fishing line. Just as there is no way to get what you want if you don't ask, it is useless to get an answer to a problem if we don't we don't ask for specific help. When we're “fishing” for an answer to a quandary or a problem, often it is much easier to conjure up a question that can be answer as we ponder and pray. It is remarkable how often we can feel inspiration and even revelation as we ask a question and then listen for an answer.

Questions Before Prayer

As Abraham Lincoln once said, “I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” We have probably all felt this way when we are in crisis, when someone's life is at stake, either physically, mentally, emotionally,, or spiritually. Many events in our lives may make us feel helpless and hopeless: a child with special needs, an impasse with a spouse, or a child who has lost his way. Even in those very stressful situations, when we are pleading for help, we can try to ask better, clearer questions like, “What can I do to help with this dilemma? Who can help me? What are the words that I need to use to make this situation better or to help this child have the faith to ask God for her own inspiration?”

The specificity of the answers usually matches the specificity of the questions. And then, of course, we need to listen. Even as we are “wrestling with the Lord” for answers to our questions, we often make the mistake of not taking he time to meditate, to wait on the Lord and earnestly *listen* for answers. If we ask our questions and then go about our daily routines or jump in bed and go to sleep, we vastly diminish our chances of being inspired with answers! Our dear friend Stephen Covey once told us in a private conversation that we should be listening for promptings and answers to our questions forty percent of the spent praying.

(Saydi) Sometimes we need to replace resentment with better questions. From my journal:

(Saydi) Jeff has been gone again this week and when he got home I got a little huffy since he didn't read my mind and jump right in to what I needed him to do. It was only when I had him home to do or not do, recognize or not recognize what I had been doing without him that I started to feel resentful and unhappy with my mother load. I got a distinct prompting as I prayed at night that I need to remind myself of my own fulfillment in this mothering work instead of wanting it so much from other places. Most of this work is what I want to be filling my life with.”

“I went to sleep wondering why men just fundamentally don't get women's experience....and visa versa. And trying to tell myself that really, that is ok. Felt a great connection with other women

in the world who have surely felt this same way. Thankful to be a woman and for the sometimes unrecognized, but so nurturing world wide sisterhood I belong to.”

(Linda) Since our children have left our nest and I am no longer awakened in the mornings by a crying baby or a child who has been up all night with a cough, I have found that I actually have time to think about my prayers before I begin. Mostly I am wondering about who in our now large, extended family may need my prayers that day so that I can ask for help. Sometimes inspiration comes before I begin my prayer, but usually a name and a need pops into my mind while I am on my knees. It is astonishing how often I write send an email or text to a child or grandchild after thinking about them in my prayer that I get a response saying something like, “How did you know that I needed that message today.”

After you pray stay on your knees for just 60 seconds and listen. When I do this I rarely get a big puzzle solving answer to a big question, but I ALWAYS feel the spirit, the reality of a God awake and aware. It takes just 60 seconds of the day to feel that divine power in my life and when I do I notice that I am more able to tune in throughout the chaos of the day.

Questions before studying the scriptures

If we think of a worry or a concern that we have with a child, a spouse or a friend and then read scripture with that in mind, we have found that it is astonishing to find inspiration almost popping off the page.

As we began this inspired system of studying the scripture at home, I (Linda) decided to consider something I was worried about concerning my children. My mind fell on our oldest son who has never married. All his siblings adore him but he often feels isolated without much in common with them when we are all together. While most of his siblings are bursting with children, he lives on his own and is an extraordinary teacher of third graders. His nieces, nephews and students adore him. In additions he pretty much a technology genius, a wonderful Sunday School teacher and a classic introvert! Because his life is so different in many ways from our other children I worry about him.

As I read John 1 I had to questions in mind: How can I help this son? What does he need from me and our family, Incredibly, I found several words and phrases and that applied directly to things that I could do to help me become more empathetic to his feelings. I felt prompted to write our son a letter of love and support and a request for ideas that would make our family gatherings easier for him. He responded beautifully and we now know more about what he is thinking, it has become easier for us to be sensitive to his feelings and more aware and more inclusive both when we are together. Richard and I as well as his siblings are doing much better job of helping him feel loved and included.

Similarly, we can ask questions before going to church on Sunday, before going into a fireside, before listening to conference, before taking the sacrament. A friend jsut shared with me recently that she is using sacrament time to think through each of the people seh loves and asking “what can I do to show them my love this week.”

Question Two Conclusions:

While the adversity inherent in mortality along with the cunning efforts of the adversary place numerous obstacles to opening the door to revelation for our families, the capacity to overcome is built into each one of us. We are children of God. He loves us. He wants to connect with us. And prayers and requests regarding our families are particularly viable because He loves our children as well. When we make space for Him, trust in His answers, allow ourselves to get familiar with His love he will transform our very natures, and help us become better parents and better marriage partners as well as better individuals. As we receive or seek or follow promptings it will become less and less about what we do, and more about who we are. Line upon line and precept upon precept we will become clear and open and connected, vibrating on God's own wavelength.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. What experiences or illustrations can you think of where guilt and discouragement got in the way of any real progress.
2. Which of the obstacles in this section ring true in your life? What practices and rituals have you had built into your life at different times that help you to tune into God.
3. What keeps you from asking God questions regarding your family?

Question Three:

How do I put Family Revelation Into Action Within My Own Family?

Understanding That We are All part of a Family,
and that we Each Can Strengthen our Families.

“None of us are entitled to revelation without effort on our part. Answers from God don't just magically appear. If we want to grow spiritually, the Lord expects us to ask questions and seek answers.”

— Sheri Dew, *Worth the Wrestle*

What a time we live in! We have access to everything. We have more freedom and more options than any other people of any other time. Gender and racial equality, while still incomplete, is more advanced than ever before. Good marriages are better than they have ever been because they combine commitment with equal partnership. Couples have children because they want them and want to nurture them in enduring families.

But it is also a time of incredible challenge for parents, even a time of fear, because many of us are not sure we are up to the challenge of being our children's successful stewards and knowing how to guide them in these perilous times of materialism, entitlement, and faith crisis.

It's tempting to want God to give us a simple magical checklist that, if completed, would ensure our kids end up with solid beliefs in everything that would bring them lasting happiness..

But that's not how it works, not today anyway. And it scares us because there has never been a more challenging time to create strong marriage partnerships and teach our children the life's lessons effectively enough to navigate them through an ever more complex world. The central challenge of our lives is to build strong families.

Are we up to that challenge?

The simple answer is *No, we are not*. Not on our own at least. We need help. Not just from the guidance and support of churches and other support groups, but from the direct inspiration of God. We need personal Family Revelation more than any other parents of any other time. And we need it not just for our parenting, but for our marriages. We need guidance to make our lives and our children's lives *home centered*, and to make our family cultures stronger than all of the other cultures that swirl around our children—the media culture, the peer culture, the social media culture.

Implementing “Home Centered”

Home Centered means not just learning and teaching good principles, but establishing of a “home infrastructure” of family goals, family laws, family traditions and rituals, and a family economy of shared responsibility; and the development of spiritual skills and ever-growing capacity to seek and receive Family Revelation.

Even after we understand how to seek and receive Family Revelation (Question One), and even while we are working to overcome the obstacles that might block it (Question Two), we still have to deal with Question Three—creating the Home Centered environment in which Family Revelation can be implemented.

Now is a great time to re-examine ourselves and to find new ways to be more effective and more deliberate and more proactive in doing all the Home Centered things that will bring more peace to our hearts and more joy to our families.

Understand that Family Revelation is more valuable than “Expert Advice” and that Divine Guidance helps far more than Parenting methods or techniques

Yes, we write parenting books, and yes, sometimes some experience and tried-and-proven methods can be helpful, but again, your children and your situation is unique, and we all have to be careful of one-size-fits-all advice. We hate being called “parenting experts” because the only expert on a particular child is that child’s parent. (also, as was once pointed out to us, an “ex” is a has been, and a “spurt” is a drip under pressure.). We would much rather be thought of as “fellow strugglers” and to put our faith in individually acquired, tailor-made Family Revelation from God.

One mom sent us this account:

I was a young mother of 5 and my oldest was 9 and my youngest was just a few months old. We had recently moved for Matt’s work which was so demanding that I was basically a single mom most of the time. My two year old was unlike my first three children. He was happy and fun and kept our house feeling alive, but he also was into everything, didn’t take no for an answer, destroyed anything he touched, could figure anything out, and life needed to be on his terms. No matter what style of parenting I tried, nothing seemed to reach him. Dealing with him along with a new baby, new area, a husband that traveled all the time, and three older children with school, homework, sports etc. left me feeling completely depleted. I was exhausted. Don’t get me wrong, I loved being a mom. I wasn’t wishing it away, I was just tired and felt like I had no idea how to parent my two year old. Something had to change or either I or my two year old was not going to make it. I loaded the kids in the car and went to Barnes and Noble. I got every book sold on how to raise a strong willed/difficult child. I am sure I was a sight to see as I hoisted all ten parenting books up on the counter with 5 kids in tow, but I didn’t care. I needed help.

I read every one of those books. I tried everything they said. There was no improvement. The next time my husband walked through the door, tears just spilled out of my eyes. I had always felt so confident as a mother, but my two year old was slowly stripping that away from me. I told Matt that all of those authors were wrong and that none of their “theories” worked. I was frustrated and swore I would never read another parenting book again.

Up until this point I really hadn’t had to rely on my Father in Heaven for parenting advice. My older three were just good kids and I didn’t have any teenagers yet. Life was still pretty simple for all of them. But my two year old, who I had a love/hate relationship with, had humbled me. This blessing quite honestly changed my life. I don’t remember the whole blessing but I do remember what the Lord said directly to my heart. “Allyson, remember that I knew Tyler before you knew Tyler. I can teach you how to raise him. I know the best way for you to parent him.”

In that moment tears filled my eyes as I remembered all those books I had bought and all of that time I had spent reading everybody else’s theories. What I really should have been doing was going to my Father in Heaven, who knew perfectly how to help me raise Tyler. My prayers were different after that as I sought true revelation for my child and for my parenting. The answers came and I understood that I had been parenting him the exact opposite way than what my Father in heaven revealed to me. I changed. I asked for and followed the Family Revelation I received. Within a few weeks Tyler was a different kid. He is now an amazing 15 year old boy and one of my best buddies. I think of that experience often when I look at him and think about how different our relationship would now be without the gift of revelation.

Seeking the Lord's counsel and listening to his gentle promptings for my children has been the greatest blessing in my life. Receiving advice from friends, family members, and books are all good things, but none of those should come before the counsel we receive from our Father in heaven. Taking time to go to the Lord and to plead for his help brings peace and direction in an unparalleled way. My kids are not perfect. Matt and I are not perfect. We make a lot of mistakes, but personal revelation and yoking ourselves with the Savior has made it so much easier.

Understand that We are All Part of Families

We are troubled when someone says something like “Oh, that didn’t apply to me because I don’t have a family.” Or “I wish people wouldn’t talk so much about families and be more sensitive to those of us who don’t have families.” Let’s understand one thing from the outset: *We all have families!* We are all part of families, various and multiple parts in fact. And, additionally, we will all have the opportunity to begin new families either here or in the Spirit World to come.

We have to be careful not to use a narrow definition of family. If we think of family as two parents and children, we have a limiting, minority view. First of all, we are all part of God’s family, and second of all we are each children of our own parents, and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins within our families. As we have the opportunity, either here or in the next world, to marry and have children of our own, we add the additional family roles of spouse, parent and later, grandparent.

So it is important not to think in the dividing terms of “families and individuals” where those who are married or have children are “families” and those who do not are “individuals.” The fact is that we are all current parts of earthly families and of God’s family, and we will become other parts of those families and of new families as we live on through eternity.

And in the perspective of eternity, it does not matter so much what phase of family we are in at the moment, or in what order or sequence things happen during the sweep of our existence. What matters is that we are *all* family and that eternal family is our destiny and God’s purpose.

If you are currently married or a parent, we hope you are reading this book to help you do better at receiving more personal revelation for those roles. If you are a son or a daughter or an uncle or an aunt or a brother or sister or a grandparent, we hope you are finding this book helpful in figuring out how to receive revelation for those roles and on how to prepare for other family roles that will come later in this life or in the Spirit World that follows.

After a speech one evening a young woman came up and somewhat flippantly said “Didn’t apply to me, I don’t have a family.” Without thinking, I said “Really, where did you come from then?” It led to a little discussion about how we are all part of families from the minute we are born to the day we die. We are children and siblings and cousins and uncles and aunts and we may, now or later, also be parents or grandparents.

As this powerful paradigm of “Home centered” takes hold—the growing knowledge and perspective that everyone is part of a family,—there may be less need to constantly say “individuals and families.” We may not have to create this separation where some are individuals

and some are families; we may be able to think of everyone as part of a family here on earth, and as an eternal, ever-progressing member of God's family.

Any paradigm or program that separates "families" from "individuals" misses the point that in fact we are all members of families and are just moving along the spectrum of family at different rates and in varying sequences. We all have so many more similarities than we do differences, and currently being single or married should not divide or separate us—it just means that we each presently have different opportunities to focus on different parts of the requirements of exaltation.

Chapter 21: Becoming Home Centered by Instigating a Values-Focused Weekly Family Meeting on Sundays

Teaching time honored values to our children and establishing a Family Culture based on tried and proven principles is the key to a happy family and the foundation for asking for and receiving the Family Revelation that we each need. If it is helpful, use the 12 universal values outlined in our #1 New York Times Bestseller *Teaching Your Children Values* and elaborated at valuesparenting.com.

The first part of becoming Home Centered is to learn how to effectively teach true principles and universal values in our homes. A good place to start is to set aside time each Sunday to hold a Family Meeting in which you go over your family's schedule for the week ahead and where you teach values and discuss the principles of your family culture and apply them to the issues that you and your children face.

Making it work

How can we help our ten-year-old Emeline manage her rage? How can our values help our thirteen year old Charlie be more aware of those around him? How can our family culture help our 15 year old daughter Hazel to create healthier thought patterns or help 7 year old Peter get ready for his challenges at school? How can our example help us manage all the back-seat fighting in our car? How can we model the relevance of our beliefs in a modern world?

"In other words, instead of starting with a value or a principle and looking for where and how to apply it, we want to start with a recognized family concern or need and look for the values and principles that apply to them.

We are trying to consider questions such as:

- What are our children struggling with this week?
- What belligerent attitudes or feelings of entitlement are causing our kids to act out?
- What bad habits do we need help in changing?
- What thought or behavior patterns are damaging to our mental health?
- What negative patterns are undermining our marriage?

In our family we're hoping to *isolate one or two important truths to focus on* each week and post them somewhere for all to see and consider during the week—something pretty simple to write on our chalkboard in our hallway or print out and put on our fridge or on the front door for all to see when they go in and out.

We're also hoping to have our older kids *memorize a very short scripture or phrase each week*. We're trying to keep it simple, and give them the ownership. Instead of (or maybe in addition

to) picking one scripture for the whole family, we may invite family members to search for a phrase or verse that really speaks to them or to something they're struggling with and repeat it to themselves as a mantra to stay on track through a difficult week. This could have a powerful effect on their thought patterns, brain connections and behaviors. Some examples from the week focused on John 1:

- “Come and See”
- Something Good can come from Nazareth (to remind us not to judge)
- And the Light shineth in the darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not.
- “The True Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”
- “And the Word was Made Flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”

It has also occurred to us that we could:

- Consider finding (or asking our children to find) stories from the media to illustrate how the light of Christ is in everyone and how the Light of Christ overcomes the darkness in the world.
- Read picture books or short stories that illustrate how light and goodness overcomes darkness.
- Listen to music and view art with light in it. Talk about the light of Christ that we can see in so many places and peoples and cultures.

Of course we need to rely on our own inspiration to know which of these ideas will work best for us! There are an incredible number of church videos, talks, and Face to Face events at our disposal when we are looking for answers to our own problems. In addition, phrases or scriptures that we carry in our minds from our scripture study that week can be a “light” to us in unexpected moments as real life swallows us up!

An Arrow that points both ways and Family Attitudes that go both up and down

We particularly love Saydi's idea here about starting with the problems you are having in your family right now. Then as you study and look for solutions, answers may very well appear. Whether you read scriptures or parenting books, instead of reading ideas and approaches and trying to find a way to apply them to what you are worried about, think *first* of a problem that you are having with a child or with a spouse. Then as you read the scriptures or advice books or listen to your favorite podcasts you are likely to find inspiration almost popping off the page as you see how what you are reading or listening to can apply to your worry or problem.

(Saydi) Like most of us I'm afraid, I always start off with a multitude of ideas, and then, gradually, reality sets in and I try to scale back to levels we can sustain. Here are some journal entries from back when the two hour block began and we were trying to do the third hour in our home: few weeks into the new system:

Our Sunday family meeting didn't go as well as it did last, probably because I was in charge and wasn't prepared, and boy is it hard to wing it when kids are constantly either interrupting, making weird humming or drumming noises, raising their hands frantically, getting up and down for food etc. I need to bring my A-game instead of trying to wing it from now on. And we need to whip these kids into better learning/listening form.

Then a week or two later, things were looking up again:

I love Sundays! This Sunday with the heavy snow sheeting down, I loved having time to prep for our own family meeting in the quiet morning

The kids were surprisingly attentive and Hazel was very into "being in charge of her own learning." It made me think that we need to make sure they all feel that responsibility so that they really have ownership. We talked about how this new way of doing this was God's way of helping us to make sure that the law is written in our hearts. When it is our hearts that are directing us, rather than an outside law, then we WANT to do the right thing. That is the goal. I think they really got it. I'm so excited about really taking this responsibility to learn together in our home seriously. When I told Charlie to go and get his scriptures, Hazel said "Don't tell him that Mom, he needs to decide to get them himself—because he feels that he wants to."

Charlie said such a nice prayer at dinner tonight. It was followed by a pretty delightful dinner conversation where the kids tried hard to tell stories without using the word "like" which made us all laugh hard.

Then a few days later during dinner, I realized that the scripture reading we had done had really gone to Hazel's heart! We were talking about "annoying people" and Hazel said something like, "I used to think a lot of people were super annoying and I don't anymore." I asked her what made her change her mind and she just said that it was simply due to her reading the scriptures. I thought this was such a cool way that gospel can change us, lots of times not even through some means that seems connected.

At another dinner during the week, we talked through some of the incredible phrases in the Come Follow Me lesson for this week (Matt and Luke 1). We're trying to encourage our kids to pick a phrase from the reading to say to themselves like a mantra as they go through the week. There are so many great little nuggets. Mine for this week (I picked two.... there were so many great ones) are "be it unto me according to thy word" and "for he that is mighty has done unto me great things"

We asked our other children for their thoughts on how they were trying to teach in their home. Our daughter Charity who lives in London with her husband and a 2-year-old and a baby wrote this:

We had our first "Sunday lesson" and Moses (2) did a great job listening and participating. It was so fun! Then Ian and I studied together while Moses napped, and that was also awesome. Absolutely loving this new pattern for Sundays.

Our daughter Shawni and her family had this terrific idea. Instead of sitting in the living room to learn, they headed out to visit the earth:

For part of our post-church-family-meeting we took a walk around the neighborhood to check the different kinds of soil, my gardening tools in hand, Bo (their dog) was in Heaven running circles around us. We talked about the soft soil around our flowers as opposed to the harder soil around the neighborhood trees and as the girls dug to check on the softness at random places we talked about how we can soften our own hearts to make room for all the “seeds” we are given to sprout and grow. How can we make our hearts softer? How can we nurture the seeds? How can we let Christ in more?

We held a little focus group with parents who were implementing the idea of a Sunday weekly meeting in their homes. Here are some of their comments:

- *Our children did not want to be told what to think. Our best ways to engage was with questions.
- * We start with our meeting by sharing the positive and negative things that happened during the week
- * Food is important. Nothing is quite as enticing as warm muffins at the beginning of our gathering. The kids are so much happier to be there.
- * Instead of a totally structured group lesson, what worked for us was to have the kids study whatever they wanted for half an hour. Then we joined together to share and ask questions.
- *Our children loved hearing the same passages in different versions and translations of the Bible.
- *Our older children take turns preparing the lesson. Then they teach and ask questions of their younger siblings.
- *We bought a manual for each child and put their names on them.
- * Right away we realized that we had to tailor the lessons to our ADHA, emotionally charged young children. We had to keep their bodies moving with songs or exercise 60% of the time. Then we go with lesson the last five minutes.
- * We had to create games to keep their attention. Having them find key words or clues In the lesson worked well for us.
- *I learned that our teenagers had an amazing moral compass.
- * While the lesson is being taught, we have the younger kids draw the scripture of what we are talking about.
- * With lots of young children, we found that the best way to keep their attention was to project the lesson on the TV screen as well as using primary videos and church Bible videos of what we are studying.

* One of our best ways to keep our kids calm is to invite an older neighbor or even a less active or someone not of our faith to join our discussion. Anything to change the chemistry from the usual bickering and sibling rivalry.

* Often there are things in the lesson that are better taught by being out in nature instead of sitting around the living room.

* We like to relate our discussion to current events.

Empty Nesters and Grandparents

We held another fascinating meeting with Empty Nest parents and discovered some unique ways to extend the Sunday Meeting idea to their broader and more spread out families.

One family initiated an adult conference call with their children and their spouses which included one son-in-law who does not share our faith. At the end of the discussion, that son-in-law said that he had found the discussion very interesting and hoped that they could have these conversations regularly.

Another family discovered Marco Polo, which is an app that allows family members to stay in touch by recording short videos. At the touch of a button participants can record something at their leisure when they are doing something interesting or have a thought that they want to share with others.

The bottom line is that we, each in our own way, grow into the opportunity and responsibility of teaching values and principles in our homes. How we do it depends on our own unique family situations, and we grow into it in fits and starts—sometimes what we try works, and sometimes it doesn't, but we all learn and grow from the trying, and we gradually see the fulfillment of the challenge of *Home Centered*.

Chapter 22: Home Centered: Getting Inspiration from what other Parents have tried

Even when we know that answers for our own families must come to us individually and be based on our own unique situations and our own personal faith and revelation, we still often need the stimulation of other families and their ideas to prompt our own revelation and the development of our own approaches.

So this chapter is *not* about “how-tos” or prescriptive advice or one-size-fits-all answers. Rather, what is listed here should be thought of only as examples and ideas—not ideas that you should copy or try to implement just as they are—rather that you should think of as a stimulus to your own creativity, or as a trigger to *your* own personal revelation about *your* family. At the same time, there is no need to “rediscover the wheel,” so if you come to an idea or example that your own stewardship-discernment tells you would work for your marriage or your children, accept it as one form of personal revelation, and begin to think about how to implement it.

Please use a particularly personal form of *discernment* as you read these examples...and let your stewardship inspiration tell if they are right for your unique situation. When you come to an approach that you like and that your discernment verifies, delve deeply into it and tailor and alter it to fit your needs and your family.

Because there is not space to fully elaborate every idea listed, we have set up a web page that will allow you to go deeper into any of these ideas mentioned here, linking to articles, videos or podcasts that expand on them. Simply go to valuesparenting.com/topten and scroll down to the idea or parenting tip that you want to dig further into. References below to “the website” refer to this site.

Top Ten Concerns of Parents

The underlying objective of the “Home Centered” paradigm is to design and structure a Family that will endure. The family is the most basic institution of society, but to last, it needs the same three things that every enduring institution has, be it a school, a club, a country or a church—1. Some kind of a legal system, 2. Some kind of economy or way to share responsibility, and 3. Identity-giving traditions and rituals.

Be aware of building these three things as you seek family revelation and address this chapter’s 10 prime concerns in your own home.

For years we have asked parents about their greatest concerns and the most current results (in no particular order) are:

1. Entitlement (work ethic, motivation, initiative, gratitude, etc.)
2. Technology, (Screen time, Social Media, On-line Bullying, etc.)

3. Discipline (Family rules, respect, obedience)
4. Teaching Values (Self-Discipline and development of Character and Testimony)
5. Kids Identity and Resilience (Bouncing back from failures and disappointments)
6. Bad choices, particularly about sex and substance abuse (anticipating and preventing problems)
7. Family Communication (And Conflict Resolution and Sibling Rivalry.)
8. Extended family (three generation families, involvement of and relationship with Grandparents)
9. Commitment, Security and Family Traditions
10. Depression (and Anxiety, Mental Wellness and Suicide)

We have used this list to organize this chapter. Under each of the top ten concerns, we will try to state the principles parents need to teach and then present one or two sample ideas or examples of how some parents have tried to teach those principles. Each of these ideas is expanded and linked to videos, articles and podcasts at valuesparenting.com/wpt.

The “Church Supported” part of the formula comes in strongly here, as there are guides and manuals with ideas on each of these ten concerns. Think of the list below and the website that expands them as additional ideas and as examples that may prompt your own personal Family Revelation.

Concern 1: Entitlement

Emphasis: Initiative, work, responsibility, gratitude, consequences.

Principles:

- With material things, we often give our children more by giving them less
- Providing an in-home system of earning, saving, budgeting and giving money will foster initiative, responsibility and gratitude.

The Family Economy

Parents can set up a work and initiative-teaching family economy where kids earn money rather than get handouts. To work well, this kind of system must turn over certain responsibilities to each child, and provide a pegboard or chart or other way for kids to keep track of their daily tasks (not more than three or four). At the end of the week, instead of an “allowance” there is a “pay day” where kids receive an amount from the Family Bank that is directly proportionate with the number of their responsibilities that they remembered and completed. They then should take the ”buying responsibility” for the toys and gadgets and other things that they need; and should have the option of leaving part of their “earned money” in the family bank which pays interest.

Concern 2: Technology, Screen time, Social Media, On-line Bullying

Emphasis: Recognizing good and bad, time management, self- regulation.

Principles:

- In this electronic world, it is crucial for parents to counsel with their children about screen time, set limits, and to teach technology-discernment As a family, decisions should be made together concerning when and where screen time is appropriate so that children feel the importance of limits and buy in on self-imposed regulations.
- There should be no cyber secrecy within families. Parents should know all.

The Technology Contract

Families can set up a “Technology Contract” that is signed by parents and kids and that sets forth the principles and rules by which technology will be used in the home and allowed on devices. This contract can contain policies about when the household wifi is off and on, and about things like at what age a child can have a smart phone and guidelines about turning it in at night and what portion of the bill the child will pay.

Concern 3: Discipline

Emphasis: Importance of family rules, respect, obedience, security.

Principles:

- Children get a lot of security as well as protection from well-understood a family legal system where there are clear rules with clear consequences.
- Children who help their parents create a list of simple family rules along with self-designated and agreed-on consequences will be more likely to obey them. Parents can be more matter-of-fact and consistent with pre-set rules than with ad hoc “discipline.”

The “Family Laws” chart.

In a family council, perhaps over several sessions, and with lots of inputs from the children, a short list of family laws can be developed and listed with the consequences on a large chart. The more the kids are involved in deciding what the laws should be and what the consequence should be when each one is broken, the harder they will try to keep the laws and avoid the punishments. The simpler the laws are, and the fewer there are of them, the better. One family developed and discussed and agreed on five one-word laws, each with a simple consequence “Peace” “Respect” “Order” “Asking” and “Obedience.”

Concern 4: Teaching Values

Emphasis: Self-Discipline and development of Integrity, Character and Testimony.

Principles:

- Children do not learn values by osmosis; they need to be taught—one value at a time.

- Parents who concentrate on one value at a time will have better success than those who try to teach multiple values at the same time.

The value of the month program.

Most parents know that the best protection and the best legacy they can give their children is to teach them good values. Just *how* to do it is the problem.

A few years back we were privileged to write a book called Teaching Your Children Values which was published by Simon and Schuster. Oprah loved the book, and along with Donahue, The Today Show, CBS This Morning, and Prime Time Live, she catapulted the book to #1 on the New York Times Bestseller list—the first parenting book in 50 years to top the list!

The thing Oprah liked, and the thing readers continue to like, is the simple format. It outlines 12 universal values that all parents want to teach their children and gives methods stories, and activities to teach it. But perhaps the most important thing it does is to suggest that families focus on one of the values each month. It's this focus that makes each value effective!

The key is to focus on one value each month. For a list of the values we suggest and for ideas on how to implement this year long program go to the webpage.

Concern 5: Kids' Identity and Resilience

Emphasis: Family Narrative, Traditions, Rituals, Family and Personal Vision Statements.

Principles:

- The more information children know about the lives of their grandparents and great grandparents as well as their own parents, the more resilient they will be and the greater sense of identity they will feel.
- Parents can translate “Ancestor stories” into kids’ language and they will become favorite bed-time stories. Stories from their parents’ own childhood are more important than we can know.

The Ancestor Story Book

This is a way of giving your children identity and resilience by teaching them more about the lives and stories of their grandparents and great-grandparents. Studies show that the more kids know about their ancestors, their genetics, their heritage, the more secure they feel and the more immune they are to peer pressure. Write down the stories you know, in age-appropriate language for your kids—put the stories in an “Ancestor Book” and let your kids illustrate the stories. These will become your children’s favorite bedtime stories!

Family Traditions and Rituals

Most families already have family traditions, but we can enshrine them more, put them on posters or calendars, and remember and anticipate them more. We can also re-evaluate our family rituals and modify them so that they teach values and reflect what we want our families to be. *For example, we used to have a tradition on Thanksgiving of eating way too much and*

watching football all day. We met with the kids early one Thanksgiving morning and developed a new tradition that involved long paper rolls on which we made a long, numbered list of everything we could think of that we were grateful for—while we were waiting for the turkey to cook. We got up to 500 that first year, and we try to ‘break our record’ every Thanksgiving.

Concern 6: Bad Choices, particularly about sex and substance abuse

Emphasis: Early intervention with “The Big Talk”, age appropriate explanations of gender issues, and helping children make decisions in advance on this and other issues.

Principles:

- Recreational sexual experimentation happens at younger and younger ages, and, coupled with growing exposure and addictions to pornography, makes this many children and youth’s most dangerous source of confusion.
- Parents in the Church and out do a better job of talking about drugs and violence and drinking than they do about sex; but each of these areas needs attention.

Decisions in Advance

So many families have gone through much worry and grief because of a single bad decision that one of their children made. Kids get blindsided by peer pressure that they had not anticipated or prepared for. The best way to prevent this from happening is to work with young children (from about age 8 to 14) on making their own list of “Decisions in Advance.”

Set up a special page in their journal with that title at the top and ask the child what kind of decisions he can make right now, even though she has not faced them yet. Kids will come up with things like “I will never smoke” or “I will graduate from college” or “I won’t ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.” Before letting the child write down any advance decision, do some role-playing where you imagine a situation a few years down the road where there is a lot of peer pressure regarding that choice. Ask the child exactly what he would say or do in that situation. When she has really thought it through, she can write it down and date it and sign it on her list of decisions in advance.

Having the “Big Talk” about Sex—preferably at the “age of accountability.”

When conducted in a positive and Gospel-centered way, open discussions about sex, chastity, and fidelity can not only prevent early and dangerous sexual experimentation and recreation, but can also help kids develop the positive attitudes toward intimacy that will one day improve their marriages. A whole dialogue for this talk can be found online at <https://valuesparenting.com/vp/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-sex/>

Concern 7: Family Communication and Conflict Resolution/Sibling Rivalry

Emphasis: Family meetings and councils, Eternal Families, Forgiveness, Empathy.

Principles:

- Over commitment and social media have reduced family communication to all time lows.
- Emotional disagreements, power struggles and sibling rivalry not only make home life less pleasant, they often destroy long-term familial relationships.

The Repenting Bench

How do I stop the fighting and bickering? The best method we've found is a designated place where kids are sent to resolve their own arguments, discover what they each did wrong, and apologize. This can help to replace sibling rivalry with sibling friendship. We call it "The Repenting Bench," and you can find out more about it at the link mentioned above.

A Secret Code for Family Communication

All parents know how important communication and discipline are within their family, but few seem to manage the clear, calm effectiveness they desire. You might consider a simple "secret code," built around animal images that kids love, which corrects and reminds children of correct behavior without power struggles or arguments. Humpback Whales, for example, do not interrupt each other, and they sing pleasantly to one another—no yelling or anger. Crabs have an instinct to pull each other down so that if there are two crabs in a bucket, neither of them will ever get out. Unlike the crabs, we want to encourage and lift each other up, not pull someone down. Each animal represents, entertainingly and memorably, one of the key lessons we want to teach our children.

The full secret code includes 9 animal images, researched, tried and proven, and guaranteed to make the task of correcting kids behavior simpler, more effective, and much, much more pleasant. For the animal code images and specific instructions on how to use them go to the website mentioned above.

Concern 8: Extended family, three generation families involvement of and relationship with Grandparents

Emphasis: Three generation families, heritage, traditions and rituals, family identity.

Principles:

- There is greater opportunity as well as greater need today for parents and grandparents to team up in the raising of children.
- Parents have the stewardship for their children, but grandparents can be a valuable resource and support.

The Family Executive Management Meeting

You are the top management team of your family, and if you can add grandparents and other concerned family members to that team, it will be stronger and more efficient.

The Ancestor Book

Re-use this idea from Concern #5

Concern 9: Commitment, Security, and Family Traditions and Rituals

Emphasis: Eternal Frame of Reference, power of commitment.

Principles:

- Good marriage relationships almost always spawn better parenting, but the reverse is not as consistently true. Thus, the marriage relationship should generally be an even higher priority than parenting.
- Traditions are the glue that holds families together.

Family Traditions Calendar

(An expansion of the Traditions overview in concern 5) If we want our family culture to be stronger than the peer culture, the internet culture, the celebrity culture and all the other cultures that swirl around our kids, we need fun and compelling family traditions. Most families have traditions—the trick is to refine them and anticipate them and emphasize them more than ever before. One good way to do this is to make a **family traditions book or calendar** and let the children illustrate it.

Family Mission Statement

Companies often have vision statements or mission statements that employees have helped craft—stating the overall goal and purpose of the organization. It develops unity and ownership in the goals. Families can do the same. Start with listing the words that describe “how we want our family to be.”

We started with a list of the words that we hoped would one day describe our family, then we winnowed it down to a descriptive paragraph, and finally down to a three-word mantra that everyone felt good about and bought into. The words were “Broaden and Contribute” and a couple of years later our children gave it to us one Christmas as a beautifully framed calligraphy and gold leaf plaque that hangs in our family room to this day. It has brought us together and influenced each of us in our choices and our ambitions.

Concern 10: Depressions, Anxiety, Mental Wellness (suicide)

Emphasis: With God, “nothing is impossible.” Mental Illness is a sickness.

Principles:

- Parenting and Family responsibility can be the most joy-giving experience of life, but can also contain periods of severe stress and depression.
- Mental and spiritual help needs to be available via ministering and elastically but also via psychological counseling and therapy.

Five Facet Review

How do I nip my kids’ problems in the bud and recognize their gifts in time to cultivate them? Try having a “Five Facet Review” once a month where you sit down as a couple and go through the five aspects of each child. “How is Tommy doing physically? How is he doing mentally?”

Emotionally? Socially? and spiritually? Analyze and brainstorm together about each of the five. Take notes. Formulate some need-meeting goals for the month ahead. Make it fun, go out to a restaurant on a date and confine your agenda to your kids!

If you are a single parent, do it with a grandparent or someone else who knows recognize oncoming problems before they are too hard to solve, and can help you notice the gifts and aptitudes of your kids in time to cultivate and develop them.

One Parent, One Child “Dates”

The most important and consequential parenting is one-on-one, one parent with one child, and Mommy dates and Daddy dates are an awesome way to be sure this kind of individual attention happens regularly (and they’re also great fun!). The basic idea, of course, is to give a child your full attention and focus during a little outing that could range from a special evening together to picking him/her up from school to go to lunch together.

Chapter 23: Home Centered: Being Prompted by some best-practices of other Marriages Partners.

As with our parenting, we can all use good marriage ideas developed by others to spur and encourage the pursuit of Family Revelation about our own marriages. Even though each of our marriages are unique, with their own particular set of assets and challenges, sometimes the good examples of other marriages can prompt our own ideas.

Sometimes in our lectures, we ask a provocative opening question to our audience: Which do you think you work harder on and put the most mental effort into, your parenting or your “marriaging.” In our sample at least, among Church members, about 80% say that they work harder at parenting than at marriaging.

Next we ask them if they think that is a problem, and most say that it is.

“Marriaging.” We may need this new word to remind us that we should approach marriaging as a skill to be learned, just as we do parenting. Marriaging is a verb and it can be approached proactively and as a skill to be learned and a gift to be given.

It’s a little like the announcement that the flight attendant makes every time you get on a plane. If your oxygen mask drops, put it on yourself first and be sure you are OK enough to help your children. Those who take care of their marriaging first find that their parenting improves right along with their first priority relationship and covenant.

We are huge admirers of single parents, and think they are the true heroes of our society. But if you are fortunate to be currently married, that is the relationship that deserves your first and highest priority.

Top Ten Marriage Ideas

The top ten marriage ideas listed here won’t work for every marriage, but the ones we have included are those that seem to work in the largest percentage of marriage relationships. Again, you should use these to trigger your own personal revelation for your own marriage. Pay attention only to the ideas that “ring true” to your spirit and your stewardship and your discernment. Again, these can be expanded by linking to podcasts and articles we have set up as expansions to this book. Simply go to valuesparenting.com/topten and scroll down to the particular idea that you want to dig deeper into and follow the links given.

And remember one critical thing, Better marriages almost always lead to better parenting, while the reverse is not necessarily true. So if you are debating where to start, start with marriage!

Every marriage is different, but there are certain principles, and methods that always have a positive effect. Here are 10 practical ideas that can make a difference and that can be ordered and prioritized according to specific and individual needs.

No. 1: Develop constant, open communication about the five things that are the most common causes of divorce

This first one puts a new twist on the five most common reasons people give for splitting up or divorcing. The thought is that if these are the five topics that cause divorce, then total, open communication about each of them may be the five best ways to protect and improve a marriage. The five are Finances, Sex, Parenting differences, Goals, and Beliefs. How completely to you communicate about each of these and do you know everything there is to know about each other on each of the five? Follow the links below for some suggestions about how to maximize your togetherness on these critical relationship subjects

No. 2: Relish rather than Resent your Differences

What is a couple to do if they love each other but are very different from each other and frequently find that they are bothered by things the other person does? First of all change your definition of a good marriage from “Two people who always agree and think alike” to “Two strong, independent people who have chosen to be interdependent but who remain who they are and each bring their unique strengths and views into a synergistic relationship.”

No. 3: Work Harder at Changing Yourself than at Changing your Spouse; and Work Harder at Making Your Spouse Happy than at Making Yourself Happy; and Work Even Harder at “Marriaging” than at Parenting

You may have gone into marriage thinking that you would be able to change your spouse into the person you wanted—into the person who will fulfill all your needs. Stop thinking that and *work hardest on changing yourself.*

Consider this question: Whose happiness do you think you have more control over, your spouse's or your own? *Work hardest on his or her happiness, and in that process you will make yourself happier.*

No. 4: Learn and Practice the Three Best Methods of Marital Conflict Resolution

Instead of worrying about disagreeing, worry about resolving differences positively. And instead of worrying if your children see you disagreeing (hopefully not violently or angrily), just be sure they also see you resolving things and making up.

There are three methods of marital conflict resolution that seem to always have a positive effect.

1. Rogerian Technique: Have a rule that you have to paraphrase back whatever your spouse has said to his or her satisfaction before you can make your own next point. This will force you to really listen to and understand each other.
2. “Go to the Balcony”. If an argument starts exciting, call a time out and each of you take a little walk—go “to the balcony”—or go change clothes or do something else for 10 or 15 minutes to re-set and get a bigger perspective, and then reconvene when you are both calmer and more collected.
3. Have a “Sunday Session” together each week where you review the past week, plan the next week, and “clear the air” on any bad feelings or unresolved differences from the past week.

No. 5: Discover, and Promise, and Implement TOTAL COMMITMENT

Real, full-on, no-caveat, nothing-held-back marriage commitment brings with it life’s greatest security and well-being. Complete commitment can actually become a kind of magic. It is the magic of synergy--of a combination where the total is greater than the sum of its parts; where one plus one can equal more than two. Much more.

Cohabitation or marriages that start with some kind of conditional commitment—the “let’s-see-how-it-works-out variety—are fragile and undependable and far more likely to break up when the going gets tough. Instead of saying “Let’s see if we can get through some tough times and then make a full commitment” we should be saying (and understanding) that “it is the total commitment that will get us through the tough times!”

In the Church, our commitments in marriage should be not only stronger, but more lasting. “For time and all eternity” is a far more committal promise than “Till death do us part.”

No. 6: Implement The 5 Cs of Great Marriage: Commitment, Compatibility, Courtship, Chastity, and Celebration

In our four decades of working with families and observing all kinds of marriage situations, we have become convinced that there are five elements that maximize the chances for a marriage to be nourishing, loving, enduring and — yes — endlessly romantic.

If it were put into an equation, it would look like this: C+C+C+C+C=MM (Maximized Marriage.)

What we like about each of these five qualities is that they can all be worked on and progressively strengthened and improved. They also provide a good check list or an evaluation framework for your marriage. Ask yourself the five questions: How am I doing on C and how could I do better? It’s a question that can be asked about each of the Cs over and over, because there is no ceiling, no limit!

No. 7: Willingly Trade your Independence for Interdependence

We live in a world where independence is the perceived goal of almost everyone, and the hoped-for outcome of everything we do. But there is something better—much better!

And it is INTERDEPENDENCE!

In an interdependent marriage or relationship, two people essentially trade their independence for something better. They learn that, through total commitment and genuine love, a certain synergy can develop where the total is greater than the sum of its parts. Within the confidence and security of their marriage, they each drop their facades and egos and allow a vulnerability and accept each other's help. They compensate for each other's weaknesses and complement each other's strengths and create a new entity of oneness without losing their separate individuality. They develop a wonderful, almost magical interdependence that combines synergy, symbiosis, and synchronicity.

No 8. Make your marriage the joining of Two Families

Whether we like it or not, marriage is not just between two people, it is between two families—and the more that fact is honored and embraced, the better!

We have friends who began to refer to their in-laws as “in-loves” and we liked the idea so much we copied it.

If we are parents, we should think of the marriage of a son or daughter as the gaining of an additional son or daughter. And we should think of the family of that new son or daughter as a merger with our family and make every effort to make them even more than friends. Visits, calls, and every other kind of communication should be proactively pursued so we get to know them and love them. And if you are the one getting married, or even if that marriage happened a long time ago, make a point of prioritizing your spouse's family and thinking of them as YOUR family. Anything less will be cheating yourself as well as them.

No. 9: Make your Marriage a Three-Way-Partnership

To have an eternal marriage, we need an Eternal Managing Partner. When a married couple begins to see a spiritual dimension to their union, it can make a two-way partnership into a three-way partnership and can bring a kind of holiness and perspective into the marriage that lifts it above the daily struggles and deepens the love and commitment.

A large majority of Americans believe in some form of higher power and engage in some kind of prayer. It is only natural to want help from this higher source on the most important relationship of our lives. And approaching marriage spiritually gives it a dimension and a level of commitment that improves its chances of lasting and flourishing.

Getting away together as a couple to communicate and plan and enjoy each other without the kids or cares or distractions of the world can have a powerful strengthening effect, but there is another kind of getting away with a third partner, and it is called prayer. When a couple recognizes not only their interdependence with each other but also their dependence on the Divine, something wonderful happens to a marriage--a new perspective comes, and a kind of help that only the Spirit can bring.

If we think of a husband and a wife as the two lower corners of a triangle, and God as the top point, then the closer we each draw ourselves toward the top, the closer we will find ourselves to each other.

No. 10: BELIEVE in the micro and the macro of Marriage and be a Marriage Advocate

There are plenty of discouraging statistics out there about the decline of marriage and worrisome public opinion polls showing a shocking rise in the number of people who don't think marriage is any longer relevant.

And sometimes these kinds of statistics and polls can tend to make us lose hope for the future of the institution of marriage and even discourage us a little about our own marriages and our ability to continue to strengthen them.

But there is another side to this coin. The fact is that the very best marriages in history are happening right now. Today's good marriages are VERY good marriages, representing more equal partnerships and the meeting of more physical, mental, social and emotional needs than marriages have ever met before. We each need to be advocates and proponents of marriage as the oldest and greatest institution on earth and as the ultimate safeguard of our society, our mores, and our civilization.

Chapter 24: Home Centered: Developing the spiritual skills to make your home the Spiritual Center

Virtually all personal development centers on the acquisition of skills.

We seek to learn skills from playing the piano to public speaking to crossword puzzles. We know that the development of a skill takes practice and lots of time. And it also takes powerful motivation and a lot of discipline.

Now raise your sights and your perspective to the higher and vaster level of spiritual skills. Extend your awareness to the alternative spiritual universe and to the timeframe of eternity.

Skills and Spiritual Skills

What are the spiritual skills we need for salvation and exaltation?

Think about the word “skill” for a moment. What comes to mind? Practice? Hard work? Making hard things seem easy? Determination?

Skill is an interesting word. It implies effort but it also suggests a certain grace and ease that only come to those who attain a certain level.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes at least 10,000 hours to master most musical or athletic or difficult technical or professional skills and gives us stories about everyone from Thomas Edison to the Beatles and how their skills were attained only after seemingly endless hours of practice.

“The gifted athlete made the game look easy.” We have all heard phrases like this, and it is true that someone with a rare gift or someone who has worked hard enough to master a skill that then turned into a gift can do incredibly hard musical or athletic or mental or social things—impossible to most—and make them look easy.

Spiritual skills are in some ways similar. They take time and they take effort to gain. Bruce and Marie Hafen in their book *Faith is not Blind* say...*the only way to develop those divine skills is by living His teachings. Even God can't teach us those (spiritual) skills unless we participate fully in the process, with all the trials and the errors that are inherent in learning a skill by practice.*

Going back to the question of hard or easy, most of us would say, physically and spiritually, that “Life is hard.” Yet Christ said that His yoke was easy and His burden was light. Could it be that we make our lives, and our parenting, and our marriages harder because we shoulder these burdens by ourselves and find that our own yoke and our own lives are heavy and hard. And could it be that when we turn fully to Christ, they can become lighter, and in some ways easier?

Perhaps the two most useful and powerful spiritual skills are Asking and Receiving. Neither should be taken lightly and it should never be assumed that they are easily available to anyone who wants to try.

Receiving personal revelation or family revelation is a spiritual skill—one that has to be deeply desired and deliberately and diligently worked at. Joseph Smith became so good at this spiritual skill that, to observers, it seemed easy for him. Sydney Rigdon, when witnessing revelation with Joseph, became so exhausted that he could not stand. Joseph who was physically unaffected, said simply “You are not as used to it as I am Sydney.”

As a spiritual skill is developed, it gets easier and more natural as well as more frequent.

These two spiritual skills of asking for and receiving are separate but can be developed together and play off of each other. The better we become at asking the more we will receive, and the better we become at receiving, the more we will know about how and what to ask for.

Each of the methods of seeking and receiving listed in the first section of this book can be thought of as a spiritual skill. We can develop the skill of meaningful scripture reading, of thoughtful temple attendance, of appreciating and being inspired by nature, and so on.

But we need to keep reminding ourselves that spiritual skills do not come quickly or easily. They demand effort and practice and patience. They also demand focus and attention—things that are pulled at from so many angles that, unless we deliberately apply them, are diffused and distracted and dissipated by the rush and demands of today’s living.

Most of us need specific times and places, set aside and held sacred, in which to hone our revelatory skills of asking and receiving. These may be our daily morning or evening prayers, or our regular scripture reading or temple attendance, or our meditation or walks in the mountains or the woods or seacoast. As with the disciplined acquisition of any skill, we will develop our own methods of practice and our own patterns of communicating with the spirit and receiving guidance and clarity.

While they are not the same thing, *Spiritual Gifts* and *Spiritual Skills* are closely related and can often be intertwined. A spiritual gift, like those listed in D&C 46, is something for which one has a natural propensity or spiritual aptitude for.

Spiritual Gifts

We are taught that we each have spiritual gifts, for healing or for faith or for discernment or simply for “believing the words of others.” These are spiritual propensities or aptitudes that we may have developed earlier in our eternities or that are simply bequeathed to us by a loving Heavenly Father.

But Spiritual Gifts can lie dormant, or even undiscovered. Our goal should be first to find and identify them, then to develop them into Spiritual Skills. And again, they can only be developed by practice and effort and trying and failing and persevering.

Does one have to have a particular Spiritual Gift in order to develop the corresponding Spiritual Skill? Probably not, because scripture teaches us to seek the best spiritual gifts, to obtain them—presumably through the development of their Spiritual Skill. In fact, we are admonished to “covet the best gifts.”

Without question, among the “best gifts” are the spiritual gifts or skills of asking and receiving personal and family revelation.

When you focus on and receive personal revelation for your family, you are working on the smallest, most intimate and personal thing on earth; and also on the biggest and most important thing in the universe and in eternity. “Marriage,” Parenting, and Family Relationship Building are the Three Celestial skills that are associated most closely with the fourth Celestial skill of Receiving Family Revelation.

The fourth skill is the one that can be applied to the other three skills and align them with God’s will and God’s guidance.

Whatever role or roles you play in the family you belong to—parent, child, sibling, aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, niece, nephew, spouse grandchild—all matter and all can be guided by Family Revelation.

The better you get at each or any of these family roles, and the more adept you get at drawing down inspiration and revelation for that role, the easier and more natural it will be to also receive Family Revelation for other family roles as they come to you either here on earth or in the Spirit World to come. And you will have the opportunity for all family roles either in time or beyond time.

In simple terms then, Family Revelation and the spiritual skills and gifts needed to seek and receive it are what lights the path leading to our individual salvation and to our family exaltation.

Chapter 25: The Knowledge of God's Goals as a Template for Our Goals

There is, of course, a powerful connection between the Spiritual Skills discussed in the last chapter and the Spiritual Goals that will be discussed here. The connection is that the latter becomes the strongest and most lasting motivation for the development of the former.

The hard work required to develop a skill is undertaken (and maintained) because of the desire to reach the goal that the skill will enable us to attain.

The goal of our Heavenly Parents—our immortality and eternal life and eternal lives—for us to return and live with them as families within their family, becomes our motivation for our own goals of committed, lasting marriages and responsible, righteous children within unified and loving families; and in turn these goals, coupled with our own humble sense of limitation and inadequacy, become our motivation to develop the spiritual skills and gifts that will bring to us the Family Revelation necessary to overcome the obstacles and progress toward our goals and God's goals.

Motivation

The ultimate motivation for developing spiritual skills is the eternal objective of Salvation and Exaltation. Or, said another way, perhaps the greatest reason we can find for seeking and receiving *Personal Revelation* is that it can lead us to Salvation; and the prime driver of *Family Revelation* is the doctrinal knowledge that Exaltation is possible only with our families, and that the very government of God and the structure of His Kingdom is based on a Familial Order.

During the early part of my professional life, I (Richard) made my living by helping clients set goals. Whether it was a company or a humanitarian group or a political candidate, my job was to write them a plan or a strategy, and those plans always began with the clearest possible statement of their short and long term goals.

One thing I learned over and over in that process is that it is impossible to set motivating, fulfilling short-range goals until one is clear and committed on the longer range goals that they must lead toward. Good short-term goals should feed into and move one closer to the fulfillment of long term goals. Once they do, it is possible to do the detailed planning or create the strategy to progress through the short goals toward the long goals.

A simple way to say all that is that if we don't know the destination we will never find the right path.

It is a powerful goal-setting advantage to know the longest term goals, and they are not ours but God's. Through scriptures and the holy books of many faiths, we know something of God's

goal and plan for their children. If we tried to reduce that goal to one word, that word might be “Exaltation” which incorporates a Return to Them in their Highest Heaven with our own families to become part of Their family and of Their eternal government and order.

God’s Goal and Our Goals

God’s goal of exaltation is not just a distant goal of eternity, it has an immediate part or phase here in mortality and is always bound to our happiness.

A shorthand way of saying it is that Family Exaltation is the END, and for a Christian, Christ and His Gospel and Atonement are the MEANS. For members of other faiths, or for general believers, the MEANS is similar in that it involves becoming all we can be with God’s help.

So the question comes: As we come to know God’s goal and plan, how do we formulate our own family goals and plans in a way that fully utilize the Means He has provided, that draw strength from the scaffolding of His influence and that fit snugly into His Grand Eternal End of The Immortality and Eternal Lives of Man? This is where Family Revelation comes in, and it comes more readily to those who have struggled to make their personal goals fit within the framework of God’s goals.

Goals of any kind are more developed and refined, and more committed to when they are written. Family goals are no exception. Sometimes writing down our goals expands them, and sometimes it filters and reduces them down to their essence.

One couple wrote this goal: *Create a marriage and family that lasts forever. Raise children who love Christ and think for themselves and seek their individual foreordinations. Work ourselves out of a job as our children grow up and spin out of our orbit and into their own independent but still connected lives. And then enjoy the grandkids!*

A single sister might write: *Be my nephews and nieces favorite aunt, with a personal relationship with each of them. Know their personalities and know their needs. Be an attentive, caring daughter to my mother and mold my character and nature into that of the wife and mother I will one day be. (And in the meantime, focus on the kinds of spiritual progression I may not have time for later.)*

A single dad might write: *Build a strong, identity-giving family for my three kids, complete with family laws, family traditions, and family responsibilities. Implement my priorities by planning family time and individual time with each child before I plan my work schedule each week.*

A grandparent might write: *Strive to see myself first and foremost as a child of my Heavenly Parents and a parent and grandparent of my posterity. Make these my chief identity. Build a family kingdom that will one day be worthy to be part of God’s kingdom.*

You are encouraged to prayerfully draft some goals and directions for your own particular family situation, and to strive to make those goals dovetail with the Exaltation goals of our Heavenly Parents.

We say “draft” because its good just to get started, even if our first draft is not very complete or satisfactory. You can change it, add to it, re-work it, and as you do, it will gradually become something that both guides you and motivates you in your search for Family Revelation.

Chapter 26: The Blessing and Back-Up of Faith and Values

In our earlier book *The Turning*, we charted how quickly families are changing, we have arrived at “tipping points” where majorities become minorities.

1. More U. S. Adults are now single than married.
2. More U. S. children now born out of wedlock than in.
3. More U. S. Marriages now end in divorce than stay together.
4. In many major world cities, there are households which are occupied by one single individual than households inhabited by some kind of family.
5. There are more Asian women between 20 and 40 who say they do not want children than who say they do.
6. Among couples that move in together, far more choose cohabitation than marriage.
7. More than half of Hispanic children in the U. S. are raised in fatherless homes. (Among African American Families the figure is 70%)

And we looked at the functions that family performs within society and asked whether any other institution could perform these essential functions:

1. The role of *procreation* and reproduction (replenishing the population).
2. The role of *roles*. (Boys need a role model for becoming a man, and girls need a role model for becoming a woman)
3. The role of *nurturing* (facilitating children’s emotional growth and helping them develop into responsible adults).
4. The role of providing a lasting *identity* (something permanent in our lives as everything else changes --jobs, locations, etc.)
5. The role of instilling *values* (other institutions may help, but the buck stops with the family wherein values are applied as well as taught)
6. The role of offering joy and *fulfillment* to individuals (at a level beyond what is obtainable elsewhere. Children should receive unconditional love within families, and parents are refined and completed as persons through the selfless love they give to their children.)

Two things are absolutely clear. First: Society cannot survive, let alone prosper without these six functions. Second: No entity other than family can perform them adequately. Familius, 2017

Our last book with McGraw Hill was *The Entitlement Trap*, which explores this I-deserve-everything attitude that robs kids of their motivation, their incentive, and their gratitude. And of course, most of this entitlement comes via the attitudes of their parents.

Our feeling is that most parents and marriage partners do not want to follow the world—they know that their families should be stronger and more prioritized, but absent a strong and visible and comprehensive family prioritizing and training campaign from the faith and their values they are being sucked along into the trends of the world and often lack any model of how prioritized a family should be.

We need more help and we need more personal effort to spot the counterfeit trends and the false ideas about happiness coming from materialism and freedom from responsibility and we need more reinforcement and reassurance that the real happiness source is devotion to our faith and our families.

As mentioned, we often tell our audience at secular speeches that, no matter how good they become at parenting methods and techniques, they will find it hard if not impossible to succeed without some kind of a back-up or support mechanism. They need to become part of a faith culture or other group that underscores and reinforces the values they are trying to teach their children.

Question Three Conclusions

“Home Centered” sounds pretty simple and straight forward. But there are many requirements and ramifications if it is to really work for our families. First, we need to understand how and be committed to the Home Center of our family; and devote ourselves to setting up our homes, and the regular practices within them, as values-centered and faith-supported Institutions, and view them as “envelopes within envelopes” parts of God’s own Eternal family.

Then we need to open ourselves to the full range of the support of our faith or of the community organizations or neighborhood groups that we choose to be a part of—looking for support, and for others who share our beliefs and our values, and understanding that it takes a community to raise a child, and that you can structure who the community will be for your family.

Questions for Further Reflection:

1. What motivates us to seek Personal Family Revelation? Do we need our own belief and understanding of what Salvation and Exaltation is to motivate us to do the hard work of seeking this guidance?
2. Do you like thinking of Family Revelation as a spiritual skill? Do you think it is a skill that can be developed? Can it even become a Spiritual Gift?
3. Does the Salvation vs. Exaltation discussion ring true and seem relevant?
4. How do you respond to the “Goals and Plans framework? Are Spiritual goals a relevant possibility? Can spiritual things be separated into “means” and “ends?”
5. Is there value in looking at lists of “most common parental concerns” to see how our own match up and to take some comfort in that so many others are facing the same issues we are?
6. Are the things discussed here relevant to you no matter what kind of family you presently have—and to the present family roles into which you now fit.
7. Do all of the ideas listed discourage you or do they get you excited about rejuvenating their marriages and overcoming some of the bad habits they may have fallen into?

8. Were you able to read them not as instructions or prescriptions but rather as “prompts” for personal, individual, stewardship requests for and receipts of family revelation?

Question Four:

How Can I Help My Children to
Receive Their Own Personal Guidance
and Gain and Retain Their Own Beliefs?

Planting a Well of Water in the Fleshy Tables of our Children's Hearts

We have one friend who is a particularly good example of the importance of having genuine spiritual experience early in life. He is a highly intellectual guy who is constantly around people who try consciously and unconsciously to undermine his faith. He sometimes has concerns about the way some of the leaders within his faith community operate, but he never questions faith itself. When we asked him about this, he told us of an experience he had as an 18 year old—an experience that involved a two day fast and a very deep and memorable spiritual confirmation of the reality of God. The power of that one experience, he says, has sustained him all of his life through all of the challenges and concerns he has had.

So the two questions that make up the title of this chapter are actually the same question...because it is their individual spiritual experiences that kids will fall back on when their beliefs and values are tested. It is their incidents of personal revelation on which the surest and most unshakable parts of their testimonies will be built.

Any parent who has experienced answers to prayers wants those same blessings for each member of his family. We desperately want to give those things to our children—we long for and yearn for “our children to partake;” yet we know that faith and conviction are God’s gifts to give, not ours.

Even though we cannot give the gifts, we can pray mightily that God will give them we can give other gifts that may make our children more prepared and likely both to seek and to receive God’s gifts. We can also strive to be the example that makes them want the gifts.

Jeffery Holland said it well, *Brothers and Sisters, our children take their flight into the future with our thrust and with our aim. And even as we anxiously watch that arrow in flight and know all the evils that can deflect its course after it has left our hand, nevertheless we take courage in remembering that the most important mortal factor in determining that arrow’s destination will be the stability, strength, and unwavering certainty of the holder of the bow...*

God will send aid to no one more readily than He will send it to a child—and to the parent of a child.—Jeffrey R. Holland, A Prayer for the Children, Ensign May 2003

(Saydi) I love this quote by Jeffery Holland, but it would be easy to misinterpret it to mean that if we fail or have doubts, if we have periods where we don’t get it all exactly right, than our children’s arrows won’t hold straight and true. As parents - who are also human - we are bound to waver. But as we persevere, as we get up and try again, the stability, resilience, faith and endurance that our children witness may teach them the most powerful lessons and keep their arrows flying even through the toughest of times.

Our children, especially during adolescence, will value and learn more from our example of genuine, honest, wholehearted imperfect living of the gospel than they would watching us fake perfection.

What Can we Do?

This section shares some of the things that we as parents can try to do to facilitate the development of our children’s desire and capacity to receive revelation and guidance for themselves. Most of them are simply examples of what other parents have tried and some will be

more relevant to you than others. They are not a prescriptive check list of things you should do or of things you should feel guilty about if you have not done. They are just things we all try to do, as we are able and as opportunities arise, to set the stage for our children to develop their own testimonies, learn to seek and recognize the spirit, and receive their own revelation.

If you are just starting out on your parenting journey, use your own power of revelatory discernment to know which of the approaches may work for you—or to use these examples of what others have done to prompt your own guidance as to what to try with your own children.

And if you are further along in your parenting, part way down the road in raising your children, remember that you are in the guilt free zone discussed in the Introduction. Don't waste any time thinking about what you might have done or should have done or wished you'd done. Start where you are now.

And remember, you don't have to be an expert, and you certainly don't have to be perfect. Just do what you can, knowing you will continue to make earthly-parent mistakes, but knowing also that God will fill in the gaps as you ask and seek and keep the door open. Just put in what you have, even if it is just one small fish and loaf, because God, in His abundance, can multiply your small offering and your insufficient efforts into qualities and quantities that will change both you and your children for the better.

As always, start with prayer. Pray individually for your children, pray as a couple for your children if you are married. Pray together as a family and in your family councils, and seek, every time, God's will for His children who you are raising and guiding.

The first thing to pray for is to know your child better. Ask the one who knows him best to shed light to you on who he is, what his gifts are, what his challenges are, what motivates him and what doesn't, how he learns, what he needs most, how he thinks and how he feels the spirit. Never stop trying (or praying) to know your child better and to understand more fully what he or she uniquely needs. There are clear answers to those questions. Ask for them, and move forward doing the best you can while you wait.

We can try to Show our children how faith is working in our life

(Saydi) Two years ago my husband Jeff and I took our four children (ages 6-13) from our Boston home to Northern California to live on a farm for a year. This was a huge departure from our urban life. Our only experience with farming was a tiny urban garden and living vicariously through the Little House books. It was a steep learning curve, and a wild adventure which looks more and more magical the further we get from it!

While on the farm we had a barn full of tools (heavy duty rototiller, ATV, wood chipper, riding lawn mower, log splitter, post driver etc) that we initially didn't know what to do with, all of which looked as if they were well used at one point. During our year on the farm we learned how to utilize most of them (thanks to YouTube), but a few tools, though very impressive and helpful looking, stayed put in their place gathering rust. We were unable to find any instructions about

how to make them relevant to the work we were doing. Eventually, in a big barn purge, they got thrown out with the trash.

Just like these tools, gospel truths are prone to be discarded if we can't find their relevance in our lives. As children grow up and life gets complicated, they need to know how to wield faith tools in ways that are relevant to them, ways that will enrich their lives and bring them peace, understanding, and happiness. The danger as parents is that tools that seem irrelevant go unused and unused tools get thrown out.

The best way for kids to grasp the relevance of the gospel is to watch it in action. Our kids have a front row seat to our attempts at figuring out things like love, forgiveness and using the Spirit to guide us in putting them to work in our lives. This can be a daunting thought: our children are right there, front and center, all the time, they see us at our best and at our worst. And as uncomfortable as this feels sometimes, it's important that we show them how the faith works in a *real* life, not a glossed over fake one. They need to observe us messing up and repenting and working to get better.

They need to see how moving through life with faith is sometimes a little scary, that hope can be slippery and hard to grasp and watch as we apply God's power to endure. Watching us we hope they'll learn that it's not about perfection as much as it is about showing up, enduring, trying again and again, and ultimately relying on grace.

The front row seat of the home is the perfect setting for children to not only watch as we use prayer and other faith tools, but to grasp and experiment with the spiritual relevance in their own lives in order to develop their own belief. With the inspired program towards "home centered" learning we have been given great resources (and more time) to open up important conversations and facilitate critical, hands-on gospel learning.

The greatest tool for helping our children find their own faith and belief is our example as parents. But no parent or family configuration is perfect. A spouse may not be living the his or her faith exactly as prescribed. *As a child I (Linda) used to worry so much about my dad who didn't always attend church. I was so worried about him not making it to heaven! But as I look back on his life of perfectly non-judgmental life of love, wisdom and caring I, I realize I'm the one who may be good enough to be with him in the afterlife! The crucial component of this section is to discover hands-on tools that we can use to spark your own ideas of how to help your children explore, find, struggle with and retain their own testimonies.*

It is individual spiritual experiences with the spirit and with discovering truth on their own that that kids will fall back on when their beliefs and convictions are tested. It is their incidents of personal revelation on which the surest and most unshakable parts of their testimonies will be built.

(Saydi) Being imperfect and genuine is more important to our kids in the development of their testimonies than making them think we have it all perfect and under control. This concept could have a whole section:

- shame comes when kids feel like they should be perfect and just can't get it right. It's good and important to model how we use grace in our lives so that they can learn to use

grace. If we portray perfection our imperfect kids will forever wonder what is wrong with them. Instead we need to be vulnerable and real and help them see what it looks like to work out our salvation.

- working through doubt openly and helping kids learn how to deal with grey. Things should be presented in mostly black and white when children are very young, but as they get older it's important that they learn how to really grapple with the grey areas of life.

When I was young and the world was black and white. I thought maybe there was one windy, narrow pre-destined path for me to follow. As I've experienced life I've realized that God is not black and white but multi colored and full of dimension and I think they hope that we will be too. To me it seems that God's plan is that we live in a messy space, a fallen world where we can get it right sometimes but also get it wrong a lot. It is when we get it wrong that we learn. They want us to be out there, in the arena, vulnerable, daring greatly, our faces marred with dust and sweat. It seems that God wants us to live, experiment, grow, learn and He wants us to help our children do the same. Under this paradigm there is no one path, deeply rutted through our destiny that we have to blindly, with a little help from revelation, figure out. We are charting our path, we are really choosing, not just taking a test.

We can Remind Ourselves that “God is Not a Vending Machine.”

As we grapple with how to help our children gain burning lifelong testimonies perhaps the biggest thing to remember is that God, as our friend Sam Brown says, “is not a vending machine.” It's so true isn't it? We can put our money in and hit B7 for twizzlers and we may just get a bag of peanuts.

- When you ask for a new baby with a gentle, loving spirit, you might get one who comes out with a lusty cry, demanding that someone bring him a coke.
- If your request is for the Lord to reveal to your daughter that she should go on a mission, what you might get is your daughter's personal revelation that she needs to stay home and work with disabled children.
- If the button you push is for a picture-perfect child with a firm testimony (and you really think you deserve to get what you want after your tireless efforts with family scripture study, Family Home Evenings, Family Councils, fervent prayers and regular temple attendance)... what you may get is a difficult lesson in free agency when your child leaves the church.

(Saydi) If we want our kids to embrace the gospel, it's important that we help them to also realize that God is not a vending machine. It's easy to lose faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ if you believe that you just have to put in the money and you'll get the blessings you desire. If our kids witness us work and ask and then rely on God's infinite perspective and all-knowing plans then they are more likely to adopt the same understanding.

No, God is not a vending machine, but he is an omnipresent, all-seeing, all-loving, all-knowing being who can see far beyond what our earthly eyes can see, further than the Hubble spacecraft

that sends us astounding pictures of the beauty of the Heavens. He can see the even bigger picture of eternity.

The devious adversary knows exactly where our weak spots are and is constantly throwing temptations at us and dangling enticements before our children's and grandchildren's eyes, working within the freedom of our agency to destroy, distract and discourage. Because we live in a time when a dark force is covering the earth with clever lies and deceptions, it is ever more important for us be vigilant in trying to help our children build a faith and belief that is firm and immovable.

Getting what we want, (which in this case is kids with valiant convictions) requires more than a simply being obedient and dropping our requests into our prayers to God and expecting it to happen. It requires deep thought, hard work and revelations about what will work for our own children and sometimes, because of free agency, deep disappointments. When we don't get what we are begging and pleading for it's often because we can't see the big picture...yet.

The chapters in this section lay out many of the things we parents try to do (and the specific ideas of some individual parents who we admire) to create a fertile home field wherein our children's faith and belief in something higher than themselves can grow.

Chapter 27: We can Share How We Found Our Own Faith and Beliefs —and give our Children Chances to Share Theirs

Think back to when you first realized that you believed in a God. Did it just slowly dawn on you? Did you begin with the testimony of your parents and build on that? Are you a convert whose first faith came in a flash of inspiration or over years of study? Did you depart from the childhood faith to find your own way and then experience a revelation in your search for truth? Are you not sure you have a firm belief yet? Did your testimony of God and the Spirit come by way of a soft assurance, a warm feeling of peace or as a blinding moment of truth “or burning in the bosom that knocked you over? As discussed in Question 1, there are multitudes of ways that people feel the Spirit or receive answers that are all part of their faith and beliefs.

Why do we so seldom share your deepest spiritual feelings with our children? Do we sometimes think they are too young to understand? Do we assume that they know? Does it feel awkward to express our love for and belief in God? An expression of your own belief may be the seed that will help your children’s testimonies to grow organically as you express your discoveries and convictions with them. *As you do, be sure you tell them not only what you know but how you know!*

I (Linda) shared how I got my clear, undeniable testimony of Jesus Christ with our children when they were teens, and I wish I had shared it sooner. I may have shared it with others before I had shared it with some of my children and I regret that.

As a youth, I was very obedient little farm girl from Montpelier, Idaho. Every week I faithfully attended church and obediently went to church. Primary. But I was completely unaware of a deep or personal set of beliefs. It just felt like the right thing to do.

To be very honest, when I left for college, in my mind, the two most important things about my beliefs were that I shouldn’t drink or get involved in recreational or experimental sex, but my real faith in God came in an unusual place and an unusual way.

After my Freshman year at college, I was in a Christian pageant and in a scene about a vision in order for it to look like a vision from the audience, a sprinkling system was installed that sprayed fine mists of water all around and over our little group clustered on the hill. On opening night, I gathered with my fellow listeners on a hillside, dressed in period clothes with plastic bags under our clothing to keep semi-dry. It was there, while participating in that vision, that I had a vision of my own!

I saw a man dressed as Jesus, with brilliant spotlights focused on him from every angle, walking across the hillside repeating the magnificent words of the Sermon on the Mount.

Listening to those glorious words booming from fifty-foot-high speakers, my mind was exploding with light. Suddenly I realized that the essence of my faith was Jesus Christ! On that hill my eternal spirit was filled with the glorious revelation of the undeniable importance of the Savior in my life as I listened to the words which I had heard so many times but had never absorbed. Truth filled my soul and I was literally “born again.”

After our scene was over, still soaking wet, I remember hiding behind a bush and crying my eyes out. For a while it was tears about my love for Jesus. And then, another thought came: “Wait! Why didn’t someone tell me about this! Why didn’t they tell me what really matters Why hadn’t my Sunday School lessons been only about the Savior? Why didn’t somebody tell me about the deep joys of his teachings?” So I cried for a while about that too.

I’ll never forget walking into sacrament meeting on my first Sunday after I returned home feeling like a new person. And suddenly I realized that “they” had been trying to tell me, but the message had bounced off my heart like just another piece of church information” For the first time for me, that church service was really all about the Savior.

I didn’t know what to listen for

Looking back, I now realize that, of course, my wonderful parents and young women leaders and seminary teachers and hundreds of conference talks had repeatedly told me of the eminent importance of Jesus’s life and teachings, but somehow that testimony had not found its way into my heart.

I wanted, from that moment of realization, to be sure that my children knew the deepest and most personal facets of my faith and my personal belief in God and his goodness.

Giving our children chances to share (and grow) their Testimonies

Beliefs and faith grow in children, (and in all of us) when we began sharing our deepest beliefs to others whom we love.

Many years ago, when our first three children were young, a friend urged us to have “testimony meetings” in our home. We took that challenge to heart and every first Sunday of a month while the children were in our home, we filled that Sunday (the time that was sometimes occupied with tempers and disruption) with a family testimony meeting. If you were to ask any of our kids where their testimonies began, I’m pretty sure they would say it was there, in our living room. Sharing their beliefs or faith or times when they had felt something higher was not mandatory but unless someone was really mad, they usually offered up their feelings without complaint. Often what they shared was just their love for other family members.

As our children grew and became teenagers, we have to admit that some of our testimony meetings were a bit rocky but as time went on, the meetings became not only something they had to do but something they really wanted to do. What one of the kids said led to something that another had been thinking about and they would want to add their thoughts. We learned some fun things in our testimony meetings that we might otherwise have never known.

As our testimony meetings evolved, we told the kids that we wanted to hear about how they felt about life right then and what they may be worried about—or spiritual experiences they’d had.

They felt free to say anything they wanted, But we requested that they end their testimony with how they felt about Jesus. Some of their stories were tear jerkers and some were hilarious. What we learned about testimonies is that *kids don't know how they feel until they say it out loud*. Often after a lackluster start, the Spirit took over in our meetings and it was such a joy to hear from the youngest seedling of faith to full grown trees with branches as they got older. For us as their parents, it was a time of rejoicing.

(Saydi) I feel like my personal faith was born and grew up during these family testimony meetings. As a child I was blind to the anguish my parents probably experienced (and I'm experiencing now as a parent) as they tried to get us into this habit, as they squelched sibling squabbles and coerced pre-teens into engaging. All I remember is the thick spirit I felt as I heard my older siblings talk about their experiences coming to know Jesus and experimenting on His word. I remember the way it felt to hear my mom fill with emotion as she talked about her love for the Savior and how comforted I felt as I heard my dad talk of the love he had for my mom and for God. The fact that this is what I remember from our meetings growing up is what motivate me to press on in my own family, even when our efforts at conducting these family testimony meetings feel a lot less than perfect, a bit like casting pearls before swine.

If you are thinking of trying this but worry that it might be too hard to do with a non-member spouse or some children who are too obstinate or timid or teetering on their testimonies, start out not calling it a testimony meeting. As we have taught parents all around the world who had a wide variety of religions and beliefs about creating good communications skills with their children we have suggested having "Family Feelings Sessions" or "What do *you* think Sessions?" We asked them to choose a value that they thought was important for their family or one they were grappling with and then let each of the kids talk about what they thought about it. Children come up with amazing ideas as they express their feelings about important things like honesty, courage, trust, kindness and love. The spirit is found in those inspiring words and many families have been amazed at the increase of love and understanding that those meetings brought.

Encourage honesty and candor in your children's testimonies, and exemplify those things in your own. No one has to say "I know" in their testimonies if they are still growing and learning and trying to believe. "I believe" is just fine, or even "I'm learning to believe." Too much "I know" can be discouraging to children who are not sure that they do know yet. Instead, it is best to emphasize sharing honestly how you feel and what you hope, and who you love.

(Saydi) We've found it to be important that we help our kids understand the faith vernacular that we often use when talking about spiritual things. I had a friend who found her 13 year old daughter crying in her room one day. After digging deep she discovered that her daughter didn't feel like God was aware of her and that revelation wasn't working in her life. She had heard her mom and church leaders talk often about how "the spirit told me" the "God whispered to me," "I felt prompted that," "I knew with every fiber of my being that" and expressed dismay that she had not experienced these same things.

It's important that we help translate some of these commonly used phrases to our kids. That we help them to know what it is that people are referring to and help them identify how they feel things are true for themselves, and how they hear God's voice in their lives.

Along the same lines, it's critical that we let our kids know that it's ok and natural and right to believe instead of "know." In the church we project a lot of certainty about our testimonies and this can cause growing faith and thinking minds to feel shaky and lost and inadequate. I have a good friend who talks about how the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. A sincere testimony full of "I believes" is just as valid as a testimony full of "I knows."

Chapter 28: We Can Work to “Plant a Testimony on the Fleshy Tables of our Children’s Hearts”, and to Produce a “Well of Living Water”

How do we help our children to feel a living testimony of Jesus and his teaching in their hearts? Isn’t this our fondest hope and greatest desire as parents? That our kids let God write his law inside of their hearts. When the law is written *in* us everything flips and we are converted. Instead of being compelled or coerced into obedience by an outside force, we are propelled by our inner, most basic desires towards light, goodness and love. This is the kind of conversion that sticks with us.

Our son Noah and his wife Kristi, worried as they watched some of their friend’s children leave the church, became fixated on what they could do to help their children find testimonies that were firm and immovable. They discovered some treasures in their scripture reading which motivated their approach.

A phrase spoke to them from II Corinthians 3:3 where Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians writes: *“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”* What a beautiful metaphor. “Fleshy tables” seem to be a warm, absorbent, safe place to secure our deepest feelings for the Savior.

Noah writes:

A testimony of Christ does not come from words written in ink or stone. It cannot! It comes by the “Spirit of the living God” to the “fleshy tables of the heart.” How remarkable is this truth! And how important to understand! All the powerful, motivating, uplifting words in the world cannot, without the power of the Spirit, create a testimony of the Savior. Words can be, and often are, a catalyst, but the power of those words to create testimony only comes when the “Spirit of the living God” writes it on the “fleshy tables of [our hearts].”

The catalyst to enabling this testimony on the fleshy tables to grow is agency. A fleshy testimony is born and cultivated only through agency. Many experiences facilitate spiritual confirmation and the “swelling motions” of the Holy Spirit but it is our choice to seek truth and our choice to recognize that truth and to seek the Spirit teaching us that actually captures the truth and transforms it into a fleshy testimony. Agency is at the core of God’s plan of joy, the catalyst that unlocks all progress, all real growth.

These concepts change the way we think about helping our kids gain a testimony of the Jesus. Instead of trying to get our kids to gain a testimony by convincing them of truth with words, we try to find ways to help them understand how the Spirit communicates with them. We encourage them to seek, to explore and to pay attention to how they feel when truth rings. We ask them difficult questions like “how do you know the Savior is real?” and “why do you believe what you believe?” and “how do you know when the Spirit communicates with you.” When we remember that the scriptures and the words of the prophets and inspiring books are a means to an end, not

an end, we can put things in better perspective as parents. As kids choose to recognize the feelings of the Spirit being written on their heart as they work to get to know that Savior and explore life and the gospel they will find motivation to choose the right.

The even deeper explanation of the fleshy tables of our hearts is found in a hidden treasure that Noah and Kristi like to tell their children—the story of the woman at the well.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” John 4: 13-14

Hold it! It’s so easy to look at that first sentence of verse 14 and assume that is the message...that whosoever drinketh of the Christ’s water will not thirst. But perhaps the more important message is found in the rest of the sentence...“the water that I give him shall *be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*”

These two are about the business of building that never-ending *well of water* in the hearts of their children so that it is their water, from their own well, not borrowed from anyone else but generated from within. They have spent a lot of time talking to their children about “the well” and have included “build a well within us” in their family mantra or cheer, which they repeat every night after their family prayers. That “well” is not only beautiful imagery, it is a promise from God to us and our children—that He will not only give us water—he will give us a well of our own. We love this this imagery because a well does not require others to pour water in, it fills on its own from the earth. A connection to the Savior through the Holy Ghost enables us to seek and fill our own well with the power of the Spirit.

Other Favorite “Heart” and “Well” Scriptures

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:⁷And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates Deuteronomy 6: 6-9

"Frontlets" or "phylacteries" were strips of parchment, on which were written four passages of Scripture, worn by devout members of the Jewish faith. They were then rolled out of a case of black calfskin, which was attached to a stiffer piece of leather from around their neck that kept the scriptures constantly before their eyes.

Proverbs gives further instructions for binding the Lord to our hearts:

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck ; write them upon the table of thine heart. 3:3

Bind them continually upon thine heart and tie them about thy neck. (6:21)

Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. (7:3)

Chapter 29: We Can Try to Teach Our Children to Recognize and Understand the Higher Spirit

When we say “I want my kids to have a testimony and to receive personal revelation, what we are really saying is “I want my children to receive the Holy Spirit” in the Christian vernacular, or the power and influence of God or of a Higher Intelligence that they can access.

That is the ultimate parent’s prayer—that their children will receive and feel the God’s presence and be guided by that Spirit in big decisions and small choices. It is the prayer that essentially says,

The universal prayer of believing parents is, “Since I can’t be by their side at all times, please may they have Thy Spirit in their hearts.”

“Positioning” the Savior in our Children’s minds and hearts

The question that we have to keep focused on and keep answering is: Even if we feel that deep love for God in the fleshy table of our own hearts, how do we help our children to progressively absorb more and more of that kind of feeling in their own hearts? How do we help our children to see the Spirit in their lives almost as Frontlets before their eyes that reminds them of how much they love the God?

Probably the biggest factor in helping our children to be able to do this and to get answers to their questions is to teach them how to recognize the Holy Spirit or the Higher Power.

(Saydi) Our son Peter just got baptized into our church a few weeks ago. He is a spiritually sensitive little guy and, as the youngest of four, has been eager to follow his siblings and get going on the same path. It occurred to me that he was only eight, and was likely expecting a big miraculous change in his day to day experience with this new gift to guide him. I felt prompted to explain to him that just as a gift of a new complicated lego set, or fancy electronics, this gift of baptism and the Spirit would take time to learn how to use. That little by little, through trying lots of things in lots of situations he would understand how to unleash all the magnificent powers of this gift. Since his baptism I’ve been trying to check in with him, to ask him: “how has the Holy Spirit been working in your life?” “what does it feel like?” “how has it helped you?” I’ve been trying to remind him that the God can help him with all kinds of things, not just spiritual but temporal, and point out that when he plays the piano well, or does well on a test, or in a game, that is the gift of the Spirit working in his life.

Another mother found her 10-year-old daughter weeping in her bedroom. After digging into what happened her young daughter said that she had been reading the Bible and trying to feel if it was true, and was devastated because she didn’t get an answer. No burning feeling, no bright light. Nothing. She was worried that she was not worthy or not pure enough to receive an answer.

Knowing her daughter's tender spirit, the mom asked her if she felt good about the stories of faith and the things she had learned about the Savior as she read. When her daughter admitted that she had felt warm and peaceful as she read the stories and what she had learned, her mom explained that her answer had been coming all along. Her good feelings as she read was the Holy Spirit, helping her to know that it was true. She helped her to understand that sometimes answers come in little moments and not with a voice, or a bolt of lightning or a finger writing on the wall. She explained that sometimes it is just a calm feeling of peace.

Teaching by Asking

Don't hesitate to talk to your children about spiritual things, or to ask them spiritual questions. Their answers will sometimes surprise and amaze you. *We took our 17 year old granddaughter and 15 year old grandson to dinner recently and asked them if they thought there was a difference between inspiration and revelation. The 15 year old said he thought inspiration was "like an idea or a prompting or a warning that just comes to you all of a sudden." Revelation, on the other hand was "Something you have to work for and ask for."*

We asked them what their most spiritual experiences were. The 17-year-old told us of a testimony meeting at youth camp. She had not really wanted to go because she felt that she didn't have much in common with the other girls who were in very different places in life than she was. During that spirit filled testimony meeting she said that she suddenly "saw her friends as God sees them and felt so much love for them." She also confided that sometimes when her parents come into her room to talk about things she is worried about, she "feels the Spirit confirming that what they say is true." The 15-year-old said he felt the most spiritual when he was "out in nature all by myself."

Asking children questions about their feelings always produces amazing results. Including our own feelings can be a conversation starter in our family sessions at home. Asking question like the following can bring the spirit into the conversation very quickly.

- Everybody has a different way of feeling the spirit. How does the spirit feel to you?
- I felt a strong spirit that what the bishop told us today was true. How did you feel about it?
- How did you feel when we prayed for Grandma? Do you think God will answer our prayers in some way?
- Did you have any experiences with the spirit this week?
- I know you are worried about Betsy. How would you feel about having a prayer together about it?
- When we were praying today for Grandpa, were you mostly just hungry or did you feel something else?

One of the surest ways for a child to feel spirit is when you, as his parent bear your testimony about him/her and their divine spirit. One of our sons had some pretty significant learning disabilities. We knew that along with disabilities come special gifts, but we had never told him

that. I will never forget a day when our son was feeling deeply discouraged because he was struggling mightily to be able to read on grade level in the 4th grade. He was attending classes with the special ed teacher and just couldn't get it! He was so discouraged.

We, as his parent sat him down and told him that even though there were things that he couldn't do as well as other kids his age, there were other things that he could do much better! His brain just worked differently than others. We went into detail about the special gifts he had which included his incredible ability to see beauty in everything, and being of being able to understand the feelings of others with exceptional skills. We explained that he was a very special child of God who loved him and that lots of things in life were more important than being a good reader. Years later he told us that he felt the spirit that day and carried those words of encouragement with him for the rest of his life.

(Saydi) I've found it to be very important that our kids understand that the spirit isn't only manifest as a "burning in the bosom" or a "still small voice" or a nice warm feeling that we get when we're being still and quiet and reverent. It's important that they know that they don't have to cry or have their voice shake to feel the spirit. In Galatians Paul teaches that the fruits of the spirit are: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Just as we point out the quiet, spirit filled moments at church or during family gospel study, we need to recognize the spirit that they feel when they are having a joyful (maybe even loud raucous) time with their family, when they feel at peace after doing something right, when they feel love for or from someone, when they exercise patience, or exhibit gentleness. It's important that we don't limit the range of the spirit in their lives. Help them recognize it in music and nature and loving relationships and happiness and challenge.

It is never too early to try to help children recognize the Spirit. *Many years ago, we sought Family Revelation about how to do this, and it led to an example of how basic and simple inspiration can be. After our prayer, we got prepared for the next Family Home Evening and sat our three- and five-year-olds down and asked them to feel some sandpaper that we had kept in the freezer—cold and rough. Did they think that was how the Holy Ghost felt? Then we had them feel the sheepskin rug that was warm from sitting by the fire. Their smiles told us that we had managed to get one little part of the message across.*

Chapter 30: Helping Kids see the Connections Between being Kind and Good and Feeling the Divine

How well we get along within our homes, and how hard we work at being our best selves can be a key factor in feeling a Higher Power and gaining a faith in a God who can help and influence us.

The Repenting Bench

In trying to figure out how to make our home more repentance “friendly” we decided to have something that was “hands on” since there was always a huge need for repentance in a house with a gaggle of strong-willed kids! Finally we became exhausted trying to be the referee and the judge and jury over arguments between kids, which were occurring regularly enough to take us to the end of our rope. .

*We decided to establish a “repenting bench” where kids would be sent when they were arguing. We had a family home evening to demonstrate just how the new system was going to work when kids were fighting. We told two of our kids who had been in a fight the day before to recreate their argument. They tried and got the giggles. We told them that when (not if) that happened again we would be sending them to the new “repenting bench” to work out their differences. In the meeting we had them role play what would happen: 1) they would have to sit there until they each figured out what **they** did wrong. (We reminded them that it usually takes two to tangle and they each had a part in the argument). When they knew, they would call a parent to the bench and let them know what they did wrong. Then in order to leave the bench they were to say to the other child, “I’m sorry. Will your forgive me? I’ll try not to do it again.” And then give the other person a hug.*

Admittedly, somethings the “sorrlys’ were perfunctory and just a way to get off the bench, but there were three things came out of that family ritual that were important. 1) After about the 20th time being sent to the bench, they knew how to repent. 2) We, as parents were no longer referees or judges and 3) It cleared the air on lots of small things and kept grudges away—and now our adult children are all dear friends. It gave them a chance to work out their problems with each other before their anger toward each other became lasting.

We all make mistakes. Some are bigger than others. What a joy to explain the atonement to our children what they can do be released from the terror of guilt and shame. We are the guardians of those supernal moments when our children come to us with a worry or some kind of guilt and we can express our faith that there is such a thing as forgiveness that can come to us as well as from us.

Chapter 31: We Can Try to Build “Spiritual Grit” and we can Let them Struggle

We live in a fallen world and life is messy and imperfect and it’s important to help our kids understand that that’s ok. If we teach our kids that perfection is the goal they are likely to feel inadequate, full of shame, unworthy of the redemption and perfection that only comes through Christ.

(Saydi) I was a much better mother before I had kids. I had it all figured out in my head, so many great ideas, so much energy and drive to love and teach and learn as a parent. When children were just figments of my imagination, a part of my future vision, they never got in the way of any of my brilliant plans. And then real live kids came along, not the American Girl Dolls I was imagining, and totally threw things off! It turns out they have their own ideas, desires, short attention spans, struggles and resistance. Ironically, it often feels like my children get in the way of my parenting!

I’m sure this feeling applies to most of what we do in this life. We make plans to study, to work, to form new habits, to eat well, to be a certain kind of person. And then real life comes along, complete with all of its complexity and it so often throws us for a loop.

I’ve found that the trick here is to embrace the messiness of this fallen world. To realize that life wasn’t meant to be the flat, black and white, single dimension that it is as we envision and plan. Although it might feel more manageable in those moments before it becomes real, it is lifeless and has no power to move us, to enlighten us, to bring us closer to God. Just as it is the darkness and contrast that gives art its beauty, it is the jumble of life, the color, the multi-dimension of struggles and challenges that makes it stunning, that gives it the power to change us and bring us closer to the Divine.

So, if you’re feeling like your approach is messy and imperfect, carry on **with grit!** I believe this is what the path towards God should feel like.

Grit is a big word in the parenting world today! Finding and living with a firm testimony is not for the faint hearted. Sometimes testimonies fluctuate and most of us are still finding new treasures along with questions. Nurturing, building, protecting and exercising our testimonies through trials and even sometimes through enormous church responsibilities takes spiritual grit.

Struggles

We held a focus group of varied ages and asked them to tell us about how they received their testimonies. There were so many different answers that involved spiritual grit.

- *My parents weren’t religious and I most often went to church on my own as a child. One Sunday as I sat there alone, we sang I Know that My Redeemer Lives and the love of that Jesus Christ had for me filled my heart and I felt safe and secure. It was the beginning...of my life with Jesus Christ as the center.*

This woman has now fulfilled wonderful but gritty church assignments and worked with neighborhood children as well as her own family to learn to pray and to seek guidance. That takes sheer grit!

- *My real faith came when our second baby was in the hospital with serious digestive problems that could have been fatal. As those days wore on, I felt the Savior's presence so often and felt the love of friends from the ward came to the rescue, helping with our toddler and food delivers to my house. I knew I was being watched over.*

This woman has raised six faithful loyal children. Not without the enormous trials of having a son-in-law who was paralyzed by a snowmobile accident and a husband who lost his vocal chords and almost his life with throat cancer. Her testimony has only grown through her trials. That involves a lot of grit!

- *"When I moved away from my family and had no living person to rely on, I really had to struggle to find a testimony. So I asked, as I had never asked before. The Spirit comforted me and I felt the God's love as I struggled through that difficult time with only the Divine to support me."*

Finding her faith through a gritty struggle was probably one of this girl's greatest blessings.

Shawni, our daughter and mother of teenagers, was with me in this focus group, and wrote:

Just thinking about that young woman struggling for a testimony brought me to tears. Because I wonder if we (my husband and I) are giving our children the opportunity to "struggle" enough? I'm thinking our new house as a metaphor. Before we built it we asked everyone we could for advice. We wanted to know all the ins and outs of what it would take before we were up to our elbows in the work. We gathered all kinds of tips from near and far. But as we moved into the actual building phase we realized we had NO IDEA what we had gotten ourselves into. Sure we could learn to stay away from the same mistakes others had made, but we, in our own unique situation, had a whole different set of problems and worries that we never could have anticipated.

"I feel like testimonies are so much the same. We can gather advice from far and wide. From our parents during scripture study, from seminary teachers, from friends who have been through trials and made mistakes. But when it comes right down to it, WE are the only ones who can really build that testimony for ourselves. We have to be the ones firmly placed right smack dab in the middle of the work. We can't borrow it from anyone else. Neither can our kids. I've realized the last couple weeks that I've been trying to spoon feed this stuff to my kids rather than being ok with them to have their own "struggle."

"The problem is that I don't really know how to do that. I want so much to give them all these precious pearls but they've got to open their own hearts to them. And often they do, but opening their hearts may look completely different to them than it does to me. They may have their own

"born again" experiences like mom did on that hill during the pageant or something different like I had kneeling by my bedside in my little bedroom surrounded by mint green-and peach-hearted wallpaper pouring out my own heart on my knees. But maybe their testimonies will be more just remembering and grouping together the myriad of smaller glimpses of light that help build their spiritual connection to Heaven...and are we the ones as parents who create those? I think we can be a powerful force in that way. I know that the purpose of this whole thing is to help kids recognize and weave together all the light infiltrated into their lives in a comprehensible and tangible way. But I think that it isn't as simple as all that."

"Because you may have a mom who feels compelled to add a little lesson into everything she says and a child who may not like that way of teaching....or who has gone deaf to it years ago. Or you may have a child who doesn't realize the importance of searching and is complacent to have things handed to him. Perhaps our kids will never have that real born again experience we tend to cater our mothering to create. Perhaps in some ways we are stifling the opportunities for growth through our incessant teaching."

"The bottom line is that we may not know how to do this thing. BUT GOD DOES. These are His children and He wants them to be born again even more deeply than we do. We need to be a healthy conduit in His hands and let our kids teeter without us holding them up sometimes."

"And that is scary."

Chapter 32: We Can Open our Children's Hearts to Truths from All Sources

Seek Truth wherever it can be found

Along with opening every opportunity for our children to feel the Spirit, we need to give them the broadmindedness and perspective to appreciate that the light of God is in all people and that truth and goodness and love can be found among all peoples and in all places. If they grow up with the black-and-white, one-path-only-to-happiness they will be confused and disoriented when they meet those of other beliefs and of no belief who are happy and good and loving.

It is so critical that our children understand that God loves all of His children equally and that he blesses people throughout the world with truth and light—and that He uses many and varied “tools” to bring to pass His work.

Because we have been blessed to travel all over the world and have spent so much time teaching incredible Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh families as well as those of many Christian faiths and good people who don't claim any religion, we have found many who may be more “in tune” with the spirit than we are as they have shared experiences of receiving revelation for their families. The light of Christ (though some may not recognize the source) that provides inspiration and revelation abides everywhere!

There is truth and light in all religions, and there is much we can learn from other faiths, including remarkable levels of dedication and devotion to the Lord and His Grace in other Christian faiths. And so many without professed faith have adopted values-based personal philosophies that give their lives real depth and joy. If our children know this, and know that we know it, they will not only be more tolerant and capable of learning from others, but also less likely to “expect everything from a perfect Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and nothing from others” which is an almost sure recipe for future disillusionment and confusion.

(Saydi) We had a faith leader in Boston who told us that one of his main goals in working with the young people of our faith was to help them to realize that as they navigated through their missions they'd likely meet many people who were closer to God than they were, and without the help of the profound truths of our church. There are people, “religious” or otherwise who have worked their whole lives to follow the light of God born inside of them, people who, through that guidance, formed a strong, deep and true relationship with God. With this attitude his missionaries made deep spiritual connections with people and were able to work together with them to teach each other and help each other draw closer to the Spirit.

If we can teach our children to walk through the world—embracing the truths of the restoration while also looking for light in others, seeking everything that is honest, good and true, they can discover deep and lasting paths towards every good thing. When our kids see us looking for light and accepting truth in all places, they will learn to do the same. This gives us a perfect opportunity as parents to help them learn the important spiritual skill of discernment. With this tool, they can recognize truth outside the bounds of the Church and also recognize the parts of culture that are not true or right.

Today, many of those experiencing “faith crisis” and leave their faith partly because they were raised to think that their church and every leader in it is perfect, and that it is “The Only True Church” and that all other churches and philosophies are false. With this kind of mistaken mindset, as they get out in the world and find some of their own church members that are imperfect in countless ways, and as they find many outside their church that are happy, leading full lives, raising happy families, and possessing all kinds of truth, they can become confused and disillusioned and a faith crisis can be triggered. Many struggle with this as they find, to their surprise, that people of other faiths and of no faith can be values-driven people who are successful and happy in their families.

Once, at a family gathering when we asked our adult children how it was that we were lucky or blessed enough that they had all retained their faith, the most prominent thing that came out was that they had been encouraged to look for the good and truth in all people and all places and to know that God worked in and through all who wished to find and practice correct principles.

This may have unburdened them from the “Only True Church” notion which can create intolerance and also cause a perception of their Church and its leaders as perfect, which makes kids vulnerable to doubts and faith crisis when they inevitably run on to imperfections either in Church history or in local leadership. One son recently said something like “Thanks Dad, for helping me to see that there is good and truth and happiness in all people and in all faiths and that we should look for it wherever we go”

Let us quickly add two personal caveats to this story: First, our kids are as imperfect as we are and we don’t want to portray them in any other way. Second, they came as who they are, and to take any credit for their faith and beliefs would be as mistaken as to take the blame for those with less believing hearts.

Of course, we should teach our children to be grateful for the faith and beliefs of their family—but not grateful in a way that makes us judgmental or condescending to those of other faiths or of no faith. Avoiding this second, false kind of gratitude and teaching our children of how far God’s goodness and truth and salvation extends (to all people everywhere who will head their own consciences and their feeling of the Divine whether they understand it or not) may inoculate them from one very prevalent faith-undermining malady

Chapter 33: We Can Remember that Faith Grows with Fertile Soil and Lots of Fertilizer

I was walking among the glorious flower gardens in early April, when the plants were young and tender at a beautiful park near our home one afternoon, thinking about ways we can help our children grow firm testimonies. How can we help their faith grow strong enough to produce the beautiful plant or flower they were foreordained to become? As I walked past garden after garden, it became clear that a lot of work had been poured into those flowers. First, a watering system had been installed, then tons of fertile soil had been placed in the enormous planter boxes and each little plant had been placed little green shoots. Each plant had been given space to grow and soak in the sunshine. Tiny pebbles of fertilizer were ready to soak up the water and sink to the roots, where it would continuously help that flower to grow.

Perhaps not all would blossom with the flowers they were meant to be but most would show proof of the hundreds of hours of tender loving care had come from their gardeners so that they could fulfill the measure of their creation.

As parents, we have each spend thousands of hours nurturing our children in our own gardens. We have provided fertile soil of a loving home, a watering system of exposure to spiritual experiences and the sunshine of love, all of which help young testimonies to grow. If they are rooted in a love for God, they will sprout testimonies but those baby testimonies will need the fertilizer of understanding the astonishing blessings of the restored gospel to help their testimonies really blossom.

Sometimes kids are totally clueless about how faith and blessings fit together. Often people leave the church because of a problem with another person in the congregation or some hair-splitting doctrinal disagreement.

As our children's testimonies begin to sprout, they need to know about the enormous number of blessings that can and should be attributed to the Divine. And that belief in a Higher Power gives us someone to thank.

Question Four Conclusions:

Each section of Question #4 has talked about a tool that can help our children find and retain a faith and belief in something higher than themselves. Some we haven't mentioned will be even more useful as you discover what resonates with your own child's drummer. But nothing is more important than our efforts to help our children find an enduring testimony that includes God, and his personal interest in us—the true source of pure joy!

It's not about giving our children faith, because they cannot go very far on borrowed light. Instead, it is a matter of creating an atmosphere in which they can seek and find their own faith. Our example can help, but so can our respect which we show by backing off a little and letting them develop the spiritual grit that comes with struggle.

Making the Spirit as real and recognized in our homes as the physical will to some extent shape how they see things and what their personal paradigm develops into. Pushing our kids too hard and trying to manipulate them into believers can backfire. In fact, the parents who lose their kids are likely to be on both extreme ends of the involvement spectrum. On the one end, are parents who don't care and who essentially are not interested enough to do anything but disengage with their kids. On the other end are the spiritual helicopter parents who hover and try to shape their children's testimonies proactively and by intervention are equally sure to fail.

What we need and want is the middle ground where kids are respected and listened to and where parents do a lot of listening themselves—to God's Guidance via Family Revelation

Questions for Further Reflection:

1. How widespread is the concern of parents over the testimonies and faith-oriented activity of their kids?
2. What do you think are the keys in helping children to want (and believe it is possible) personal revelation for themselves?
3. What protects kids from future "faith crisis"?
4. How do we give children agency while at the same time trying to influence the growth of their beliefs in the Divine?
5. Which of the methods for helping your child receive their own testimonies through inspiration and revelation are most applicable to your family? What are some of our own?

Question Five:

What About The Real World—Life's Changes, Crises, Failures, and Storms?

Finding Family Revelation for the really hard things of life.

“Keep loving. Keep trying. Keep trusting. Keep believing. Keep growing. Heaven is cheering you on today, tomorrow, and forever.” Jeffery R. Holland

As we begin to write this section, we are on a plane and on our way to attend the funeral of our nephew whose life was cut short by a terrible illness. My brother and his wife will bury their son today—something no parent should have to do—something no parent plans to do. It is a time when intense Family Revelation and enormous Divine comfort is desperately needed. Our hearts bleed for them and as all of us gather, we all beg for insight and help.

This final question is about grappling with events that occur in our families over which we have no control. Challenges that require us to adapt and change and react, challenges that require us to learn things that we may not have wanted to learn—things on which we need revelation and guidance with an intimacy and a clarity beyond what is required in more normal life.

Some of these unplanned and unexpected forms of adversity come upon us as tragedies, and others come simply as changes we are not ready for. But change is the only predictable constant in our lives as we pass through phases and turns and twists that none of us can anticipate or plan.

What can help us in how we respond and react is Family Revelation.

Review the phases of your own life for a moment. Some of these changes could take a book to complete the details, but just think about the number of times you have entered a new experience that required adjustments and “learning to love it.” From the first day you left the safety of your home for kindergarten, there has been a continual series of new phases, each with its own challenges: middle school, high school, painstaking decisions about college or job choices, serving missions (or not), finding the right career (or not).

There may have been an enormous need for answers from heaven while finding and deciding on a person to marry. Enormous changes and needs for revelation come when deciding where to live (over and over again). When and how many children are sacred decisions that bring dramatic change. Bringing children into the world might have included miscarriages and infertility issues which causes mighty suffering and a need for the comfort of the spirit. Perhaps a divorce or a wayward child brought momentous changes as you begged for inspiration to know what to do and how to learn to love the things that you may initially hate. Those years of living in “the refiner’s fire” with children in our homes bring unimaginable stretching and a constant need for help from Heaven.

Going on to the empty nest phase of life sounded like it would be a pleasant relief when we were young parents, but as we get there we know that it holds its own special needs for inspiration and change. Much of this phase includes changing our minds, sometimes gritting our teeth and learning to love it. As we enter life with adult children and grandchildren and a “full-time” spouse (or not) additional changes come. In addition, many have ageing parents and often we are sandwiched between caring for our own family and the beloved people who cared for us. Death becomes a bigger part of life. Our prayers get longer and more specific. Our hips and knees begin to give us trouble and we can’t get out of bed without feeling creaky. The changes that our own aging brings also carry a special need for “loving it.”

We have a couple of awe-inspiring friends who have been our role model for growing older for many years. The husband is 90 and affected with the ravages of Parkinson's disease. Raising his head as much as he could over his walker when I asked how he was doing one Sunday, he answered in a laborious, raspy voice (also a result of the disease), "I'm doing as well I can under the circumstances. You know, there is only one opportunity in all of eternity to grow old and I'm making the best of it every day!"

His wife, a magnificent, brilliant and example of the gospel in action also remains optimistic even with her own failing health with back pain at 87. She is always quick to answer our emails and assure us that they are working on college courses online, making cookies for the homeless and are holding each other up as they dance in the kitchen every morning to Have I Told You Lately that I Love You. That is the supreme example of coming what may and loving it!

The bottom line is that we need to plan on changes we can't plan. The attitude and spirit with which we face each surprise, and our ability to keep the door open to Family Revelation will make all the difference.

The chapters of this section, (34-40) explore some of the life-changes that most of have faced or will face—each of which stretch and test us and create an extreme need for Family Revelation—to guide and sustain us through these high-risk phases and events.

Chapter 34: How can we feel the hand of the Divine as we experience sudden changes?

“There is a tendency to think of change as the enemy. Many of us are suspect of change and will often fight and resist it before we have even discovered what the actual effects will be. When change is thought through carefully, it can produce the most rewarding and profound experiences in life.” Marvin K. Ashton

No matter how many examples of “big life changes” were printed here, you would think of some additional ones that have happened only to you. Consider for a moment how much of your life has been guided during some of those changes. Think back at how often prayers have been answered and you have been led to ways to work with difficult, life-changing events in your life. Maybe some of the answers were not what you wanted or expected. Perhaps you thought of phases in your life that you definitely didn’t love!

A big change occurred in our lives last year. Our oldest grandson Max returned from a 2-year voluntary service “mission” in Taiwan, went back to college and within what seemed like weeks, had found his one and only and was talking about marriage!

At first it was a scramble for all of us to realize that Max was actually getting serious about getting married. His parents and his grandparents (us) had so many other adventures planned for him before making that big decision. But within a few months he popped the question and put a ring on her finger in the same spot his Dad had proposed to his Mom twenty-five years before.

To be honest, it was hard for us to grasp the idea that we were old enough to have a grandson getting married but it was even harder for our daughter Shawni, Max’s mother, to imagine herself letting that son of hers go! (And to think of herself as a potential grandmother). While wrestling with herself about this big change in plans, and going through a lot of soul-searching and pleading with the Lord for confirmation that this was right, she was sitting in the temple when she felt the very real comforting blanket of the Holy Ghost settle around her, whispering that all would be well! Not easy, but right!

Here are a few thoughts from Shawni’s journal that make me smile because so many of us have been there:

“I am so close to tears every time I think of what’s coming up. It’s so emotional to me that my son is getting married. Beautiful, sad, glorious, all these emotions swirling around in my heart. And I’m trying to stay calm, to manage expectations and go forward without second-guessing all the plans for the wedding, but I don’t think that comes very easily to my nature”.

It was quite an exciting and short journey to the actual wedding. On the wedding day, the usual disasters appeared. Among them, a dear, helpful friend accidentally ironed a hole right through the front of one of the silk dresses that Shawni had painstakingly found for her daughters for the wedding reception. Panic turned to joy as a seamstress friend showed up and somehow made it look almost perfect just in time for the pictures. Then another complication happened:

(from Shawni's journal):

“Max forgot his ring, which created another mini fiasco that I don't know the details of but somehow involved our friend stepping out of the temple and getting ahold of Elle (Max's sister) to bring it in just in time. After that it was like the air stilled and all the panic and busyness melted into thin air in that temple waiting room filled up with so many people we love, and who love Max and Abby.

And then, the spirit that so many of us have felt in the sealing room of the temple as we have watched our beloved children be sealed to someone else for eternity.... settled peacefully on all of us. Shawni explains it so beautifully here:

“There was something in that room, perhaps my hovering, helping angels, that just patted me gently on the shoulders, smoothed my racing heart, wrapped me up in love and peace and gratitude and deep astonishment. My son was getting married. To a girl he is head-over-heels in love with. Who makes him shine like I've never seen before. And they get to be married for eternity, to work out their differences through the good times and the bad, to build each other, to learn from each other, to grow together forever. They both have the gospel in their hearts. It's planted there solidly. And I think that's the key that will get them through all kinds of things. Highs and lows. Beauty and sorrow. There's something inside me that keeps telling me they are a good match for that. They will help each other in ways I can't even understand.”

We're pretty sure that Max and Abby will live together “happily ever after” but not without difficulties as they navigate life together. Joys and sorrows are inevitable. So are disagreements and rocky paths. They are starting out on the unpredictable path through those unexpected life phases that we just reviewed. But as they diligently ask for help, revelation from Heaven will be the glue that holds them together forever.

(Saydi) This story about Max is an example of a hard and unexpected change but not tragic. What do we do when we are faced with tragic sudden changes? Although infinitely more excruciating, the formula is similar. When faced with sudden changes, if we turn to God to seek his will, the door to His vast vision and awareness is opened wide and He can hold us as we adjust, often slowly and painfully, to our new realities. God can carry us through these hard transitions between our expectations of what we thought would happen, and get us past the curve balls mortality sends our way.

Chapter 35: What about changes that create real grief?

“We came to mortal life to encounter resistance. It was part of the plan for our eternal progress. Without temptation, sickness, pain, and sorrow, there could be no goodness, virtue, appreciation for well-being, or joy.” Howard W. Hunter

The first place most of us go when we are facing big challenges in our lives is to our knees. Abraham Lincoln said “There are times when I am driven to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to go.”

We petition, bargain with, beseech, entreat, implore God to grant our requests. Sometimes we get just what we ask for and we rejoice. Other times, when we are in the depths of sorrow because of a great crisis the answers don't seem to come at all.

When we are crying for Divine help at the loss of a child or about how to help a family member who is suffering, the most comforting example of how to embrace those storms of life is found in the inspiring story in Mark 4: 35-41. After a long day of teaching multitudes of people through deep and moving parables from the bow of a boat while they listened, mesmerized on the shore, Jesus must have been exhausted. When evening came, the multitude dispersed and to the apostles who were with him he said, “Let us pass over unto the other side.” Apparently, they set sail and Jesus found a pillow and a comfortable spot in the “hinter of the boat” and fell deeply asleep. And then...mayhem! “And there arose a great storm of wind , and the waves beat into the ship so that it was now full.”

That ship was full of water and those aboard thought they were about to die! In a panic they awakened the Savior and said, “*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*” As we all know, Jesus arose, rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, “*Peace be still.*” The wind ceased and there was a great calm. And in that calm, the Savior asked two very instructive questions: “*Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?*”

We would like to think that those questions were spoken not in anger but as a reminder that Jesus, the Savior of the world was there with them in that boat! How could they think that they would perish? Did they not know that he was there and would be protect then? At that moment, the disciples, who must have been astonished to realize that Jesus not only could heal the sick and cause the blind to see, He could also control nature! Yet they had neglected to realize that He would save them? Perhaps this was another parable, using them instead of a fictional character to teach a valuable lesson. The Savior was perhaps giving them a loving reminder that they must replace faith with fear, even in the most violent storms and know that He would surely be there to guide and protect them during all the storms of their lives.

So it is with us! He is with us during our life-changes and our grueling trials. And even though, at times, it may feel as though Jesus is asleep while we are suffering, in actuality He will be there to say, “Peace be still.” In essence, he will be assuring us, even though our storms may be long and arduous, that “It's all going to be alright!” He is in the boat with us and will help us see our way through our dark places.

(Saydi) There have been times when I have felt abandoned by the Savior, like those disciples might have felt in that small boat on that stormy sea. Sure, the master of the universe was in their boat, but he was asleep on a pillow. In these times it's easy to really start to feel as if you're perishing and no one cares to come and rescue. But when we cling to faith instead of fear, if we can remind ourselves that Jesus is in our boat, that He is aware of us and our storms, that He has miraculous power over our lives.

Christ does have power to calm storms in our lives, but, perhaps most miraculously Christ has power to calm the storms within us. In this story perhaps Christ's command to "be still" was directed less to the winds and waves and more to the frantic hearts of the disciples. Even more than praying for storms to cease, we have to let Christ calm our fears as whisper peace to our stormy souls.

Our best lifeline through the difficult changes and challenges in life is to diligently continue to seek guidance from Above. And with the help of a loving God and The Spirit we can navigate the arduous, ever-changing gyroscope of our lives with faith and love. Life is full of dealing with the distressing realities. People we love make mistakes and so do we. There are endless stories that involve grief and pain in our lives: A beloved child or family member who has left the church, a spouse who has been unfaithful, a family member who has a chronic addiction, even one whose pain has caused him or her to take their own life.

Help from the Spirit

The list of things that cause grief in our lives goes on and on! But the list of gifts that can help us make our way through the trials that cause grief are also endless.

We love this quote: "*Grief does not change you... It reveals you.*" John Green, ([The Fault in Our Stars](#)). And with the help of God and heaven, it can also strengthen you!

In the following chapters we will look at some real-world examples from families who have experienced grief and undesired change for a variety of reasons; and how Family Revelation has helped them navigate their storms. You may see similarities to your own family. Hopefully, looking at examples from the lives of others will spark ideas that will reveal ways to help replace fear with faith in our own lives as we navigate the trials of our lives and as we are reminded that the Savior is always "in the boat" with us.

Chapter 36: What about seeking help to deal with the great epidemic of our generation...mental illness?

“Broken minds can be healed just the way broken bones and broken hearts are healed...While God is at work making those repairs, the rest of us can help by being merciful, nonjudgemental, and kind” Jeffery R. Holland

In the Eyre family, we have children living all over creation with their young families. Two in Europe, one in Hawaii, one in New York City and the rest scattered around in between. We love them all so much and are in constant touch with them—enough so that we know that none of them are without their difficulties, pains, and trials. Some of these are physical and some are mental and emotional.

My mother, who had never had a down-day in her life, fell when she was in her 80’s and broke her hip. Her whole identity revolved around an active life filled with the joy of athletics and service. Something got tangled up in her brain and she became clinically depressed! My sister and I were at our wits end praying for answers, pleading for direction, for relief, for understanding and for help! Medications only seemed to make things worse.

In Your own Life

By now, you will almost certainly be thinking about someone you love who is in a dark place, whether it be depression, or other issues concerning the continually rising numbers of people suffering with various forms of mental illness.

Living with and caring for those who are dealing with mental illness can be grueling and even debilitating. Those of us who have never experienced more than a short period of time feeling depressed about something, find it hard to understand and empathize with those who are suffering from deep or clinical depression.

Sincere prayers for revelation on how to help are important but often revelation comes through people who really know how to help. One young woman, suffering with clinical depression was sure that God would save her. After endless prayers and a long wait she was guided to the understanding that her help on earth was to be found in professionals and medical doctors who had spent their lives being inspired to find mediations that would help those in need. She learned that it was important to seek for counselors, therapists and medications for help. In addition, she was prompted to find a friend who had also experienced depression and had found relief...someone who could get down in that dark hole with her and help her figure out how to get out.

There is no one size fits all answer for you or a loved one who is struggling with depression or mental illness. This is where revelation comes in. For some the answer might lie in finding a

good therapist for others, seeking the correct medication. For some the answer might be to make some life changes, find a better support system or connect on a deeper level with loved ones. There are as many different paths through these struggles as there are people who are affected. Our job is to connect with God and ask him to help us know which path we, or a family member should take.

Sometimes we grossly underestimate the depth and resistance of depression. A mother who was desperate to help her adult son—who was curled up in a ball in his dark room, wishing to die—thought that perhaps reading him an article from the Ensign that she found so inspiring would help. Years later, after massive research on depression and treatments that included shock therapy, she realized how uninformed she had been to her son's real needs.

Until you've experienced a mental illness there is no way to completely understand what it's like and we do our friends and family a disservice when we try to pretend we know what they're experiencing. From a perspective of mental health it's so easy to be baffled by the behavior, perspective and thoughts of one who is suffering from mental illness.

(Saydi) My cousin recently passed away after struggling with a mental illness for 20 years. At his funeral a dream was shared that his father had. In the dream my cousin was in a large body of water, panicking as he was attached to a chain and weight pulling him down below the surface.

Full of determination and power he swam with all his might to make it to the surface for air. Despite being continually pulled down he kept swimming with all his might to break free. He swam and struggled and reached until finally the chain was broken and he surfaced, breathing in a big gulp of air and freedom.

Because mental illness is impossible to understand from the outside, often it looks to an outsider like the person struggling isn't trying hard enough, isn't working, should maybe just tweak this one thing, or change their mind and buck up.

We have to remind ourselves that everyone is doing the best they can with what they have. Often on the inside people are swimming and struggling and reaching, only to be continually pulled under by a weight and chain.

Above all we must remember to feel God's love for us and our loved ones whose lives are in turmoil. And remember that He said "I have graven thee upon palms of my hand." (Isaiah 49:16). He loves each individual with a love beyond our understanding. He will be standing there on our doorstep with a light to help us navigate those days of feeling helpless.

"Your illness does not define you. Your strength and courage does." **Anonymous**

Chapter 37: How can I seek Family Revelation to help those who struggle with addictions?

We live in a world full of subtle “enticings.” And a lot of them come from the little computers in our pockets or purses. Our little screens can lead us either to the brightest destinations or the darkest wilderness. Though many good “directions” come from the information explosion, it has also created extensive havoc. Countless marriages and lives have been disrupted and sometimes destroyed by the new drug called pornography. It has become a tool of guilt as well of temptation and makes people think that they have already gone so far downhill that there’s no going back. They are hooked! Other addictions are also fostered there, and in fact those small screens themselves are one of the key addictions.

There are sources of help, ranging from councilors to 12-step groups, but again, our greatest help will come through our own personal Family Revelation.

The Internet, smartphones and social media are grabbing our children’s minds. These “curious objects” have affected our children in ways that were unimaginable to our ancestors. Teenagers and often their parents as well are addicted to their “devices” and check for “direction” multiple times every hour. And our children struggle with FOMO (fear of missing out) which further increases their cell phone addiction.

As our adult children have struggled with what to do about the addictive nature of electronic media with their children, they have discovered that one of the best ways to handle restrictions is to let their kids be part of the solution. Instead of taking phones away after an infraction of a rule, they have had multiple family councils where parents have explained the dangers of devices and kids have helped decide on the rules and the consequences for breaking them. Systems have been put in place that allows parents to turn off their devices including phones, computers and computer games until homework, music practice and sports are completed. The key getting the kids be on board with the dangers of technology and the principles behind the importance of limits and then having them help set agreed-on the rules for use. It is a perfect example of Joseph Smith’s admonition to “teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves.”

The spectrum of addictions is wide and varied and sadly, the effects of addictions involve not only that person but their families, sometimes for generations.

Each of us Faces our Own Story

I (Linda) have a half-brother who died of alcoholism. He lived in a time before anyone really knew how to treat an addiction to alcohol. He was kind and soft-spoken but hopelessly addicted. He married a woman who was bright and happy except when she was drinking. Then she became abusive. Although they have both passed away, their wonderful oldest child has now lived with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome for 63 years. Their second daughter, 61 has emphysema as a result of having been addicted to cigarettes since she was in high school.

A dear friend had a son with some learning disabilities in high school and started drinking and smoking with a crowd of friends where he felt comfortable. There may never have been a more supportive family in history who have continued to love this young man unconditionally. His mother has helped him through the church's addiction program several times and he has gone with determination to change with real intent. But with all those good intentions, and with high hopes every time and some long periods of success, he has not yet completely succeeded in overcoming his addiction. The most important part is that this family, including that troubled son, refuses to give up! He is always ready to try again.

There is a reason that this young man and his family haven't given up. Years ago when the problems became severe, the father of this family called for a family council where they all, together, sought Family Revelation. The mom and the other five children in the family were gathered together to work on a plan to help. They rallied around him with love and support.

Twelve years ago when the father of that family died suddenly, the mother took the reins and continued to call for family councils (by now the children were all married with families of their own) to help their brother as needs continued. After years of petitioning the Lord for new ways to help this son, this family has been inspired to extend not only unconditional love, but also *tough* unconditional love as this beloved son and brother works his way through his time on earth.

He continues to believe in the quote mentioned earlier, "Oh God of second chances and new beginnings, here I am again" Progress is slow. Sometimes it seems as though progress is going two steps forward and one back but as his family continue to rally around him, they all have hope that through continuing inspiration, they can help him to conquer this ugly, Satan-backed addiction. Through it all, this family has learned not only to increase their love for their brother but to have a special love for each other and for their directions from the Lord on his behalf.

Family Councils are useful for all families but especially for families who are experiencing the critical issues of addiction. As we try to help those who suffer with the really hard things in life and plead for help from Heaven to help those who suffer with addictions which are one of Satan's greatest tools to beguile those we love to listen to his voice.

Answers to our prayers—our pleading for help with loved ones who are in the grip of addictions—will sometimes be that we have to allow those we dearly love to exercise their free agency. This is sometimes excruciating as we see those we love suffer because of bad decisions and the snares of obsession and addiction. But in the process, we can learn so much about life and ourselves and God's plan for happiness. We stretch in ways that we never thought possible as we are guided by direct revelation and comforted from the Holy Spirit. In the end much of what we learn as we go through those hard times with those we love are treasures!

This beautiful little poem from Mary Oliver speaks volumes in a few sentences that applies so beautifully to all of us who deal with loved ones over which we have no ultimate control :

Someone I loved once gave me

a box full of darkness.

*It took me years to understand
That this, too, was a gift.*

Chapter 38: How can family revelation give me hope when a child has serious lifelong disabilities?

“Adversities are temporary. What is permanent is what we become by the way we react to them”

Dallen H. Oaks

Bless those valiant souls who adopt children *because* they have disabilities! And the many parents who feel that their greatest gift in life is their child with special needs! Those beautiful spirits in troublesome bodies and minds teach us so much!

The Special Olympics has been a fabulous new awakening to the world of what is possible for kids with disabilities. In 2011 Barry Morrow who won the Academy Award for his film *Rain Man*, gave his golden statue to Kim Peek, a Utah native and a Savant about whose life the movie was based. Kim and his father traveled the world with the statue inspiring those lives he touched with the value of those wonderful souls who are disabled. *The Peek Award* every year since has honored media makers who positively affect our society's awareness and perceptions of people with disabilities. The Award for 2019 went to Dan Habib for creating an wonderful body of work about disabled people, including a documentary called *Intellegent Lives*. It is astonishing and we highly recommend it!

When babies are born with unexpected lifelong special needs, it can be devastating. Somehow almost everyone we know who has had a disabled child, knows the wonderful story that Laurie Ballam recorded on a cassette tape that she made with her husband Michael in 1997 called *Unexpected Journey*. They recorded their thoughts after the birth of their son who was born with significant life-long disabilities that would change their lives and the life of their family forever.

To paraphrase as nearly as I can remember, Laurie uses the clever metaphor of boarding a plane, excited about a trip to the tropics with all the clothing and other items needed to enjoy the warmth and sunshine at her destination. When she lands, the airplane door opens and she is stunned to realize she has been taken to a Scandinavian country in the middle of winter. Totally unprepared for the surprise and unequipped to cope with the situation, she is at first angry and is desperate to go back to where she had intended to go. But as she learns there is no way to go back, she works to embrace the change with courage and flexibility. In the end she is even embracing what she learned there with joy, realizing that she could never have discovered what she needed to know about herself and others, had that unexpected change of events not happened.

Lucy's Story

Lucy, the last child of our daughter Shawni was born with Bardiet Biedl Syndrome (BBS), a very rare syndrome that involves a variety of difficult issues. Most kids with the syndrome become blind sometime between ages 11 and 14 and have serious issues with weight. The hormone in their pituitary glands called leptin, which tells them that they have eaten enough is missing.

Kids with BBS are always hungry. Lucy is twelve and losing her sight. Her night vision is almost gone and she uses a cane to navigate during the day, although she can still see to read and can see fairly well in the daytime if the light is bright

Even though there are also some autistic tendencies and some ADD and ADHD issues involved in this syndrome, We Love Lucy! But the needs are endless. There are multiple genetic issues that are different in each BBS child's case and the syndrome is so rare that parents are pretty much on their own as they deal with each individual child's issues and needs.

We all knew from the start that this would be a lifelong challenge, At the moment Lucy has been approved for a clinical trial of a drug that has helped several kids with BBS control their weight. It includes a daily shot, given to Lucy by her mom at home every day and an extensive trip every two weeks for eighteen months to Marshfield Clinic in Wisconsin where doctors specialize in children with BBS. Shawni and David take turns taking her to the clinic, which involves a 3 1/2 hour flight and then renting a car and driving another 3 hours to get to the Clinic (sometimes in a snow storm).

Countless hours have been spent with wonderful social workers and a braille teacher who is a true champion in knowing how to direct her to the best possible outcome. As adolescence approaches Lucy's parents are deeply concerned about difficult social "issues" which are inevitable even in the best-case scenario in Jr High. In addition they are working to keep up with the needs of their other four kids. It's not easy! Here are some of Shawni's thoughts of being overwhelmed, along with little bursts of inspiration.

"I feel like my life is spinning out of control with so many needs right now—and Lucy is sort of on the outer spin, her friends, her emotions, her school work, ...they've all taken a spot in the fray. I keep getting this tug to sit with her quietly, looking into her eyes to try to help her make sense of the continually changing world she's grappling with. So we started reading "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" in small increments and I've made a conscious effort to stop and look in her eyes, cup her chin in my hands (like my favorite picture of Christ does) and try to glimpse into her soul and figure out how to help. But those moments are just that: glimpses, and then I'm off to the next thing. I wish life could slow down."

Most certainly Shawni and her husband David have landed in a place that they didn't expect. They were all packed up to go to a different place. And there's no going back. Life with a disabled child changes life every day. Like so many parents of children with special needs, prayers, inspiration, revelation, desperation, and innovation, have helped on a day to day process of discovering new ideas and new paths that have been a result of endless prayers for help.

Their lives and the lives of their children have been changed and enlightened in ways that would have been unimaginable had they not had the opportunity to nurture a child that required such constant revelation to help them find their way in a maze of uncertainty and the unknown. The whole family not only adores Lucy, but have such compassion for other children with special needs. They have learned what the pure love of Christ really means. Parents who deal with the life-long difficulties and complications of raising a child with special needs also develop a refinement of the spirit and a certain kind of sanctification that belongs only to those who have spent their lives in the service of a beautiful child with a dysfunctional body and/or mind.

Most of the difficulties in our lives are temporary. Injuries get better. Life-phases change. Naughty children often grow up to be amazing human beings, We pass through trials. But raising a child with disabilities is lifelong. It is a never-ending search for how to make things the best they can be.

The best and absolutely joyful aspect of this is that most of those who have disabilities also have unusual capabilities. Lucy is an astonishing artist, learns to play the piano (via jumbo notes) in a delightful way like no other and she has a fabulous contagious giggle. She is a genius at legos and sees objects in ways that we wish could. She is a master at telling it like it is!

We can feel the noble spirits of those with special needs that lift and inspire us! When Kim Peek and his father finished their worldwide tour, sharing Kim's amazing gift of an astounding memory with thousands of people along with the gold-leafed statue from the academy awards, the gold was almost completely worn off. When someone asked Kim where the gold went, he gave an answer that only he would think of. He said, "It's on the hands of children!"

The present problems and needs of a child with special needs can be overwhelming. And thinking about their future lives on earth is often even more daunting. It makes us smile when we think of the great joy that comes from thinking first, as they pass through the veil and rejoice with love ones grandparents and those who love them as they leave their earthly bodies and disabilities behind. And then in the resurrection when those troublesome bodies and minds are restored to perfection.

How will she look? What treasures lie in her soul that she was unable to express on earth? It will be a joy beyond imagination to put our arms around that formally disabled body and mind in all her glory and to feel the love of the Lord as that child meets parents and caregivers and loved ones as themselves...for the first time, It will be inexpressible joy in the pure love of Christ.

Chapter 39: How can I receive revelation to forgive family member who have caused deep injustices?

The following personal story might bring some stories of injustice in your own life to mind:

Eighty-year-old Wanda was slowly pulling out of her driveway in her car when a three-year-old, who was walking along with her parents on a Saturday afternoon dashed into her path. There was a small gash on the child's forehead and the horrified, deeply compassionate grandma and the child's parents rushed her to a nearby hospital for stitches. Shaken but thinking of how much worse the accident could have been they all went home grateful.

Within a few weeks, when Wanda had almost recovered from the trauma, she received notice that she was being sued by the other family. For the next two years, when the case finally went to court, that dear humble grandmother hardly slept a full night, agonizing over the details of that day, worrying about the child, insurance issues and how much money she might have to pay including money for an attorney. The greatest sadness was that child was the grandchild of a family member. It crushed her to think that a relative could cause such anguish. At the end of the trial (which the family won) the father of the child walked up to Wanda in the hall of the courthouse and said, "This isn't about you Aunt Wanda. We just needed the money."

Wanda eventually recovered but her daughter, who lived far away, did not. No sorrow or repentance for their actions was ever mentioned by the young couple and seeing her mother suffer all that time over such an injustice had left her incredulous and downright mad. It was a load she carried for years until she went to visit her mom one summer and came face to face with the injured child's mother. The young mother didn't recognize her but as the daughter looked into her young, innocent face she realized that she was entirely unaware of the horror she and her husband had inflicted on her mother. So unaware that it probably had never occurred to either parent to apologize. They just "needed the money." In a flash a revelation came to her mind as she remembered the magnanimous words of the Savior at the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." She heaved a huge sigh as she realized it was time to forgive and forget. A long-carried load of resentment and anger lifted from her soul and she felt free.

Volumes could be written about family angst because of misunderstandings and injustices. If we're not careful feelings of anger or even hate in our families can take over lives. As I contemplated this story, it was evident that one can forgive, even when repentance is not part of the mix. Carrying indignation and wrath, especially if it is toward a family member is a very heavy load to drag around in life. We love this thought: "Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Unknown

An inspiring friend who has dealt with a stunning setback in their family that involved an unfaithfulness and a lot of broken hearts, was thinking about how to mend her broken heart and

to forgive. In a moment of contemplation she remembered what Jesus had asked his disciples early in his ministry, “What seek ye?” That question lodged in her mind as though it was a question directed to her. “What do I really, deeply desire right now?” In thinking about the sorrow she had experienced along with their family because of the current crisis, she picked up her planner and a folded piece of paper fell out that she had tucked there from a Christmas letter. The title had intrigued her and she had intended to read but had forgotten. It was the perfect answer to her question that dropped in her lap just at the moment when she was desperate for a way to forgive, to heal her heart and begin to feel whole again.

The title of the article was *The Uncommon Power of Grace*, written in the New York Times just before Christmas on December 18 2018. It revealed the importance of grace in our lives, especially in devastating situations when we are bitterly disappointed and the person involved is in dire need of forgiveness. These two paragraphs were particularly poignant to her:

“If you find yourself in the company of people whose hearts have been captured by grace, count yourself lucky. They love us despite our messy lives, stay connected to us through our struggles, always holding out the hope of redemption. When relationships are broken...it’s grace that causes people not to give up, to extend the invitation to reconnect, to work through misunderstandings with sensitivity and transparency.’

“You don’t sense hard edges, dogmatism or self-righteous judgment from gracious people. There’s a tenderness about them that opens doors that had previously been bolted shut. People who have been transformed by grace have a special place in their hearts for those living in the shadows of society. They’re easily moved by stories of suffering and step into the breach to heal. And grace properly understood always produces gratitude” Peter Wehner NYT Dec. 2018

The thoughts she read about grace were the answer to prayers and to the question, “What she really desired at that moment was grace. Her mind was filled with the answer that she should not not only forgive, but forgive with grace which the dictionary describes as elegance or beauty in form or action. She knew that she needed to forgive with love...and to be gracious instead of judgmental, even when someone’s action had changed a life or tread on sensitivities.

Not only is grace the ultimate gift from our Savior, but it is also a glorious gift that we can give to others as we deal with family members who have brought about unexpected sorrow to our lives. As we see so many beautiful saints in the gospel forgiving family members and others who have created sadness or disruption in their lives, we see the gospel in action!

May we add love and grace to repentance and forgiveness to the list of crucial things we need in order to receive reconciliation with our family members? When someone has accused us wrongly, or a teenager is being disrespectful, or when adult family members clash on matters of family, religion or politics, grace and love are literally the salvation of lasting relationships. And when love doesn’t seem to work, often the solution is...to love *more!* The Savior’s supreme example of loving those who hate us and revile against us is the door to our success in receiving family revelation for injustices.

As we close these chapters, on the “real world” challenges of our lives, we see that life is a fascinating journey. It’s also just plain hard and sometimes full to the brim with the havoc created by sin, disappointments and injustices in our families. By using the God-given tools to return to our Heavenly home without a load of troublesome baggage, having learned the eternal importance of love, repentance forgiveness and grace we can find freedom and we can enter with the ultimate gift...joy! .

We love this favorite quote that puts things into perspective:

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a Ride!" **Hunter S. Thompson**

Often life just plain hard and sometimes full to the brim with the havoc created by sin, disappointments, and upheavals because of differing beliefs and injustices, often over issues that involve inheritances and money in our families. By using the God-given tools of reconciliation, we can return to our Heavenly home without a load of troublesome baggage, having learned the eternal importance of love, repentance forgiveness and grace we can find freedom and we can enter with the ultimate gift...joy!

Chapter 40: What about The Biggest Change: Experiencing the holy process of sanctification as we seek to “Endure to the beginning.”

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Psalms 116:15

Of course, the final change in life is death. We have all experienced the death of a loved one and we are all facing death as an inevitability.

Richard’s father died of cancer at age 39 (his mother was 38 and was a widow for 52 years). Linda’s half-sister died of cancer just after giving birth to her third child. And as mentioned at the beginning of this section, we have a dearly loved nephew who just passed away at 33 with a cruel mental illness.

The funeral for the passing of one who has lived a good long life is often cause for a celebration of a life well-lived. For others who die suddenly or whose life has been filled with grief because of mental illness or even who have taken their own life after a long struggle with misery, death carries a special kind of grief.

Nothing brings a more acute need for faith and for Family Revelation.

Finding direction from heaven as we experience or contemplate parting with a much-loved family member who suffers with a fatal illness sometimes encompasses many of the ways to seek and receive revelation discussed in Question One. Dealing with this final step of life involves searching for answers “through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12) as both the sufferer and those who love them experience death.

Managing Death

When gloom seems to overtake the long, strenuous journey that finally ends with the unknown of stepping through the veil—instead of thinking about “*enduring to the end*”, we might take the perspective that it is actually more a matter of “*enduring to the beginning*.” It will be a new beginning for caregivers as they start a new era of life without a loved one on earth and certainly a new beginning for the one who has passed through the veil. It is the beginning of a joyful new step into eternity.

Brigham Young offers some delightfully hopeful, even joyful insights about the spirit world:

“ I would like to say to you, my friends and brethren, if we could see things as they are, and as we shall understand them...we shall turn round and look about upon it and think...why, this (death) is the greatest advantage of my whole existence, for I have passed from a state of sorrow, grief, mourning, woe, misery, pain, anguish and disappointment into a state of existence, where I can enjoy life to the fullest extent as far as that can be done without a body. My spirit is set free,

I run, I walk, I labor, I go, I come, I do this, I do that, whatever is required of me, nothing like pain or weariness, I am full of life, full of vigor, and I enjoy the presence of my heavenly Father, by the power of his spirit. I want to say to my friends, if you will live your religion, live so as to be full of the faith of God, that the light of eternity will shine upon you, you can see and understand these things for yourselves.” (B.Young)

The comforting words of President Ezra Taft Benson relate: *...the spirit world is not far away . Sometimes the veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us* (Conf. Report, 4/71, p. 18, Ensign 6/71, p. 33)

Those who gave the tireless care will someday be “crowned with glory” for their love and sacrifices. As Thomas Carlyle said, *Adversity is the diamond dust Heaven polishes its jewels with.* Faith, hope and charity will ring true. And the Savior will be there in the boat with us whispering, “Peace be still.”

Question Five Conclusions

The changes, crises, and storms that are inevitable in our lives and unescapable in our families can push us past our capacities and beyond our strength and demand help and comfort and sustaining from a higher source—in short, they require Family Revelation. Sometimes the guidance we receive in these dark and seemingly hopeless situations can turn ashes to joy and remind us in unforgettable ways of the power of the Spirit.

The stretching, grueling challenges covered in this last section are only samples of the many hard and unexpected changes that life holds for all of us. But while they vary in how they come and what they do to us, the ultimate answer for all of them is found in the Family Revelation that we can seek and receive.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. What have been the hardest changes in your life so far? As you reflect back on them, have they provided spiritual growth? Did they make you more attuned and more diligent in seeking Family Revelation? What did you seek and what did you receive during those changes?
2. What future changes can you anticipate and prepare for? Could Family Revelation have an equally important role in preparing for future change as in meeting it when it comes?
3. In hindsight, has your life and your nature been largely formed by change? Do you generally view major life changes positively or negatively?
4. Do you relate to the “storm and sun” metaphor? Looking back as well as forward, can growth and progress come in both kinds of weather?
5. How do crises and failures relate to the “war in heaven” and to the two plans presented there?
6. What are the major stages or phases that couples (or dads and moms, individually and together) go through during the course of their lives?
7. How do these phases impact our relationships with spouse and with children?
8. What are some of the “best practices” for weathering (and even thriving with) these changes?

Dedication

To our children, who have taught us about family revelation from all angles—first as the challenges and issues and needs for which we sought it, and now as the parents of our grandchildren, seeking it in brilliant ways that teach us more than we taught them.

Today, our most consistent and important prayers—ours and theirs—are simply for the Holy Ghost to guide the choices and the lives of our children, and reveal to us the keys to our own family's joy, and foreordination, and exaltation.