Being an Example Talk given by Grandma Elva Smith March 28, 1993

One way we can feel Christ’s love is through the example of others as they emulate Christ’s life. I am happy that during this past week I have had the opportunity of reviewing how important good example is. I know the example we are is so important but sometimes we might get a little careless and forget just what kind of an example we are setting.

First of all, as Nephi said, I too, was born of goodly parents who taught me gospel truths and they lived by them. They did whatever the Lord asked them to do. When I was 18 years old my parents were called on a temple mission for 6 months. This call was repeated again for 6 months several times with a few months in between each call. Many times I accompanied them to the temple, drove the car for them and spent the day in Cardston visiting friends or whatever.

At this time the first temple session started at 8am with a spiritual meeting in the temple chapel. I loved to attend these meetings and I was welcomed even though I didn’t have a temple recommend- I had not received my own endowment. President Wood usually presided or one of his counselors and they would call people from the audience to bear their testimonies or sing. I remember hearing Arvilla’s folks sing a duet and at a later time I was there when Bishop Ellis was called to bear his testimony –also I remember Morgan being called to bear his testimony. The next session was at 2 pm preceded by another meeting and another at 6pm – before each session. I loved to find an excuse to go to those meetings. I’m not sure when the meetings were discontinued. They were wonderful.

My mind was made up before, but I was convinced the temple was the only place I would ever be married in. There was such a special spirit there. I’m a long way from being a teenage girl in Mutual. Your life is much different than mine was. You live in the computer age. I came from a pencil age – not even a ball point. The world is different but the principles are the same.

When we are young we look to the older girls for our examples and when you become older we realize there are younger ones looking up to us. Girls, be a good example to your young friends. They are watching you.

I have had many committed teachers through my life who were good examples to me. The influence one’s life has on the lives of others is seldom spoken and is little known – but it is there.

I really can’t remember much about each lesson but I do remember the feelings that were left with me. My grandchildren often say, “Tell us about the olden days.”

I am remembering a sister who was my mutual teacher. She had 5 or 6 children and taught our class every Tuesday evening. We met in the old church in Taylorville –one big room with a green curtain pulled around a section to give us some privacy. We had a coal oil lamp on the chair for light. Visual aids had not appeared at that time. I have never forgotten her committed and devoted example. She made a lasting impression on me that helped my testimony grow. There were about 10 girls in our class and we had a lot of fun. Sometimes the evening finished with a dance - music from the piano. She usually walked to the church- there and back- a couple of miles each way. Cars were not so reliable in the early 30’s. It was usually walk, or hop on a horse, but she usually walked. Her example has stayed with me. We are drawn to people like her – to be like them.

I have always loved Primary and the early examples the leaders have been to me. Whenever I see any of them who are still here I want to call them ‘Sister Primary’. I often think of the example that Marguirete’s Aunt was. She was the first Primary I knew. She prepared us for the yearly Primary Conference, teaching new songs usually without a piano. She was not a musician but she could carry a nice tune. She was tireless.

We have been admonished to be an example of the believers. A believer is someone who knows and follows the teaching of Christ in his mind and heart and whose actions are a witness of that belief.

We can understand a principle but we must live it. We choose the examples we follow. They are not forced up on us. We choose which ones we emulate and which ones we want to ignore. Throughout the beginning pages of the Book of Mormon we are reminded that Nephi believed the words of his father, Lehi, and used his free agency to follow Lehi’s righteous example. Lamon and Lemuel thought their father was foolish and they murmured against him. They chose not to follow their father’s teachings. Nephi was blessed with the spirit of the Lord. Laman and Lemuel lived lives of despair.

Lehi asked his four sons to go back to Jersalem to get the records. Laban had the records. He was a very wealthy man. They cast lots and it fell to Laman to go back and try to get them but he had to flee for his life. Laban would not give them to him. Nephi thought of all the wealth they left behind and maybe they could buy the records. When Laban saw all the wealth he realized he could keep the records and have the wealth. He refused so he sent his servants to kill Nephi and his brothers. They had to flee for their lives. Things of the world did not produce the records. Nephi was not ready to give up. In 1Nephi 4:1 Nephi said, “Let us go again to Jerusalem and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord for he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty or even his tens of thousands.”

At night Nephi led his brothers outside the wall of Jersalem. This time not leaving it to chance or worldly things but going by faith. He said, “I was led by the spirit not knowing beforehand what I should do.” The Lord opened the way for him to obtain the record. By putting his trust in the Lord, he produced the result. Nephi’s righteous example has blessed many.

One of the General Authorities tells this story- When he was in the Marine Corps somewhere in California, he said he left a decision to chance and almost found himself in an unpleasant situation. His buddies had been pestering him every weekend to go to the dance hall in Los Angeles and have a good time. Each weekend he turned them down thinking that was not the right place for him. But just once he decided to leave it to chance and see how it would turn out. They started out riding the street car. As it progressed from stop to stop it was filling up with many young ladies. They were not the type he had been around before. They were extremely forward. He felt uncomfortable as they approached him and he retreated. On the back seat of the street car were four young ladies whose appearance was entirely different. He asked them if they were going to the dance. Their reply was, “not the one you are going to.” Then they said, “We are going to a Mormon dance in the Adams Ward.” He felt relieved and willingly got off the bus when they did and had a delightful evening at the Adams Ward.

We need to make our own decisions not to follow worldly ways. If we could or would always follow examples based on our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ what a change it would make in our lives.

Alma 39:11 we read- “Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing. Suffer not the devil to lead away your heart for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.” This was the counsel Alma gave his son Corianton who was doing foolish things and not obeying his father’s council. He set a bad example that affected the lives of many others.

An exemplary way of life is for all of us. It is not reserved for only a few, as some think, but a constant attitude of those who desire to follow the Lord’s council. We can always feel secure in looking to Christ as our perfect example.

Third Nephi 27:27 “Therefore what manner of men ought ye to be- Verily I say unto you EVEN AS I AM.” Jesus taught many beautiful principles. Follow the commandment to be happy. Do not argue or fight but love one another. He taught us how to pray. “Behold I am the light I have set an example”, “A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you.”

The best way to approach a friend who needs the light of the gospel is to be a good example. We need to be caring and interested in their thoughts and feelings and be a good listener. Then testify of the things we know. If you try to improve one person by being a good example you are improving two people –yourself and the other person. If you try to improve someone without being a good example you will not improve anyone.

We really need no reason to honor the Sabbath other than our love for the Savior and to keep his commandments. D&C 59:9 “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day.” We have not been given endless restrictions for the Sabbath day. There is a line that is acceptable and what is not. We have to answer these questions ourselves and follow the examples set before us.

One young girl said her parents laid down the law about Sunday. She thought it unfair. She had been taught in her classes that on Sunday she should visit the sick and things like that. So if she couldn’t do anything fun she might as well do something good. She took her sister with her and they visited an older couple who had trouble walking, who did not come to church very often. “We started telling them about our Sunday School class and Sacrament meeting and ended up hearing many interesting stories about their lives. Now we visit them quite often. They became our favorite people”. Sundays had become people days for these girls and they enjoyed the Sabbath day even more.

It is sad if our Sabbath depends on which sport event is scheduled or if the weather is ideal for an outing. I hope I have been a right example for my children to help them feel good about the Sabbath. I like to put away anything I have been working on during the week. This is my work and not for Sunday. We can feel reverence for the Sabbath if it is special. We tried to have a special dinner to be eaten in the dining room. After church, when my children were younger, there was usually a ball game in session as we were leaving town. You could hear the screams. I don’t remember the boys ever begging to stay and watch the games. They were hungry and anxious to get home. I remember one Sunday one of my boys hurried and changed his clothes and was busy making a sandwich. I said, “We are just about ready to sit down”, but he said, “Oh I won’t have time they will be here for me any minute”. Then I found out he had been asked to be part of a baseball team rounded up out in our area and they were going to Stavely for a game. They had convinced my son they had to have him or they couldn’t play. To myself I thought I would be as surprised if they came for him, as he would be surprised if they didn’t come. They didn’t come. They were being a bad example to him at his teen age. I have encouraged the girls to dress in keeping with the Sabbath and it pleases me that my daughters follow that example with their daughters. Keeping the Sabbath Day holy is a sign to the Lord that we want to be his people.

We need to set an example like Joshua. It was necessary in his time, as it is now, for the people to make a firm commitment and take a stand. “Choose ye this day whom you will serve but for me and my house we will serve the Lord”. Joshua 25:15

Brother Clark tells the story about making a purchase and he needed to cash a check. When he was asked for identification as he took out his credit cards and his temple recommend fell out. The cashier said, “I’ll accept that, if it is current”. Wouldn’t it be great if we had a Mormon credit card – a card carrying Mormon could be depended on to keep his word and to be honest in paying his bills. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to set such an example and to be known for our honesty.

President Eldon Tanner said – remind the people who they are and then act accordingly. If we act accordingly we will be keeping the commandments of God. Parent’s example means everything to children. They will follow a good or a bad example because our actions speak louder than our words.

I read a story about a girl named Jenny. She was invited by her high school association to attend a social which was to be her introduction to this particular high school group. She was thrilled, when they picked her up in her new dress. They were fine girls who had invited her as far as she knew. She went to the place and after a time she was the only one not smoking. This surprised her because she knew some of the girls were from LDS homes. She felt conspicuous a little out of place and wondered if it would be appropriate to just hold a cigarette although she never had. She put that thought away. Then a girl broke out a case of champagne her dad had provided. They all began to drink it. Soon Jenny discovered she was really on one side of the room and them on the other. She felt terrible. She even considered holding a glass but she couldn’t do that either. Finally accompanied by their sneers she left.

It is sad to see nice young people in such a predicament. I hope our young people have the courage to leave when they find themselves in uncomfortable situations. They can leave a theatre if the film is offensive or the video offensive. You don’t need to stay. There was a young man in a crowd at some function and packages of cigarettes were passed around. It seemed everyone took one. He was feeling that he would be so conspicuous not to take one but right beside him was a fellow who said, “No thank you”. That helped him. Someone else was strong enough to show him how to be a good example. Then he noticed down the row, many others refusing to take one.

I think L Tom Perry told the story of being with a group for their cocktail get-acquainted time. All the men were waving their glasses around; finally he asked if there was anything else to drink. “Oh yes, we can get you some ginger ale”. But he couldn’t see much difference in the looks of ginger ale or the real thing. He said, “I would really like a glass of milk”. A jug of milk was put out and he found it interesting to see how many followed him and had milk. After that incident a large pitcher of milk was always seen on the counter at their functions.

The example we set about our church callings is all important. Making a remark like, ‘I have to Visiting Teaching’ can make it sound to those around like it is drudgery. A different picture is painted when you say, ‘today I get to go visit sister so and so’. We need to be careful what we say.

It is the same about paying tithing and fast offering. If it can be done willingly just like a good habit and not say, ‘I could surely use that money for myself’. Tithing should be given lovingly, joyfully and willingly. The Lord’s tenth is sacred.

I remember the story of President Lorenzo Snow when he was told to visit St George Utah. While there, the importance of the law of tithing was confirmed. He said, “The word of the Lord is this, the time has come for every Latter Day Saint to do the will of the Lord and pay his tithing in full”. This is the word of the Lord to all of us.

It is a voluntary matter between us and the Lord. Each of us decides whether we want the blessings which come from the obedience to the law. If we love the Lord we desire to keep His commandments and receive His blessings. I have a testimony of the blessings that come when we pay our tithes. Arlen and Eldon were both on their missions for one year at the same time. I felt we were blessed at that time to live comfortably and keep them on their missions. The windows of heaven were opened for us both spiritually and temporally even though the crops were not great at that time.

I would also like to include a word or two about prayer. ‘And they shall teach their children to pray and walk uprightly before the Lord’. When quite young we learn we can get spiritual help whenever we need it. Prayer binds us together and we can ask nothing more than if we ‘council with the Lord in all thy doings. And he will direct thee for good. When thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord that he may watch over you in your sleep and when thou rise up in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God. If ye do these things ye shall be lifted up at the last day’.

If we are to receive answers to prayer our desire and willingness to do the will of the Lord must be equal to our request.

In closing let us always be an example to the believer. That we will act upon it. I am convinced most young people will respond when they see their examples are not wavering. Mothers, how you live will make so much difference in how your daughters live. Be careful of your standards and practices because they will follow you.

The church is true. I love the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am so thankful for my membership in it and for my family and I ask the Lord’s blessings to be with us all.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.