NARRATOR: This is Stories from General Conference on the topic of Parenting. This is the Mormon Channel.

Parenting can be a difficult job and has no instruction manual that works in every case. Every child is different. But one of the best methods is to practice what you preach. In the October 1997 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson related a long-remembered example of this principle given by a son at his father’s funeral.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, October 1997)

“At the funeral service of a noble General Authority, H. Verlan Andersen, a tribute was expressed by a son. It has application wherever we are and whatever we are doing. It is the example of personal experience.

The son of Elder Andersen related that years earlier, he had a special school date on a Saturday night. He borrowed from his father the family car. As he obtained the car keys and headed for the door, his father said, "The car will need more gas before tomorrow. Be sure to fill the tank before coming home."

Elder Andersen's son then related that the evening activity was wonderful. Friends met, refreshments were served, and all had a good time. In his exuberance, however, he failed to follow his father's instruction and add fuel to the car's tank before returning home.

Sunday morning dawned. Elder Andersen discovered the gas gauge showed empty. The son saw his father put the car keys on the table. In the Andersen family the Sabbath day was a day for worship and thanksgiving, and not for purchases.

As the funeral message continued, Elder Andersen's son declared, "I saw my father put on his coat, bid us good-bye, and walk the long distance to the chapel, that he might attend an early meeting." Duty called. Truth was not held slave to expedience.

In concluding his funeral message, Elder Andersen's son said, "No son ever was taught more effectively by his father than I was on that occasion. My father not only knew the truth, but he also lived it." Live truth.”
NARRATOR: Setting high expectations for your children can help them reach their full potential. In the Priesthood session of the April 1998 General Conference, Elder Neal A. Maxwell told about how his parents set high expectations and taught him how to work.

(Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Priesthood Session, April 1998)

Brethren, during my Aaronic Priesthood years I was a swineherd! Way back then, by means of a 4-H Club project involving purebred Duroc pigs, I became familiar with work! As proof that what follows is not merely swollen memory, may I, with Elder Nelson's help, display very briefly this blanket of nearly 100 ribbons won by my prize pigs at various fairs over several years.

Up near Elder Nelson's hand is a pink ribbon, won 60 years ago. It was the very first ribbon I ever won. I think the judge had a tender eye, and the pig wasn't really so choice, but he knew I needed encouragement and hence the fourth prize. The purple ribbons were for champions that were exhibited later on!

Thank you, Elder Nelson.

Brethren, I learned the hard way about the need to watch shifting pork prices at the local meat-packing plant. Careful records of profits and losses were kept with the help of my bookkeeper father. As in all things, my parents, so supportive, even ended up doing some of the perspiring themselves, including a special mother born 95 years ago today. She showed me how to work, and she loved me enough to correct me.

In order to obtain low-cost pig feed, I regularly bought dozens and dozens of three-day-old loaves of bread at a bakery for a mere penny a loaf. Additionally, if present at the right time at a local dairy, I could get about 70 gallons of skim milk free! Now I pay $2.50 a gallon--an amusing irony. By saving in these ways, I could buy the needed grain for the pigs with the little hard cash that I had.

There were many times when a pregnant sow would give birth to her litter after midnight. The resultant weariness of attending to all that, and more, was real. Yet through it all, there was a sense of some accomplishment, including contributing to our family menus. Most young men my age did similar work. Back then, brethren, we were all poor together, and we didn't know it. Work was a given. Today, for some, receiving is a given.

However, there were real social downsides to raising pigs. Already shy, I remember vividly the principal of the junior high school coming into my class once and saying aloud in front of everybody: "Neal, your mother just called. Your pigs are out!" I felt like crawling under my desk but instead ran home to help round up the pigs.

My father was loving but exacting. He noted that while I worked hard, my work was often not carefully done. I was a stranger to excellence. One summer day I determined to
please Dad by putting in a number of needed fence posts, firmly implanted and fully aligned. I worked hard all that day and then scanned the lane expectantly down which my father would walk home. When he arrived, I watched anxiously as he carefully inspected the fence posts, even checking them with a level bar before pronouncing them to be fully satisfactory. Then came his praise. My sweat of the brow had earned Dad's commendation which, in turn, melted my heart.

Please forgive this brief autobiographical note, which I have used to express my deep appreciation for learning to work at an early age. Even so, brethren, I certainly did not always put my shoulder to the wheel with a "heart full of song," but I did learn about shoulders and wheels, which helped later in life, when the wheels grew larger. Some of today's otherwise good young men mistakenly think that putting their shoulders to the wheel is the same thing as putting their hands on a steering wheel!

NARRATOR: Parents have more experience than their children, and should use that wisdom to keep their children safe. But children sometimes have the tendency to resist warnings from parents. In the October 1998 General Conference, Elder Henry B. Eyring told of a personal experience with his mother that he remembered long afterwards.

(Elder Henry B. Eyring, Saturday Afternoon Session, October 1998)

Those of us who have been parents have felt the anxiety of sensing danger our children cannot yet see. Few prayers are so fervent as those of a parent asking to know how to touch a child to move away from danger. Most of us have felt the blessing of hearing and heeding the warning voice of a parent.

I can still remember my mother speaking softly to me one Saturday afternoon when, as a little boy, I asked her for permission to do something I thought was perfectly reasonable and which she knew was dangerous. I still am amazed at the power she was granted, I believe from the Lord, to turn me around with so few words. As I remember them, they were: "Oh, I suppose you could do that. But the choice is yours." The only warning was in the emphasis she put on the words could and choice. Yet that was enough for me.

Her power to warn with so few words sprang from three things I knew about her. First, I knew she loved me. Second, I knew she had already done what she wanted me to do and been blessed by it. And third, she had conveyed to me her sure testimony that the choice I had to make was so important that the Lord would tell me what to do if I asked Him. Love, example, and testimony: those were keys that day, and they have been whenever I have been blessed to hear and then heed the warning of a servant of the Lord.

NARRATOR: You are listening to “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of parenting here on the Mormon Channel.
In the October 2001 General Conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson told about a harrowing experience he had with his family and a lesson he learned about parenting.

(Elder Russell M. Nelson, Sunday Morning Session, October 2001)

Years ago when Sister Nelson and I had several teenaged daughters, we took our family on a vacation far away from telephones and boyfriends. We went on a raft trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. As we started our journey, we had no idea how dangerous this trip could be.

The first day was beautiful. But on the second day, when we approached Horn Creek rapids and saw that precipitous drop ahead, I was terrified. Floating on a rubber raft, our precious family was about to plunge over a waterfall! Instinctively I put one arm around my wife and the other around our youngest daughter. To protect them, I tried to hold them close to me. But as we reached the precipice, the bended raft became a giant sling and shot me into the air. I landed into the roiling rapids of the river. I had a hard time coming up. Each time I tried to find air, I hit the underside of the raft. My family couldn't see me, but I could hear them shouting, "Daddy! Where's Daddy?"

I finally found the side of the raft and rose to the surface. The family pulled my nearly drowned body out of the water. We were thankful to be safely reunited.

The next several days were pleasant and delightful. Then came the last day, when we were to go over Lava Falls, known as the most dangerous drop of the journey. When I saw what was ahead, I immediately asked to beach the raft and hold an emergency family council meeting, knowing that if we were to survive this experience, we needed to plan carefully. I reasoned with our family: "No matter what happens, the rubber raft will remain on top of the water. If we cling with all our might to ropes secured to the raft, we can make it. Even if the raft should capsize, we will be all right if we hang tightly to the ropes."

I turned to our little seven-year-old daughter and said, "All of the others will cling to a rope. But you will need to hold on to your daddy. Sit behind me. Put your arms around me and hold me tightly while I hold the rope."

That we did. We crossed those steep, rough rapids—hanging on for dear life—and all of us made it safely.

Brothers and sisters, I nearly lost my life learning a lesson that I now give to you. As we go through life, even through very rough waters, a father's instinctive impulse to cling tightly to his wife or to his children may not be the best way to accomplish his objective. Instead, if he will lovingly cling to the Savior and the iron rod of the gospel, his family will want to cling to him and to the Savior.
This lesson is surely not limited to fathers. Regardless of gender, marital status, or age, individuals can choose to link themselves directly to the Savior, hold fast to the rod of His truth, and lead by the light of that truth. By so doing, they become examples of righteousness to whom others will want to cling.

NARRATOR: Setting proper priorities is an important part of parenting. In the October 2002 General Conference, Elder L. Tom Perry told of an experience with his own family that illustrated the effects of proper priorities.

(Elder L. Tom Perry, Saturday Morning Session, October 2002)

Second only to the importance of being eternal companions is being an earthly parent. Fathers and mothers need to consider their roles in this great responsibility. My children taught me a great lesson many years ago. Our family had moved from California to New York, where I had accepted a position with a new company. We began the process of finding a new home by looking in communities closest to the city. Gradually, however, we moved farther away from the city to find a home in a neighborhood that suited our needs. We found a beautiful home some distance from New York City. It was a one-story house nestled in the lovely deep woods of Connecticut. The final test before purchasing the home was for me to ride the commuter train into New York and check the time and see how long the commute would take. I made the trip and returned quite discouraged. The trip was one and one-half hours each way. I walked into our motel room where our family was waiting for me and presented to my children a choice.

"You can have either this house or a father," I said. Much to my surprise they responded, "We will take the house. You are never around much anyway." I was devastated. What my children were telling me was true. I needed to repent fast. My children needed a father who was home more. Eventually we reached a compromise and bought a home closer to the city, with a much shorter commute. I changed my work habits to allow me to have more time with my family.

NARRATOR: Those who place their parenting responsibilities in the proper priority will provide a foundation for generations far into the future. In the April 2004 General Conference, Sister Julie B. Beck told of a group of women she encountered who had the proper perspective about motherhood.

(Sister Julie B. Beck, Sunday Morning Session, April 2004)

I was recently at a park where I met a group of women with mother hearts. They were young, covenant-keeping women. They were bright and had obtained advanced degrees from respected universities. Now they were devoting their considerable gifts to planning
dinner that evening and sharing housekeeping ideas. They were teaching two-year-olds to be kind to one another. They were soothing babies, kissing bruised knees, and wiping tears. I asked one of those mothers how it came about that she could transfer her talents so cheerfully into the role of motherhood. She replied, "I know who I am, and I know what I am supposed to do. The rest just follows." That young mother will build faith and character in the next generation one family prayer at a time, one scripture study session, one book read aloud, one song, one family meal after another. She is involved in a great work. She knows that "children are an heritage of the Lord" and "happy is the [woman] that hath [a] quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3, 5). She knows that the influence of righteous, conscientious, persistent, daily mothering is far more lasting, far more powerful, far more influential than any earthly position or institution invented by man. She has the vision that, if worthy, she has the potential to be blessed as Rebekah of old to be "the mother of thousands of millions" (Genesis 24:60).

NARRATOR: Parenting is a heavy responsibility that needs the proper priority and effort. The role of parent is sacred, and when done properly, it has an enormous positive effect on not just our own children, but generations of descendants.

Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. For more information on the Mormon Channel, go to radio.lds.org.