

NOTE: The original article is no longer found on the Meridian Magazine website. I managed to find a copy of it from the [internet archive](#) captured on Sept 14, 2000. Many people have asked to read this article and I list it as one of the articles that inspired me with my homeschooling. It is provided here as a reference only. ~Ann Agent

<http://web.archive.org/web/20000914200627/http://www.meridianmagazine.com/voices/000815hometemple.html>

MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

My Home as a Temple

by Kristine Manwaring

Is there something sacred in the everyday?

I have spent too much time in my home discouraged.

I want to rear my children in a celestial atmosphere. "With all my heart I believe that the best place to prepare for eternal life is in the home," said David O. McKay¹, and his words resonate to the core of my being. Yet, believing something does not automatically make it happen. In the abstract, I love my family, I love my home, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. In the reality of three meals a day, soccer games, dirty laundry, reports on Spain, and strep throat, the connection between eternal life and daily life often escapes me.

"Only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness," the LDS Bible Dictionary tells me.

When I think of "sacred" I think of temples. I picture white couches, hushed voices, crystal chandeliers, and uninterrupted worship. I cannot recall ever leaving the temple wishing I hadn't been there or begrudging the time I spent serving our ancestors. It seems everything in the temple runs according to plan and that everything I do there is part of a larger, meaningful whole. Homes, on the other hand, are noisy, messy, often disorganized, and characterized by nothing but interruptions. The demands during a single day are relentless, and it is not uncommon for both mother and father to feel used or spent. Even in the quiet moments, I usually find myself cooking, folding laundry, giving spelling quizzes, and playing Legos. These activities do not feel sacred to me, and, if the truth be told, I'd rather not be doing them so much of the time. What possible definition of the word "sacred" could apply to these two seemingly opposite experiences?

When I was first presented with the idea that homes should be sacred, I tried to make my home fit the kind of cleanliness and order I thought the temple represented. Instead of a temple-like home, I ended up with a growing resentment towards the very things that homes exist for. Cooking and laundry became onerous because the tasks themselves created disorder. I even developed an intolerance for the cheerful chaos that burst through the back door with my children as the school bus pulled away. I became confused. Is my home still sacred when it is messy? What about when it is loud? What if I have children or friends who do not want to be reverent? Do they still get to come into my home? The harder I pushed my family to fit my narrow definition of "sacred," the more anxious and less temple-like we all felt.

Then I began walking in the mornings with a wise neighbor who grew up in a large, loving family and first became a mother at the age of forty-four. From her long perspective as a daughter and her more recent experience as a mother, she has come to believe that the work of feeding, clothing, and nurturing one another is every bit as spiritual as it is physical. She feels strongly that when ordinary, life-sustaining tasks are done together as a family, they bind family members to one another in small but critical ways. She speaks of chopping vegetables and cleaning bathrooms with her sons with something akin to reverence. She has even said that scrubbing a wall with a child is a more productive "togetherness" experience than attending his ball game or vacationing as a family.

I was startled to realize that she saw as "sacred" the very tasks that I always thought were obstacles to sacredness. And for evidence, she turned to the scriptures. The parable of the sheep and the goats found in Matthew 25 clearly shows that Christ will judge us according to our willingness to feed and clothe "the least of these my brethren." Does this include members of our own families? In fact, Christ used imagery of feeding and washing and cleaning throughout His parables and object lessons. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd" (Isaiah 40:11). He will "wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion" (2 Nephi 14:4) and "sweep away the bad out of [His] vineyard" (Jacob 5:66). He even likens Himself to a hen who "gathereth her chickens under her wings" (Matthew 23:37).

Even more striking to me, Christ not only spoke of these things, He personally did them. He fed multitudes with limited tangible resources in a miraculous example of His attention to our physical as well as spiritual hunger. He washed the feet of His disciples to illustrate the humble service required of a Master, and to reveal

what He was willing to do that we might be entirely clean. In the book of Moses, He states that He, Himself, made the coats of skins to clothe Adam and Eve. When seen in this new light, my perception of tasks like peeling potatoes and scrubbing floors began to turn upside down and inside out. It was becoming obvious to me that when we care for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of our families, we are patterning our lives after the Savior.

One morning my friend commented about the struggle mothers face cleaning with children. She worried that if mothers think they have to maintain temple-like standards of cleanliness, they will focus on the cleaning itself and miss out on the wonderful opportunity to work side by side with their children. "Are we doing a disservice to mothers if we hold out the temple as a standard for them to emulate?" she asked. Her question touched a raw nerve. It brought back painful memories of my own attempts to make my home like a temple, and I wanted to object. I went home and looked up the exact wording of the "temple" entry in the Bible Dictionary. There it was again: "Only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness." There was no hint that we should try to *make* our homes sacred like the temple. The sacredness is somehow already there.

For the rest of the day, parallels between my routines at home and those at the temple flooded my mind. In the temple, for instance, we worship as a group. The pace for the entire group is set by the slowest member. I thought of how family scripture reading or dressing for church or even passing the food at dinner is almost always determined by our two-year-old. In temple ceremonies what we do with our hands is just as important as what we say with our lips. Certainly I show my love for my family with both my hands and my lips during the rituals of homemaking. I vocally tell my children I love them, but an understanding of the depth of my love comes when my hands clean up their vomit or gently scrub their backs or hang on to the seats of their bicycles or hold their hands as we cross the street. I even thought about what it is we are taught at the temple. In both settings we learn of our true identity and our connections and obligations to one another. Boyd K. Packer stated in the October 1998 Conference, "[M]ost of what I know about how our Father in Heaven really feels about us, His children, I have learned from the way I feel about my wife and my children and their children. This I have learned at home."²

Michael Wilcox, in his book House of Glory, states that, "As we pray for understanding, we can be assured that everything in the temple is beautiful...The temptation to reject a symbol as unedifying says much more about our ignorance of its meaning than about the symbol itself. If we understood it, it would be beautiful and powerful." As I have prayed for an understanding and testimony of the sacredness of my home, I have learned to apply this same principle to the ceremonies of making a home. Only when I cease to feel "above" mundane tasks like taking out the garbage or sweeping the kitchen floor do I glimpse their symbolic and sacred nature. As I clean windows, for instance, I notice the sunlight shining through more clearly, affirming that Jesus Christ is the source of all light. When I choose to spend a particular moment serving my family in this way over the many other possibilities, I remember that Mosiah taught that "when [we] are in the service of [our] fellow beings" we are also in the service of our God (Mosiah 2:17).

I learn even more when I share these tasks with my children. One Saturday morning my nine-year-old daughter and I were cleaning our large kitchen window together. I was outside and she was inside. We both sprayed the entire window with cleaner and when I looked at the window, I couldn't see her at all. Gradually, as we both wiped away the spray, her image became clearer until, with both the dirt and the spray gone, I could see her with perfect clarity. Our relationship is sometimes stormy, and the incident reminded me of my need to constantly keep wiping away surface tensions, judgmental thoughts, and misunderstandings whenever her true identity and potential are temporarily clouded from my vision.

On the days I don't really feel like laboring for and with my family, my reluctance itself teaches me about my relationship with my Heavenly Father, His son Jesus Christ, and my own progress toward them. How much greater their love for us must be than what I am capable of, for they never tire of listening to our prayers nor are they inconvenienced by our constant need for their help.

Realizing something of the spiritual value of homemaking has made me more aware of the need to more fully involve my family in these tasks. My husband and I no longer simply delegate chores to our children each day. We wash dishes and make beds alongside them. By doing so, we have been blessed with opportunities to teach our children and be taught ourselves with a frequency and a depth we previously never imagined. A year ago, I spent most of my dishwashing time muttering under my breath and trying to jam too many dishes into the limited dishwasher space. Now, every time I invite a child to thrust their hands into the warm, soapy water with mine, I learn something new about their spirit and their life. It is only when doing dishes together that my twelve-year-old son, who mostly speaks in monosyllables about his experiences at school, reveals who his friends are and why he has chosen them, the pressure he feels about his grades, how much he likes math, and what he thinks about

his teacher.

Paradoxically, what I previously labeled "mindless" and once thought of as interruptions to spiritual growth are becoming the core of what makes my home feel sacred. As I cook meals, wash dishes, make beds, and sweep floors, I am continually in the midst of both teaching and being taught about charity, humility, hope, and faith. I am exchanging independence and "everyone seeking after their own" for a mutual dependence and unity in purpose that surely is related to Zion. I feel the sacredness in my home not only when it is clean, but also when we are in the process of getting it that way. Some days I don't even mind that we will go through the process again the very next day.

Much of my discouragement at home was due to a sense of failure I felt for not being able to artificially create sacredness there. How comforting it is to be released from that burden. With joy and gratitude I now realize I need only look for the way sacredness already surrounds me.

About the Author

Kristine Manwaring grew up in the Seattle, Washington area. She received a BA in Near Eastern Studies and worked for WordPerfect Corporation until the day she had her first child. She is now home with four children, ranging in age from 14 to 4.

Notes

1. McKay, David O., "Blueprint for Family Living," *Improvement Era*, April 1963, p. 252.
2. Boyd K. Packer, "Parents in Zion", *Ensign*, November 1998, p. 24.

© 2000 [Meridian Magazine](#). All Rights Reserved.