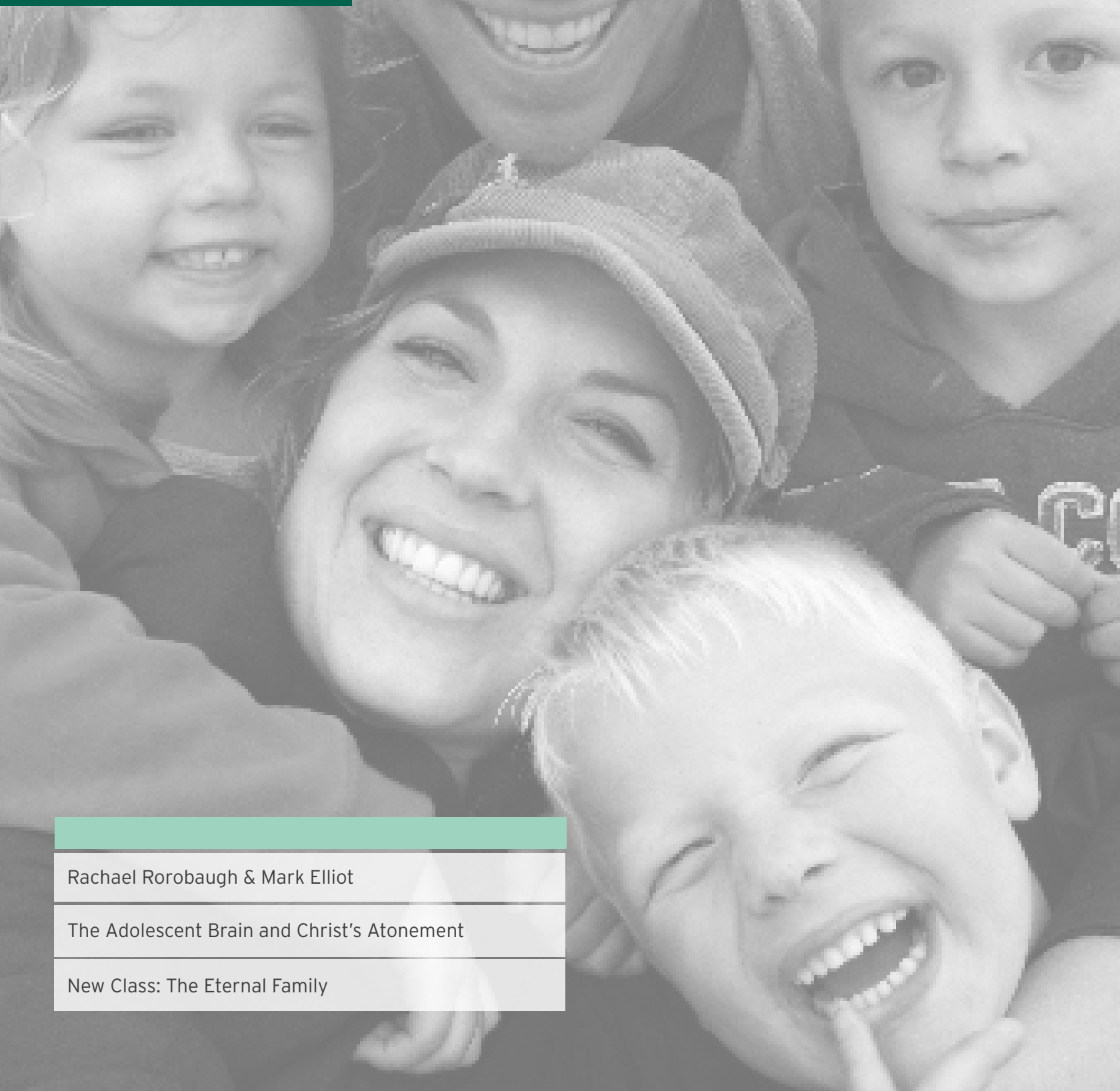




FAMILY CONNECTIONS

BYU SCHOOL OF FAMILY LIFE ALUMNI MAGAZINE

WINTER 2018



Rachael Rorobaugh & Mark Elliot

The Adolescent Brain and Christ's Atonement

New Class: The Eternal Family

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DEAN M. BUSBY
DIRECTOR,
SCHOOL OF FAMILY LIFE



Dear School of Family Life Alumni,

Welcome to our new issue of Family Connections. During the last 7 years we have had the privilege of eight faculty members from the school giving one of the university devotionals or forums. This is a singular honor that comes to a faculty member rarely, at most once a career, and for most faculty it never occurs. So we have been honored to have so many from our school presenting these lectures. In this issue, we are pleased to reprint a recent devotional given by Dr. Sarah Coyne. I think you will enjoy this.

The presence of technology and media in our lives has become so ubiquitous that its influence is often beneath our awareness. I have published a few articles on media and relationships so I tend to pay attention to these sorts of issues. But this year, while I was with a group of our SFL students on a study abroad class to Belize, we visited an Amish community that made me think about these matters on a whole different level. They do not allow electricity and all of the devices and technologies associated with it into their communities. The contrast between their lifestyles and ours was tremendous. While I admit that having to prepare meals, wash cloths, bathe, and travel would be exponentially more difficult for them than it is for us, I did notice how much more connected they felt to each other and to their religion than most of the people I know. This experience has caused me to reflect on the many ways that our modern lifestyles have interfered with the natural flow of our relationships. I have pondered how we could achieve some of the benefits of an Amish life without such a drastic approach. I am sorry to admit that I am not smart enough to have come up with any real solutions.

Still, when I listen to the talks given by our faculty, many of which are available on the SFL website (<http://familylife.byu.edu/Lectures.html>), I am encouraged that their careful study and research of these important issues we are facing in our families can help us address our challenges without taking a draconian approach to technology or media. Likewise, when I listen to the materials and lessons that Drs. Jason Carroll and Larry Nelson are using along with their colleagues in Religious Education for the new eternal family course (SFL 200) that you will read about in this edition, I also feel hopeful.

What is consistent about this research and teaching that can be so useful for us is the way these gifted scholars and teachers help us pay attention to the important doctrines and principles we want to have guide us in our daily lives. It is the way they help us make more conscious decisions about applying these principles so we feel empowered to set the tone and quality of our relationships, rather than allowing influences from outside our homes to set that tone. It is learning about how other people successfully develop relationships that are healthy and strong that gives us ideas and supports our efforts. I hope you find their insights and knowledge as helpful as I have found them to be as you read this issue and dig a little deeper into the materials available to us.

SINCERELY,
DEAN BUSBY

FRONT COVER: Rorobaugh Family

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PHOTO BY MAGGIE MILLER



DR. SARAH M. COYNE

THE FANTASY & ROYAL REALITY OF *your Royal Identity*

Dr. Sarah M. Coyne¹

Editor's Note: This article was originally given as a BYU Devotional address on May 31st, 2016. We reprint it here with Dr. Coyne's permission. Many SFL faculty have given Devotional addresses. You can listen to them at: <http://familylife.byu.edu/Lectures.html>

I study the effect of media on children and families and recently finished a study on the effect of the superhero and princess culture on children. If you have ever been around a preschool child, you know that both superheroes and princesses are very popular with this age group. In fact, many children this age say that they would like to be a superhero or a princess when they grow up. I've pondered on how being a superhero or a princess might relate to our royal identity and what this might mean for the way we see ourselves in an eternal light.

SUPERHEROES AND THE IDEAL MAN

From Superman to Spider-Man to Marvel's Avengers, some of the most popular movies of all time have featured superheroes. Why are superheroes so popular today? Well, superheroes are pretty cool. Wouldn't we all like to imagine ourselves being able to fly faster than a speeding bullet, see through buildings, or be almost invincible?

And yet, cool as superheroes are, they are not always the greatest role models in how they use power. First of all, superheroes tend to embody a stereotypical hypermasculinization: They are often brash, arrogant, angry, and aggressive, and they take a lot of risks. Some of them misunderstand or abuse their power. It seems that to be a superhero or even to be a man in popular culture today, one needs to



embody pretty negative behaviors.

In a recent BYU devotional Bishop Gérald Caussé spoke out on the troubling portrayal of superheroes in the media:

The world values the cult of the invincible. Superheroes, from Batman to Superman, abound in our media. This ideology leads to dangerous behavior. We see people who want to hide their problems under the appearance of strength through boasting, aggressiveness, or abusive behaviors. Some are so obsessed with outperforming others that they turn to drugs or other stimulants in order to do so. Still others lose themselves in egotism and self-admiration. These forms of pride lead to disappointment, ineffectiveness, or worse.²

In this one-size-fits-all mentality for our young boys and men, weakness is not tolerated, and humility, empathy, emotional connection, and softness are not valued. Indeed, some of the most damaging words you can say to a young boy who shows softness or emotional pain is “be a man” or “man up.” The hypermasculinization we so value in the superhero culture is a complete distortion and takes us away from understanding our royal identity as children of God.

Another common fantasy of the superhero culture is called the muscular ideal. Superheroes in popular media tend to look very similar to each other: they are extremely muscular and have broad

shoulders and small waists. Research suggests that exposure to these types of images and media models is related to body dissatisfaction and depression in men.

We almost never talk to men about their body image. There are quite a few conference talks on this topic directed to women, but for some reason we ignore the men. But we know that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15) and that the body is a gift from Heavenly Father. One of Satan’s primary attacks on men’s esteem is to diminish their respect for their body. He tries to make men feel they aren’t good enough or don’t measure up.

Sister Susan W. Tanner (BA ’84), former Young Women general president, said:

[Satan] seduces some to despise their bodies; others he tempts to worship their bodies. In either case, he entices the world to regard the body merely as an object. In the face of so many satanic falsehoods about the body, I want to raise my voice today in support of the sanctity of the body. I testify that the body is a gift to be treated with gratitude and respect.³

Men should not worry about trying to conform to the muscular ideal we see in the superhero culture. The body is not merely an object meant to be honed to ultimate perfection. When I picture Christ, I picture the ultimate superhero—but I do not picture Him as being particularly muscular. We are created in the express image of our Heavenly Father and are His royal heirs. That means our bodies look like His. In the eternities, I cannot imagine everyone walking around looking like they are on steroids! Instead, I imagine individuals of different shapes.

Russell M. Nelson, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said:

Your body, whatever its natural gifts, is a magnificent creation of God [see Psalm 8:3–5; see also Hebrews 2:7, 9]. It is a

tabernacle of flesh—a temple for your spirit [see 1 Corinthians 6:19]. A study of your body attests to its divine design.⁴

Men, do not buy into the fantasy of the superhero culture when you think about the profound gift of your body from your Heavenly Father. Your acceptance of your body is a key part in understanding your royal identity.

THE ULTIMATE VILLAIN AND ULTIMATE HERO

One of my favorite superhero stories is the animated film *The Incredibles*. In the movie is a little boy named Buddy who wants more than anything to be a superhero, but he doesn’t have any superhero powers. He becomes angry and decides to devote his life to destroying the real superheroes as a way to prove how much smarter and more powerful he is. Buddy changes his name to Syndrome and ends up becoming a villain, even though he started out wanting to help others.

There is a very real villain in the story of our lives. Like Buddy, he started out with a different name, Lucifer. The irony is that Satan could have become powerful if he would have trusted in his Father in Heaven’s plan. Instead, he was too impatient and power hungry, which ultimately led to his undoing.

Satan is more powerful than any villain we see in superhero stories but, in our story, we know the ending of the ultimate battle between good and evil, the final showdown. Christ will win the day. Good will conquer evil.

Batman, Captain America, Iron Man, and Spider-Man all have excellent redeeming qualities, yet they pale in comparison with those of the ultimate superhero: Jesus Christ, who was both powerful and meek.

A real superhero is empathetic. He is someone who is “willing to mourn with those that mourn . . . and comfort those that stand

¹ Sarah M. Coyne is an associate professor of human development in the BYU School of Family Life.

³ Susan W. Tanner, “The Sanctity of the Body,” *Ensign*, November 2005, p. 13.

⁴ Russell M. Nelson, “We Are Children of God,” *Ensign*, November 1998, p. 85.

⁵ Tommy Cooney, quoted in Jamesia Thomas, “Peewee Football Team Creates Appreciation Day for Bullied Boy,” *Good Morning America*, ABC News, Nov. 25, 2013, abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/11/peewee-football-team-creates-appreciation-day-for-bullied-boy.

in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). He is soft, gentle, tender, and kind. He understands and uses his emotions to bless the lives of others. We see none of the arrogance or brashness portrayed in the media; instead, we see humility and an understanding and acceptance of one’s own weaknesses.

A true superhero is a defender. I study bullying in childhood, and there is a small group of children who are termed “defenders.” When these children see someone picking on another, they are willing to stand up for the victim, to get a teacher, and to tell the bully to stand down. Defending someone against the schoolyard bully takes a unique type of courage.

I once saw a news article about some young defenders from the Bridgewater, Massachusetts, area. Danny Keefe, age 6, suffered a severe brain hemorrhage after birth and has some serious developmental delays, including some speech problems. He likes to wear a jacket, a tie, and a fedora to school every day. Danny is also the official “water coach” for the Peewee Football League Bridgewater Badgers, composed of a group of fifth-grade boys.

When some of the kids at school started picking on Danny for the way that he spoke and for his choice in outfits, the boys on the football team took action. The quarterback of the football team later said:

We thought that we would all have a day to dress up like Danny. We thought we would all come to school like Danny and sponsor Danny to show Danny that we love him—that we love him very much.⁶

These boys are superheroes—better, in fact, than many of the superheroes we see in the media. They were able to defend someone who was being hurt without resorting to aggression themselves.

In our recent study on superheroes and

defending in preschool boys, we found that boys did not pick up the defending themes in superhero media. Young fans of superheroes were no more likely to be defenders than their peers who were less into the superhero culture. And they were more aggressive than their peers.

A better way to learn how to become a defender would be to study and emulate Jesus Christ—the ultimate defender of mankind. One of my favorite stories in the New Testament is that of the woman caught in adultery:

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. [John 8:3–4]

This was a serious crime, and there was no doubt that she was guilty. The law at the time allowed for her to be stoned to death. She must have been so afraid.

The scribes and Pharisees continued to press Him, and in His kind and wise manner He said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”

By His very example Christ defended the woman, and the crowds, “being convicted by their own conscience,” left her alone and departed.

Christ then asked: Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. [John 8:6–11]. As a mother, I want so badly for my three boys to understand what it means to be a true superhero: To be kind, honest, and true. To defend those who cannot defend themselves. To honor the priesthood and to be righteous defenders of Christ’s authority. To understand where true power comes from

and to respect the true source. To each love and respect their future wife and to be kind, gentle, and understanding fathers. To serve those around them and to show integrity for their values even as the world tries to knock them down.

My greatest hope for my boys is that they understand their royal identities as sons of God and live their lives in a way that would make Him proud.

A ROYAL OBSESSION

Now, on to the princesses. We are obsessed today with royalty. The Disney Princess line earns around \$3 billion each year.⁶ Our own research suggests that 96 percent of pre-school girls view Disney princess media and 82 percent play with Disney princess toys.⁷

I did my graduate work in England and then worked there for a few years before we moved to Utah. While there, I watched people become obsessed when Prince William married Kate Middleton and then become even more so when she gave birth first to Prince George and then to Princess Charlotte. We see this same level of obsession in the media world.

While our family lived in England, we visited an exhibit at the Tower of London that displays the crown jewels and the royal scepter that Queen Elizabeth was given at her coronation. I remember being enchanted by their beauty. I reflected on what an amazing experience that must have been for Elizabeth to have had that crown put on her head and the scepter placed in her hand as she became the queen of England.

My name, Sarah, actually means “princess” in Hebrew. Until I turned 30 and decided I needed to grow up a little, my email address began with “princess-sarah.”

So I have been thinking about this princess thing for a very long time, and

⁶ Jenna Goudreau, “Disney Princess Tops List of the 20 Best-Selling Entertainment Products,” *Forbes*, Sept. 17, 2012, forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2012/09/17/disney-princess-tops-list-of-the-20-best-selling-entertainment-products.

⁷ Sarah M. Coyne, Jennifer Ruh Linder, Eric E. Rasmussen, David A. Nelson, and Victoria Birkbeck, “Pretty as a Princess: Longitudinal Effects of Engagement with Disney Princesses on Gender Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and Prosocial Behavior in Children,” *Child Development*, 87, 1909–1925.

I always felt like my name represented something important and something special. However, you don't need to be named princess to actually be one.

One of my favorite stories is from the film *A Little Princess*. If you remember, this was the story of Sara Crewe, a rich little girl who ended up losing her father and living in an orphanage. One day the headmistress was being particularly mean to Sara and told her that she was not a princess anymore. Sara stood up straight and tall and told her:

I am a princess. All girls are! Even if they live in tiny old attics, even if they dress in rags, even if they aren't pretty or smart or young, they're still princesses.⁸

One reason I think we are so interested in royalty is because it speaks, in part, to the royalty within us. Each of us is a very real prince or princess in our own right—the child of a loving heavenly king and queen. No matter our circumstances in life, we are princesses or princes of a royal family, destined to become queens and kings someday.

Speaking to the young women, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said:

You are truly royal spirit daughters of Almighty God. You are princesses, destined to become queens. Your own wondrous story has already begun. Your “once upon a time” is now.⁹

Each one of us, if we are righteous and endure to the end, will one day receive not a crown and scepter of jewels but, as it says in the scriptures, “a crown of eternal life” (D&C 20:14).

SOMEDAY MY PRINCE WILL COME

In princess stories, a common plot involves the princess finding true love. A prince rides

up on a white horse to sweep the princess off her feet. He seems perfect in every way, and it is love at first sight. They kiss and ride off into a beautiful sunset together, ready to live happily ever after.

Though beautiful, this storyline is misleading in a number of ways. First of all, I believe that the youth of today are too concerned about finding their prince and expecting him to be perfect.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

As we visit with young adults all over the Church, often they will ask, “Well, what are the characteristics I should look for in a future spouse?” as though they have some checklist of “I need to find someone who has these three or four or five things.”...

The list is not for evaluating someone else. The list is for you . . . and what . . . you need to become. And so if there are three primary characteristics that [you] hope to find in an eternal companion, then those are the three things [you] ought to be working to become. Then [you] will be attractive to someone who has those things. . . . You are not on a shopping spree looking for the greatest value with a series of characteristics. You become what you hope your spouse will be, and you'll have a greater likelihood of finding that person.¹⁰

Instead of focusing so much on finding a prince, young women should focus more on becoming a princess. And I don't mean a bratty, materialistic, helpless type of princess. I mean a daughter of God who is secure in her royal identity, who loves to learn and to help others, and who has a strong testimony of Jesus Christ. Good things happen when we focus more on becoming the right person and less on finding the perfect person.

THE THIN IDEAL

In the media, princesses typically have the same look: an impossibly tiny waist, large eyes, and lustrous long hair. In research

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I am a princess. All girls are! Even if they live in tiny old attics, even if they dress in rags, even if they aren't pretty or smart or young, they're still princesses.

”

this is called the “thin ideal.” Studies have shown that internalization of the thin ideal can have a damaging impact on girls' body image, self-esteem, and self-worth.

We start this internalization with our very youngest girls, dressing them up as princesses and complimenting them for being “pretty.” As with superheroes and the muscular ideal, this appearance-based talk leads girls to believe that there is one correct size and shape. Is it any wonder that women tend to have so many body image issues?

As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “One would truly need a great and spacious makeup kit to compete with beauty as portrayed in media all around us.”¹¹

One of my favorite princess movies is *Brave*. If you remember the story, Merida is an independent young princess in Scotland. Her mother is constantly telling her how a princess should behave and tries to arrange a marriage with three lackluster princes. The three candidates decide to have an archery contest to win Merida's hand in marriage.

¹⁰ David A. Bednar, in “Elder and Sister Bednar—Episode 1,” *Conversations*, Mormon Channel, April 7, 2009, mormonchannel.org/listen/series/conversations-audio/elder-and-sister-bednar-episode-1

¹¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, “To Young Women,” *Ensign*, November 2005, p. 30.

⁸ *A Little Princess* (1995).

⁹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Your Happily Ever After,” *Ensign*, May 2010, p. 127.



Merida is forced to wear a corset and to watch her fate be decided by men she barely knows.

After the three men have shot their arrows, Merida comes up, gives a royal grunt, and stretches to rip her dress apart so she can move more easily. She then pulls out a bow and arrow and says, "I am Merida, firstborn descendant of Clan DunBroch. And I'll be shooting for my own hand!"¹² She then shoots a perfect bullseye.

Here Merida is taking charge of her royal future. Yes, she was meant to become queen, but she learns that she doesn't need others to dictate the way she looks or decide her fate. She goes on to discover her true identity—that being a princess means being herself and not some contrived princess from fairy tales long ago.

Women, love who you are. And part of that means loving your body with every blemish, stretch mark, and perceived flaw. Do not waste any more of your precious time obsessing over the way you look. Yes,

we want to be healthy, but this means very different things for each person, and body acceptance may be difficult to achieve for some of us.

I believe one of Satan's greatest weapons is to lead women to reject their bodies. Our Father in Heaven loves us for who we are—in fact, I believe He cares very little about our current dress size or how we look in a bathing suit. Remember, we are created in the image of our heavenly parents. We don't know much about our Heavenly Mother. We don't know what she looks like or even much about who she is as an individual. I can't wait to meet her someday. I have so many questions for her! I do believe that my body looks like hers in a way. I want to be respectful and true to her image and to the way she must have lived her life.

FALLING ASLEEP

In many princess stories, such as *Sleeping Beauty* or *Snow White*, the princess falls asleep and is rescued by a prince. Ladies,

we are not on this earth to fall asleep! Our Heavenly Father has much bigger plans in store for us. He has asked us to serve our communities and our families and to mother and nurture the children in our care, whether they are our own children, nieces, nephews, or other children in our sphere of influence. He has asked us to learn and to grow.

In a talk called "How Can I Become the Woman of Whom I Dream?" President Gordon B. Hinckley taught young women:

Find purpose in your life. Choose the things you would like to do, and educate yourselves to be effective in their pursuit. . . . You are hopeful that you will marry and that all will be taken care of. In this day and time, a girl needs an education. She needs the means and skills by which to earn a living should she find herself in a situation where it becomes necessary to do so.

Study your options. Pray to the Lord earnestly for direction. Then pursue your course with resolution.

The whole gamut of human endeavor is now open to women. There is not anything that you cannot do if you will set your mind to it. You can include in the dream of the woman you would like to be a picture of one qualified to serve society and make a significant contribution to the world of which she will be a part.¹³

I resonate with these words. My family's circumstances necessitated that I be the primary earner. This was a difficult decision, and we spent many, many nights on our knees in prayer. Many people were supportive, but others were judgmental and condescending when I started working full-time at BYU.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says: Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. I believe that promise with all my heart. I am fortunate to have found a man who is my true equal, who understands, as it says in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," that we "are obligated to help

¹² Brave (2012).

¹³ Gordon B. Hinckley, "How Can I Become the Woman of Whom I Dream?" *Ensign*, May 2001, p. 95.

¹⁴ "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 2010, p. 129.

¹⁵ Russell M. Nelson, "A Plea to My Sisters," *Ensign*, November 2015, p. 97; quoting Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign*, November 1978, p. 106; emphasis in original.

one another as equal partners.”¹⁴ I trusted in the spiritual promptings we received that helped me know that I was meant to be at BYU. Because of the choices I made earlier in life and the education I felt prompted to receive, I am becoming the type of scholar that I know Heavenly Father needs me to become.

Other women’s paths may be very different than mine. Regardless of their circumstances, we need women who can speak up and speak out. President Russell M. Nelson said to the women of the Church:

My dear sisters, whatever your calling, whatever your circumstances, we need your impressions, your insights, and your inspiration. We need you to speak up and speak out in ward and stake councils. We need each married sister to speak as “a contributing and full partner” as you unite with your husband in governing your family. Married or single, you sisters possess distinctive capabilities and special intuition you have received as gifts from God. We brethren cannot duplicate your unique influence.¹⁵

Women, do not be afraid to share your experiences and your insights—especially when you are in a leadership position. The world needs your voices! We need you all. We need the single sisters, we need the mothers, we need the widows, we need the grandmas, we need the aunts, and we need the daughters. We need the women in the workplace and we need the women who stay home with their children.

Ruth L. Renlund—Elder Dale G. Renlund’s wife—said, “One thing I’ve always felt strongly about is that there’s no one way to be an LDS



woman.”¹⁶ We have many roles, but we have one thing in common. We are daughters—and, I would add, princesses—of a Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love Him.” And He needs the women of the Church more in this time than in any other. We are not here to fall asleep.

In our princess study we asked preschool girls who their favorite princess was and why. The vast majority chose Rapunzel, likely because the movie *Tangled* had just come out. The number one reason why they liked Rapunzel was because of the way she looked. In the entire study, there was only one girl who chose Mulan as her favorite princess. When asked why, the girl answered boldly, “Because she saves China.”

God has asked us not only to save China but to fight for and defend our brothers and sisters across the entire world. We simply cannot do this if we fall asleep and do nothing.

“

Our savior Jesus Christ atoned for our sins, descending below all so that he could know exactly what we are going through. He sacrificed all so that we could live.

”

¹⁶ Interview by Nollie Haws with Ruth Lybbert Renlund, “Just Call Me Ruth,” May 12, 2010, The Mormon Women Project, mormonwomen.com/interview/just-call-me-ruth. See Young Women theme, in *Young Women Personal Progress* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), p. 3.

MY GIRL

My little princess is my daughter, Hannah. I hope she knows that she is treasured by both of her parents and by her Father in Heaven. I hope she truly understands her royal identity and that being a princess isn't just about dressing up in fancy dresses. I hope this becomes a core part of her identity that will help her get through the hard times that she will surely experience in her life. I hope she knows that being a princess comes with the responsibility to care for others, to be brave, and to be of good courage. Being a princess comes with the responsibility to not fall asleep but to truly do good in this world.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

After sharing several princess fantasies, I want to end with one reality. Even though we are not here to fall asleep, we will be rescued by a prince—the Prince of Peace. Our Savior Jesus Christ atoned for our sins, descending below all so that He could know exactly what we are going through. He sacrificed all so that we could live.

Christ has rescued me so many times in my life. This last year we experienced the death of a beloved niece, Nona. Watching my sister bury her only child, a princess she and her husband had so fervently wanted, was the most painful moment in my life.

I remember one day in my office feeling so sad that I couldn't work. I shut down my computer, crawled under my desk, curled up in a little ball, and just sobbed. I felt like nothing could ever be right in the world again.

I began to pray for comfort and understanding. The Spirit filled the room and penetrated my heart so that I could barely breathe. I realized that Heavenly Father had also lost a child, and I imagined the pain He must have felt as He watched His Beloved Son on the cross. I was given an assurance that my niece, our little princess, was destined for royalty and that the bands of death were nothing compared to the “happily ever after” that she was currently experiencing.

We are each of royal birth—princesses and princes in our own right. We have the potential to have greater power and reach than the most powerful superhero portrayed in the media today. Let us not waste this precious gift. Realizing we are “royal” can change the very way that we see ourselves, our bodies, our families, our lives, and our destinies. ■



PHOTO BY MAGGIE MILLER

ALUMNI PROFILES

KEEPING IT REAL WITH RACHAEL RORROBAUGH

BY AMY NILSSON MAUGHAN

“

Being present is another form of honesty, and I'm learning to be realistic and content with what I can do right now.

”

Editor's Note: We have received a good deal of feedback over the years from our alumni about Family Connections. One strand of comments has asked us to profile some alumni who are leading "real" lives, meaning alumni who have experienced the trials and tribulations that are so common to contemporary families, even when alumni are grounded in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and educated in secular principles of strong family life. This profile of Rachael Rorobaugh definitely hits that mark. This remarkable woman has dealt with and overcome so much. Her story inspires us and gives us hope. Enjoy. AJH

A conversation with Rachael Rorobaugh is an interesting combination of humor and heartbreak. She is open, she is real, and she is so dialed into her psyche, it's an education just listening to her insights and reflections. But her post-BYU journey has been far from picture perfect, which is exactly what makes it so relatable. We all have twists and turns in our stories that we couldn't have imagined and would not have chosen to write into life's narrative. The profile you're about to read is a candid, brave, and honest account of a fellow alumni's stumbling journey that will no doubt resonate with readers on a very human and meaningful level.



Rachael graduated in the summer of 2007 with a degree in Marriage, Family, and Human Development. When asked what led to her choice of major, Rachael answered without hesitation: “I wanted to help children.” She explained that, while working as a substitute teacher for special education programs, she noticed in many cases there was nothing wrong with the children’s brains at all; rather, their problems stemmed from living in dysfunctional families. As Rachael consistently observed a connection between healthy marriages, healthy families, and healthy children, she chose an education in family life and threw herself into the major.

A self-proclaimed “marriage and family nerd,” Rachael got involved in every opportunity to learn, including research projects, multiple certification programs, and helping Dr. Alan Hawkins on early versions of his guidebook, *Should We Stay Together?*—a guide designed to help individuals and couples who are thinking about divorce. Rachael could not have imagined there would come a day in the future when she would call Dr. Hawkins and ask, “Hey, Alan, whatever happened to that guidebook I helped you with? And by the way, can I get

a copy of it?” Unfortunately, it wouldn’t be for a friend.

Divorce is painstaking under any circumstance, but for someone who centered her university studies around relationships, it felt like the ultimate failure for Rachael to end up in a broken marriage. Yet most graduates in the field of family life would agree that our real education comes after the diploma, when we must put into practice the concepts and tools we studied as bright-eyed (and often single) college students. Rachael’s hard-fought wisdom is a testament to the learning that continues long after our schooling is finished.

At one point, Rachael stopped in the middle of our conversation to wonder whether her MFHD degree helped her first marriage, or if it had contributed to the challenges. “I had a lot of pride,” she explained. “I went into marriage thinking I knew what was up.” But even if her education gave her a false sense of relationship prowess, the couple faced bigger and more damaging hurdles—such as her husband’s debilitating pornography addiction and sexual coercion in the marriage.

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Divorce is painstaking under any circumstance, but for someone who centered her university studies around relationships, it felt like the ultimate failure.

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While Rachael and her ex-husband speak openly of his addiction, she does not blame him, but rather his circumstances, for the addiction. He was the product of a difficult childhood, a dysfunctional family, and had strained relationships with his divorced parents. The dynamic between Rachael and her own parents, while the opposite, also played a part in her troubled marriage. "Enmeshment!" Rachael exclaimed, sounding almost amused by her assessment. "I learned all about insecure attachments in my classes at BYU, never realizing how the concept applied to me and my own situation."

Rachael was careful, yet transparent, when describing her problematic family dynamics. "I was the oldest daughter," she said, "and in some ways grew up as a little minion." While quick to convey deep love for her family and parents, Rachael expressed relief that she "can finally examine my parents' behavior without feeling guilty or like I'm blaming them."

Rachael has made great progress in understanding her family relationships and how they affect her, but can still be afraid to stand up for herself or tell her mom no. There was no bitterness in Rachael's tone as she told me this. She recounted the facts with a sort of child-like wonder, sounding more relieved than resentful to be piecing things together. "Just like my ex-husband, and all those children I worked with, my mom was a product of a dysfunctional family," she explained.

If we are willing to examine our own lives with the kind of truth and vulnerability Rachael embodies, most of us will have our own stories of dysfunction to deconstruct. It's not surprising that many who go into therapy as a profession do so to make sense of their own complicated lives and relationships.

"I wish I could go back in time and make

different decisions," Rachael said of her first marriage. But at the same time she was lamenting the poor decisions of her past, she shared nuggets of wisdom so quickly that it was hard to keep up with taking notes. "I was just naïve," she explained, continuing: "You know how we learned to go into marriage with both eyes open, then keep one eye shut afterwards? Well, I had it backwards. I was willing to squint and look at the guy sideways in order to make him the right person for me. I know for sure I disobeyed counsel from the Spirit."

After a moment of reflection, she added, "Even if I could go back in time and change anything, there's no way I could have chosen somebody healthy. I just wasn't capable of making good decisions at that point." That's how self-aware Rachael has become in the years since her graduation.

She is now re-married to a man she loves dearly, yet finds herself in another trying situation with new and different obstacles. "We both bring baggage to the marriage," she explained. "And also ... children." Rachael's sons are 6 and 8 years old, flanking her husband's 7-year-old daughter, and their family can often feel more disjointed than blended. "We have issues with the kids and trauma from our previous marriages and divorces. The only time we're like a real family is on a rare holiday or during an hour after school that we have all the children."

To help cope with their challenges, Rachael has attended the LDS Church's 12-Step program and Al-Anon, which supports family members of addicts. More recently, she joined a parenting class called Hand-in-Hand Parenting that she credits for helping her in many ways. The program teaches the importance of healing her childhood feelings and reactions to problems so she can function as the adult. "It's so ironic," she said, her tone melancholy and sincere. "I originally

set out to help children, never realizing the child I would most need to heal was my own bruised and hurting inner child."

Rachael has learned the importance of detangling herself from others and taking care of herself, and can now "identify triggers and feelings rather than just going through childhood-old knee-jerk reactions. I still find myself being triggered," she said, "but I'm aware now; I'm awake."

In contrast to the learning environments that are built around problems and people who share them, Rachael observed that church can sometimes be a place where people put their best foot forward, projecting an all-is-well image regardless of what may be happening beneath the surface. Her second husband joined the church but only stayed active for a year, so Rachael attends meetings alone each week, sitting through lessons and talks that often emphasize the importance of strong, forever families.

To counteract any tendency toward superficial appearances, Rachael strives to be an example of openness at church. "How will we really apply the gospel if we're all pretending to have perfect lives and families?" she asked. "In order to have the





most meaningful conversations, we have to apply gospel concepts to our real lives." This philosophy carries over to her own teaching, both in Relief Society and Gospel Doctrine classes, where she applies real life experiences to her lessons. She's noticed that people are responsive to this and tend to open up more about their own lives in a sort of ripple effect.

While speaking of the need for gospel teachers to adapt manuals to the different people, personalities, and circumstances in a class or congregation, Rachael was hit with inspiration. "Maybe my college degree is like a church manual," she said with excitement. "Through my education, I learned guidelines and principles based on ideals, but it's up to me to adapt the manual to my own real life." Another nugget of wisdom.

While it would be a nice, tidy ending to say Rachael can look back on her life and find the silver lining in all of her challenges, it wouldn't be true—and Rachael is too honest to paint that picture. "In many ways, I'm still in the trenches," she said. "It can be so grueling." Even when things are good, there are issues lurking that she worries could explode at any time. "Everything can feel

so hard and heavy," she said, admitting that reading the SFL alumni magazine has been hard for her in the past. "Honestly, I would read it bitterly at times, wishing I'd been smart enough and healthy enough not to marry my ex, and to have stayed in school longer so I could be involved in cool things like my fellow alumni."

But Rachael's trying journey has led to new perspectives on what it means to "do something" with her major. She explained it like this: "Children of dysfunctional families are often over-responsible and feel like they have to fix everything. I used to only feel good about myself if I was helping others. But I now understand that helping my own family is enough. I don't have to save all the children—it's okay to focus on just me and mine! I am worthy of that kind of attention!"

Rachael has mused about forming a support group for blended families, or perhaps incorporating premarital education into wedding packages at the Red Barn Ranch—the wedding venue she and her husband own and run. "But all that can wait," Rachael said. "For now, I'm really at peace with my children and family consuming my time. Being present is another form of

honesty, and I'm learning to be realistic and content with what I can do right now."

Rachael's contentedness is inspiring. It makes me want to worry less about what I haven't done with my own major, and appreciate the opportunities and challenges of raising a family. Though many, if not all of us, are disillusioned or disappointed by at least some aspect of our marriage, career, or parenting, life seems to present us with struggles perfectly tailored to suit our individual growth. Sometimes it's just hard to be human, and there is beauty and power in loving freely, communicating honestly, and accepting each other not in spite of our flaws, but because of them. In a world so often in need of a band-aid and a hug, Rachael's hard-fought wisdom and searching sincerity may be just what the family doctor ordered. ■



MARK ELLIOT'S

INTERNATIONAL CRUSADE
FOR FATHERHOOD, FAMILY,
AND EARLY CHILDHOOD,
EDUCATION

BY AMY NILSSON MAUGHAN



DID YOU SAY NEW ZEALAND?

When I reached out to feature Mark Elliott in this issue of Family Connections, he was happy to oblige—with one caveat: “I’m actually in New Zealand this week at an international conference,” he wrote in his email response. “I’ll be back in my office early next week, and won’t be able to get to it till then.”

Now I’m no Sherlock, but this reply tipped me off to a few key things about Mark:

1. He has an office—which led me to surmise he must also have a steady job.
2. Knowing he holds a master’s degree in Family Science, I presumed that job to be in the field of family something.
3. Assuming the conference was related to Mark’s job, I could safely deduce his work in the field of family life takes him on some pretty grand adventures!

Such observations may not be significant to someone outside the field, but things like jobs, offices, and conferences in New Zealand are neither givens nor necessarily commonplace for graduates of BYU’s School

of Family Life—at least not in my experience. I definitely looked forward to learning more about this alumnus.

BUT NOT JUST NEW ZEALAND

As it turns out, Mark’s travel to New Zealand is no isolated incident. Currently residing in Washington, D.C., Mark is the CEO of Community Development Institute (CDI), a national nonprofit organization that builds leadership capacity and strengthens organizations that work with young children (<https://www.cditeam.org>). He also serves as the program director for the Global Leaders for Young Children program at the World Forum Foundation—a program that seeks to launch the next generation of early childhood leaders around the world (<https://worldforumfoundation.org>).

Mark’s company, CDI, serves as the secretariat for the program, and his combined responsibilities take him around the globe, educating, assisting, and building global leader advocacy efforts. The recent World Forum for Early Care and Education

in Auckland, New Zealand, is part of this program, and was the conference Mark spoke of in our first email exchange. He wasn’t only attending that conference; he was speaking at its plenary session.

So how did Mark get to this point? Let’s zoom out for a minute and take a broader look at his path.

THE WATER HE SWIMS IN

Mark Elliott grew up in Sandy, Utah, in a family of six children. He met his future wife, Joani Scadlock, when they were sophomores at the same high school, but they didn’t marry until 1993, after Mark had served a full-time LDS mission in Asunción, Paraguay. He graduated from Brigham Young University in 1997 with a bachelor’s degree in Family Science and completed a master’s in the same subject shortly afterward.

Some of his first roles after graduation were coordinating father involvement efforts in the Early Head Start and Early Intervention programs. At the time, he was a young father himself, with children about the same age as

those they served in the program. "My ability to relate with other fathers was a strength in my early work in the field," he reports. The jobs eventually led Mark to becoming a consultant and starting training programs on how to engage men in early childhood programs. "This is where I first started working with my current organization, CDI," Mark explains, "so I would say being a man in a field that focuses on families and children helped me find a niche in the field."

Now nearly 20 years into his career, Mark has become so used to a field populated by more women than men that he doesn't think about it much anymore. "It's just the water I swim in," he says simply.

THE PERKS OF AN ADVANCED DEGREE

Though Mark originally planned to pursue a Ph.D. and work in academia, he realized through internships and working toward a Certified Family Life Educator credential that his passion was in community-based services. Although a master's in the field is not typically considered a terminal degree,

it was beneficial in helping Mark advance in nonprofit administration. "I believe that having a graduate-level degree increased my salary prospects and strengthened my competitiveness in advancement in the field," he says. "It's been a key part of my professional pathway."

CARVING OUT A CAREER PATH

"One of the most perilous parts of my journey was finding my path upon completion of my degree," Mark says. Internships, volunteer work, and involvement in research had expanded his skill set and helped him gain experience that he could use in applying for jobs. However, he found himself "highly educated with little paid work experience in the field." This limited his qualification for certain positions and meant settling for lower pay to get his foot in the door of great opportunities. Over the years, Mark has observed that graduates who spend a lot of time differentiating themselves through internships and practical experience, and who take the time to volunteer or work part-time jobs in related work, give themselves a

much stronger chance to find pathways to professional work in the field.

"There are many opportunities for people with educational background in this field," Mark says, "[but] it requires one to carve out a path for him- or herself." It took patience, a lot of work, and a bit of divine intervention to land his first full-time position at a nonprofit organization, and his family had to tighten their belts for a while to make it work. "I had peers in other fields who were making higher salaries from the get-go," says Mark. "However, I was following my passion. It has led me down an exciting and rewarding path. I love what I do." He's now worked more than 18 years in the field and found a lot of opportunities for growth. As he's advanced into various opportunities, his ability to comfortably support his family has increased. Mark's experience is a realistic but encouraging example of a career path in the field of family life. "You can make a living in this field," Mark says, "but it takes early investment. You've got to stick with it."

COMMUNITY NONPROFIT TO NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Mark's desire to influence children and families at the community level is what led him to start working in the local nonprofit sector. He began with Kids On The Move, where he worked with both Early Head Start and Early Intervention programs, serving families that had young children with special needs as well as families of young children in poverty. Mark's passion for serving families with young children deepened with the birth of his own children, Alexa and Grace. A few days after Grace, his second child, was born, they found out she had Down syndrome. The joys and challenges of raising a child with a significant disability gave Mark "new perspective on building programs that are effective at supporting children and families in multiple circumstances."

Mark's responsibilities at Kids On the



Move not only entailed working with parents, but also with community partnerships. As mentioned before, he began doing consulting work in providing training to other programs in father involvement and effective program practice. This consulting work led him to his first job at CDI, which provides service throughout the United States and Puerto Rico to early childhood programs, including Head Start. Mark worked as a Regional Training and Technical Assistance Provider for Head Start programs in a six-state region.

Eventually, Mark returned to Kids On the Move and worked in the organization's administration as the development director. During that time, his ability with the Spanish language was needed by CDI so that he could work as a consultant with the Head Start program in Puerto Rico. This led to more extensive consulting with CDI at programs throughout the United States. In 2008, Mark returned to work full-time at CDI, which has taken him all over the United States working in local Head Start programs, seeking to strengthen program operations, and building local capacity to serve children and families. In 2015, Mark became CEO, the position he holds today.

ONWARD TO INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

Mark attributes his passion for different cultures and international work to his missionary service in Paraguay. The experience developed in him a desire that would persist throughout his career to extend his impact to supporting work internationally.

Mark has served in his role as program director for the Global Leaders for Young Children program since 2014. That 2-year leadership development program, designed for emerging leaders who work to support young children, has a current cohort of 33 leaders from 21 countries and has served more than 200 leaders from over 60 countries since 2004.



As he works to strengthen leadership capacity at a global level, Mark's recent travels have taken him to Cambodia, Lithuania, Argentina, France, Hungary, and Brazil, among other places. "While it's challenging to be away from family on the road," Mark says, "my world view and perspective have greatly expanded through getting to know and working with those from different backgrounds."

WHEN FAMILY IS BOTH OF YOUR JOBS

While a father's career often supports his family, it is otherwise separate, generally, from his role as a father. I'm fascinated by the distinctive intersection of Mark's profession in family matters with that of his role as father in his own home.

One synergistic component of this fusion is that Mark's family has been able to join him in many of his professional travel opportunities. Traveling together has given them wonderful opportunities to discover new places and have new experiences. The family enjoys the diversity of people and the variety of worldviews around them. They

also love taking advantage of the many local sightseeing opportunities in the D.C. area and nearby Philadelphia and New York. "One of our favorite activities is bike riding some of the great trails in Maryland and D.C.," Mark says. "And we're always on the hunt for a great empanada" (a delicious pastry).

Mark's wife, Joani, earned her B.A. and M.A. in English at BYU and has taught college writing at both BYU and at the University of Maryland. Alexa is now 17 and will be a high school senior this year, and Grace, 14, will be starting her first year of high school. "Our family loves supporting each other in their various activities," Mark says, "whether that's cheering Grace on at swim team, or Alexa in her school play."

While learning how to parent a child with a significant disability has been a challenging part of their journey, it has brought much joy to Mark and Joani, along with deeper perspective. "Grace has forever altered the way we see others and has given us an appreciation for the many ways God manifests His hand in our lives," Mark says. "Alexa astounds us with her patience, her grit, and her willingness to do hard things. We try



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Grace has forever altered the way we see others and has given us an appreciation for the many ways God manifests His hand in our lives.

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Alexa astounds us with her patience, her grit, and her willingness to do hard things. We try to laugh more than cry and we try to cheer each other on when we're tackling hard things.

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to laugh more than cry and we try to cheer each other on when we're tackling hard things. We're a close family.”

HOW FAR HE'S COME & HOW FAR HE'LL GO

Interviewing Mark Elliott was especially interesting for me, because I graduated with a degree in Family Science at the same time he did. Though I don't recall having classes together, I do remember seeing Mark around the old Smith Family Living Center. Men always stood out in the 90%-female SFL program, but Mark also stood out because he was often talking with professors and had demeanor that was serious, involved, and determined. I could tell even then that this “Family Science guy” was going places; I just couldn't have guessed how far his future would take him—both figuratively and literally.

From his earliest community efforts to his current international scope, Mark's work has had an incredible impact on countless young children and families. While it's hard to imagine what more such an accomplished person can do, I have no doubt Mark Elliott will continue forward as a courageous force for good in the fields of Family Science and Early Childhood Education. ■

A RELIGIOUS BACCALAUREATE

BY MARLENE ELLINGSON ¹

Editor's Note: SFL alumni are actively involved in their communities, seeking to make a positive difference. Here is one story of an SFL alumna who became involved in the important but challenging and sensitive issue of how religion fits in the public square. AJH

I walked in the door that night, and my heart just about burst with joy. After years of coming home from high school baccalaureate services feeling defeated and discouraged, this year was a success! It was actually a religious baccalaureate. God was praised; He was thanked. The students and audience were admonished to trust Him, to turn to Him, to allow our future studies to point us to Him. I felt so grateful!

It had been a long path to this success, but in the end, it was working together that made the difference. Instead of treating the high school administration as the enemy who refused to budge, I finally understood where they were coming from and how to work with them toward a solution. Though the administrators' hands were tied, we could still work to find a way to allow this freedom of religious expression. My long history of attending baccalaureate services helped me see the trend away from religious ceremonies. My first baccalaureate was in 2001, when my oldest daughter graduated. It was a wonderful service and my whole family felt the Spirit and was uplifted. Years passed, and I began to see less and less mention of Deity in baccalaureate services. The prayers were pre-written, pre-

¹Marlene R. Ellingson graduated from BYU summa cum laude in 1983 with a B.A. in Family Living. She can be reached at: mm.e.fam@outlook.com.



approved, and read as speeches. But at least they mentioned God. By 2007, the music included “The Prayer,” sung as a duet—but any mention of religion was practically gone. In between these numbers were inspirational but very nonreligious speeches. The so-called “prayers” hardly resembled prayers at all. By another daughter’s baccalaureate in 2009, there was essentially no religion. In fact, the students crowded in to hear rock music! Gone was the processional or any feeling of reverence befitting a Sunday service. There were catcalls, jokes, and laughing during the program. On stage, it was just a talent show—good talent, but nothing about God.

At this point, I looked up baccalaureate and found that indeed it is, by definition, “a religious service.” It is an optional, nondenominational celebration held on a Sunday for anyone who would like to participate. But the top academic kids who had planned it had been instructed by the supervising faculty advisor, “This is not a religious service, it is a spiritual service.”

I met with the vice principal in charge of

seniors and found him adamant that religion does not belong at school. He said he had no choice and that nothing would change. I was disappointed, but I felt renewed hope when a new principal came to Mesa High School a couple of years later. He was a good Christian man who also found our baccalaureate too secular. I wrote him the following email:

We understand that the prayers were prescribed. The person praying was asked to write a generic prayer and to read it like a speech and not to represent her religion in her prayer! This bothers us the most. That the administration prescribed her prayer!! A Jew, if chosen to represent the students in prayer at a religious service, should be able to pray as a Jewish prayer. A Christian should be able to pray a Christian prayer, as his or her religion dictates. Even a nondenominational service should not require that a particular person cannot live his denomination. The person chosen to pray should be allowed to pray his or her way.

I was so hopeful for that year’s baccalaureate service, I optimistically brought my whole family to see the religious program the principal had encouraged. Alas, it was another great disappointment. The faculty advisor had insisted that the student judges not allow any musical number that referred to God, though one girl bravely spoke up before singing her song to dedicate it “to God, who gives us everything.” That proved to be the only mention of God the whole evening. In fact, the main faculty speaker gave a tongue-in-cheek speech all about “Hell!” My young boys turned to me and asked, “Is this what baccalaureate is?”

I shook my head in sorrow. How far we had come from a service that praised God! I wrote another email to the principal:

I can’t tell you how disappointed I was at baccalaureate. The faculty speaker used such poor taste, in my estimation. His talk was designed to shock. It was “anti-religious.” In this address, the students were given the message that “it’s OK if cursing slips out now and then.” They were given the example of using vulgar words, and not just once, but perhaps 15–20 times. I once heard that an educated person is one who has learned how to bring emphasis using a bigger vocabulary, without the need to resort to cursing. At an educational institution, shouldn’t we give our students an example of articulate, well-written speech from the faculty?

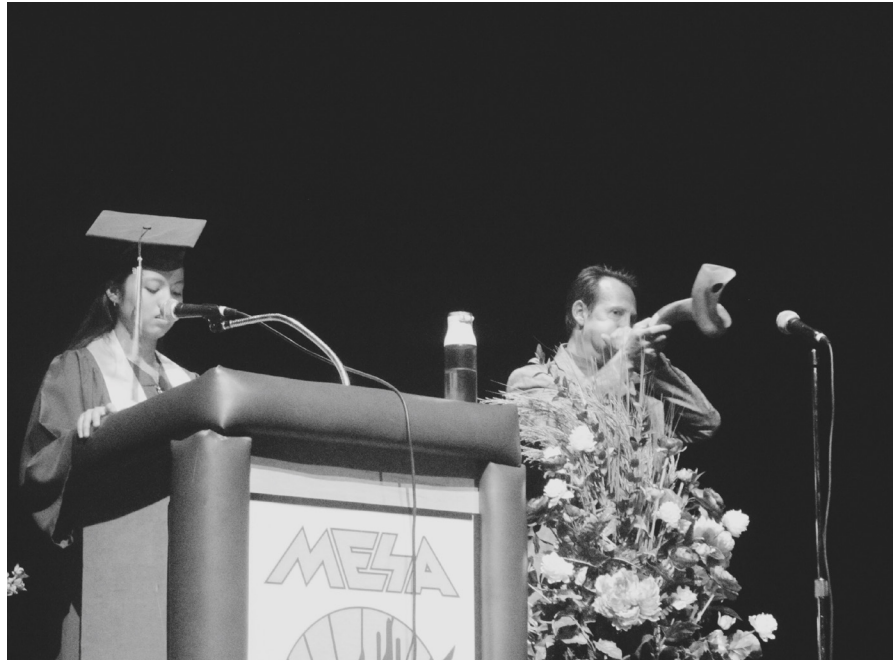
Our principal responded, agreeing this address was truly an embarrassment to him. Though we agreed that baccalaureate should be better, writing an email to him expressing my feelings was still valuable. Emails, letters, and other correspondence from parents can give an administrator important fuel to guide and support his or her decisions.

Four years later, in 2015, I found myself in an interesting position. I served with the senior girls in my ward and learned they were extremely anxious about what lay ahead for them. These girls struggled with fear about their futures as they faced large, life-altering decisions. It was confirmed to me that in these troubled times, there is great need for baccalaureate services to point graduating students to God as their guide. That year I also had a son who was a senior. He’s normally a very cheerful young man who doesn’t let

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I once heard that an educated person is one who has learned how to bring emphasis using a bigger vocabulary, without the need to resort to cursing.

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much ruffle him, but I observed him despair as several of his senior classmates chose to turn away from God. One by one, good boys from good families that my son had grown up with openly declared themselves atheist. I resolved more than ever to fight for a religious baccalaureate service.

Unfortunately, that year a new administration took over the planning and execution of baccalaureate. Though it was a nice service, there was not a reference to God in the entire program. And this time, the speech-prayers were removed altogether. At this point, my husband and I spoke to Mr. Baser, a teacher at the high school. He explained that there were lawsuits being filed against administrations for having religion on campus. In Massachusetts, 2 years earlier, a court had ruled the school could not hold a religious service, citing separation of church and state as the legal reason. I finally understood why administrations were backing away from religion.

“What about Vespers?” I asked him.

Vespers is a long-standing tradition at Mesa High School of religious choir music sung at Christmastime. He told me that music can be religious, because many of the classical masterpieces were written for the church. “What about Christian Dance Club?” I then asked. They present an annual Christmas program called “Let There be Praise” that honors Jesus Christ beautifully and is performed at the school auditorium. Mr. Baser said that since the club is student-led, it can be religious. Administrations can’t prevent religious observance by the students, he explained; they just can’t organize or sponsor it. Parents from the community sponsored the Christmas dance show entirely, even paying for the janitorial service.

We came up with the idea that maybe a school club that represented all religions could take charge of baccalaureate. Students would run the club and plan the baccalaureate service. That way, we could still use the school auditorium, but parents rather than teachers could help and teachers



would not be required to come. The whole community could be involved.

Mid-January of 2016, I had a meeting with the assistant principal. I fasted and prayed that her heart would be softened and open to this new idea. Mr. Baser came to the meeting as support. We expressed our understanding of the dilemma the administration faced in presenting anything religious, and told her our plan to solve this by turning over baccalaureate to the students and community. Her comment was that "Baccalaureate is a dying institution." A neighboring high school had discontinued it altogether. She reasoned that it wouldn't hurt to try a different approach, so she would take our idea to the principal for approval. Word came back at last: it was a go! We could try a student-led, community-involved baccalaureate this year.

Mr. Baser agreed to be faculty advisor to the new Interfaith Club. He had lived an interfaith life, being raised Catholic, attending Protestant churches, and later accepting the Mormon faith. A good-sized group of kids

from all faiths joined the club, including a wonderful young woman as president and another who was elected secretary. They planned to have a different religion presented to the club every-other week, and a business meeting to plan baccalaureate during the weeks in between. They invited me to attend anytime to experience this great club and these great kids in action. The students ran it all very effectively. They listened politely and asked good questions about different faiths. Several kids were anxious to bring their priest or religious mentors to share their beliefs.

Under Mr. Baser's guidance, the students used past programs that I provided as a starting point to plan their baccalaureate. They arranged auditions and asked parents to help set up and decorate. At the first meeting, I told them about my experiences at past services. I encouraged them to keep in mind baccalaureate's intended purposes: (1) to praise God with gratitude for their high school experience, and (2) to look to Him for guidance at this crossroad in their lives.

After making a few phone calls, I reached

the Arizona Interfaith Council. This group, which included our city mayor, was happy to support the students' plan. They invited Mr. Baser and the club's president to come to their banquet, and later, many members of their group came to the students' baccalaureate and some even participated.

Baccalaureate 2016 was put on entirely by the students, along with volunteer teachers who wanted to support the endeavor. There was an excellent turnout from the students and community. The service was reverent and dignified, and included a processional at the beginning and end. The program included a Sikh prayer and one from the Hare Krishna movement. We got to hear the Jewish shofar blown. There was a Catholic priest who gave a wonderful message about finding the Creator in one's scientific education. Students spoke about God helping them throughout their high school experience and thanking Him. Each musical number was about God. There were real, heartfelt prayers.

The week before baccalaureate, our stake president asked me to write a message to



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I was taught to stand up
for what is right and
good, including the
family and religious
freedom.
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send to the bishops in the stake, encouraging members to come and support the event. This is what I wrote:

Baccalaureate, a long-standing tradition at Mesa High and across the country, is by definition a religious service held before graduation on a Sunday. It is not catered to any particular denomination, but is for all who wish to come. The purpose? To turn students' hearts toward God, in gratitude and for help as they face a somewhat daunting future. But in recent years, there has been no praying nor even reference to God allowed!

This year, however, Mesa High's baccalaureate is going to be religious! A new Mesa High Interfaith Club has been developed and well-supported by many students. Now that baccalaureate is organized by this student club rather than the administration, it can be religious while remaining nondenominational. An exciting change for all—various clergymen, including elements of the Jewish faith, Muslim faith, Sikh faith, Hare Krishna faith, Catholic, Mormon, and nondenominational sects throughout our community will participate this year.

Please encourage your congregation to come and support religious freedom in this way. Join these students in their praise and thanks to God at this important crossroads in their lives! “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10) Sunday, May 22nd, 6 p.m. at Mesa High School Auditorium. Doors open at 5:30.

Years ago, when I had first expressed my concern about baccalaureate to the vice principal in charge of seniors, he had accused me, saying, “What you really want is a Mormon service!” “No!” I insisted. “A Jewish prayer is fine! A Protestant one. Any denomination. I just want these kids to be able to pray!” So this year, when at last there were real prayers, including a wonderful closing prayer that truly thanked God and asked His help for the future, I was so grateful. It was truly a dream come true.

As part of my training in Family Life at BYU, I was taught to stand up for what is right and good, including the family and religious freedom. One voice that is understanding, articulate, and persistent can truly make a difference for good in our world today. ■



NAVIGATING THE TEEN YEARS

THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN & CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

Dr. Mark H. Butler and Genevieve L. Smith¹
Brigham Young University

Like other spiritually sincere youth, Caleb struggles with pornography use. At first, he was repulsed by it, but he found himself drawn back to it. The arousal was preoccupying and pleasurable. Pornography use became a habit. He still wanted to go on a mission, marry in the temple, be a worthy father. Repeatedly, he resolved to stop using pornography. He felt anger and shame every time he fell short. Caleb became discouraged and felt like he could never change. He felt that he didn't deserve God's or anyone else's love and forgiveness because of all his broken promises.

Parents and teens alike are anxious to navigate the teen years successfully. We will consider the unique vulnerability of adolescents to pornography use, the perfect fit of Christ's Atonement to their developmental experience, and the importance for parents and teens to engage with the Atonement as they meet the challenges of the teen years.

As we will see, adolescents are developmentally susceptible to pornography use. Parents and teens sensitized to its dangers may quickly characterize any pornography use as an addiction. Addiction can be a deeply shaming term and its use counterproductive.² Incorrectly categorizing pornography use as "addiction" can shame, demoralize, inhibit repentance, weaken strength for recovery, and lead users to isolate themselves, forfeiting help they desperately need. "Humiliation, shame, guilt, and angst are not the primary engines of change"³ and can even make relapse more likely. Parents and leaders are wise to avoid shaming teens.

A DEVELOPMENTAL COLLISION IN ADOLESCENCE



Furthermore, for most adolescent struggles with pornography, “addiction” is also diagnostically inaccurate. Pornography involvement varies from unintended, recurring exposure, to intentional use for physical gratification alone, to habitual use with emotional/psychological dependency (as a maladaptive coping strategy), to entrapment in a cycle of relapses, each relapse producing consequences that trigger the next round of use.⁴ While any pornography use degrades moral sensitivity and can be a gateway to immorality, seldom is it accurately termed an addiction.⁵ Only where intense preoccupation and powerlessness, psychological dependency, significant marital/family, school, work, or social impairment, consequential risk-taking, and inability to stop despite repeated attempts are all evident might there be an addiction. Even then, careful consideration should be made as to whether adopting the term will help or hurt.

Nevertheless, pornography use can impair moral agency and become increasingly involuntary, leading people to feel powerless in the face of temptation.⁶ Perhaps it is the frightening and frustrating experience of powerlessness that leads people to call

it addiction. While we avoid the term addiction, we acknowledge that adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to deep and debilitating entanglement with pornography.

A DEVELOPMENTAL HEAD-ON COLLISION

Five developmental and contextual influences bear down on adolescents and collide to create a “perfect storm” of vulnerability: the adolescent brain, sexual maturation, spiritual awakening, a sexually saturated environment, and shaming experiences.

A TRULY ADOLESCENT BRAIN

Although teens often look grown up on the outside, brain development continues throughout adolescence⁷ and into the mid-twenties.⁸ Until then, the brain isn’t fully wired up.⁹ Like the body, the brain also experiences a growth spurt right before puberty, particularly in the frontal cortex and associated regions of the brain.¹⁰ The frontal cortex is where we gain regulatory control over our emotions, allowing us to choose our response to emotions, rather than be triggered by them. Until this brain

development occurs, compared to adults, teens are likely to have diminished capacity for response inhibition or impulse control.¹¹ Other limitations and liabilities of the adolescent brain are outlined in Table 1. Consequently, the adolescent brain is not ready for adult drives and decisions, but these drives and decisions don’t wait for the brain to catch up.

Every parent and youth leader has observed that teens are thus prone to impulsive, poorly thought-out behavior¹²—behavior that leaves adults wondering, “What were you thinking?” Understanding brain development helps us know that adolescents don’t think in the same way adults become capable of thinking.

SEXUAL MATURATION

Just as physical growth gets ahead of physical coordination, so also sexual maturation outpaces brain development—the brain won’t catch up until around age 25!¹³ The adolescent brain is still underdeveloped in its capacity to grapple with these powerful physical impulses. Consequently, the adolescent years can feel like being an inexperienced rider jockeying a high-spirited stallion.

Table 1. Adolescent brain vulnerabilities

ADOLESCENT BRAIN LIMITATIONS & VULNERABILITIES IN JUDGMENT, REASONING, & BEHAVIORAL MASTERY

POOR PLANNING / PROGNOSTICATION

- Absence of forward thinking
- Failure to perceive risk/perceived invulnerability

POOR IMPULSE CONTROL / SELF-CONTROL

- Short time horizon for decision-making
- Underdeveloped capacity for delaying gratification
- More easily distractible from long-term goal-striving/moral ideals

POWERFUL / COMPELLING EXPERIENCE OF EMOTION, PASSION, PLEASURE

- Emotional intensity, fervency
- Activated more by emotion than by reason
- (Which contribute to) impulsive behavior
- High arousal-seeking behavior

EXTREME THINKING AND EMOTIONALLY SKEWED EXPERIENCING

- Polarized, dichotomous thinking, in “black-and-white” extremes
- Overgeneralization or globalized thinking
- Emotional reasoning/emotionally biased processing of experience

(See Jensen & Kirwan, 2015; Act for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence, 2002; L. Steinberg, 2005; Yurgelun-Todd, 2007.)

Hormonally charged sexual maturation produces romantic motivation, sexual interest, and emotional motivation and intensity.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, then, puberty is correlated with increased risk-taking, novelty-seeking, and sensation-seeking.¹⁵

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Adolescent identity development¹⁶ includes spiritual identity, incorporating answers to life's existential questions—our origin, purpose, potential, and moral values. Answers to these questions help frame one's sense of self. Spiritual awakening often occurs during adolescence, when cognitive development enables our capacity for abstract thought and meaning-making. The emotional intensity of adolescence means that spiritual awakening is often fervent and associated with behavioral zeal.

Spiritual awakening collides head-on with the realities of sexual maturation and the vulnerabilities of the adolescent brain. Teens' spiritual zeal, combined with inevitable discrepancy between their ideals and performance, followed by “black-and-white” moral self-judgment, can result in a disproportionate, exaggerated experience of guilt and shame.¹⁷ When striving teens fall short again and again, they are prone to

conclude that since they aren't perfect, they're bad. Each mistake is often seen as erasing all previous efforts and successes. Additionally, emotional reasoning combined with spiritual awakening often results in adolescents thinking, “I feel bad, so I am bad.” Teens don't separate how they feel or what they do from who they feel they are or can be in the future.

A SEXUALLY SATURATED ENVIRONMENT

Today's sexually saturated environment also bears down on vulnerable teens and presents daily temptations. Sexual enticements can be hard to resist for teens grappling with feelings, interests, and passions accompanying puberty. A sexually saturated environment preys upon teens' sexual drive, powerful hormones, and strong emotions.

POTENTIALLY SHAMING RESPONSES

A final experience adding to adolescents' distress is the possibility that parents, leaders, or other mentors will react in shaming ways. Caleb had a loving, trusting relationship with his parents and talked to them about his struggles with pornography. When

Caleb tripped up again and again, his parents' tones of voice and gestures sometimes reflected their disbelief and incredulity. “How could you forget yesterday's conversation and commitments so quickly?” Actually, Caleb remembered them very well, and remained committed to them, which only perplexed him and his parents all the more. This disconnect seems inexplicable to adults—how dreams, plans, and goals can be so easily eclipsed by the moment. Nor could Caleb explain how immediate impulses and emotions so easily stole the stage. Teens' common answer of “I don't know” is an honest expression of their own confusion and consternation.

Already embarrassed and confused by their mistakes, teens readily perceive disappointment and frustration in the words, gestures, and actions of parents and leaders. Teens are hyper-attuned to perceive judgment and disapproval. The adolescent brain leads them to magnify their mistakes and twist productive guilt into toxic shame. All this often leads to teens feeling personally “bad.” Negative attributions largely of their own making depress their mood, discourage attempts to

“

EVERYONE NEEDS DEVELOPMENTAL PATIENCE. WE CAN SCAFFOLD ADOLESCENTS AS THEY GROW, GRACE BY GRACE.

”

do better, and risk leading them to retreat from crucial relationships and further into their problem.

THE ATONEMENT'S PERFECT FIT—ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENTAL PATIENCE

Considering these five influences that collide during adolescence, teens' situation can seem unmanageable. However, understanding Christ's Atonement and how He allows for developmental patience and growth perspective can combat discouragement and foster healthy progression. Parents as well as teens must grasp that making mistakes is developmentally normal. Christ's Atonement provides a safe space to learn and grow. While sinful behavior cannot be justified or excused, life's reality of ongoing repentance and continual striving are made joyfully possible through His Atonement.¹⁸ We need to be patient with teens. Equally important, we need to encourage adolescents to be patient with themselves. As a starting point for understanding and crucial conversations concerning the perfect fit of Christ's Atonement to adolescence, we recommend turning to spiritual resources.¹⁹

Heeding inspired counsel, we learn to “allow for the reality that God is more concerned with growth than with geography.”²⁰ Encourage growth perspective. Teens and

parents can ponder helpful questions: What direction are you heading? Are you improving, keeping in mind that mistakes and setbacks are part of the journey? Do you maintain a repentant heart? Are you daily doing those things that help strengthen you? Are you choosing to trust God's forgiveness and mercy? Without excusing sin, are you picking yourself up and moving forward? Are you building on your good foundation daily? If you are, then you are doing what God wants you to do.²¹

WATCH FOR EXCESSIVE GUILT AND TOXIC SHAME; PRACTICE POSITIVE MOTIVATION

Spiritually awakened teens already experience discrepancy—the gap between state and ideal—in overabundance. What they need help with is vision, faith, and hope in order to achieve resolve and sustain the fighting spirit that gives them a fighting chance—all in developmental due time.²² While fear and suffering, including moral guilt, can initiate a behavioral U-turn, it is a poor and debilitating long-term motivator;²³ and soul-attacking shame is just toxic. Sustaining change resolve and momentum is anchored in a compelling vision and belief in personal potential.

“Behavior change [comes] ... when the person connects [change] ... with something

of intrinsic value, ... something cherished. ... motivation for change arises in an accepting, empowering atmosphere that makes it safe for the person to explore the ... painful present in relation to what is [deeply] wanted and valued.”²⁴ Parents can testify to their teen of God's love for them personally, of their teens divine nature and divine potential, and their access to enabling power through Christ's Atonement. These testimonies need to be personalized and individualized, not generalized, since teens readily believe in God's love for others, for example, but not for them. As teens come to believe what they are taught, these doctrines can create powerful incentive to do better and be better.

PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN HELP TEENS

Understanding Christ's preparation for developmental patience through the Atonement can help parents and teens approach repentance positively. Once we have helpful attitudes and both developmental and spiritual vision and understanding in place, we're prepared for positive conversations and positively focused change work.

Given how quick teens are to feel shamed, parents often discover that even talking about the problem is a conversation-

stopper. For this and other reasons, a solution focus is better than a problem focus.²⁵ Study successes, not relapses. Often, teens are so focused on their mistakes that they don't realize or acknowledge how many times they're successfully resisting temptations. Sometimes parents don't either. Nor do they take time to consider exactly how they're succeeding when they do. Focusing attention on successes and solutions can be affirming, encouraging, and motivating; and it can uncover what works! Faith, hope, and resolve can be renewed.

Closely related to this is the way we go about accountability. Parents and others can help by identifying protective behaviors that instill and strengthen righteous desire, and then focus accountability more on these "dailies"—e.g., prayer, scripture study, healthy sociality—than on engaging around potentially shaming, daily relapse checks.²⁶

Understanding and applying Christ's Atonement validates a growth and strengthening perspective and positive approach. Just as exercising a muscle strengthens it, we can help teens exercise the frontal cortex by teaching them to set manageable goals—in all areas of endeavor—and then work toward them incrementally. When it comes to brain development, any activity requiring patient practice toward a long-term goal is empowering, helping wire up the brain for self-discipline and self-mastery.²⁷ Parents can cheerlead and coach participation, progression, and patience.

Yet, although such activities can help teens develop self-control and developmental patience, no single intervention or solution is going to remarkably turn the tide. Each is simply one piece of a larger puzzle that makes up our human struggle for self-mastery. While helping adolescents, we must remember that we weren't "all put together" either when we were their age. We can think back to how powerful our emotions, impulses, and drives were then. Everyone needs developmental patience. We can scaffold adolescents as they grow, grace by grace. We

can promote positive growth attitudes and help teens see themselves in a developmentally nuanced and patient way. We, too, can be loving and nonjudgmental. Jesus Christ's Atonement enables and empowers us in all of these things. Truly, His Atonement and our developmental "adolescence" in mortality are meant for each other, especially during the vulnerable teen years. ■

Endnotes:

¹ With permission from the publisher, portions of this article are excerpted and reprinted here from the following: Butler, M. H., Smith, G. L., & Jensen, B. R. (2016). The adolescent brain and the Atonement: Meant for each other. Part 1: The dilemma. *Religious Educator*, 17(1), 159-185; Butler, M. H., & Smith, G. L. (2016). The adolescent brain and the Atonement: Meant for each other. Part 2: The rescue. *Religious Educator*, 17(2), 163-199. Mark H. Butler, Ph.D., is a professor and Genevieve L. Smith, B.S., a graduate of the School of Family Life at BYU. They are currently writing a book addressed to LDS parents and leaders titled *The Adolescent Brain and the Atonement: Meant for Each Other*, which explores the issues described in this essay and positive change strategies in greater depth.

² Gilliland, R., South, M., Carpenter, B. N., & Hardy, S. A. (2011). The roles of shame and guilt in hypersexual behavior. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 18, 12-29.

³ Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. R. (2002). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford, p. 12.

⁴ Butler, M. H. (2010). *Spiritual exodus: A Latter-day Saint guide to recovery from behavioral addiction*. Provo, UT: BYU Academic Press. Replete with the terms addiction and behavioral addiction, this recovery text is an evidence of our helpful progression in conceptualizing and talking about behavioral challenges and change.

⁵ See Thombs, D. L., & Osborn, C. J. (2013). Introduction to addictive behaviors, 4th ed. New York: Guilford. (Ch. 10, The controversial science of behavioral addiction); Oaks, Dallin H. (2015, October). Recovering from the trap of pornography. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2015/10/recovering-from-the-trap-of-pornography?lang=eng>. The term addiction is a diagnostic descriptor used only when a psychological dependency has developed, where the behavior is associated with significant functional impairment, and where powerlessness over the behavior has developed. Various mechanisms of powerlessness contribute to a person's growing struggle with pornography use, which nevertheless still do not fully qualify as an "addiction."

⁶ Ibid., 3; Butler, M. H., Call, M. L., Meloy, K. C., & Zitzman, S. T. (2014). Deconstructing mechanisms of powerlessness for clients seeking recovery: Learning to be powerless over addiction. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, 21(2), 92-113; Butler, M. H., Meloy, K. C., & Call, M. L. (2015). Dismantling powerlessness in addiction: Empowering recovery through rehabilitative behavioral learning. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*, 22(1), 26-58.

⁷ Chugani H. T. (1998). Biological basis of emotions: Brain systems and brain development. *Pediatrics*, 102, 1225-1229; Paus, T. (2005). Mapping brain maturation and cognitive development during adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(2), 60-68; Steinberg, L. (2005). Cognitive and affective development in adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(2), 69-74; Yurgelun-Todd, D. (2007). Emotional and cognitive changes during adolescence. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 17(2), 251-257.

⁸ Ibid., 6; Yurgelun-Todd. Cornell University, University of Rochester, & NYS Center for School Safety (ACT for Youth Center of Excellence) (May, 2002). Adolescent brain development: Research facts and findings. Retrieved from http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_brain_0502.pdf

⁹ Ibid., 7; Cornell et al., 2002; Ibid., 6, Steinberg, 2005; Ibid., 6, Yurgelun-Todd, 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7, Cornell et al., 2002.

¹¹ Ibid., 6, Yurgelun-Todd, 2007; Rosso I. M., Young, A. D., Femia, L. A., & Yurgelun-Todd, D. A. (2004). Cognitive and emotional components of frontal lobe functioning in childhood and adolescence. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1021, 355-362; Rubia, K., Overmeyer, S., Taylor, E., ... & Bullmore E. T. (2000). Functional frontalisation with age: Mapping neurodevelopmental trajectories with fMRI. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 24, 13-19.

¹² Ibid., 6, Yurgelun-Todd, 2007.

¹³ Jensen, F. E., & Urien, D. K. In Ruder, D. B. (2008, September-October). A work in progress: The teen brain. *Harvard Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/09/the-teen-brain.html>

¹⁴ Dahl, R. E. (2004). Keynote Address. In R. E. Dahl & L. P. Spear (Eds.), *Adolescent brain development: Vulnerabilities and opportunities* (pp. 1-22). New York Academy of Sciences.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶ Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

¹⁷ Miller, C. H., & Hedges, D. W. (2008). Scrupulosity disorder: An overview and introductory analysis. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 22, 1042-1058.

¹⁸ Cardon, C. A. (2013, April). The Savior wants to forgive. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/04/the-savior-wants-to-forgive?lang=eng>

¹⁹ E.g., Cardon, C. A. (2013, April). The Savior wants to forgive. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/04/the-savior-wants-to-forgive?lang=eng>; Christofferson, D. Todd (2014, October). Free forever, to act for themselves. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/10/free-forever-to-act-for-themselves?lang=eng>; Holland, Jeffrey R. (2016, April). Tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2016/04/tomorrow-the-lord-will-do-wonders-among-you?lang=eng>; Uchtdorf, Dieter F. (2013, October). You can do it now! In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/you-can-do-it-now?lang=eng#watch=video>; Uchtdorf, D. F. (2016, April). He will place you on his shoulders and carry you home. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2016/04/he-will-place-you-on-his-shoulders-and-carry-you-home?lang=eng>

²⁰ Maxwell, N. A. (1981). *Notwithstanding my weakness*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book. See also ibid., 17.

²¹ See ibid., 17; ibid., 18, Uchtdorf, 2013, 2016.

²² Butler, M. H., & Call, M. L. (2014). God's motivational interview with Moses. *Religious Educator*, 15(1), 123-143.

²³ Uchtdorf, D. F. (2017, April). Perfect love casteth out fear. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2017/04/perfect-love-casteth-out-fear?lang=eng>

²⁴ Ibid., 2 (p. 12). "A certain folk belief seems to be embedded in some cultures and subcultures: [namely, that] change is motivated primarily by the avoidance of [pain]. If you can just make people feel bad enough, they will change. [The belief is that] people would be motivated to change ... [if they felt] enough discomfort, shame, guilt, loss, threat, anxiety, or humiliation. ... In this view, people don't change because they haven't yet suffered enough." Ibid., 2, pp. 11-12. Increasingly, research demonstrates this to be a fundamentally flawed view and approach. We understand that punishment and suffering as goads for repentance are limited in their utility and are risky. As decades of research on heightening intrinsic motivation for change have shown, overloading guilt, suffering, or punishments is often counterproductive and can be harmful. While the demands of justice must be answered, Christ has already suffered for our sins so that we might not suffer any more than is absolutely needful for our repentance (D&C 19:16-19). The focused and short-lived purpose of guilt and suffering is energizing a U-turn toward change. Beyond that, a compelling vision of our exalted potential, anchored to a belief in our divine nature and sustained by our faith in Christ, is the source of enduring motivation for daily repentance striving. See Uchtdorf, Dieter F. (2017, April). Perfect love casteth out fear. In General Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2017/04/perfect-love-casteth-out-fear?lang=eng>

²⁵ de Shazer, S. (1985). *Keys to solution in brief therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

²⁶ The spiritual provision of a "probationary period" is apropos here. We need to allow space for effort and for growth and "interview" in appropriate intervals.

²⁷ See Mosiah 3:19.

SFL PROGRAM FEATURES:

THE ETERNAL FAMILY:

A NEW FOUNDATIONS
COURSE FOR THE SCHOOL
OF FAMILY LIFE

“THE 3-CREDIT COURSE IS “DESIGNED TO BE AN EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING BY STUDY AND BY FAITH (D&C 88:118).”

Registration is here. You go to add your major classes, an elective, a religion class, and then the dreaded G.E. class. How do you fit all of these into your schedule? BYU is now offering a new course that will fulfill both an SFL requirement and a Religion requirement (REL C 200): SFL 200: The Eternal Family, taught by Family Life professors Dr. Jason Carroll, Dr. Sarah Coyne, and Dr. Larry Nelson.

Dr. Nelson explained that the texts for the course will be the scriptures, teachings of general authorities, and social science research. In that sense, it is a blend of science and religion: This is what makes the course unique. According to Dr. Carroll, the 3-credit course is “designed to be an experience in learning by study and by faith (D&C 88:118). It’s an integration of the doctrines of the gospel together with research and

application into real-life practices.” In light of this, one can understand why SFL 200 will become the required foundations course in the School of Family Life (replacing SFL 100, “Strengthening Marriage and Families: Proclamation Principles & Research Perspectives”).

Both religious and secular education are vital; as Mormon Newsroom says: “Church teachings outline a vast field of valuable knowledge, incorporating an unlimited array of secular and religious subjects. ... They [Mormons] regard all forms of truth as relevant and sacred.”¹ The fusion that the course provides has a synergistic effect, meaning that students will be able to come away from the class with more than a scriptural understanding of eternal families and more than a textbook understanding of healthy family functioning.

Professor Nelson hopes that fusing the scientific and religious elements will showcase how the two elements can be taught together, and even used to support one another.

It is my experience that students are familiar with and have a testimony of the things taught in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” However, they enjoy learning more about the doctrines and scientific evidence related to the topics taught therein. The former seems to help dispel cultural myths and answer the question “why” for them, while the latter seems to equip them with a “language” of how to communicate—share and defend—their beliefs with friends not of our faith. We start the semester with one of our favorite quotes by Elder Russell M. Nelson, given at the dedication of the BYU Life Sciences Building dedication in 2015:

¹ <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormons-and-education-an-overview>

² <https://www.lds.org/church/news/church-leaders-gather-at-byu-life-sciences-building-for-dedication?lang=eng>

“THIS NEW COURSE WILL BE OF REAL INTEREST TO NEW STUDENTS COMING TO CAMPUS WHO WILL BE UNDER THE NEW RELIGIOUS EDUCATION GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS TO COMPLETE THE ETERNAL FAMILY COURSE.”

“This university is committed to search for truth and teach the truth. All truth is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether truth comes from a scientific laboratory or by revelation from the Lord, it is all compatible. ... conflict only arises from an incomplete knowledge of either science or religion, or both.”

I love teaching truths associated with the family that are derived from both sources, and students seem to resonate to learning from both sources, as well.²

Dr. Carroll said the focus of the class is to provide students with an understanding of core doctrines related to marriage and family relationships as well as to help them develop the skills needed to be personally prepared for dating, marriage, and parenting relationships. He explains:

The class helps students deepen their understanding of the vision and life priorities found in the doctrines of the gospel, while also teaching them practical skills related to dating, communication, conflict management, managing finances, parenting, and other parts of relationships that can help them

realize that vision in their own lives.

Athletic Training major Portia Kunz took the class in the Winter 2017 semester and described it as “very accessible.” She added: “[I] liked the idea of bringing the social sciences into the class.” She said one of the most important things she learned about was human sexuality. In her experience, that topic had never been truly covered in a religious capacity; she really appreciated that SFL 200 taught the topic in a way that meshed science and religion.

Public Health major Mikelle Lloyd’s experience with the class was similar to Portia’s. She said:

I learned so many things that helped me put relationships in perspective. This class helped me regain an eternal perspective on dating and marriage and it helped me to truly understand how and why the family is the most fundamental social unit in society. ... [It’s] one of the most edifying classes I [have taken] at BYU.

Mikelle loved seeing how secular knowledge was able to fit with doctrinal teachings.

The required texts for the class include the REL C 200 Eternal Families Packet, which is a carefully selected collection of doctrinal talks by church leaders on family topics, and the SFL textbook Successful Marriages and Families, edited by Dr. Alan Hawkins, Dr. David Dollahite, and Dr. Thomas Draper. A variety of course assignments range from papers to readings. One such assignment given by Carroll was a paper titled The Family Life Mentor Interview. Students interviewed a couple of their choice that had been married 15+ years about marriage. The objective was for the students to learn more about family and married life; and to analyze a real-life relationship through the lens of class principles.

According to Dr. Carroll, “this new course will be of real interest to new students coming to campus who will be under the new Religious Education graduation requirements to complete the Eternal Family course.” The SFL plans to offer two or three large sections of the class during Fall and Winter semesters each year. ■



NEW BIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS TRACK



**SARAH ARMKNECHT,
BIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
TRACK STUDENT**

One thing that Dr. Brian Rowley did not anticipate when he first started as an optometrist was how many people were willing to share things with him that had nothing to do with their eye exams. “Sometimes,” he said, “it feels like they are looking toward you as an expert in other areas of their lives. Because of my training in the field of Family Science, I have been able to listen and sometimes share a resource that helps.”

“Early on,” he continues, “I learned that the things I do as an optometrist, by and large, support the family. I’ve also learned that helping families is one of the most satisfying parts of my job, and gives meaning to what I do in eye care.”

Rowley created an unofficial track for himself when he was a BYU undergrad preparing for his career, one that the School

of Family has recently formalized and added to its Human Development emphasis. The Biological Foundations track allows students to incorporate hard sciences such as chemistry and biology into their Family Life degree. It was created for students who are interested in health professions that work with children and families, such as pediatrics, dentistry, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and child life specialty. “It allows flexibility for the specific requirements of the health profession of interest to the student while also providing a strong foundation of knowledge in the area of human development,” says Dr. Laura Walker, Associate Director in the School of Family Life.

Rowley’s goal was to become an optometrist, but he also wanted to study human development. As he wanted to graduate swiftly, he chose to be part of the Family Science department and take hard science classes as electives. Of his experience, he says:

I was most interested in getting a degree as quickly as I could, so that I could continue on with my doctoral degree. Optometry school did not specify what bachelor’s degree a person had, they just wanted to make sure the appropriate “pre-requisite” classes had been taken. With my interest in understanding more about how people think and feel, and due to my desire to obtain more skills that would help as I worked directly with people, the Family Science degree was

a perfect match for me. ... Because I had already completed some elective classes pre-BYU that fit perfectly within the Family [Life] program, it was a great option.

I think there are a lot of people who want to go into the medical field, that are expecting to work closely with people. The Family [Life] degree gave me some tools that I feel have played a significant role in helping me interact with the public. ... I think it is great that the School of Family Life is forging a new track that will give future students an opportunity to be better prepared for the future.

Not all students in the new track are thinking about going into the medical professions. When Sarah Armknecht came to BYU, she wanted an outlet for her love of science and math. But when she took the SFL 210 Human Development class from Dr. Larry Nelson, she felt drawn to the SFL major. When she discovered the Biological Foundations track, she felt this would be a great way to combine her love of science and child development. She plans to continue her training in a graduate program in Human Development, a field that increasingly is blending biological and social development. “I really enjoy learning about child development from so many different angles,” Sarah says. “I think I have a more rounded understanding of development because of the biological science classes I’m taking as a part of my Biological Foundations track in the major.” ■

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS!

KRISTEN CRANE CADDEN, *SANT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT*

Met Kristen Crane Cadden, a Family Studies senior from Salt Lake City, Utah. The Olympus High graduate came to BYU in 2011 not knowing what she wanted to do with her life. Even after declaring a Linguistics major and taking a few classes, Kirsten knew she needed a change. So, in 2013, she left BYU to serve a mission in Boston, Massachusetts, and it was there that she found her true calling. “My mission really shaped my interest in family studies,” she said.

I had the opportunity to spend time with families of different backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures. I saw a lot of good and a lot of bad in families and relationships. I realized that there were patterns that applied almost universally that could create either strong relationships or disastrous relationships. I came home with a strong desire to continue helping individuals and families find strength and success.

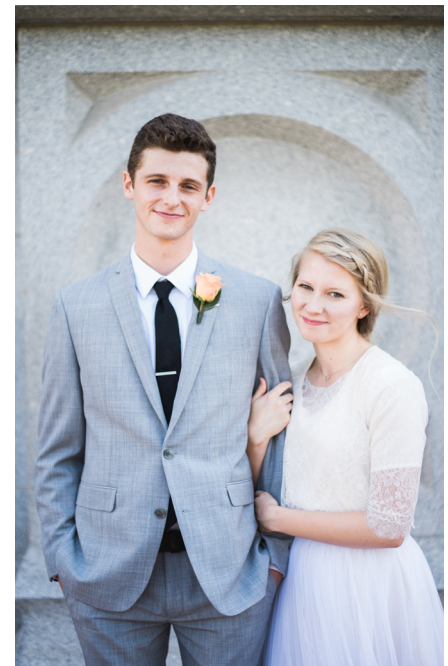
That desire, however, was not realized. When Kirsten came back from her mission, she became depressed: “After I came home from my mission, I hit a wall. I felt stuck in school, started and ended a bad relationship, and was falling into depression. I didn’t know what was wrong with me.” She decided to change her major to Family Studies, and, at the encouragement of friends and family, took a family processes class. It changed Kirsten’s life: “I loved my classes, my

professors, and the opportunities ahead of me.”

Kirsten’s receipt of a Sant scholarship soon thereafter further motivated her. The “Merlin and Edna Sant Endowed Scholarship Society in Family Studies” awards scholarships to Family Life majors and Gerontology students. In 2016, 50 scholarships were awarded. Kirsten says: “It was very validating and I was very grateful. That scholarship gave me a confidence boost—knowing that I was good enough to get it made me feel like I was being successful in school and doing good work.”

The scholarship is also a great financial boost. Kirsten has since married and plans on obtaining a master’s in Social Work so that she can “learn more about effective [family life education] programs and how to create them. I firmly believe that the charge from the Relief Society to strengthen home and family does not only apply to my own family in my own home, but to all homes and all families. I want to be involved in that work because it is a profession of ministering.” Because of the Sant scholarship, she will be able to preserve the money from her education fund that she would have used as an undergraduate to help her pursue graduate studies.

At the center of Kirsten’s work is her desire to have a family and be an intentional mother and wife. She acknowledges that this will be difficult, with her in graduate school and her husband attending law school. But she trusts



that God will provide for them. Truly, He already has, through the Sant’s generous donation, and will certainly continue to do so, just as Edna and Merlin Sant will continue to bless the lives of countless Family Studies and Gerontology students.

Your generous support can help provide inspiring educational opportunities like Kirsten’s for other students. Please contact Jim Crawley (jim_crawley@byu.edu) at LDS Philanthropies to learn more. ■

SFL NEWS

MICAELA JOHNSON: “MAKE IT WITH WOOL” COMPETITION WINNER

Micaela Johnson, one of our clothing students, started sewing when she was 14. Her first projects were a small quilt and a pillowcase. She has come a long way in her sewing abilities, as she recently won the Utah statewide competition of the “Make It With Wool” contest sponsored by the American Wool Council. She went on to compete on the national level in January 2017. Micaela set out to win a new Bernina sewing machine at the state level and she accomplished her goal.

Micaela made many of her clothes in high school, including her prom dress. She was often unhappy with the results but persisted as she tried new ideas. When she came to BYU, her father, Lee Johnson, who teaches in the School of Family Life, told her about the clothing classes offered through the university. She enrolled in the intermediate class and learned a lot of techniques that helped her immensely. She stated, “Anyone can sew a straight line and follow directions.” What she wanted to learn were better techniques for specific styles.

She continued and took the Patternmaking class, which she called, “a breath of fresh air.” In her Advanced Sewing Construction class, Micaela did an extraordinary project by copying a \$5,000 Alexander McQueen coat design. She created her own pattern fitted to her body and used wool, silk, and velvet totaling about \$100. The jacket turned out beautifully. After completing the Tailoring class, Micaela started her jacket and skirt to compete in the contest.



Micaela said she got many compliments on her pad stitching and bound buttonholes, both very difficult techniques used in her jacket. She is planning on entering again next year and hoping to win the national competition. We love having Micaela in our classes and seeing her wonderful talents continue to grow. Currently Micaela is in the master's program in Statistics. She hopes to continue sewing and furthering her skills wherever she lives. ■

DIANA HARRISON: HOPE & PERSISTENCE



“
The reason why I felt
so joyful was simple:
I decided that
nothing—including
my weight—could
make me feel less as
a person...
”

Diana Harrison, who graduated from BYU with a degree in Home Economics Teaching in 1995, struggled for decades with her weight, at one time ballooning to nearly 300 pounds. “I struggled with being large,” Diana says, “but I was super happy...not terribly healthy, but happy. Really. The reason why I felt so joyful was simple: I decided that nothing—including my weight—could make me feel less as a person...That said, I admit I didn’t want to be captured on camera. I didn’t want how I looked recorded for eternity. I didn’t feel that the way I looked reflected my authentic self. I felt buried.”

In 2011, Diana finally found the breakthrough she’d been searching for

in T-Tapp, an isometric exercise program created by Teresa Tapp. The program, designed to work fascia, strengthen the lymphatic system, and improve the connection between brain and body using a kinetic focus, helped Diana drop nearly 100 pounds. After a set-back due to a car accident and brain injury, she attended an intensive five-day T-Tapp event that resulted in more weight loss and created new neuro-pathways in her brain that brought about significant improvements in her cognitive function. With renewed brain-body connections, a practical exercise routine, and a commitment to all natural eating, Diana successfully reached the

healthy weight and emotional wellness she maintains today.

Through her website, (<http://www.dianaharrisonstrongenough.com>) Facebook page, online support groups, and various speaking forums, Diana has reached an increasingly wide audience with her story of hope and perseverance. “I’m just a simple little gal,” she says. “But I’m willing to go and do, so God uses me.” She looks forward to publishing her book, *Strong Enough: My Healing Journey*, as a way to share her message of positivity and hope with others who may be struggling with weight or negative self-image. ■

DR. KATHRYN EDIN: HINCKLEY CHAIR DISTINGUISHED LECTURER 2017



The 2017 Marjorie P. Hinckley Chair Distinguished Lecturer was Dr. Kathryn Edin, the Bloomberg Distinguished Professor in the Department of Sociology at Zanvyl Krieger School and the Department of Population, Family, and Reproductive Health, in the Bloomberg School of Public Health, at Johns Hopkins University.

She has done more, perhaps, than any scholar to help people understand family formation and dissolution behavior of low-income young men and women in the United States. Her extended ethnographic research among those populations have helped to shed light on why they tend to

choose to have children but not marry, why the romantic relationships they form tend to be fragile, and how parenthood gains powerful meaning in their lives. Her work has been highly influential in shaping policy discussions and debates. She is a delightful, down-to-earth individual, a devoted wife and mother, and a compassionate, caring citizen involved not only in researching her subjects, but also in trying to improve their lives with community service.

To watch her compelling lecture, go to: <https://hinckleychair.byu.edu/Pages/lecture.aspx> ■

CONNECT WITH US

Join the SFL Alumni Network

SFL Alumni Activities

Since the last edition of our magazine, we've added some events to our calendar. In February 2017, alumna Denise Barney presented "The Power of Positive Parenting." You can view that presentation at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XLA5nLVocM>

In April, renowned author and alumna Laura M. Brotherson spiced things up with a married-couples date night, "Creating a Sextraordinary Marriage." (Sorry, no video for that one.) Both Barney and Brotherson, in their own ways, offered fantastic tips and ideas for strengthening family relationships. We're looking forward to our third event in October 2017, when both alumni and students of the School of Family Life will have the opportunity to become "Marital First Responders."

SFL Alumni Facebook Group

If you haven't done it yet, consider adding yourself to the BYU SFL Alumni Connect page on Facebook. There you'll find events, contests, education/volunteer/job opportunities, various family-centric posts, and more. Also, feel free to post anything to the group that would be beneficial to your fellow alumni. And stay tuned for an upcoming chat about the content of this latest issue of Family Connections.

HERE'S HOW TO JOIN:

1

*Search for "BYU SFL Alumni Connect"
on Facebook.*

2

Ask to be added to the group.

3

*Check your messages, as we may need to verify
that you have graduated from BYU in the SFL
major.*

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

A BYU education should be “spiritually strengthening, intellectually enlarging, and character building, leading to lifelong learning and service.” In that spirit, the School of Family Life faculty have suggested some recent publications and resources of potential interest to SFL alumni to help them stay current in their fields.

RELIGION AND FAMILIES: AN INTRODUCTION, DR. LOREN C. MARKS, DR. DAVID C. DOLLAHITE. ROUTLEDGE PRESS (2016).

BYU School of Family Life faculty Dr. Loren D. Marks and Dr. David C. Dollahite recently published this new book that will be of interest to SFL alumni. This is the first multidisciplinary text to address the connection between religion and family life. The latest scholarship is reviewed along with narratives drawn from interviews with 200 diverse families that bring the concepts to life. In preparing to write the book, the authors read the sacred texts of many faiths, interviewed religious leaders, and attended religious services for a wide array of faiths. The result is an engaging account of why and how families are influenced by their religion. The book examines both traditional and nontraditional families from a score of denominations within Christianity (including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Judaism, and Islam.

THE MARRIAGE PARADOX: WHY EMERGING ADULTS LOVE MARRIAGE YET PUSH IT ASIDE, DR. BRIAN J. WILLOUGHBY & DR. SPENCER L. JAMES. OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (2017).

Marriage has been declared dead by many scholars and the media. Especially among young adults, marriage may seem like a relic of a distant past. Yet young adults continue to report that marriage is important to them, and they may not be abandoning marriage, as many would assume.

In *The Marriage Paradox*, BYU SFL Professors Brian Willoughby and Spencer James explore both national U.S. data and a smaller sample of emerging adults to find out how they really view marriage today. Interspersed with real stories and insight from emerging adults, this book

attempts to make sense of the increasingly paradoxical ways that young adults are thinking about marriage. The book offers a deep exploration of why we see the marital trends of today, and why emerging adults may not actually be moving away from marriage.

INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY STUDIES BLOG: [HTTPS://IFSTUDIES.ORG/BLOG](https://ifstudies.org/blog)

If you want to stay up to date with important research and developments on family life, this is an excellent weekly blog to check out. The mission of the Institute for Family Studies (IFS) is to strengthen marriage and family life, and to advance the well-being of children through research and public education. Known for its objective and impeccably researched studies that attract attention and respect from across the ideological spectrum, IFS's programs and platforms focus on a number of important trending marriage and family issues. The fact that roughly one in two children in America grow up outside an intact, married family constitutes one of the most significant threats to America's future stability and prosperity. By carefully and accurately documenting the causes and consequences of family instability, IFS seeks to elevate this growing phenomenon to the top of the nation's policy and cultural agenda, where it can receive the recognition and response it deserves. You can use this website to become more aware of what can be done to strengthen marriage and family life in America. Several LDS family scholars contribute regularly to this blog. Scroll down to the bottom of the webpage and sign up to join the blog's mailing list.

MORE LIFE - LONG LEARNING

Marital First Responders Training

Have you ever had friends or family members confide in you about their marital problems? A recent study found that 73% of Americans answered “yes” to this question. Many people confide in friends or family members long before they seek professional help for their marriage. So, as friends and loved ones, we’re on the front lines of helping people deal with marital challenges.

Marital First Responders (maritalfirstresponders.com) are people who others open up to about relationship problems. But they are sometimes unsure about how to be helpful, how to avoid taking sides, and how to steer friends and family members to the right resources.

About 150 SFL alumni and students attended a training to help them be more intentional, confident, and effective when others come to them for support and perspective on relationship struggles, whether they are the complaints of everyday coupledness or bigger issues like thoughts of divorce.

Training topics include:

- Listening and empathizing without taking sides
- Offering helpful perspectives on relationships
- Keeping good boundaries
- Challenging when needed
- Helping people find the right kind of help

**October 12, 2017,
was our third event:**

Marital First Responders Training, with Dr. Steven M. Harris, Ph.D., LMFT, Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Minnesota.

If you would like to view a recording of this 4-hour training session, go to:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JermduAnECO&feature=youtu.be>



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