



Family Times

Work, For Heaven's Sake!

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Quotable: “Those who do too much for their children will soon find they can do nothing with their children. So many children have been so much done for they are almost done in.”
(*Ensign*, May 1975, p.



As a youth leader in my Church, I had the opportunity several years ago to go on a “High Adventure,” with our local teacher quorum. Although it was a great experience, I left a little disheartened because most of the young men, aged 14 and 15, did not know how to work. Only one young man helped without being asked or told what to do. Two young men would help if you asked them to. The rest of the young men were completely worthless when it came to working or helping. The other youth leader I was with joined with me in deciding we would no longer pick up after these young men. So, when we left our last campsite, we literally left behind hundreds of dollars worth of equipment and clothing because we refused to clean up after these pampered young

men, and they were too lazy to care. It was evident to me that most of these young men were raised in homes where their parents did all the work, and they had little responsibilities.

Oh, the pampered generation! Playing hour after hour of video games while holding a Big Mac in one hand, and a remote control in the other— some actually breaking down and crying if they are asked to help around the house? Parents, what in the world have we done? Some have created literal monsters. In a counseling session a few years ago, I told a mother that it sounded like her out of control teenage son needed some discipline. She looked at me and said, “I can’t punish him, it will make him mad.” Can you say “Too late.” I knew that you could.

Elder Joe J. Christensen described this generation when he spoke in General Conference several years ago:

“Teaching children to work, to take responsibility, requires some creativity. Especially in urban settings, too many children are growing up in an environment when they do not have enough to do. They are like the thirteen-year-old boy who was asked what he did all day in the summer.

“He said, ‘Well, I get up in the morning about ten or eleven. Then my mom gets me something to eat. Then maybe I’ll go with some of the guys and play a little basketball, maybe watch TV, and then go down to the mall and “hang out” for a while-- sorta watch the girls and stuff.’

“When asked what time he got to bed, he

“If children are raised with a poor attitude about work and do not learn to sustain themselves, they will be weak and dependant as adults. They may ultimately become a liability to society instead of making a real contribution” (Gene R. Cook, *Raising Up A Family To The Lord* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993], p. 226)



“I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours.” (Jerome Klapka Jerome, in *The International Dictionary of Thoughts*, comp. John P. Bradley, Leo F. Daniels, and Thomas C. Jones Chicago: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Co., 1969, p. 782.)

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said, ‘Oh, usually about one or two o’clock. I go over to a friend’s house and watch some videos. It’s really neat, because my friend’s mom told the guy at the video shop that it was all right for her son to check out any video he wanted-- including R-rated.

“We could feel great concern for the future of that young Latter-day boy and his friends” (Joe J. Christensen, *One Step at a Time: Building A Better Marriage, Family, and You* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996], p. 79).

Unfortunately, this situation described by Elder Christensen is all too common today. I am surprised how many young men go into the mission field and head off to college, having never worked a day of their lives. A young man acquaintance reported “This is the last summer I can goof off. My dad said that starting next summer, I’m going to have to get a job.” That young man was 17 when he said that. I have watched him closely since then. He is now 18, heading off for school, and still hasn’t

“found” a job. What kind of missionary will he be? What young lady will want to marry such a man with so little to offer?

Several weeks ago, I was on the BYU Idaho campus participating in their Education Week [which, by the way, is one of the best kept secrets in the Church— it Rivals BYU’s Ed Week, with 30,000 less people]. I had the opportunity to eat breakfast with one of my old college professors from BYU. It was great to catch up on what had happened in our lives the past 20 years. My professor had served as a Mission President about 10 years ago in the Midwest. I asked him about the work ethic of his missionaries. He then related the following: “I would kneel in front of the transfer board and just pray and plead that the Lord would just send me some missionaries who knew how to work.” He then continued and said, “I would rather have a missionary who knew how to work, and didn’t have a testimony— we could deal with that— than a missionary who had a testimony, but did not

know how to work.” As soon as I concluded my conversation with him, I called home to make sure my kids were working! I was getting nervous.

After my wife and I were married, I often dreamed of one day living in a nice home on about 10 acres of land, complete with horses, cows, and ducks on the pond. Having my children help my wife and I work was just going to be part of the deal. After 20 plus years of marriage, it doesn’t look like that idyllic life is going to happen. Our challenge has been like many of yours— teaching our children to work while living in an urban setting. President Spencer W. Kimball spoke to this when he said, “The idle generation! Hours each day and nothing to do. ... We want you parents to create work for your children. ... ‘What can we do?’ ” they ask. Do the shopping, work in the hospital, help the neighbors and the church custodian, wash dishes, vacuum the floors, make the beds, get the meals, learn to sew. Read good books, ... clean the house, press your



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shovel the snow, peddle papers. Lawmakers in their over-eagerness to protect the child have legislated until the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. But no law prohibits most work [here] suggested ... , and parents can make work” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, pp. 360–61).

One of the challenges, but also one of the great opportunities, is to find meaningful work for our children to do. Besides having chores and responsibilities around the home, our children should have opportunities to work for other people. If their only experience in life is working for their parents, then they really have been sheltered from what's it's like to work for those who do not view the world the same way that we do. I have enjoyed talking to my children about the different people that they work for. It has been a great learning opportunity for them to work for different bosses, aside from the nice fringe benefit of making some money.

How would it be if our children could one day pay a tribute like this:

“I really enjoyed [President Benson's] talk to fathers because I could relate to some of the suggestions he gave there. The one that stands out in my mind is to teach your kids to work. My father and I did countless projects around the home together, with the most memorable being the basketball court. For us to put up our court it was necessary to haul out twenty-seven pickup-loads of dirt. This took many hours and quite a few weeks. When my father would come home from work, we would eat and immediately it was into the grubbies and work in the backyard to start digging. It entailed quite a process. We had to remove a section of the fence so we could back the truck into the yard and make it easier to wheelbarrow the dirt into the truck. Once the truck was full it also had to be unloaded. At times the calloused hands and aching back didn't seem worth it, but finally we had our court

“I will never forget

the many hours we spent side by side discussing life and the gospel. I learned more than just a good work ethic; I learned a lot about my dad and I grew really close to him. It will always be something we can look back on and see the fruits of our labors, and the stronger ties that now bind our relationship are impossible to break” (Douglas E. Brinley, “Fathering—Comments from the Fathered,” in *Eternal Families* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], Eds. Douglas E. Brinley and Daniel K. Judd, pp. 147–148).

Working in our families and teaching our children how to work is essentially how we teach our children to serve in the Kingdom.

I recommend a self evaluation to all parents. Is there anything that you presently do for your children that they can do themselves? If so, make some changes. Expect your children to work. Work with them on projects together, and help them find jobs to earn money. Their income will help offset some of your expenses, and they



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Will feel better about themselves.

It is not easy to help create a desire in our children to work. We must create needs!

If children have a need for something, then they will they desire to achieve it. Thus, in order to create a desire, parents must help create needs. So, for children whose parents buy them everything, what desire do they have to work? Parents have to create needs! This can be done in a monthly parent-child interview. Parents can help their children identify upcoming needs they have. Financial needs for the next quarter can also be discussed. There will be shoes for football, insurance for driving, prom dresses, camps, EFY, school clothes, etc. Help children understand what their contribution should be, and then help them identify how they can earn the money.

Sometimes a need can be created by giving a child a difficult calling or assignment. Gene R. Cook shared the experience of his dad telling him that he (Gene)

would have to pay for his own mission. He was trying to create a need. Elder Cook worked for eight years to earn the money for his mission. However, just a few days before his left, his dad said that he “had no intention of being robbed of the blessings of paying for my mission.” He then told Gene that he could use the money for college and marriage when he got home from his mission. The need was what motivated Elder Cook to earn the money.

Parents can also help children set target dates for certain amounts of money they will have for their missions, colleges, or marriage. Such a specific goal can help create a real need in children.

Needs can also be created in our children if they can associate with hard working friends. Several years ago, my son went to Six Flags with his good friend from Utah. At that point in his life, my son had earned a little money, but not as much as he should or could. On the other hand, his friend dug trenches for sprinkler systems and earned

a lot of money that summer-money. My son watched as his friend was able to buy food and drink in the park all day long. By the end of the day, my son had no money whatsoever. I think that got him thinking how nice it would be to work more, and earn some money. Now the tides have changed. I now go to Six Flags and try to bum money off my son— he has more money than I do.

One last suggestion. Children can create a need within themselves. If young people are approached spiritually and taught what the Lord expects them to do, they will create the need within themselves and will stretch to do what is right. (see Gene R. Cook, *Raising Up A Family To The Lord* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993], pp. 248-249).

The Lord wants our children to learn to work, sacrifice, and serve. We cannot build future missionaries and disciples of the Savior on diets of Cotton Candy, Co-Co Puffs, and Country Club memberships. They need to learn to work, and the laboratory for that is the home.