



## Choosing Parenthood, the Hard Joy

By Ray Alston

### PARENTING

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*Parenthood is often framed as optional and exhausting. But what do we gain by taking a more eternal view?*

When did parenthood become just one lifestyle option among many—and what gets lost when it's framed that way?

Such a shift certainly has its positives—allowing people to choose is not in itself a bad thing—but [current narratives](#) discourage having and raising children. Media and public discussions [often emphasize the burdens of parenthood](#). For just one prominent example, in 2024, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued a warning that parenting can present a “[public health concern](#)” because of the stress and mental health challenges associated with it.

Other commentators have pointed out that a generation learned to “[dread motherhood](#).” These trials are very real. We bear broad responsibilities in our communities to help reduce the loneliness and stressors of parenting.

But if we discuss only the problems, we are not creating a more accurate picture than if we only rhapsodize sentimentally about the pitter-patter of little feet. We shouldn't ignore the deeper reality: parenting is both struggle and joy, and part of our covenantal relationship with God. Couples who are trying to decide whether or not to have children need an honest, balanced look at parenting that examines both its challenges and its [abundant blessings](#), as well as God's wishes for His children about their children.

Achieving such a balanced look at parenting, however, requires more than an exhaustive list of pros and cons. It requires a reframing of the discussion that allows us to see all aspects of parenthood accurately. Fortunately, there are revealed truths that help us to see parenting from an [eternal perspective](#). One of the most important sources of revealed truth on parenting is *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, an inspired declaration by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1995.

Parenting is both struggle and joy.

## Parenthood as Burden vs. Parenthood as Commandment

*The Family: A Proclamation to the World* is unambiguous: God commands us to choose to bring children into the world in the proper order. The Proclamation affirms that the commandment “to multiply and [replenish the earth remains in force](#).” If we are tempted to consider such teachings outdated or superseded by new conditions, recent prophetic teachings have also reinforced the doctrine. In October, President Dallin H. Oaks, then the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, “The national declines in marriage and childbearing are understandable for historic reasons, but [Latter-day Saint values and practices should improve](#)—not follow—those trends.” The commandment remains relevant, and seeing the obligation to bear children as a commandment represents a fundamental reframing.

A commandment is different from a social mandate or a biological imperative since commandments include personal accountability before God. Scripture teaches us that

when God gives us commandments, He also makes it possible for us to obey them (see [1 Nephi 3:7](#)). Therefore, parents do not face the challenges of bearing and rearing children alone. They are promised the assistance of the Almighty. Furthermore, commandments require honest effort rather than absolute success (see, for instance, [Doctrine and Covenants 124:49](#)). Those who for one reason or another are unable to have children in this life but who have tried can be comforted that they are under no condemnation.

Choosing to have children is only the first step. Parents then have responsibilities throughout their children's lives. These responsibilities can seem daunting, and some potential parents may feel reluctant to assume such a level of responsibility. However, The Proclamation, even while impressing on readers the seriousness of these responsibilities, also presents them as manageable tasks. A fascinating passage lays out basic parental responsibilities: "Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity."

The word "entitled" is typically used negatively. This is particularly the case in the public language of the Church. For example, Oaks has taught, "[Entitlement is generally selfish](#). It demands much, and it gives little or nothing. Its very concept causes us to seek to elevate ourselves above those around us."

*The Family: A Proclamation to the World* is an unusual case in which "entitled" is used not to criticize an attitude, but to instill one. While we should not generally feel a right to special privileges, an exception is made for children. They have a divinely appointed right to be born into a family welded together through mutual commitment between husband and wife.

The word "entitled," therefore, shows that perhaps the most important thing parents can provide their children is the security that comes from faithfulness to each other. It is easy to overemphasize many aspects of parenting, such as responsibilities to provide children with financial resources and with their initial education and socialization. While important, these duties are not the first identified. The foundational priority for couples is building a loving relationship founded on mutual fidelity

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to each other and obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ. The fact that fidelity is the first responsibility of parenthood in the Proclamation should inspire confidence in couples considering whether or not to have children. Can you love each other and be true to each other? If so, then you are well on your way to being a great parent in the eyes of God!

The stance on marital fidelity in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* represents another important reframing of our perspectives. Marital fidelity is actually as much about children as it is about husband and wife. Therefore, personal fulfillment is not the foundation for a happy family. Rather, the foundation is the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Such a view of the family implies the sacrifice of some personal desires, perhaps even needs. But the message of Christ's Gospel is that sacrifice proves eternally more satisfying than seeking our own fulfillment, as Jesus taught:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." ([Matthew 16:24-25](#)).

## Choosing Parenthood with an Eternal Lens

The sacrifices necessary to have and raise children, therefore, are not merely rewarding. They can be sanctifying. They bind husband and wife together in shared commitments. They help tie them to Christ as they join Him in His redemptive mission. The blessings that families receive for such sacrifices overflow and pour into communities. Oaks taught, "Following Christ and giving ourselves in service to one another is [the best remedy](#) for the selfishness and individualism that now seem to be so common." As the home becomes a laboratory for developing Christlike service, sacrifice, and love, family members are better prepared to bring these attributes into the public square. Complete fidelity between couples is the beginning of developing Christlike character as a family and can lead to other virtues, including more public ones. The Proclamation, therefore, helps us to see that creating a loving family is part of our Christian calling to love and serve our neighbors. Love cultivated in the home radiates outward to bless others.

Such a view of parenting can help us.

While the demands of parenting can seem daunting and even all-consuming, the Proclamation helps us to see them as manageable. Its call for community support and individual adaptation provides the practical tools necessary for implementing its teachings in the life of every family. It presents mutual fidelity as the baseline for creating a happy family. We can start there knowing that God will help us accomplish the other responsibilities He has given us and that He will be merciful to us as we give our honest effort. Such a view of parenting can help us to see that it is not only possible, but also rewarding.

About the author

## Ray Alston

Ray Alston has a PhD from The Ohio State University. He now teaches Russian at BYU-Idaho, where he graduated with a BA in English in 2011. That was also where he met his wife, Megan, with whom he shares three sons and a love of nature, music, and good books.