



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY-IDAHO

THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness,

to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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Excerpts from the General Handbook of the Church

– Chapters 1 & 2

1.1 God's Plan of Happiness

Heavenly Father provided the plan of happiness to enable us to enjoy all His blessings. His work and glory is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Immortality is to live forever with a resurrected physical body. Eternal life, or exaltation, is to become like God and live in His presence eternally as families.

We cannot obtain immortality and eternal life without God's help. In this life, we are subject to sin and death, which separate us from Heavenly Father and prevent us from becoming more like Him.

Jesus Christ is central to God's plan. Because of Heavenly Father's infinite love for us, He sent His Son to redeem us from sin and death through His atoning sacrifice (see John 3:16). Through His Atonement, Jesus Christ ensures that each of us born on earth will be resurrected and gain immortality. His Atonement also makes it possible for us to be cleansed from sin and have our hearts changed so we can receive eternal life and a fulness of joy.

To receive eternal life, we must “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32). This invitation extends to all who have lived or will ever live on the earth. Heavenly Father wants all of His children to choose to return to Him.

1.3.1 Priesthood Authority and Keys

Through the priesthood, God accomplishes the work of salvation and exaltation. The priesthood authority and keys needed to direct God's work on earth were restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16; 112:30; see also 3.1). These keys are held by Church leaders today. They call and authorize others to assist in God's work (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:8, 65–67).

1.3.2 Covenants and Ordinances

In Heavenly Father's plan, we make covenants as we receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation, such as baptism (see John 3:5; see also chapter 18). These covenants and ordinances are essential for us to become more like God and return to dwell in His presence (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22).

1.3.3 Prophetic Direction

Through His chosen prophets, God reveals truth and provides inspired guidance and warnings (see Amos 3:7; Doctrine and Covenants 1:4). This guidance helps us enter and remain on the path leading to eternal life.

1.3.4 Scriptures

Under the direction of the Lord's prophets and apostles, the Church provides and preserves the word of God as found in the holy scriptures. The scriptures testify of Christ, teach His gospel, and help us exercise faith in Him (see Jacob 7:10–11; Helaman 15:7).



Teaching the Doctrine of The Family

Sister Julie B. Beck

Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Satellite Broadcast

• August 4, 2009 •

Conference Center Theater



1. It's a great blessing for me to be with you, my wonderful friends in the seminary and institute program. Thank you for the service that you give throughout the Church in the world. As I have traveled in my Church responsibilities, I've met so many of you. You are ecclesiastical leaders and also the leaders and teachers of the rising generation. Thank you for all you do.

2. A few of your number are here in the studio with me today representing the rest of you. These are seminary and institute teachers from the Ogden, Utah, area. We are so grateful to them for coming with their wives and husbands to share this experience together.

3. It is a blessing for us to have the quality of teachers and leaders that you are helping our rising generation. You have a great responsibility, and you have a position of influence in the kingdom. We know that we couldn't teach the rising generation with such effectiveness without you—those who are full time and those who are volunteers. Thank you, thank you, thank you. My heart swells with gratitude for all that you do.

4. I've served on the Board of Education and on the Executive Committee of the Board of Education for almost two and a half years now, and I've seen that every single teacher who is recommended for employment and every leader in Church education passes through a review process that goes all the way to the First Presidency. How blessed we are to have that process.

5. We are very interested in who is teaching the rising generation. A major financial commitment of the Church's education program is to the seminaries and institutes of religion. I've been studying again your *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders* (2001) and hope that you are reviewing this also. This is a marvelous resource for you in all that you do. In the front section it says, "Religious

education is education for eternity and requires the influence of the Spirit of the Lord" (p. 1). I pray that we will have that influence with us as we review some things today.

6. I've mentioned how carefully the First Presidency worries about every detail of Church education. I know how much money they spend on the rising generation. I know how many people are employed to take care of the rising generation. Why do they invest so much?

7. As I've met with young single adults around the world, I ask these questions: Why does the First Presidency care so much about the youth of the Church, and why do they invest so much? In their focus groups and their firesides, these are the answers I get, and you should be interested in these answers. You might ask your own students these questions. They say: "Well, we are the future Church leaders." "Education is the key to success." "We need training so we can stay strong." "Our testimonies are strengthened in our classes." "We need to meet other great Latter-day Saint youth." "We are the hope of the future." One said, "We appreciate it." Another one said, "Well, they spend so much money on us because we're worth it."

8. I was very interested in those answers. You have to know that after pushing hard and receiving response after response, I have rarely heard, "So I will someday be a better father, or a better mother, or a better family leader." Family is rarely on their minds. Their responses are generally about self, and of course we know this is the time of life they're in. They're living in a very self-interested time of life, but they aren't thinking about family.

The Objective

9. You have some revised seminary and institute objectives.

When you got these objectives, family was mentioned in them. It says that your purpose is “to help the youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven.” That’s your objective. So, you’re going to do that through your purpose of living the gospel, of teaching students the gospel, and administering in such a way that you will be strengthening parents in those families. There are a couple of places where references to the family were added.

10. We’re here to help with the Lord’s purpose, as it says, to help them achieve “eternal life.” In Moses 1:39 we learn, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” We know that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ our immortality has been taken care of, but to receive eternal life we have some responsibilities. There are certain things that we have to do.

11. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “Your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as that has been revealed in these latter days” (“The Charted Course of the Church in Education” [address to seminary and institute of religion leaders, Aug. 8, 1938], 6, www.ldsces.org; see also Teaching the Gospel, 4). So, what is that gospel, and what is essential to achieve eternal life?

12. We know that we cannot achieve eternal life without the ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We find other teachings about living the commandments, serving, and giving away all we have to the Lord, but all of those things are based on the covenants we make. Without those covenants, we cannot achieve eternal life. That’s why we share the gospel and prepare missionaries—because Heavenly Father says, “All my children need to be taught and given an opportunity to make the covenants that will save them.” That’s why we build temples—because Heavenly Father says, “All my children need an opportunity to make these covenants.” So, we do vicarious work for those who have died. Heavenly Father wants every one of His children to have an opportunity. That’s why we teach the gospel to our youth—so they will understand and make and keep the covenants that they need to receive eternal life.

13. My purpose today is to talk to you about why the Board of Education wanted an emphasis on family in your objectives. Why would we want you to talk about family or understand family when you’re teaching a generation of unmarried people? We will review the theology of the family, threats to the family, and what we hope the rising generation—your students—will understand and do because of what you will teach them about the family.

The Theology of the Family

14. Let’s talk, first of all, about the theology of the family and why seminary and institute teachers need to understand and teach this. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a theology of the family. It’s based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. I don’t know how well your students understand that. They may be able to recite the facts about the Creation, but do they know that this is a theology of the family? The Creation of the earth was the creation of an earth where a family could live. It was a creation of a man and a woman who were the two essential halves of a family. It was not about a creation of a man and a woman who happened to have a family. It was intentional all along that Adam and Eve form an eternal family. It was part of the plan that these two be sealed and form an eternal family unit. That was the plan of happiness.

15. The Fall provided a way for the family to grow. Through the leadership of Eve and Adam, they chose to have a mortal experience. The Fall made it possible for Adam and Eve to have a family, to have sons and daughters. They needed to grow in numbers and grow in experience. The Fall provided that for the family.

16. The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. The plan of happiness and the plan of salvation was a plan created for families. I don’t think very many of the rising generation understand that the main pillars of our theology are centered in the family.

17. When we speak of qualifying for the blessings of eternal life, we mean qualifying for the blessings of eternal families. This was Christ’s doctrine, and this is some of what was restored that had been lost—understanding and clarity about family. Without these

blessings, the earth is wasted. When did we learn that? Let's turn in our scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants 2. Section 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants is the only part that we have in the Doctrine and Covenants that Joseph Smith recorded from his visits with the angel Moroni. This is what section 2 says:

18. "Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

19. "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

20. "If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming" (vv. 1–3).

21. How early did the Prophet Joseph Smith understand that this was going to be a theology about the family? He understood it when he was 17 and he began to be taught. What are the promises made to the fathers? Who were the fathers? The fathers were Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah—those ancient prophets who understood the doctrine of eternal families. The promises of the children made to the fathers was that their hearts would turn to their fathers. Their hearts would be turned to the blessings of eternal life that they could have. This is talking about temple blessings—temple ordinances and covenants without which "the whole earth [is] utterly wasted."

22. So, if we teach about what is in every section of the Doctrine and Covenants, if we teach so that our students know all the rivers in the Book of Mormon, if they can name all the prophets of the Old Testament, if they can describe to you the pioneer trek and the history of the Latter-day Saints in the restored times but they don't understand the promises made to the fathers and their part in it, it is "utterly wasted." I would submit that all of our teaching is utterly wasted if they don't understand the context that all of this is taught within.

23. The proclamation on the family was written to reinforce that. It reinforces the family being central to the Creator's plan.¹ Without the family, there is no plan; there is no reason for it. I'm not certain that everyone of the rising generation understands that with clarity. Threats to the Family

24. Let's review some of the threats to the family. We have to know what we're fighting against. If our young people don't understand what they're fighting against, then they can't prepare for the battle, and neither can you. We see evidence all around us that the family is not important. It's becoming less important in all societies. We know that because marriage rates are declining, the age of marriage is rising, divorce rates are rising, and more than a fourth of all births are out of wedlock. We see lower birth rates, and they're dropping every year worldwide. Abortion is rising and becoming increasingly legal around the world. We see unequal relationships with men and women, and we see a lot of cultures that still practice abuse of some kind within family relationships. Many times a career is gaining importance over the family.

25. We know, from our studies here at Church headquarters concerning the rising generation, that our youth are increasingly less confident in the institution of families. They are less confident in their ability to form a successful eternal family. Because they are less confident in families, they're placing more and more value on education and less and less importance on forming an eternal family.

26. We know, from visiting with them and conducting studies, that they show a lack of faith in their ability to be successful in families. They don't see forming families as a faith-based work. For them, it's a selection process much like shopping. They don't see it as something that the Lord will bless them and help them to accomplish. They also distrust their own moral strength and the moral strength of their peers. Because temptations are so fierce, they aren't sure they can be successful in keeping covenants. They also have insufficient and underdeveloped social skills, which are an impediment to them in forming eternal families.

27. They all have cell phones. I haven't been to a country in the world in the last three years where every young person doesn't have a cell phone. They all have a cell phone, and they all have an e-mail address. They're getting increasingly adept at talking to somebody 50 miles away and less and less able to carry on conversations with people in the same room. That makes it difficult for them to socialize with each other.

28. We also have the problem that we read about in Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh

and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

29. This is the world our young people are growing up in. They are in this world where there is “spiritual wickedness in high places.” Public policies are being made every day that are anti family, and the definition of family is changing legally around the world. Concerning spiritual wickedness, we could call attention to pornography, which is rampant. The use of pornography among our youth is growing. The new target audience for those who create pornography is young women. There are media messages everywhere that are anti family, and our young people are very connected with media—Internet, television, the things they receive on their phones, all electronic devices are delivering anti family messages to them every day. Increasingly, our youth are seeing no reason to form a family or get married in spite of all the teaching you give them. They are being desensitized about the need to form eternal families.

30. Let’s read about how this is happening. Let’s turn to Alma 30. This is Korihor. Let’s put the family lens on this to see how this stacks up with what you’re hearing today about family messages. Korihor, who in verse 12 was described as an anti-Christ, said in verses 13–14:

31. “O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

32. “Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.”

33. This is what our rising generation is starting to think about families. Continuing in Alma:

34. “How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

35. “Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead

you away into a belief of things which are not so.

36. “And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature” (vv. 15–17).

37. Have you heard that in the world’s messages? “You are the one who will get yourself ahead. It’s because of your skills and your intelligence that you will be successful.” That’s the media message young people are getting every day.

38. Another message: “Therefore every man prospered according to his genius” (v. 17). Get your education. Be the best. There are TV shows they are watching that are competitive shows—they are seeing American Idol, So You Think You Can Dance, lots of competition shows. The more of a genius you are, the more famous you will be. These types of shows are popular among our youth.

39. “And that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime” (v. 17). That’s what they’re hearing every day. “Live the life that’s going to make you happy.” That’s the media message that they are getting.

40. I’m finding verse 18 interesting: “Thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms.”

41. A lot of the anti family messages that you are hearing are targeting young women. Satan knows that he will never have a body; he will never have a family. He will target those young women who create the bodies for the future generations and who should teach the families. They don’t even know what they’re being taught in the messages. It’s just seeping in, almost through their pores. Because Satan can’t have it, he’s luring away many women, and also men, and they’re losing confidence in their ability to form eternal families.

43. Korihor was an anti-Christ. Anti-Christ is anti family. Any doctrine or principle our youth hear from the world that is anti family is also anti-Christ. It’s

that clear. They need to know that if it's anti family, it's anti-Christ. An anti- Christ is anti family.

44. We are in danger of getting a generation like we see described in Mosiah 26, where many of the rising generation don't believe in the traditions of their fathers, and they become a separate people as to their faith and remain so ever after. Despite all the money, all the effort you put in, they could be led away if they don't understand their part in the plan.

Teaching the Rising Generation

45. Let's go to the question "What is it we hope this rising generation will understand and do because of what you will teach them?" Teach so they don't misunderstand that every doctrine, every principle, everything you're teaching leads them to the fullness of the gospel. And the fullness of the gospel is found in the temples—in temple ordinances and covenants and their eternal role. That is the full gospel.

46. In the Church, a primary concern is to teach the saving principles of the gospel, and the saving principles are those that are the family principles, the principles that will teach them to form a family, to teach that family, and to prepare that family for ordinances and covenants. Then teach it to the next generation, and the next. Your students have that responsibility.

47. Let's be very clear on key elements of doctrine. I hope every one of your classrooms has a copy of the proclamation on the family in it and that all of your students have a copy of the proclamation with them. Then, when you are teaching them, you can tie back teachings to key statements and phrases that are in the proclamation on the family. The proclamation is not a standalone lesson. If you're teaching in the Old Testament, the proclamation should be a partner piece that they are circling and underlining and finding where the Old Testament families understood these principles. If you're teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants, you can tie it back to the proclamation. This also applies to the Book of Mormon. If they have the proclamation with them in their scriptures, they will be learning and tying it together as you work.

48. President Hinckley said in 1995, when he read the proclamation on the family in a general Relief Society meeting and revealed it to the Church, that the

proclamation was "a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices" that this Church has always had.² This is not new doctrine from 1995. It was a reaffirmation of understanding that was there since Joseph Smith understood it at age 17.

49. One of those doctrines is the understanding of parents, sons, and daughters. President Spencer W. Kimball said this: "From the beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has emphasized family life. We have always understood that the foundations of the family, as an eternal unit, were laid even before this earth was created! Society without basic family life is without foundation and will disintegrate into nothingness" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 3; or Ensign, Nov. 1980, 4).

50. Elder Robert D. Hales said this about marriage:

51. "The family is not an accident of mortality. It existed as an organizational unit in the heavens before the world was formed; historically, it started on earth with Adam and Eve, as recorded in Genesis. Adam and Eve were married and sealed for time and all eternity by the Lord, and as a result their family will exist eternally" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," in Dawn Hall Anderson, ed., *Clothed with Charity* [1997], 134). That's very clear, isn't it?

52. President Ezra Taft Benson said this:

53. "This order is ... described in modern revelation as an order of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity, and to do the will and work of God throughout their mortality.

54. "... This order of priesthood has been on the earth since the beginning, and it is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live."³

55. Elder David A. Bednar taught us in his wonderful message "Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan." (I recommend this to you for your study; it is from the Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Supporting the Family held February 11, 2006. There are other foundational messages there—one from

President Thomas S. Monson, one from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, and another one from Elder L. Tom Perry.)

56. Elder Bednar talked specifically about two important reasons why we have the family, why we have marriage. “Reason 1: The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation” (p. 3). Do your students understand that with clarity? “Reason 2: By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children” (p. 4). Wonderful principles taught there.

57. Students also need to understand that the command to “multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28) remains in force. It’s okay for them to bear children. Bearing children is a faith-based work. President Kimball said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so”.⁴

58. The media messages that are coming at your youth are antichildren. Motherhood and fatherhood are eternal roles and responsibilities. I don’t know if they understand that. Each carries the responsibility for either the male or the female half of the plan. They are preparing in this life for those eternal roles. They’re not just preparing their testimonies—they are preparing for eternal responsibilities.

59. What we’re really preparing them for is the blessings of Abraham. We can review that in Abraham 1 of the Pearl of Great Price. Let’s read this and ask ourselves some questions. (When I’m talking to young adults, I say, “How do we know Abraham was a young adult male?” It says that Abraham “saw that it was needful for [him] to obtain another place of residence” [v. 1]. So they can think of themselves: “It is needful for me to obtain another place of residence. I don’t need to live with my father forever.”)

60. In verse 2, Abraham said: “Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers.” We often call Abraham the father, so who were Abraham’s fathers? Adam, Noah, Seth, and the ancient prophets; those were the fathers he knew about, and he knew about the plan

and their responsibilities. What were the blessings? He wanted “the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers” (Abraham 1:2).

61. Where do we learn about these things in our day, and where do we receive these blessings? He wanted the blessings of the temple that were available to him so he could become “a rightful heir,” “a father of many nations.” That blessing only comes to those who have a temple sealing and marriage. You cannot be a father of many nations without a wife that you are sealed to. He could not hold the right belonging to the fathers without a wife who had the rights belonging to the mothers.

62. Abraham wanted and sought the temple blessings that we learn about in section 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants, that same priesthood. So, who were the mothers? Do your young women know who the mothers were? Do they know that their ancestral mothers were Eve and Sarah and Rebekah and those other important women? The scriptures call Eve “our glorious Mother Eve” (D&C 138:39). And why was she glorious? Because she understood her responsibility in the formation of an eternal family.

63. I love the story of Abraham and Sarah and of Isaac and Rebekah that is found in Genesis. If Abraham wanted these blessings, his wife was pretty important. Abraham and Sarah had one son—the golden son, Isaac. If Abraham wanted these blessings—to be the “father of many nations”—how important was Isaac’s wife? Isaac’s wife was pivotal in Abraham being able to receive his blessings. She was so important that he sent his servant on a mission to find the right girl—a girl who would keep her covenants, a girl who understood what it meant to form an eternal family and have those same blessings. (It’s a great study to just see what Rebekah’s qualities were. You can start in Genesis 24:15 and read through sometime with your students and learn what some of her qualities were. Ask: What do we learn about Rebekah? What was she

like? What was her character that made her the kind of person to qualify to be the wife of the one golden child who was then going to pass on these blessings?)

64. In verse 60 we come to the point where Rebekah was blessed by her brothers. It says, “Be thou the mother of thousands of millions.” Where do you get those kinds of blessings? You get those in the temple. And Rebekah was blessed and wanted these blessings. So Rebekah left all her family and her former life. She wanted those blessings so much that she said, “I don’t need to wait. I will go now” (see Genesis 24:61). And she and Isaac formed an eternal family. They had two boys. One of their boys chose to marry out of the covenant.

65. We learn from Rebekah that she was weary of her life because of the daughters of Heth. Those were the women who were not in the covenant. This is in Genesis 27:46 where she said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?” Now, Rebekah gave up everything—she left her family and her homeland to go form an eternal family because she wanted these blessings. And of her two sons, she had one left; and of the daughters of the land, there was not one who could form an eternal marriage with her son. She needed to see that her righteous son got the blessings. Rebekah used her influence to see that the priesthood blessings and keys passed to the righteous son. It’s a perfect example of the man who has the keys and the woman who has the influence working together to ensure their blessings.

66. Now we had Isaac and Rebekah, who knew about the promises to “be ... the mother of thousands of millions” or the “father of many nations.” How important was the wife of Jacob? Very important. Because of Rebekah’s influence and Isaac’s priesthood keys, we have the twelve tribes of Israel, who now people the earth. That story of Isaac and Rebekah is pivotal. Everything depended on a man and a woman who understood their place in the plan and their responsibilities to form an eternal family, to bear children, and to teach them.

67. So, what I submit to you as one of your responsibilities—besides teaching those doctrines so your students don’t misunderstand—is send Isaac and

Rebekah forth from every classroom. We need every one of your students to understand his or her role in this great partnership—that they are each an Isaac or a Rebekah. Then they will know with clarity what they have to do.

Live the Hope of Eternal Life

68. Next, I would have you live in your homes, in your families, in your marriages so your students have the hope of eternal life from watching you. Your objective is to live the kind of a home life that your students want to have—have that kind of a family. They won’t get that message from many other places. Live it and teach it with so much clarity that what you teach will cut through all the noise they are hearing and pierce their hearts and touch them. You don’t need to compete in volume; you don’t need to compete in the number of words; you just need to be very clear in your examples. You are the ideal for them.

69. Live in your home so that you’re brilliant in the basics, so that you’re intentional about your roles and responsibilities in the family. You think in terms of precision, not perfection. (Perfection is difficult to obtain in this life, but live your family life with precision.) If you have your goals and you’re precise in how you go about them in your homes, your students will learn from you. They learn that you pray, you study the scriptures together, you have family home evening together, you make a priority of mealtimes and teach your family during those times. You are constantly teaching your families the same things that you’re teaching your students. You speak respectfully of your marriage partners. Then from your example the rising generation will gain great hope and will understand—not just from the words you teach, but from the way you feel and emanate the spirit of family.

Review

70. The seminary and institute objective is to prepare our youth for the blessings of eternal life. You are preparing your students for the temple; you are preparing them for eternal families, without which the earth is “utterly wasted.” There are many threats that are coming at the rising generation—threats to them forming an eternal family—and they are being hit with those and losing confidence in their ability to form eternal families. In a lot of ways they’re similar

to Abraham, living in a land where there's idolatry and wickedness, and they need to mentally take themselves out of that into the land where the Lord can bless them to receive the covenants.

71. Your role in this is to teach them so they don't misunderstand, to be very clear on key points of doctrine, which you find in the proclamation on the family. This is prominent in your teaching, prominent in your classrooms, prominent in what they're learning. You are preparing them for the blessings of Abraham in everything you are teaching. You are preparing them for the temple. You are seeking to send forth from every classroom an Isaac and a Rebekah. You're living so they have confidence in you, and through your example they know they can form eternal families.

72. Oftentimes with young adults I'll tell the story about the day my husband and I were married. We had three dollars. Even worldwide, that's not very much money nowadays. It was a faith-based work when we got married. We didn't get married because of money, or because our education was complete, or because we even had a place to live. We lived with Grandpa and took care of him for the first season of our marriage. We went to school and worked hard, but we entered that relationship as a faith-based work. We knew that we had made a covenant with the Lord and that He would bless us. It didn't take money; it took faith. Those are messages they need to have and get confidence in because of you.

73. This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before in the history of the world. If they don't know it, they can't defend it. They need to understand temples and priesthood. If you don't know that they are meant to be fathers and mothers, then they won't know that they are meant to be fathers and mothers. Your effort will be wasted.

74. President Kimball said this in 1980, so this is almost 30 years ago, and I find it prophetic and very applicable to us:

75. "Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us.

76. "... There are those who would define the family in such a nontraditional way that they would define it out of existence. ...

77. "We of all people, brothers and sisters, should not be taken in by the specious arguments that the family unit is somehow tied to a particular phase of development a moral society is going through. We are free to resist those moves which downplay the significance of the family and which play up the significance of selfish individualism. We know the family to be eternal. We know that when things go wrong in the family, things go wrong in every other institution in society".⁵

78. My brothers and sisters, my wonderful friends and partners in this work, "we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ" and His full doctrine (2 Nephi 25:26), His doctrine which is based on the theology of the family. We are "not ashamed of the gospel of [Jesus] Christ" (Romans 1:16) or His doctrine. We are willing to defend it and teach it with clarity. And we know that as we do so we will have heavenly help. Our covenants make it possible for us to live with Heavenly Father eternally. That is our great blessing.

79. I leave with you my testimony that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that it was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We have the fullness of the gospel this day. I bear you my testimony that we are sons and daughters of heavenly parents, who sent us forth to have this earthly experience to prepare us for the blessing of eternal families. I bear you my testimony of our Savior Jesus Christ, that through His Atonement we can become perfect and equal to our responsibilities in our earthly families, and that through His Atonement we have the promise of eternal life in families. I bear you my testimony of the power of the Holy Ghost to be with us and guide us in all of our teaching. And if we call upon that power, that power will pierce the hearts and souls and minds of this generation, which are hungry to learn the truth. They will recognize it because they did receive their first lessons in the world of spirits. It will ring true to them. We are led today by a living prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. I also thank each of you for your dedicated service, your lives of faith and consecration, and your living examples of the truthfulness of this gospel. I pray the Lord's bless-

ings to be with you in all that you do, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 100.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple,” Ensign, Aug. 1985, 6.
4. Spencer W. Kimball, “Fortify Your Homes against Evil,” Ensign, May 1979, 6.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “Families Can Be Eternal,” Ensign, Nov. 1980, 4.

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 1 Scriptures

We are children of Heavenly Parents

Genesis 1:27

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Romans 8:16-17

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint- heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Hebrews 12:9

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

D&C 76:23-24

23 For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

24 That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.

God's plan of happiness is based on eternal truth and law

D&C 130:18-21

18 Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

19 And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.

20 There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

21 And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.

D&C 88:15-16, 21-24, 34-38

15 And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.

16 And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul.

21 And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom.

22 For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.

23 And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory.

24 And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory; therefore he is not meet for a kingdom of glory. Therefore he must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory.

25 And again, verily I say unto you, the earth abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law—

26 Wherefore, it shall be sanctified; yea, notwithstanding it shall die, it shall be quickened again, and shall abide the power by which it is quickened, and the righteous shall inherit it.

27 For notwithstanding they die, they also shall arise again, a spiritual body.

28 They who are of a celestial spirit shall receive the same body which was a natural body; even ye shall receive your bodies, and your glory shall be that glory by which your bodies are quickened.

29 Ye who are quickened by a portion of the celestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

30 And they who are quickened by a portion of the terrestrial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

31 And also they who are quickened by a portion of the telestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

32 And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received.

33 For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.

34 And again, verily I say unto you, that which is

governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same.

35 That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willethto abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still.

36 All kingdoms have a law given;

37 And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom.

38 And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions. 39 All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.

39 All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.

D&C 93:24-39

24 And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;

25 And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.

26 The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;

27 And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

28 He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.

29 Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

30 All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.

31 Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.

32 And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation.

33 For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy;

34 And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.

35 The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple.

36 The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

37 Light and truth forsake that evil one.

38 Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.

39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the traditions of their fathers.

Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and the family is central to the Creator's plan

Matthew 19:3-6

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

D&C 49:15-17

15 And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

16 Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation;

17 And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.



The Love and Laws of God

BYU Devotional Sept 17, 2019
President Russell M. Nelson



laws operate in and affect each of our lives, whether we believe them or not.

III. Truth number three: God loves every one of us with perfect love.

1. My dear brothers and sisters, Wendy and I have looked forward to being with you today. Just a few days ago we returned from an international assignment, and now we are in the final stages of preparing for general conference. But there is no group we would rather be with today than you.

2. I wish to discuss five truths that I feel impressed to share with you.

I. Truth number one: You are sons and daughters of God.

3. You already know this. You have sung about it since you were toddlers. But let me clarify a distinguishing characteristic about your identity. You are the children whom God chose to be part of His battalion during this great climax in the longstanding battle between good and evil—between truth and error. I would not be surprised if, when the veil is lifted in the next life, we learn that you actually pled with our Heavenly Father to be reserved for now. I would not be surprised to learn that premortally you loved the Lord so much that you promised to defend His name and gospel during this world's tumultuous winding-up scenes. One thing is certain: You are of the house of Israel and you have been sent here to help gather God's elect.

II. Truth number two: Truth is truth.

4. Some things are simply true. The arbiter of truth is God—not your favorite social media news feed, not Google, and certainly not those who are disaffected from the Church.
5. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that absolute truth cannot be “altered by the opinions of men. . .

If men are really humble, they will realize that they discover, but do not create, truth.”¹

6. Many now claim that truth is relative and that there is no such thing as divine law or a divine plan. Such a claim is simply not true. There is a difference between right and wrong. Truth is based upon the laws God has established for the dependability, protection, and nurturing of His children. Eternal

8. More than anything, our Father wants His children to choose to return home to Him. Everything He does is motivated by His yearning desire. The entire reason we are on this earth is to qualify to live with Him forever. We do that by using our agency to find and stay on the covenant path that leads back to our heavenly home.
9. God knew that because of the adversary's deceptive tactics and traps, the covenant path would not be easy to find or to stay on. So He sent His Only Begotten Son to atone for us and to show us the way. The godly power available to all who love and follow Jesus Christ is the power to heal us, strengthen us, cleanse us from sin, and magnify us to do things we could never do on our own. Our Savior is the Divine Exemplar who marked the path that we are to follow.
10. Because the Father and the Son love us with infinite, perfect love and because They know we cannot see everything They see, They have given us laws that will guide and protect us.
11. There is a strong connection between God's love and His laws. I have come to see the significance of that connection and the power of divine law. Two experiences may illustrate.
12. The first I see as a parent. I am the grateful father of nine daughters and one son. I love them with all my heart. As our children were growing up, their mother and I established family rules to keep them safe and facilitate their growth. Our children did not always like or understand the rules, but because we loved them, we were willing to do all we could to guide and protect them.
13. As much as I love my children, I can only imagine how much God loves each of us, because His love for us is infinite! The apostle Paul taught that
14. *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,*
15. *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall*

*be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*²

16. Just as the rules that my wife and I developed for our children were motivated by love, God's laws reflect His perfect love for each of us. His laws keep us spiritually safe and help us to progress eternally.
17. The second experience by which I came to see the power of divine law came during my career as a medical doctor and scientific researcher.
18. After graduating from medical school, I pursued advanced education in surgery. At that time there was no such thing as heart surgery. Then I teamed up with other researchers in the daunting task of making an artificial heart and lung machine. We knew that such an apparatus could possibly maintain the body's circulation while repairs might be made on the heart. But during that early era, there was much we did not know.
19. Then one day, two truths articulated in the Doctrine and Covenants spoke to my inquiring mind. These truths were, first, that all blessings are predicated upon obedience to law³ and, second, that to every kingdom there is a law given.⁴
20. Well, I reasoned that if every kingdom had a law, there must be laws that govern the beating heart. I was determined to discover those laws and obey them. By doing so, blessings would come and lives could be saved.
21. In medical school I had been taught that if one touched the beating heart, it would stop beating. However, one of the first laws we discovered in the lab was that we could touch the heart of an animal without losing its heartbeat. This finding opened the door later to uncovering another law that made more complex open-heart operations possible.
22. We learned that if we added potassium chloride to blood flowing into the coronary arteries, thereby altering the normal sodium/potassium ratio, the heart would stop beating instantly. Then, when we nourished the heart with blood that had a normal sodium/potassium ratio, the heart would spring back to its normal beating pattern. Literally we could turn the heart off long enough to repair it and then turn it back on again.
23. Decades later, when I explained this to a group of medical students, one prominent professor asked, "But what if it doesn't work?" My answer? It always works, because it is based on divine law.
24. Divine law is incontrovertible! The same can be

said of the law of gravity and the laws of foil and lift that allow airplanes to fly. Each is an absolute truth. Doctors or pilots do not have the power to change those laws, but their understanding of them safeguards lives.

25. My dear brothers and sisters, divine laws are God's gifts to His children. Just as our family's rules kept our children safe as they grew to adulthood, just as divine laws governing the heart and the flight of airplanes keep you safe on an operating table or while traveling, abiding by God's laws will keep you safe as you progress toward eventual exaltation. Let me say it as succinctly as I can: As you abide by God's laws, you are progressing toward exaltation.
26. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that God "institute[d] laws whereby [we] could have a privilege to advance like himself."⁵ God's greatest blessings are reserved for those who obey His laws, as He explained: "For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing."⁶ God's laws are motivated entirely by His infinite love for us and His desire for us to become all we can become.
27. **IV. Truth number four: The Lord Jesus Christ, whose Church this is, appoints prophets and apostles to communicate His love and teach His laws.**
28. The gospel of Jesus Christ is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."⁷
29. Each of the Lord's apostles is in a position to observe and feel the love that Heavenly Father has for His children, particularly for those who are struggling. He cares deeply about those who have strayed from the covenant path, especially when they fear there is no way back.
30. My dear young friends, there is always a way back. Jesus Christ (and His gospel) is the way. You have not committed any sin so serious that you are beyond the reach of the Savior's love and atoning grace. As you take steps to repent and follow God's laws, you will begin to feel just how much Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son want you back home with Them! They want you to be happy. They will do anything within Their power that does not violate your agency or Their laws to help you come back. How I cherish the privilege of feeling Their love for you!
31. Sometimes we as leaders of the Church are criticized for holding firm to the laws of God, de-

the Savior's doctrine, and resisting the social pressures of our day. But our commission as ordained apostles is "to go into all the world to preach [His] gospel unto every creature."⁸ That means we are commanded to teach truth.

32. In doing so, sometimes we are accused of being uncaring as we teach the Father's requirements for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. But wouldn't it be far more uncaring for us not to tell the truth—not to teach what God has revealed?
33. It is precisely because we do care deeply about all of God's children that we proclaim His truth. We may not always tell people what they want to hear. Prophets are rarely popular. But we will always teach the truth!
34. My dear young friends, exaltation is not easy. Requirements include a focused and persistent effort to keep God's laws, rigorously repenting when we don't. But the reward for doing so is far greater than anything we can imagine, because it brings us joy here and "never-ending happiness"⁹ hereafter.
35. Thus our commission as apostles is to teach nothing but truth. That commission does not give us the authority to modify divine law.
36. For example, let's consider the definition of marriage. In recent years, many countries, including the United States, have legalized same-sex marriage. As members of the Church, we respect the laws of the land and abide by them, including civil marriage. The truth is, however, that in the beginning—in the beginning—marriage was ordained by God! And to this day it is defined by Him as being between a man and a woman. God has not changed His definition of marriage.
37. God has also not changed His law of chastity. Requirements to enter the temple have not changed. And our desire for there to be love at home and harmony between parent and child has not changed.
38. Though we of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles cannot change the laws of God, we do have the charge "to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations."¹⁰ Thus we can adjust policy when the Lord directs us to do so. You have recently seen such examples. Because the Restoration is ongoing, policy changes will surely continue.¹¹
39. Perhaps I can illustrate this through policy adjustments regarding those who identify themselves as

lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) and their children. (I realize that other initials could be added to this acronym, but LGBT should suffice for the purposes of this message.)

40. Consider the policy announced in November 2015 related to the advisability of baptism for the children of LGBT parents. Our concern then, and one we discussed at length and prayed about fervently over a long period of time, was to find a way to reduce friction between gay or lesbian parents and their children.
41. Because parents are the primary exemplars for their children, we did not want to put young children in the position of having to choose between beliefs and behavior they learned at home and what they were taught at church. We wanted to facilitate harmony in the home and avoid pitting children and parents against each other. Thus in 2015 the policy was made to assist children and their parents in this circumstance; namely, that children being raised by LGBT parents would not automatically be eligible for baptism at age eight. Exceptions to this policy would require First Presidency approval.
42. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve have continued to seek the Lord's guidance and to plead with Him in behalf of His children who were affected by the 2015 policy. We knew that this policy created concern and confusion for some and heartache for others. That grieved us. Whenever the sons and daughters of God weep—for whatever reasons—we weep. So our supplications to the Lord continued.
43. We also took note of LGBT parents who sought permission from the First Presidency for their children to be baptized. In nearly every case in which the LGBT parents agreed to teach their children about—and be supportive of—the covenant of baptism, the requested exception was granted.
44. As a result of our continued supplication, we recently felt directed to adjust the policy such that the baptism of children of LGBT parents may be authorized by bishops without First Presidency approval, if the custodial parents request the baptism and understand that a child will be taught about sacred covenants to be made at baptism.
45. We also determined that LGBT parents may request that a baby be named and blessed by one who worthily holds the Melchizedek Priesthood. It is important that these parents understand that ward

members will contact them periodically and that when a child who has been blessed reaches eight years of age, local leaders will recommend that the child be baptized.

46. Finally, we also clarified that homosexual immorality would be treated in the eyes of the Church in the same manner as heterosexual immorality.
47. Though it may not have looked this way to some, the 2015 and 2019 policy adjustments on this matter were both motivated by love—the love of our Heavenly Father for His children and the love of the Brethren for those whom we serve.
48. Because we feel the depth of God’s love for His children, we care deeply about every child of God, regardless of age, personal circumstances, gender, sexual orientation, or other unique challenges.

49. V.

50. Now, for the fifth truth: You may know for yourself what is true and what is not by learning to discern the whisperings of the Spirit. “For the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. It speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.”¹²
51. My dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to seek earnestly a confirmation from the Spirit that what I have told you is true and is from the Lord. He has declared that we may seek knowledge from heaven and expect to receive it: “If thou shalt ask,” the Lord promised, “thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge.”¹³
52. Ask your Heavenly Father if we truly are the Lord’s apostles and prophets. Ask if we have received revelation on this and other matters. Ask if these five truths are, in fact, true.
53. Now, in my capacity as president of the Church, I invoke a blessing upon you to be able to discern between right and wrong, between the laws of God and the conflicting voices of the world. I bless you with power to detect the adversary’s deceptions. I bless you with greater capacity to receive revelation. And I bless you to be able to feel the infinite reach of God’s perfect love for you.
54. I so bless you and express my love for you, along with my witness that this is the Lord’s Church and that He presides over and guides all we do, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” BYU devotional address, 6 September 1977; emphasis in original.
2. Romans 8:38-39.
3. See D&C 130:21.
4. See D&C 88:38.
5. Joseph Smith, HC 6:312 (7 April 1844); quoted in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 210.
6. D&C 132:5.
7. Ephesians 2:20.
8. D&C 18:28.
9. Mosiah 2:41.
10. D&C 107:33.
11. “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” (Articles of Faith 1:9.)
12. Jacob 4:13.
13. D&C 42:61.

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/>



Truth and the Plan

President Dallin H. Oaks
General Conference, Oct 2018



1. Modern revelation defines truth as a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:24). That is a perfect definition for the plan of salvation and “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
2. We live in a time of greatly expanded and disseminated information. But not all of this information is true. We need to be cautious as we seek truth and choose sources for that search. We should not consider secular prominence or authority as qualified sources of truth. We should be cautious about relying on information or advice offered by entertainment stars, prominent athletes, or anonymous internet sources. Expertise in one field should not be taken as expertise on truth in other subjects.
3. We should also be cautious about the motivation of the one who provides information. That is why the scriptures warn us against priestcraft (see 2 Nephi 26:29). If the source is anonymous or unknown, the information may also be suspect.
4. Our personal decisions should be based on information from sources that are qualified on the subject and free from selfish motivations.
5. When we seek the truth about religion, we should use spiritual methods appropriate for that search: prayer, the witness of the Holy Ghost, and study of the scriptures and the words of modern prophets. I am always sad when I hear of one who reports a loss of religious faith because of secular teachings. Those who once had spiritual vision can suffer from self-inflicted spiritual blindness. As President Henry B. Eyring said, “Their problem does not lie in what they think they see; it lies in what they cannot yet see.”¹
6. The methods of science lead us to what we call scientific truth. But “scientific truth” is not the whole of life. Those who do not learn “by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118) limit their understanding of truth to what they can verify by scientific means. That puts artificial limits on their pursuit of truth.
7. President James E. Faust said: “Those who have been baptized] put their eternal soul at risk by carelessly pursuing only the secular source of learning. We believe that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the fulness of the gospel of Christ, which gospel is the essence of truth and eternal enlightenment.”²
8. We find true and enduring joy by coming to know and acting upon the truth about who we are, the meaning of mortal life, and where we are going when we die. Those truths cannot be learned by scientific or secular methods.
9. I will now speak of restored gospel truths that are fundamental to the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Please consider these truths carefully. They explain much about our doctrine and practices, perhaps including some things not yet understood.
10. There is a God, who is the loving Father of the spirits of all who have ever lived or will live.
11. Gender is eternal. Before we were born on this earth, we all lived as male or female spirits in the presence of God.
12. We have just heard the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square sing “I Will Follow God’s Plan.”³ That is the plan God established so that all of His spirit children could progress eternally. That plan is vital to each of us.
13. Under that plan, God created this earth as a place where His beloved spirit children could be born into mortality to receive a physical body and to have the opportunity for eternal progress by making righteous choices.
14. To be meaningful, mortal choices had to be made between contesting forces of good and evil. There had to be opposition and, therefore, an adversary, who was cast out because of rebellion and was allowed to tempt God’s children to act contrary to God’s plan.
15. The purpose of God’s plan was to give His children the opportunity to choose eternal life. This could

be accomplished only by experience in mortality and, after death, by postmortal growth in the spirit world.

16. In the course of mortal life, we would all be soiled by sin as we yielded to the evil temptations of the adversary, and we would eventually die. We accepted those challenges in reliance upon the plan's assurance that God our Father would provide a Savior, His Only Begotten Son, who would rescue us by a universal resurrection to an embodied life after death. The Savior would also provide an atonement to pay the price for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions He prescribed. Those conditions included faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and other ordinances performed by priesthood authority.
17. God's great plan of happiness provides a perfect balance between eternal justice and the mercy we can obtain through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It also enables us to be transformed into new creatures in Christ.
18. A loving God reaches out to each of us. We know that through His love and because of the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son, "all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of [His] Gospel" (Articles of Faith 1:3; emphasis added).
19. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is properly known as a family-centered Church. But what is not well understood is that our family-centeredness is focused on more than mortal relationships. Eternal relationships are also fundamental to our theology. "The family is ordained of God."⁴ Under the great plan of our loving Creator, the mission of His restored Church is to help the children of God achieve the supernal blessing of exaltation in the celestial kingdom, which can be attained only through an eternal marriage between a man and a woman (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–3). We affirm the Lord's teachings that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" and that "marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan."⁵
20. Finally, God's love is so great that, except for the few who deliberately become sons of perdition, He has provided a destiny of glory for all of His children. "All of His children" includes all who are dead. We perform ordinances for them by proxy in our temples. The purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ is to qualify His children for the highest degree of glory, which is exaltation or eternal life. For those who do not desire or qualify for that, God has provided other, though lesser, kingdoms of glory.
21. Anyone who understands these eternal truths can understand why we members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints think as we do and do as we do.
22. I will now mention some applications of these eternal truths, which can be understood only in light of God's plan.
23. First, we honor individual agency. Most are aware of the restored Church's great efforts to promote religious freedom in the United States and across the world. These efforts do not promote just our own interests but, according to His plan, seek to help all of God's children enjoy freedom to choose.
24. Second, we are a missionary people. We are sometimes asked why we send missionaries to so many nations, even among Christian populations. We receive the same question about why we give many millions of dollars of humanitarian aid to persons who are not members of our Church and why we do not link this aid to our missionary efforts. We do this because we esteem all mortals as children of God—our brothers and sisters—and we want to share our spiritual and temporal abundance with everyone.
25. Third, mortal life is sacred to us. Our commitment to God's plan requires us to oppose abortion and euthanasia.
26. Fourth, some are troubled by some of our Church's positions on marriage and children. Our knowledge of God's revealed plan of salvation requires us to oppose current social and legal pressures to retreat from traditional marriage and to make changes that confuse or alter gender or homogenize the differences between men and women. We know that the relationships, identities, and functions of men and women are essential to accomplish God's great plan.
27. Fifth, we also have a distinctive perspective on children. We look on the bearing and nurturing of children as part of God's plan and a joyful and sacred duty of those given the power to participate in it. In our view, the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity. Therefore, we must teach and contend for principles and practices that provide the best conditions

for the development and happiness of children—all children.

28. Finally, we are beloved children of a Heavenly Father, who has taught us that maleness and femaleness, marriage between a man and a woman, and the bearing and nurturing of children are all essential to His great plan of happiness. Our positions on these fundamentals frequently provoke opposition to the Church. We consider that inevitable. Opposition is part of the plan, and Satan's most strenuous opposition is directed at whatever is most important to God's plan. He seeks to destroy God's work. His prime methods are to discredit the Savior and His divine authority, to erase the effects of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, to discourage repentance, to counterfeit revelation, and to contradict individual accountability. He also seeks to confuse gender, to distort marriage, and to discourage childbearing—especially by parents who will raise children in truth.
29. The work of the Lord is going forward despite the organized and constant opposition that confronts us as we strive to practice the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For those who falter under that opposition, I offer these suggestions.
30. Remember the principle of repentance made possible by the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell urged, don't be among those "who would rather try to change the Church than to change themselves."⁶
31. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland urged:
32. "Hold fast to what you already know and stand strong until additional knowledge comes. ...
33. "... In this Church, what we know will always trump what we do not know."⁷
34. Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the first principle of the gospel.
35. Finally, seek help. Our Church leaders love you and seek spiritual guidance to help you. We provide many resources such as you will find through LDS.org and other supports for gospel study in the home. We also have ministering brothers and sisters called to give loving assistance.
36. Our loving Heavenly Father wants His children to have the joy that is the purpose of our creation. That joyful destiny is eternal life, which we can obtain by pressing forward along what our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, often calls "the covenant path." Here is what he said in his first message

as President of the Church: "Keep on the covenant path. Your commitment to follow the Savior by making covenants with Him and then keeping those covenants will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere."⁸

37. I solemnly testify that the things I have said are true, and they are made possible by the teachings and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, who makes it all possible under the great plan of God, our Eternal Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Henry B. Eyring, *To Draw Closer to God: A Collection of Discourses* (1997), 143.
2. James E. Faust, "The Abundant Life," *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 9.
3. "I Will Follow God's Plan," *Children's Songbook*, 164–65.
4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.
5. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 145.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, *If Thou Endure It Well* (1996), 101.
7. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 94; emphasis in original.
8. Russell M. Nelson, "As We Go Forward Together," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7.

[churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/truth-and-the-plan?lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/truth-and-the-plan?lang=eng)



The Eye of Faith

Elder Neil L. Andersen

General Conference April 2019



1. Shortly before His Crucifixion, Jesus was taken before Pilate in the judgment hall. “Art thou the King of the Jews?” Pilate condescendingly asked. Jesus responded: “My kingdom is not of this world. ... I [came] into the world, that I should bear witness [of] the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”
2. Pilate cynically asked, “What is truth?”¹
3. In today’s world, the question “What is truth?” can be painfully complex to the secular mind.
4. A Google search for “What is truth?” brings more than a million responses. We have more available information on our cell phones than in all the books of a brick and mortar library. We live with information and opinion overload. Enticing and alluring voices pursue us at every turn.
5. Caught in today’s confusion, it is no wonder that so many consign themselves to the words spoken 2,500 years ago by Protagoras to the young Socrates: “What is true for you,” he said, “is true for you, and what is true for me, is true for me.”²
6. Truth through the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ
7. 5 Blessed with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we humbly declare that there are some things that are completely and absolutely true. These eternal truths are the same for every son and daughter of God.
8. 6 The scriptures teach, “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”³ Truth looks backward and forward, expanding the perspective of our small point in time.
9. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”⁴ Truth shows us the way to eternal life, and it comes only through our Savior, Jesus Christ. There is no other way.
10. Jesus Christ teaches us how to live, and, through His Atonement and Resurrection, He offers us forgiveness from our sins and immortality beyond the veil. This is absolutely true.
11. He teaches us that it does not matter if we are rich or poor, prominent or unknown, sophisticated or simple. Rather, our mortal quest is to strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to choose good over evil, and to keep His commandments. While we celebrate the innovations of science and medicine, the truths of God go far beyond these discoveries.
12. In opposition to the truths of eternity, there always have been counterfeits to distract God’s children from the truth. The arguments of the adversary are always the same. Listen to these, voiced 2,000 years ago:
13. “[You] cannot know of things [you] do not see. ... [Whatever a person does is] no crime.”
14. “[God is not blessing you, but] every [person] prosper[s] according to his [own] genius.”⁵
15. “It is not reasonable that such a being as ... Christ ... [would] be the Son of God.”⁶
16. “[What you believe is a foolish tradition and a] derangement of your [mind].”⁷ Sounds like today, doesn’t it?
17. With the Restoration of the gospel, God has given us the way to learn and know essential spiritual truths: we learn them through the holy scriptures, through our personal prayers and our own experiences, through the counsel of the living prophets and apostles, and through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who can help us to “know the truth of all things.”⁸
18. Truth Is Spiritually Discerned
19. We can know the things of God as we seek them spiritually. Paul said, “The things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God. ... [For] they are spiritually discerned.”⁹
- 20.
21. Look at this art by Michael Murphy. From this perspective, you would hardly believe that it is an artistic rendition of a human eye. However, as you look at the dots from a different perspective, you see the beauty of the artist’s creation.
22. Likewise, we see the spiritual truths of God through the perspective of an eye of faith. Paul

said: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁰

23. The scriptures, our prayers, our own experiences, modern prophets, and the gift of the Holy Ghost bring us the spiritual perspective of truth necessary for our journey here on earth.
24. The Proclamation through the Eye of Faith
25. Let’s look at the proclamation on the family through the eye of faith.
26. President Gordon B. Hinckley introduced “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” with this statement: “With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn [you].”¹¹
27. The proclamation begins: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”
28. These are eternal truths. You and I are not an accident of nature.
29. I love these words: “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan.”¹²
30. We lived before our birth. Our individual identity is stamped in us forever. In ways we don’t fully understand, our spiritual growth there in the premortal world influences who we are here.¹³ We accepted God’s plan. We knew that we would experience difficulties, pain, and sorrow upon the earth.¹⁴ We also knew that the Savior would come and that as we proved ourselves worthy, we would rise in the Resurrection, having “glory added upon [our] heads for ever and ever.”¹⁵
31. The proclamation is direct: “We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.”
32. Our Father’s plan encourages a husband and wife to bring children into the world and obligates us to speak in defense of the unborn.
33. Principles of the Proclamation Are Beautifully Connected
34. If we pick and choose what we accept in the proclamation, we cloud our eternal view, putting too much importance on our experience here and now. By prayerfully pondering the proclamation through the eye of faith, we better understand how the principles are beautifully connected, supporting one another, revealing our Father’s plan for His children.¹⁶
35. Should we really be surprised when the Lord’s prophets declare His will and, for some, questions remain? Of course, some reject the voice of the prophets immediately,¹⁷ but others prayerfully ponder their honest questions—questions that will be settled with patience and an eye of faith. If the proclamation had been revealed in a different century, there would still have been questions, just different questions than those of today. One purpose of prophets is to help us in resolving sincere questions.¹⁸
36. Prior to being the President of the Church, President Russell M. Nelson said: “Prophets see ahead. They see the harrowing dangers the adversary has placed or will yet place in our path. Prophets also foresee the grand possibilities and privileges awaiting those who listen with the intent to obey.”¹⁹
37. I testify to the truth and spiritual power of the united voice of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.
38. The World Walking Away
39. In my lifetime, we have seen a dramatic change in the world’s beliefs about many of the principles taught in the proclamation. During my teenage and early married years, many in the world walked away from the Lord’s standard we call the law of chastity, that sexual relations are to occur only between a man and a woman who are lawfully married. In my 20s and 30s, many walked away from the sacred protection of the unborn, as abortion became more acceptable. In more recent years, many have walked away from God’s law that marriage is a sacred union between a man and a woman.²⁰
40. Watching many walking away from the boundaries the Lord has set reminds us of that day in Capernaum when the Savior declared His divinity and sadly “many of his disciples ... walked [away].”
41. The Savior then turned to the Twelve: “Will ye also go away?”
42. Peter answered:
43. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.
44. “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”²¹

45. Not All Fit Neatly inside the Proclamation
46. There are so many, young and old, who are loyal and true to the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though their own current experience does not fit neatly inside the family proclamation: children whose lives have been shaken by divorce; youth whose friends mock the law of chastity; divorced women and men who have been gravely wounded by the unfaithfulness of a spouse; husbands and wives who are unable to have children; women and men who are married to a spouse who does not share their faith in the restored gospel; single women and men who, for various reasons, have been unable to marry.
47. One friend of nearly 20 years, whom I admire greatly, is not married because of same-sex attraction. He has remained true to his temple covenants, has expanded his creative and professional talents, and has served nobly in both the Church and the community. He recently said to me, “I can sympathize with those in my situation who choose not to keep the law of chastity in the world in which we live. But didn’t Christ ask us to be ‘not of this world’? It is clear that God’s standards are different from those of the world.”
48. The laws of man often move outside the boundaries set by the laws of God. For those desiring to please God, faith, patience, and diligence are surely needed.²²
49. My wife, Kathy, and I have known a single sister, now in her mid-40s, who is gifted in her professional abilities and serves valiantly in her ward. She too has kept the laws of God. She wrote:
50. “I dreamed of the day I would be blessed with a husband and children. I am still waiting. At times, my situation brings feelings of being forgotten and alone, but I try to keep the focus off what I don’t have and instead on what I do have and how I can help others.
51. “Service to my extended family, in my ward, and in the temple has helped me. I am not forgotten or alone because I am part of, and we are all part of, a larger family.”
52. There Is One Who Understands
53. Some will say, “You don’t understand my situation.” I may not, but I testify that there is One who does understand.²³ There is One who knows your burdens because of His sacrifice made in the garden and on the cross. As you seek Him and

keep His commandments, I promise you that He will bless

you and lift the burdens too heavy to bear alone. He will give you eternal friends and opportunities to serve. More important, He will fill you with the powerful Spirit of the Holy Ghost and shine His heavenly approval upon you. No choice, no alternative that denies the companionship of the Holy Ghost or the blessings of eternity is worthy of our consideration.

54. I know the Savior lives. I witness that He is the source of all truth that really matters and that He will fulfill all the blessings He has promised to those who keep His commandments. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.¹

Notes

1. John 18:33, 36–38.
2. William S. Sahakian and Mabel Lewis Sahakian, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers* (1966), 28.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
4. John 14:6.
5. Alma 30:15, 17.
6. Helaman 16:18.
7. See Alma 30:14, 23, 27.
8. Moroni 10:5.
9. Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 2:11 (in 1 Corinthians 2:11, footnote c); 1 Corinthians 2:14.
10. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
11. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 100. President Russell M. Nelson recently explained some of the history of the proclamation, as summarized by Sheri Dew in *Insights from a Prophet’s Life: Russell M. Nelson* (2019), 208:

“One day in 1994, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spent a day in their council room in the Salt Lake Temple discussing issues surrounding the family. They considered everything from the increasingly ubiquitous nature of pornography to potential anti-family legislation of various kinds. This was not a new discussion, but that day the entire agenda revolved around this one vital topic.

“The Twelve reviewed both doctrine and policies, considering those things that could not be changed—doctrine—and those things that possibly could be—policies. They discussed issues they saw coming, including an intensified societal push for gay marriage and transgender rights. ‘But that was not the end of what we saw,’ Elder Nelson explained. ‘We could see the efforts of various communities to do away with all standards and limitations on sexual activity. We saw the confusion of genders. We could see it all coming.’

“This extended discussion, along with others over a period of time, led to the conclusion that the Twelve should prepare a document, perhaps even a proclamation, outlining the Church’s stand on the family to present to the First Presidency for consideration.”

12. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2017, 145.
13. President Dallin H. Oaks said: “All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father’s plan and fought for it. Many of us also made covenants with the Father concerning what we would do in mortality. In ways that have not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world influence us in mortality” (“The Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, Nov. 1993, 72).
14. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and the Plan,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2018, 25–28.
15. Abraham 3:26.
16. President Dallin H. Oaks has said:

“Converted Latter-day Saints believe that the family proclamation, issued nearly a quarter century ago and now translated into scores of languages, is the Lord’s reemphasis of the gospel truths we need to sustain us through current challenges to the family. ...

I testify that the proclamation on the family is a statement of eternal truth, the will of the Lord for His children who seek eternal life. It has been the basis of Church teaching and practice for the last 22 years and will continue so for the future. Consider it as such, teach it, live by it, and you will be blessed as you press forward toward eternal life. ...

“... I believe our attitude toward and use of the family proclamation is one of those tests for this generation. I pray for all Latter-day Saints to stand firm in that test” (“The Plan and the Proclamation,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2017, 30–31).

17. President Russell M. Nelson has said: “There are those who label us [as] bigots, but the bigots are those who don’t allow us to feel as we feel but want us to allow them to feel as they feel. Our stand ultimately boils down to the law of chastity. The Ten Commandments are still valid. They’ve never been revoked. ... It is not our prerogative to change laws that God has decreed” (in Dew, *Insights from a Prophet’s Life*, 212).

“While the family is under attack across the entire world, the truths of the family proclamation will fortify you.

“You wonderful youth of the noble birthright, you need to understand the far-reaching consequences of society’s current skirmish over the very definition of marriage. The present debate involves the question of whether two people of the same gender can be married. If you have a question about the position of the Church on this or any other important issue, prayerfully ponder it, and then heed the prophetic messages at this forthcoming October general conference of the Church. Those inspired addresses, plus inspiration from the Holy Ghost, will bring to your mind a fuller and truer understanding” (Russell M. Nelson, “Youth of the Noble Birthright: What Will You Choose?” [Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 6, 2013], broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

18. Russell M. Nelson, “Stand as True Millennials,” Ensign, Oct. 2016, 31; Liahona, Oct. 2016, 53.

President Nelson has said: “Civil governments are heavily influenced by social trends and secular philosophies as they write, rewrite, and enforce laws. Regardless of what civil legislation may be enacted, the doctrine of the Lord regarding marriage and morality cannot be changed. Remember: sin, even if legalized by man, is still sin in the eyes of God!” (“Decisions for Eternity,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2013, 108).

19. John 6:66–69.
20. See Alma 32:41–43; I have always been impressed that in this great chapter on growing our faith, the virtues of faith, patience, and diligence are mentioned together in each of the last three verses.
21. See Alma 7:12; Jesus Christ suffered not only for our sins but for our infirmities as well: “He will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” (Synonyms for infirmities would be sickness, weakness, affliction, deficiency.) See Doctrine and Covenants 88:6: “He descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.” of the Noble Birthright: What Will You Choose?” [Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 6, 2013], broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).



The Prophet of God

Elder Neil L. Andersen
General Conference, April 2018



1. I add my welcome to Elder Gerrit Gong and Elder Ulisses Soares to the unparalleled brotherhood of the Quorum of the Twelve.
2. In sustaining President Russell M. Nelson as the Lord's prophet and as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we were part of a divinely decreed solemn assembly—solemn because the events of this past hour have been anticipated in the heavens since before the world was. The Lord Jesus Christ, who directs His work, has today through President Eyring presented His prophet, His anointed leader, to us, His covenant people, allowing us publicly to manifest our willingness to sustain him and follow his counsel.
3. To those millions of members who are not here with us in the Conference Center, I want you to know that the Spirit of the Lord in this building during the sustaining of President Nelson was exactly as you would have anticipated it—full of spiritual power. But our heaven-directed assembly is not in this Conference Center alone but across the world—in chapels in Asia, Africa, and North America; in homes in Central and South America and Europe; on covered patios in the Pacific and the islands of the sea. This assembly is in whatever part of the world you might be, even if your connection is no more than the audio of your smart-phone. Our raised hands were not counted by our bishops, but they were surely noted in heaven, as our covenant is with God, and our action is recorded in the book of life.

4. The Lord Chooses His Prophet

5. The selection of a prophet is made by the Lord Himself. There is no campaigning, no debates, no posturing for position, no dissension, distrust, confusion, or commotion. I too confirm that the power of heaven was with us in the upper room of the temple as we prayerfully encircled President Nelson and felt the undeniable approval of the Lord upon him.

6. President Nelson's selection to serve as God's

prophet was made long ago. The Lord's words to Jeremiah also apply to President Nelson: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."¹ Only three years ago, Elder Nelson, at age 90, was fourth in seniority, with two of the three senior Apostles being younger in age than he was. The Lord, who controls life and death, selects His prophet. President Nelson, at age 93, is in amazing health. We hope he will be with us for another decade or two, but for now we are trying to persuade him to stay off the ski slopes.

7. While we sustain the prophet as the Lord's anointed, let it be clear that we worship only God, our Heavenly Father, and His divine Son. It is through the merits, the mercy, and the grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ, that we can one day enter again into Their presence.

8. Why We Follow the Prophet

9. But Jesus also taught an important truth about the servants He sends to us. "He that receiveth you," He said, "receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."³
10. The most important role of the Lord's prophet is to teach us of the Savior and lead us to Him.
11. There are many logical reasons to follow President Russell M. Nelson. Even those not of our faith would call him brilliant. He was a medical doctor at age 22, an esteemed cardiac surgeon, and a renowned pioneer in the development of open-heart surgery.
12. Most would acknowledge his wisdom and judgment: nine decades of learning about life and death, living unselfishly, loving and teaching God's children in every corner of the globe, and maturing with the experiences of having 10 children, 57 grandchildren, and 118 great-grandchildren (this last number changes frequently; a great-grandson was born only this past Wednesday).

13. Those who know him well would speak of President Nelson facing the difficulties of life with faith and courage. When cancer took the life of his 37-year-old daughter, Emily, leaving a loving husband and five small children, I heard him say, “I was her father, a medical doctor, and an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I had to bow my head and acknowledge, ‘Not my will but thine be done.’”⁴

14. A Watchman on the Tower

15. Although we admire all of these noble qualities, why do we follow President Nelson? Why do we follow the prophet? Because the Lord Jesus Christ has called him and designated him as His watchman on the tower.
16. Carcassonne is a remarkable walled city in France that has stood since medieval times. Tall towers surge upward from its protected walls, built for watchmen who stood on those towers day and night, keeping their attention riveted in the distance for the enemy. When the watchman saw an enemy approaching, his warning voice protected the people of Carcassonne from the impending danger they could not see.
17. A prophet is a watchman on the tower, protecting us from spiritual dangers we may not see.
18. The Lord said to Ezekiel, “I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word [from] my mouth, and warn them from me.”⁵
19. We often speak of our need to follow the prophet, but consider this heavy burden the Lord places upon His prophet: “If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked . . . , [and] that wicked man . . . die in his iniquity; . . . his blood will I require at thine hand.”⁶

20. A Greater Personal Witness

21. We embrace President Nelson as we would have embraced Peter or Moses if we had lived in their day. God told Moses, “I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.”⁷ We listen to the Lord’s prophet with the faith that his words are “from [the Lord’s] own mouth.”⁸
22. Is this blind faith? No, it is not. We each have a spiritual witness of the truthfulness of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. By our own will and choice, we raised our hand this morning, declaring our desire to sustain the Lord’s prophet with our “confidence, faith, and prayer[s]”⁹ and to follow his counsel. We have the privilege as Latter-day Saints to receive a personal witness that President Nelson’s call is from God. While my wife, Kathy, has known President Nelson personally

for nearly three decades and has no question about his divine mantle, upon his setting apart, she began reading all his general conference talks of the past 34 years, praying for an even deeper assurance of his prophetic role. I promise you that this greater witness will come to you as you humbly and worthily seek it.

23. Why are we so willing to follow the voice of our prophet? For those diligently seeking eternal life, the prophet’s voice brings spiritual safety in very turbulent times.
24. We live on a planet clamoring with a million voices. The internet, our smartphones, our bloated boxes of entertainment all plead for our attention and thrust their influence upon us, hoping we will buy their products and adopt their standards.
25. The seemingly endless array of information and opinion remind us of the scriptural warnings of being “tossed to and fro,”¹⁰ “driven with the wind,”¹¹ and overcome by the “cunning craftiness” of those who “lie in wait to deceive.”¹²
26. Anchoring our souls to the Lord Jesus Christ requires listening to those He sends. Following the prophet in a world of commotion is like being wrapped in a soothing, warm blanket on a freezing cold day.
27. We live in a world of reason, debate, argument, logic, and explanation. Questioning, “Why?” is positive in so many aspects of our lives, allowing the power of our intellect to guide a multitude of choices and decisions we face each day.
28. But the Lord’s voice often comes without explanation.¹³ Long before academics studied the impact of infidelity upon trusting spouses and children, the Lord declared, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”¹⁴ Beyond relying on the intellect alone, we treasure the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- 29. Don’t Be Surprised**
30. The prophet’s voice, while spoken kindly, will often be a voice asking us to change, to repent, and to return to the Lord. When correction is needed, let’s not delay. And don’t be alarmed when the prophet’s warning voice counters popular opinions of the day. The mocking fireballs of annoyed disbelievers are always hurled the moment the prophet begins to speak. As you are humble in following the counsel of the Lord’s prophet, I promise you an added blessing of safety and peace.
31. Don’t be surprised if at times your personal views are not initially in harmony with the teachings of

the Lord's prophet. These are moments of learning, of humility, when we go to our knees in prayer. We walk forward in faith, trusting in God, knowing that with time we will receive more spiritual clarity from our Heavenly Father. One prophet described the incomparable gift of the Savior as "the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father."¹⁵ The surrender of our will to God's will is, in fact, not surrender at all but the beginning of a glorious victory.

32. Some will try to overly dissect the prophet's words, struggling to determine what is his prophetic voice and what is his personal opinion.

33. In 1982, two years before being called as a General Authority, Brother Russell M. Nelson said: "I never ask myself, 'When does the prophet speak as a prophet and when does he not?' My interest has been, 'How can I be more like him?'" And he added, "My [philosophy is to] stop putting question marks behind the prophet's statements and put exclamation points instead."¹⁶ This is how a humble and spiritual man chose to order his life. Now, 36 years later, he is the Lord's prophet.

34. Increasing Your Faith in the Savior

35. In my personal life, I have found that as I prayerfully study the words of the prophet of God and carefully, with patience, spiritually align my will with his inspired teachings, my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ always increases.¹⁷ If we choose to set his counsel aside and determine that we know better, our faith suffers and our eternal perspective is clouded. I promise you that as you remain resolute in following the prophet, your faith in the Savior will increase.

36. The Savior said, "All the prophets ... have testified of me."¹⁸

37. A prophet does not stand between you and the Savior. Rather, he stands beside you and points the way to the Savior. A prophet's greatest responsibility and most precious gift to us is his sure witness, his certain knowledge, that Jesus is the Christ. Like Peter of old, our prophet declares, "[He is] the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁹

38. In a future day, looking back on our mortality, we will rejoice that we walked the earth at the time of a living prophet. At that day, I pray that we will be able to say:

39. We listened to him.

40. We believed him.

41. We studied his words with patience and faith.

42. We prayed for him.

43. We stood by him.

44. We were humble enough to follow him.

45. We loved him.

46. I give you my solemn witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, and that President Russell M. Nelson is His anointed prophet upon the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Jeremiah 1:5.

2. See 2 Nephi 2:8.

3. Matthew 10:40.

4. Personal memory; also see Spencer J. Condie, Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle (2003), 235.

5. Ezekiel 33:7.

6. Ezekiel 33:8.

7. Exodus 4:12.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 21:5.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 107:22.

10. Ephesians 4:14.

11. James 1:6.

12. Ephesians 4:14.

13. President Dallin H. Oaks once said:

"In a 1988 interview ... I explained my attitude toward attempts to supply mortal reasons for divine revelation:

"If you read the scriptures with this question in mind, 'Why did the Lord command this or why did he command that,' you find that in less than one in a hundred commands was any reason given. It's not the pattern of the Lord to give reasons. We [mortals] can put reasons to revelation. We can put reasons to commandments. When we do, we're on our own. Some people put reasons to the [revelation] ... , and they turned out to

be spectacularly wrong. There is a lesson in that. ... I decided a long time ago that I had faith in the command and I had no faith in the reasons that had been suggested for it.' ...

“... The whole set of reasons seemed to me to be unnecessary risk taking. ... Let's don't make the mistake that's been made in the past, ... trying to put reasons to revelation. The reasons turn out to be man-made to a great extent. The revelations are what we sustain as the will of the Lord and that's where safety lies” (Life's Lessons Learned [2011], 68–69).

14. Exodus 20:14.

15. Mosiah 15:7.

16. Russell M. Nelson, in Lane Johnson, “Russell M. Nelson: A Study in Obedience,” Ensign, Aug. 1982, 24; Tambuli, Jan. 1983, 26.

17. President Henry B. Eyring said: “Another fallacy is to believe that the choice to accept or not accept the counsel of prophets is no more than deciding whether to accept good advice and gain its benefits or to stay where we are. But the choice not to take prophetic counsel changes the very ground upon which we stand. It becomes more dangerous. The failure to take prophetic counsel lessens our power to take inspired counsel in the future. The best time to have decided to help Noah build the ark was the first time he asked. Each time he asked after that, each failure to respond would have lessened sensitivity to the Spirit. And so each time his request would have seemed more foolish, until the rain came. And then it was too late” (“Finding Safety in Counsel,” Ensign, May 1997, 25).

18.3 Nephi 20:24.

19. Matthew 16:16; see also John 6:69

Becoming Like God

Gospel Topics Essay

1. One of the most common images in Western and Eastern religions alike is of God as a parent and of human beings as God's children. Billions pray to God as their parent, invoke the brotherhood and sisterhood of all people to promote peace, and reach out to the weary and troubled out of deep conviction that each of God's children has great worth.

2. But people of different faiths understand the parent-child relationship between God and humans in significantly different ways. Some understand the phrase "child of God" as an honorary title reserved only for those who believe in God and accept His guidance as they might accept a father's. Many see parent-child descriptions of God's relationship to humanity as metaphors to express His love for His creations and their dependence on His sustenance and protection.

3. Latter-day Saints see all people as children of God in a full and complete sense; they consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential. Each has an eternal core and is "a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents." Each possesses seeds of divinity and must choose whether to live in harmony or tension with that divinity. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people may "progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny." Just as a child can develop the attributes of his or her parents over time, the divine nature that humans inherit can be developed to become like their Heavenly Father's.

4. The desire to nurture the divinity in His children is one of God's attributes that most inspires, motivates, and humbles members of the Church. God's loving parentage and guidance can help each willing, obedient child of God receive of His fullness and of His glory. This knowledge transforms the way Latter-day Saints see their fellow human beings. The teaching that men and women have the potential to be exalted to a state of godliness clearly expands beyond what is understood by most contemporary Christian churches and expresses for the Latter-day Saints a yearning rooted in the Bible to live as God lives, to love as He loves, and to prepare for all that our loving Father in Heaven wishes for His children.

What does the Bible say about humans' divine potential?

5. Several biblical passages intimate that humans can become like God. The likeness of humans to God is emphasized in the first chapter of Genesis: "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." After Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," God said they had "become as one of us," suggesting that a process of approaching godliness was already underway. Later in the Old Testament, a passage in the book of Psalms declares, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High."

6. New Testament passages also point to this doctrine. When Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the grounds that "thou, being a man, makest thyself God," He responded, echoing Psalms, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded His disciples to become "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." In turn, the Apostle Peter referred to the Savior's "exceeding great and precious promises" that we might become "partakers of the divine nature." The Apostle Paul taught that we are "the offspring of God" and emphasized that as such "we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The book of Revelation contains a promise from Jesus Christ that "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

7. These passages can be interpreted in different ways. Yet by viewing them through the clarifying lens of revelations received by Joseph Smith, Latter-day Saints see these scriptures as straightforward expressions of humanity's divine nature and potential. Many other Christians read the same passages far more metaphorically because they experience the Bible through the lens of doctrinal interpretations that developed over time after the period described in the New Testament.

How have ideas about divinity shifted over Christian history?

8. Latter-day Saint beliefs would have sounded more familiar to the earliest generations of Christians than they do to many modern Christians. Many church fathers (influential theologians and teachers in early Christianity) spoke approvingly of the idea that humans can become divine. One modern scholar refers to the “ubiquity of the doctrine of deification”—the teaching that humans could become God—in the first centuries after Christ’s death. The church father Irenaeus, who died about A.D. 202, asserted that Jesus Christ “did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be what He is Himself.” Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215) wrote that “the Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God.” Basil the Great (A.D. 330–379) also celebrated this prospect—not just “being made like to God,” but “highest of all, the being made God.”

9. What exactly the early church fathers meant when they spoke of becoming God is open to interpretation, but it is clear that references to deification became more contested in the late Roman period and were infrequent by the medieval era. The first known objection by a church father to teaching deification came in the fifth century. By the sixth century, teachings on “becoming God” appear more limited in scope, as in the definition provided by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. A.D. 500): “Deification ... is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.”

10. Why did these beliefs fade from prominence? Changing perspectives on the creation of the world may have contributed to the gradual shift toward more limited views of human potential. The earliest Jewish and Christian commentaries on the Creation assumed that God had organized the world out of preexisting materials, emphasizing the goodness of God in shaping such a life-sustaining order. But the incursion of new philosophical ideas in the second century led to the development of a doctrine that God created the universe ex nihilo—“out of nothing.” This ultimately became the dominant teaching about the Creation within the Christian world. In order to emphasize God’s power, many theologians reasoned that nothing could have existed for as long as He had. It became important in Christian circles to assert that

God had originally been completely alone.

11. Creation ex nihilo widened the perceived gulf between God and humans. It became less common to teach either that human souls had existed before the world or that they could inherit and develop the attributes of God in their entirety in the future. Gradually, as the depravity of humankind and the immense distance between Creator and creature were increasingly emphasized, the concept of deification faded from Western Christianity, though it remains a central tenet of Eastern Orthodoxy, one of the three major branches of Christianity.

How were ideas about deification introduced to Latter-day Saints?

12. The earliest Latter-day Saints came from a society dominated by English-speaking Protestants, most of whom accepted both ex nihilo creation and the Westminster Confession’s definition of God as a being “without body, parts, or passions.” They likely knew little or nothing about the diversity of Christian beliefs in the first centuries after Jesus Christ’s ministry or about early Christian writings on deification. But revelations received by Joseph Smith diverged from the prevailing ideas of the time and taught doctrine that, for some, reopened debates on the nature of God, creation, and humankind.

13. Early revelations to Joseph Smith taught that humans are created in the image of God and that God cares intimately for His children. In the Book of Mormon, a prophet “saw the finger of the Lord” and was astonished to learn that human physical forms were truly made in the image of God. In another early revelation, Enoch (who “walked with God” in the Bible) witnessed God weeping over His creations. When Enoch asked, “How is it thou canst weep?” he learned that God’s compassion toward human suffering is integral to His love. Joseph Smith also learned that God desires that His children receive the same kind of exalted existence of which He partakes. As God declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” In 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon experienced a vision of the afterlife. In the vision, they learned that the just and unjust alike would receive immortality through a universal resurrection, but only those “who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” would receive the fullness of God’s glory and be “gods,

even the sons of God.” Another revelation soon confirmed that “the saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance and be made equal with him.” Latter-day Saints use the term exaltation to describe the glorious reward of receiving one’s full inheritance as a child of Heavenly Father, which is available through the Atonement of Christ, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

14. This striking view of each human’s potential future was accompanied by revealed teachings on humanity’s past. As Joseph Smith continued to receive revelations, he learned that the light or intelligence at the core of each human soul “was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” God is the Father of each human spirit, and because only “spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy,” He presented a plan for human beings to receive physical bodies and progress through their mortal experience toward a fullness of joy. Earthly birth, then, is not the beginning of an individual’s life: “Man was also in the beginning with God.” Likewise, Joseph Smith taught that the material world has eternal roots, fully repudiating the concept of creation *ex nihilo*. “Earth, water &c—all these had their existence in an elementary State from Eternity,” he said in an 1839 sermon. God organized the universe out of existing elements.

15. Joseph Smith continued to receive revelation on the themes of divine nature and exaltation during the last two years of his life. In a revelation recorded in July 1843 that linked exaltation with eternal marriage, the Lord declared that those who keep covenants, including the covenant of eternal marriage, will inherit “all heights and depths.” “Then,” says the revelation, “shall they be gods, because they have no end.” They will receive “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”

16. The following April, feeling he was “never in any nearer relationship to God than at the present time,” Joseph Smith spoke about the nature of God and the future of humankind to the Saints, who had gathered for a general Church conference. He used the occasion in part to reflect upon the death of a Church member named King Follett, who had died unexpectedly a month earlier. When he rose to speak, the wind was blowing, so Joseph asked his listeners to give him their “profound attention” and to “pray that the Lord may strengthen my lungs” and stay the winds until his

message had been delivered.

17. “What kind of a being is God?” he asked. Human beings needed to know, he argued, because “if men do not comprehend the character of God they do not comprehend themselves.” In that phrase, the Prophet collapsed the gulf that centuries of confusion had created between God and humanity. Human nature was at its core divine. God “was once as one of us” and “all the spirits that God ever sent into the world” were likewise “susceptible of enlargement.” Joseph Smith preached that long before the world was formed, God found “himself in the midst” of these beings and “saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself” and be “exalted” with Him.

18. Joseph told the assembled Saints, “You have got to learn how to be a god yourself.” In order to do that, the Saints needed to learn godliness, or to be more like God. The process would be ongoing and would require patience, faith, continuing repentance, obedience to the commandments of the gospel, and reliance on Christ. Like ascending a ladder, individuals needed to learn the “first principles of the Gospel” and continue beyond the limits of mortal knowledge until they could “learn the last principles of the Gospel” when the time came. “It is not all to be comprehended in this world,” Joseph said. “It will take a long time after the grave to understand the whole.”

19. That was the last time the Prophet spoke in a general conference. Three months later, a mob stormed Carthage Jail and martyred him and his brother Hyrum.

What has been taught in the Church about divine nature since Joseph Smith?

20. Since that sermon, known as the King Follett discourse, the doctrine that humans can progress to exaltation and godliness has been taught within the Church. Lorenzo Snow, the Church’s fifth President, coined a well-known couplet: “As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.” Little has been revealed about the first half of this couplet, and consequently little is taught. When asked about this topic, Church President Gordon B. Hinckley told a reporter in 1997, “That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don’t know very much about.” When

asked about the belief in humans' divine potential, President Hinckley responded, "Well, as God is, man may become. We believe in eternal progression. Very strongly."

21. Eliza R. Snow, a Church leader and poet, rejoiced over the doctrine that we are, in a full and absolute sense, children of God. "I had learned to call thee Father, / Thru thy Spirit from on high," she wrote, "But, until the key of knowledge / Was restored, I knew not why." Latter-day Saints have also been moved by the knowledge that their divine parentage includes a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. Expressing that truth, Eliza R. Snow asked, "In the heav'ns are parents single?" and answered with a resounding no: "Truth eternal / Tells me I've a mother there."⁴⁵ That knowledge plays an important role in Latter-day Saint belief. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, "Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them." Humankind's divine nature and potential for exaltation have been repeatedly taught in general conference addresses, Church magazines, and other Church materials. "Divine nature" is one of eight core values in the Church's Young Women program. Teaching on human beings' divine parentage, nature, and potential features prominently in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Divine nature and exaltation are essential and beloved teachings in the Church

Does belief in exaltation make Latter-day Saints polytheists?

22. For some observers, the doctrine that humans should strive for godliness may evoke images of ancient pantheons with competing deities. Such images are incompatible with Latter-day Saint doctrine. Latter-day Saints believe that God's children will always worship Him. Our progression will never change His identity as our Father and our God. Indeed, our exalted, eternal relationship with Him will be part of the "fullness of joy" He desires for us.

23. Latter-day Saints also believe strongly in the fundamental unity of the divine. They believe that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost, though distinct beings, are unified in purpose and doctrine.⁴⁷ It is in this light that Latter-day Saints understand Jesus's prayer for His disciples through the ages: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in

me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

24. If humans live out of harmony with God's goodness, they cannot grow into God's glory. Joseph Smith taught that "the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only [except] upon the principles of righteousness." When humans abandon God's selfless purposes and standards, "the heavens withdraw themselves [and] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved." Pride is incompatible with progress; disunity is impossible between exalted beings.

How do Latter-day Saints envision exaltation?

25. Since human conceptions of reality are necessarily limited in mortality, religions struggle to adequately articulate their visions of eternal glory. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." These limitations make it easy for images of salvation to become cartoonish when represented in popular culture. For example, scriptural expressions of the deep peace and overwhelming joy of salvation are often reproduced in the well-known image of humans sitting on their own clouds and playing harps after death. Latter-day Saints' doctrine of exaltation is often similarly reduced in media to a cartoonish image of people receiving their own planets.

26. A cloud and harp are hardly a satisfying image for eternal joy, although most Christians would agree that inspired music can be a tiny foretaste of the joy of eternal salvation. Likewise, while few Latter-day Saints would identify with caricatures of having their own planet, most would agree that the awe inspired by creation hints at our creative potential in the eternities.

27. Latter-day Saints tend to imagine exaltation through the lens of the sacred in mortal experience. They see the seeds of godhood in the joy of bearing and nurturing children and the intense love they feel for those children, in the impulse to reach out in compassionate service to others, in the moments they are caught off guard by the beauty and order of the universe, in the grounding feeling of making and keeping divine covenants. Church members imagine exaltation less through images of what they will get and more through the relationships they have now and how those relationships might be purified and elevat-

ed. As the scriptures teach, “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”

How important are teachings about exaltation to Latter-day Saint beliefs overall?

28. The teaching that human beings have a divine nature and future shapes the way Latter-day Saints view fundamental doctrine. Perhaps most significantly, belief in divine nature helps us more deeply appreciate the Atonement of Jesus Christ. While many Christian theologians have expressed the magnitude of the Savior’s Atonement by emphasizing human depravity, Latter-day Saints understand the magnitude of the Atonement of Christ in terms of the vast human potential it makes possible. Christ’s Atonement not only provides forgiveness from sin and victory over death, it also redeems imperfect relationships, heals the spiritual wounds that stifle growth, and strengthens and enables individuals to develop the attributes of Christ. Latter-day Saints believe that it is only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that we can have a sure hope of eternal glory and that the power of His Atonement is fully accessed only by faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in following the instruction and example of Christ. Thus, those who become like God and enter into a fullness of His glory are described as people who have been “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”

29. An awareness of humans’ divine potential also influences Latter-day Saints’ understanding of gospel principles such as the importance of divine commandments, the role of temples, and the sanctity of individual moral agency. Belief that human beings are actually God’s children also changes Latter-day Saints’ behavior and attitudes. For example, even in societies where casual and premarital sex are considered acceptable, Latter-day Saints retain a deep reverence for the God-given pro-creative and bonding powers of human sexual intimacy and remain committed to a higher standard in the use of those sacred powers. Studies suggest that Latter-day Saints place an exceptionally high priority on marriage and parenthood, a consequence in part of a strong belief in heavenly parents and a commitment

to strive for that divinity.

Conclusion

30. All human beings are children of loving heavenly parents and possess seeds of divinity within them. In His infinite love, God invites His children to cultivate their eternal potential by the grace of God, through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of humans’ eternal potential to become like their Heavenly Father is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ and inspires love, hope, and gratitude in the hearts of faithful Latter-day Saints.

Becoming Like God

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/becoming-like-god?lang=eng>

Mother in Heaven

Overview



1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that all human beings, male and female, are beloved spirit children of heavenly parents, a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother. This understanding is rooted in scriptural and prophetic teachings about the nature of God, our relationship to Deity, and the godly potential of men and women.¹ The doctrine of a Heavenly Mother is a cherished and distinctive belief among Latter-day Saints.²
2. While there is no record of a formal revelation to Joseph Smith on this doctrine, some early Latter-day Saint women recalled that he personally taught them about a Mother in Heaven.³ The earliest published references to the doctrine appeared shortly after Joseph Smith's death in 1844, in documents written by his close associates.⁴ The most notable expression of the idea is found in a poem by Eliza R. Snow, entitled "My Father in Heaven" and now known as the hymn "O My Father." This text declares: "In the heav'ns are parents single? / No, the thought makes reason stare; / Truth is reason—truth eternal / Tells me I've a mother there."⁵
3. Subsequent Church leaders have affirmed the existence of a Mother in Heaven. In 1909, the First Presidency taught that "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity."⁶ Susa Young Gates, a prominent leader in the Church, wrote in 1920 that Joseph Smith's visions and teachings revealed the truth that "the divine Mother, [is] side by side with the divine Father."⁷ And in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," issued in 1995, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared, "Each [person] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny."⁸
4. Prophets have taught that our heavenly parents work together for the salvation of the human family. "We are part of a divine plan designed by Heavenly Parents who love us," taught Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁹ President Harold B. Lee stated, "We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us when we do all we can."¹⁰
5. Latter-day Saints direct their worship to Heavenly Father, in the name of Christ, and do not pray to Heavenly Mother. In this, they follow the pattern set by Jesus Christ, who taught His disciples to "always pray unto the Father in my name."¹¹ Latter-day Saints are taught to pray to Heavenly Father, but as President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "The fact that we do not pray to our Mother in Heaven in no way belittles or denigrates her."¹² Indeed, as Elder Rudger Clawson wrote, "We honor woman when we acknowledge Godhood in her eternal Prototype."¹³
6. As with many other truths of the gospel, our present knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited. Nevertheless, we have been given sufficient knowledge to appreciate the sacredness of this doctrine and to comprehend the divine pattern established for us as children of heavenly parents. Latter-day Saints believe that this pattern is reflected in Paul's statement that "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord."¹⁴ Men and women cannot be exalted without each other. Just as we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, "Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them."¹⁵
7. The Church acknowledges the contribution of scholars to the historical content presented in this article; their work is used with permission.

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<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>

Unit 1 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Tad R. Callister, “Our Identity and Destiny”

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/tad-r-callister-our-identity-and-our-destiny/>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “No Other Gods”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2013/10/no-other-gods?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “As He Thinketh”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/as-he-thinketh-in-his-heart-?lang=eng>

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 2 Scriptures

God's plan enables his children to progress towards perfection and obtain eternal life

3 Nephi 12:48

48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

3 Nephi 27:27

27 . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.

Moroni 10:32

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

D&C 14:7

7 And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.

Gender is an eternal characteristic of our identity and purpose and men and women are designed to progress towards eternal life together as husband and wife.

Moses 3:18-25

18 And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten, that it was not good that the man should be alone; wherefore, I will make an help meet for him.

19 And out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and commanded that they should come unto Adam, to see what he would call them; and they were also living souls; for I, God, breathed into them the breath of life, and commanded that whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that should be the name thereof.

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but as for Adam,

there was not found an help meet for him.

21 And I, the Lord God, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and he slept, and I took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in the stead thereof;

22 And the rib which I, the Lord God, had taken from man, made I a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said: This I know now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Moses 4:17-19, 22-26

17 And I, the Lord God, said unto Adam: Who told thee thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, if so thou shouldst surely die?

18 And the man said: The woman thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree and I did eat.

19 And I, the Lord God, said unto the woman: What is this thing which thou hast done? And the woman said: The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. . .

22 Unto the woman, I, the Lord God, said: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

23 And unto Adam, I, the Lord God, said: Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the fruit of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying—Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed shall be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.

24 Thorns also, and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.

25 By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou shalt return unto the ground—for thou shalt surely die—for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou wast, and unto dust shalt thou return.

26 And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living; for thus have I, the Lord God, called the first of all women, which are many.

Proverbs 31:10-15, 20-31

10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price

is far above rubies.

11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

15 She ariseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

D&C 25:1-5, 10, 13-16

1 Hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, while I speak unto you, Emma Smith, my daughter; for verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom.

2 A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; and if thou art faithful and walk in the paths of virtue before me, I will preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion.

3 Behold, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou art an elect lady, whom I have called.

4 Murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen, for they are withheld from thee and from the world, which is wisdom in me in a time to

come.

5 And the office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., thy husband, in his afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of meekness.

10 And verily I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better.

13 Wherefore, lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made.

14 Continue in the spirit of meekness, and beware of pride. Let thy soul delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come upon him.

15 Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come.

16 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my voice unto all. Amen.

D&C 121: 34-44

34 Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

35 Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

36 That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

37 That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

38 Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

39 We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

40 Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

41 No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

42 By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall

greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

43 Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth

afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

44 That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Alma 13:3-6, 9

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good

works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.



Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan

Elder David A. Bednar
Ensign, Jun 2006, 82-87



The Doctrinal Ideal of Marriage

1. We have been counseled strongly by the First Presidency to devote our best efforts to the strengthening of marriage and the home. Such instruction has never been more needed in the world than it is today, as the sanctity of marriage is attacked and the importance of the home is undermined.

2. Even though the Church and its programs support marriage and family and generally are successful at doing so, we should always remember this basic truth: no instrumentality or organization can take the place of the home or perform its essential functions.

¹ Consequently, today I will speak with you primarily as men and women, as husbands and wives, and as mothers and fathers and secondarily as priesthood and auxiliary leaders in the Church. My assignment is to discuss the essential role of eternal marriage in our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness.

3. We will focus on the doctrinal ideal of marriage. My hope is that a review of our eternal possibilities and a reminder about who we are and why we are here in mortality will provide direction, comfort, and sustaining hope for us all, regardless of our marital status or personal present circumstances. The disparity between the doctrinal ideal of marriage and the reality of daily life may seem at times to be quite large, but you gradually are doing and becoming much better than you probably recognize.

4. I invite you to keep in mind the following questions as we discuss principles related to eternal marriage.

5. Question 1: In my own life, am I striving to become a better husband or a wife, or preparing to be a husband or a wife, by understanding and applying these basic principles?

6. Question 2: As a priesthood or auxiliary leader, am I helping those I serve to understand and apply these basic principles, thereby strengthening marriage and the home?

7. As we prayerfully ponder these questions and consider our own marriage relationships and our responsibilities in the Church, I testify the Spirit of the Lord will enlighten our minds and teach us the things we need to do and to improve (see John 14:26).

Why Marriage is Essential

8. In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles proclaim "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."² This keynote sentence of the proclamation teaches us much about the doctrinal significance of marriage and emphasizes the primacy of marriage and family in the Father's plan. Righteous marriage is a commandment and an essential step in the process of creating a loving family relationship that can be perpetuated beyond the grave.

9. Two compelling doctrinal reasons help us to understand why eternal marriage is essential to the Father's plan.

10. Reason 1: The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

11. The eternal nature and importance of marriage can be fully understood only within the overarching context of the Father's plan for His children. "All human beings— male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and ... has a divine nature and destiny."³ The great plan of happiness enables the spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experience, and to progress toward perfection.

12. "Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose"⁴ and in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary.

13. After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said it was “not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18; Moses 3:18), and Eve became Adam’s companion and helpmeet.

14. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness. Alone, neither the man nor the woman could fulfill the purposes of his or her creation.

15. By divine design, men and women are intended to progress together toward perfection and a fullness of glory. Because of their distinctive temperaments and capacities, males and females each bring to a marriage relationship unique perspectives and experiences. The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other. “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11; italics added).

16. Reason 2: By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

17. The commandment given anciently to Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. “God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.... The means by which mortal life is created [are] divinely appointed.”⁵ Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

18. A home with a loving and loyal husband and wife is the supreme setting in which children can be reared in love and righteousness and in which the spiritual and physical needs of children can be met. Just as the unique characteristics of both males and females contribute to the completeness of a marriage relationship, so those same characteristics are vital to the rearing, nurturing, and teaching of children. “Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a

mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”⁶

Guiding Principles

19. The two doctrinal reasons we have reviewed about the importance of eternal marriage in the Father’s plan of happiness suggest guiding principles for those who are preparing to marry, for those who are married, and for our service in the Church.

20. Principle 1: The importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness.

21. We frequently speak about and highlight marriage as a fundamental unit of society, as the foundation of a strong nation, and as a vital sociological and cultural institution. But the restored gospel helps us to understand that it is so much more!

22. Do we perhaps talk about marriage without adequately teaching the importance of marriage in the Father’s plan? Emphasizing marriage without linking it to the simple and fundamental doctrine of the plan of happiness cannot provide sufficient direction, protection, or hope in a world that grows increasingly confused and wicked. We would all do well to remember the teaching of Alma—that “God gave unto [the children of men] commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:32; italics added).

23. Elder Parley P. Pratt expressed beautifully the blessings that come to us as we learn about, understand, and strive to apply in our lives the doctrinal ideal of marriage:

24. “It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

25. “It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. ...

26. “I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. ... In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.

27. “Yet, at that time, my dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had ... merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity.”⁷

28. As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, can we see how the importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the

context of the Father's plan of happiness? The doctrine of the plan leads men and women to hope and prepare for eternal marriage, and it defeats the fears and overcomes the uncertainties that may cause some individuals to delay or avoid marriage. A correct understanding of the plan also strengthens our resolve to steadfastly honor the covenant of eternal marriage. Our individual learning, our teaching, and our testifying in both the home and at church will be magnified as we ponder and more fully understand this truth.

29. Principle 2: Satan desires that all men and women might be miserable like unto himself.

30. Lucifer relentlessly assails and distorts the doctrines that matter most to us individually, to our families, and to the world. Where is the adversary focusing his most direct and diabolical attacks? Satan works unremittingly to confuse understanding about gender, to promote the premature and unrighteous use of procreative power, and to hinder righteous marriage precisely because marriage is ordained of God and the family is central to the plan of happiness. The adversary's attacks upon eternal marriage will continue to increase in intensity, frequency, and sophistication.

31. Because today we are engaged in a war for the welfare of marriage and the home, in my latest reading of the Book of Mormon I paid particular attention to the ways the Nephites prepared for their battles against the Lamanites. I noted that the people of Nephi "were aware of the intent of [their enemy], and therefore they did prepare to meet them" (Alma 2:12; italics added).

As I read and studied, I learned that understanding the intent of an enemy is a key prerequisite to effective preparation. We likewise should consider the intent of our enemy in this latter-day war.

32. The Father's plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him. Lucifer's attacks on the plan are intended to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to halt their eternal progression. The over-arching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become "miserable like unto himself" (2 Ne. 2:27), and he works to warp the elements of the Father's plan he hates the most. Satan does not have a body, he cannot marry, and he will not have a family. And he persistently strives to confuse the divinely appointed purposes of gender, marriage, and family. Throughout the world, we see growing evidence of the effectiveness of Satan's efforts.

33. More recently the devil has attempted to combine and legally validate confusion about gender

and marriage. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit alternatives the adversary advocates can never lead to the completeness that is made possible through the sealing together of a man and a woman, to the happiness of righteous marriage, to the joy of posterity, or to the blessing of eternal progression.

34. Given what we know about our enemy's intent, each of us should be especially vigilant in seeking personal inspiration as to how we can protect and safeguard our own marriages—and how we can learn and teach correct principles in the home and in our Church assignments about the eternal significance of gender and of the role of marriage in the Father's plan.

35. Principle 3: The ultimate blessings of love and happiness are obtained through the covenant relationship of eternal marriage.

36. The Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point in a covenant marriage relationship. Please notice how the Savior is positioned at the apex of this triangle, with a woman at the base of one corner and a man at the base of the other corner. Now consider what happens in the relationship between the man and the woman as they individually and steadily "come unto Christ" and strive to be "perfected in Him" (Moro. 10:32). Because of and through the Redeemer, the man and the woman come closer together.

37. As a husband and wife are each drawn to the Lord (see 3 Ne. 27:14), as they learn to serve and cherish one another, as they share life experiences and grow together and become one, and as they are blessed through the uniting of their distinctive natures, they begin to realize the fulfillment that our Heavenly Father desires for His children. Ultimate happiness, which is the very object

of the Father's plan, is received through the making and honoring of eternal marriage covenants.

38. As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, one of our paramount responsibilities is to help young men and women learn about and prepare for righteous marriage through our personal example. As young women and men observe worthiness, loyalty, sacrifice, and the honoring of covenants in our marriages, then those youth will seek to emulate the same principles in their courting and marriage relationships. As young people notice that we have made the comfort and convenience of our eternal companion our highest priority, then they will become less self-centered and more able to give, to serve, and to create an equal and enduring companionship. As young women and men perceive mutual respect,

affection, trust, and love between a husband and a wife, then they will strive to cultivate the same characteristics in their lives. Our children and the youth of the Church will learn the most from what we do and what we are—even if they remember relatively little of what we say.

39. Unfortunately many young members of the Church today are fearful of and stumble in their progress toward eternal marriage because they have seen too much of divorce in the world and of broken covenants in their homes and in the Church.

40. Eternal marriage is not merely a temporary legal contract that can be terminated at any time for almost any reason. Rather, it is a sacred covenant with God that can be binding in time and throughout all eternity. Faithfulness and fidelity in marriage must not simply be attractive words spoken in sermons; rather, they should be principles evident in our own covenant marriage relationships.

41. As we consider the importance of our personal example, do you and I discern areas where we need to improve? Is the Holy Ghost inspiring our minds and softening our hearts and encouraging us to do and to become better? As priesthood and auxiliary leaders, are we focusing our efforts on strengthening marriage and the home?

42. Husbands and wives need time together to fortify themselves and their homes against the attacks of the adversary. As we strive to magnify our callings in the Church, are we unintentionally hindering husbands and wives and mothers and fathers from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities in the home? For example, do we sometimes schedule unnecessary meetings and activities in a way that interferes with the essential relationship between a husband and a wife and their relationships with children?

43. As we sincerely ponder these questions, I am confident the Spirit is even now helping and will continue to help each of us learn the things we should do at home and in the Church.

The Spiritual Resources We Need

44. Our responsibilities to learn and understand the doctrine of the plan, to uphold and be examples of righteous marriage, and to teach correct principles in the home and at church may cause us to wonder if we are equal to the task. We are ordinary people who must accomplish a most extraordinary work.

45. Many years ago, Sister Bednar and I were busy trying to meet the countless competing demands of a

young and energetic family—and of Church, career, and community responsibilities. One evening after the children were asleep, we talked at length about how effectively we were attending to all of our important priorities. We realized that we would not receive the promised blessings in eternity if we did not honor more fully the covenant we had made in mortality. We resolved together to do and to be better as a husband and a wife. That lesson learned so many years ago has made a tremendous difference in our marriage.

46. The sweet and simple doctrine of the plan of happiness provides precious eternal perspective and helps us understand the importance of eternal marriage. We have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need. We have the fullness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Ghost and revelation. We have saving ordinances, covenants, and temples. We have priesthood and prophets. We have the holy scriptures and the power of the word of God. And we have The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

47. I testify that we have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need to learn about, to teach, to strengthen, and to defend righteous marriage—and that indeed we can live together in happiness as husbands and wives and families in eternity. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

1. See First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; or Liahona, Dec. 1999, 1; Ensign, June 1999, 80.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
4. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
6. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (1938), 297–98.

https://video.byui.edu/media/Elder+David+A.+Bednar+%22Marriage+is+Essential+to+His+Eternal+Plan%22/0_q01z8tvp



It is Not Good for Man or Woman to Be Alone

Sheri L. Dew

Ensign, November 2001

1. For nearly five years, I have had the blessing of serving with Relief Society sisters and priesthood leaders from Africa to the Amazon. These experiences with you have reinforced for me the importance of a fundamental gospel principle. I wish to direct my remarks about this principle especially to the young adult men and women of the Church, who are embarking upon a most demanding phase of their lives.

2. This summer I injured a shoulder and lost the use of an arm for weeks. I hadn't realized how much one arm depends upon the other for balance, or how much less I could lift with one arm than two, or that there were some things I couldn't do at all. This disability not only renewed my respect for those who deal so well with a physical limitation, but helped me realize how much more two arms working together can do.

3. Two are usually better than one, as our Father confirmed when He declared that "it was not good that the man should be alone" and made a help meet for Adam—someone with distinct gifts who would give him balance, help him shoulder the burdens of mortality, and enable him to do things he couldn't do alone. For "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord."

4. Satan understands the power of men and women united in righteousness. He is still stinging from his banishment into eternal exile after Michael led the hosts of heaven, comprised of valiant men and women united in the cause of Christ, against him. In the chilling words of Peter, "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Lucifer is determined to devour marriages and families, because their demise threatens the salvation of all involved and the vitality of the Lord's kingdom itself. Thus, Satan seeks to confuse us about our stewardships and distinctive natures as men and women. He bombards us with bizarre messages about gender, marriage, family, and all male-female relationships. He would have us believe men and women are so alike that our



unique gifts are not necessary, or so different we can never hope to understand each other. Neither is true.

5. Our Father knew exactly what He was doing when He created us. He made us enough alike to love each other, but enough different that we would need to unite our strengths and stewardships to create a whole. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage or family, no ward or stake is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths.

6. These truths about the divinely appointed stewardships of men and women are largely lost on the world today. You will not find them on a TV sitcom or even, sadly, in some homes and wards. But they are not lost to the Lord, who has given us "a pattern in all things, that [we] may not be deceived." The Lord's pattern for couples and in large measure men and women serving together in His kingdom was established by our first parents. Together Adam and Eve labored, mourned, were obedient, had children, taught their posterity the gospel, called upon the name of the Lord, "heard the voice of the Lord," blessed the name of God, and dedicated themselves to God. Repeatedly the scriptures about Adam and Eve refer to the pronoun they.

7. Neither Adam with his priesthood nor Eve with her motherhood could bring about the Fall alone. Their unique roles were interconnected. They counseled with one another, lifted burdens neither could have lifted alone, and then faced the wilderness, with all of its uncertainty, together. This is the Lord's pattern for righteous men and women.

8. Now, some of us encounter life circumstances that are less than ideal. I understand this. I personally deal with this. And yet, my dear young friends, in whose hands rests the future of the Church and its families, I must tell you that your understanding of this divine pattern will affect your marriage, your family, your ability to help build the kingdom, and your eternal life.

9. My young sisters, some will try to persuade you that because you are not ordained to the priesthood you have been shortchanged. They are simply wrong, and they do not understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. The blessings of the priesthood are available to every righteous man and woman. We may all receive the Holy Ghost, obtain personal revelation, and be endowed in the temple, from which we emerge “armed” with power. The power of the priesthood heals, protects, and inoculates all of the righteous against the powers of darkness. Most significantly, the fullness of the priesthood contained in the highest ordinances of the house of the Lord can only be received by a man and woman together. Said President Harold B. Lee: “Pure womanhood plus priesthood means exaltation. But womanhood without priesthood, or priesthood without pure womanhood doesn’t spell exaltation.”

10. Sisters, we as women are not diminished by priesthood power, we are magnified by it. I know this is true, for I have experienced it again and again.

11. Your future husbands and the men with whom you serve will need the support only you can give. You have an inner spiritual strength that President James E. Faust said equals and even surpasses that of men. Do not abdicate your spiritual responsibility. Your faith will preach compelling sermons. No amount of time in front of the mirror will make you as attractive as having the Holy Ghost with you. Bless your family and the Church as only a woman of God can—with virtue, faith, integrity, and constant compassion.

12. Young men, your ordination to the priesthood is a grand privilege and responsibility, and not a license to dominate. Be unfailingly worthy to exercise this godly power, which is given you to be of service. A man is never more magnificent than when he is guided by the Spirit to honor the priesthood he holds.

13. If you will marry a virtuous woman who can hear the voice of the Lord, she will bless your life every day of your life. Consider Eve. She was the first to see that the fruit of the tree was good, and after partaking, she “gave unto her husband . . . , and he did eat.” Were it not for Eve, our progression would have ceased. Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated that her act was “a glorious necessity [that opened] the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same.”

14. Young men, you will preside at home and in the Church. But be humble enough to listen to and learn from the women in your life. They will provide insight, balance, and unique wisdom. And when challenges come, you will see how resilient a woman committed to God the Father and Jesus Christ is.

15. This divine pattern for men and women that strengthens marriages and families also fortifies the Church. For the Church cannot achieve the full measure of its creation unless both faithful men who bear the priesthood and righteous women who rejoice in serving under the direction of the priesthood work together. Time and again I have experienced this joy.

16. I think of a meeting in Brazil where I had a translator who was unsure of her ability to convert my English into Portuguese. But as it turned out, she and I communicated with ease. After the meeting I found out why. I learned that not only had the General Authority who presided been literally on the edge of his seat behind us the entire meeting, prompting the translator when necessary, but he had also assigned another priesthood leader to pray for both of us throughout the meeting.

17. That General Authority created a safety net of support so that I could fulfill the assignment he had given me. Such a circle of support has no end, because there is no end to the good works of righteous men and women who respect each other and who thrust in their sickles and reap, side by side, in the Lord’s vineyard. If we are going to build the kingdom of God, we as men and women of God must build each other. There is no challenge—with activation, retention, families, or anything—that we can’t solve when we counsel together in councils and help each other lift the load.

18. My dear young friends, learn the Lord’s pattern for men and women now. Ponder the scriptural

accounts of Adam and Eve and see what the Lord will teach you that will strengthen your marriage, your family, and your Church service. Recent devastating events in the United States seem to indicate difficult days ahead. But they are days that will be filled with confidence and courage if the men and women of your generation unite in righteousness as never before. There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you will work together, equally yoked, under the guidance of the priesthood.

19. Our Father's patterns help us avoid deception. Look to the Lord and not to the world for your ideas and ideals about men and women. For, my young friends, you are the mothers, fathers, and leaders who were reserved for this unprecedented time because our Father knows you, and He knows you have what it takes to face the world and to be fearless in building the kingdom. Do it together, for it is not good for man or woman to be alone. Lift each other, and together you will be able to lift the beautiful burdens of mortality and have glory added upon your heads forever. The Lord must have righteous men and righteous women to build His kingdom. I know that this is so. God is our Father. His Only Begotten Son is the Christ. This is Their work and Their glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Eccl. 4:9.
2. Moses 3:18; see also Abr.5:14.
3. 1 Cor. 11:11.
4. 1 Pet. 5:8.
5. D&C 52:14.
6. See Moses 5:1.
7. See Moses 5:27.
8. See 2 Ne. 2:20.
9. See Moses 5:12.
10. Moses 5:4.
11. See Moses 5:12.
12. See D&C 109:22.
13. See D&C 131:1–4; D&C 132:19–20.
14. The Teachings of Harold B. Lee (1996), 292.
15. See “What It Means to Be a Daughter of God,” Ensign, Nov. 1999, 101.
16. Moses 4:12.
17. “The Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, Nov. 1993, 73.
18. See Abr. 3:26.

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A Plea to My Sisters and The Price of Priesthood Power (excerpts)

President Russell M. Nelson General
Conference October 2015 and April
2016



1. The women of this dispensation are distinct from the women of any other because this dispensation is distinct from any other.⁴ This distinction brings both privileges and responsibilities.
2. Thirty-six years ago, in 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball made a profound prophecy about the impact that covenant-keeping women would have on the future of the Lord's Church. He prophesied: "Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world ... will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world."⁵
3. My dear sisters, you who are our vital associates during this winding-up scene, the day that President Kimball foresaw is today. You are the women he foresaw! Your virtue, light, love, knowledge, courage, character, faith, and righteous lives will draw good women of the world, along with their families, to the Church in unprecedented numbers!⁶
4. We, your brethren, need your strength, your conversion, your conviction, your ability to lead, your wisdom, and your voices. The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God!⁷
5. President Packer declared:
6. "We need women who are organized and women who can organize. We need women with executive ability who can plan and direct and administer; women who can teach, women who can speak out.
7. "We need women with the gift of discernment who can view the trends in the world and detect those that, however popular, are shallow or dangerous."⁸
8. Today, let me add that we need women who know how to make important things happen by their faith and who are courageous defenders of morality and families in a sin-sick world. We need women who are devoted to shepherding God's children along the covenant path toward exaltation; women who know how to receive personal revelation, who understand the power and peace of the temple endowment; women who know how to call upon the powers of heaven to protect and strengthen children and families; women who teach fearlessly.
9. 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"¹⁰ 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.
10. We know that the culminating act of all creation was the creation of woman!¹¹ We need your strength!
11. My dear sisters, nothing is more crucial to your eternal life than your own conversion. It is converted, covenant-keeping women—women like my dear wife Wendy—whose righteous lives will increasingly stand out in a deteriorating world and who will thus be seen as different and distinct in the happiest of ways.
- 12. The Price of Priesthood Power (excerpts) – April 2016 General Conference**
13. To bear means to support the weight of that which is held. It is a sacred trust to bear the priesthood, which is the mighty power and authority of God. Think of this: the priesthood conferred upon us is

the very same power and authority through which God created this and numberless worlds, governs the heavens and the earth, and exalts His obedient children.³

14. I fear that there are too many men who have been given the authority of the priesthood but who lack priesthood power because the flow of power has been blocked by sins such as laziness, dishonesty, pride, immorality, or preoccupation with things of the world.
15. I fear that there are too many priesthood bearers who have done little or nothing to develop their ability to access the powers of heaven. I worry about all who are impure in their thoughts, feelings, or actions or who demean their wives or children, thereby cutting off priesthood power.
16. I fear that too many have sadly surrendered their agency to the adversary and are saying by their conduct, “I care more about satisfying my own desires than I do about bearing the Savior’s power to bless others.”
17. I fear, brethren, that some among us may one day wake up and realize what power in the priesthood really is and face the deep regret that they spent far more time seeking power over others or power at work than learning to exercise fully the power of God.⁴ President George Albert Smith taught that “we are not here to while away the hours of this life and then pass to a sphere of exaltation; but we are here to qualify ourselves day by day for the positions that our Father expects us to fill hereafter.”⁵
18. Why would any man waste his days and settle for Esau’s mess of pottage⁶ when he has been entrusted with the possibility of receiving all of the blessings of Abraham?⁷
19. I urgently plead with each one of us to live up to our privileges as bearers of the priesthood. In a coming day, only those men who have taken their priesthood seriously, by diligently seeking to be taught by the Lord Himself, will be able to bless, guide, protect, strengthen, and heal others. Only a man who has paid the price for priesthood power will be able to bring miracles to those he loves and keep his marriage and family safe, now and throughout eternity.
20. 16 What is the price to develop such priesthood power? The Savior’s senior Apostle, Peter—that same Peter who with James and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery⁸—declared qualities we should seek to “be partakers of the divine nature.”⁹
21. He named faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, and diligence.¹⁰ And don’t forget humility!¹¹ So I ask, how would our family members, friends, and coworkers say you and I are doing in developing these and other spiritual gifts?¹² The more those attributes are developed, the greater will be our priesthood power.
22. How else can we increase our power in the priesthood? We need to pray from our hearts. Polite recitations of past and upcoming activities, punctuated with some requests for blessings, cannot constitute the kind of communing with God that brings enduring power. Are you willing to pray to know how to pray for more power? The Lord will teach you.
23. Are you willing to search the scriptures and feast on the words of Christ¹³—to study earnestly in order to have more power? If you want to see your wife’s heart melt, let her find you on the Internet studying the doctrine of Christ¹⁴ or reading your scriptures!
24. Are you willing to worship in the temple regularly? The Lord loves to do His own teaching in His holy house. Imagine how pleased He would be if you asked Him to teach you about priesthood keys, authority, and power as you experience the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood in the holy temple.¹⁵ Imagine the increase in priesthood power that could be yours.
25. Are we willing to pray, fast, study, seek, worship, and serve as men of God so we can have that kind of priesthood power?
26. My dear brethren, we have been given a sacred trust—the authority of God to bless others. May each one of us rise up as the man God foreordained us to be—ready to bear the priesthood of God bravely, eager to pay whatever price is required to increase his power in the priesthood.

Notes

1. See Philippians 4:7.
2. This includes tears—in keeping the commandment to weep for those we love when they graduate from this life (see Doctrine and Covenants 42:45).
3. See Rebekah’s influence on Isaac and their son Jacob in Genesis 27:46; 28:1–4.
4. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 4:166. Note: All previous dispensations were limited to a small segment of the world and were terminated by apostasy. In contrast, this dispensation will not be limited in location or time. It will fill the world and merge with the Second Coming of the Lord.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 222–23.
6. When I was born, there were fewer than 600,000 members of the Church. Today there are more than 15 million. That number will continue to increase.
7. President Joseph Fielding Smith told sisters of the Relief Society, “You can speak with authority, because the Lord has placed authority upon you.” He also said that the Relief Society has “been given power and authority to do a great many things. The work which they do is done by divine authority” (“Relief Society—an Aid to the Priesthood,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1959, 4, 5). These quotations were also cited by Elder Dallin H. Oaks in a conference address, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 51.
8. Boyd K. Packer, “The Relief Society,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 8; see also M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family* (1997), 93.
9. See Spencer J. Condie, *Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle* (2003), 146, 153–56. Note: In 1964 President Kimball set me apart as a stake president and blessed me that the mortality
10. “When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a full partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be silent partners or limited partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a contributing and full partner” (Spencer W. Kimball, “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 106).
11. “All the purposes of the world and all that was in the world would be brought to naught without woman—a keystone in the priesthood arch of creation” (Russell M. Nelson, “Lessons from Eve,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 87). “Eve became God’s final creation, the grand summation of all of the marvelous work that had gone before” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Women in Our Lives,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 83).
12. See Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 33.
13. See 2 Nephi 32:3.
14. See 2 Nephi 31:2–21.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–20.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 45:33.



Spiritual Treasures

President Russell M. Nelson
General Conference October 2019



1. Thank you for that beautiful music. As we all stood to sing that intermediate hymn, “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” I had two overpowering thoughts come to me. One is about the Prophet Joseph Smith, the prophet of this dispensation. My love and admiration for him grows with every passing day. The second thought occurred as I looked at my wife, my daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters. I felt like I’d like to claim every one of you as part of my family.
2. Several months ago, at the end of a temple endowment session, I said to my wife Wendy, “I hope the sisters understand the spiritual treasures that are theirs in the temple.” Sisters, I often find myself thinking about you, including two months ago when Wendy and I visited Harmony, Pennsylvania.
3. This was our second trip there. Both times we have been deeply moved as we walked on that sacred ground. It was near Harmony that John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and restored the Aaronic Priesthood.
4. It was there that the Apostles Peter, James, and John appeared to restore the Melchizedek Priesthood.
5. It was in Harmony that Emma Hale Smith served as her husband’s first scribe while the Prophet translated the Book of Mormon.
6. It was also in Harmony that Joseph received a revelation manifesting the Lord’s will to Emma. The Lord instructed Emma to expound the scriptures, to exhort the Church, to receive the Holy Ghost, and to spend her time “learning much.” Emma was also counseled to “lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better” and to hold fast to her covenants with God. The Lord concluded His instruction with these compelling words: “This is my voice unto all.”¹
7. Everything that happened in this area has profound implications for your lives. The restoration of the priesthood, along with the Lord’s counsel to Emma, can guide and bless each of you. How I yearn for you to understand that the restoration of the priesthood is just as relevant to you as a woman as it is to any man. Because the Melchizedek Priesthood has been restored, both covenant-keeping women and men have access to “all the spiritual blessings of the church”² or, we might say, to all the spiritual treasures the Lord has for His children.
8. Every woman and every man who makes covenants with God and keeps those covenants, and who participates worthily in priesthood ordinances, has direct access to the power of God. Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God’s priesthood power by virtue of their covenant, along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power.
9. The heavens are just as open to women who are endowed with God’s power flowing from their priesthood covenants as they are to men who bear the priesthood. I pray that truth will register upon each of your hearts because I believe it will change your life. Sisters, you have the right to draw liberally upon the Savior’s power to help your family and others you love.
10. Now, you might be saying to yourself, “This sounds wonderful, but how do I do it? How do I draw the Savior’s power into my life?”
11. You won’t find this process spelled out in any manual. The Holy Ghost will be your personal tutor as you seek to understand what the Lord would have you know and do. This process is neither quick nor easy, but it is spiritually invigorating. What could possibly be more exciting than to labor with the Spirit to understand God’s power—priesthood power?
12. What I can tell you is that accessing the power of God in your life requires the same things that the Lord instructed Emma and each of you to do.
13. So, I invite you to study prayerfully section 25 of the Doctrine and Covenants and discover what the Holy Ghost will teach you. Your personal spiritual endeavor will bring you joy as you gain, understand, and use the power with which you have been endowed.

14. Part of this endeavor will require you to put aside many things of this world. Sometimes we speak almost casually about walking away from the world with its contention, pervasive temptations, and false philosophies. But truly doing so requires you to examine your life meticulously and regularly. As you do so, the Holy Ghost will prompt you about what is no longer needful, what is no longer worthy of your time and energy.
15. As you shift your focus away from worldly distractions, some things that seem important to you now will recede in priority. You will need to say no to some things, even though they may seem harmless. As you embark upon and continue this lifelong process of consecrating your life to the Lord, the changes in your perspective, feelings, and spiritual strength will amaze you!
16. Now a little word of warning. There are those who would undermine your ability to call upon the power of God. There are some who would have you doubt yourself and minimize your stellar spiritual capacity as a righteous woman.
17. Most certainly, the adversary does not want you to understand the covenant you made at baptism or the profound endowment of knowledge and power you have received or will receive in the temple—the house of the Lord. And Satan certainly does not want you to understand that every time you worthily serve and worship in the temple, you leave armed with God’s power and with His angels having “charge over” you.³
18. Satan and his minions will constantly contrive roadblocks to prevent you from understanding the spiritual gifts with which you have been and can be blessed. Unfortunately, some roadblocks may be the result of another’s misbehavior. It grieves me to think that any of you have felt marginalized or have not been believed by a priesthood leader or have been abused or betrayed by a husband, father, or a supposed friend. I feel deep sorrow that any of you have felt sidelined, disrespected, or misjudged. Such offenses have no place in the kingdom of God.
19. Conversely, it thrills me when I learn of priesthood leaders who eagerly seek the participation of women in ward and stake councils. I am inspired by each husband who demonstrates that his most important priesthood responsibility is to care for his wife.⁴ I praise that man who deeply respects his wife’s ability to receive revelation and treasures her as an equal partner in their marriage.
20. When a man understands the majesty and power of a righteous, seeking, endowed Latter-day Saint woman, is it any wonder that he feels like standing when she enters the room?
21. From the dawning of time, women have been blessed with a unique moral compass—the ability to distinguish right from wrong. This gift is enhanced in those who make and keep covenants. And it diminishes in those who willfully ignore the commandments of God.
22. I hasten to add that I do not absolve men in any way from God’s requirement for them also to distinguish between right and wrong. But my dear sisters, your ability to discern truth from error, to be society’s guardians of morality, is crucial in these latter days. And we depend upon you to teach others to do likewise. Let me be very clear about this: if the world loses the moral rectitude of its women, the world will never recover.
23. We Latter-day Saints are not of the world; we are of covenant Israel. We are called to prepare a people for the Second Coming of the Lord.
24. Now, may I clarify several additional points with respect to women and priesthood. When you are set apart to serve in a calling under the direction of one who holds priesthood keys—such as your bishop or stake president—you are given priesthood authority to function in that calling.
25. Similarly, in the holy temple you are authorized to perform and officiate in priesthood ordinances every time you attend. Your temple endowment prepares you to do so.
26. If you are endowed but not currently married to a man who bears the priesthood and someone says to you, “I’m sorry you don’t have the priesthood in your home,” please understand that that statement is incorrect. You may not have a priesthood bearer in your home, but you have received and made sacred covenants with God in His temple. From those covenants flows an endowment of His priesthood power upon you. And remember, if your husband should die, you would preside in your home.
27. As a righteous, endowed Latter-day Saint woman, you speak and teach with power and authority from God. Whether by exhortation or conversation, we need your voice teaching the doctrine of Christ. We need your input in family, ward, and stake councils. Your participation is essential and never ornamental!

28. My dear sisters, your power will increase as you serve others. Your prayers, fasting, time in the scriptures, service in the temple, and family history work will open the heavens to you.
29. I entreat you to study prayerfully all the truths you can find about priesthood power. You might begin with Doctrine and Covenants sections 84 and 107. Those sections will lead you to other passages. The scriptures and teachings by modern prophets, seers, and revelators are filled with these truths. As your understanding increases and as you exercise faith in the Lord and His priesthood power, your ability to draw upon this spiritual treasure that the Lord has made available will increase. As you do so, you will find yourselves better able to help create eternal families that are united, sealed in the temple of the Lord, and full of love for our Heavenly Father and for Jesus Christ.
30. All our efforts to minister to each other, proclaim the gospel, perfect the Saints, and redeem the dead converge in the holy temple. We now have 166 temples throughout the world, and more are coming.
31. As you know, the Salt Lake Temple, Temple Square, and the adjoining plaza near the Church Office Building will be renewed in a project that will begin at the close of this year. This sacred temple must be preserved and prepared to inspire future generations, just as it has influenced us in this generation.
32. As the Church grows, more temples will be built so that more families can have access to that greatest of all blessings, that of eternal life.⁵ We regard a temple as the most sacred structure in the Church. Whenever plans are announced to construct a new temple, it becomes an important part of our history. As we have discussed here tonight, you sisters are vital to the work of the temple, and the temple is where you will receive your highest spiritual treasures.
33. Please listen carefully and reverently as I will now announce plans to build eight new temples. If one is announced in a place that is meaningful to you, I suggest that you simply bow your head prayerfully with gratitude in your heart. We are pleased to announce plans to construct temples in the following locations: Freetown, Sierra Leone; Orem, Utah; Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea; Bentonville, Arkansas; Bacolod, Philippines; McAllen, Texas; Cobán, Guatemala; and Taylorsville, Utah. Thank

you, dear sisters. We deeply appreciate your receipt of these plans and your reverent response.

34. Now, in closing, I would like to leave a blessing upon you, that you may understand the priesthood power with which you have been endowed and that you will augment that power by exercising your faith in the Lord and in His power.
35. Dear sisters, with deep respect and gratitude, I express my love for you. Humbly, I declare that God lives! Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 25:7–16.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 107:18; emphasis added.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:2–4. 60
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

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We can Do Better and Be Better

President Russell M. Nelson
General Conference April 2019



1. My dear brethren, it is inspiring to look out over this vast congregation of the Lord's battalion of priesthood bearers. What a mighty force for good you are! We love you. We pray for you. And we are most grateful for you.
2. Recently I have found myself drawn to the Lord's instruction given through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation."¹ This declaration is often repeated throughout scripture.² It prompts an obvious question: "Does everyone need to repent?" The answer is yes.
3. Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us from looking to Jesus Christ,³ who stands with open arms,⁴ hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.
4. The word for repentance in the Greek New Testament is *metanoeo*. The prefix *meta-* means "change." The suffix *-noeo* is related to Greek words that mean "mind," "knowledge," "spirit," and "breath."⁵
5. Thus, when Jesus asks you and me to "repent,"⁶ He is inviting us to change our mind, our knowledge, our spirit—even the way we breathe. He is asking us to change the way we love, think, serve, spend our time, treat our wives, teach our children, and even care for our bodies.
6. Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process. It is the key to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.⁷
7. Whether you are diligently moving along the covenant path, or can't even see the path from where you are now, I plead with you to repent. Experience the strengthening power of daily repentance—of doing and being a little better each day.
8. When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him.⁸ When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!⁹
9. Brethren, we need to do better and be better because we are in a battle. The battle with sin is real. The adversary is quadrupling his efforts to disrupt testimonies and impede the work of the Lord. He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.¹⁰
10. Repentance is the key to avoiding misery inflicted by traps of the adversary. The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity, and purity brings power. Personal purity can make us powerful tools in the hands of God. Our repentance—our purity—will empower us to help in the gathering of Israel.
11. The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith "that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness."¹¹
12. We know what will give us greater access to the powers of heaven. We also know what will hinder our progress—what we need to stop doing to increase our access to the powers of heaven. Brethren, prayerfully seek to understand what stands in the way of your repentance. Identify what stops you from repenting. And then, change! Repent! All of us can do better and be better than ever before.¹²
13. There are specific ways in which we can likely improve. One is in the way we treat our bodies. I stand

in awe of the miracle of the human body. It is a magnificent creation, essential to our gradual ascent toward our ultimate divine potential. We cannot progress without it. In giving us the gift of a body, God has allowed us to take a vital step toward becoming more like Him.

14. Satan understands this. He chafes at the fact that his premortal apostasy permanently disqualifies him from this privilege, leaving him in a constant state of jealousy and resentment. Thus many, if not most, of the temptations he puts in our path cause us to abuse our bodies or the bodies of others. Because Satan is miserable without a body, he wants us to be miserable because of ours.¹³
15. Your body is your personal temple, created to house your eternal spirit.¹⁴ Your care of that temple is important. Now, I ask you, brethren, are you more interested in dressing and grooming your body to appeal to the world than to please God? Your answer to this question sends a direct message to Him about your feelings regarding His transcendent gift to you. In this reverence for our bodies, brethren, I think we can do better and be better.
16. Another way we can also do better and be better is how we honor the women in our lives, beginning with our wives and daughters, our mothers and sisters.¹⁵
17. Months ago, I received a heartbreaking letter from a dear sister. She wrote: “[My daughters and I] feel we are in fierce competition for our husbands’ and sons’ undivided attention, with 24/7 sports updates, video games, stock market updates, [and] endless analyzing and watching of games of every [conceivable] sport. It feels like we’re losing our front-row seats with our husbands and sons because of their permanent front-row seats with [sports and games].”¹⁶
18. Brethren, your first and foremost duty as a bearer of the priesthood is to love and care for your wife. Become one with her. Be her partner. Make it easy for her to want to be yours. No other interest in life should take priority over building an eternal relationship with her. Nothing on TV, a mobile device, or a computer is more important than her well-being. Take an inventory of how you spend your time and where you devote your energy. That will tell you where your heart is. Pray to have your heart attuned to your wife’s heart. Seek to bring her joy. Seek her counsel, and listen. Her input will improve your output.
19. If you have a need to repent because of the way you have treated the women closest to you, begin now. And remember that it is your responsibility to help the women in your life receive the blessings that derive from living the Lord’s law of chastity. Never be the reason that a woman is unable to receive her temple blessings.
20. Brethren, we all need to repent. We need to get up off the couch, put down the remote, and wake up from our spiritual slumber. It is time to put on the full armor of God so we can engage in the most important work on earth. It is time to “thrust in [our] sickles, and reap with all [our] might, mind, and strength.”¹⁷ The forces of evil have never raged more forcefully than they do today. As servants of the Lord, we cannot be asleep while this battle rages.
21. Your family needs your leadership and love. Your quorum and those in your ward or branch need your strength. And all who meet you need to know what a true disciple of the Lord looks like and acts like.
22. My dear brethren, you were chosen by our Father to come to earth at this crucial time because of your premortal spiritual valor. You are among the finest, most valiant men who have ever come to the earth. Satan knows who you are and who you were premortally, and he understands the work that must be done before the Savior returns. And after millennia of practicing his cunning arts, the adversary is experienced and incorrigible.
23. Gratefully, the priesthood we hold is far stronger than are the wiles of the adversary. I plead with you to be the men and young men the Lord needs you to be. Make your focus on daily repentance so integral to your life that you can exercise the priesthood with greater power than ever before. This is the only way you will keep yourself and your family spiritually safe in the challenging days ahead.
24. The Lord needs selfless men who put the welfare of others ahead of their own. He needs men who intentionally work to hear the voice of the Spirit with clarity. He needs men of the covenant who keep their covenants with integrity. He needs men who are determined to keep themselves sexually pure—worthy men who can be called upon at a moment’s notice to give blessings with pure hearts, clean minds, and willing hands. The Lord needs

men eager to repent—men with a zeal to serve and be part of the Lord’s battalion of worthy priesthood bearers.

25. I bless you to become those men. I bless you with the courage to repent daily and learn how to exercise full priesthood power. I bless you to communicate the love of the Savior to your wife and children and to all who know you. I bless you to do better and be better. And I bless you that as you make these efforts, you will experience miracles in your life.
26. We are engaged in the work of Almighty God. Jesus is the Christ. We are Their servants. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 6:9; 11:9.
2. See Mark 1:4; Mosiah 18:20; Alma 37:33; 3 Nephi 7:23; Moroni 3:3; Doctrine and Covenants 19:21; 44:3; 55:2.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
4. See Deuteronomy 26:8; 2 Nephi 1:15; Mormon 6:17; Doctrine and Covenants 6:20.
5. See Russell M. Nelson, “Repentance and Conversion,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2007, 103.
6. See, for example, Luke 13:3, 5.
7. See 2 Nephi 9:23; Mosiah 4:6; 3 Nephi 9:22; 27:19.
8. See Russell M. Nelson, “Repentance and Conversion,” 103–4.
9. See 3 Nephi 27:27.
10. See Jude 1:17–21; 2 Nephi 2:25, 27; 28:20; see also 1 Nephi 8:10–12, 21–23; 11:21–22; 12:17; Doctrine and Covenants 10:22; Moses 5:13.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36.
12. The words the Lord has inspired in the revelations and in present-day teachings—higher, holier, accelerate, increase, strengthen, greater, transform, remodel, improve, enhance, change, deepen, stretch—are words of spiritual growth (see Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113–14).
13. We know that “men are free according to the flesh. ... They are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).
14. See 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:18–20.
15. See Jacob 2:35.
16. Letter received Feb. 4, 2019.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 33:7.



“Brethren We Have a Work to Do” & “Let Us Be Men” (Excerpts)

Elder D. Todd Christofferson
General Conference, October 2006
& 2012

Brethren We Have a Work to Do

1. Brethren, much has been said and written in recent years about the challenges of men and boys. A sampling of book titles, for example, includes *Why There Are No Good Men Left*, *The Demise of Guys*, *The End of Men*, *Why Boys Fail*, and *Manning Up*. Interestingly, most of these seem to have been written by women. In any case, a common thread running through these analyses is that in many societies today men and boys get conflicting and demeaning signals about their roles and value in society.

2. The author of *Manning Up* characterized it this way: “It’s been an almost universal rule of civilization that whereas girls became women simply by reaching physical maturity, boys had to pass a test. They needed to demonstrate courage, physical prowess, or mastery of the necessary skills. The goal was to prove their competence as protectors of women and children; this was always their primary social role. Today, however, with women moving ahead in an advanced economy, provider husbands and fathers are now optional, and the character qualities men had needed to play their role—fortitude, stoicism, courage, fidelity—are obsolete and even a little embarrassing.”¹

3. In their zeal to promote opportunity for women, something we applaud, there are those who denigrate men and their contributions. They seem to think of life as a competition between male and female—that one must dominate the other, and now it’s the women’s turn. Some argue that a career is everything and marriage and children should be entirely optional—therefore, why do we need men?² In too many Hollywood films, TV and cable shows, and even commercials, men are portrayed as incompetent, immature, or self-absorbed. This cultural emasculation of males is having a damaging effect. . . .

4. Some men and young men have taken the negative signals as an excuse to avoid responsibility and never really grow up. In an observation that is too of-



ten accurate, one university professor remarked, “The men come into class with their backward baseball caps and [their lame] the ‘word processor ate my homework’ excuses. Meanwhile, the women are checking their day planners and asking for recommendations for law school.”³ One female movie reviewer expressed the rather cynical view that “what we can count on men for, if we’re lucky and we choose to have a partner, is to be just that—a partner. Someone who stands in his own space even as he respects our standing in our own.”⁴

5. Brethren, it cannot be this way with us. As men of the priesthood, we have an essential role to play in society, at home, and in the Church. But we must be men that women can trust, that children can trust, and that God can trust. In the Church and kingdom of God in these latter days, we cannot afford to have boys and men who are drifting. We cannot afford young men who lack self-discipline and live only to be entertained. We cannot afford young adult men who are going nowhere in life, who are not serious about forming families and making a real contribution in this world. We cannot afford husbands and fathers who fail to provide spiritual leadership in the home. We cannot afford to have those who exercise the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God, waste their strength in pornography or spend their lives in cyberspace (ironically being of the world while not being in the world).

6. Brethren, we have work to do.

7. Young men, you need to do well in school and then continue your education beyond high school. Some of you will want to pursue university studies and careers in business, agriculture, government, or other professions. Some will excel in the arts, music, or teaching. Others will choose a military career or learn a trade. Over the years, I have had a number of craftsmen work on projects and repairs at my home, and I have admired the hard work and skill of these men. In whatever you choose, it is essential that you become proficient so that you can support a family and make a contribution for good in your community and your

country.

8. You adult men—fathers, single adults, leaders, home teachers—be worthy models and help the rising generation of boys become men. Teach them social and other skills: how to participate in a conversation, how to get acquainted and interact with others, how to relate to women and girls, how to serve, how to be active and enjoy recreation, how to pursue hobbies without becoming addicted, how to correct mistakes and make better choices.

9. And so to all who are listening, wherever this message may reach you, I say as Jehovah said to Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:6). Take heart and prepare the best you can, whatever your circumstances. Prepare to be a good husband and father; prepare to be a good and productive citizen; prepare to serve the Lord, whose priesthood you hold. Wherever you are, your Heavenly Father is mindful of you. You are not alone, and you have the priesthood and the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . .

10. Of course, as has been repeated by prophets over the years, “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes.”⁵ We have much to do to strengthen marriage in societies that increasingly trivialize its importance and purpose. We have much to do to teach our children “to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28). Our task is nothing less than to help our children experience the mighty change of heart or conversion to the Lord spoken of so eloquently in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 5:1–12; Alma 26). Together with the Relief Society, priesthood quorums can build up parents and marriages, and quorums can provide the blessings of the priesthood to single-parent families.

11. Yes, brethren, we have work to do. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and the good you do. Keep going, and the Lord will help you. At times you may not know quite what to do or what to say—just move forward. Begin to act, and the Lord assures that “an effectual door shall be opened for [you]” (D&C 118:3). Begin to speak, and He promises, “You shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say” (D&C 100:5–6). It is true that we are in many ways ordinary and imperfect, but we have a perfect Master who wrought a perfect Atonement, and we have call upon His grace and His priesthood. As we repent and purge our souls, we are promised that we will be taught and endowed with power from on high (see D&C 43:16).

12. The Church and the world and women are crying for men, men who are developing their capacity and talents, who are willing to work and make sacrifices, who will help others achieve happiness and salvation. They are crying, “Rise up, O men of God!”⁶ God help us to do it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (2011), 16.

2. “When you ask young people today what will make them adults, almost no one mentions marriage. They are far more likely to see issues around work— completing education, financial independence, a full- time job—as the signs that they have arrived. Work, career, independence: these are the primary sources of identity today” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 45). The pressure on women to adopt this anti-marriage ethic is especially intense.

A Times of London contributor wrote: “No one, not my family or my teachers, ever said, ‘Oh yes, and by the way you might want to be a wife and mother too.’ They were so determined we would follow a new, egalitarian, modern path that the historic ambitions of generations of women—to get married and raise a family—were intentionally airbrushed from their vision of our future” (Eleanor Mills, “Learning to Be Left on the Shelf,” *Sunday Times*, Apr. 18, 2010, www.thetimes.co.uk; in Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 72). Another writer in her 40s quoted some responses to an article she wrote about her regrets over not marrying: “I am totally appalled by your need for a man,” “Get some self-esteem!” “You have taken codependency to a whole new low,” and “If my daughter grows up to want a man half as much as you do, I will know that I’ve done something wrong in raising her” (Lori Gottlieb, *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr.*

Good Enough [2010], 55). The good news is that most people, including educated young adults, aren’t buying the anti-marriage, antifamily message. “According to a study by a University of Pennsylvania economist, in the United States in 2008, 86 percent of college-educated white women were married by age 40, compared with 88 percent of those with less than a four-year degree. The numbers for white, college-educated men are similar: 84 percent of them were married by 40 in 2008. The conventional wisdom, not borne out by research, by the way, may have it that marriage is a raw deal for women. But college-educated white women don’t seem to believe it. They are the most likely of any group to think that ‘married people are generally happier than unmarried people.’ . . . The large majority—70 percent—of first-year college students think raising a family is ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to their futures” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 173–74).

3. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Why There Are No Good Men Left: The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (2003), 67.

4. Amanda Dickson, “‘Hunger Games’ Main Character a Heroine for Our Day,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 2, 2012, www.deseretnews.com.

5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.

6. “Rise Up, O Men of God,” Hymns, no. 323.

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Let Us Be Men (excerpts)

1. Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.

2. One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one's knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our family of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.

3. On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally, dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."

4. The prophet Lehi pled with his rebellious sons, saying, "Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men" (2 Nephi 1:21; emphasis added). By age, Laman and Lemuel were men, but in terms of character and spiritual maturity they were still as children. They murmured and complained if asked to do anything hard. They didn't accept anyone's authority to correct them. They didn't value spiritual things. They easily resorted to violence, and they were good at playing the victim.

5. We see some of the same attitudes today. Some act as if a man's highest goal should be his own pleasure. Permissive social mores have "let men off the hook" as it were, so that many think it acceptable to father children out of wedlock and to cohabit rather than marry.¹ Dodging commitments is considered smart, but sacrificing for the good of others, naive. For some, a life of work and

achievement is optional. ...

6. We who hold the priesthood of God cannot afford to drift. We have work to do (see Moroni 9:6). We must arise from the dust of self-indulgence and be men! It is a wonderful aspiration for a boy to become a man—strong and capable; someone who can build and create things, run things; someone who makes a difference in the world. It is a wonderful aspiration for those of us who are older to make the vision of true manhood a reality in our lives and be models for those who look to us for an example.

7. In large measure, true manhood is defined in our relationship to women. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have given us the ideal to pursue in these words:

8. "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. ... By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families."³

9. ... President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking in this meeting in April 1998, gave specific counsel for young men:

10. "The girl you marry will take a terrible chance on you.

... [You] will largely determine the remainder of her life.

11. "Work for an education. Get all the training that you can. The world will largely pay you what it thinks you are worth. Paul did not mince words when he wrote to Timothy, 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' (1 Tim. 5:8)."⁴

12. Integrity is fundamental to being men. Integrity means being truthful, but it also means accepting responsibility and honoring commitments and covenants. President N. Eldon Tanner, a former counselor in the First Presidency and a man of integrity, told of someone who sought his advice:

13. "A young man came to me not long ago and said, 'I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can't make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?'

14. "I looked at him and said, 'Keep your agreement.'

15. "'Even if it costs me my home?'

16. “I said, ‘I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, ... and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.’”⁵

17. Good men sometimes make mistakes. A man of integrity will honestly face and correct his mistakes, and that is an example we can respect. Sometimes men try but fail. Not all worthy objectives are realized despite one’s honest and best efforts. True manhood is not always measured by the fruits of one’s labors but by the labors themselves—by one’s striving.⁶

18. Though he will make some sacrifices and deny himself some pleasures in the course of honoring his commitments, the true man leads a rewarding life. He gives much, but he receives more, and he lives content in the approval of his Heavenly Father. The life of true manhood is the good life.

19. Most importantly, when we consider the admonition to be men, we must think of Jesus Christ. When Pilate brought Jesus forth wearing a crown of thorns, he declared, “Behold the man!” (see John 19:4–5). Pilate may not have fully understood the significance of his own words, but the Lord indeed stood before the people then as He stands today—the highest ideal of manhood. Behold the man!

20. The Lord asked His disciples what manner of men they should be and then answered, “Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27; see also 3 Nephi 18:24). That is our ultimate quest. What did He do that we can emulate as men?

21. Jesus rejected temptation. When confronted by the great tempter himself, Jesus “[yielded] not to the temptation” (Mosiah 15:5). He countered with scripture: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Gospel commandments and standards are our protection also, and like the Savior, we may draw strength from the scriptures to resist temptation.

22. The Savior was obedient. He forsook completely the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) and yielded His will to the Father (see Mosiah 15:7). He was baptized to show “that, according to the flesh he humbled himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7).

23. Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He employed the divine powers of the holy

priesthood to bless those in need, “such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (Mosiah 3:5). Jesus told His

Apostles: “Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44–45). As His fellow servants, we may become great in His kingdom through love and service.

24. The Savior was fearless in opposing evil and error. “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple ... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:12–13). He called upon all to repent (see Matthew 4:17)

and be forgiven (see John 8:11; Alma 5:33). So might we stand firm in defending sacred things and in raising the warning voice.

25. He gave His life to redeem mankind. Surely we can accept responsibility for those He entrusts to our care.

26. Brethren, let us be men, even as He is. ever” (D&C 117:13, 15; emphasis added).

Notes

1. See, for example, James E. Faust, “Challenges Facing the Family,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 1–2; Eduardo Porter and Michelle O’Donnell, “Middle-Aged, No Degree, No Wife,”

2. New York Times, published in Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Aug. 6, 2006, p. A7; Peg Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys,” Newsweek, Jan. 30, 2006, 44–51.

3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.

4. “Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry,” Ensign, May 1998, 49–50.

5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1966, 1137.

6. In the late 1830s, after the Saints had abandoned Kirtland, the Lord called a man named Oliver Granger to go back and try to settle some unfinished matters for the First Presidency. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said: “Therefore, let [Oliver Granger] contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord. ... Therefore let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings of my people be on him forever and ever.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2006/10/let-us-be-men?lang=eng>



Helping Those Who Struggle With Same Gender Attraction

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



1. A pleasant young man in his early 20s sat across from me. He had an engaging smile, although he didn't smile often during our talk. What drew me in was the pain in his eyes.

2. "I don't know if I should remain a member of the Church," he said. "I don't think I'm worthy."

3. "Why wouldn't you be worthy?" I asked.

4. "I'm gay."

5. I suppose he thought I would be startled. I wasn't. "And ... ?" I inquired.

6. A flicker of relief crossed his face as he sensed my continued interest. "I'm not attracted to women. I'm attracted to men. I've tried to ignore these feelings or change them, but..."

7. He sighed. "Why am I this way? The feelings are very real."

8. I paused, then said, "I need a little more information before advising you. You see, same-gender attraction is not a sin, but acting on those feelings is—just as it would be with heterosexual feelings. Do you violate the law of chastity?"

9. He shook his head. "No, I don't."

10. This time I was relieved. "Thank you for wanting to deal with this," I said. "It takes courage to talk about it, and I honor you for keeping yourself clean."

11. "As for why you feel as you do, I can't answer that question. A number of factors may be involved, and they can be as different as people are different. Some things, including the cause of your feelings, we may never know in this life. But knowing why you feel as you do isn't as important as knowing you have not transgressed. If your life is in harmony with the commandments, then you are worthy to serve in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with the members, attend the temple, and receive all the blessings of the Savior's Atonement."

12. He sat up a little straighter. I continued, "You serve yourself poorly when you identify yourself primarily by your sexual feelings. That isn't your only characteristic, so don't give it disproportionate attention. You are first and foremost a son of God, and He loves you."

13. "What's more, I love you. My Brethren among the General Authorities love you. I'm reminded of a comment President Boyd K. Packer made in speaking to those with same-gender attraction. 'We do not reject you,' he said. '... We cannot reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We will not reject you, because we love you.'"

14. We talked for another 30 minutes or so. Knowing I could not be a personal counselor to him, I directed him to his local priesthood leaders. Then we parted. I thought I detected a look of hope in his eyes that had not been there before. Although he yet faced challenges to work through—or simply endure—I had a feeling he would handle them well.

God Loveth His Children.

15. When an angel asked Nephi a question about God, Nephi answered, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17). I too affirm that God loves all His children and acknowledge that many questions, including some related to same-gender attraction, must await a future answer, perhaps in the next life. Unfortunately, some people believe they have all the answers now and declare their opinions far and wide. Fortunately, such people do not speak for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

16. Although I believe members are eager to extend compassion to those different from themselves, it is human nature that when confronted with a situation we don't understand, we tend to withdraw. This is particularly true of same-gender attraction. We have so little reliable information about it that those wanting to

help are left feeling a bit unsteady. Admitting my own inadequacy in this regard but wanting to assist, let me offer some suggestions to help those who have loved ones or friends who are attracted to the same gender. Our Father's Plan of Happiness

17. First, let's be absolutely clear on what God wants for each of us. He wants us to have all of the blessings of eternal life. He wants us to become like Him. To help us do that, He has given us a plan. This plan is based on eternal truths and is not altered according to the social trends of the day.

18. At the heart of this plan is the begetting of children, one of the crucial reasons Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden (see 2 Nephi 2:19–25; Moses 5:10–12). They were commanded to “be fruitful, and multiply” (Moses 2:28), and they chose to keep that commandment. We are to follow them in marrying and providing physical bodies for Heavenly Father's spirit children. Obviously, a same- gender relationship is inconsistent with this plan.

19. For various reasons, marriage and children are not immediately available to all. Perhaps no offer of marriage is forthcoming. Perhaps even after marriage there is an inability to have children. Or perhaps there is no present attraction to the opposite gender. Whatever the reason, God's richest blessings will eventually be available to all of His children if they are clean and faithful.

20. Through the exercise of faith, individual effort, and reliance upon the power of the Atonement, some may overcome same-gender attraction in mortality and marry. Others, however, may never be free of same- gender attraction in this life.

21. As fellow Church members, families, and friends, we need to recognize that those attracted to the same gender face some unique restrictions regarding expression of their feelings. While same-gender attraction is real, there must be no physical expression of this attraction. The desire for physical gratification does not authorize immorality by anyone. Such feelings can be powerful, but they are never so strong as to deprive anyone of the freedom to choose worthy conduct.

22. In saying this, let me make it clear that attractions alone, troublesome as they may be, do not make one unworthy. The First Presidency has stated,

“There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior.” If you do not act on temptations, you have not transgressed. The failure to see that distinction sometimes leads to despair. I ache for those who do not understand that every blessing offered by God is available to anyone who obeys the laws upon which those blessings are predicated (see D&C 130:20– 21). No one who lives the gospel should despair. Hope and peace come from the Comforter, and the answer to despair is to invite the Holy Ghost into our lives.

Ways to Help.

23. Let's assume you are the family member or friend of someone with same-gender attraction who comes to you for help. What do you say? What do you do?

24. I'd begin by recognizing the courage that brought your son, daughter, sibling, or friend to you. I'd recognize the trust that person has extended. Discussing the issue with someone of trust is a healthy first step to dealing with confusing feelings, and it is imperative that these first steps be met with compassion.

25. Next, if you are a parent of one with same-gender attraction, don't assume you are the reason for those feelings. No one, including the one struggling, should try to shoulder blame. Nor should anyone place blame on another—including God. Walk by faith, and help your loved one deal the best he or she can with this challenge.

26. In doing so, recognize that marriage is not an all- purpose solution. Same-gender attractions run deep, and trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them. We are all thrilled when some who struggle with these feelings are able to marry, raise children, and achieve family happiness. But other attempts have resulted in broken hearts and broken homes.

27. Above all, keep your lines of communication open. Open communication between parents and children is a clear expression of love, and pure love, generously expressed, can transform family ties. But love for a family member does not extend to condoning unrighteous behavior. Your children are welcome to stay

in your home, of course, but you have every right to exclude from your dwelling any behavior that offends the Spirit of the Lord.

The Garden Principle

28. Next, consider a principle learned in gardening. Someone said that if we plant a garden with good seed, there will not be so much need of the hoe. Likewise, if we fill our lives with spiritual nourishment, we can more easily gain control over inclinations. This means creating a positive environment in our homes in which the Spirit is abundantly evident. A positive environment includes consistent private and public worship, prayer, fasting, scripture reading, service, and exposure to uplifting conversation, music, literature, and other media.

29. This same environment extends to experiences at church. Some with same-gender attractions have unresolved fears and are offended at church when no offense is intended. On the other hand, some members exclude from their circle of fellowship those who are different. When our actions or words discourage someone from taking full advantage of Church membership, we fail them—and the Lord. The Church is made stronger as we include every member and strengthen one another in service and love (see D&C 84:110).

30. You may feel prompted to encourage the one you are trying to help to visit with a priesthood leader who holds the keys of inspired counsel. Please do so, knowing that the First Presidency has asked Church leaders to discuss these matters confidentially and in a spirit of Christlike love.

In the Lord's Hands

31. Not long ago I received a letter from a man in his early 30s who struggles with same-gender attraction. His struggle has not been easy, and he has not yet married. But, he wrote, “the Lord has helped me face my current circumstances, and I am content to do my best and leave my life in His hands.”

32. I weep with admiration and respect at the faith and courage of such a man who is living with a challenge I have never faced. I love him and the thousands like him, male or female, who “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12). I commend his attitude to all who struggle with—or who are helping others who struggle with—same-gender attraction.

Notes

1. “Ye Are the Temple of God,” Liahona, Jan. 2001, 87; Ensign, Nov. 2000, 74.
2. First Presidency letter, Nov. 14, 1991.
3. See First Presidency letter, Nov. 14, 1991.

churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2007/10/helping-those-who-struggle-with-same-gender-attraction?lang=eng

Unit 2 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Oaks & Elder Wickman, “Same Gender Attraction Interview”

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>

First Presidency Letter and Statement on Same-Sex Marriage

<https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2015-07-09/letter-from-first-presidency-regarding-same-sex-marriage-32545>

Elder Richard G. Scott, “Finding Happiness”

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-g-scott-finding-happiness/>

Elder Boyd K. Packer, “For Time and All Eternity”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1993/10/for-time-and-all-eternity?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1993/10/for-time-and-all-eternity?lang=eng>

“The Divine Institution of Marriage” LDS Newsroom

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage>

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 3 Scriptures

The covenants and ordinances of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are necessary for obtaining eternal life

Mosiah 18:9-11

9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

11 And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.

Exodus 19:3-6

3 And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

D&C 84:19-22

19 And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

20 Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

21 And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is

not manifest unto men in the flesh;

22 For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

D&C 84:33-39

33 For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

34 They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

35 And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

36 For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;

37 And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;

38 And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

39 And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood.

D&C 109: 1, 14-15, 21-24

1 Thanks be to thy name, O Lord God of Israel, who keepest covenant and showest mercy unto thy servants who walk uprightly before thee, with all their hearts—

14 And do thou grant, Holy Father, that all those who shall worship in this house may be taught words of wisdom out of the best books, and that they may seek learning even by study, and also by faith, as thou hast said;

15 And that they may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost, and be organized according to thy laws, and be prepared to obtain every needful thing;

21 And when thy people transgress, any of them, they may speedily repent and return unto thee, and find favor in thy sight, and be restored to the blessings which thou hast ordained to be poured out upon those who shall reverence thee in thy house.

22 And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them;

23 And from this place they may bear exceedingly great and glorious tidings, in truth, unto the ends of the earth, that they may know that this is thy work, and that thou hast put forth thy hand, to fulfil that

which thou hast spoken by the mouths of the prophets, concerning the last days.

24 We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house, to all generations and for eternity;

Abraham 2:8-11

8 My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.

9 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;

10 And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;

11 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.

Entering the new and everlasting covenant of marriage is necessary for eternal life.

D&C 131:1-4

1 In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

2 And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this border of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

3 And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

4 He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.

D&C 132:15-17; 19-20

15 Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when

they are out of the world.

16 Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

17 For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever.

19 And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb's Book of Life . . . in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

20 Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.

Sacred ordinances performed in holy temples make it possible for deceased family members to receive the blessings of salvation

D&C 2:1-3

1 Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

2 And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

3 If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.

18 I might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands. It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

24 Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand; and who can abide the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of allacceptation.

JSH 1: 72-74

72 The messenger who visited us on this occasion and conferred this Priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us, and that I should be called the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second. It was 77 on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized.

73 Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.

74 Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of. In the meantime, we were forced to keep secret the circumstances of having received the Priesthood and our having been baptized, owing to a spirit of persecution which had already manifested itself in the neighborhood.

Compilation of Quotes on the Importance of a Physical Body

1. “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. ...
2. “The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”
3. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 211, 214.)
4. “Satan does not have a body, and his eternal progress has been halted. Just as water flowing in a riverbed is stopped by a dam, so the adversary’s eternal progress is thwarted because he does not have a physical body. Because of his rebellion, Lucifer has denied himself all of the mortal blessings and experiences made possible through a tabernacle of flesh and bones. He cannot learn the lessons that only an embodied spirit can learn. He cannot marry or enjoy the blessings of procreation and family life. He cannot abide the reality of a literal and universal resurrection of all mankind. One of the potent scriptural meanings of the word damned is illustrated in his inability to continue developing and becoming like our Heavenly Father...
5. “I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls. The concerns I raise are not new; they apply equally to other types of media, such as television, movies, and music. But in a cyber world, these challenges are more pervasive and intense. I plead with you to beware of the sense-dulling and spiritually destructive influence of cyberspace technologies that are used to produce high fidelity and that promote degrading and evil purposes.
6. “If the adversary cannot entice us to misuse our physical bodies, then one of his most potent tactics is to beguile you and me as embodied spirits to disconnect gradually and physically from things as they really are.” (David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” *Ensign*, June 2010, 16)
7. 6 “.....Have we ever really considered why having a physical body is so important? Now, I know we can all say the right words when answering the question about why we are here on the earth, but do we really understand why a body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness?...I would like for us to dig a bit deeper into this eternally, important question about why a body is so important. Ultimately the answer affects everything we do: what we think, how we act, where we go, what we eat, what we drink, and what we wear and how we look.
8. “Now, I do not claim to know the complete answer to the question of why a physical body is so important. But let me share with you a few basic reasons why a body is essential to our spiritual development and our eternal progression.
9. “Reason no. 1. Obtaining a tabernacle of flesh is an essential step in the process of becoming like our Heavenly Father. Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, depth, and intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate... Thus, our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and respond to truth, and our ability to obey the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ are amplified through our physical bodies. In this classroom of mortality we experience tenderness, kindness, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, and even the challenges of physical limitations in ways that prepare us for eternity. Simply stated, there are lessons we must learn and experiences we must have, as the scriptures describe, ‘according to the flesh’ (1 Ne. 19:6; Alma 7:12–13).
10. “Reason no. 2. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son are, by nature, creators. As the sons and daughters of God, we have the potential to become like Them. The Father and the Son have entrusted us with a portion of Their creative power and provided specific guidelines for the proper use of that sacred ability to create life and establish an eternal family. How we feel about and use that sacred power in this life will determine in large measure whether additional creative power will be ours in the life to come.
11. “Reason no. 3. As we attempt to answer the question about why we are here on the earth... please consider carefully the following statement by Presi-

- dent Brigham Young (1801–77): ‘The spirit is pure, and under the special control and influence of the Lord, but the body is of the earth, and is subject to the power of the Devil, and is under the mighty influence of that fallen nature that is of the earth. If the spirit yields to the body, the Devil then has power to overcome the body and spirit of that man, and he loses both.
12. “‘Recollect, brethren and sisters, every one of you, that when evil is suggested to you, when it arises in your hearts, it is through the temporal organization. When you are tempted, buffeted, and step out of the way inadvertently; when you are overtaken in a fault, or commit an overt act unthinkingly; when you are full of evil passion, and wish to yield to it, then stop and let the spirit, which God has put into your tabernacles, take the lead. If you do that, I will promise that you will overcome all evil, and obtain eternal lives. But many, very many, let the spirit yield to the body, and are overcome and destroyed’ (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1941], 70).
 13. “The precise nature of the test of mortality, then, can be summarized in the following questions: Will my body rule over my spirit, or will my spirit rule over my body? Will I yield to the enticings of the natural man or to the eternal man? That, brothers and sisters, is the test. We are here on the earth to develop godlike qualities and to learn to bridle all of the passions of the flesh (see Alma 38:12).
 14. “Interestingly, I have heard many people, both outside and inside the Church, declare, “It’s my body and I can do to it what I want.” The correct doctrinal response to such a statement is quite simple. No, your body is not your own; it is on loan from God....
 15. “Because the physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, we should not be surprised that Lucifer seeks to thwart our progression by enticing us to use our bodies improperly. It is to me one of the ultimate ironies of eternity that the adversary, who is miserable because he has no physical body and therefore cannot progress, seeks to make us miserable ‘like unto himself’ (2 Ne. 2:27) through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have and cannot use thus is the primary instrument through which he attempts to lure us to spiritual destruction.
 16. Remember, our bodies are not our own; they are on loan from God. Indeed, they are temples, and the Spirit of the Lord should dwell therein and shine through. And, may I quickly add, it is harder for the Spirit to shine in and through our physical bodies when we are dozy and dull from foolishly going to bed at 1:30 A.M. or 2:30 A.M. or later night after night after night (see D&C 88:124). (David A. Bednar, “Ye Are the Temple of God,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2001)
 17. “If the body is intrinsically good, why then do the scriptures speak of the evil of being carnally minded and of the hostility between flesh and spirit? (See, for example, 2 Ne. 9:39; Rom. 8:5–7.) To understand this, we need to attend to what the prophets mean by such terms as carnal, natural man, and the flesh. As scripture uses the term, man’s carnal nature is not the same as his physical nature, nor are sins of the flesh only those relating to our physical bodies. Paul lists among the ‘works of the flesh’ many sins that have little to do with the body and much to do with the spirit—for example, idolatry, hatred, heresies, and envyings. (Gal. 5:19–21.) He seems to equate flesh with what King Mosiah calls ‘the natural man’—that lower, fallen part of our natures which tends to take us away from God. (Mosiah 3:19.) Likewise, to be in a ‘carnal state’ is not simply to have a physical body but to be ‘carnally minded’—or full of evil desires. We become ‘carnal’ not by acquiring bodies (if so, children would be sinful!) but by loving evil. (Moses 5:13.) The body itself is not evil, though having a body introduces the potential for doing evil. Evil rises out of how we use the body—or rather abuse it. One of the challenges of mortality is for the spirit to learn to appropriately control the body....
 18. “The intense physical pleasure the earth affords is deliberate; God intends food to taste good, landscapes to please the eye, smells to gladden the heart. Such great gifts, however, can be abused. This is the connotation of the telling word extortion—which literally means to ‘twist out.’ Our use of the physical world and the body must not be twisted out of the divinely ordained purposes for which they were given. Physical pleasure is good in its proper time and place, but even then it must not become our god.” (John S. Tanner, “The Body as a Blessing,” *Ensign*, July 1993)
 19. “Of all the creations of the Almighty, there is none more beautiful, none more inspiring than a lovely daughter of God who walks in virtue with

an understanding of why she should do so, who honors and respects her body as a thing sacred and divine, who cultivates her mind and constantly enlarges the horizon of her understanding, who nurtures her spirit with everlasting truth” (Gordon, B. Hinckley, “Our Responsibility to Our Young Women,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1988, 11).

20. “With your body being such a vital part of God’s eternal plan, it is little wonder that the Apostle Paul described it as a ‘temple of God’ [1 Corinthians 3:16; see also 6:19]. Each time you look in the mirror, see your body as your temple. That truth—refreshed gratefully each day—can positively influence your decisions about how you will care for your body and how you will use it.” (Pres. Russell M. Nelson, “Decisions for Eternity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 107.)
21. “As God and Christ are deserving of our reverence, so Their works are deserving of our respect and reverence. That of course includes the marvelous creation that is this earth. And yet as wonderful as this earth is, it is not the greatest of God’s creations. Greater still is this marvelous physical body. It is in the very likeness of the person of God. It is essential to our earthly experience and key to our everlasting glory.
22. “How are we to preserve the sanctity of this most important and sacred of God’s creations? At a minimum, we would not in any way defile our bodies.” (Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “A Sense of the Sacred”, Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 7, 2004, 3–4, speeches.byu.edu.)
23. “[Satan] tempts many to defile this great gift of the body through unchastity, immodesty, self-indulgence, and addictions. He 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.” (Susan W. Tanner, former Young Women General President, “The Sanctity of the Body,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 13.)
24. “In this same vein may I address an even more sensitive subject. I plead with you young women to please be more accepting of yourselves, including your body shape and style, with a little less longing to look like someone else. We are all different. Some are tall, and some are short. Some are round,

and some are thin. And almost everyone at some time or other wants to be something they are not! But as one adviser to teenage girls said: ‘You can’t live your life worrying that the world is staring at you. When you let people’s opinions make you self-conscious you give away your power. ... The key to feeling [confident] is to always listen to your inner self—[the real you.]’ And in the kingdom of God, the real you is ‘more precious than rubies.’ Every young woman is a child of destiny and every adult woman a powerful force for good. I mention adult women because, sisters, you are our greatest examples and resource for these young women. And if you are obsessing over being a size 2, you won’t be very surprised when your daughter or the Mia Maid in your class does the same and makes herself physically ill trying to accomplish it. We should all be as fit as we can be—that’s good Word of Wisdom doctrine. That means eating right and exercising and helping our bodies function at their optimum strength. We could probably all do better in that regard. But I speak here of optimum health; there is no universal optimum size.

25. “Frankly, the world has been brutal with you in this regard. You are bombarded in movies, television, fashion magazines, and advertisements with the message that looks are everything! The pitch is, ‘If your looks are good enough, your life will be glamorous, and you will be happy and popular.’ That kind of pressure is immense in the teenage years, to say nothing of later womanhood. In too many cases too much is being done to the human body to meet just such a fictional (to say nothing of superficial) standard.
26. “Be a woman of Christ. Cherish your esteemed place in the sight of God. He needs you. This Church needs you. The world needs you. A woman’s abiding trust in God and unfailing devotion to things of the Spirit have always been an anchor when the wind and the waves of life were fiercest.” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “To Young Women,” General Conference, Oct. 2005)



“Come, Follow Me”

President Russell M. Nelson
General Conference, April 2019



1. My beloved brothers and sisters, my wife Wendy and I rejoice in being with you on this Sabbath morning. Much has happened since our last general conference. New temples have been dedicated in Concepción, Chile; Barranquilla, Colombia; and Rome, Italy. We experienced a rich outpouring of the Spirit at these sacred events.
2. I congratulate the many women (and men) who have recently read the Book of Mormon and discovered joy and hidden treasures. I am inspired by reports about miracles received.
3. I marvel at 11-year-old young men who, now as deacons, worthily pass the sacrament each Sunday. They go to the temple along with our 11-year-old young women, who are now eagerly learning and serving as Beehives. Both young men and young women are preaching gospel truths with clarity and conviction.
4. I rejoice with children and youth who are helping to teach the gospel in their homes as they work with their parents to follow the home-centered, Church-supported curriculum.
5. We received this photo of four-year-old Blake, who, early on a Saturday morning, grabbed a Church book and exclaimed, “I need to feed my spirit!”
6. Blake, we are thrilled with you and others who are choosing to feed their spirits by feasting on the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. And we delight in knowing that many are receiving the power of God in their lives as they worship and serve in the temple.
7. As many of you know, our family experienced a tender separation three months ago when our daughter Wendy departed from this mortal life. In the final days of her battle with cancer, I was blessed with the opportunity to have our farewell daddy-daughter conversation.
8. I held her hands and told her how much I loved her and how grateful I was to be her father. I said: “You married in the temple and faithfully honored your covenants. You and your husband welcomed seven children into your home and raised them to be devout disciples of Jesus Christ, valiant Church members, and contributing citizens. And they have chosen spouses of that same caliber. Your daddy is very, very proud of you. You have brought me much joy!”
9. She quietly responded, “Thank you, Daddy.”
10. It was a tender, tearful moment for us. During her 67 years, we worked together, sang together, and often skied together. But that evening, we talked of things that matter most, such as covenants, ordinances, obedience, faith, family, fidelity, love, and eternal life.
11. We miss our daughter greatly. However, because of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not worry about her. As we continue to honor our covenants with God, we live in anticipation of our being with her again. Meanwhile, we’re serving the Lord here and she is serving Him there—in paradise.¹
12. Actually, my wife and I visited Paradise earlier this year—Paradise, California, that is. As it happened, our scheduled visit there came less than 40 hours after our daughter departed from this world. We, along with Elder Kevin W. Pearson and his wife, June, were bolstered by the Saints of the Chico California Stake. We learned of their great faith, their ministering, and the miracles that occurred even amidst their devastating losses from the most destructive wildfire in the history of California.
13. While there, we spoke at length with a young police officer, John, who was one of many brave first responders. He recalled the thick darkness that descended upon Paradise on November 8, 2018, as flames and embers raced through the town, devouring property and possessions like a scourge and leaving nothing but piles of ash and stark brick chimneys.
14. For 15 hours, John drove through an impenetrable darkness that was streaked with javelins of threatening embers as he helped person after person, family after family escape to safety—all at the peril

of his own life. Yet during that strenuous ordeal, what terrified John most was his all-consuming question: “Where is my family?” After many long, terrifying hours of anguish, he finally learned of their safe evacuation.

15. The account of John’s concern for his family has prompted me to speak today with those of you who may ask when approaching the end of your mortal life, “Where is my family?” In that coming day when you will complete your mortal probation and enter the spirit world, you will be brought face-to-face with that heart-wrenching question: “Where is my family?”
16. Jesus Christ teaches the way back to our eternal home. He understands our Heavenly Father’s plan of eternal progression better than any of us. After all, He is the keystone of it all. He is our Redeemer, our Healer, and our Savior.
17. Ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, Jesus the Christ has offered His mighty arm to help all who choose to follow Him. Repeatedly, scriptures record that despite all kinds of sins from all kinds of people, His arms are outstretched still.²
18. The spirit in each of us naturally yearns for family love to last forever. Love songs perpetuate a false hope that love is all you need if you want to be together forever. And some erroneously believe that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a promise that all people will be with their loved ones after death.
19. In truth, the Savior Himself has made it abundantly clear that while His Resurrection assures that every person who ever lived will indeed be resurrected and live forever,³ much more is required if we want to have the high privilege of exaltation. Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.
20. Listen to these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to His prophet: “All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.”⁴
21. So, what is required for a family to be exalted forever? We qualify for that privilege by making covenants with God, keeping those covenants, and receiving essential ordinances.
22. This has been true since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, Abraham and Sarah, Lehi and Sariah, and all other devoted disciples of Jesus Christ—since the world was created—have made the same covenants with God. They have received the same ordinances that we as members of the Lord’s restored Church today have made: those covenants that we receive at baptism and in the temple.
23. The Savior invites all to follow Him into the waters of baptism and, in time, to make additional covenants with God in the temple and receive and be faithful to those further essential ordinances. All these are required if we want to be exalted with our families and with God forever.
24. The anguish of my heart is that many people whom I love, whom I admire, and whom I respect decline His invitation. They ignore the pleadings of Jesus Christ when He beckons, “Come, follow me.”⁵
25. I understand why God weeps.⁶ I also weep for such friends and relatives. They are wonderful men and women, devoted to their family and civic responsibilities. They give generously of their time, energy, and resources. And the world is better for their efforts. But they have chosen not to make covenants with God. They have not received the ordinances that will exalt them with their families and bind them together forever.⁷
26. How I wish I could visit with them and invite them to consider seriously the enabling laws of the Lord. I’ve wondered what I could possibly say so they would feel how much the Savior loves them and know how much I love them and come to recognize how covenant-keeping women and men can receive a “fulness of joy.”⁸
27. They need to understand that while there is a place for them hereafter—with wonderful men and women who also chose not to make covenants with God—that is not the place where families will be reunited and be given the privilege to live and progress forever. That is not the kingdom where they will experience the fulness of joy—of never-ending progression and happiness.⁹ Those consummate blessings can come only by living in an exalted celestial realm with God, our Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and our wonderful, worthy, and qualified family members.
28. I feel to say to my reticent friends:
29. “In this life, you have never settled for second best

in anything. Yet, as you resist fully embracing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are choosing to settle for second best.

30. “The Savior said, ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’¹⁰ However, as you choose not to make covenants with God, you are settling for a most meager roof over your head throughout all eternity.”
31. I would further entreat my reticent friends by saying:
32. “Pour out your heart to God. Ask Him if these things are true. Make time to study His words. Really study! If you truly love your family and if you desire to be exalted with them throughout eternity, pay the price now—through serious study and fervent prayer—to know these eternal truths and then to abide by them.
33. “If you are not sure you even believe in God, start there. Understand that in the absence of experiences with God, one can doubt the existence of God. So, put yourself in a position to begin having experiences with Him. Humble yourself. Pray to have eyes to see God’s hand in your life and in the world around you. Ask Him to tell you if He is really there—if He knows you. Ask Him how He feels about you. And then listen.”
34. One such dear friend of mine had limited experiences with God. But he longed to be with his departed wife. So he asked me to help him. I encouraged him to meet with our missionaries in order to understand the doctrine of Christ and learn of gospel covenants, ordinances, and blessings.
35. That he did. But he felt the course they advised would require him to make too many changes in his life. He said, “Those commandments and covenants are just too difficult for me. Also, I can’t possibly pay tithing, and I don’t have time to serve in the Church.” Then he asked me, “Once I die, please do the necessary temple work for my wife and me so that we can be together again.”
36. Thankfully, I am not this man’s judge. But I do question the efficacy of proxy temple work for a man who had the opportunity to be baptized in this life—to be ordained to the priesthood and receive temple blessings while here in mortality—but who made the conscious decision to reject that course.
37. 30 My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love. He

invites us to “come, follow me.”

38. Now, as President of His Church, I plead with you who have distanced yourselves from the Church and with you who have not yet really sought to know that the Savior’s Church has been restored. Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.
39. I testify that God lives! Jesus is the Christ. His Church and the fulness of His gospel have been restored to bless our lives with joy, here and hereafter. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Alma 40:12–14.
2. See Jeremiah 27:5; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; Alma 5:33; 3 Nephi 9:14.
3. The Resurrection will come to all because of Christ’s victory over death (see Alma 11:41–45; 40; Doctrine and Covenants 76; Moses 7:62).
4. Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
5. Luke 18:22.
6. See John 11:35; Moses 7:28–29.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–70.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.
9. See Mosiah 2:41; Alma 28:12.
10. John 14:2.



The Power of Covenants

Elder D. Todd Christofferson Ensign,
May 2009, 19-32

1. May I extend a warm and sincere welcome to Elder Neil L. Andersen to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He is a worthy and welcome addition.
2. On August 15, 2007, Peru suffered a massive earthquake that all but destroyed the coastal cities of Pisco and Chincha. Like many other Church leaders and members, Wenceslao Conde, the president of the Balconcito Branch of the Church in Chincha, immediately set about helping others whose homes were damaged.
3. Four days after the earthquake, Elder Marcus B. Nash of the Seventy was in Chincha helping to coordinate the Church's relief efforts there and met President Conde. As they talked about the destruction that had occurred and what was being done to help the victims, President Conde's wife, Pamela, approached carrying one of her small children. Elder Nash asked Sister Conde how her children were. With a smile, she replied that through the goodness of God they were all safe and well. He asked about the Condes' home.
4. "It's gone," she said simply.
5. "What about your belongings?" he inquired.
6. "Everything was buried in the rubble of our home," Sister Conde replied.
7. "And yet," Elder Nash noted, "you are smiling as we talk."
8. "Yes," she said, "I have prayed and I am at peace. We have all we need. We have each other, we have our children, we are sealed in the temple, we have this marvelous Church, and we have the Lord. We can build again with the Lord's help."
9. This tender demonstration of faith and spiritual strength is repeated in the lives of Saints across the world in many different settings. It is a simple illustration of a profound power that is much needed in our day and that will become increasingly crucial in days ahead.
10. We need strong Christians who can persevere against hardship, who can sustain hope through tragedy, who can lift others by their example and their compassion, and who can consistently overcome temptations. We need strong Christians who can make important things happen by their faith and who can defend the truth



of Jesus Christ against moral relativism and militant atheism.

11. What is the source of such moral and spiritual power, and how do we obtain it? The source is God. Our access to that power is through our covenants with Him. A covenant is an agreement between God and man, an accord whose terms are set by God (see Bible Dictionary, "Covenant," 651). In these divine agreements, God binds Himself to sustain, sanctify, and exalt us in return for our commitment to serve Him and keep His commandments.
12. We enter into covenants by priesthood ordinances, sacred rituals that God has ordained for us to manifest our commitment. Our foundational covenant, for example, the one in which we first pledge our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ, is confirmed by the ordinance of baptism. It is done individually, by name. By this ordinance, we become part of the covenant people of the Lord and heirs of the celestial kingdom of God.
13. Other sacred ordinances are performed in temples built for that very purpose. If we are faithful to the covenants made there, we become inheritors not only of the celestial kingdom but of exaltation, the highest glory within the heavenly kingdom, and we obtain all the divine possibilities God can give (see D&C 132:20).
14. The scriptures speak of the new and everlasting covenant. The new and everlasting covenant is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, the doctrines and commandments of the gospel constitute the substance of an everlasting covenant between God and man that is newly restored in each dispensation. If we were to state the new and everlasting covenant in one sentence it would be this: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
15. Jesus explained what it means to believe in Him: "Now this is the commandment [or in other words, this is the covenant]: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20).

16. What is it about making and keeping covenants with God that gives us the power to smile through hardships, to convert tribulation into triumph, to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, ... and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27)?

Strengthened by Gifts and Blessings

17. First, as we walk in obedience to the principles and commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we enjoy a continual flow of blessings promised by God in His covenant with us. Those blessings provide the resources we need to act rather than simply be acted upon as we go through life.¹ For example, the Lord’s commandments in the Word of Wisdom regarding the care of our physical bodies bless us first and foremost with “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 89:19). Furthermore, they lead to a generally more healthy life and freedom from destructive addictions. Obedience gives us greater control over our lives, greater capacity to come and go, to work and create. Of course, age, accident, and illnesses inevitably take their toll, but even so, our obedience to this gospel law enhances our capacity to deal with these challenges.

18. In the covenant path we find a steady supply of gifts and help. “Charity never faileth” (1 Corinthians 13:8; Moroni 7:46), love begets love, compassion begets compassion, virtue begets virtue, commitment begets loyalty, and service begets joy. We are part of a covenant people, a community of Saints who encourage, sustain, and minister to one another. As Nephi explained, “And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them” (1 Nephi 17:3).²

Strengthened with Increased Faith

19. All this is not to say that life in the covenant is free of challenge or that the obedient soul should be surprised if disappointments or even disasters interrupt his peace. If you feel that personal righteousness should preclude all loss and suffering, you might want to have a chat with Job.

20. This brings us to a second way in which our covenants supply strength—they produce the faith necessary to persevere and to do all things that are expedient in the Lord. Our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ and keep His commandments requires a degree of faith, but as we honor our covenants, that faith expands. In the first place, the promised fruits of obedience become evident, which confirms our faith. Secondly, the Spirit communicates God’s pleasure, and we feel secure in His continued

blessing and help. Thirdly, come what may, we can face life with hope and equanimity, knowing that we will succeed in the end because we have God’s promise to us individually, by name, and we know He cannot lie (see Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12).

21. Early Church leaders in this dispensation confirmed that adhering to the covenant path provides the reassurance we need in times of trial:

22. “It was [the knowledge that their course in life conformed to the will of God] that enabled the ancient saints to endure all their afflictions and persecutions, and to take ... not only the spoiling of their goods, and the wasting of their substance, joyfully, but also to suffer death in its most horrid forms; knowing (not merely believing) that when this earthly house of their tabernacle was dissolved, they had a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1.)” (Lectures on Faith [1985], 67).

23. They further pointed out that in offering whatever sacrifice God may require of us, we obtain the witness of the Spirit that our course is right and pleasing to God (see Lectures on Faith, 69–71). With that knowledge, our faith becomes unbounded, having the assurance that God will in due time turn every affliction to our gain. Some of you have been sustained by that faith as you have endured those who point fingers of scorn from the “great and spacious building” and cry, “Shame!” (see 1 Nephi 8:26–27), and you have stood firm with Peter and the Apostles of old, “rejoicing that [you] were counted worthy to suffer shame for [Christ’s] name” (Acts 5:41).

24. The Lord said of the Church: “Verily I say unto you, all among them who ... are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.

25. “For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit” (D&C 97:8–9).

26. The Apostle Paul understood that one who has entered into a covenant with God is both given the faith to face trials and gains even greater faith through those trials. Of his personal “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), he observed:

27. “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

28. “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

29. “Therefore I take pleasure in [my] infirmities,

in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:8–10).³

Strengthened through the "Power of Godliness"

30. We have considered, first, the empowering blessings and, second, the endowment of faith that God grants to those who keep their covenants with Him. A final aspect of strength through covenants that I will mention is the bestowal of divine power. Our covenant commitment to Him permits our Heavenly Father to let His divine influence, "the power of godliness" (D&C 84:20), flow into our lives. He can do that because by our participation in priesthood ordinances we exercise our agency and elect to receive it. Our participation in those ordinances also demonstrates that we are prepared to accept the additional responsibility that comes with added light and spiritual power.

31. In all the ordinances, especially those of the temple, we are endowed with power from on high.⁴

This "power of godliness" comes in the person and by the influence of the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Holy Ghost is part of the new and everlasting covenant. It is an essential part of our baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. It is the messenger of grace by which the blood of Christ is applied to take away our sins and sanctify

us (see 2 Nephi 31:17). It is the gift by which Adam was "quickened in the inner man" (Moses 6:65). It was by the Holy Ghost that the ancient Apostles endured all that they endured and by their priesthood keys carried the gospel to the known world of their day.

32. When we have entered into divine covenants, the Holy Ghost is our comforter, our guide, and our companion. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are "the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment" (Moses 6:61). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are testimony, faith, knowledge, wisdom, revelations, miracles, healing, and charity, to name but a few (see D&C 46:13–26).

33. It is the Holy Ghost that bears witness of your words when you teach and testify. It is the Holy Ghost that, as you speak in hostile venues, puts into your heart what you should say and fulfills the Lord's promise that "you shall not be confounded before men" (D&C 100:5). It is the Holy Ghost that reveals how you may clear the next seemingly

insurmountable hurdle. It is by the Holy Ghost in you that others may feel the pure love of Christ and receive strength to press forward. It is also the Holy Ghost, in His character as the Holy Spirit of Promise, that confirms the validity and efficacy of your covenants and seals God's promises upon you.⁵

34. Divine covenants make strong Christians. I urge each one to qualify for and receive all the priesthood ordinances you can and then faithfully keep the promises you have made by covenant. In times of distress, let your covenants be paramount and let your obedience be exact. Then you can ask in faith, nothing wavering, according to your need, and God will answer. He will sustain you as you work and watch. In His own time and way He will stretch forth his hand to you, saying, "Here am I." I testify that in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is found the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances by which we can enter into binding covenants with our Heavenly Father in the name of His Holy Son. I testify that God will keep His promises to you as you honor your covenants with Him. He will bless you in "good measure, pressed down, ... shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). He will strengthen and finish your faith. He will, by His Holy Spirit, fill you with godly power. I pray that you will always have His Spirit to be with you to guide you and deliver you from want, anxiety, and distress. I pray that through your covenants, you may become a powerful instrument for good in the hands of Him who is our Lord and Redeemer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

35. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed, "As God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, He never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of His law and ordinances" (History of the Church, 5:135).

36. Some see only sacrifice and limitations in obedience to the commandments of the new and everlasting covenant, but those who live the experience—who give themselves freely and unreservedly to the covenant life—find greater liberty and fulfillment. When we truly understand, we seek more commandments, not fewer. Each new law or commandment we learn and live is like one more rung or step on a ladder that enables us to climb higher and higher. Truly, the gospel life is the good life.

37. The Apostle James taught the same lesson:

38. As the Prophet Joseph petitioned in the prayer dedicating the Kirtland Temple, which prayer was revealed to him by the Lord, “We ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them” (D&C 109:22).

39. In the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer referenced earlier, the Prophet petitioned, “And do thou grant, Holy Father, that all those who shall worship in this house... may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 109:14–15). The “fulness of the Holy Ghost” includes what Jesus described as “the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom; which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son” (D&C 88:4–5).

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Let This House Be Built unto My Name

Elder David A. Bednar

General Conference April 2020



1. In the Sacred Grove 200 years ago, young Joseph Smith saw and talked with God, the Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. From Them, Joseph learned about the true nature of the Godhead and of ongoing revelation as this supernal vision ushered in the latter-day “dispensation of the fulness of times.”¹
 2. Approximately three years later, in response to earnest prayer on the evening of September 21, 1823, Joseph’s bedroom filled with light until it was “lighter than at noonday.”² A personage appeared at his bedside, called the young boy by name, and declared “he was a messenger sent from the presence of God ... and that his name was Moroni.”³ He instructed Joseph about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.
 3. And then Moroni quoted from the book of Malachi in the Old Testament, with a little variation in the language used in the King James Version:
 4. “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. ...
 5. “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”⁴
 6. Importantly, Moroni’s instruction to Joseph Smith about Elijah’s mission initiated temple and family history work in the latter days and was a key element in restoring “all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”⁵
 7. I pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost as we learn together about the covenants, ordinances, and blessings that are available to us in the temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- The Return of Elijah**
8. I begin by asking a fundamental question: why was the return of Elijah important?
 9. “We learn from latter-day revelation that Elijah held the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood”⁶ and “was the last prophet to do so before the time of Jesus Christ.”⁷
 10. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the ... fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood ... ; and to ... obtain ... all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers, even those who are in heaven.”⁸
 11. This sacred sealing authority is necessary so that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”⁹
 12. Joseph further clarified: “How shall God come to the rescue of this generation? He will send Elijah the prophet. ... Elijah shall reveal the covenants to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers.”¹⁰
 13. Elijah appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration and conferred this authority upon Peter, James, and John.¹¹ Elijah also appeared with Moses and Elias on April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple and conferred the same priesthood keys upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.¹²
 14. The restoration of the sealing authority by Elijah in 1836 was necessary to prepare the world for the Savior’s Second Coming and initiated a greatly increased and worldwide interest in family history research.
- Changing, Turning, and Purifying Hearts**
15. The word heart is used over 1,000 times in the standard works. This simple but significant word often denotes the inner feelings of an individual. Our hearts—the sum total of our desires, affec-

tions, intentions, motives, and attitudes—define who we are and determine what we will become. And the essence of the Lord’s work is changing, turning, and purifying hearts through gospel covenants and priesthood ordinances.

16. **We do not build or enter holy temples solely to have a memorable individual or family experience. Rather, the covenants received and the ordinances performed in temples are essential to the sanctifying of our hearts and for the ultimate exaltation of God’s sons and daughters.**
17. Planting in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers—even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—turning the hearts of the children to their own fathers, conducting family history research, and performing vicarious temple ordinances are labors that bless individuals on both sides of the veil. As we become anxiously engaged in this sacred work, we are obeying the commandments to love and serve God and our neighbors.¹³ And such selfless service helps us truly to “Hear Him!”¹⁴ and come unto the Savior.¹⁵
18. The most sacred covenants and priesthood ordinances are received only in a temple—the house of the Lord. Everything that is learned and all that is done in the temple emphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ and His role in Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness.

From the Inside Out

19. President Ezra Taft Benson described an important pattern the Redeemer employs in bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”¹⁶ He said: “The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.”¹⁷
20. Covenants and priesthood ordinances are central in the ongoing process of spiritual rebirth and transformation; they are the means whereby the Lord works with each of us from the inside out. Covenants that are honored steadfastly, remembered always, and written “with the Spirit of the living God ... in fleshy tables of the heart”¹⁸ provide purpose and the assurance of blessings in

mortality and for eternity. Ordinances that are received worthily and remembered continually open the heavenly channels through which the power of godliness can flow into our lives.

21. We do not come to the temple to hide from or escape the evils of the world. Rather, we come to the temple to conquer the world of evil. As we invite into our lives the “power of godliness”¹⁹ by receiving priesthood ordinances and making and keeping sacred covenants, we are blessed with strength beyond our own²⁰ to overcome the temptations and challenges of mortality and to do and become good.

The Fame of This House Shall Spread

22. The first temple of this dispensation was constructed in Kirtland, Ohio, and dedicated on March 27, 1836.
23. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith one week after the dedication, the Lord declared:
24. 18 “Let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name. ...
25. 19 “Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants have been endowed in this house.
26. “And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people.”²¹
27. Please note the phrases the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice and the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands. These were stunning declarations in April of 1836, when the Church had only a relative handful of members and one temple.
28. Today in 2020, we have 168 operating temples. Forty-nine additional temples are under construction or have been announced. Houses of the Lord are being constructed on the “isles of the sea”²² and in countries and locations previously considered by many unlikely to warrant a temple.
29. The endowment ceremony currently is presented in 88 languages and will become available in many additional languages as temples are built to bless more of God’s children. In the next 15 years, the number of languages in which temple ordinances will be available likely will double.

30. This year we will break ground and start construction on 18 temples. In contrast, it took 150 years to build the first 18 temples, from the organization of the Church in 1830 to the dedication of the Tokyo Japan Temple by President Spencer W. Kimball in 1980.
31. Consider the hastening of temple work that has occurred just during the lifetime of President Russell M. Nelson. When President Nelson was born on September 9, 1924, the Church had six operating temples.
32. When he was ordained an Apostle on April 7, 1984, 60 years later, 26 temples were operating, an increase of 20 temples in 60 years.
33. When President Nelson was sustained as President of the Church, 159 temples were operating, an increase of 133 temples in the 34 years during which he served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.
34. Since becoming the President of the Church on January 14, 2018, President Nelson has announced 35 new temples.
35. Ninety-six percent of the existing temples have been dedicated during President Nelson's lifetime; 84 percent have been dedicated since he was ordained an Apostle.

Always Focus on the Things That Matter Most

36. As members of the Lord's restored Church, we stand all amazed at the ever-accelerating pace of His work in the latter days. And more temples are coming.
37. Brigham Young prophesied, "To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal."²³
38. Understandably, the announcement of each new temple is a source of great joy and a reason to give thanks to the Lord. However, our primary focus should be on the covenants and ordinances that can change our hearts and deepen our devotion to the Savior and not simply on the location or beauty of the building.
39. The fundamental obligations that rest upon us as members of the Lord's restored Church are (1) to "Hear Him!"²⁴ and have our own hearts changed through covenants and ordinances and (2) to fulfill

joyfully the divinely appointed responsibility to offer temple blessings to the entire human family on both sides of the veil. With the Lord's direction and help, indeed we will fulfill these sacred duties.

The Building Up of Zion

40. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared:
41. "The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; but they died without the sight; ... it is left for us to see, participate in and help to roll forward the Latter-day glory."²⁵
42. "The heavenly Priesthood will unite with the earthly, to bring about those great purposes; ... a work that God and angels have contemplated with delight for generations past; that fired the souls of the ancient patriarchs and prophets; a work that is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family."²⁶
43. I solemnly testify that the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith, and Elijah restored the sealing authority. Sacred temple covenants and ordinances can strengthen us and purify our hearts as we "Hear Him!"²⁷ and receive the power of godliness in our lives. And I witness that this latter-day work will destroy the powers of darkness and bring about the salvation of the human family. Of these truths I joyfully testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Ephesians 1:10.
2. Joseph Smith—History 1:30.
3. Joseph Smith—History 1:33.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39.
5. Acts 3:21.
6. Bible Dictionary, "Elijah."
7. Guide to the Scriptures, "Elijah."
8. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 311; emphasis added.
9. Matthew 16:19; see also Matthew 18:18; Helaman 10:7; Doctrine and Covenants 124:93; 132:46.

10. Teachings: Joseph Smith, 313.
11. See Matthew 17:3.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.
13. See Matthew 22:34–40.
14. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
15. See Omni 1:26; Moroni 10:30, 32.
16. Moses 1:39.
17. Ezra Taft Benson, “Born of God,” Ensign, Nov. 1985, 6.
18. 2 Corinthians 3:3.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:20–21.
20. See “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” Hymns, no.220.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 110:6, 9–10.
22. 2 Nephi 29:7.
23. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), 310.
24. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
25. Teachings: Joseph Smith, 186.
26. Teachings: Joseph Smith, 514–15.
27. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.



The Priesthood and the Savior's Atoning Power

By Elder Dale G. Renlund
General Conference October 2017



1. Picture with me a rocket being maneuvered to a launchpad so it can be readied for liftoff. Now visualize the ignition. Fuel, in a controlled burn, is converted into hot gas that spews out, providing the necessary thrust to propel the rocket into space. Finally, envision the payload, or cargo, that sits atop the rocket. The payload's worth is fully realized only when it gets where it needs to be and functions as it should. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to appreciate that an expensive global communications satellite is of little value sitting in a warehouse. The rocket's mission is simply to deliver a payload.
2. This evening I would like to compare the priesthood that we hold to a rocket and the opportunity to benefit from the Savior's atoning power to the payload that a rocket delivers.
3. Because of His atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ has the power and authority to redeem all mankind. To make His atoning power accessible, He has delegated a portion of His power and authority to men on earth. This delegated power and authority is called priesthood. It permits priesthood holders to help Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in Their work—to bring about the salvation and exaltation of God's children. It does so because it provides His children the opportunity to receive the blessings of the Savior's atoning power.
4. The atoning power of Jesus Christ is essential because none of us can return to our heavenly home without help. In mortality, we invariably make mistakes and violate God's laws. We become stained by sin and cannot be allowed back to live in God's presence. We need the Savior's atoning power so that we can be reconciled to Heavenly Father. Jesus Christ broke the bands of physical death, allowing resurrection for all. He offers forgiveness of sins, conditioned on obedience to the laws and ordinances of His gospel. Through Him, exaltation is offered. The opportunity to benefit from the Savior's atoning power is creation's most important payload.
5. For Heavenly Father's purposes to be accomplished, Christ's atoning power needs to be made available to God's children.¹ The priesthood delivers these opportunities. It is the rocket. Priesthood is essential because necessary ordinances and covenants on earth are administered only by its authority. If the priesthood fails to deliver the opportunity to benefit from the Savior's atoning power, what would be its purpose? Would it just be a complex, attention-grabbing firecracker? God intends priesthood to be used for more than just a class on Sunday or as a service opportunity. He intends for it to deliver the payload.
6. Minor defects in rockets can cause mission failure. Brittle seals and material fatigue can cause a rocket to malfunction. To guard the priesthood from, metaphorically, brittle seals and material fatigue, God protects both its conferral and use.² Priesthood conferral is safeguarded by priesthood keys, which are the rights of presidency given to man.³ Priesthood use is likewise safeguarded by priesthood keys but also by covenants that the priesthood holder makes. The use of the priesthood is consequently governed by both priesthood keys and covenants. A man's priesthood commission is individually given and does not exist independent of him;⁴ priesthood is not an amorphous source of autonomous power.
7. Both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods are received by covenant.⁵ God determines the terms and man accepts. Broadly speaking, priesthood holders covenant to help God in His work. Early in this dispensation, Jesus Christ explained that the priesthood covenant "is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world ... because they come not unto me."⁶
8. This teaches that the purpose of the priesthood is to invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel. We have the priesthood so that we can help Heavenly Father's children be relieved of the burden of sin and become like Him. Through the priesthood, the power of godliness is manifest in the lives of all who make

and keep gospel covenants and receive the associated ordinances.⁷ This is the way each of us comes unto Christ, is purified, and is reconciled to God. Christ's atoning power is made accessible through the priesthood, which delivers the payload.

9. Covenants with God are serious and solemn. A man should prepare for, learn about, and enter such covenants with the intent to honor them. A covenant becomes a pledge of self. Paraphrasing the English playwright Robert Bolt, a man makes a covenant only when he wants to commit himself quite exceptionally to a promise. He makes an identity between the truth of the promise and his own virtue. When a man makes a covenant, he is holding himself, like water, in his cupped hands. And if he opens his fingers, he need not hope to find himself again. A covenant-breaker no longer has a self to commit or a guarantee to offer.⁸
10. An Aaronic Priesthood holder covenants to avoid evil, help others be reconciled to God, and prepare to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.⁹ These sacred responsibilities are fulfilled as he teaches, baptizes, strengthens Church members, and invites others to accept the gospel. These are his "rocket" functions. In return, God promises hope, forgiveness, the ministering of angels, and the keys of the gospel of repentance and baptism.¹⁰
11. A Melchizedek Priesthood holder covenants to fulfill the responsibilities associated with the Aaronic Priesthood and to magnify his calling in the Melchizedek Priesthood.¹¹ He does so by keeping the commandments associated with the covenant. These commandments include giving "diligent heed to the words of eternal life" by living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,¹² bearing testimony of Jesus Christ and His latter-day work,¹³ not boasting of himself,¹⁴ and becoming the Savior's friend, trusting Him as a friend would.¹⁵
12. In return, God promises that a Melchizedek Priesthood holder will receive keys to understand the mysteries of God. He will become perfect so that he can stand in the presence of God. He will be able to fulfill his role in the work of salvation. Jesus Christ will prepare the way before the priest- hood holder and will be with him. The Holy Ghost will be in the priesthood holder's heart, and angels will bear him up. His body will be strengthened and renewed. He will become heir to the blessings of Abraham and, along with his wife, joint-heir with Jesus Christ to Heavenly Father's kingdom.¹⁶ These are "exceeding great and precious promis- es."¹⁷ No greater promises can be imagined.
13. To each man who receives the Melchizedek Priest- hood, God affirms His covenant promises with an oath.¹⁸ This oath pertains only to the Melchizedek Priesthood,¹⁹ and it is God who swears the oath, not the priesthood holder.²⁰ Because this unique situation involves His divine power and authority, God uses an oath, employing the most forceful language He can, to assure us of the binding and irreversible nature of His promises.
14. Severe consequences result from breaking priest- hood covenants and altogether turning from them.²¹ Being casual or apathetic in a priesthood calling is like introducing material fatigue into a rocket component. It jeopardizes the priesthood covenant because it can lead to mission failure. Disobedience to God's commandments breaks the covenant. For a perpetual, unrepentant cov- enant-breaker, the promised blessings are with- drawn.
15. I came to understand more fully the relationship between the "priesthood" rocket and the "oppor- tunity to benefit from Christ's atoning power" payload several years ago. During a weekend, I had two assignments. One was to create the first stake in a country, and the other was to interview a young man and, if all was in order, restore his priesthood and temple blessings. This 30-year- old man had joined the Church in his late teens. He served an honorable mission. But when he returned home, he lost his way, and he lost his membership in the Church. After some years, "he came to himself,"²² and with the help of loving priesthood leaders and kind members, he repented and was readmitted by baptism into the Church.
16. Later, he applied to have his priesthood and tem- ple blessings restored. We set an appointment for Saturday at 10:00 a.m. at the meetinghouse. When I arrived for the earlier interviews, he was already there. He was so anxious to have the priesthood once again, he just could not wait.
17. During our interview, I showed him the letter explaining that President Thomas S. Monson had personally reviewed his application and authorized the interview. This otherwise stoic young man wept. I then told him that the date of our inter- view would have no official meaning in his life. He

looked puzzled. I informed him that after I restored his blessings, his membership record would show only his original baptism, confirmation, priesthood ordination, and endowment dates. He choked up again.

18. I asked him to read from the Doctrine and Covenants:
19. “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”
20. “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.”²³
21. Tears filled his eyes a third time. Then I placed my hands on his head, and in the name of Jesus Christ and by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and with the authorization of the President of the Church, I restored his priesthood and temple blessings.
22. The joy that came over us was profound. He knew he was once again authorized to hold and exercise the priesthood of God. He knew that his temple blessings were again fully operative. He had a bounce in his step and a radiant light about him. I was so proud of him, and I sensed how proud Heavenly Father was of him too.
23. Thereafter, the stake was organized. The meetings were well attended by enthusiastic, faithful Saints, and a wonderful stake presidency was sustained. However, for me, the historic occasion of organizing this first stake in a country was overshadowed by the joy I felt in restoring the blessings to this young man.
24. I have come to realize that the purpose of organizing a stake, or using the priesthood of God in any way, is to assist Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in Their work—to provide the opportunity for redemption and exaltation to each of God’s children. Like the rocket whose purpose is to deliver a payload, the priesthood delivers the gospel of Jesus Christ, enabling all to make covenants and receive the associated ordinances. “The atoning blood of Christ”²⁴ can thereby be applied in our lives as we experience the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost and receive the blessings God promises.
25. In addition to obeying the laws and ordinances of the gospel yourself, I invite you to make and keep priesthood covenants. Receive God’s oath and His promise. Magnify your responsibilities

in the priesthood to help Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Use the priesthood to help deliver the opportunity to benefit from the Savior’s atoning power to someone else! As you do, great blessings will come to you and your family. I testify that the Redeemer lives and directs this work, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See 1 Nephi 11:31;
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:36.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:11; see also Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 49–52.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:95, 130, 132. The priesthood a man receives is no more independent of him than Christ’s atoning power is independent of Christ.
5. References to a covenant related to the lesser priesthood are found in Numbers 25:10–13; Nehemiah 13:29; and Malachi 2:2–8.
6. References to a covenant related to the Melchizedek Priesthood are found in Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:26–37 (in the Bible appendix); Psalm 110:1, 4; and Doctrine and Covenants 84:39–42. See also Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrine of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 32–34.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 84:48, 50.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.
9. See Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts* (1990), xiii–xiv, 140.
10. See Numbers 25:12–13; Nehemiah 13:29; Ezekiel 34:2–6; Malachi 2:2–9; Doctrine and Covenants 13:1; 20:46–59; 84:33–40.
11. See Hebrews 7:19; Doctrine and Covenants 84:26–27.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:43–44.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:61–62.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:73.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:77–88.
17. See Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:26–37 (in the Bible appendix); Hebrews 7:11; Doctrine and Covenants 84:19, 33–34, 38, 42, 77–88.
18. 2 Peter 1:4.
19. See Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:27–31 (in the Bible appendix); Psalm 110:1, 4; Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 7:19–21 (in the Bible appendix); Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–40, 48.
20. See The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson (1988), 223; Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 59; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 323.
21. There is no scriptural reference or account of the recipient swearing an oath as he makes the Melchizedek Priesthood covenant. Instead, in Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:27–31 (in the Bible appendix); Psalm 110:1, 4; Hebrews 7:21; and Doctrine and Covenants 84:40, it is God who swears an oath as He makes the covenant with the recipient. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “The Lord swears with an oath in his own name ... that everyone who keeps the covenant made in connection with the Melchizedek Priesthood shall inherit, receive, and possess all things in his everlasting kingdom. ... God swore with an oath that Christ would be exalted, and he

swears anew, at the time each of us receives the Melchizedek Priesthood, that we will have a like exaltation if we are true and faithful in all things” (“The Doctrine of the Priesthood,” 33).

28. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:41–42. Repentance is always possible for those willing to change. See,
29. for instance, Dale G. Renlund, “Repentance: A Joyful Choice,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 121–24.
30. 22. Luke 15:17.
31. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.
32. Mosiah 4:2.

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Celestial Marriage

President Russell M. Nelson Ensign,
November 2008



1. My beloved brethren and sisters, I am deeply grateful for each of you. Together we feel a profound sense of gratitude for the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this world abounding with misery, we are truly thankful for God's "great plan of happiness."¹ His plan declares that men and women are "that they might have joy."² That joy comes when we choose to live in harmony with God's eternal plan.

2. The importance of choice may be illustrated by a homespun concept that came to mind one day when I was shopping in a large retail store. I call it "patterns of the shopper." As shopping is part of our daily life, these patterns may be familiar.

3. Wise shoppers study their options thoroughly before they make a selection. They focus primarily on the quality and durability of a desired product. They want the very best. In contrast, some shoppers look for bargains, and others may splurge, only to learn later—much to their dismay—that their choice did not endure well. And sadly, there are those rare individuals who cast aside their personal integrity and steal what they want. We call them shoplifters.

4. The patterns of the shopper may be applied to the topic of marriage. A couple in love can choose a marriage of the highest quality or a lesser type that will not endure. Or they can choose neither and brazenly steal what they want as "marital shoplifters."

5. The subject of marriage is debated across the world, where various arrangements exist for conjugal living. My purpose in speaking out on this topic is to declare, as an Apostle of the Lord,³ that marriage between a man and a woman is sacred—it is ordained of God.⁴ I also assert the virtue of a temple marriage. It is the highest and most enduring type of marriage that our Creator can offer to His children.

6. While salvation is an individual matter, exaltation is a family matter.⁵ Only those who are married in the temple and whose marriage is sealed by

the Holy Spirit of Promise will continue as spouses after death⁶ and receive the highest degree of celestial glory, or exaltation. A temple marriage is also called a celestial marriage. Within the celestial glory are three levels. To obtain the highest, a husband and wife must be sealed for time and all eternity and keep their covenants made in a holy temple.⁷

7. The noblest yearning of the human heart is for a marriage that can endure beyond death. Fidelity to a temple marriage does that. It allows families to be together forever.

8. This goal is glorious. All Church activities, advancements, quorums, and classes are means to the end of an exalted family.⁸

9. To make this goal possible, our Heavenly Father has restored priesthood keys in this dispensation so that essential ordinances in His plan can be performed by proper authority. Heavenly messengers—including John the Baptist⁹; Peter, James, and John¹⁰; Moses, Elias, and Elijah¹¹—have participated in that restoration.¹²

10. Knowledge of this revealed truth is spreading across the earth.¹³ We, as the Lord's prophets and apostles, again proclaim to the world that "the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."¹⁴

11. We further proclaim that "all human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

12. "In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. [Heavenly Father's great] plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy

temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”¹⁵

13. That proclamation on the family helps us realize that celestial marriage brings greater possibilities for happiness than does any other relationship.¹⁶ The earth was created and this Church was restored so that families could be formed, sealed, and exalted eternally.¹⁷

14. Scriptures declare that “it is lawful that [a man] should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”¹⁸ Another affirms that “the man [is not] without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”¹⁹ Thus, marriage is not only an exalting principle of the gospel; it is a divine commandment.

15. Our Heavenly Father declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”²⁰ The Atonement of His Beloved Son enabled both of these objectives to be realized. Because of the Atonement, immortality—or resurrection from the dead—became a reality for all.²¹ And because of the Atonement, eternal life—which is living forever in God’s presence, the “greatest of all the gifts of God”²²—became a possibility. To qualify for eternal life, we must make an eternal and everlasting covenant with our Heavenly Father.²³ This means that a temple marriage is not only between husband and wife; it embraces a partnership with God.²⁴

16. The family proclamation also reminds us that “husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.”²⁵ Children born of that union are “an heritage of the Lord.”²⁶ When a family is sealed in the temple, that family may become as eternal as the kingdom of God itself.²⁷

17. Such a reward requires more than a hopeful wish. On occasion, I read in a newspaper obituary of an expectation that a recent death has reunited that person with a deceased spouse, when, in fact, they did not choose the eternal option. Instead, they opted for a marriage that was valid only as long as they both should live. Heavenly Father had offered them a supernal gift, but they refused it. And in rejecting the gift, they rejected the Giver of the gift.²⁸

18. One strong sentence of scripture clearly distinguishes between a hopeful wish and eternal truth: “All covenants, contracts, . . . obligations, oaths, vows, . . . or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for

all eternity, . . . are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.”²⁹

19. These truths are absolute. Members of this Church invite all people to learn them and to qualify for eternal life.³⁰ We invite all to gain faith in God the Eternal Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ, to repent, to receive the Holy Ghost, to obtain the blessings of the temple, to make and keep sacred covenants, and to endure to the end.

20. Mercifully, God’s great plan of happiness and its eternal blessings can be extended to those who did not have the opportunity to hear the gospel in mortality. Temple ordinances can be done vicariously for them.³¹

21. But what of the many mature members of the Church who are not married? Through no failing of their own, they deal with the trials of life alone. Be we all reminded that, in the Lord’s own way and time, no blessings will be withheld from His faithful Saints.³² The Lord will judge and reward each individual according to heartfelt desire as well as deed.³³

22. Meanwhile, mortal misunderstandings can make mischief in a marriage. In fact, each marriage starts with two built-in handicaps. It involves two imperfect people. Happiness can come to them only through their earnest effort. Just as harmony comes from an orchestra only when its members make a concerted effort, so harmony in marriage also requires a concerted effort. That effort will succeed if each partner will minimize personal demands and maximize actions of loving selflessness. President Thomas S. Monson has said: “To find real happiness, we must seek for it in a focus outside ourselves. No one has learned the meaning of living until he has surrendered his ego to the service of his fellow man. Service to others is akin to duty—the fulfillment of which brings true joy.”³⁴

23. Harmony in marriage comes only when one esteems the welfare of his or her spouse among the highest of priorities. When that really happens, a celestial marriage becomes a reality, bringing great joy in this life and in the life to come.

24. God’s plan of happiness allows us to choose for ourselves. As with the patterns of the shopper, we may choose celestial marriage or lesser alternatives.³⁵ Some marital options are cheap, some

are costly, and some are cunningly crafted by the adversary. Beware of his options; they always breed misery!³⁶

25. The best choice is a celestial marriage. Thankfully, if a lesser choice has previously been made, a choice can now be made to upgrade it to the best choice. That requires a mighty change of heart³⁷ and a permanent personal upgrade.³⁸

Blessings so derived are worth all efforts made.³⁹

26. The full realization of the blessings of a temple marriage is almost beyond our mortal comprehension. Such a marriage will continue to grow in the celestial realm. There we can become perfected.⁴⁰ As Jesus ultimately received the fullness of the glory of the Father,⁴¹ so we may “come unto the Father ... and in due time receive of his fullness.”⁴²

27. Celestial marriage is a pivotal part of preparation for eternal life. It requires one to be married to the right person, in the right place, by the right authority, and to obey that sacred covenant faithfully.⁴³ Then one may be assured of exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 42:8. It is also known as the “plan of ... God” (see 2 Nephi 9:13; Alma 34:9), the “plan of redemption” (see Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:26, 30, 32–33; 29:2; 42:13), the “plan of salvation” (see Alma 24:14; 42:5), and the “plan of mercy” (see Alma 42:15, 31).

2. 2 Nephi 2:25.

3. See D&C 107:35.

4. See D&C 49:15–17.

5. See Russell M. Nelson, “Salvation and Exaltation,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2008, 7–10.

6. See D&C 76:53; 132:7.

7. See D&C 131:1–3.

8. One example of this objective is the scriptural declaration that “thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family” (D&C 23:3; emphasis added).

9. See D&C 13.

10. See Matthew 16:18–19; D&C 27:12–13; Joseph Smith—History 1:72.

11. See D&C 110:11–16.

12. See D&C 128:8, 18; 132:45–46.

13. See 2 Nephi 10:2; 30:8.

14. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

15. *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

16. Previously I have stated that “marriage is the foundry for social order, the fountain of virtue, and the foundation for eternal exaltation” (“Nurturing Marriage,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2006, 36).

17. Whenever scriptures warn that the “earth would be

utterly wasted,” the warning is connected to the need for priesthood authority to seal families together in holy temples (see D&C 2:1–3; 138:48; Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39).

18. D&C 49:16; see also Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7–9; D&C 42:22; Moses 3:24; Abraham 5:18.

19. 1 Corinthians 11:11.

20. Moses 1:39.

21. See 2 Nephi 9:22; Alma 12:8; 33:22; Helaman 14:17; Mormon 9:13; Moses 7:62; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 7:69.

22. D&C 14:7.

23. See D&C 132:19.

24. See Matthew 19:6.

25. *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102. 26. Psalm 127:3. 101

27. See D&C 132:19–20.

28. See D&C 88:33.

29. D&C 132:7; emphasis added.

30. Jesus taught this concept to the people of ancient America (see 3 Nephi 27:16–20). See also 2 Nephi 33:4; D&C 42:61; Joseph Smith Translation, 1 John 5:13.

31. See D&C 128:1–18; 137:7–8.

32. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:76–77.

33. See Alma 41:3; D&C 137:9.

34. “Messages of Inspiration from President Monson,” *Church News*, July 5, 2008, 2.

35. See 2 Nephi 2:27; Jacob 6:8.

36. Satan wants us to be miserable, as he is (see Revelation 12:9; 2 Nephi 2:18; D&C 10:22–27; Moses 4:6).

37. See Alma 5:12–14. Such a mighty change includes repentance, forgiveness, and a renewed determination to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32).

38. “The first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4). Repentance requires a complete change for the better—a total personal upgrade.

39. See D&C 93:1.

40. See Moroni 10:32. 41. See D&C 93:13–14.

42. D&C 93:19; see also D&C 66:2; 132:5–6.

43. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 118.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/celestial-marriage?lang=eng>



Divorce

Elder Dallin H. Oaks Ensign, May 2007, 70–73



1. I have felt impressed to speak about divorce. This is a sensitive subject because it evokes such strong emotions from persons it has touched in different ways. Some see themselves or their loved ones as the victims of divorce. Others see themselves as its beneficiaries. Some see divorce as evidence of failure. Others consider it an essential escape hatch from marriage. In one way or another, divorce touches most families in the Church.

2. Whatever your perspective, please listen as I try to speak plainly about the effects of divorce on the eternal family relationships we seek under the gospel plan. I speak out of concern, but with hope.

3. We live in a world in which the whole concept of marriage is in peril and where divorce is commonplace.

4. The concept that society has a strong interest in preserving marriages for the common good as well as the good of the couple and their children has been replaced for many by the idea that marriage is only a private relationship between consenting adults, terminable at the will of either.¹

5. Nations that had no divorce law have adopted one, and most nations permitting divorces have made them easier to obtain. Unfortunately, under current no-fault divorce laws, it can be easier to sever a marriage relationship with an unwanted spouse than an employment relationship with an unwanted employee. Some even refer to a first marriage as a “starter marriage,” like a small home one uses for a while before moving on.

6. The weakening of the concept that marriages are permanent and precious has far-reaching consequences. Influenced by their own parents’ divorce or by popular notions that marriage is a ball and chain that prevents personal fulfillment, some young people

shun marriage. Many who marry withhold full commitment, poised to flee at the first serious challenge.

7. In contrast, modern prophets have warned that looking upon marriage “as a mere contract that may be entered into at pleasure ... and severed at the first difficulty ... is an evil meriting severe condemnation,” especially where children are made to suffer.²

8. In ancient times and even under tribal laws in some countries where we now have members, men have power to divorce their wives for any trivial thing. Such unrighteous oppression of women was rejected by the Savior, who declared:

9. “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

10. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:8–9).

11. The kind of marriage required for exaltation—eternal in duration and godlike in quality—does not contemplate divorce. In the temples of the Lord, couples are married for all eternity. But some marriages do not progress toward that ideal. Because “of the hardness of [our] hearts,” the Lord does not currently enforce the consequences of the celestial standard. He permits divorced persons to marry again without the stain of immorality specified in the higher law. Unless a divorced member has committed serious transgressions, he or she can become eligible for a temple recommend under the same worthiness standards that apply to other members.

12. There are many good Church members who have been divorced. I speak first to them. We know

that many of you are innocent victims—members whose former spouses persistently betrayed sacred covenants or abandoned or refused to perform marriage responsibilities for an extended period. Members who have experienced such abuse have firsthand knowledge of circumstances worse than divorce.

13. When a marriage is dead and beyond hope of resuscitation, it is needful to have a means to end it. I saw examples of this in the Philippines. Two days after their temple marriage, a husband deserted his young wife and has not been heard from for over 10 years. A married woman fled and obtained a divorce in another country, but her husband, who remained behind, is still married in the eyes of the Philippine law. Since there is no provision for divorce in that country, these innocent victims of desertion have no way to end their married status and go forward with their lives.

14. We know that some look back on their divorces with regret at their own partial or predominant fault in the breakup. All who have been through divorce know the pain and need the healing power and hope that come from the Atonement. That healing power and that hope are there for them and also for their children.

15. Now I speak to married members, especially to any who may be considering divorce.

16. I strongly urge you and those who advise you to face up to the reality that for most marriage problems, the remedy is not divorce but repentance. Often the cause is not incompatibility but selfishness. The first step is not separation but reformation. Divorce is not an all-purpose solution, and it often creates long-term heartache. A broad-based international study of the levels of happiness before and after “major life events” found that, on average, persons are far more successful in recovering their level of happiness after the death of a spouse than after a divorce.³ Spouses who hope that divorce will resolve conflicts often find that it aggravates them, since the complexities that follow divorce—especially where there are children—generate new conflicts.

17. Think first of the children. Because divorce separates the interests of children from the interests of their parents, children are its first victims. Scholars of family life tell us that the most important cause of

the current decline in the well-being of children is the current weakening of marriage, because family instability decreases parental investment in children.⁴ We know that children raised in a single-parent home after divorce have a much higher risk for drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, poor school performance, and various kinds of victimization.

18. A couple with serious marriage problems should see their bishop. As the Lord’s judge, he will give counsel and perhaps even discipline that will lead toward healing.

19. Bishops do not counsel members to divorce, but they can help members with the consequences of their decisions. Under the law of the Lord, a marriage, like a human life, is a precious, living thing. If our bodies are sick, we seek to heal them. We do not give up. While there is any prospect of life, we seek healing again and again. The same should be true of our marriages, and if we seek Him, the Lord will help us and heal us.

20. Latter-day Saint spouses should do all within their power to preserve their marriages. They should follow the marriage enrichment counsel in the First Presidency’s message in the April 2007 Ensign and Liahona.⁵ To avoid so-called “incompatibility,” they should be best friends, kind and considerate, sensitive to each other’s needs, always seeking to make each other happy. They should be partners in family finances, working together to regulate their desires for temporal things.

21. Of course, there can be times when one spouse falls short and the other is wounded and feels pain. When that happens, the one who is wronged should balance current disappointments against the good of the past and the brighter prospects of the future.

22. Don’t treasure up past wrongs, reprocessing them again and again. In a marriage relationship, festering is destructive; forgiving is divine (see D&C 64:9–10). Plead for the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord to forgive wrongs (as President Faust has just taught us so beautifully), to overcome faults, and to strengthen relationships.

23. If you are already descending into the low state of marriage-in-name-only, please join hands, kneel

together, and prayerfully plead for help and the healing power of the Atonement. Your humble and united pleadings will bring you closer to the Lord and to each other and will help you in the hard climb back to marital harmony.

24. Consider these observations of a wise bishop with extensive experience in counseling members with marriage problems. Speaking of those who eventually divorced, he said:

25. “Universally, every couple or individual said they recognized that divorce was not a good thing, but they all insisted that their situation was different.

26. “Universally, they focused on the fault of the spouse and attributed little responsibility to their own behavior. Communication had withered.

27. “Universally, they were looking back, not willing to leave the baggage of past behavior on the roadside and move on. “Part of the time, serious sin was involved, but more often they had just ‘fallen out of love,’ saying, ‘He doesn’t satisfy my needs anymore,’ or, ‘She has changed.’

28. “All were worried about the effect on the children, but always the conclusion was ‘it’s worse for them to have us together and fighting.’”

29. In contrast, the couples who followed this bishop’s counsel and stayed together emerged with their marriages even stronger. That prospect began with their mutual commitment to keep the commandments, stay active in their Church attendance, scripture reading, and prayer, and to work on their own shortcomings. They “recognized the importance and power of the Atonement for their spouse and for themselves,” and “they were patient and would try again and again.” When the couples he counseled did these things, repenting and working to save their marriages, this bishop reported that “healing was achieved 100 percent of the time.”

30. Even those who think their spouse is entirely to blame should not act hastily. One study found “no evidence that divorce or separation typically made adults happier than staying in an unhappy marriage. Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce reported being happily married five years later.”⁶ A

woman who persisted in an intolerable marriage for many years until the children were raised explained: “There were three parties to our marriage—my husband and I and the Lord. I told myself that if two of us could hang in there, we could hold it together.”

31. The power of hope expressed in these examples is sometimes rewarded with repentance and reformation, but sometimes it is not. Personal circumstances vary greatly. We cannot control and we are not responsible for the choices of others, even when they impact us so painfully. I am sure the Lord loves and blesses husbands and wives who lovingly try to help spouses struggling with such deep problems as pornography or other addictive behavior or with the long-term consequences of childhood abuse.

32. Whatever the outcome and no matter how difficult your experiences, you have the promise that you will not be denied the blessings of eternal family relationships if you love the Lord, keep His commandments, and just do the best you can. When young Jacob “suffered afflictions and much sorrow” from the actions of other family members, Father Lehi assured him, “Thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:1–2). Similarly, the Apostle Paul assured us that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28).

33. In conclusion, I speak briefly to those contemplating marriage. The best way to avoid divorce from an unfaithful, abusive, or unsupportive spouse is to avoid marriage to such a person. If you wish to marry well, inquire well. Associations through “hanging out” or exchanging information on the Internet are not a sufficient basis for marriage. There should be dating, followed by careful and thoughtful and thorough courtship. There should be ample opportunities to experience the prospective spouse’s behavior in a variety of circumstances. Fiancés should learn everything they can about the families with whom they will soon be joined in marriage. In all of this, we should realize that a good marriage does not require a perfect man or a perfect woman. It only requires a man and a woman committed to strive together toward perfection.

34. President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “Two individuals approaching the marriage altar must realize that to attain the happy marriage which they hope for

they must know that marriage ... means sacrifice, sharing, and even a reduction of some personal liberties. It means long, hard economizing. It means children who bring with them financial burdens, service burdens, care and worry burdens; but also it means the deepest and sweetest emotions of all.”⁷

35. From personal experience, I testify to the sweetness of the marriage and family life that the family proclamation describes as founded upon a husband and wife’s “solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children” and “upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸ I testify of Him as our Savior and pray in His name for all who strive for the supreme blessings of an eternal family, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Bruce C. Hafen, *Covenant Hearts* (2005), 37–39; Allan Carlson, *Fractured Generations* (2005), 1–13; Bryce Christensen, *Divided We Fall* (2006), 44–45.
2. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 8–9; or “Structure of the Home Threatened by Irresponsibility and Divorce,” *Improvement Era*, June 1969, 5.
3. Richard E. Lucas, “Adaptation and the Set-Point Model of Subjective Well-Being: Does Happiness Change after Major Life Events?” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Apr. 2007, available at www.psychologicalscience.org.
4. See Jean Bethke Elshtain and David Popenoe, *Marriage in America* (1995), quoted in Bruce C. Hafen, “Marriage and the State’s Legal Posture toward the Family,” *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Oct. 15, 1995, 18; see also *Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles* (2006), 24.
5. James E. Faust, “Enriching Your Marriage,” *Liahona*, Apr. 2007, 2–6; *Ensign*, Apr. 2007, 4–8.
6. Linda J. Waite and others, *Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages* (Institute for American Values, 2002), 6; see also scholarly studies cited in *Marriage and the Law: A Statement of Principles* (Institute for American Values, 2006), 21.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 194.
8. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

Unit 3 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “Celestial Marriage”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTGD6wA5MfY&ab_channel=BYUSpeeches

Elder David A. Bednar, “Honorably Hold a Name and a Standing”

[churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/04/honorably-hold-a-name-and-standing?lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/04/honorably-hold-a-name-and-standing?lang=eng)

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 4 Scriptures

God's commandment for his children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force and the means by which mortal life is created is divinely appointed

Genesis 1:27-28

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:

Genesis 2:24-25

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Psalms 127:3

3 Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

D&C 49:15-17

15 And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

16 Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation;

17 And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.

The sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between a man and a woman lawfully wedded as husband and wife

1 Corinthians 6:13-20

13 . . . Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.

15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and

make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are abouted with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Alma 39:3-9

3 And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

4 Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted. 5 Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

6 For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness.

7 And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good.

8 But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

9 Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

3 Nephi 12:27-30

27 Behold, it is written by them of old time, that

thou shalt not commit adultery;

28 But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.

29 Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your

30 For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.

D&C 42:22-24

22 Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.

23 And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out.

24 Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out.

D&C 59:6

6 Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it.

D&C 63:16

16 And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

D&C 121:45-46

45 Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

46 The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.



Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 2001.

1. The topic of human intimacy is as sacred as any I know. In discussing it, the subject can quickly slide from the sacred into the merely sensational. It would be better not to address the topic at all than to damage it with casualness or carelessness.

2. Some may feel this is a topic we hear discussed too frequently, but given the world in which we live, we may not be hearing it enough. All of the prophets, past and present, have spoken on it. Most in the Church are doing wonderfully well in the matter of personal purity, but some are not doing so well, and much of the world around us is not doing well at all.

3. Unfortunately, the degree of unchaste behavior around us is likely to increase rather than decrease as the times become more secular, more sophisticated, and more self-indulgent. Edward Gibbon, the distinguished British historian of the eighteenth century, wrote, “Although the progress of civilisation has undoubtedly contributed to assuage the fiercer passions of human nature, it seems to have been less favourable to the virtue of chastity. . . . The refinements of life [seem to] corrupt, [even as] they polish, the [relationship] of the sexes.”¹

4. But it is not our purpose here to document social problems or wring our hands over the dangers that such outside influences may hold for us. As serious as such contemporary realities are, I wish to discuss this topic in quite a different way, discuss it specifically for Latter-day Saints. So I conspicuously set aside statistics on such tragedies as AIDS, abortions, and illegitimate births and refer rather to a gospel-based view of personal purity.

5. Indeed, I wish to do something even a bit more difficult than listing the dos and don’ts of personal purity. I wish to examine, to the best of my ability, why we should be clean, why moral discipline is such a significant matter in God’s eyes. I know that may sound presumptuous, but a philosopher once said, “Tell me



sufficiently why a thing should be done, and I will move heaven and earth to do it.” Hoping you will feel the same way as he, and with full recognition of my limitations, I wish to try to give at least a partial answer to “Why be morally clean?” I will need first to pose briefly what I see as the doctrinal seriousness of the matter before then offering at least three reasons for such seriousness.

The Significance of Sanctity

6. Why is the matter of sexual relationships so severe that fire is almost always the metaphor, with passion pictured vividly in flames?

7. May I begin with one-half of a nine-line poem by Robert Frost. (The other half is worth a sermon also, but it will have to wait for another day.) Here are the first four lines of Frost’s “Fire and Ice”:

8. Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice. From what I’ve tasted of desire I hold with those who favor fire.²

9. A second, less poetic but more specific opinion is offered by the writer of Proverbs: “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? . . . But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.”³

10. In getting at the doctrinal seriousness of this subject, why is the matter of sexual relationships so severe that fire is almost always the metaphor, with passion pictured vividly in flames? What is there in the potentially hurtful heat of this that leaves one’s soul—or perhaps the whole world, according to Frost—destroyed, if that flame is left unchecked and those

passions unrestrained? What is there in all of this that prompts Alma to warn his son Corianton that sexual transgression is “an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost”?⁴

11. Setting aside sins against the Holy Ghost as a special category unto themselves, it is LDS doctrine that sexual transgression is second only to murder in the Lord’s list of life’s most serious sins. By assigning such rank to a physical appetite so conspicuously evident in all of us, what is God trying to tell us about its place in His plan for all men and women in mortality? I submit to you He is doing precisely that—commenting about the very plan of life itself. Clearly God’s greatest concerns regarding mortality are how one gets into this world and how one gets out of it. These two most important issues in our very personal and carefully supervised progress are the two issues that He as our Creator, Father, and Guide wishes most to reserve to Himself. These are the two matters that He has repeatedly told us He wants us never to take illegally, illicitly, unfaithfully, without sanction.

12. As for the taking of life, we are generally quite responsible. Most people, it seems to me, readily sense the sanctity of life and as a rule do not run up to friends, put a loaded revolver to their heads, and cavalierly pull the trigger. Furthermore, when there is a click of the hammer rather than an explosion of lead, and a possible tragedy seems to have been averted, no one in such a circumstance would be so stupid as to sigh, “Oh, good. I didn’t go all the way.”

13. No, “all the way” or not, the insanity of such action with fatal powder and steel is obvious on the face of it. Such a person running about with an arsenal of loaded handguns or military weaponry firing at young people would be apprehended, prosecuted, and institutionalized if in fact such a lunatic would not himself have been killed in all the pandemonium.

14. After such a moment of horror, we would undoubtedly sit in our homes or classrooms with terror on our minds for many months to come, wondering how such a thing could possibly happen—especially to members of the Church.

15. Fortunately, in the case of how life is taken, I

think we seem to be quite responsible. The seriousness of that does not often have to be spelled out, and not many sermons need to be devoted to it. But in the significance and sanctity of giving life, some of us are not so responsible, and in the larger world swirling around us we find near-criminal irresponsibility. What would in the case of taking life bring absolute horror and demand grim justice, in the case of giving life brings dirty

jokes, four-letter language, and wholesale voyeurism in movies, on television, over the internet, and almost everywhere else we turn.

16. Is all of this so wrong? That question has always been asked, usually by the guilty. “Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.”⁵ No murder here. Well, maybe not. But sexual transgression? “He that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.”⁶ Sounds near-fatal to me.

17. It is this doctrinal seriousness that should help us prevent such painful moments and avoid what Alma called the “inexpressible horror” of standing in the presence of God unworthily. Care and caution in this matter will permit the intimacy it is your right, privilege, and delight to enjoy in marriage to be untainted by such crushing remorse and guilt. May I now give those three reasons I mentioned earlier as to why this is an issue of such magnitude and consequence.

The Doctrine of the Soul

18. When one toys with the God-given . . . body of another, he or she toys with the very soul of that individual, toys with the central purpose and product of life.

19. First, we simply must understand the revealed, restored Latter-day Saint doctrine of the soul, and the high and inextricable part the body plays in that doctrine.

20. One of the “plain and precious” truths restored to this dispensation is that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man,”⁷ and that when the spirit and body are separated, men and women “cannot receive a fulness of joy.”⁸ Certainly that suggests something of the reason why obtaining a body is so fundamentally important to the plan of salvation in the first place, why sin of any kind is such a serious matter (namely, because its automatic consequence is death, thesepa-

ration of the spirit from the body and the separation of the spirit and the body from God), and why the resurrection of the body is so central to the great abiding and eternal triumph of Christ's atonement. We do not have to be a herd of demonically possessed swine charging down Gadarene slopes toward the sea⁹ to understand that a body is the great prize of mortal life, and that even a pig's will do for those frenzied premortal spirits that rebelled and to this day remain dispossessed in their first, unembodied estate.

21. May I quote a 1913 sermon by Elder James E. Talmage on this doctrinal point:

22. "We have been taught . . . to look upon these bodies of ours as gifts from God. We Latter-day Saints do not regard the body as something to be condemned, something to be abhorred. We regard [the body] as the sign of our royal birthright. We recognize the fact that those who kept not their first estate were denied that inestimable blessing. We believe that these bodies may be made, in very truth, the temple of the Holy Ghost. . . ."

23. "It is peculiar to the theology of the Latter-day Saints that we regard the body as an essential part of the soul. Read your dictionaries, the lexicons, and encyclopedias, and you will find that nowhere, outside of the Church of Jesus Christ, is the solemn and eternal truth taught that the soul of man is the body and the spirit combined."¹⁰

24. So partly in answer to why such seriousness, we answer that when one toys with the God-given—and satanically coveted—body of another, he or she toys with the very soul of that individual, toys with the central purpose and product of life, "the very key" to life, as Elder Boyd K. Packer once called it.¹¹ In trivializing the soul of another (please include the word *body* there) we trivialize the atonement, which saved that soul and guaranteed its continued existence. And when one toys with the Son of Righteousness, the Day Star Himself, one toys with white heat and a flame hotter and holier than the noonday sun. You cannot do so and not be burned.

You cannot with impunity "crucify . . . the Son of God afresh."¹² Exploitation of the body (please include the word *soul* there) is, in the last analysis, an exploitation of Him who is the Light and the Life of the world. Perhaps here Paul's warning to the Corinthians takes on newer, higher meaning:

25. "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid Flee fornication. He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."¹³

26. Our soul is what is at stake here—our spirit and our body. Paul understood that doctrine of the soul every bit as well as Elder James E. Talmage did, because it is gospel truth. The purchase price for our fullness of joy—body and spirit eternally united—is the pure and innocent blood of the Savior of the world. We cannot then say in ignorance or defiance, "Well, it's my life" or worse yet, "It's my body." It is not your life or your body. "Ye are not your own," Paul said. "Ye are bought with a price." As a result of the excruciating suffering endured by Him in the atonement—the payment He made for our sins—we are eternally indebted to Jesus. That is one reason we call Him "Master," in the holiest sense of the word. So in answer to the question, "Why does God care so much about sexual transgression?" it is partly because of the precious gift offered by and through His Only Begotten Son to redeem the souls—bodies and spirits—we too often share and abuse in such cheap and tawdry ways. Christ restored the very seeds of eternal lives,¹⁴ and we desecrate them at our peril. The first key reason for personal purity? Our very souls are involved and at stake.

A Symbol of Total Unity

27. You may come to that moment of real love, of total union, only to discover to your horror that what you should have saved has been spent.

28. Second, human intimacy, that sacred, physical union ordained of God for a married couple, deals with a symbol that demands special sanctity.

29. Such an act of love between a man and a woman is—or certainly was ordained to be—a symbol of total union: union of their hearts, their hopes, their lives, their love, their family, their future, their everything.

It is a symbol that we try to suggest in the temple with a word like seal. The Prophet Joseph Smith once said we perhaps could render such a sacred bond as welding—that those united in matrimony and eternal families are welded together, inseparable if you will, to withstand the temptations of the adversary and the afflictions of mortality.¹⁵

30. But such a total, virtually unbreakable union, such an unyielding commitment between a man and a woman, can come only with the proximity and permanence afforded in a marriage covenant, with the union of all that they possess—their very hearts and minds, all their days and all their dreams. They work together, they cry together, they enjoy Brahms and Beethoven and breakfast together, they sacrifice and save and live together for all the abundance that such a totally intimate life provides such a couple. And the external symbol of that union, the physical manifestation of what is a far deeper spiritual and metaphysical bonding, is the physical blending that is part of—indeed, a most beautiful and gratifying expression of—that larger, more complete union of eternal purpose and promise.

31. As delicate as it is to mention, I nevertheless trust the reader's maturity to understand that physiologically we are created as men and women to form such a union. In this ultimate physical expression of one man and one woman, they are as nearly and as literally one as two separate physical bodies can ever be. It is in that act of ultimate physical intimacy that we most nearly fulfill the commandment of the Lord given to Adam and Eve, living symbols for all married couples, when He invited them to cleave unto one another only, and thus become "one flesh."¹⁶

32. Obviously, such a commandment to these two, the first husband and wife of the human family, has unlimited implications—social, cultural, and religious as well as physical—but that is exactly my point. As all couples come to that moment of bonding in mortality, it is to be just such a complete union. That commandment cannot be fulfilled, and that symbolism of "one flesh" cannot be preserved, if we hastily, guiltily, and surreptitiously share intimacy in a darkened corner of a darkened hour, then just as hastily, guiltily, and surreptitiously retreat to our separate worlds—not to eat or live or cry or laugh together, not to do the laundry and the dishes and the homework, not to manage a budget and pay the bills and tend the children and plan

together for the future. No, we cannot do that until we are truly one—united, bound, linked, tied, welded, sealed, married.

33. Can you see then the moral duplicity that comes from pretending we are one, sharing the physical symbols and physical intimacy of our union, but then fleeing, retreating, severing all such other aspects—and symbols—of what was meant to be a total obligation, only to unite again furtively some other night or, worse yet, furtively unite (and you can tell how cynically I use that word) with some other partner who is no more bound to us, no more one with us than the last was or than the one that will come next week or next month or next year or anytime before the binding commitments of marriage?

34. You must wait until you can give everything, and you cannot give everything until you are at least legally and, for Latter-day Saint purposes, eternally pronounced as one. To give illicitly that which is not yours to give (remember, "you are not your own") and to give only part of that which cannot be followed with the gift of your whole heart and your whole life and your whole self is its own form of emotional Russian roulette. If you persist in sharing part without the whole, in pursuing satisfaction devoid of symbolism, in giving parts and pieces and inflamed fragments only, you run the terrible risk of such spiritual, psychic damage that you may undermine both your physical intimacy and your wholehearted devotion to a truer, later love. You may come to that moment of real love, of total union, only to discover to your horror that what you should have saved has been spent and that only God's grace can recover that piecemeal dissipation of your virtue.

35. A good Latter-day Saint friend, Dr. Victor L. Brown Jr., has written of this issue:

36. "Fragmentation enables its users to counterfeit intimacy. . . . If we relate to each other in fragments, at best we miss full relationships. At worst, we manipulate and exploit others for our gratification. Sexual fragmentation can be particularly harmful because it gives powerful physiological rewards which, though illusory, can temporarily persuade us to overlook the serious deficits in the overall relationship. Two people may marry for physical gratification and then discover that the illusion of union collapses under the weight of

intellectual, social, and spiritual incompatibilities. . . .

37. “Sexual fragmentation is particularly harmful because it is particularly deceptive. The intense human intimacy that should be enjoyed in and symbolized by sexual union is counterfeited by sensual episodes which suggest—but cannot deliver—acceptance, understanding, and love. Such encounters mistake the end for the means as lonely, desperate people seek a common denominator which will permit the easiest, quickest gratification.”¹⁷

38. Listen to a far more biting observation by a non-Latter-day Saint regarding such acts devoid of both the soul and the symbolism we have been discussing. He writes: “Our sexuality has been animalized, stripped of the intricacy of feeling with which human beings have endowed it, leaving us to contemplate only the act, and to fear our impotence in it. It is this animalization from which the sexual manuals cannot escape, even when they try to do so, because they are reflections of it. They might [as well] be textbooks for veterinarians.”¹⁸

39. In this matter of counterfeit intimacy and deceptive gratification, I express particular caution to the men who read this message. I have heard all my life that it is the young woman who has to assume the responsibility for controlling the limits of intimacy in courtship because a young man cannot. Seldom have I heard any point made about this subject that makes me more disappointed than that. What kind of man is he, what priesthood or power or strength or self-control does this man have, that lets him develop in society, grow to the age of mature accountability, perhaps even pursue a university education and prepare to affect the future of colleagues and kingdoms and the course of the world, yet he does not have the mental capacity or the moral will to say, “I will not do that thing”? No, this sorry drugstore psychology would have us say, “I just can’t help myself. My glands have complete control over my life—my mind, my will, my entire future.”

40. To say that a young woman in such a relationship has to bear her responsibility and that of the young man too is one of the most inappropriate suggestions I can imagine. In most instances if there is sexual transgression, I lay the burden squarely on the shoulders of the young man—for our purposes probably a priesthood bearer—and that’s where I believe God intended responsibility to be. In saying that, I do

not excuse young women who exercise no restraint and have not the character or conviction to demand intimacy only in its rightful role. Unfortunately, I have had enough experience in Church callings to know that women as well as men can be predatory, a phenomenon more and more evident (and more and more tragic) in modern times. But I also refuse to accept the feigned innocence of some young man who wants to sin and calls it psychology.

41. Indeed, most tragically, it is the young woman who is most often the victim; it is the young woman who most often suffers the greater pain; it is the young woman who most often feels used and abused and terribly Unclean. And for that imposed uncleanness the man as well as the woman will pay, as surely as the sun sets and rivers run to the sea.

42. Note the prophet Jacob’s straightforward language on this account in the Book of Mormon. After a bold confrontation on the subject of sexual transgression among the Nephites, he quotes Jehovah: “For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

43. “For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction.”¹⁹

44. Don’t be deceived and don’t be destroyed. Unless such fire is controlled, your clothes and your future will be burned, and your world, short of painful and perfect repentance, can go up in flames. I give that to you on good word: I give it to you on God’s word.

Sacramental Moments

45. Sexual union is a sacrament of the highest order, a union not only of a man and a woman but very much the union of that man and that woman with God.

46. Third, after soul and symbol comes the word sacrament, a term closely related to the other two. Sexual intimacy is not only a symbolic union between

a man and a woman—the uniting of their very souls—but it is also symbolic of a union between mortals and deity, between otherwise ordinary and fallible humans uniting for a rare and special moment with God Himself and all the powers by which He gives life in this wide universe of ours.

47. In this latter sense, human intimacy is a kind of sacrament, a very special symbol. For our purpose, a sacrament could be any one of a number of gestures or acts or ordinances that unite us with God and His limitless powers. We are imperfect and mortal; He is perfect and immortal. But from time to time—indeed, as often as is possible and appropriate—we find ways and go to places and create circumstances where we can unite symbolically with Him and, in so doing, gain access to His power. Those special moments of union with God are sacramental moments, such as kneeling at a marriage altar or blessing a newborn baby or partaking of the emblems of the Lord's Supper. This latter ordinance is the one we in the Church have come to associate most traditionally with the word else her second estate, someone else his next level of development in the divine plan of salvation. I submit to you that no power, priesthood or otherwise, is given by God so universally to so many with virtually no control over its use except self-control. And I submit that we will never be more like God at any other time in this life than when we are expressing that particular power. Of all the titles He has chosen for Himself, Father is the one He declares, and creation is His watchword—especially human creation, creation in His image. His glory isn't a mountain, as stunning as mountains are. It isn't in sea or sky or snow or sunrise, as beautiful as they all are. It isn't in art or technology, be that a concerto or computer. No, His glory—and His grief—is in His children. We—you and I—are His prized possessions, and we are the earthly evidence, however inadequate, of what He truly is. Human life is the greatest of God's powers, the most mysterious and magnificent chemistry of it all, and you and I have been given it, but under the most serious and sacred of restrictions. You and I—who can make neither mountain nor moonlight, not one rain-drop or a single rose—have this greater gift in an absolutely unlimited way. And the only control placed on us is self-control—self-control born of respect for the divine sacramental power it is. Surely God's trust in us to respect this future-forming gift is an awesomely staggering one. We who may not be able to repair a bicycle or assemble an

average jigsaw puzzle can yet, in all of our weaknesses and imperfections, carry this procreative power which makes us so very much like God in at least that one grand and majestic way.

A Serious Matter

48. “Sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume [us] in chaos.”—Will and Ariel Durant

49. Souls. Symbols. Sacraments. Do these words suggest why human intimacy is such a serious matter? Why it is so right and rewarding, so stunningly beautiful when it is within marriage and approved of God (not just “good” but “very good”),²⁰ and so blasphemously wrong—like unto murder—when it is outside such a covenant? It is my understanding that we park and pet and sleep over and sleep with at the peril of our very lives. Our penalty may not come on the precise day of our transgression, but it comes surely and certainly enough, and were it not for a merciful God and the treasured privilege of personal repentance, far too many would even now be feeling that hellish pain which, like the passion we have been discussing, is also always described in the metaphor of fire. Someday, somewhere, sometime the morally unclean will, until they repent, pray like the rich man, wishing Lazarus to “dip . . . his finger in the water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”²¹

50. In closing, consider this from two students of civilization's long, instructive story:

51. “No one man [or woman], however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life [or hers] before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group.”²²

52. Or, in the more ecclesiastical words of Elder James E. Talmage:

53. “It has been declared in the solemn word of revelation, that the spirit and the body constitute the soul of man; and, therefore, we should look upon this body as something that shall endure in the resurrected state, beyond the grave, something to be kept pure and holy. Be not afraid of soiling its hands; be not afraid of scars that may come to it if won in earnest effort, or [won] in honest fight, but beware of scars that disfigure, that have come to you in places where you ought not have gone, that have befallen you in unworthy undertakings[pursued where you ought not have been]; beware of the wounds of battles in which you have been fighting on the wrong side.”²³

54. If some are feeling the “scars . . . that have come to you in places where you ought not have gone,” to them is extended the special peace and promise available through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. His love and the restored gospel principles and ordinances that make His love available to us with all their cleansing and healing power are freely given. The power of these principles and ordinances, including complete and redeeming repentance, are fully realized only in this, the true and living Church of the true and living God. We should all “come unto Christ”²⁴ and be morally clean in order to claim all the blessings of love—His love for us, our love for Him, and a couple’s truest love for each other.

Notes

1. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. 40 of Great Books of the Western World, 1952, 92.
2. In New Hampshire (New York: Henry Holt, 1923), 80.
3. Proverbs 6:27–28, 32–33.
4. Alma 39:5; emphasis added.
5. Proverbs 30:20.
6. Proverbs 6:32.
7. D&C 88:15; emphasis added. 8. D&C 93:34.
9. See Matthew 8:28–32.
10. Conference Report, October 1913, 117.
11. “The Very Key,” filmstrip based on a talk by Elder Boyd K. Packer (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987).
12. Hebrews 6:6.
13. 1 Corinthians 6:13–20; emphasis added.
14. See D&C 132:19, 24.
15. See D&C 128:18.
16. Genesis 2:24.
17. Human Intimacy: Illusion & Reality (Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1981), 5–6.
18. Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 182.
19. Jacob 2:31–34; emphasis added.
20. Genesis 1:31. 21. Luke 16:24.

22. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 35–36.

23. Conference Report, October 1913, 117.

24. Moroni 10:30, 32.

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We Believe in Being Chaste

Elder David A. Bednar
General Conference, April 2013

1. My message addresses a fundamental question of great spiritual consequence: Why is the law of chastity so important? I pray the Holy Ghost will confirm the truthfulness of the principles I emphasize.

2. The eternal importance of chastity can only be understood within the overarching context of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness for His children. "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and ... has a divine nature and destiny" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2010, 129). All men and women lived with God as His spirit children before coming to the earth as mortal beings. The Father's plan enables His spirit sons and daughters to obtain physical bodies, to gain mortal experience, and to progress toward exaltation.

3. Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal existence. Thus, our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and act in accordance with truth, and our ability to obey the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ are amplified through our physical bodies. In the school of mortality, we experience tenderness, love, kindness, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, and even the challenges of physical limitations in ways that prepare us for eternity. Simply stated, there are lessons we must learn and experiences we must have, as the scriptures describe, "according to the flesh" (1 Nephi 19:6; Alma 7:12–13).

4. After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said "it was not good that the man should be alone" (Moses 3:18; see also Genesis 2:18), and Eve became Adam's wife and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females was needed to enact the plan of happiness. "Neither is the man without the woman,



neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11). The man and the woman are intended to learn from, strengthen, bless, and complete each other.

5. The means by which mortal life is created is divinely appointed. "The first commandment ... God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife" (Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2010, 129). The commandment to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

6. The power of procreation is spiritually significant. Misuse of this power subverts the purposes of the Father's plan and of our mortal existence. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son are creators and have entrusted each of us with a portion of Their creative power. Specific guidelines for the proper use of the ability to create life are vital elements in the Father's plan. How we feel about and use that supernal power will determine in large measure our happiness in mortality and our destiny in eternity.

7. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained: "The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given his children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment, but another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse. The emphasis we place on the law of chastity is explained by our understanding of the purpose of our procreative powers in the accomplishment of God's plan. ...

8. "Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of the procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute

They are not a conquest to be achieved or simply an act to be performed. Rather, they are in mortality one of the ultimate expressions of our divine nature and potential and a way of strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between husband and wife. We are agents blessed with moral agency and are defined by our divine heritage as children of God—and not by sexual behaviors, contemporary attitudes, or secular philosophies.

10. To some degree, the natural man described by King Benjamin is alive and well in each of us (see Mosiah 3:19). The natural man or woman is unrepentant, is carnal and sensual (see Mosiah 16:5; Alma 42:10; Moses 5:13), is indulgent and excessive, and is prideful and selfish. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “The ‘natural man’ is the ‘earthly man’ who has allowed rude animal passions to overshadow his spiritual inclinations” (“Ocean Currents and Family Influences,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 112).

11. In contrast, the “man [or woman] of Christ” (Helaman 3:29) is spiritual and bridles all passions (see Alma 38:12), is temperate and restrained, and is benevolent and selfless. Men and women of Christ lay hold upon the word of God, deny themselves and take up His cross (see Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; D&C 56:2), and press forward along a strait and narrow course of faithfulness, obedience, and devotion to the Savior and His gospel.

12. As sons and daughters of God, we have inherited divine capacities from Him. But we presently live in a fallen world. The very elements out of which our bodies were created are by nature fallen and ever subject to the pull of sin, corruption, and death. Consequently, the Fall of Adam and its spiritual and temporal consequences affect us most directly through our physical bodies. And yet we are dual beings, for our spirit that is the eternal part of us is tabernacled in a physical body that is subject to the Fall. As Jesus emphasized to the Apostle Peter, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). The precise nature of the test of mortality, then, can be summarized in the following question: Will I respond to the inclinations of the natural man, or will I yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and put off the natural man and become a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord (see Mosiah 3:19)? That is the test. Every appetite, desire, propensity, and impulse of the

natural man may be overcome by and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We are here on the earth to develop godlike qualities and to bridle all of the passions of the flesh.

13. The Father’s plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him with resurrected, exalted bodies. Heavenly Father desires us to be together in the light and filled with hope. In contrast, Lucifer labors to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to hinder their eternal progression. The overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become “miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). Lucifer wants us ultimately to be alone in the dark and without hope.

14. Satan relentlessly works to distort the most important elements of the Father’s plan. He does not have a body, and his eternal progress has been halted. Just as water flowing in a riverbed is stopped by a dam, so the adversary’s eternal progress is thwarted because he does not have a physical body. Because of his rebellion, Lucifer has denied himself all of the mortal blessings and experiences made possible through a body of flesh and bones. He cannot learn the lessons that only an embodied spirit can learn. He resents the reality of a literal and universal resurrection of all mankind. One of the potent scriptural meanings of the word damned is illustrated in his inability to continue developing and becoming like our Heavenly Father.

15. Because a physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, Lucifer seeks to frustrate our progression by tempting us to use our bodies improperly. One of the ultimate ironies of eternity is that the adversary, who is miserable precisely because he has no physical body, entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to spiritual destruction.

16. Violating the law of chastity is a grievous sin and a misuse of our physical tabernacles. To those who know and understand the plan of salvation, defiling the body is an act of rebellion (see Mosiah 2:36–37; D&C 64:34–35) and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit companionship advocated by the adversary is temporary and empty.

17. Alma counseled his son Shiblon to “bridle all [of his] passions, that [he] may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Significantly, disciplining the natural man in each of us makes possible a richer, a deeper, and a more enduring love of God and of His children. Love increases through righteous restraint and decreases through impulsive indulgence.

18. President Marion G. Romney declared:

19. “I can think of no blessings to be more fervently desired than those promised to the pure and the virtuous. Jesus spoke of specific rewards for different virtues but reserved the greatest, so it seems to me, for the pure in heart, ‘for they,’ said he, ‘shall see God’ (Matt. 5:8). And not only shall they see the Lord, but they shall feel at home in his presence.

20. “Here is ... the Savior’s promise: ‘Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God’ (D&C 121:45)” (“Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 42).

21. We also are promised that, as we pursue the pathway of virtue, “the Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion” (D&C 121:46). Thus, living the law of chastity invites some of the greatest blessings men and women can receive in mortality: appropriate spiritual confidence in the presence of family, friends, Church associates, and, ultimately, the Savior. Our innate longing to belong is fulfilled in righteousness as we walk in the light with hope.

22. Some of you who receive this message need to repent of sexual or other sins. The Savior is often referred to as the Great Physician, and this title has both symbolic and literal significance. All of us have experienced the pain associated with a physical injury or wound. When we are in pain, we typically seek relief and are grateful for the medication and treatments that help to alleviate our suffering. Consider sin as a spiritual wound that causes guilt or, as described by Alma to his son Corianton, “remorse of conscience” (Alma 42:18). Guilt is to our spirit what pain is to our body—a warning of danger and a protection from additional damage. From the Atonement of the Savior flows the soothing salve that can heal our spiritual wounds and remove guilt. However, this salve can only be applied through the principles of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, and consistent obedience. The results of

sincere repentance are peace of conscience, comfort, and spiritual healing and renewal.

23. Your bishop or branch president is the spiritual physician’s assistant who is authorized to help you repent and heal. Please remember, however, that the extent and intensity of your repentance must match the nature and severity of your sins—especially for Latter-day Saints who are under sacred covenant. Serious spiritual wounds require sustained treatment and time to heal completely and fully.

24. The doctrine I have described will seem to be archaic and outdated to many people in a world that increasingly mocks the sanctity of procreation and minimizes the worth of human life. But the Lord’s truth is not altered by fads, popularity, or public opinion polls. I promise that obedience to the law of chastity will increase our happiness in mortality and make possible our progress in eternity. Chastity and virtue are now, always have been, and always will be “most dear and precious above all things” (Moroni 9:9). I so testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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Children

Elder Neil L. Andersen Ensign,
November 2011



1. As we look into the eyes of a child, we see a fellow son or daughter of God who stood with us in the premortal life.

2. It is a crowning privilege of a husband and wife who are able to bear children to provide mortal bodies for these spirit children of God. We believe in families, and we believe in children.

3. When a child is born to a husband and wife, they are fulfilling part of our Heavenly Father's plan to bring children to earth. The Lord said, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."¹ Before immortality, there must be mortality.

4. The family is ordained of God. Families are central to our Heavenly Father's plan here on earth and through the eternities. After Adam and Eve were joined in marriage, the scripture reads, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."² In our day prophets and apostles have declared, "The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force."³

5. This commandment has not been forgotten or set aside in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁴ We express deep gratitude for the enormous faith shown by husbands and wives (especially our wives) in their willingness to have children. When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. These are sacred decisions—decisions that should be made with sincere prayer and acted on with great faith.

6. Years ago, Elder James O. Mason of the Seventy shared this story with me: "The birth of our sixth child was an unforgettable experience. As I gazed on this beautiful, new daughter in the nursery just moments after her birth, I distinctly heard a voice declare, 'There will yet be

another, and it will be a boy.' Unwisely, I rushed back to the bedside of my absolutely exhausted wife and told her the good news. It was very bad timing on my part."⁵ Year after year the Masons anticipated the arrival of their seventh child. Three, four, five, six, seven years passed. Finally, after eight years, their seventh child was born—a little boy.

7. Last April, President Thomas S. Monson declared:

8. "Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it's growing ever wider.

9. "The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world. We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded."⁶

10. Many voices in the world today marginalize the importance of having children or suggest delaying or limiting children in a family. My daughters recently referred me to a blog written by a Christian mother (not of our faith) with five children. She commented: "[Growing] up in this culture, it is very hard to get a biblical perspective on motherhood. Children rank way below college. Below world travel for sure. Below the ability to go out at night at your leisure. Below honing your body at the gym. Below any job you may have or hope to get." She then adds: "Motherhood is not a hobby, it is a calling. You do not collect children because you find them cuter than stamps. It is not something to do if you can squeeze the time in. It is what God gave you time for."⁷ Having young children is not easy. Many days are just difficult. A young mother got on a bus with seven children. The bus driver asked, "Are these all yours, lady? Or is it a picnic?"

11. "They're all mine," she replied. "And it's no picnic!"⁸

12. As the world increasingly asks, "Are these all yours?" we thank you for creating within the Church a sanctuary for families, where we honor and help mothers with children.

13. To a righteous father, there are no words sufficient to express the gratitude and love he feels for his wife's incalculable gift of bearing and caring for their children.

14. Elder Mason had another experience just weeks after his marriage that helped him prioritize his family responsibilities. He said:

15. "Marie and I had rationalized that to get me through medical school it would be necessary for her to remain in the workplace. Although this was not what we [wanted] to do, children would have to come later. [While looking at a Church magazine at my parents' home,] I saw an article by Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then of the Quorum of the Twelve, [highlighting] responsibilities associated with marriage.

According to Elder Kimball, one sacred responsibility was to multiply and replenish the earth. My parents' home was [close to] the Church Administration Building. I immediately walked to the offices, and 30 minutes after reading his article, I found myself sitting across the desk from Elder Spencer W. Kimball." (This wouldn't be so easy today.)

16. "I explained that I wanted to become a doctor. There was no alternative but to postpone having our family. Elder Kimball listened patiently and then responded in a soft voice, 'Brother Mason, would the Lord want you to break one of his important commandments in order for you to become a doctor? With the help of the Lord, you can have your family and still become a doctor. Where is your faith?'"

17. Elder Mason continued: "Our first child was born less than a year later. Marie and I worked hard, and the Lord opened the windows of heaven." The Masons were blessed with two more children before he graduated from medical school four years later.⁹

18. Across the world, this is a time of economic instability and financial uncertainty. In April general conference, President Thomas S. Monson said: "If you are concerned about providing financially for a wife and family, may I assure you that there is no shame in a couple having to scrimp and save. It is generally during these challenging times that you will grow closer together as you learn to sacrifice and to make difficult decisions."¹⁰

19. Elder Kimball's piercing question, "Where is your faith?" turns us to the holy scriptures.

20. It was not in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve bore their first child. Leaving the garden, "Adam [and Eve] began to till the earth. ... Adam

knew his wife, and she [bore] ... sons and daughters, and [acting in faith] they began to multiply and to replenish the earth."¹¹

21. It was not in their Jerusalem home, with gold, silver, and precious things, that Lehi and Sariah, acting in faith, bore their sons Jacob and Joseph. It was in the wilderness. Lehi spoke of his son Jacob as "my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness."¹² Lehi said of Joseph, "Thou wast born in the wilderness of [our] afflictions; yea, in the days of [our] greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee."¹³

22. In the book of Exodus, a man and woman married and, acting in faith, had a baby boy. There was no welcoming sign on the front door to announce his birth. They hid him because Pharaoh had instructed that every new-born male Israelite should be "cast into the river."¹⁴ You know the rest of the story: the baby lovingly laid in a little ark made of bulrushes, placed in the river, watched over by his sister, found by Pharaoh's daughter, and cared for by his own mother as his nurse. The boy was returned to Pharaoh's daughter, who took him as her son and called him Moses.

23. In the most beloved story of a baby's birth, there was no decorated nursery or designer crib—only a manger for the Savior of the world.

In "the best of times [and] ... the worst of times,"¹⁵ the true Saints of God, acting in faith, have never forgotten, dismissed, or neglected "God's commandment ... to multiply and replenish the earth."¹⁶ We go forward in faith—realizing the decision of how many children to have and when to have them is between a husband and wife and the Lord. We should not judge one another on this matter.

25. The bearing of children is a sensitive subject that can be very painful for righteous women who do not have the opportunity to marry and have a family. To you noble women, our Heavenly Father knows your prayers and desires. How grateful we are for your remarkable influence, including reaching out with loving arms to children who need your faith and strength.

26. The bearing of children can also be a heart-breaking subject for righteous couples who marry and find that they are unable to have the children they so anxiously anticipated or for a husband and wife who plan on having a large family but are blessed with a smaller family.

27. We cannot always explain the difficulties of our mortality. Sometimes life seems very unfair—especially when our greatest desire is to do exactly what the Lord has commanded. As the Lord's servant, I assure you that this promise is certain: "Faithful members

whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, [as] they keep the covenants they have made with God.”¹⁷

28. President J. Scott Dorius of the Peru Lima West Mission told me their story. He said:

29. “Becky and I were married for 25 years without being able to have [or adopt] children. We moved several times. Introducing ourselves in each new setting was awkward and sometimes painful. Ward members wondered why we [didn’t have] children. They weren’t the only ones wondering.

30. “When I was called as a bishop, ward members [expressed] concern that I did not have any experience with children and teenagers. I thanked them for their sustaining vote and asked them to allow me to practice my child-raising skills on their children. They lovingly obliged.

31. “We waited, gained perspective, and learned patience. After 25 years of marriage, a miracle baby came into our lives. We adopted two-year-old Nicole and then newborn Nikolai. Strangers now compliment us on our beautiful grandchildren. We laugh and say, ‘They are our children. We have lived our lives backwards.’”¹⁸

32. Brothers and sisters, we should not be judgmental with one another in this sacred and private responsibility.

33. “And [Jesus] took a child ... in his arms [and] said ...

34. “Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth ... him that sent me.”¹⁹

35. What a wonderful blessing we have to receive sons and daughters of God into our home.

36. Let us humbly and prayerfully seek to understand and accept God’s commandments, reverently listening for the voice of His Holy Spirit.

37. Families are central to God’s eternal plan. I testify of the great blessing of children and of the happiness they will bring us in this life and in the eternities, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Moses 1:39.
2. Genesis 1:28.
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
4. According to the annual American Community Survey, released by the U.S. Census Bureau, “Utah still has the nation’s largest households, highest fertility rate, lowest median age, youngest age at marriage and most stay-at-home moms” (“Who Are Utahns? Survey Shows We’re Highest, Lowest, Youngest,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 22, 2011, A1, A8).
5. E-mail from Elder James O. Mason, June 25, 2011.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 66, 67.
7. Rachel Jankovic, “Motherhood Is a Calling (and Where Your Children Rank),” July 14, 2011, desiringgod.org
8. See “Jokes and Funny Stories about Children,” the-jokes.co.uk/jokes-about-children.php
9. E-mail from Elder James O. Mason, June 29, 2011.
10. Thomas S. Monson, *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 67.
11. Moses 5:1, 2.
12. 2 Nephi 2:1.
13. 2 Nephi 3:1.
14. Exodus 1:22.
15. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Signet Classic, 1997), 13.
16. *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
17. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.3.3.
18. E-mail from President J. Scott Dorius, Aug. 28, 2011.
19. Mark 9:36–37

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2011/10/children?lang=eng>



Love and Marriage

Sister Wendy Nelson Worldwide Devotionals, 2017



1. My dear brothers and sisters, we love you and we love being with you! You are indeed the hope of Israel, which is why as I offer a few thoughts, I pray that the Holy Ghost will deliver the exact message you need to hear.

2. Prior to our marriage, I was a professor of marriage and family therapy for more than 25 years—the last 13 right here at Brigham Young University. I counseled thousands of couples and heard one tragic story after another about fractured families and ruined relationships. I saw firsthand what works in marriage and what does not. I learned what can heal even ravaged marriages and what can wreck others almost overnight. So today, would you allow me to speak with you about what is surely one of your very favorite topics? Love and marriage?

3. I'd like to share four truths I believe will not only save you unnecessary heartache but will help you to be, and to choose, a righteous spouse and then to create a happy marriage and a productive family.¹

4. Tonight I hope you'll think of me as your "Aunt Wendy" as I speak to you from my heart just as I would—and have—to my own nieces and nephew. So, here are Aunt Wendy's four truths about love and marriage:²

5. Truth #1: Truths about love and marriage are brought to you by the Holy Ghost from our Heavenly Father. He decreed marriage to be an irreplaceable component of His plan of happiness.³ The Spirit is the messenger of these truths. I urge you to seek to understand them.

6. By contrast, lies about love and marriage originate with, and are perpetuated by, Satan and his servants. The adversary rejoices every time he persuades a victim to embrace anything that defiles or degrades love and marriage. However, truth is truth, lies are lies, and no amount of clever marketing, campaigning, or advocacy

can ever change that.

7. Truth #2: Personal purity is the key to true love. The more pure your thoughts and feelings, your words and actions, the greater your capacity to give and receive true love.

8. Trust me on this: Every time you pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father in prayer, and then listen; every time you study the scriptures seeking answers to the questions of your heart; every time you avoid anything that would wound your spirit (such as pornography); every time you worship in the temple; every time you find an ancestor's ordinance-qualifying information, you are choosing to increase your personal purity.

9. Your future spouse will thank you because in that very moment you will be preparing for true marital intimacy. So, if you're single and wonder how best to prepare for true love, the answer is: Do whatever it takes to keep your thoughts, feelings, words, and actions pure. Invite the Spirit to guide you. He will help you! And if you're married, my counsel is exactly the same!

10. As you work to become more pure, you will have the Holy Ghost with you more and more. Your ability to receive personal revelation will increase, which means you'll have clearer direction for your life. You'll feel more peace and more joy, less lonely, and more hopeful about your future. You'll also have increased mental clarity as you study and work. And, in addition to these great rewards for working every day to be just a little more pure, you'll be increasing your ability to experience true marital intimacy.

11. This is why pornography is so devastating! Contrary to what all of its promoters claim, pornography will actually prevent you from experiencing the most marvelous kind of intimacy.

12. Now, this next truth, Truth #3, may boggle your mind because it's the exact opposite of what the adversary and much of the world would have you believe about love and marriage.

13. Truth #3: As an important part of the expression of their love, the Lord wants a husband and wife to partake of the wonders and joys of marital intimacy.

14. Marital intimacy is ordained by God. It is commanded and commended by Him because it draws a husband and wife closer together and closer to the Lord! True marital intimacy involves the whole soul of each spouse.⁴ It is the uniting of the body and the spirit of the husband with the body and the spirit of his wife.

15. That soulful union represents just how united a husband and wife are in all areas of their lives. They work together as partners. They pray, play, struggle, grow, and enjoy life together. They sacrifice for each other and encourage each other to be all they were born to be.

16. My dear brothers and sisters, marital intimacy is sacred. In fact, a husband and wife can be drawn closer to God when joined in true marital intimacy.

17. So, how can you prepare for such intimacy? You will need to live righteously so the Spirit can be the companion to you and your spouse.

18. This leads to Truth #4: For true marital intimacy, the Holy Ghost needs to be involved. It is simply not possible to have the kind of intimate experiences outside of marriage that you can have within because the Spirit will not be present.

19. Elder Parley P. Pratt taught that the Holy Ghost has the ability to increase, enlarge, expand, and purify "all the natural passions and affections."⁵ Just imagine: He can purify your feelings! Therefore, anything that invites the Spirit into your life, and into the life of your spouse and your marriage, will increase your ability to experience marital intimacy. It really is as simple, and as profound, as that!

20. On the other hand, anything that offends the Spirit will decrease your ability to be one with your spouse. Things such as anger, lust, unforgiveness, contention, immorality, and unrepented sin will reduce your attempt for marital intimacy to be something that is nothing more than a sexual experience.

21. So, to recap: While worldly sex is under the influence of the world and the adversary and involves carnal, sensual, and devilish passions, God-ordained marital intimacy is under the influence of the Spirit and involves Spirit-enhanced and purified passions. The truth is, the more pure you are, the more marvelous your marital intimacy will be.⁶

22. With worldly sex, anything goes. With marital intimacy, exquisite care is taken to avoid anything and everything—from language to music to movies—that offends the Spirit, your spirit, or your spouse's.

23. While worldly sex is lustful and kills love, marital intimacy generates more love.

24. Worldly sex degrades men and women and their bodies, while marital intimacy honors men and women and celebrates the body as one of the great prizes of mortal life.

25. With worldly sex, individuals can feel used, abused, and ultimately more lonely. With marital intimacy, spouses feel more united and loved, more nurtured and understood.

26. Worldly sex ravages and eventually ruins relationships. Marital intimacy strengthens marriages. It supports, heals, and hallows the lives of spouses and their marriage.

27. Worldly sex has been likened to the toot of a flute, while marital intimacy has been likened to the grandeur of an entire orchestra.⁷

28. Worldly sex becomes a total obsession because it never fulfills its promises. God-ordained marital intimacy is glorious and will continue eternally for covenant-keeping husbands and wives.

29. In short, marital intimacy endorsed by the Spirit is blessed by the Lord and is sanctifying.⁸

30.

31. Now, creating a strong, happy marriage is not easy! I can attest to that. But it will bring you joy!

32.

33. For our 10th wedding anniversary, I wondered what I could give my husband to represent the joy our marriage has brought me. This is what I gave him: A swing!

34.

35. My dear brothers and sisters, whom we love, if you will intentionally implement these four truths, I am confident that you can build a happy marriage that will sustain and comfort you forever. A marriage that will allow you to be more than you could ever be on your own.

36.

37. I testify that marriage is one of the greatest privileges God gives to His children, that marriage can be the source of unparalleled joy, and that personal purity is the key to that joy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Henry B. Eyring, “Renaissance of Marriage: To Become as One” (address given at the Complementary of Man and Woman: An International Interreligious Colloquium in Vatican City, Rome, Nov. 18, 2014), LDS.org.

2. See Wendy L. Watson, *Purity and Passion: Spiritual Truths about Intimacy That Will Strengthen Your Marriage* (2001).

3. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Why Marriage, Why Family,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 50–53.

4. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments,” in *Morality* (1992), 152–66.

5. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (1978), 61.

6. Now, some of you may want to be good—but not too good. Some of you may be tempted to do everything you can to avoid looking excessively virtuous, if there is such a thing. And yet if you want to enjoy the most fulfilling kind of marital intimacy, that is exactly what you want. You want to be as pure as possible so that your marital intimacy can be as marvelous as possible.

7. Personal communication with Truman G. Madsen.

8. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:34.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-devotionals/2017/01/love-and-marriage?lang=eng>



Making the Right Choices

Elder Richard G. Scott
General Conference, October 1994



1. Present tonight are many young men who hold the priesthood of God.¹ Some of you look forward to being a missionary when you are older. Others are planning to go soon; still others have completed missions and are seeking an eternal companion. I am sobered by the realization that some of you will not reach these worthy goals because of other choices you are making now.

2. I am grateful this is a private priesthood meeting, for I have felt impressed to treat sensitive yet important matters. While they apply to all present, I particularly want to talk with you young men. I will speak as though you and I were alone in a private interview and no one else can hear us. My purpose is to help you learn how to make the right choices. That will help you develop strong feelings of self-worth. You will have confidence to do right and overcome strong negative peer pressure and bad influences.

3. As a young boy, I felt that some things that I heard discussed by others at school about private parts of the body were wrong. Yet I wasn't really sure how wrong or why they were wrong. You may have similar feelings. Since in tonight's setting you cannot ask me anything, I will use some of the confidential questions most frequently asked by youth I have met across the world. I will answer them by what I have learned from the scriptures and the prophets. You then will have clear standards from which to make choices. I pray that as we talk the Holy Ghost will let you feel the truth of what is said. I know that as you listen and think of how our interview applies to you, there will come impressions regarding what to do about it in your own life.

4. Question: Could you give us some help about resisting peer pressure? Why do some people do things that are wrong, then brag about how much fun they are having? When I don't participate, they make me feel stupid because I won't do it.

5. Answer: You can't please God without upsetting Satan, so you will get pressure from those he tempts to do wrong. Individuals who do wrong want you to join them because they feel more comfortable in what they are doing when others do it also. They may also want to take advantage of you. It is natural to want to be accepted by peers, to be part of a group—some even join gangs because of that desire to belong, but they lose their freedom, and some lose their lives. One of the hardest things for you to recognize is how truly strong you already are and how others silently respect you. We have great confidence in you. You don't need to compromise your standards to be accepted by good friends. The more obedient you are, the more you stand for true principles, the more the Lord can help you overcome temptation.² You can also help others because they will feel your strength. Let them know about your standards by consistently living them. Answer questions about your principles when you are asked, but avoid being preachy. I know from personal experience that works.

6. No one intends to make serious mistakes. They come when you compromise your standards to be more accepted by others. You be the strong one. You be the leader. Choose good friends and resist peer pressure together.

7. Question: How do we keep bad thoughts from entering our minds, and what do we do when they come?

8. Answer: Some bad thoughts come by themselves. Others come because we invite them by what we look at and listen to.³ Talking about or looking at immodest pictures of a woman's body can stimulate powerful emotions. It will tempt you to watch improper videocassettes or movies. These things surround you, but you must not participate in them. Work at keeping your thoughts clean by thinking of something

good.⁴ The mind can think of only one thing at a time. Use that fact to crowd out ugly thoughts.⁵ Above all, don't feed thoughts by reading or watching things that are wrong. If you don't control your thoughts, Satan will keep tempting you until you eventually act them out.⁶

9. Question: Why is the law of chastity so important? Why is sex before marriage wrong?

10. Answer: Fundamental to the great plan of happiness and central to the teachings of the Savior is the family. A new family begins when a man and woman make sacred marriage vows and are legally bound together to become husband and wife, father and mother. The perfect beginning is through sealing in the temple. With marriage they commit the best of themselves to be absolutely loyal to each other and to invite children to be nurtured and taught. The father assumes his role as provider and protector, the mother her role as the heart of the home, with her tender, loving, nurturing influence. Together they strive to instill in themselves and their children principles such as prayer, obedience, love, giving of oneself, and the quest for knowledge.

11. Within the enduring covenant of marriage, the Lord permits husband and wife the expression of the sacred procreative powers in all their loveliness and beauty within the bounds He has set.⁷ One purpose of this private, sacred, intimate experience is to provide the physical bodies for the spirits Father in Heaven wants to experience mortality. Another reason for these powerful and beautiful feelings of love is to bind husband and wife together in loyalty, fidelity, consideration of each other, and common purpose.

12. However, those intimate acts are forbidden by the Lord outside the enduring commitment of marriage because they undermine His purposes.⁸ Within the sacred covenant of marriage, such relationships are according to His plan. When experienced any other way, they are against His will. They cause serious emotional and spiritual harm. Even though participants do not realize that is happening now, they will later. Sexual immorality creates a barrier to the influence of the Holy Spirit with all its uplifting, enlightening, and empowering capabilities. It causes powerful physical and emotional stimulation. In time that creates an unquenchable appetite that drives the offender to ever

more serious sin. It engenders selfishness and can produce aggressive acts such as brutality, abortion, sexual abuse, and violent crime. Such stimulation can lead to acts of homosexuality, and they are evil and absolutely wrong.⁹

13. Sexual transgression would defile the priesthood you now hold, sap your spiritual strength, undermine your faith in Jesus Christ, and frustrate your ability to serve Him. Consistent, willing obedience increases your confidence and ability. It produces character that allows you to face difficult challenges and overcome them. It qualifies you to receive inspiration and power from the Lord.¹⁰

14. Question: They always tell us we shouldn't become sexually involved, but they never tell us the limits. What are they?

15. Answer: Any sexual intimacy outside of the bonds of marriage—I mean any intentional contact with the sacred, private parts of another's body, with or without clothing—is a sin and is forbidden by God. It is also a transgression to intentionally stimulate these emotions within your own body.¹¹ Satan tempts one to believe that there are allowable levels of physical contact between consenting individuals who seek the powerful stimulation of emotions they produce, and if kept within bounds, no harm will result. As a witness of Jesus Christ, I testify that is absolutely false. Satan particularly seeks to tempt one who has lived a pure, clean life to experiment through magazines, video-cassettes, or movies with powerful images of a woman's body. He wants to stimulate appetite to cause experimentation that quickly results in intimacies and defilement. Powerful habits are formed which are difficult to break. Mental and emotional scars result.

16. When you are mature enough to plan seriously for marriage, keep your expressions of feelings to those that are comfortable in the presence of your parents.¹² To help you keep these sacred commandments, make a covenant with the Lord that you will obey them. Decide what you will do and will not do. When temptation comes, do not change your standards. Do not abandon them when circumstances seem to justify an exception. That is Satan's way to hurt you by making it seem that sometimes God's law does not apply. There are no exceptions.

17. Question: Before you are married, how far is too far to go if it is with your girlfriend?

18. Answer: Before marriage there can be no sexual contact with a girlfriend, fiancée, or anyone else, period.¹³ While a commandment, that standard is for your happiness. That's why the Church counsels you to go in groups and not to date while you are young. Later, as you prepare for marriage, remember that true love elevates, protects, respects, and enriches another. It motivates you to make sacrifices for the girl you love. Satan would promote counterfeit love, which is really lust. That is driven by hunger to satisfy personal appetite. Protect the one you love by controlling your emotions to the limits set by the Lord. You know how to be clean. We trust you to do it.

19. Question: How do you go about repenting after a sexual sin is committed? What sins should you tell the bishop?

20. Answer: All of the sexual transgressions we have discussed require sincere repentance with the participation of the bishop. Should you have done any of this, repent now. It is wrong to violate these commandments of the Lord. It is worse to do nothing about it. Sin is like cancer in the body. It will never heal itself. It will become worse unless cured through repentance. Your parents can help strengthen you. Then you can become clean and pure by repentance under the guidance of the bishop. He may seem to be busy or unavailable. Tell him you are in trouble and need help. He will listen.

21. A youth in serious trouble said: "I have done things that I knew were bad. I have been taught they were ever since I can remember. I know repentance is a great gift; without it I would be lost. But I'm not ready to repent of my sins, yet I know when I am ready I can." How tragic. The thought of intentionally committing serious sin now and repenting later is perilously wrong. Never do that.¹⁴ Many start that journey of intentional transgression and never make it back. Premeditated sin has greater penalties and is harder to overcome. If there is sin, repent now—while you can.

22. I pray that as we have talked you have had feelings to do better.¹⁵ You hold the priesthood of God. That is a sacred responsibility,¹⁶ and also a singular privilege.¹⁷ You will be fortified in your determination

to live righteously as you study the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon. Listen to your parents, leaders, and the prophet we have sustained today. Have faith in the Savior. He will help you.¹⁸ Remember He said, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise."¹⁹

23. Please stay morally clean. The Lord will make that possible as you do your part with all your strength.²⁰ Jesus Christ lives, and He loves you. He will help you as you do your part. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), p. 64; see also Millennial Star, 51 (1889):657.
2. See 1 Cor. 10:13.
3. See H. Burke Peterson, Ensign, Nov. 1993, pp. 42–44.
4. See The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), pp. 278, 445–46.
5. See Boyd K. Packer, Ensign, Jan. 1974, pp. 27–28.
6. See Thomas S. Monson, Ensign, Nov. 1990, p. 47; see also Robert L. Simpson, Ensign, Jan. 1973, p. 112.
7. See Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, May 1974, p. 7.
8. See Boyd K. Packer, Ensign, July 1972, pp. 111–13.
9. See Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, Nov. 1980, pp. 97–98. 10. See D&C 43:9, 15–16.
11. See Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, Nov. 1974, p. 8; Nov. 1977, p. 6; Nov. 1980, p. 97.
12. See The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, pp. 283–84.
13. See The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), pp. 65, 176–77.
14. Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, pp. 70–72.
15. See D&C 64:33–34.
16. See D&C 84:35–39. See also Spencer W. Kimball, The Miracle of Forgiveness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), pp. 124–25.
17. See The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 494. 18. See Moro. 10:32. 19. D&C 82:10.
20. See 3 Ne. 18:20.

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Pornography

Elder Dallin H. Oaks
General Conference, April 2005



1. Last summer Sister Oaks and I returned from two years in the Philippines. We loved our service there, and we loved returning home. When we have been away, we see our surroundings in a new light, with increased appreciation and sometimes with new concerns.

2. We were concerned to see the inroads pornography had made in the United States while we were away. For many years our Church leaders have warned against the dangers of images and words intended to arouse sexual desires. Now the corrupting influence of pornography, produced and disseminated for commercial gain, is sweeping over our society like an avalanche of evil.

3. At our last conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley devoted an entire talk to this subject, warning in the plainest terms that “this is a very serious problem even among us” (“A Tragic Evil among Us,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 61). Most of the bishops we meet in stake conferences now report major concerns with this problem.

4. My fellow holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and also our young men, I wish to speak to you today about pornography. I know that many of you are exposed to this and that many of you are being stained by it.

5. In concentrating my talk on this subject I feel like the prophet Jacob, who told the men of his day that it grieved him to speak so boldly in front of their sensitive wives and children. But notwithstanding the difficulty of the task, he said he had to speak to the men about this subject because God had commanded him (see Jacob 2:7–11). I do so for the same reason.

6. In the second chapter of the book that bears his name, Jacob condemns men for their “whoredoms”

(vv. 23, 28). He told them they had “broken the hearts of [their] tender wives, and lost the confidence of [their] children, because of [their] bad examples before them” (v. 35).

7. What were these grossly wicked “whoredoms”? No doubt some men were already guilty of evil acts. But the main focus of Jacob’s great sermon was not with evil acts completed, but with evil acts contemplated.

8. Jacob began his sermon by telling the men that “as yet, [they had] been obedient unto the word of the Lord” (Jacob 2:4). However, he then told them he knew their thoughts, that they were “beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable . . . unto God” (v. 5). “I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts” (v. 6), he added. Jacob was speaking as Jesus spoke when He said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28; see also 3 Nephi 12:28; D&C 59:6; 63:16).

9. More than 30 years ago, I urged BYU students to avoid the “promotional literature of illicit sexual relations” in what they read and viewed. I gave this analogy:

10. “Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions, bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call a brain. The brain won’t vomit back filth. Once recorded, it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life.”¹

11. Here, brethren, I must tell you that our bishops and our professional counselors are seeing an increasing number of men involved with pornography, and many of those are active members. Some involved in pornography apparently minimize its seriousness and continue to exercise the priesthood of God because they think no one will know of their involvement. But the user knows, brethren, and so does the Lord.

12. Some have suggested that pornography should be a separate question in the temple recommend interview. It is already. At least five different questions should elicit a confession and discussion on this subject if the person being interviewed has the spiritual sensitivity and honesty we expect of those who worship in the house of the Lord.

13. One of the Savior's most memorable teachings applies to men who are secretly viewing pornography:

14. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

15. "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:25–26; see also Alma 60:23).

16. The Savior continues His denunciation of those who treat what is visible but neglect to cleanse the inner man:

17. "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

18. "Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matthew 23:27–28).

19. The immediate spiritual consequences of such hypocrisy are devastating. Those who seek out and use pornography forfeit the power of their priesthood. The Lord declares: "When we undertake to cover our sins, . . . behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" (D&C 121:37).

20. Patrons of pornography also lose the companionship of the Spirit. Pornography produces fantasies that destroy spirituality. "To be carnally minded is death"—spiritual death (Romans 8:6; see also 2 Nephi 9:39).

21. The scriptures repeatedly teach that the Spirit of the Lord will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. When we worthily partake of the sacrament, we are promised that we will "always have his Spirit to be with [us]." To qualify for that promise we covenant that we will "always remember him" (D&C 20:77). Those who seek out and use pornography for sexual stimulation obviously violate that covenant. They also violate a sacred covenant to refrain from unholy and impure practices. They cannot have the Spirit of the Lord to be with them. All such need to heed the Apostle Peter's plea: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

22. Brethren, you have noticed that I am not discussing the effects of pornography on mental health or criminal behavior. I am discussing its effects on spirituality—on our ability to have the companionship of the Spirit of the Lord and our capacity to exercise the power of the priesthood.

23. Pornography also inflicts mortal wounds on our most precious personal relationships. In his talk to men of the priesthood last October, President Hinckley quoted the letter of a woman who asked him to warn Church members that pornography "has the effect of damaging hearts and souls to their very depths, strangling the life out of relationships" (Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2004, 60).

24. At a recent stake conference a woman handed me a similar letter. Her husband had also served in important Church callings for many years while addicted to pornography. She told of great difficulty in getting priesthood leaders to take this problem of pornography seriously: "I got all kinds of responses—like I was over-reacting or it was my fault. The bishop we have now has been great. And now after 15 years my husband is trying to deal with his addiction, but now it is 15 years harder to quit for him and the loss has been incalculable."

25. Pornography impairs one's ability to enjoy anormal emotional, romantic, and spiritual relationship with a person of the opposite sex. It erodes the moral barriers that stand against inappropriate, abnormal, or illegal behavior. As conscience is desensitized, patrons of pornography are led to act out what they have witnessed, regardless of its effects on their life and the lives of others.

26. Pornography is also addictive. It impairs decision-making capacities and it "hooks" its users, drawing them back obsessively for more and more. A man who had been addicted to pornography and to hard drugs wrote me this comparison: "In my eyes cocaine doesn't hold a candle to this. I have done both. Quitting even the hardest drugs was nothing compared to [trying to quit pornography]" (letter of Mar. 20, 2005).

27. Some seek to justify their indulgence by arguing that they are only viewing "soft," not "hard," porn. A wise bishop called this refusing to see evil as evil. He quoted men seeking to justify their viewing choices by comparisons such as "not as bad as" or "only one bad scene." But the test of what is evil is not its degree but its effect. When persons entertain evil thoughts long enough for the Spirit to withdraw, they lose their spiritual protection and they are subject to the power and direction of the evil one. When they use Internet or other pornography for what this bishop described as "arousal on demand" (letter of Mar. 13, 2005), they are deeply soiled by sin.

28. King Benjamin's great sermon describes the terrible consequences. When we withdraw from the Spirit of the Lord, we become an enemy to righteousness, we have a lively sense of our guilt, and we "shrink from the presence of the Lord" (see Mosiah 2:36–38). "Mercy hath no claim on that man," he concluded; "therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment" (v. 39).

29. Consider the tragic example of King David. Though a spiritual giant in Israel, he allowed himself to look upon something he should not have viewed (see 2 Samuel 11). Tempted by what he saw, he violated two of the Ten Commandments, beginning with "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). In this way a prophet-king fell from his exaltation (see D&C 132:39).

30. But the good news is that no one needs to follow the evil, downward descent to torment. Everyone caught on that terrible escalator has the key to reverse his course. He can escape. Through repentance he can be clean.

31. Alma the Younger described it:

32. "Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell. . . .

33. "The very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

34. "And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

35. "Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

36. "And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

37. "And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!" (Alma 36:13–14, 17–20).

38. My brethren who are caught in this addiction or troubled by this temptation, there is a way.

39. First, acknowledge the evil. Don't defend it or try to justify yourself. For at least a quarter century our leaders have pleaded with men, and also with women and children, to avoid this evil.² Our current Church magazines are full of warnings, information, and helps on this subject—with more than a score of articles published or to be published this year and last year alone.³

40. Second, seek the help of the Lord and His servants. Hear and heed President Hinckley's words: "Plead with the Lord out of the depths of your soul that He will remove from you the addiction which enslaves you. And may you have the courage to seek the loving

guidance of your bishop and, if necessary, the counsel of caring professionals” (Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2004, 62).

41. Third, do all that you can to avoid pornography. If you ever find yourself in its presence—which can happen to anyone in the world in which we live—follow the example of Joseph of Egypt. When temptation caught him in her grip, he left temptation and “got him out” (Genesis 39:12).

42. Don’t accommodate any degree of temptation. Prevent sin and avoid having to deal with its inevitable destruction. So, turn it off! Look away! Avoid it at all costs. Direct your thoughts in wholesome paths. Remember your covenants and be faithful in temple attendance. The wise bishop I quoted earlier reported that “an endowed priesthood bearer’s fall into pornography never occurs during periods of regular worship in the temple; it happens when he has become casual in his temple worship” (letter of Mar. 13, 2005).

43. We must also act to protect those we love. Parents install alarms to warn if their household is threatened by smoke or carbon monoxide. We should also install protections against spiritual threats, protections like filters on Internet connections and locating access so others can see what is being viewed. And we should build the spiritual strength of our families by loving relationships, family prayer, and scripture study.

44. Finally, do not patronize pornography. Do not use your purchasing power to support moral degradation. And young women, please understand that if you dress immodestly, you are magnifying this problem by becoming pornography to some of the men who see you.

45. Please heed these warnings. Let us all improve our personal behavior and redouble our efforts to protect our loved ones and our environment from the onslaught of pornography that threatens our spirituality, our marriages, and our children.

46. I testify that this is what we should do to enjoy the blessings of Him whom we worship. I testify of Jesus Christ, the Light and Life of the World, whose Church this is, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Challenges for the Year Ahead (pamphlet, 1974), 4–5; reprinted in “Things They’re Saying,” New Era, Feb. 1974, 18.

2. See, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Tragic Evil among Us,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2004, 59–62; David E. Sorensen, “You Can’t Pet a Rattlesnake,” Liahona, July 2001, 48–50; Ensign, May 2001, 41–43; Thomas S. Monson, “Pornography—the Deadly Carrier,” Ensign, Nov. 1979, 66–67; David B. Haight, “Personal Morality,” Ensign, Nov. 1984, 70–73.

3. See, for example, Rory C. Reid, “The Road Back: Abandoning Pornography,” Liahona, Feb. 2005, 28–33; Ensign, Feb. 2005, 46–51; Arianne B. Cope, “Internet Café,” New Era, Mar. 2005, 34–37; Nycole S. Larsen, “The Decision,” Friend, Mar. 2004, 40–41.



Statements on Intimacy in Marriage

Selected Teachings Related Scripture

1 Corinthians 7:2–5

“Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

“The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

“Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”

Physical Intimacy Ordained of God

President John Taylor

“We have a great many principles innate in our natures that are correct, but they want sanctifying. God said to man, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.’ (Genesis 1:28.) Well, he has planted, in accordance with this, a natural desire in woman towards man, and in man towards woman and a feeling of affection, regard, and sympathy exists between the sexes. We bring it into the world with us, but that, like everything else, has to be sanctified. An unlawful gratification of these feelings and sympathies is wrong in the sight of God, and leads down to death, while a proper exercise of our functions leads to life, happiness, and exaltation in this world and the world to come. And so it is in regard to a thousand other things” (Gospel Kingdom, 61).



President Joseph F. Smith

“The lawful association of the sexes is ordained of God, not only as the sole means of race perpetuation, but for the development of the higher faculties and nobler traits of human nature, which the love-inspired companionship of man and woman alone can insure” (“Unchastity the Dominant Evil of the Age,” Improvement Era, June 1917)

President Spencer W. Kimball

“It is the destiny of men and women to join together to make eternal family units. In the context of lawful marriage, the intimacy of sexual relations is right and divinely approved. There is nothing unholy or degrading about sexuality in itself, for by that means men and women join in a process of creation and in an expression of love” (President Kimball Speaks Out, 2).

“The union of the sexes, husband and wife (and only husband and wife), was for the principal purpose of bringing children into the world. Sexual experiences were never intended by the Lord to be a mere plaything or merely to satisfy passions and lusts. We know of no directive from the Lord that proper sexual experience between husbands and wives need be limited totally to the procreation of children, but we find much evidence from Adam until now that no provision was ever made by the Lord for indiscriminate sex” (“The Lord’s Plan for Men and Women,” Ensign, Oct. 1975, 4).

Elder Parley P. Pratt

“Our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose; and they are the very mainsprings of life and happiness—they are the cement of all virtuous and heavenly society—they are the essence of charity, or love; . . .

“There is not a more pure and holy principle in existence than the affection which glows in the bosom of a virtuous man for his companion; . . .

“The fact is, God made man, male and female; he planted in their bosoms those affections which are calculated to promote their happiness and union” (Writings of Parley Parker Pratt, 52–53).

Physical Intimacy Only in Marriage

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

“The expression of our procreative powers is pleasing to God, but he has commanded that this be confined within the relationship of marriage” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 99; or Ensign, Nov. 1993, 74).

Elder Richard G. Scott

“Any sexual intimacy outside of the bonds of marriage

— I mean any intentional contact with the sacred, private parts of another’s body, with or without clothing—is a sin and is forbidden by God” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 51; or Ensign, Nov. 1994, 38).

Purposes of Intimacy

President Lorenzo Snow

“Think of the promises that are made to you in the beautiful and glorious ceremony that is used in the marriage covenant in the temple. When two Latter-day Saints are united together in marriage, promises are made to them concerning their offspring, that reach from eternity to eternity. They are promised that they shall have the power and the right to govern and control and administer salvation and exaltation and glory to their offspring worlds without end. And what offspring they do not have here, undoubtedly there will be opportunities to have them hereafter. What else could man wish? A man and a woman in the otherlife, having celestial bodies, free from sickness and disease, glorified and beautified beyond description, standing in the midst of their posterity, governing and controlling them, administering life, exaltation, and glory, worlds without end” (Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, 138).

President Spencer W. Kimball

“Your love, like a flower, must be nourished. There will come a great love and interdependence between you, for your love is a divine one. It is deep, inclusive, comprehensive. It is not like that association of the world which is misnamed love, but which is mostly physical attraction. When marriage is based on this only, the parties soon tire of each other. There is a break and a divorce, and a new, fresher physical attraction comes with another marriage which in turn

may last only until it, too, becomes stale. The love of which the Lord speaks is not only physical attraction, but spiritual attraction as well. It is faith and confidence in, and understanding of, one another. It is a total partnership. It is companionship with common ideals and standards. It is unselfishness toward and sacrifice for one another. It is cleanliness of thought and action and faith in God and his program.

It is parenthood in mortality ever looking toward godhood and creationship, and parenthood of spirits. It is vast, all-inclusive, and limitless. This kind of love never tires or wanes. It lives on through sickness and sorrow, through prosperity and privation, through accomplishment and disappointment, through time and eternity” (Faith Precedes the Miracle, 130–31).

Misused Physical Intimacy

President David O. McKay

“Let us instruct young people who come to us, first, young men throughout the Church, to know that a woman should be queen of her own body. The marriage covenant does not give the man the right to enslave her, or to abuse her, or to use her merely for the gratification of his passion. Your marriage ceremony does not give you that right” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1952, 86).

President Spencer W. Kimball

“If it is unnatural, you just don’t do it. That is all, and all the family life should be kept clean and worthy and on a very high plane. There are some people who have said that behind the bedroom doors anything goes. That is not true and the Lord would not condone it” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 312).

“We urge, with Peter, ‘. . . Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.’ (1 Pet. 2:11.) No indecent exposure or pornography or other aberrations to defile the mind and spirit. No fondling of bodies, one’s own or that of others, and no sex between persons except in proper marriage relationships. This is positively prohibited by our Creator in all places, at all times, and we reaffirm it. Even in marriage there can be some excesses and distortions. No amount of rationalization to the contrary can satisfy a disappointed Father in heaven” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, 8–9; or Ensign, May 1974, 7).

President Howard W. Hunter

“Keep yourselves above any domineering or unworthy behavior in the tender, intimate relationship between husband and wife. Because marriage is ordained of God, the intimate relationship between husbands and wives is good and honorable in the eyes of God. He has commanded that they be one flesh and that they multiply and replenish the earth (see Moses 2:28; 3:24). You are to love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it (see Ephesians 5:25–31).

“Tenderness and respect—never selfishness—must be the guiding principles in the intimate relationship between husband and wife. Each partner must be considerate and sensitive to the other’s needs and desires. Any domineering, indecent, or uncontrolled behavior in the intimate relationship between husband and wife is condemned by the Lord” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 68; or Ensign, Nov. 1994, 51).

Elder Spencer W. Kimball

“Even though sex can be an important and satisfactory part of married life, we must remember that life is not designed just for sex. Even marriage does not make proper certain extremes in sexual indulgence. To the Ephesian saints Paul begged for propriety in marriage: ‘So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.’ (Eph. 5:28.) And perhaps the Lord’s condemnation included secret sexual sins in marriage, when he said: ‘. . . And those who are not pure, and have said they were pure, shall be destroyed, saith the Lord God.’ (D&C 132:52.)” (Miracle of Forgiveness, 73).

Unit 4 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Fountain of Life”

[churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/eternal-marriage-student-manual/intimacy-in-marriage/the-fountain-of-life?lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/eternal-marriage-student-manual/intimacy-in-marriage/the-fountain-of-life?lang=eng)

Sister Linda S. Reeves, “Protection from Pornography”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/04/protection-from-pornography-a-christ-focused-home?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2006/10/he-heals-the-heavy-laden?lang=eng>

Elder Jeffery R. Holland, “Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments”

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/souls-symbols-sacraments/>

Elder David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2010/06/things-as-they-really-are?lang=eng>

“Birth Control” True to the Faith & Handbook 2

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/true-to-the-faith/birth-control?lang=eng>

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 5 Scriptures

Husbands and wives have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.

John 13:34-35

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 15:13

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ephesians 5:23, 25, 28

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. . .

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . .

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

D&C 25:5

14 And the office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., thy husband, in his afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of meekness.

D&C 42:22

22 Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.

D&C 83:2

2 Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken; and if they are not found transgressors they shall have fellowship in the church.

Mothers and Fathers have a sacred duty to love, teach, and nurture their children.

Mosiah 4:14-15

14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the devil spirit which hath been spoken

of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.

D&C 68:25-31

25 And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

26 For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized.

27 And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands.

28 And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.

29 And the inhabitants of Zion shall also observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

30 And the inhabitants of Zion also shall remember their labors, inasmuch as they are appointed to labor, in all faithfulness; for the idler shall be had in remembrance before the Lord.

31 Now, I, the Lord, am not well pleased with the inhabitants of Zion, for there are idlers among them; and their children are also growing up in wickedness; they also seek not earnestly the riches of eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness.

D&C 93:40-43, 50

40 But I have commanded you to bring up your children in blight and truth.

41 But verily I say unto you, my servant Frederick G. Williams, you have continued under this condemnation; 42 You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments; and that wicked one hath power, as yet, over you, and this is the cause of your affliction.

43 And now a commandment I give unto you—if you will be delivered you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house.

50 My servant Newel K. Whitney also, a bishop of my church, hath need to be chastened, and set in order his family, and see that they are more diligent and concerned at home, and pray always, or they shall be

removed out of their place.

D&C 83:4-5

4 All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age.

5 And after that, they have claim upon the church, or in other words upon the Lord's storehouse, if their parents have not wherewith to give them inheritances.

Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ

Matthew 5:7-9

7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Matthew 7:12

12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets

3 Nephi 11:29-30

29 For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

30 Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

D&C 68:9-11

9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

11 And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

Excerpts from the General Handbook of the Church – Chapters 1 & 2



1.1 God's Plan of Happiness

Heavenly Father provided the plan of happiness to enable us to enjoy all His blessings. His work and glory is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Immortality is to live forever with a resurrected physical body. Eternal life, or exaltation, is to become like God and live in His presence eternally as families.

We cannot obtain immortality and eternal life without God's help. In this life, we are subject to sin and death, which separate us from Heavenly Father and prevent us from becoming more like Him.

Jesus Christ is central to God's plan. Because of Heavenly Father's infinite love for us, He sent His Son to redeem us from sin and death through His atoning sacrifice (see John 3:16). Through His Atonement, Jesus Christ ensures that each of us born on earth will be resurrected and gain immortality. His Atonement also makes it possible for us to be cleansed from sin and have our hearts changed so we can receive eternal life and a fulness of joy.

To receive eternal life, we must “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32). This invitation extends to all who have lived or will ever live on the earth. Heavenly Father wants all of His children to choose to return to Him.

1.3.1 Priesthood Authority and Keys

Through the priesthood, God accomplishes the work of salvation and exaltation. The priesthood authority and keys needed to direct God's work on earth were restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16; 112:30; see also 3.1). These keys are held by Church leaders today. They call and authorize others to assist in God's work (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:8, 65–67).

1.3.2 Covenants and Ordinances

In Heavenly Father's plan, we make covenants as we receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation, such as baptism (see John 3:5; see also chapter 18). These covenants and ordinances are essential for us to become more like God and return to dwell in His presence (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22).

1.3.3 Prophetic Direction

Through His chosen prophets, God reveals truth and provides inspired guidance and warnings (see Amos 3:7; Doctrine and Covenants 1:4). This guidance helps us enter and remain on the path leading to eternal life.

1.3.4 Scriptures

Under the direction of the Lord's prophets and apostles, the Church provides and preserves the word of God as found in the holy scriptures. The scriptures testify of Christ, teach His gospel, and help us exercise faith in Him (see Jacob 7:10–11; Helaman 15:7).



Living After the Manner of Manner Happiness

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
BYU-I Devotional



1. I am thrilled to be with you today as you begin a new school year at BYU-Idaho. I realize you actually started a few weeks ago but this is the first opportunity President Clark would give me to set foot on campus. He wanted to make sure things got underway properly and therefore requested that I not come in any sooner.
2. I realized while sitting here that this is my first opportunity to be in this beautiful conference center. As some of the very, very senior faculty and staff will remember, I used to come to devotionals in the Hart Building and lead the student body in a stirring cheer to the four R's of the neighborhood--Rexburg, Ririe, Rigby and Roberts. Those were the good old days. You have now gotten so global that cheer would have to be Rome, Raleigh, Raratonga, and Russia--a cheer not appropriate in this hall. My how you have grown. I love this school with all my heart and I certainly love President and Sister Clark with all their administrative, faculty and staff associates here. Thank you, President Clark, for the invitation to be with you.
3. In a phrase I am sure you have heard many times, the Prophet Joseph Smith once said that "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it."¹
4. It is that worthy quest for happiness that I wish to speak today. Note that I said "quest for happiness," not happiness itself. Remember the Prophet Joseph's choice of language: He spoke of the path that leads to happiness as the key to realizing that goal.
5. By the way this is not a new quest that only started with the creation of Family Home Evening groups in Rexburg. No, this has been one of the fundamental pursuits of humankind down through the ages of time. One of the greatest intellectual minds the Western world has ever known once said, "Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."² That was Aristotle, but note how presciently his statement parallels that of the Prophet Joseph--almost the exact phrasing. In those opening lines of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson immortalized both our personal and political quests by forever linking (at least in America) the three great inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But notice in that magnificent troika it is not happiness that is a right (like life and liberty), but specifically the pursuit of happiness.
6. So how do we "pursue" happiness, especially when we are young and inexperienced, maybe a little fearful, and life lies ahead of us as a challenging mountain to climb? Well, we know one thing for sure: happiness is not easy to find running straight for it. It is usually too elusive, too ephemeral, too subtle. If you haven't learned it already, you will learn in the years ahead that most times happiness comes to us when we least expect it, when we are busy doing something else. Happiness is almost always a by-product of some other endeavor. One of my favorite writers from my university days said, "Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder."³ This is one of those great gospel ironies that often don't seem to make sense, like "the last shall be first" and "lose your life to find it." The gospel is filled with such ironies and indirections, and I think the pursuit of happiness is one of them. So how do we optimize our chance for happiness without pursuing it so directly that we miss it? Let me go to a most remarkable book for some answers.
7. The first 30 years of Book of Mormon history do not present a pleasant story. After the abrupt necessity of abandoning their entire earthly fortune, leaving Jerusalem hastily on the eve of international conflict, crossing the Arabian peninsula in the most adverse of circumstances, building a boat

without any prior experience in doing so, crossing an ocean with would-be fatal conflicts breaking out repeatedly and landing in a primitive, unknown new land with all the hardship such a settlement would entail, the hostility within the family of Lehi and Sariah became so intense that the two halves of their family split asunder, with one group fleeing yet farther into the wilderness, fearing for their lives lest they fall victim to the bloodthirsty quest of the other. As they plunged into unsettled terrain to seek safety and fashion a life for themselves as best they could, the prophet-leader of this Nephite half of the family says they now tried to live “after the manner of happiness.”⁴

8. In light of what they had just been through for thirty years and with what we know yet lay in store for them in the trials almost constantly ahead, such a comment seems almost painful. How could any of this be described as anything remotely like “happiness”? Ah, my young Rexburg friends, there is the rub. Nephi does not say they were happy, though it is evident they actually were. What he says is, they “lived after the manner of happiness.” Today I would have you understand that that there is a wonderful key in that phrase that can unlock precious blessings for you the rest of your life.
9. I do not think God in his glory or the angels of heaven or the prophets on earth intend to make us happy all the time, every day in every way, given the testing and trial this earthly realm is intended to provide. As President James E. Faust once phrased it: “Happiness is not given to us in a package that we can just open up and consume. Nobody,” he said, “is ever happy 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”⁵ But my reassurance to you today is that in God’s plan we can do very much to find the happiness we do desire. We can take certain steps, we can form certain habits, we can do certain things that God and history tell us lead to happiness with the confidence that if we live in such a manner that butterfly is much more likely to land upon our shoulder.
10. In short your best chance for being happy is to do the things that happy people do. Live the way happy people live. Walk the path that happy people walk. And your chances to find joy in unexpected moments, to find peace in unexpected places, to find the help of angels when you didn’t even know they knew you existed, improves exponentially. Here are at least a couple of ideas about how one

might live “after the manner of happiness.”

11. Above all else, ultimate happiness, true peace, and anything even remotely close to scriptural joy are found first, foremost, and forever in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lots of other philosophies and systems of belief have been tried. Indeed it seems safe to say that virtually every other philosophy and system has been tried down through the centuries of history. But when the Apostle Thomas asked the Lord the question young people often ask today, “How can we know the way?” (and at your age in life that really translates, “How can we know the way to be happy?”) Jesus gave the answer that rings from eternity to all eternity, “I am the way, the truth, and the life . . . And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do . . . If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.”⁶
12. What a promise! Live my way, live my truth, live my life--live in this manner that I am showing you and teaching you--and whatsoever you ask will be given, whatsoever you seek you will find, including happiness. Parts of the blessing may come soon, parts may come later, and parts may not come until heaven but they will come--all of them. What encouragement that is after a blue Monday or a sad Tuesday or a tearful Wednesday! And it is a promise the realization of which cannot come any other way than by devotion to eternal truth! In the words of then newly ordained Elder David O. McKay just short of a full century ago, “[Unlike gratification or pleasure or some kind of thrill, true] happiness is found only along that well-beaten [gospel] track, narrow as it is, . . . [and] straight [as it is], which leads to life eternal.”⁷ So love God and each other, and be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
13. Second, learn as quickly as you can that so much of your happiness is in your hands, not in events or circumstances or fortune or misfortune. That is part of what the battle for agency was over in the pre-mortal councils of heaven. We have choice, we have volition, we have agency, and we can choose if not happiness per se then we can choose to live after the manner of it. Abraham Lincoln had plenty to be unhappy about in the most difficult administration a President of the United States has ever faced, but even he reflected that “folks are usually about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”⁸ Happiness comes first by what comes into your head a long time before it comes into your

hand. Joseph Smith was living “after the manner of happiness” in a very unhappy situation when he wrote from Liberty Jail to those on the outside who were also the victims of great injustice and persecution:

14. “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; . . .
15. “The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth.”⁹
16. Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly. That is not only good counsel against the modern plague of pornography, but it is counsel for all kinds of gospel thoughts, good thoughts, constructive thoughts, hopeful thoughts. Those faith-filled thoughts will alter how you see life’s problems and how you find resolution to them. “The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind,”¹⁰ the revelations say. Too often we have thought it was all up to the heart; it is not. God expects a willing mind in the quest for happiness and peace as well. Put your head into this. All of this takes effort. It is a battle but a battle for happiness that is worth waging. In her popular book of a year or so ago, Elizabeth Gilbert wrote:
17. “Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and . . . look for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness . . . , to stay afloat on top of it.”¹¹
18. I love that phrase of hers: “Participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings.”¹² Don’t be passive. Swim upward. Think and speak and act positively. That is what happy people do; that is one aspect of living after the manner of happiness.
19. Here is another. In anticipation of giving this talk, I sat in my study for a long time trying to think if I had ever known a happy person who was unkind or unpleasant to be with. And guess what? I couldn’t think of one, not a single, solitary one. So learn this great truth early in life while you are at such a happy place as BYU-Idaho: You can never, worlds without end, build your happiness on someone else’s unhappiness. Sometimes, maybe especially when we are young and insecure and trying to make our way up in the world, we think if we can tear someone else down a little, it will somehow miraculously lift us up. That is what bullying is. That is what catty remarks are. That is what arrogance and superficiality and exclusiveness are. Perhaps we think if we are negative enough, or cynical enough, or just plain mean enough, then expectations won’t be too high; we can keep everyone down to a flaw-filled level and therefore our flaws won’t be so glaring.
20. Happy people aren’t negative or cynical or mean so don’t plan on that being part of the “manner” of happiness. If my life has taught me anything, it is that kindness and pleasantness and faith-based optimism are characteristics of happy people. From the words of Mother Teresa, “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.”¹³
21. A related step along the path toward happiness is to avoid animosity, contention, and anger in your life. Remember it is Lucifer, Satan, the adversary of us all who loves anger. He is “the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.”¹⁴ After quoting that verse in general conference a few years ago, Elder Lynn Robbins said, “[That] verb stir sounds like a recipe for disaster: Put tempers on medium heat, stir in a few choice words, and bring to a boil; continue stirring until thick; cool off; let feelings chill for several days; serve cold; lots of leftovers.” “Lots of leftovers” indeed.¹⁵
22. Anger damages or destroys almost everything it touches. As someone has said, to harbor anger is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. It is a vicious acid that will destroy the container long before it does damage to the intended object. There is nothing in it or its cousinly vices--violence, rage, bitterness and hate--that has anything to do with living the gospel or the pursuit of happiness. I do not think that anger can exist--or at least can be fostered and entertained and indulged in--in a life being lived “after the manner of happiness.”
23. One last suggestion when there are so many others we should consider; that original verse from Nephi said that in an effort to find happiness in their new land after their 30 years of trouble “I, Nephi, did

cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.”¹⁶ By contrast those from whom they fled “became an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety.”¹⁷

24. If you want to be happy this year in school, or on a mission, or in a marriage--work at it. Learn to work. Serve diligently. Don't be idle and mischievous. A homespun definition of Christ-like character might be the integrity to do the right thing at the right time in the right way. And the right thing for you to do at BYU-I this year is study. This is a year of education paid for by you, by your parents, and by the tithe payers of this Church. So don't be idle. Don't be wasteful. Do the right thing at the right time. “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”¹⁸ “Be industrious and . . . labor, including laboring for and serving others, one of the truly great keys to true happiness.”
25. Now, let me close by citing again Alma's straightforward counsel to Corianton:
26. With all the encouragement a father would want to give a son or daughter, he said that in the resurrection the faithful are raised to a state of “endless happiness” wherein they “inherit the kingdom of God.”¹⁹ At that time, he said, we will be “raised to happiness according to [our] desires of happiness.”²⁰ But he also sternly cautions: “Do not suppose . . . that [without repentance] ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”²¹ Sin is the antithesis of “living after the manner of happiness.” Indeed those who believe otherwise, Alma says, “are without God in the world, and . . . have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.”²²
27. A state contrary to the nature of happiness. That is the worst state I can imagine to live in. As a new school year begins I welcome you from the state of Idaho or Wyoming or Arizona or California. I welcome you from any state in the union or any state on the planet. I invite you to rejoice in any state you have ever been in except the “state contrary to the nature of happiness.” I ask you to reject transgression in order to live consistent with the nature of God, which is the nature of true happiness. I encourage you and applaud you in “pursuing the path that leads to it.” You can't find it any other way.
28. My testimony to you is that God, your Eternal Father in heaven, is always encouraging and applauding your pursuit even more lovingly than I. I testi-

fy that He wants you to be happy, to have true joy. I testify of the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son which provides the right path and, if necessary, a new start on it, a second chance, a change in our nature if necessary. In the power and authority of my office I leave an apostolic blessing on each of you that you will know that Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life”²³--that no one comes to true happiness except by Him. I bless you to know that someday, sometime, somewhere you will have every righteous desire of your heart as you live the gospel of Jesus Christ, thus living “after the manner” that leads to those blessings. I testify and I bless you in the name of Him who is the Good Shepherd, the Chief Cornerstone of this Church, the High Priest of good things to come in your life, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Selected by Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 255-56.2
2. Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*. With an English translation by H Rackham (1982).3 Henry David Thoreau, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/146930-i-am-a-happy-camper-so-i-guess-im-doing-4>
3. 2 Nephi 5:27.5
4. James E. Faust “Our Search for Happiness,” *Ensign*, October 2000, 2, italics added.6 John 14:5-6, 13-14.7
5. David O. McKay, Conference Report, October 1919, 180. italics added. 8
6. Quoted by Dr. Frank Crane, *Syracuse Herald of Syracuse*, New York, January 1, 1914.9
7. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45-46.10
8. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.11 Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 2006.12
9. Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*.13
10. Mother Teresa, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/33359-let-no-one-ever-come-to-you-without-leaving-better-14>
11. 3 Nephi 11:29.15
12. Lynn G. Robbins, “Anger and Agency,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 80.16
13. 2 Nephi 5:17.17
14. 2 Nephi 5:24.18
15. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.19
16. Alma 41:4.20
17. Alma 41:5.21
18. Alma 41:10.22
19. Alma 41:11.23
20. John 14:16
21. Alma 41:10
22. Alma 41: 11
23. John 14:16

<https://www.byui.edu/devotionals/elder-jeffrey-r-holland>



Parents and Children

President Dallin H. Oaks Ensign,
October 2018



1. My dear sisters, how wonderful to have this new general conference session of women of the Church eight years and older. We have heard inspiring messages from the sister leaders and from President Henry B. Eyring. President Eyring and I love working under the direction of President Russell M. Nelson, and we look forward to his prophetic address.
- I.
2. Children are our most precious gift from God—our eternal increase. Yet we live in a time when many women wish to have no part in the bearing and nurturing of children. Many young adults delay marriage until temporal needs are satisfied. The average age of our Church members' marriages has increased by more than two years, and the number of births to Church members is falling. The United States and some other nations face a future of too few children maturing into adults to support the number of retiring adults.¹ Over 40 percent of births in the United States are to unwed mothers. Those children are vulnerable. Each of these trends works against our Father's divine plan of salvation.
3. II.
4. Latter-day Saint women understand that being a mother is their highest priority, their ultimate joy. President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "Women for the most part see their greatest fulfillment, their greatest happiness in home and family. God planted within women something divine that expresses itself in quiet strength, in refinement, in peace, in goodness, in virtue, in truth, in love. And all of these remarkable qualities find their truest and most satisfying expression in motherhood."
5. 4 He continued: "The greatest job that any woman will ever do will be in nurturing and teaching and living and encouraging and rearing her children in righteousness and truth. There is no other thing that will compare with that, regardless of what she does."²
6. Mothers, beloved sisters, we love you for who you are and what you do for all of us.
7. 5 In his important 2015 address titled "A Plea to My Sisters," President Russell M. Nelson said:
8. "The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God!"
9. "Today, ... we need women who know how to make important things happen by their faith and who are courageous defenders of morality and families in a sin-sick world. We need women who are devoted to shepherding God's children along the covenant path toward exaltation; women who know how to receive personal revelation, who understand the power and peace of the temple endowment; women who know how to call upon the powers of heaven to protect and strengthen children and families; women who teach fearlessly."³
10. These inspired teachings are all based on "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," in which this restored Church reaffirms doctrine and practices central to the Creator's plan before He created the earth.
11. III.
12. Now I address the younger group of this audience. My dear young sisters, because of your knowledge of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are unique. Your knowledge will enable you to endure and overcome the difficulties of growing up. From a young age, you have participated in projects and programs that have developed your talents, such as writing, speaking, and planning. You have learned responsible behavior and how to resist temptations to lie, cheat, steal, or use alcohol or drugs.
13. Your uniqueness was recognized in a University of North Carolina study of American teens and religion. A Charlotte Observer article had the title "Mormon teens cope best: Study finds they

top peers at handling adolescence.” This article concluded that “Mormons fared best at avoiding risky behaviors, doing well in school and having a positive attitude about the future.” One of the researchers in the study, who interviewed most of our youth, said, “Across almost every category we looked at, there was a clear pattern: Mormons were first.”⁴

14. Why do you cope best with the difficulties of growing up? Young women, it is because you understand our Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness. This tells you who you are and the purpose of your life. Youth with that understanding are first in problem-solving and first in choosing the right. You know you can have the Lord’s help in overcoming all the difficulties of growing up.

15. Another reason why you are most effective is that you understand that you are children of a Heavenly Father who loves you. I am sure you are familiar with our great hymn “Dearest Children, God Is Near You.” Here is the first verse we all have sung and believed:

16. Dearest children, God is near you,

17. Watching o’er you day and night,

18. And delights to own and bless you,

19. If you strive to do what’s right.⁵

20. There are two teachings in that verse: First, our Heavenly Father is near us and watches over us day and night. Think of it! God loves us, He is near to us, and He watches over us. Second, He delights to bless us as we “strive to do what’s right.” What comfort in the midst of our anxieties and difficulties!

21. Yes, young women, you are blessed, and you are wonderful, but you are like all of Heavenly Father’s children in your need to “strive to do what’s right.”

22. Here I could give you counsel on many different things, but I have chosen to speak of only two.

24. My first counsel concerns cell phones. A recent nationwide survey found that over half of teens in the United States said they spend too much time on their cell phones. More than 40 percent said they felt anxious when they were separated from their cell phones.⁶ This was more common among girls than boys. My young sisters—and adult women too—it will bless your lives if you limit your use of and dependence on cell phones.

25. My second counsel is even more important. Be kind to others. Kindness is something many of our

youth are doing already. Some groups of youth in some

26. communities have shown the way for all of us. We have been inspired by our young people’s acts of kindness to those in need of love and help. In many ways, you give that help and show that love to one another. We wish all would follow your example.

27. At the same time, we know that the adversary tempts all of us to be unkind, and there are still many examples of this, even among children and youth. Persistent unkindness is known by many names, such as bullying, ganging up on someone, or joining together to reject others. These examples deliberately inflict pain on classmates or friends. My young sisters, it is not pleasing to the Lord if we are cruel or mean to others.

28. Here is an example. I know of a young man, a refugee here in Utah, who was teased for being different, including sometimes speaking his native language. He was persecuted by a gang of privileged youth until he retaliated in a way that caused him to be jailed for over 70 days while being considered for deportation. I don’t know what provoked this group of youth, many of them Latter-day Saints like you, but I can see the effect of their meanness, a tragic experience and expense to one of the children of God. Small actions of unkindness can have devastating consequences.

29. When I heard that story, I compared it with what our prophet, President Nelson, said in his recent worldwide youth devotional. In asking you and all other youth to assist in gathering Israel, he said: “Stand out; be different from the world. You and I know that you are to be a light to the world. Therefore, the Lord needs you to look like, sound like, act like, and dress like a true disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁷

30. The youth battalion President Nelson invited you to join will not be mean to one another. They will follow the Savior’s teaching to reach out and be loving and considerate of others, even to turn the other cheek when we feel someone has wronged us.

31. In a general conference address about the time many of you were born, President Gordon B. Hinckley praised “beautiful young women who are striving to live the gospel.” He described them, just as I feel to describe you:

32. “They are generous toward one another. They seek to strengthen one another. They are a credit to their parents and the homes from which they come.

They are approaching womanhood and will carry throughout their lives the ideals which presently motivate them.”⁸

33. As a servant of the Lord, I say to you young women, our world needs your goodness and love. Be kind to one another. Jesus taught us to love one another and to treat others as we want to be treated. As we strive to be kind, we draw closer to Him and His loving influence.
34. My dear sisters, if you participate in any meanness or pettiness—individually or with a group—resolve now to change and encourage others to change. That is my counsel, and I give it to you as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ because His Spirit has prompted me to speak to you about this important subject. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who taught us to love one another as He loved us. I pray that we will do so, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Sara Berg, “Nation’s Latest Challenge: Too Few Children,” AMA Wire, June 18, 2018, wire.amaassn.org.
2. Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley (1997), 387, 390; see also M. Russell Ballard, “Mothers and Daughters,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2010, 18 (in Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society [2011], 156).
3. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2015, 96; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” Ensign, May 1995, 33.
4. The study was published by the Oxford University Press as Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005).
5. “Dearest Children, God Is Near You,” Hymns, no. 96.
6. See “In Our Opinion: You Don’t Need to Be Captured by Screen Time,” Deseret News, Aug. 31, 2018, deseretnews.com.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), 8, HopeofIsrael.lds.org.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Need for Greater Kindness,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2006, 60–61.

churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/parents-and-children?lang=eng



A Prayer for the Children

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland Ensign, May 2003

1. At the close of His first day teaching among the Nephite faithful, the resurrected Jesus turned His attention to a special audience which often stands just below the level of our gaze, sometimes nearly out of sight.
2. The sacred record says: “He commanded that their little children should be brought [forward]. ...
3. “And ... when they had knelt upon the ground, ... he himself also knelt ... ; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, ... so great and marvelous [were the] things ... [He did] speak unto the Father. ...
4. “... When Jesus had made an end of praying ... , he arose; ... and ... wept, ... and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and [again] prayed unto the Father for them.
5. “And when he had done this he wept again; ... [saying] unto the multitude, ... Behold your little ones.”
6. We cannot know exactly what the Savior was feeling in such a poignant moment, but we do know that He was “troubled” and that He “groaned within himself” over the destructive influences always swirling around the innocent. We know He felt a great need to pray for and bless the children. In such times as we are in, whether the threats be global or local or in individual lives, I too pray for the children. Some days it seems that a sea of temptation and transgression inundates them, simply washes over them before they can successfully withstand it, before they should have to face it. And often at least some of the forces at work seem beyond our personal control.
7. Well, some of them may be beyond our control, but I testify with faith in the living God that they are not beyond His. He lives, and priesthood power is at work on both sides of the veil. We are not alone, and we do not tremble as if abandoned. In doing our part,



we can live the gospel and defend its principles. We can declare to others the sure Way, the saving Truth, the joyful Life. We can personally repent in any way we need to repent, and when we have done all, we can pray. In all these ways we can bless one another and especially those who need our protection the most—the children. As parents we can hold life together the way it is always held together—with love and faith, passed on to the next generation, one child at a time.

8. In offering such a prayer for the young, may I address a rather specific aspect of their safety? In this I speak carefully and lovingly to any of the adults of the Church, parents or otherwise, who may be given to cynicism or skepticism, who in matters of whole-souled devotion always seem to hang back a little, who at the Church’s doctrinal campsite always like to pitch their tents out on the periphery of religious faith. To all such—whom we do love and wish were more comfortable camping nearer to us—I say, please be aware that the full price to be paid for such a stance does not always come due in your lifetime. No, sadly, some elements of this can be a kind of profligate national debt, with payments coming out of your children’s and grandchildren’s pockets in far more expensive ways than you ever intended it to be.

9. In this Church there is an enormous amount of room—and scriptural commandment—for studying and learning, for comparing and considering, for discussion and awaiting further revelation. We all learn “line upon line, precept upon precept,” with the goal being authentic religious faith informing genuine Christlike living. In this there is no place for coercion or manipulation, no place for intimidation or hypocrisy. But no child in this Church should be left with uncertainty about his or her parents’ devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Restoration of His Church, and the reality of living prophets and apostles who, now as in earlier days, lead that Church according to “the will of

the Lord, ... the mind of the Lord, ... the word of the Lord, ... and the power of God unto salvation.” In such basic matters of faith, prophets do not apologize for requesting unity, indeed conformity, in the eloquent sense that the Prophet Joseph Smith used that latter word. In any case, as Elder Neal Maxwell once said to me in a hallway conversation, “There didn’t seem to be any problem with conformity the day the Red Sea opened.”

10. Parents simply cannot flirt with skepticism or cynicism, then be surprised when their children expand that flirtation into full-blown romance. If in matters of faith and belief children are at risk of being swept downstream by this intellectual current or that cultural rapid, we as their parents must be more certain than ever to hold to anchored, unmistakable moorings clearly recognizable to those of our own household. It won’t help anyone if we go over the edge with them, explaining through the roar of the falls all the way down that we really did know the Church was true and that the keys of the priesthood really were lodged there but we just didn’t want to stifle anyone’s freedom to think otherwise. No, we can hardly expect the children to get to shore safely if the parents don’t seem to know where to anchor their own boat. Isaiah once used a variation on such imagery when he said of unbelievers, “[Their] tacklings are loosed; they could not ... strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail.”

11. I think some parents may not understand that even when they feel secure in their own minds regarding matters of personal testimony, they can nevertheless make that faith too difficult for their children to detect. We can be reasonably active, meeting-going Latter-day Saints, but if we do not live lives of gospel integrity and convey to our children powerful heartfelt convictions regarding the truthfulness of the Restoration and the divine guidance of the Church from the First Vision to this very hour, then those children may, to our regret but not surprise, turn out not to be visibly active, meeting-going Latter-day Saints or sometimes anything close to it.

12. Not long ago Sister Holland and I met a fine young man who came in contact with us after he had been roaming around through the occult and sorting through a variety of Eastern religions, all in an attempt to find religious faith. His father, he admitted,

believed in nothing whatsoever. But his grandfather, he said, was actually a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “But he didn’t do much with it,” the young man said. “He was always pretty cynical about the Church.” From a grandfather who is cynical to a son who is agnostic to a grandson who is now looking desperately for what God had already once given his family! What a classic example of the warning Elder Richard L. Evans once gave. Said he: “Sometimes some parents mistakenly feel that they can relax a little as to conduct and conformity or take perhaps a so called liberal view of basic and fundamental things—thinking that a little laxness or indulgence won’t matter—or they may fail to teach or to attend Church, or may voice critical views. Some parents ... seem to feel that they can ease up a little on the fundamentals without affecting their family or their family’s future. But,” he observed, “if a parent goes a little off course, the children are likely to exceed the parent’s example.”

13. To lead a child (or anyone else!), even inadvertently, away from faithfulness, away from loyalty and bedrock belief simply because we want to be clever or independent is license no parent nor any other person has ever been given. In matters of religion a skeptical mind is not a higher manifestation of virtue than is a believing heart, and analytical deconstruction in the field of, say, literary fiction can be just plain old-fashioned destruction when transferred to families yearning for faith at home. And such a deviation from the true course can be deceptively slow and subtle in its impact. As one observer said, “[If you raise the temperature of my] bath water ... only 1 degree every 10 minutes, how [will I] know when to scream?”

14. When erecting their sacred tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai, the ancient children of Israel were commanded to make firm their supporting cords and strengthen the stakes which held them. The reason? Storms arise in life—regularly. So fix it, fasten it, then fix and fasten it again. Even then we know that some children will make choices that break their parents’ hearts. Moms and dads can do everything right and yet have children who stray. Moral agency still obtains. But even in such painful hours it will be comforting for you to know that your children knew of your abiding faith in Christ, in His true Church, in the keys of the priesthood and in those who hold them. It will be

comforting then for you to know that if your children choose to leave the straight and narrow way, they leave it very conscious that their parents were firmly in it.

15. Furthermore, they will be much more likely to return to that path when they come to themselves and recall the loving example and gentle teachings you offered them there.

16. Live the gospel as conspicuously as you can. Keep the covenants your children know you have made. Give priesthood blessings. And bear your testimony! Don't just assume your children will somehow get the drift of your beliefs on their own. The prophet Nephi said near the end of his life that they had written their record of Christ and preserved their convictions regarding His gospel in order "to persuade our children ... that our children may know ... [and believe] the right way."

17. Nephi-like, might we ask ourselves what our children know? From us? Personally? Do our children know that we love the scriptures? Do they see us reading them and marking them and clinging to them in daily life? Have our children ever unexpectedly opened a closed door and found us on our knees in prayer? Have they heard us not only pray with them but also pray for them out of nothing more than sheer parental love? Do our children know we believe in fasting as something more than an obligatory first-Sunday-of-the-month hardship? Do they know that we have fasted for them and for their future on days about which they knew nothing? Do they know we love being in the temple, not least because it provides a bond to them that neither death nor the legions of hell can break? Do they know we love and sustain local and general leaders, imperfect as they are, for their willingness to accept callings they did not seek in order to preserve a standard of righteousness they did not create? Do those children know that we love God with all our heart and that we long to see the face—and fall at the feet—of His Only Begotten Son? I pray that they know this.

18. Brothers and sisters, our children take their flight into the future with our thrust and with our aim. And even as we anxiously watch that arrow in flight and know all the evils that can deflect its course after it has left our hand, nevertheless we take courage in remembering that the most important mortal factor in

determining that arrow's destination will be the stability, strength, and unwavering certainty of the holder of the bow.

19. Carl Sandburg once said, "A baby is God's opinion that life should go on." For that baby's future as well as your own, be strong. Be believing. Keep loving and keep testifying. Keep praying. Those prayers will be heard and answered in the most unexpected hour. God will send aid to no one more readily than He will send it to a child—and to the parent of a child. "And [Jesus] said unto them: Behold your little ones.

20. "And ... they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending ... as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them." May it always be so, I earnestly pray—for the children—in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

21.

Notes

10. 1. 3 Ne. 17:11, 14–16, 18, 21–23.
11. 2. See John 14:6. 3. 2 Ne. 28:30. 4. D&C 68:4.
12. 5. See D&C 128:13.
13. 6. Isa. 33:23.
14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1964, 135–36; emphasis added.
15. Marshall McLuhan, quoted in John Leo, "The Proper Place for Commercials," U.S. News and World Report, 30 Oct. 1989, 71.
16. 9. See Isa. 54:2; 3 Ne. 22:2.
17. See Luke 15:17.
18. See Joseph Smith, comp., Lectures on Faith (1985), 37 for a defining statement on the parental power of human testimony.
19. 2 Ne. 25:23, 26, 28; emphasis added.
20. I am indebted to Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* for the suggestion of this metaphor.
21. In *The Columbia World of Quotations* (1996), no. 48047.
22. 15. 3 Ne. 17:23–24.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2003/04/a-prayer-for-the-children?lang=eng>



A Sin-Resistant Generation

Joy D. Jones

General Conference April 2017

1. A year and a half ago, President Russell M. Nelson spoke of the need “to teach and help raise a sin-resistant generation.”¹ That phrase—“a sin-resistant generation”—struck a deep spiritual chord within me.

2. We honor children who strive to live pure and obedient lives. I have witnessed the strength of many children throughout the world. They stand resilient, “steadfast and immovable”² in a variety of challenging circumstances and environments. These children understand their divine identity, feel Heavenly Father’s love for them, and seek to obey His will.

3. However, there are children who struggle to stand “steadfast and immovable” and whose delicate minds are being wounded.³ They are being attacked on every side by “the fiery darts of the adversary”⁴ and are in need of reinforcement and support. They are an overwhelming motivation for us to step up and wage a war against sin in our effort to bring our children unto Christ.

4. Listen to the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie nearly 43 years ago:

5. “As members of the Church, we are engaged in a mighty conflict. We are at war. We have enlisted in the cause of Christ to fight against Lucifer. ...

6. “The great war that rages on every side and which unfortunately is resulting in many casualties, some fatal, is no new thing. ...

7. “Now there neither are nor can be any neutrals in this war.”⁵

8. Today the war continues with increased intensity. The battle touches us all, and our children are on the front lines facing the opposing forces. Thus, the need intensifies for us to strengthen our spiritual strategies.



Fortifying children to become sin-resistant is a task and a blessing for parents, grandparents, family members, teachers, and leaders. We each bear responsibility to help. However, the Lord has specifically instructed parents to teach their children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost” and “to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.”⁶

9. How to “bring up [our] children in light and truth”⁷ may be a challenging question since it is individualized for each family and each child, but Heavenly Father has given universal guidelines that will help us. The Spirit will inspire us in the most effective ways we can spiritually inoculate our children.

10. To begin, having a vision of the importance of this responsibility is essential. We must understand our—and their—divine identity and purpose before we can help our children see who they are and why they are here. We must help them know without question that they are sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father and that He has divine expectations of them.

11. Second, understanding the doctrine of repentance is essential for becoming resistant to sin. Being sin resistant doesn’t mean being sinless, but it does imply being continually repentant, vigilant, and valiant. Perhaps being sin-resistant comes as a blessing from repeatedly resisting sin. As James said, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”⁸

12. The stripling warriors “were exceedingly valiant for courage ... ; but behold, this was not all—they were ... true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted. Yea, ... they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.”⁹ These young men went to war carrying

Christlike virtues as weapons against their adversaries. President Thomas S. Monson reminded us that “the call for courage comes constantly to each of us. Every day of our lives courage is needed—not just for the momentous events but more often as we make decisions or respond to circumstances around us.”¹⁰

13. Our children don spiritual armor as they establish patterns of personal daily discipleship. Perhaps we underestimate the abilities of children to grasp the concept of daily discipleship. President Henry B. Eyring counseled us to “start early and be steady.”¹¹ So a third key to helping children become sin-resistant is to begin at very early ages to lovingly infuse them with basic gospel doctrines and principles—from the scriptures, the Articles of Faith, the For the Strength of Youth booklet, Primary songs, hymns, and our own personal testimonies—that will lead children to the Savior.

14. Creating consistent habits of prayer, scripture study, family home evening, and Sabbath worship leads to wholeness, internal consistency, and strong moral values—in other words, spiritual integrity. In today’s world where integrity has all but disappeared, our children deserve to understand what true integrity is and why it is so important—especially as we prepare them to make and keep sacred covenants at baptism and in the temple. As Preach My Gospel teaches, “Keeping commitments prepares people [including very young people] to make and keep sacred covenants.”¹²

15. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught, “When we talk about covenant keeping, we are talking about the heart and soul of our purpose in mortality.”¹³ There is unusual power in making and keeping covenants with our Heavenly Father. The adversary knows this, so he has obscured the concept of covenant making.¹⁴ Helping children understand, make, and keep sacred covenants is another key in creating a sin-resistant generation.

16. How do we prepare our children to make and keep sacred covenants as they enter and progress along the covenant path? Teaching children to keep simple promises when they are young will empower them to keep holy covenants later in life.

17. Let me share a simple example: In family home

evening, a father asked, “How are we getting along as a family?” Five-year-old Lizzie complained that her big brother, Kevin, was teasing her too much and hurting her feelings. Kevin reluctantly admitted that Lizzie was right. Kevin’s mother asked him what he could do to get along better with his sister. Kevin thought and decided he would promise Lizzie that he would go one whole day without teasing her.

18. At the end of the next day as everyone gathered for family prayer, Kevin’s dad asked Kevin how he had done. Kevin’s response was “Dad, I kept my promise!” Lizzie happily agreed, and the family congratulated Kevin.

19. Kevin’s mother then suggested that if he could keep his promise for one day, why couldn’t he do it for two days? Kevin agreed to try it again. Two days passed, Kevin was successful in keeping his promise, and Lizzie was even more thankful! When his father asked why he was keeping his promises so well, Kevin said, “I kept my promise because I said I would.”

20. A succession of small, successfully kept promises leads to integrity. The consistent practice of promise keeping is spiritual preparation for children to receive their first covenant of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, wherein they covenant to serve God and keep His commandments.¹⁵ Promises and covenants are inseparable.

21. In the book of Daniel, we learn of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s idol.¹⁶ The king warned them that they would be cast into a burning fiery furnace if they didn’t comply. They refused and said:

22. “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace....

23. “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods.”¹⁷

24. “But if not.” Consider the meaning of these three words and how they relate to keeping covenants. These three young men were not basing their obedience upon being delivered. Even if they were not delivered, they would keep their promise to the Lord because they said they would. Keeping our covenants is always independent

of our situation. These three young men, just as the stripling warriors, are wonderful examples of sin- resistance for our children.

25. How do these examples apply in our homes and to our families? “Line upon line, precept upon precept,”¹⁸ we help children taste success in small bites. As they keep their promises, they feel the Spirit in their lives. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught that “the consummate reward of integrity is the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁹ Then shall our children’s “confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”²⁰ Out of the well of integrity springs an empowered, sin-resistant generation.

26. Brothers and sisters, hold your little ones close—so close that they see your daily religious behavior and watch you keeping your promises and covenants. “Children are great imitators, so give them something great to imitate.”²¹ We are indeed helping to teach and raise a sin-resistant generation unto the Lord promise by promise and covenant by covenant.

27. I testify that Jesus Christ leads this Church. As you teach, lead, and love children in the Savior’s way, you can receive personal revelation that will aid you in creating and arming valiant, sin-resistant children. My prayer is that our children will echo the words of Nephi: “Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?”²² I testify that our Savior atoned for the sins of the world²³—because He said He would—and that He loves us more than we mere mortals can even comprehend²⁴—because He said He would. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 97.
2. Mosiah 5:15.
3. See Jacob 2:9.
4. 1 Nephi 15:24; see also Helaman 5:12.
5. Bruce R. McConkie, “Be Valiant in the Fight of Faith,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 33, 34.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25, 28.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 93:40.
8. James 4:7; see also Alma 19:33. 9. Alma 53:20–21.
10. Thomas S. Monson, “Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 67.
11. Henry B. Eyring, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 37.
12. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 196.
13. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Keeping Covenants: A Message for Those Who Will Serve a Mission,” *New Era*, Jan. 2012, 2.
14. See 1 Nephi 13:26–28.
15. See Mosiah 18:10.
16. See Daniel 3. 17. Daniel 3:17–18. 18. 2 Nephi 28:30.
19. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Personal Integrity,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 33.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
21. Anonymous.
22. 2 Nephi 4:31.
23. See 3 Nephi 27:14–15.
24. See John 15:13.



Mothers Who Know

Sister Julie B. Beck

General Conference, October 2007

1. In the Book of Mormon we read about 2,000 exemplary young men who were exceedingly valiant, courageous, and strong. “Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him” (Alma 53:21). These faithful young men paid tribute to their mothers. They said, “Our mothers knew it” (Alma 56:48). I would suspect that the mothers of Captain Moroni, Mosiah, Mormon, and other great leaders also knew.

2. The responsibility mothers have today has never required more vigilance. More than at any time in the history of the world, we need mothers who know. Children are being born into a world where they “wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).¹ However, mothers need not fear. When mothers know who they are and who God is and have made covenants with Him, they will have great power and influence for good on their children.

Mothers Who Know Bear Children

3. Mothers who know desire to bear children. Whereas in many cultures in the world children are “becoming less valued,”² in the culture of the gospel we still believe in having children. Prophets, seers, and revelators who were sustained at this conference have declared that “God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”³ President Ezra Taft Benson taught that young couples should not postpone having children and that “in the eternal perspective, children—not possessions, not position, not prestige—are our greatest jewels.”⁴

4. Faithful daughters of God desire children. In the scriptures we read of Eve (see Moses 4:26), Sarah (see Genesis 17:16), Rebekah (see Genesis 24:60), and Mary (see 1 Nephi 11:13–20), who were foreordained to be mothers before children were born to them.



Some women are not given the responsibility of bearing children in mortality, but just as Hannah of the Old Testament prayed fervently for her child (see 1 Samuel 1:11), the value women place on motherhood in this life and the attributes of motherhood they attain here will rise with them in the Resurrection (see D&C 130:18). Women who desire and work toward that blessing in this life are promised they will receive it for all eternity, and eternity is much, much longer than mortality. There is eternal influence and power in motherhood.

Mothers Who Know Honor Sacred Ordinances and Covenants

5. Mothers who know honor sacred ordinances and covenants. I have visited sacrament meetings in some of the poorest places on the earth where mothers have dressed with great care in their Sunday best despite walking for miles on dusty streets and using worn-out public transportation. They bring daughters in clean and ironed dresses with hair brushed to perfection; their sons wear white shirts and ties and have missionary haircuts. These mothers know they are going to sacrament meeting, where covenants are renewed. These mothers have made and honor temple covenants. They know that if they are not pointing their children to the temple, they are not pointing them toward desired eternal goals. These mothers have influence and power.

Mothers Who Know Are Nurturers

6. Mothers who know are nurturers. This is their special assignment and role under the plan of happiness.⁵ To nurture means to cultivate, care for, and make grow. Therefore, mothers who know create a climate for spiritual and temporal growth in their homes. Another word for nurturing is homemaking. Homemaking includes cooking, washing clothes and dishes, and keeping an orderly home. Home is where

women have the most power and influence; therefore, Latter-day Saint women should be the best homemakers in the world. Working beside children in home-making tasks creates opportunities to teach and model qualities children should emulate. Nurturing mothers are knowledgeable, but all the education women attain will avail them nothing if they do not have the skill to make a home that creates a climate for spiritual growth. Growth happens best in a “house of order,” and women should pattern their homes after the Lord’s house (see D&C 109). Nurturing requires organization, patience, love, and work. Helping growth occur through nurturing is truly a powerful and influential role bestowed on women.

Mothers Who Know Are Leaders

7. Mothers who know are leaders. In equal partnership with their husbands, they lead a great and eternal organization. These mothers plan for the future of their organization. They plan for missions, temple marriages, and education. They plan for prayer, scripture study, and family home evening. Mothers who know build children into future leaders and are the primary examples of what leaders look like. They do not abandon their plan by succumbing to social pressure and worldly models of parenting. These wise mothers who know are selective about their own activities and involvement to conserve their limited strength in order to maximize their influence where it matters most.

Mothers Who Know Are Teachers

8. Mothers who know are always teachers. Since they are not babysitters, they are never off duty. A well-taught friend told me that he did not learn anything at church that he had not already learned at home. His parents used family scripture study, prayer, family home evening, mealtimes, and other gatherings to teach. Think of the power of our future missionary force if mothers considered their homes as a pre-missionary training center. Then the doctrines of the gospel taught in the MTC would be a review and not a revelation. That is influence; that is power.

Mothers Who Know Do Less

9. Mothers who know do less. They permit less of what will not bear good fruit eternally. They allow less media in their homes, less distraction, less activity that draws their children away from their home. Mothers who know are willing to live on less and consume

less of the world’s goods in order to spend more time with their children—more time eating together, more time working together, more time reading together, more time talking, laughing, singing, and exemplifying. These mothers choose carefully and do not try to choose it all. Their goal is to prepare a rising generation of children who will take the gospel of Jesus Christ into the entire world. Their goal is to prepare future fathers and mothers who will be builders of the Lord’s kingdom for the next 50 years. That is influence; that is power.

Mothers Who Know Stand Strong and Immovable

10. Who will prepare this righteous generation of sons and daughters? Latter-day Saint women will do this—women who know and love the Lord and bear testimony of Him, women who are strong and immovable and who do not give up during difficult and discouraging times. We are led by an inspired prophet of God who has called upon the women of the Church to “stand strong and immovable for that which is correct and proper under the plan of the Lord.”⁶ He has asked us to “begin in[our] own homes”⁷ to teach children the ways of truth. Latter-day Saint women should be the very best in the world at upholding, nurturing, and protecting families. I have every confidence that our women will do this and will come to be known as mothers who “knew” (Alma 56:48). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 21.
2. James E. Faust, “Challenges Facing the Family,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
4. To the Mothers in Zion (pamphlet, 1987), 3.
5. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.

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Covenant Women in Partnership with God

Henry B. Eyring General Conference
October 2019



1. I am grateful for the blessing of addressing you, the covenant daughters of God. Tonight, my purpose is to encourage you in the great service to which you are called. Yes, every daughter of God listening to my voice has received a call from the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Your call began when you were placed into mortality, in a place and time chosen for you by a God who knows you perfectly and loves you as His daughter. In the spirit world, He knew you and taught you and placed you where you would have the opportunity, rare in the history of the world, to be invited into a baptismal font. There, you would hear these words spoken by a called servant of Jesus Christ: “Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”¹
3. When you came out of the water, you had accepted another call to serve. As a new covenant daughter of God, you made a promise and received an assignment in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of which you were then confirmed a member. You covenanted with God to take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, to keep His commandments, and to serve Him.
4. For each one who makes these covenants, the service that the Lord calls him or her to do will be suited perfectly to that person. The covenant daughters and sons of God, however, all share one important and joyful call. It is to serve others for Him.
5. Speaking to sisters, President Russell M. Nelson gave a wonderful summary of the Lord’s call to you to join Him in His work. President Nelson described your call in this way: “The Lord said, ‘My work and my glory [is] to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.’ (Moses 1:39.) So His devoted daughter-disciple may truly say, ‘My work and my glory is to help my loved ones reach that heavenly goal.’”
6. “To help another human being reach one’s celestial potential is part of the divine mission of woman. As mother, teacher, or nurturing Saint, she molds living clay to the shape of her hopes. In partnership with God, her divine mission is to help spirits live and souls be lifted. This is the measure of her creation. It is ennobling, edifying, and exalting.”²
7. You cannot know when, or for what length of time, your personal mission will be focused on service in calls such as mother, leader, or ministering sister. The Lord, out of love, does not leave us the choice of the timing, duration, or sequence of our assignments. Yet you know from scripture and living prophets that all of these assignments will come, either in this life or in the next, to every daughter of God. And all of them are preparation for eternal life in loving families—“the greatest of all the gifts of God.”³
8. You will be wise to bend every effort to prepare now with the end in mind. That task is made simpler because each of these assignments requires much of the same preparation.
9. Let’s start with the assignment to be a ministering sister. Whether you have that assignment as a 10-year-old daughter in a family where the father has died, or as a Relief Society president whose town was recently affected by fire, or when you are in a hospital recovering from surgery—you have a chance to fulfill your call from the Lord to be His ministering daughter.
10. Those appear to be very different ministering assignments. Yet they all require the preparation of a powerful, loving heart, a fearless faith that the Lord gives no command save He prepares a way, and a desire to go and do for Him.⁴ Because she was prepared, the 10-year-old daughter put her arms around her widowed mother and prayed to know how to help her family. And she keeps at it.
11. The Relief Society president had prepared to minister before the unexpected fire in her area. She

had come to know and love the people. Her faith in Jesus Christ had grown over the years from having received answers to her prayers for the Lord to help her in small services for Him. Because of her long preparation, she was ready and eager to organize her sisters to minister to people and families in distress.

12. A sister recovering in a hospital from surgery was prepared to minister to her fellow patients. She had spent a lifetime ministering for the Lord to every stranger as if he or she was a neighbor and a friend. When she felt in her heart the call to minister in the hospital, she served others so bravely and with such love that the other patients began to hope she wouldn't recover too soon.
13. In the same way that you prepare to minister, you can and must prepare for your call to be a leader for the Lord when it comes. It will require faith in Jesus Christ, rooted in your deep love of the scriptures, to lead people and to teach His word without fear. Then you will be prepared to have the Holy Ghost as your constant companion. You will be eager to say, "I will," when your counselor in the Young Women presidency says, with panic in her voice, "Sister Alvarez is sick today. Who will teach her class?"
14. It takes much the same preparation for the wonderful day when the Lord calls you to an assignment as a mother. But it will also take an even more loving heart than you needed earlier. It will take faith in Jesus Christ beyond what has ever before been in your heart. And it will take a capacity to pray for the influence, direction, and comfort of the Holy Ghost beyond what you may have felt was even possible.
15. You might reasonably ask how a man of any age can know what mothers need. It's a valid question. Men can't know everything, but we can learn some lessons by revelation from God. And we can also learn much by observation, when we take the opportunity to seek the Spirit to help us understand what we observe.
16. I have been observing Kathleen Johnson Eyring for the 57 years we have been married. She is the mother of four boys and two girls. To date, she has accepted the call to be a mothering influence on more than a hundred direct family members and hundreds more whom she has adopted into her mother heart.
17. You remember President Nelson's perfect descrip-

tion of a woman's divine mission—including her mission of mothering: "As mother, teacher, or nurturing Saint, she molds living clay to the shape of her hopes. In partnership with God, her divine mission is to help spirits live and souls be lifted. This is the measure of her creation."⁵

18. As nearly as I can discern, my wife, Kathleen, has followed that charge, given to our Father's daughters. The key appears to me to be the words "she molds living clay to the shape of her hopes ... in partnership with God." She did not force. She molded. And she had a template for her hopes, and to which she tried to mold those she loved and mothered. Her template was the gospel of Jesus Christ—as I could see through
19. prayerful observation over the years.
20. Becoming a covenant woman in partnership with God is how great and good daughters of God have always mothered, led, and ministered, serving in whatever way and place He has prepared for them. I promise that you will find joy in your journey to your heavenly home as you return to Him as a covenant-keeping daughter of God.
21. I testify that God the Father lives and He loves you. He will answer your prayers. His Beloved Son leads, in every detail, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Russell M. Nelson is His living prophet. And Joseph Smith saw and spoke with God the Father and Jesus Christ in a grove of trees in Palmyra, New York. I know that is true. I also testify that Jesus Christ is your Savior; He loves you. And through His Atonement, you can be purified and lifted to the high and holy callings which will come to you. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 20:73.
2. Russell M. Nelson, "Woman—Of Infinite Worth," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 22.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
4. See 1 Nephi 3:7.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "Woman—Of Infinite Worth," 22.

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Fathers

Elder D. Todd Christofferson



1. I speak today of fathers. Fathers are fundamental in the divine plan of happiness, and I want to raise a voice of encouragement for those who are striving to fill well that calling. To praise and encourage fatherhood and fathers is not to shame or discount anyone. I simply focus today on the good that men can do in the highest of masculine roles—husband and father.
2. David Blankenhorn, the author of *Fatherless America*, has observed: “Today, American society is fundamentally divided and ambivalent about the fatherhood idea. Some people do not even remember it. Others are offended by it. Others, including more than a few family scholars, neglect it or disdain it. Many others are not especially opposed to it, nor are they especially committed to it. Many people wish we could act on it, but believe that our society simply no longer can or will.”¹
3. As a Church, we believe in fathers. We believe in “the ideal of the man who puts his family first.”² We believe that “by divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”³ We believe that in their complementary family duties, “fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”⁴ We believe that far from being superfluous, fathers are unique and irreplaceable.
4. Some see the good of fatherhood in social terms, as something that obligates men to their offspring, impelling them to be good citizens and to think about the needs of others, supplementing “maternal investment in children with paternal investment in children. ... In short, the key for men is to be fathers. The key for children is to have fathers. The key for society is to create fathers.”⁵ While these considerations are certainly true and important, we know that fatherhood is much more than a social construct or the product of evolution. The role of father is of divine origin, beginning with a Father in Heaven and, in this mortal sphere, with Father Adam.
5. The perfect, divine expression of fatherhood is our Heavenly Father. His character and attributes include abundant goodness and perfect love. His work and glory are the development, happiness, and eternal life of His children.⁶ Fathers in this fallen world can claim nothing comparable to the Majesty on High, but at their best, they are striving to emulate Him, and they indeed labor in His work. They are honored with a remarkable and sobering trust.
6. For men, fatherhood exposes us to our own weaknesses and our need to improve. Fatherhood requires sacrifice, but it is a source of incomparable satisfaction, even joy. Again, the ultimate model is our Heavenly Father, who so loved us, His spirit children, that He gave us His Only Begotten Son for our salvation and exaltation.⁷ Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”⁸ Fathers manifest that love as they lay down their lives day by day, laboring in the service and support of their families.
7. Perhaps the most essential of a father’s work is to turn the hearts of his children to their Heavenly Father. If by his example as well as his words a father can demonstrate what fidelity to God looks like in day-to-day living, that father will have given his children the key to peace in this life and eternal life in the world to come.⁹ A father who reads scripture to and with his children acquaints them with the voice of the Lord.¹⁰
8. We find in the scriptures a repeated emphasis on the parental obligation to teach one’s children:
9. “And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old,

the sin be upon the heads of the parents. ...

10. "And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord."¹¹
11. In 1833, the Lord reprimanded members of the First Presidency for inadequate attention to the duty of teaching their children. To one He said specifically, "You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments; and that wicked one hath power, as yet, over you, and this is the cause of your affliction."¹²
12. Fathers are to teach God's law and works anew to each generation. As the Psalmist declared:
13. "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:
14. "That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should [then] arise and declare them to their children:
15. "That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."¹³
16. Certainly, teaching the gospel is a shared duty between fathers and mothers, but the Lord is clear that He expects fathers to lead out in making it a high priority. (And let's remember that informal conversations, working and playing together, and listening are important elements of teaching.) The Lord expects fathers to help shape their children, and children want and need a model.
17. I myself was blessed with an exemplary father. I recall that when I was a boy of about 12, my father became a candidate for the city council in our rather small community. He did not mount an extensive election campaign—all I remember was that Dad had my brothers and me distribute copies of a flyer door to door, urging people to vote for Paul Christofferson. There were a number of adults that I handed a flyer to who remarked that Paul was a good and honest man and that they would have no problem voting for him. My young boy heart swelled with pride in my father. It gave me confidence and a desire to follow in his footsteps. He was not perfect—no one is—but he was upright and good and an aspirational example for a son.
18. Discipline and correction are part of teaching. As Paul said, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."¹⁴ But in discipline a father must exercise particular care, lest there be anything even ap-
proaching abuse, which is never justified. When a father provides correction, his motivation must be love and his guide the Holy Spirit:
19. "Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;
20. "That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death."¹⁵
21. Discipline in the divine pattern is not so much about punishing as it is about helping a loved one along the path of self-mastery.
22. The Lord has said that "all children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age."¹⁶ Breadwinning is a consecrated activity. Providing for one's family, although it generally requires time away from the family, is not inconsistent with fatherhood—it is the essence of being a good father. "Work and family are overlapping domains."¹⁷ This, of course, does not justify a man who neglects his family for his career or, at the other extreme, one who will not exert himself and is content to shift his responsibility to others. In the words of King Benjamin:
23. "Ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another. ...
24. "But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another."¹⁸
25. We recognize the agony of men who are unable to find ways and means adequately to sustain their families. There is no shame for those who, at a given moment, despite their best efforts, cannot fulfill all the duties and functions of fathers. "Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed."¹⁹
26. Loving the mother of his children—and showing that love—are two of the best things a father can do for his children. This reaffirms and strengthens the marriage that is the foundation of their family life and security.
27. Some men are single fathers, foster fathers, or step-fathers. Many of them strive mightily and do their very best in an often difficult role. We honor those who do all that can be done in love, patience, and self-sacrifice to meet individual and family needs.

It should be noted that God Himself entrusted His Only Begotten Son to a foster father. Surely some of the credit goes to Joseph for the fact that as Jesus grew, He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”²⁰

28. Regrettably, due to death, abandonment, or divorce, some children don't have fathers living with them. Some may have fathers who are physically present but emotionally absent or in other ways inattentive or nonsupportive. We call on all fathers to do better and to be better. We call on media and entertainment outlets to portray devoted and capable fathers who truly love their wives and intelligently guide their children, instead of the bumbler and buffoons or “the guys who cause problems,” as fathers are all too frequently depicted.
29. To children whose family situation is troubled, we say, you yourself are no less for that. Challenges are at times an indication of the Lord's trust in you. He can help you, directly and through others, to deal with what you face. You can become the generation, perhaps the first in your family, where the divine patterns that God has ordained for families truly take shape and bless all the generations after you.
30. To young men, recognizing the role you will have as provider and protector, we say, prepare now by being diligent in school and planning for postsecondary training. Education, whether in a university, technical school, apprenticeship, or similar program, is key to developing the skills and capabilities you will need. Take advantage of opportunities to associate with people of all ages, including children, and learn how to establish healthy and rewarding relationships. That typically means talking face to face with people and sometimes doing things together, not just perfecting your texting skills. Live your life so that as a man you will bring purity to your marriage and to your children.
31. To all the rising generation, we say, wherever you rank your own father on the scale of good-better-best (and I predict that ranking will go higher as you grow older and wiser), make up your mind to honor him and your mother by your own life. Remember the yearning hope of a father as expressed by John: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”²¹ Your righteousness is the greatest honor any father can receive.
32. To my brethren, the fathers in this Church, I say, I know you wish you were a more perfect father.

I know I wish I were. Even so, despite our limitations, let us press on. Let us lay aside the exaggerated notions of individualism and autonomy in today's culture and think first of the happiness and well-being of others. Surely, despite our inadequacies, our Heavenly Father will magnify us and cause our simple efforts to bear fruit. I am encouraged by a story that appeared in the New Era some years ago. The author recounted the following:

33. “When I was young, our little family lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the second floor. I slept on the couch in the living room. . . .
34. “My dad, a steelworker, left home very early for work each day. Every morning he would . . . tuck the covers around me and stop for a minute. I would be half-dreaming when I could sense my dad standing beside the couch, looking at me. As I slowly awoke, I became embarrassed to have him there. I tried to pretend I was still asleep. . . . I became aware that as he stood beside my bed he was praying with all his attention, energy, and focus—for me.
35. “Each morning my dad prayed for me. He prayed that I would have a good day, that I would be safe, that I would learn and prepare for the future. And since he could not be with me until evening, he prayed for the teachers and my friends that I would be with that day. . . .
36. “At first, I didn't really understand what my dad was doing those mornings when he prayed for me. But as I got older, I came to sense his love and interest in me and everything I was doing. It is one of my favorite memories. It wasn't until years later, after I was married, had children of my own, and would go into their rooms while they were asleep and pray for them that I understood completely how my father felt about me.”²²
37. Alma testified to his son: “Behold, I say unto you, that it is [Christ] that surely shall come . . . ; yea he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people.
38. “And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds; or rather . . . that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.”²³
39. That is the ministry of fathers today. God bless and make them equal to it, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 20:73.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Woman—Of Infinite Worth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 22.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
4. See 1 Nephi 3:7.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Woman—Of Infinite Worth,” 22.
6. Moses 1:39
7. John 3:16
8. John 15:13
9. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23
10. Doctrine and Covenants 18:34-36
11. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25, 28
12. Doctrine and Covenants 93:42
13. Psalm 78:5-7
14. Hebrews 12:6
15. Doctrine and Covenants 121:43-44
16. Doctrine and Covenants 83:4
17. Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 113.
18. Mosiah 4:14-15
19. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 129.
20. Luke 2:52
21. 3 John 1:4
22. Julian Dyke, “[Thanks, Dad](#),” *New Era*, Apr. 1993, 38; *Tambuli*, Oct. 1994, 45.
23. Alma 39:15-16

Unit 5 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Robert D. Hales, “Strengthening Families”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1999/04/strengthening-families-our-sacred-duty?lang=eng>

Elder David A Bednar, “More Diligent and Concerned at Home”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/10/more-diligent-and-concerned-at-home?lang=eng>

President Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Mothers in Zion”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcjeLC88x1Y>

President Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Fathers in Israel”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1987/10/to-the-fathers-in-israel?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2005/10/priesthood-authority-in-the-family-and-the-church?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Keys and Authority of the Priesthood”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/04/the-keys-and-authority-of-the-priesthood?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Love and Law”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/10/love-and-law?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2007/10/good-better-best?lang=eng>

REL 200 – THE ETERNAL FAMILY

Unit 6 Scriptures

All mankind will stand before God in judgement and will be held accountable for how they treated their family

Mormon 9:14

14 And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still.

D&C 101:78

78 That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

The disintegration of the family will bring upon the world the calamities foretold by the prophets

2 Timothy 3:1-7

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Moses 7:65-66

65 And it came to pass that Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, in the last days, to dwell on the earth in righteousness for the space of a thousand years;

66 But before that day he saw great tribulations

among the wicked; and he also saw the sea, that it was troubled, and men's hearts failing them, looking forth with fear

for the judgments of the Almighty God, which should come upon the wicked.

D&C 45:26-27, 31-35

26 And in that day shall be heard of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion,

and men's hearts shall fail them, and they shall say that Christ delayeth his coming until the end of the earth.

27 And the love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound.

31 And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing

scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.

32 But my disciples shall stand in holy places and shall not be moved; but among the wicked, men shall lift up their voices and curse God and die.

33 And there shall be earthquakes also in divers places, and many desolations; yet men will harden their hearts against me, and they will take up the sword, one against another, and they will kill one another.

34 And now, when I the Lord had spoken these words unto my disciples, they were troubled.

35 And I said unto them: Be not troubled, for, when all these things shall come to pass, ye may know that the promises which have been made unto you shall be fulfilled.

D&C 97:22-28

22 For behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it? 23 The Lord's scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people; yea, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come;

24 For the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations and all their wicked works.

25 Nevertheless, Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her.

26 But if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her according to all her works, with sore affliction, with pestilence, with plague, with sword, with vengeance, with devouring fire.

27 Nevertheless, let it be read this once to her ears, that I, the Lord, have accepted of her offering; and if

she sin no more none of these things shall come upon her;

28 And I will bless her with blessings, and multiply a multiplicity of blessings upon her, and upon her generations forever and ever, saith the Lord your God. Amen.

D&C 101:44-54, 63-64

44 A certain nobleman had a spot of land, very choice; and he said unto his servants: Go ye unto my vineyard, even upon this very choice piece of land, and plant twelve olive trees;

45 And set watchmen round about them, and build a power, that one may overlook the land round about, to be a watchman upon the tower, that mine olive trees may not be broken down when the enemy shall come to spoil and take upon themselves the fruit of my vineyard. 47 And while they were yet laying the foundation thereof, they began to say among themselves: And what need hath my lord of this tower?

48 And consulted for a long time, saying among themselves: What need hath my lord of this tower, seeing this is a time of peace?

49 Might not this money be given to the exchangers? For there is no need of these things.

50 And while they were at variance one with another they became very slothful, and they hearkened not unto the commandments of their lord.

51 And the enemy came by night, and broke down the hedge; and the servants of the nobleman arose and were affrighted, and fled; and the enemy destroyed their works, and broke down the olive trees.

52 Now, behold, the nobleman, the lord of the vineyard, called upon his servants, and said unto them, Why! what is the cause of this great evil?

53 Ought ye not to have done even as I commanded you, and—after ye had planted the vineyard, and built the hedge round about, and set watchmen upon the walls thereof—built the tower also, and set a watchman upon the tower, and watched for my vineyard, and not have fallen asleep, lest the enemy should come upon you?

54 And behold, the watchman upon the tower would have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off; and then ye could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer.

63 Again, verily I say unto you, I will show unto you wisdom in me concerning all the churches, inasmuch as they are willing to be guided in a right and

proper way for their salvation—

64 That the work of the gathering together of my saints may continue, that I may build them up unto my name upon holy places; for the time of harvest is come, and my word must needs be fulfilled.

We should seek to uphold, maintain, and strengthen families everywhere

Alma 46:12-13, 16, 19-20

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

13 . . . (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

16 And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored.

19 And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:

20 Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.

Ephesians 6:10-18

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of

The gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;



Christian Courage: The Price of Discipleship

Elder Robert D. Hales Ensign, Nov. 2008,
72–75



1. We have gathered together as one, we have taken upon us the name of Jesus Christ, and we are Christians. One of the questions we would ask: why then, if we have that love of the Savior, would someone want to be an antagonist or to attack us?

2. Recently a group of bright, faithful young Latter-day Saints wrote down some of the most pressing questions on their minds. One sister asked, “Why doesn’t the Church defend itself more actively when accusations are made against it?”

3. To her inquiry I would say that one of mortality’s great tests comes when our beliefs are questioned or criticized. In such moments, we may want to respond aggressively—to “put up our dukes.” But these are important opportunities to step back, pray, and follow the Savior’s example. Remember that Jesus Himself was despised and rejected by the world. And in Lehi’s dream, those coming to the Savior also endured “mocking and pointing ... fingers” (1 Nephi 8:27). “The world hath hated [my disciples],” Jesus said, “because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). But when we respond to our accusers as the Savior did, we not only become more Christlike, we invite others to feel His love and follow Him as well.

4. To respond in a Christlike way cannot be scripted or based on a formula. The Savior responded differently in every situation. When He was confronted by wicked King Herod, He remained silent. When He stood before Pilate, He bore a simple and powerful testimony of His divinity and purpose. Facing the moneychangers who were defiling the temple, He exercised His divine responsibility to preserve and protect that which was sacred. Lifted up upon a cross, He uttered the incomparable Christian response: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

5. Some people mistakenly think responses such as silence, meekness, forgiveness, and bearing humble testimony are passive or weak. But to “love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” (Matthew 5:44) takes faith, strength, and, most of all, Christian courage.

6. The Prophet Joseph Smith demonstrated this courage throughout his life. Though he “suffer[ed] severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious” (Joseph Smith—History 1:27), he did not retaliate or give in to hatred. Like all true disciples of Christ, he stood with the Savior by loving others in a tolerant and compassionate way. That is Christian courage.

7. When we do not retaliate—when we turn the other cheek and resist feelings of anger—we too stand with the Savior. We show forth His love, which is the only power that can subdue the adversary and answer our accusers without accusing them in return. That is not weakness. That is Christian courage.

8. Through the years we learn that challenges to our faith are not new, and they aren’t likely to disappear soon. But true disciples of Christ see opportunity in the midst of opposition.

9. In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Abinadi was bound and brought before the evil King Noah. Although the king vigorously opposed Abinadi and eventually sentenced him to death, Abinadi boldly taught the gospel and bore his testimony anyway. Because Abinadi took advantage of that opportunity, a priest named Alma was converted to the gospel and brought many souls unto Christ. The courage of Abinadi and Alma was Christian courage.

10. Experience shows that seasons of negative publicity about the Church can help accomplish the Lord's purposes. In 1983 the First Presidency wrote to Church leaders, "Opposition may be in itself an opportunity. Among the continuing challenges faced by our missionaries is a lack of interest in religious matters and in our message. These criticisms create ... interest in the Church. ... This provides an opportunity [for members] to present the truth to those whose attention is thus directed toward us."¹

11. We can take advantage of such opportunities in many ways: a kind letter to the editor, a conversation with a friend, a comment on a blog, or a reassuring word to one who has made a disparaging comment. We can answer with love those who have been influenced by misinformation and prejudice—who are "kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" (D&C 123:12). I assure you that to answer our accusers in this way is never weakness. It is Christian courage in action.

12. As we respond to others, each circumstance will be different. Fortunately, the Lord knows the hearts of our accusers and how we can most effectively respond to them. As true disciples seek guidance from the Spirit, they receive inspiration tailored to each encounter. And in every encounter, true disciples respond in ways that invite the Spirit of the Lord.

13. Paul reminded the Corinthians that his preaching was "not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). Because that power resides in the Spirit of the Lord, we must never become contentious when we are discussing our faith. As almost every missionary learns, Bible bashing always drives the Spirit away. The Savior has said, "He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me" (3 Nephi 11:29). More regrettable than the Church being accused of not being Christian is when Church members react to such accusations in an un-Christlike way! May our conversations with others always be marked by the fruits of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance" (Galatians 5:22–23). To be meek, as defined in Webster's dictionary, is "manifesting patience and longsuffering: enduring injury without resentment."² Meekness is not weakness. It is a badge of Christian courage.

14. This is especially important in our interactions with members of other Christian denominations. Surely our Heavenly Father is saddened—and the devil laughs—when we contentiously debate doctrinal differences with our Christian neighbors.

15. This is not to suggest that we compromise our principles or dilute our beliefs. We cannot change the doctrines of the restored gospel, even if teaching and obeying them makes us unpopular in the eyes of the world. Yet even as we feel to speak the word of God with boldness, we must pray to be filled with the Holy Ghost (see Acts 4:29, 31). We should never confuse boldness with Satan's counterfeit: overbearance (see Alma 38:12). True disciples speak with quiet confidence, not boastful pride.

16. As true disciples, our primary concern must be others' welfare, not personal vindication. Questions and criticisms give us an opportunity to reach out to others and demonstrate that they matter to our Heavenly Father and to us. Our aim should be to help them understand the truth, not defend our egos or score points in a theological debate. Our heartfelt testimonies are the most powerful answer we can give our accusers. And such testimonies can only be borne in love and meekness. We should be like Edward Partridge, of whom the Lord said, "His heart is pure before me, for he is like unto Nathanael of old, in whom there is no guile" (D&C 41:11). To be guileless is to have a childlike innocence, to be slow to take offense and quick to forgive.

17. These qualities are first learned in the home and family and can be practiced in all our relationships. To be guileless is to look for our own fault first. When accused, we should ask as the Savior's Apostles did, "Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26:22). If we listen to the answer given by the Spirit, we can, if needed, make corrections, apologize, seek forgiveness, and do better.

18. Without guile, true disciples avoid being unduly judgmental of others' views. Many of us have cultivated strong friendships with those who are not members of our Church—schoolmates, colleagues at work, and friends and neighbors throughout the world. We need them, and they need us. As President Thomas S. Monson has taught, "Let us learn respect for others. ... None of us lives alone—in our city, our nation, or our world."³

19. As the Savior demonstrated with Herod, sometimes true disciples must show Christian courage by saying nothing at all. Once when I was golfing, I barely brushed up against a large cholla cactus, which seems to shoot needles like a porcupine. Thorns from that plant stuck all over my clothing, even though I had barely touched the cactus plant. Some situations are like that plant: they can only injure us. In such instances, we are better off to keep our distance and simply walk away. As we do, some may try to provoke us and engage us in argument. In the Book of Mormon, we read about Lehonti and his men camped upon a mount. The traitorous Amalickiah urged Lehonti to “come down” and meet him in the valley. But when Lehonti left the high ground, he was poisoned “by degrees” until he died, and his army fell into Amalickiah’s hands (see Alma 47). By arguments and accusations, some people bait us to leave the high ground. The high ground is where the light is. It’s where we see the first light of morning and the last light in the evening. It is the safe ground. It is true and where knowledge is. Sometimes others want us to come down off the high ground and join them in a theological scrum in the mud. These few contentious individuals are set on picking religious fights, online or in person. We are always better staying on the higher ground of mutual respect and love.

20. In doing so, we follow the example of the prophet Nehemiah, who built a wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s enemies entreated him to meet them on the plain, where “they thought to do [him] mischief.” Unlike Lehonti, however, Nehemiah wisely refused their offer with this message: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:2–3). We too have a great work to do, which will not be accomplished if we allow ourselves to stop and argue and be distracted. Instead we should muster Christian courage and move on. As we read in Psalms, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers” (Psalm 37:1).

21. Evil will always be with us in this world. Part of mortality’s great test is to be in the world without becoming like the world. In His Intercessory Prayer, the Savior asked His Heavenly Father, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). But even as the Savior warned of persecution, He

promised peace: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). I testify that with the mantle of His peace upon us, the First Presidency’s promise will be fulfilled: “The opposition which may seem hard to bear will be a blessing to the kingdom of God upon the earth.”⁴

22. To my inquiring sister and all who seek to know how we should respond to our accusers, I reply, we love them. Whatever their race, creed, religion, or political persuasion, if we follow Christ and show forth His courage, we must love them. We do not feel we are better than they are. Rather, we desire with our love to show them a better way—the way of Jesus Christ. His way leads to the gate of baptism, the straight and narrow path of righteous living, and the temple of God. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Only through Him can we and all our brothers and sisters inherit the greatest gift we can receive—eternal life and eternal happiness. To help them, to be an example for them, is not for the weak. It is for the strong. It is for you and me, Latter-day Saints who pay the price of discipleship by answering our accusers with Christian courage.

23. I conclude by making the testimony of Mormon my own: “Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life” (3 Nephi 5:13). I bear my special witness of Him—that our lives can be everlasting because His love is everlasting. That we may share His eternal, unconditional love with our brothers and sisters everywhere, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. First Presidency letter, Dec. 1, 1983.
2. Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (1976), “meek,” 1403.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “In Quest of the Abundant Life,” Ensign, Mar. 1988,
4. First Presidency letter, Dec. 1, 1983.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/christian-courage-the-price-of-discipleship?lang=eng>



Speech at 2016 BYU Religious Freedom Conference

Elder Lance B. Wickman July 2016



Introduction

1. This is an important conference. We need to meet together with the common purpose of preserving religious freedom and then discuss and debate both first principles and hard practical choices. We need to be better informed. We need to become more skilled in our ability to explain what religious freedom is and why it is so important. So, I applaud you for coming, and especially those who have organized this conference and nurtured it over the years, including my beloved colleague and friend Bill Atkin, Cole Durham, Brett Scharffs, Elizabeth Clark, and too many others to mention. Thank you for all you do to defend religious freedom.

2. My topic today is the importance of upholding the fundamental right of religious liberty through the clear establishment of religious priorities and then the practical, sometimes difficult compromises with our fellow citizens whose priorities may be different than ours.

Religious freedom is a fundamental right of paramount importance.

4. Any discussion of this subject must begin with the truth that religious freedom is a fundamental human right—a right that is essential to mortality’s central purpose of exercising our divinely granted moral agency to make righteous choices leading to eternal life. Religious liberty is the cocoon in which that agency is nurtured and thrives. It provides meaning and purpose to our families and relationships. It provides hope and assurance that this mortal sojourn, so often fraught with pain and sorrow, is not the end but only a step toward a glorious hereafter. It defines who and what we are—reaching deep into our very souls, our very identities. That alone justifies the protection of religious liberty as a fundamental human right.

5. Respecting religious freedom as a fundamental right means that law and society should afford suffi-

cient space so that people and institutions of faith can live out their deepest beliefs freely and openly. As Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught just a few days ago as he spoke on religious freedom:

6. A robust freedom is not merely what political philosophers have referred to as the ‘negative’ freedom to be left alone. Rather, it is a much richer ‘positive’ freedom—the freedom to live one’s religion or belief in a legal, political, and social environment that is tolerant, respectful, and accommodating of diverse beliefs.¹

7. Of course, religious freedom is not absolute. Limitations are appropriate where necessary to protect life, property, health, and safety or to prevent infringements upon the fundamental rights of others. And, as I’ll discuss later, religious freedom cannot always prevail over the right of democratic institutions to establish the basic framework of society. But any limitations should be truly necessary and not an excuse for abridging religious freedom.

Current threats to religious freedom are very real and deeply troubling.

10. It is easy for pundits to dismiss concerns about religious freedom as overblown. After all, no one has repealed the First Amendment. And hasn’t the Supreme Court been ruling in favor of religious liberty even in controversial cases? You’ve heard similar arguments.

11. But make no mistake. The current threats to religious freedom are very real and growing rapidly. Eugene Volokh, a law professor at UCLA, was quoted in the New York Times as saying, “If I were a conservative Christian (which I most certainly am not), I would be very reasonably fearful, not just as to tax exemptions but as to a wide range of other programs—fearful that within a generation or so, my religious beliefs would be treated the same way as racist religious beliefs are.”²

12. Although the vast majority of Americans

are willing to let others believe and worship as they choose, the sphere for the free and open exercise of religion is shrinking as society grows more indifferent toward religion and as government enforces secular values in areas once considered private. A major flash point, of course, is the ongoing sexual revolution and the increasing use of nondiscrimination laws and other coercive means to force acceptance of secular views of marriage, family, sexuality, and gender that directly conflict with profoundly important religious beliefs and ways of life. And this is occurring not just in public and commercial settings, but also with respect to religious organizations and their affiliated nonprofit organizations like religious colleges.

13. For example, a bill introduced in California's legislature sought to deny religious colleges so-called "Cal Grants"—basically, state Pell Grants—for invoking their federal right under Title IX to a religious exemption, and then put them on a shaming list to further pressure them to abandon their religious standards. Vigorous lobbying by religious schools have managed to get the Cal Grant piece removed for the moment, but the rest of it remains. The ability of religious colleges with honor codes to participate on equal terms with secular colleges in federal research contracts will soon be challenged, and threats are arising to their accreditation. A school district in Lynn, Massachusetts, banned the students of a local religious college from teaching in its public schools, merely because the college opposed a new executive order from the White House favoring LGBT employees. Recent debates in Congress over religious liberty protections in the federal contracting sphere included arguments that would justify outright repeal of long-standing exemptions under Title VII and the Americans with Disabilities Act for faith-based hiring by religious organizations—exemptions that previously enjoyed nearly unquestioned support.

14. The big fight over the HHS contraceptive mandate could easily have been avoided with a modicum of sensitivity by government officials for the needs of religious colleges and groups like the Little Sisters of the Poor. In fact, the justices on the Supreme Court quickly came up with a practical solution that would protect the interests of all involved—one that federal officials could have adopted years ago but chose not to.

15. On other fronts, ethics and licensing bodies are already seeking to discipline professionals who espouse traditional sexual mores. It may soon be hard to be a faithful Church member who openly believes in the

family proclamation and to be a psychologist, social worker, or even a lawyer. Openly holding such beliefs is already difficult socially within professional circles, but it may soon be difficult as a matter of ethics and licensing. I'm aware of a recent situation where a state occupational board opened a formal investigation into an LDS counselor for things he said as a member of his stake high council.

16. Then there are all the clashes that can arise in the context of expansive public accommodations laws, both for faith-based organizations and private owners.

17. And, as Professor Volokh suggested, it is now virtually certain that theories once used to deny tax-exempt status to racist organizations eventually will be invoked to challenge the tax-exempt status of churches that as a matter of doctrine reject same-sex marriage or have sexual worthiness standards. And I could go on.

18. At its broadest level, the biggest risk may not be legal but social. Powerful cultural forces seek to characterize those with traditional beliefs as bigots. The risk is that traditional believers and their religious institutions may eventually be relegated to pariah status—officially recognized as "equal citizens" while in practical reality marginalized and penalized for their faith.

19. The First Amendment protects core elements of the fundamental right to religious freedom but does not answer all religious freedom questions.

20. Now, in saying all this, I don't want to be alarmist. It's not time to head for the hills with your food storage strapped to your back! The First Amendment remains a bulwark against outright oppression. It prevents the legal establishment of a national religion. It protects an absolute right to believe any religion your conscience dictates and to belong to any church that will have you. It strongly protects the right of individuals to worship "how, where, or what they may."³ It protects the right to express religious beliefs in word and writing and to pass your faith on to your children. It protects the right to form a church and to determine its doctrines and establish its membership and leadership criteria without interferences from the government. The Constitution bans religious tests for public office, enshrining an ideal that influences public policy even in the private realm. There is unanimous support on the Supreme Court for the principle that, absent the most compelling reasons, government cannot target a religious practice no matter how unpopular it may be.

21. So, there is no question the First Amendment protects core elements of the fundamental right to religious freedom.

22. But the First Amendment's broad language leaves unclear how the fundamental right to religious freedom applies to numerous other areas of life. For example:

23. Does the First Amendment afford a church the right to build a much-needed meeting-house in a neighborhood despite restrictive zoning laws, even if it will increase traffic?

24. Does it afford a religious doctor the right not to perform a medical procedure that violates his conscience?

25. Does it afford religious schools and colleges the right to receive governmental assistance, contracts, and grants on equal terms with secular schools and colleges?

26. Does it afford religious business owners the right to hire only people of their own faith or to choose the health benefits they provide to their employees or to refuse some services despite nondiscrimination laws?

27. Does it afford parents the right to home-school their children with little or no government oversight?

28. Does it guarantee the tax deductibility of contributions to churches and other religious organizations?

29. The truth is, we don't know the answers to these and numerous other questions about religious freedom. And if you asked James Madison, who basically wrote the First Amendment, he wouldn't know either. What he and the other Framers thought they were doing when they proposed the First Amendment to their new Constitution—which of course applied only to the federal government—was preventing a national church and more or less maintaining the existing state of religious affairs.

30. But I can imagine Madison saying something along the lines of what Justice Scalia wrote in *Employment Division v. Smith*: "Just as a society that believes in the negative protection accorded to the press by the First Amendment is likely to enact laws that affirmatively foster the dissemination of the printed word, so also a society that believes in the negative protection accorded to religious belief can be expected to be solicitous of that value in its legislation as well."

31. Justice Scalia was saying, in other words, that even though the First Amendment may not protect every right that is important to religious people, a nation

and culture that respect religious freedom should naturally be willing to do more than the bare minimum the Constitution requires. It should be willing to enact laws and create compromises that afford believers and religious institutions the space they need to live according to their deepest beliefs.

32. Ambiguity in the meaning of the First Amendment is not a defect but rather part of a constitutional design that establishes a framework for citizens to resolve disputes.

33. This ambiguity in the meaning of the First Amendment is not a defect but rather part of the constitutional design. In his famous dissent in *Lochner v. New York*, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes reminded the Court's majority that while the Constitution certainly protects property and contract rights, it does not embody an all-encompassing economic theory. Rather, Justice Holmes said, the Constitution "is made for people of fundamentally differing views."⁴

34. Just as the property and contract provisions of the Constitution do not answer all questions about property and contract rights, so too the religion clauses of the First Amendment do not resolve many difficult religious freedom conflicts.

35. One thing getting lost in all the talk on both sides about absolute rights is an understanding that in this setting the United States Constitution does two things. First, it secures the core of our most basic rights. And second, it establishes a democratic process for resolving difficult issues of rights and social policy so that, as Justice Holmes said, "people of fundamentally differing views" can live together in peace. Sometimes we seem to think that the Supreme Court ought to decide all the really important issues by turning everything into a "right" and then balancing out competing rights in the way it thinks best. But such thinking only cheapens our democracy and our citizenship. The Founding Fathers intended our system of representative democracy to be a framework for resolving fundamental clashes of opinions about matters of vital importance, not just about where to locate the town postoffice.

36. In its better moments, the Supreme Court has endorsed this constitutional vision. Our constitutional "system," the court wrote in 1986, "was deliberately so structured to assure full, vigorous, and open debate on the great issues affecting the people."⁵

37. Justice Kennedy, writing for the Supreme Court, recently affirmed much the same vision:

38. Our constitutional system embraces, too, the

right of citizens to debate so they can learn and decide and then, through the political process, act in concert to try to shape the course of their own times and the course of a nation that must strive always to make freedom ever greater and more secure. . .

. The idea of democracy is that it can, and must, mature. Freedom embraces the right, indeed the duty, to engage in a rational, civic discourse in order to determine how best to form a consensus to shape the destiny of the Nation and its people⁶

39. So, while the right to religious freedom is certainly fundamental, its application to many controversial issues is often unclear and thus often left to the political process. I don't agree with the holding of the Smith decision, but Justice Scalia was surely right when he wrote, "Values that are protected against government interference through enshrinement in the Bill of Rights are not thereby banished from the political process."⁷

40. I sometimes fear that we have relied too much on the Constitution to do the hard work of citizenship for us. The Constitution—including the First Amendment—was never intended to make us lazy citizens, to absolve us from the duty and imperative to be vigilant in defense of our religious rights and interests. Rather, the Constitution's fundamental purpose was to establish a system of government for finding sustainable compromises allowing us to live within the broader society. As citizens of this nation, we have a duty to work with our fellow countrymen to find workable solutions to vexing problems—including clashes of rights and fundamentally competing interests. The Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."⁸ It is our Christian duty to find ways to make peace.

And making peace sometimes requires that we make compromises—not compromises on our doctrines, beliefs, or moral standards, of course, but compromises in the application of religious freedom to the practical realities of life in this diverse nation.

Setting Priorities and Seeking Peace

42. In my view, those of us who care deeply about religious freedom have two important responsibilities if we want to also be peace-makers. First, we must set priorities, so we are clear about what is core to religious freedom and what is less vital. Only then can we understand where compromises can be struck. Second, we must learn how to get involved politically, socially, and professionally to both defend religious

freedom as a fundamental right and to make appropriate compromises in the interest of fairness to others and peace. I want to touch on both these responsibilities.

43. First, setting religious freedom priorities. Some may be shocked to hear this, but not all religious freedoms are equally important. This is an obvious point, but it is an important one for clear thinking. If you had to make a choice, for example, between the freedom to pray with your family in your home and the freedom to hire only people of your own faith in your big business, I think it's obvious which one you would choose. While both involve religious liberty, one is more essential than the other. Although it can limit the free exercise of religion, barring big business owners from hiring only people of their own faith has been the law for decades. But barring someone from praying in his own home would be an intolerable act of tyranny.

44. So, in a pluralistic nation where religious people and institutions find themselves competing for influence with others having much different priorities and interests, sometimes we have to make hard choices. We have to prioritize. Defenders of religious freedom have to decide what is closer to the essential core of religious freedom and what is more peripheral. To do otherwise risks weakening our defense of what is essential. If everything that could even loosely be considered "religious" is treated as equally important, then effectively nothing religious is important. The innermost core.

45. Let's talk, then, about what rights are at the innermost core of religious freedoms. Here our constitutional and legal traditions provide some guidance. Courts have long recognized the need for greater protections for private and intimate matters than for public or commercial ones. That makes sense, and it provides a starting point for thinking about religious freedom priorities. As a general matter, religious liberty claims are more compelling the more closely they relate to purely private, family, and ecclesiastical matters, and, conversely, less compelling the closer they get to public and governmental functions. There may be exceptions, but that's a good starting point when thinking about religious freedom priorities and potential compromises.

46. Certain freedoms are at the core of religious liberty because they lie within a fundamentally private sphere. On these freedoms there is little room for compromise. They include freedom of belief; freedoms related to family gospel teaching and worship; free-

dom to express your beliefs to another willing listener, such as in missionary work; and freedoms related to the internal affairs of churches, including the establishment of Church doctrine, the selection and regulation of priesthood leadership, and the determination of membership criteria. These religious freedoms fall within a zone of personal and institutional autonomy and thus are subject to little if any regulation by government.

They are basically nonnegotiable.

47. The inner core includes more than just private matters. Believers are entitled to the same rights of free speech and expression in the public square as nonbelievers. That means they have the same First Amendment right as any other citizen to express their views on public streets and sidewalks; to publish their beliefs via print, radio, the Internet, and social media; to participate fully in democratic debates over matters of public policy, including controversial matters; and to petition the government for protection of their interests. These are basic freedoms inherent in American citizenship and are likewise nonnegotiable.

48. The inner core also includes the right not to be punished, retaliated against, or discriminated against by government based on religion. No believer should be excluded from public office or employment based solely on their faith. America doesn't have religious tests for governmental positions. Similarly, there should be no religious test for working in the various professions regulated by government. For example, those with traditional beliefs regarding marriage, family, gender, and sexuality should not be excluded from being professional counselors, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and any other category of occupation where the government grants licenses. Nor should it be more difficult to establish a nonprofit religious organization than a secular nonprofit. And religious organizations should not be denied nonprofit status based on their doctrines and religious practices. Again, these basic rights to equal treatment are fundamental American freedoms and should not be open for discussion or compromise.

49. What I've just described may be called the inner core of religious freedom. Unless that core is strongly protected, there is no religious freedom as Americans have known it. These freedoms are essential to individual believers and their families in their private lives. They are also essential to prevent official

persecution and to ensure that members of particular faith communities are not rendered legal and social outcasts, as Jews once were in Europe.

Near the core

50. Close to this innermost core are freedoms that pertain to religiously important nonprofit functions carried on by religious organizations. This includes the freedom of religious nonprofits to have employment policies that reflect their religious beliefs, including the freedom to hire based on religious criteria. This is the freedom, enshrined in Title VII, that allows the Church to have a temple recommend standard for Church employment. Without this freedom, the ability of religious organizations to carry out their missions would be severely impaired.

51. Also in this category is the right to establish religious schools, colleges, and universities. Such institutions should have the freedom to establish student honor codes that reflect their religious teachings, including standards governing sexually appropriate conduct. And government should not use its ability to fund education to coerce or pressure religious schools into abandoning their religious standards.

52. Likewise, religious charities should have the right to conduct their good works according to the dictates of their respective faiths—without substantial interference by government and without being forced to engage in activities that are fundamentally contrary to their beliefs.

53. These freedoms are vitally important to the Church and other religious organizations. But as you can tell, they already get us into areas that are increasingly controversial because sometimes they can extend beyond the purely private or religious.

Moving beyond the core

54. As we move to more commercial settings, our expectations of unfettered religious freedom must be tempered. This is not because commerce is unimportant but because it is now heavily regulated and overlaps with what for decades have been considered civil rights—such as the right not to be discriminated against in employment or denied service at a public accommodation based on certain characteristics.

55. Claims by business owners for religious freedom are strongest in small, intimate, and family business settings and correspondingly weaker in large and impersonal corporate settings. Still, businesses should not be forced to produce products or types of services that fundamentally conflict with their religious beliefs. For instance, no one could seriously contend that a business should be required to print or distribute pornography; that principle can also apply in less obvious circumstances as well. Similarly, businesses should be able to use symbols and messages that reflect their beliefs. I understand that In-N-Out Burger prints “John 3:16” on the bottom of every cup.

56. But the ability of secular businesses to deny employment or services to those whose lifestyles they consider immoral will often be limited. While In-N-Out Burger should have the right to put scriptural messages on its cups, it cannot expect to refuse service to non-Christians or LGBT persons.

57. Hence, the commercial setting is an area where defenders of religious freedom sometimes must be willing to make prudential compromises. Not every aspect of your business will be able to reflect your religious beliefs in the same way your home or religious congregation can. Preserving the ability of business owners to conduct every aspect of their businesses according to their religious beliefs will be impossible. And the Church itself is not in a position to fight that fight if doing so comes at the expense of more core religious freedoms. Protecting those core freedoms must remain the priority, or we risk losing even them.

The outer circle

58. Finally, there are zones where claims for religious freedom are much weaker and will be very difficult to defend. Some of these pertain to government services, where officials are required by law to perform certain functions. In these areas, religious beliefs should be reasonably accommodated, but other governmental interests may significantly limit the degree of accommodation. For instance, if it is your job to perform marriages for the county clerk’s office and no one else can easily take your place, then your freedom to refuse to perform marriages that are contrary to your religious beliefs may be very limited.

59. Still, a government that respects religious liberty should accommodate the religious needs of its civil servants to the greatest extent reasonable. Appropriate accommodations should also be made for religious dress and, where possible, Sabbath observance.

60. In summary, as I see things, there is a hierarchy of religious freedoms and we have no choice but to

set priorities. Those that relate to private and ecclesiastical contexts or are part of the basic rights of all citizens, are the most essential and least subject to compromise, while those that relate to commercial and governmental settings will of necessity require greater pragmatism and compromise. Please understand that in labeling some freedoms part of the “core” of religious liberty, I am not suggesting that freedoms outside that core are unimportant or not worth defending. What I am suggesting is that if we want to preserve religious freedom and live in peace in a society that is increasingly intolerant of faith, then we will have to be very clear about what matters most and make wise compromises in areas that matter less, because if we don’t, we risk losing essential rights that we simply cannot live without.

Defending Religious Freedom—Lift Where You Stand

61. I said earlier that those who care about religious freedom must first set priorities and then, second, learn how to get involved to defend religious freedom and make appropriate compromises in the interest of fairness and peace. I turn now to this second imperative—how to get involved in the defense of religious freedom.

62. Recently Elder Christofferson spoke at the Freedom Festival here in Provo about how ordinary citizens can defend religious freedom. He outlined a simple four-part approach that applies to all of us:

63. First, become informed. You are doing that today and throughout this conference. To defend religious freedom, we need wisdom—indeed, inspired wisdom. And that requires knowledge. So it is vital that we become informed about what religious freedom means; what freedoms are most essential; what competing social interests exist; how society and our friends, neighbors, and children view religious freedom; what challenges religious freedom faces; and how those challenges will affect real people living real lives. We must become informed.

64. Second, learn to speak up with courage and civility. This is a fine line. On the one hand, we cannot be intimidated into silence by intolerant voices that claim to represent progress and open-mindedness. That tired bromide is getting old; such voices do not represent progress, and we cannot allow it to silence us. But by the same token, we must state our views with genuine civility. This isn’t the time for anger. So, when you

Speak up, speak calmly. Smile a bit. Seek true understanding. Acknowledge legitimate points. And explain why the freedoms you defend are so important to you, your family, and your church—make it personal. Stand firmly for principle while understanding that in some areas we will have to compromise to protect our most vital freedoms.

65. Third, as President Uchtdorf would say, “Lift where you stand.”⁹ You don’t need to run for Congress or the legislature to make a difference. And the Church doesn’t need you to undertake lawsuits on its behalf. What is needed is for you to get involved in the political, community, professional, and business organizations around you and to express your concern and support for religious freedom. The time for an insular focus on just our own families and congregations is gone. We have to get involved in the community organizations around us and encourage them to be respectful and supportive of religious freedom, even when that means accommodating to some extent beliefs and practices we don’t like.

66. Finally, at all times, be an example of the believers so that others will see your good works, experience your genuine friendship, and be sympathetic toward your concerns about religious freedom. As Elder Christofferson said:

67. “Americans tend to respect and protect what they believe is good. So let us show them the highest and best in our faiths—our willingness to love and serve others, to build strong families, to live honorable lives, to be good citizens. As our fellow citizens see the goodness of your faith, ‘they will want to listen to you and understand when you say your religious freedom is being abridged. They may not agree with you, or even understand entirely the issue that is so important to you. But if they know you and respect you because you are a true [example of the believers], they will be far more inclined to work toward a solution that respects [essential] religious freedoms.’ ”¹⁰

Compromises

68. Finally, some thoughts on compromises. As we face difficult social and legal issues, where other interests are competing with religious freedom, we need to be prepared to make wise compromises in areas that, although important, may not be core to religious freedom. Frankly, we have no choice. When such conflicts arise, we should think in terms of “fairness for all,” a phrase the Church has used in a number of settings.

69. What does “fairness for all” mean? At bottom, it means that every person—including people of faith and their religious communities—should have enough space to live according to their core beliefs so long as they don’t harm the fundamental rights of others. It means pluralism. It means a fair opportunity for each person to participate in society, professions, the job market, and commerce. It means looking for less-burdensome alternatives when accomplishing important objectives. It means balancing competing interests so that as many people as possible can live as equal citizens according to their deepest values and needs.

70. Such balancing is not a precise science. No one can have all they want. It requires dialogue, understanding, goodwill, principled stances, hard compromises, and a willingness to adjust so that our laws and communities make space for everyone. It requires—as the Savior required—that we be peacemakers.

Conclusion

71. This is a tall order, to be sure. I know some believe religious freedom should never have to compromise. I know some believe we should stand and fight on every front. Such feelings are visceral and emotional, and I understand them. But if we do that—if we merely give vent to our emotions—in the current cultural environment, we risk losing everything. And we risk failing to follow the example of Christ. Wisdom, fairness, and love for our religious freedoms require that we engage with our fellow citizens, reaching across serious cultural divides, and find common ground so that everyone can live together in freedom and peace. I hope we will all do our part to achieve that lofty goal. Thank you.

Notes

1. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, A Celebration of Religious Freedom (São Paulo, Brazil, Apr. 29, 2015), available at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/a-celebration-of-religious-freedom>.
2. Laurie Goodstein & Adam Liptak, Schools Fear Gay Marriage Rulin Could End Tax Exemptions, N.Y. Times, June 24, 2015.
3. Articles of Faith 1:11.
4. *Lochner v. New York*, 198 U.S. 45, 76 (1906) (Holmes, J., dissenting).
5. *Bowsher v. Synar*, 478 U.S. 714, 722 (1986) (emphasis added).
6. *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*, 134 S. Ct. 1623, 1636–37 (2014).
7. *Smith*, 494 U.S. at 890.
8. Matthew 5:9.
9. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 53–56.
10. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, 2016 Provo Freedom Festival Address, quoting D. Todd Christofferson, *Watchmen on the Tower: Religious Freedom in a Secular Age*, Clark Memorandum (Spring 2015).



Of Rights and Responsibilities: The Social Ecosystem of Religious Freedom

By Elder Patrick Kearon of the Presidency of the Seventy

Introduction

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends, it is an honor to speak to you today. The subject of religious freedom continues to raise new questions. We have come to learn a little more from many of the most able minds and willing hearts in the field. If we listen to each other carefully, we will be better equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow. Most of us drink from the waters of religious freedom without even knowing it. We think of it as a river that will always flow. But we might not recognize the risks to the tributaries that feed that river.

The perpetuation of religious liberty requires that it be understood and valued by the rising generations. There is a need for them to comprehend what religious freedom brings to society and what is lost when this liberty is eroded. When young people come to understand why this freedom is crucial to their own aspirations, welfare and happiness, they will feel inspired to act to strengthen and preserve religious freedom.

Community and Commitment

To better understand the freedoms we now enjoy, we can look to history. My parents came from what you in the United States call “the greatest generation.” They both served in the British armed forces in World War II — my father in the Royal Air Force, my mother in the Army as a nurse. Between them they served across Europe, North Africa, India and Burma. They fought for their neighbors, they fought in defense of their homeland and they certainly fought for religious freedom, but I don’t suppose that was a phrase they would have used at the time. With so many others, they



warded off the tyranny of Nazism. So many freedoms were on the line, and that generation gave everything they had in their defense. Vast swaths of Europe were overrun, with massive casualties. Whole nations were subjugated by tyrants whose aim was to conquer and not only suppress freedoms, including religious freedom, but wipe out and destroy people of particular ethnic backgrounds, faith and belief. The generation which confronted these demonic threats did so with phenomenal courage. It took a society that possessed a highly developed social solidarity and mutual accountability to bring about such a moral achievement.

After six unspeakably harrowing years, the war was won. In the ensuing years, those who had experienced this conflict saw society through the lens of that experience. After a decade or two, they observed the next generation, which had not been where they had been nor confronted what they had seen. These young people became concerned with what in many cases the wartime generation regarded as lesser things. The cohesion that had come from shared hardship borne of an existential threat began to wear off. I was a child through part of this period. The protests of the 1960s found their way onto our television screen. What they exhibited in raw emotional power, they often lacked in sustained social commitment. These actions ranged from bus boycotts to opposition to the Vietnam War to campus protests over student fees. They were all motivated by worthy purposes, but on their own, these purposes were limited without the continuous obligations borne of shared vision and purpose. Of course, protest is a vital function in a democracy, and free people are free because they are able to challenge the status quo and those they have elected. But during those years, the youth of Britain sometimes appeared to protest for its own sake. My parents lamented the shift toward a mindset of rights with no apparent regard for, or reference to, responsibilities. The two must work together; passion and duty must connect. And that concept is

what I would like to address — our rights and the responsibilities associated with those rights.

Today it might appear to some that rights just happen — that they are automatically inherited and perpetuated without thought or effort. We can forget the extraordinary struggle, resolve and sacrifice that went into protecting our abundance. We may rarely think about our obligations to keep those rights in place.

The Heart of Religious Freedom

For a time, I lived in a country that did not allow the free expression of religion. I witnessed how people who dared to stray from the official line could be punished. Unfortunately, this continues today in many nations across the globe. Violation of religious freedom is one of the main reasons why we see so many refugees and displaced people today. Religious differences become religious alienation, alienation turns into persecution, and persecution turns to conflict, war and mass flight. These crises happen when freedoms, including religious freedom and freedom of conscience, are not protected. Regimes target those who believe differently, force them from their homes and uproot them in terrifying ways. In 2015 and 2016, from one end of Europe to the other, I saw firsthand countless ordinary people driven from their homes and lands further to the east across countries and continents in search of safety and refuge. Often their beliefs were a factor in why they were displaced.

Hatred and terror drove these people from their homes. The world needs places of refuge from such extremism. Where liberty thrives, it flows almost invisibly. We experience the benefits of it all the time but rarely see how it actually works. Religious liberty acts as the heart of society, a key contributor carrying the lifeblood of all that is good to the whole community.

Healthy societies run on trust, confidence and a sense of safety. With freedom of religion and belief, people feel safe in their deepest convictions and can express and exercise them publicly. The great enemy of religious freedom is estrangement and alienation. When a society or government divides people based on what they believe, how they think, the words they say, whom they worship or the manner in which they worship, common ground is lost, and life together becomes a battle. The test of a pluralistic society is to achieve uni-

ty without diminishing the diversity within it.

Religious freedom means nothing if you protect your own religious practice while neglecting the practice of others, especially those who might be less secure and able to defend themselves. It only works if you protect the rights of everyone. As Elder D. Todd Christofferson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has said, religious freedom is important precisely because it gives everyone — religious or not — the “space to determine for ourselves what we think and believe.”¹ In terms of numbers and inherited culture, the United States has a Christian majority, but unless it honors the lawful practices of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Native American religions and everyone else, including individuals and groups who profess no faith at all, it will fail to live up to its own ideals.²

We all need to be consistent in defending and respecting everyone. And doing so does not mean you have to diminish your own beliefs. That’s how all our rights will be taken seriously. We can’t pick and choose who gets what rights. Every religion is susceptible to the fluctuations of prominence and obscurity. The cultural group that enjoys privilege today may lose it tomorrow, even in nations where the rule of law and democratic principles have been enshrined for centuries.

Having a broad view of religious liberty helps us see that it is universal, not just the preserve of those who are powerful or popular. Religious freedom is suprapolitical, something that is part of our nature before politics declares it to be so. Every person, regardless of religion, race, gender, orientation or nationality, possesses fundamental rights simply by being human. They include the right to life, liberty, security, equal protection of the law and the freedom of thought, speech, and religion, as well as protection from political extremism. But we all must remember, be taught and pass on the responsibilities that come with these rights.

Rights are inscribed in laws, constitutions and charters the world over, but they were first imprinted in the human heart by a loving God. One of the founders of this nation, Alexander Hamilton, wrote, “The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sun beam, in the whole volume of human nature, by

the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.”³

Though these inalienable rights come from above, they still have to be cultivated by human beings below. It is up to us — it is the responsibility associated with these rights — to implement, protect and anchor them in our daily life.

Two Sides of the Religious Freedom Coin

Rights and responsibilities can’t be separated without negative consequences. The symbiosis between rights and responsibilities is often forgotten in the rush to demand that something be given to us, while forgetting to foster the conditions in which that right can even be respected or have meaning.

Appropriately exercised, rights and responsibilities move in a virtuous circle. We are more inclined to honor the rights of people when we know them personally and feel a sense of responsibility for their well-being. Meaning in life comes from giving yourself to others, not demanding that others give to you. Author and commentator David Brooks has written that joy comes from commitment:

“In reality, the people who live best tie themselves down. They don’t ask: What cool thing can I do next? They ask: What is my responsibility here? They respond to some problem or get called out of themselves by a deep love. By planting themselves in one neighborhood, one organization or one mission, they earn trust. They have the freedom to make a lasting difference. It’s the chains we choose that set us free.”⁴

Important work in religious freedom is found in walking a mile with your brother and sister, listening to a stranger talk about their religious experience, and in the gentle efforts of dialogue and persuasion.

The study of religious liberty has so many facets and nuances it can be dizzying. The conversation often focuses on the law — what it is, what it should be, what it protects, what it should protect, how it sets boundaries and so on. Law is vital and is an essential part of a bigger picture. However, rights act more like habits than dry edicts. Law and custom must work together.

Behind every right, if we look closely enough, stand layers upon layers of social practices that regulate innumerable human interactions in societies, families, marriages, friendships and all human relationships. They are called “norms,” and they require innumerable transactions of give and take. The demands we make of the law only make sense when embedded in a web of countless norms that make our society possible. We need to keep finding ways to align what we demand with what we can contribute—to our families, workplaces, neighborhoods, churches, schools and communities.

Understanding and appreciation of religious freedom will need to move from the exclusive realm of specialists to a much broader audience, to include those who don’t grasp the intricacies of the law nor have the capacity to influence the law in conventional ways.

To do this, we will need to reframe our own understanding and more effectively articulate what this freedom means and the responsibility it brings. We have a particular obligation to carry this to a younger audience who will be charged to see these freedoms protected and responsibilities fulfilled in the coming years.

A Challenge to Embrace

Many in the rising generation today are concerned about serving those in need, making a difference, changing the world and helping their community. They seek morality and responsibility and understand the language of universality. Our young people can be jaded by exclusion, inconsistent application of laws and entrenched interests of a few to the detriment of many. They are attuned to the authentic. They are outward-looking and deeply sensitive to treating people fairly and equally. Their yearning to serve is deep. All of this is wonderful and promising!

But on the whole, the religiosity of young people is shifting. They are much less inclined to identify with a particular religion, let alone attend church.⁵ They can see religion as stifling their values of inclusion and tolerance. But it is not only the youth; the trend toward a secularized public life affects all ages.⁶ One of the results is that our culture is fragmenting into cultural and ideological tribes.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, former president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, once said, “Men everywhere seem to be groping as in darkness, casting aside the traditions that were the strength of our society yet unable to find a new star to guide them.”⁷

Peter Beinart, a writer and political science professor at City University of New York, sees a connection between decreasing religious activity and increasing political conflict. He recently wrote, “Maybe religion builds habits and networks that help people better weather national traumas, and thus retain their faith that the system works. For whatever reason, secularization isn’t easing political conflict. It’s making American politics even more convulsive and zero-sum.”⁸

We can help fill this void with a positive message and constructive actions. There is a need, and a real opportunity, for religious freedom to be framed differently and be more clearly understood.

Be a Force in the World

Do we fear the world more than we shape it? Do we let our anxieties prevent us from making a difference? Do we spend more time hiding from society’s flaws than fixing its problems?

How we answer these questions determines what our social environment looks like. It is always changing and improves or deteriorates depending on our actions. Society is not something that just happens to us; it is something we help shape.

The main thing is to engage, dialogue, bridge and interact with people of all sorts. Unless we participate, we lose our ability to both influence the world and learn from it. As British novelist E.M. Forster put it, “Only connect! ... Live in fragments no longer.”⁹

We all have a stake in this debate. “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”¹⁰ The poet John Donne wrote these words nearly 400 years ago, but they still resonate today.

Contributing to the good of society is part of our spiritual stewardship. Jesus taught his followers to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Let

your light shine, he said, as a city on a hill. Salt was an ancient symbol of friendship and generosity. And like salt, we have a duty to savor person-to-person connections and nurture amity between adversaries. We must not cloister ourselves with others who think like us and congregations that believe like us. Jesus demonstrated how to lift society, moving deliberately to the despised, the diseased and the misunderstood, listening to and healing them.

I have been inspired by the goodness and selflessness of members of my own church who reach out to those in need. Wherever I have witnessed, in the course of my service, those afflicted by fire, flood or any manner of natural disaster or humanitarian crisis, our people have been there. When visiting such a location in California, I was asked if I knew what FEMA stood for.

As I struggled with “Federal... Emergency...,” my friend said, “No, it’s ‘Find Every Mormon Available.’” It was said in jest, but more than once media has reported that the first two groups at the scene were the Mormons and the Latter-day Saints — reminding us of the uphill task we have to be known by our full name. The point is, our people do go out of their way, a very long way out of their way, to help in crises the world over. This isn’t only disaster response and assisting refugees. These devoted souls are there in those often invisible, private, chronic situations which can last a lifetime. And of course, it’s not just our people; we work alongside representatives of numerous other faiths, often partnering with them in some of the most challenging parts of the world. There are certainly those involved doing extraordinary work for whom faith is not a driving force. But these contributions with our fellow believers are vast. And, importantly in today’s context, they are often overlooked. Part of that is our own fault, as we can have something of a tortured relationship with the idea of telling people about these good works. As a church, we are torn between having these efforts be private and letting that light shine in a way that will create awareness that we take our responsibility of contributing to society very seriously. We will probably need to talk more openly about these contributions, letting people know that at the heart of our faith is the desire to help our fellow human beings, wherever they are, people of faith and no faith at all. And that we do so without seeking converts in these most trying moments in people’s lives.

We need to help many more young people see the opportunities the free exercise of religion provides to serve others in need and unite communities in ways that benefit all people. And we need to help them understand that the expression of religious belief through community service is dependent on religious freedom. With this understanding, they will not only value religious freedom more deeply but will courageously act to strengthen and perpetuate it. Influencing society always seems to be the job of someone else — someone with more power, more money, more time. Perhaps we expect some program or sponsor to take the lead. But when it comes to taking care of people, there is no “someone else”; there is only us. Civic engagement requires people to freely act on their beliefs and solve the problems of their communities. If the prevailing philanthropic desires of our rising generation are to be harnessed and maximized, our young people will need to come to the same conclusion as have so many of us here today. And that is, that this is the most worthy of causes — a spring and holiest beliefs, and at the same time, blesses individuals, families, communities of all descriptions and entire nations. How to unite these benevolent desires of the rising generation with the responsibility of preserving religious freedom, along with every other inalienable right, is the task before all of us, and I am so grateful that you have gathered in this way to address just that.

We have a responsibility to help and, as God told the Prophet Jeremiah, “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”¹¹

Conclusion

Now to conclude, every society has a foundation of truths, rules, expectations and norms which guide their thinking and their actions every day. Many take them for granted. And like all things we suppose will simply always be there for us — like the air we breathe — we hardly notice them. That is, until they’re challenged. And then we have to look closely and really get to know them, as if discovering them for the first time. So it is with religious freedom.

The way we all as human beings form our deepest beliefs is perhaps life’s greatest journey of discovery. The freedom in which we do so is precious. Our ability

to practice and share those beliefs as we learn of and come to understand the beliefs of others enriches us

all, broadens our view and creates harmony. A climate in which we are free to believe and practice is also a climate in which we can contribute. Religious freedom demands both the universal right and the universal responsibility, and it is our turn to do our part.

As human beings and the children of divine creation, we all want to live by a moral vision and want to share it with others. In doing this, we enter the realm of both religion and politics. This can be messy and contentious, but we have reason to be optimistic. As Martin Luther King Jr. was so fond of saying, drawing from the abolitionist Theodore Parker, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”¹²

We are in that arc, and God expects us to do our part in nudging it toward justice. This is our work. Thank you.

Notes

1. “A Celebration of Religious Freedom,” interfaith address in São Paulo, Brazil, April 29, 2015.
2. Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life, Religious Landscape Study, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>.
3. Alexander Hamilton, *The Farmer Refuted*, 1775,
4. p. 5.
5. David Brooks, “Five Lies Our Culture Tells: The Cultural Roots of Our Political Problem,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2019.
6. Michael Lipka, “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of ‘Nones,’” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.
7. Becka A. Alper, “Why America’s ‘Nones’ Don’t Identify with a Religion,” Pew Research Center, August 8, 2018.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Pursue the Steady Course,” *Ensign*, January 2005, 4.
9. Peter Beinart, “Breaking Faith,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2017.
10. E.M. Forster, *Howard’s End*, 1910, chapter 22, p. 214.
11. John Donne, *Meditation XVII, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*.
12. Jeremiah 29:7, English Standard Version Anglicized.
13. Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” speech given at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/transcript-elder-kearon-religious-freedom-byu-2019>



Defenders of the Family Proclamation

Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson
General Conference, April 2015

1. What a privilege and joy to be a part of this marvelous assembly of girls and women. How blessed we are as women to be joined together this evening in unity and in love.

2. I recently read the story of Marie Madeline Cardon, who, with her family, received the message of the re- stored gospel of Jesus Christ from the first missionaries called to serve in Italy in 1850. She was a young woman of 17 or 18 years of age when they were baptized. One Sunday, while the family was holding a worship service in their home high in the Alps of northern Italy, an angry mob of men, including some of the local ministers, gathered around the house and began shouting, yelling, and calling for the missionaries to be brought outside. I don't think they were anxious to be taught the gospel— they intended bodily harm. It was young Marie who marched out of the house to confront the mob.



3. They continued their vicious yells and demands for the missionaries to be brought out. Marie raised her Bible up in her hand and commanded them to depart. She told them that the elders were under her protection and that they could not harm one hair of their heads. Listen to her own words: "All stood aghast. ... God was with me. He placed those words in my



mouth, or I could not have spoken them. All was calm, instantly. That strong ferocious body of men stood helpless before a weak, trembling, yet fearless girl." The ministers asked the mob to leave, which they did quietly in shame, fear, and remorse. The small flock completed their meeting in peace.¹

4. Can't you just picture that brave young woman, the same age as many of you, standing up to a mob and defending her newly found beliefs with courage and conviction?

5. Sisters, few of us will ever have to face an angry mob, but there is a war going on in this world in which our most cherished and basic doctrines are under attack. I am speaking specifically of the doctrine of the family. The sanctity of the home and the essential purposes of the family are being questioned, criticized, and assaulted on every front.

6. When President Gordon B. Hinckley first read "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" 20 years ago this year, we were grateful for and valued the clarity, simplicity, and truth of this revelatory document. Little did we realize then how very desperately we would need these basic declarations in today's world as the criteria by which we could judge each new wind of worldly dogma coming at us from the media, the Internet, scholars, TV and films, and even legislators. The proclamation on the family has become our benchmark for judging the philosophies of the world, and I testify that the principles set forth within this statement are as true today as they were when they were given to us by a prophet of God nearly 20 years ago.

7. May I point out something obvious? Life rarely goes exactly according to plan for anyone, and we are very aware that not all women are experiencing what the proclamation describes. It is still important to understand and teach the Lord's pattern and strive for

the realization of that pattern the best we can.

8. Each of us has a part to play in the plan, and each of us is equally valued in the eyes of the Lord. We should remember that a loving Heavenly Father is aware of our righteous desires and will honor His promises that nothing will be withheld from those who faithfully keep their covenants. Heavenly Father has a mission and plan for each of us, but He also has His own timetable. One of the hardest challenges in this life is to have faith in the Lord's timing. It's a good idea to have an alternative plan in mind, which helps us to be covenant-keeping, charitable, and righteous women who build the kingdom of God no matter which way our lives go. We need to teach our daughters to aim for the ideal but plan for contingencies.

9. During this 20th anniversary year of the family proclamation, I would like to issue a challenge for all of us as women of the Church to be defenders of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Just as Marie Madeline Cardon courageously defended the missionaries and her newly found beliefs, we need to boldly defend the Lord's revealed doctrines describing marriage, families, the divine roles of men and women, and the importance of homes as sacred places—even when the world is shouting in our ears that these principles are outdated, limiting, or no longer relevant. Everyone, no matter what their marital circumstance or number of children, can be defenders of the Lord's plan described in the family proclamation. If it is the Lord's plan, it should also be our plan!

10. There are three principles taught in the proclamation which I think are especially in need of steadfast defenders. The first is marriage between a man and a woman. We are taught in the scriptures, "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord."² For anyone to attain the fulness of priesthood blessings, there must be a husband and a wife sealed in the house of the Lord, working together in righteousness and remaining faithful to their covenants. This is the Lord's plan for His children, and no amount of public discourse or criticism will change what the Lord has declared. We need to continue to model righteous marriages, seek for that blessing in our lives, and have faith if it is slow in coming. Let us be defenders of marriage as the Lord has ordained it while continuing to show love and compassion for those with differing views.

11. The next principle which calls for our defending voices is elevating the divine roles of mothers and fathers. We eagerly teach our children to aim high in this life. We want to make sure that our daughters know that they have the potential to achieve and be whatever they can imagine. We hope they will love learning, be educated, talented, and maybe even become the next Marie Curie or Eliza R. Snow.

12. Do we also teach our sons and daughters there is no greater honor, no more elevated title, and no more important role in this life than that of mother or father? I would hope that as we encourage our children to reach for the very best in this life that we also teach them to honor and exalt the roles that mothers and fathers play in Heavenly Father's plan.

13. Our youngest daughter, Abby, saw a unique opportunity to stand as a defender of the role of mother. One day she got a notice from her children's school that they were having Career Day presentations at the school. Parents were invited to send in an application if they wanted to come to school to teach the children about their jobs, and Abby felt impressed to apply to come and speak about motherhood. She didn't hear back from the school, and when Career Day was getting close, she finally called the school, thinking they may have lost her application. The organizers scrambled around and found two teachers who agreed to have Abby come talk to their classes at the end of Career Day.

14. In her very fun presentation to the children, Abby taught them, among other things, that as a mother she needed to be somewhat of an expert in medicine, psychology, religion, teaching, music, literature, art, finance, decorating, hair styling, chauffeuring, sports, culinary arts, and so much more. The children were impressed. She finished by having the children remember their mothers by writing thank-you notes expressing gratitude for the many loving acts of service they received daily. Abby felt that the children saw their mothers in a whole new light and that being a mother or father was something of great worth. She applied to share again this year at Career Day and was invited to present to six classes.



15. Abby has said of her experience: “I feel like it could be easy in this world for a child to get the sense that being a parent is a secondary job or even sometimes a necessary inconvenience. I want every child to feel like they are the most important priority to their parent, and maybe telling them how important being a parent is to me will help them realize all that their parents do for them and why.”

16. Our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, is a wonderful example of honoring women and motherhood, especially his own mother. In reference to our earthly mothers, he has said: “May each of us treasure this truth; one cannot forget mother and remember God. One cannot remember mother and forget God. Why? Because these two sacred persons, God and [our earthly] mother, partners in creation, in love, in sacrifice, in service, are as one.”³

17. The last principle we need to stand and defend is the sanctity of the home. We need to take a term which is sometimes spoken of with derision and elevate it. It is the term homemaker. All of us—women, men, youth, and children, single or married—can work at being homemakers. We should “make our homes” places of order, refuge, holiness, and safety. Our homes should be places where the Spirit of the Lord is felt in rich abundance and where the scriptures and the gospel are studied, taught, and lived. What a difference it would make in the world if all people would see themselves as makers of righteous homes. Let us defend the home as a place which is second only to the temple in holiness.

18. Sisters, I am grateful to be a woman in these latter days. We have opportunities and possibilities which no other generation of women has had in the

world. Let us help build the kingdom of God by standing up boldly and being defenders of marriage, parenthood, and the home. The Lord needs us to be brave, steadfast, and immovable warriors who will defend His plan and teach the upcoming generations His truths.

19. I bear witness that Heavenly Father lives and loves each of us. His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. I leave this testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Marie Madeline Cardon Guild, “Marie Madeline Cardon Guild: An Autobiography,” cardonfamilies.org/Histories/Marie-MadelineCardonGuild.html; see also Marie C. Guild autobiography, circa 1909, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
 2. 1 Corinthians 11:11.
 3. Thomas S. Monson, “Behold Thy Mother,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 32. Official Web site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
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<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2015/04/defenders-of-the-family-proclamation?lang=eng>



To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse

Elder Richard G. Scott Ensign, May 2008



1. Some matters are so sensitive and intensely personal and can awaken such disturbing feelings that they are seldom mentioned publicly. Yet, if tenderly and compassionately treated in the light of truth, discussion of these matters can bring greater understanding, with the easing of pain, the blessing of healing, and even the avoidance of further tragedy.

2. It is with a deep desire to define a path to relief that I speak to you who suffer the shattering consequences of mental, verbal, physical, and especially sexual abuse. I speak also to those of you who cause it. I will focus on sexual abuse, although the counsel given should help the victims of other mistreatment. My intent is to act as a mirror so that divine, healing light can illuminate the dark clouds of distress caused by others' unrighteous acts. May I be aided to communicate understandably, to provide help, and not further complicate a damaged life. It is also likely that greater understanding, awareness, and sensitivity may permit some of the rest of us to help resolve or prevent the tragedy of abuse in additional victims.

3. The rising tide of this vicious, abominable sin may not have touched your life personally. Yet it is pervasive enough in the world that it may have touched someone you love. It frequently causes such profound suffering—that can be overcome—that I want to speak of how healing can be attained. It will be done reverently, for my objective is to help heal and not aggravate painful memories.

Agency

4. Moral agency is a vital element in our Father in Heaven's plan of happiness. He understood that some of His spirit children would use that agency improperly, causing serious problems to others. Some would even violate sacred trust, such as a father or family

member abusing an innocent child. Since our Heavenly Father is completely just, there has to be a way of overcoming the tragic consequences of such damaging use of agency for both the victim and the perpetrator. That secure healing comes through the power of the Atonement of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to rectify that which is unjust. Faith in Jesus Christ and in His power to heal provides the abused with the means to overcome the terrible consequences of another's unrighteous acts. When combined with complete repentance, the Atonement also affords the perpetrator a way to avoid the severe punishment the Lord has decreed for such acts.

To the Victim

5. I testify that I know victims of serious abuse who have successfully made the difficult journey to full healing through the power of the Atonement. After her own concerns were resolved by her faith in the healing power of the Atonement, one young woman who had been severely abused by her father requested another interview with me. She returned with an older couple. I could sense that she loved the two very deeply. Her face radiated happiness. She began, "Elder Scott, this is my father. I love him. He's concerned about some things that happened in my early childhood. They are no longer a problem for me. Could you help him?" What a powerful confirmation of the Savior's capacity to heal! She no longer suffered from the consequences of abuse, because she had adequate understanding of His Atonement, sufficient faith, and was obedient to His law. As you conscientiously study the Atonement and exercise your faith that Jesus Christ has the power to heal, you can receive the same blessed relief. During your journey of recovery, accept His invitation to let Him share your burden until you have sufficient time and strength to be healed.

6. To find relief from the consequences of abuse, it is helpful to understand their source. Satan is the author of all of the destructive outcomes of abuse. He has extraordinary capacity to lead an individual into blind alleys where the solution to extremely challenging problems cannot be found. His strategy is to separate the suffering soul from the healing attainable from a compassionate Heavenly Father and a loving Redeemer.

7. If you have been abused, Satan will strive to convince you that there is no solution. Yet he knows perfectly well that there is. Satan recognizes that healing comes through the unwavering love of Heavenly Father for each of His children. He also understands that the power of healing is inherent in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Therefore, his strategy is to do all possible to separate you from your Father and His Son. Do not let Satan convince you that you are beyond help.

8. Satan uses your abuse to undermine your self-confidence, destroy trust in authority, create fear, and generate feelings of despair. Abuse can damage your ability to form healthy human relationships. You must have faith that all of these negative consequences can be resolved; otherwise they will keep you from full recovery. While these outcomes have powerful influence in your life, they do not define the real you.

9. Satan will strive to alienate you from your Father in Heaven with the thought that if He loved you He would have prevented the tragedy. Do not be kept from the very source of true healing by the craftiness of the prince of evil and his wicked lies. Recognize that if you have feelings that you are not loved by your Father in Heaven, you are being manipulated by Satan. Even when it may seem very difficult to pray, kneel and ask Father in Heaven to give you the capacity to trust Him and to feel His love for you. Ask to come to know that His Son can heal you through His merciful Atonement.

10. It was Satan's proposal that Father's children be forced to obey, that there be no moral agency and therefore no personal growth. To preserve moral agency, the Lord does not restrain individuals from improper use of that agency. However, He will punish them for such acts unless there is full repentance. Through the Holy Ghost, He sends warning promptings to the abuser, but often that individual's degrading appetite is so powerful that it blocks out that spiritual

guidance. That is why our Father provided a way to heal the consequences of acts that, through force, misuse of authority, or fear of another, temporarily take away the agency of the abused.

11. The beginning of healing requires childlike faith in the unalterable fact that Father in Heaven loves you and has supplied a way to heal. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, laid down His life to provide that healing. But there is no magic solution, no simple balm to provide healing, nor is there an easy path to the complete remedy. The cure requires profound faith in Jesus Christ and in His infinite capacity to heal. It is rooted in an understanding of doctrine and a resolute determination to follow it.

12. Healing may begin with a thoughtful bishop or stake president or a wise professional counselor. If you had a broken leg, you wouldn't decide to fix it yourself. Serious abuse can also benefit from professional help. There are many ways to begin healing, but remember that a full cure comes through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Redeemer. Have faith that with effort His perfect, eternal, infinite Atonement can heal your suffering from the consequences of abuse.

13. As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser and even have feelings of sorrow for him or her. When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heartache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser. As a result, you will enjoy greater peace. While an important part of healing, if the thought of forgiveness causes you yet more pain, set that step aside until you have more experience with the Savior's healing power in your own life.

14. If you are currently being abused or have been in the past, find the courage to seek help. You may have been severely threatened or caused to fear so that you would not reveal the abuse. Have the courage to act now. Seek the support of someone you can trust. Your bishop or stake president can give you valuable counsel and help you with the civil authorities. Explain how you have been abused and identify who has done it. Ask for protection. Your action may help others avoid becoming innocent victims, with the consequent suffering. Get help now. Do not fear—for fear is a tool Satan will use to keep you suffering. The Lord will help

you, but you must reach out for that help.

15. Do not be discouraged if initially a bishop hesitates when you identify an abuser. Remember that predators are skillful at cultivating a public appearance of piety to mask their despicable acts. Pray to be guided in your efforts to receive help. That support will come. Rest assured that the Perfect Judge, Jesus the Christ, with a perfect knowledge of the details, will hold all abusers accountable for every unrighteous act. In time He will fully apply the required demands of justice unless there is complete repentance. Your preoccupation with a need for justice only slows your healing and allows the perpetrator to continue his abusive control. Therefore you should leave punishment for the diabolic acts of abuse to civil and Church authorities.

To the Perpetrator

16. Now, to the perpetrator who has shattered the life of another by abuse: Recognize that you need help with your addiction or it will destroy you. You will not overcome it by yourself. You likely need specialized professional help. I plead with you to seek to be rescued now. You likely have deceived yourself in the false, temporary security that you have successfully hidden your transgression from the civil or Church authorities. But know that the Lord Jesus Christ is completely aware of your sins. He has warned: “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . , it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Know that even without action by a victim, your act of abuse will be publicly known, for Satan will expose you, then abandon you.

17. Simplify your life by taking steps now to cleanse your soul from such sin and resolve the penalties they evoke. Show your desire to heal the anguish that you have caused others. Talk to your bishop or stake president. The seriousness of your acts may require you to face civil and Church discipline. But full repentance will bring the sweet relief of forgiveness, peace of conscience, and a renewed life. It will also bring relief to the abused and their families. You will be free of the weight of remorse and the accusing thoughts of what you have caused in grief and anguish in another’s life. Recognize that it is much easier to repent in this life than it will be in the next, so repent

now. You will be helped when you decide to be freed from your addiction through repentance and the support of others. Be grateful that you didn’t live anciently when abusers were stoned to death without the opportunity for repentance.

To Parents

18. Parents, in appropriate, sensitive ways, teach your children of the potential danger of abuse and how to avoid it. Be aware of warning signs, such as an abrupt change in a child’s behavior, that may signal a problem. Be alert to a child’s unsettled feelings and identify their origin.

To Judges in Israel

19. To you who hold the keys of a judge in Israel, painstakingly assure that every individual that is suffering from abuse receives appropriate help. The Church handbook and the help line listed there are valuable resources to guide your ecclesiastical action and coordination with civil authorities.⁴ Carefully supervise the participation of any individual who may have had past offenses. Recognize that it is very unlikely that a perpetrator will confess his depraved acts. Seek the guidance of the Spirit when you feel that something may be amiss. Enlist the help of ward and stake leaders to avoid potential dangers.

20. I pray that you, as one abused or one who has caused it, will act now to avail yourself of the healing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I testify that your faith and obedience will assure that He will help you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. These materials may help in recovering from the tragedy of abuse:

- Gordon B. Hinckley, “Save the Children,” Ensign, Nov. 1994, 52–54;
- James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” Liahona, Jan. 2002, 19–22; Ensign, Nov. 2001, 18–20;
- Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2006, 6–9;
- Richard G. Scott, “Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse,” Ensign, May 1992, 31–33;
- Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 16–18;
- Richard G. Scott, “Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2004, 15–18;
- Richard G. Scott, “The Atonement Can Secure Your Peace and Happiness,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2006, 40–42;
- Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” Liahona and Ensign, May 2006, 69–71; “A Conversation on Spouse Abuse,” Ensign, Oct. 1999, 22–27;
- “The Wrongful Road of Abuse,” chapter 28 in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 1998), 249–55; D&C 121:34–46.

2. Matthew 18:6.

3. See Deuteronomy 22:25–27.

4. See Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics (2006), 107–8, 110, 120, 122, 147, 186.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/04/to-heal-the-shattering-consequences-of-abuse?lang=eng>

What Is Abuse?

Abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of others (such as a child or spouse, the elderly, or the disabled) in a way that causes physical, emotional, or sexual harm. Abuse causes confusion, doubt, mistrust, and fear in the victims and sometimes inflicts physical injury. Most, but not all, allegations of abuse are true, and should be taken seriously and handled with great care.

Abuse tends to become more severe over time. The Lord condemns abusive behavior in any form—including neglect and physical, sexual, or verbal abuse. Most abuse violates the civil laws of society. (See First Presidency letter, “Responding to Abuse,” July 28, 2008.)

Teaching Doctrine

- The doctrine of the Church commits all leaders and members to protect each individual (see Matthew 18:6; Ephesians 5:25, 28–29; “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2017, 145).
- Abuse in any form is sinful, tragic, and in total opposition to the teachings of the Savior (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:37).
- The Savior extends succor, healing, and strength to victims of abuse because of His infinite and eternal Atonement (see Alma 7:11–12; 34:10).
- Those who commit abuse in any way are accountable to God (see Doctrine and Covenants 101:78). Heavenly Father and His Son offer forgiveness to those who have committed abuse when they change their behavior and fully repent (see Mosiah 14:4–12; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43).
- The principles in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” are vital for all members to understand and will help everyone avoid the evils of abuse (see Gordon B. Hinckley, “Save the Children,” Ensign, Nov. 1994, 52–54).

How Can Abuse Be Prevented?

- Encourage couples and families to live the gospel in the home. They should establish patterns of kindness, respect, and open communication so that



all family members are comfortable discussing sensitive matters (see “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2017, 145).

- Encourage parents to teach children information and skills appropriate to their age and maturity so they will know what to do if faced with abuse.
- Make members aware of these publications: Preventing and Responding to Spouse Abuse: Helps for Members (1997) and Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse: Helps for Members (1997).

Selected Teachings

- We condemn most strongly abusive behavior in any form. We denounce the physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse of one’s spouse or children....No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to hold the priesthood of God. No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to be a member in good standing in this Church. The abuse of one’s spouse and children is a most serious offense before God, and any who indulge in it may expect to be disciplined by the Church. (Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?,” Ensign, Nov. 1998, 70–72)
- In all that Christ was, He was not ever envious or inflated, never consumed with His own needs. He did not once, not ever, seek His own advantage at the expense of someone else. He delighted in the happiness of others, the happiness He could bring them. He was forever kind. In a dating and courtship relationship, I would not have you spend five minutes with someone who belittles you, who is constantly critical of you, who is cruel at your expense and may even call it humor. Life is tough enough without having the person who is supposed to love you leading the assault on your self-esteem, your sense of dignity, your confidence, and your joy. In this person’s care you deserve to feel

physically safe and emotionally secure. Members of the First Presidency have taught that “any form of physical or mental abuse to any woman is not worthy of any priesthood holder” and that no “man who holds the priesthood of God [should] abuse his wife in any way, [or] demean or injure or take undue advantage of [any] woman”—and that includes friends, dates, sweethearts, and fiancées, to say nothing of wives. (Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU Devotional Address, “How Do I Love Thee?”, February 15, 2000)

- Husbands, you have been entrusted with the most sacred gift God can give you—a wife, a daughter of God, the mother of your children who has voluntarily given herself to you for love and joyful companionship. Think of the kind things you said when you were courting, think of the blessings you have given with hands placed lovingly upon her head, think of yourself and of her as the god and goddess you both inherently are, and then reflect on other moments characterized by cold, caustic, unbridled words. Given the damage that can be done with our tongues, little wonder the Savior said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If it is possible to be more condemning than that, we speak even more vigorously against all forms of sexual abuse. Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be. In that same spirit we speak to the sisters as well, for the sin of verbal abuse knows no gender. Wives, what of the unbridled tongue in your mouth, of the power for good or ill in your words? How is it that such a lovely voice which by divine nature is so angelic, so close to the veil, so instinctively gentle and inherently kind could ever in a turn be so shrill, so biting, so acrid and untamed? A woman’s words can be more piercing than any dagger ever forged, and they can drive the people they love to retreat beyond a barrier more distant than anyone in the beginning of that exchange could ever have imagined. Sisters, there is no place in that magnificent spirit of yours for acerbic or abrasive expression of any kind, including gossip or backbiting or catty

remarks. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels”, Ensign, May 2007, 16-18)

Other Resources

- Abuse: Help for the Victim,” ministeringresources.lds.org
- “Abuse: Help for the Offender,” ministeringresources.lds.org
- Articles of Faith 1:12; Doctrine and Covenants 121; 123
- Benjamin M. Ogles, “Agency, Accountability, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ: Application to Sexual Assault”, BYU Devotional Address, Jan. 30, 2018
- Gordon B. Hinckley, “Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood,” Ensign, May 2002, 52–59
- Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?” Ensign, Nov. 1998, 70–72
- Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2005, 24–27
- Richard G. Scott, “To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse,” Ensign or Liahona, May 2008, 40–43
- LDS Family Services courses Strengthening Marriage and Strengthening the Family



What Matters Most is What Lasts Longest

Elder M. Russell Ballard Ensign
November 2005



1. Several of the Brethren and I recently visited a few of the refugee centers in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas where devastated and displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina were staying as they began to try to put their lives back together. Their stories and situations are tragic and poignant in many ways, but in all that I heard, what touched me the most was the crying out for family: “Where is my mother?” “I can’t find my son.” “I’ve lost a sister.” These were hungry, frightened people who had lost everything and needed food, medical attention, and help of all kinds, but what they wanted and needed most was their families.

2. Crisis or transition of any kind reminds us of what matters most. In the routine of life, we often take our families—our parents and children and siblings—for granted. But in times of danger and need and change, there is no question that what we care about most is our families! It will be even more so when we leave this life and enter into the spirit world. Surely the first people we will seek to find there will be father, mother, spouse, children, and siblings.

3. I believe the mission statement for mortality might be “to build an eternal family.” Here on this earth we strive to become part of extended families with the ability to create and form our own part of those families. That is one of the reasons our Heavenly Father sent us here. Not everyone will find a companion and have a family in mortality, but everyone, regardless of individual circumstances, is a precious member of God’s family.

4. Brothers and sisters, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the proclamation to the world on the family, which was issued by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1995 (see “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). It was then and is now a clarion call to protect and strengthen families and a stern warning in a world where declining values and misplaced priorities threaten to destroy society by undermining its basic unit.

5. The proclamation is a prophetic document, not only because it was issued by prophets but because it was ahead of its time. It warns against many of the very things that have threatened and undermined families during the last decade and calls for the priority and the emphasis families need if they are to survive in an environment that seems ever more toxic to traditional marriage and to parent-child relationships.

6. The proclamation’s clear and simple language stands in stark contrast to the confused and convoluted notions of a society that cannot even agree on a definition of family, let alone supply the help and support parents and families need. You are familiar with such words from the proclamation as these:

7. “Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.”

8. “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual pre-mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”

9. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children.”

10. “Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”

11. “The disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”

12. And the last words of the proclamation express the simple truth that the family is “the fundamental unit of society.”

13. Today I call upon members of the Church and on committed parents, grandparents, and extended family members everywhere to hold fast to this great proclamation, to make it a banner not unlike General Moroni's "title of liberty," and to commit ourselves to live by its precepts. As we are all part of a family, the proclamation applies to everyone.

14. Public opinion surveys indicate that people everywhere in the world generally consider the family as the highest priority; yet in recent years the broader culture seems to ignore or misdefine the family. Consider some of the changes of the past decade:

15. Many larger national and international institutions that used to support and strengthen families now try to supplant and even sabotage the very families they were created to serve.

16. In the name of "tolerance," the definition of family has been expanded beyond recognition to the point that "family" can be any individuals of any gender who live together with or without commitment or children or attention to consequence.

17. Rampant materialism and selfishness delude many into thinking that families, and especially children, are a burden and a financial millstone that will hold them back rather than a sacred privilege that will teach them to become more like God.

18. And yet most parents throughout the world continue to know both the importance and the joy that are attached to natural families. Friends of mine who just returned from speaking to families and parents on several continents reported to me that the hopes and concerns of parents are remarkably similar throughout the earth.

19. In India a concerned Hindu mother said, "All I want is to be a bigger influence on my children than the media and the peer group." And a Buddhist mother in Malaysia said, "I'd like my boys to be able to operate in the world, but I don't want them to be of the world." Parents from all different cultures and faiths are saying and feeling the same things we are as parents in the Church.

20. The world needs to know what the proclamation teaches, because the family is the basic unit

of society, of the economy, of our culture, and of our government. And as Latter-day Saints know, the family will also be the basic unit in the celestial kingdom.

21. In the Church, our belief in the overriding importance of families is rooted in restored doctrine. We know of the sanctity of families in both directions of our eternal existence. We know that before this life we lived with our Heavenly Father as part of His family, and we know that family relationships can endure beyond death.

22. If we live and act upon this knowledge, we will attract the world to us. Parents who place a high priority on their families will gravitate to the Church because it offers the family structure, values, doctrine, and eternal perspective that they seek and cannot find elsewhere.

23. Our family-centered perspective should make Latter-day Saints strive to be the best parents in the world. It should give us enormous respect for our children, who truly are our spiritual siblings, and it should cause us to devote whatever time is necessary to strengthen our families. Indeed, nothing is more critically connected to happiness—both our own and that of our children—than how well we love and support one another within the family.

24. President Harold B. Lee spoke of the Church as a crucial "scaffolding" that helps build the individual and the family (see Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 107). The Church is the kingdom of God on earth, but in the kingdom of heaven, families will be both the source of our eternal progress and joy and the order of our Heavenly Father. As we are often reminded, we will be released one day from our Church callings; but if we are worthy, we will never be released from our family relationships.

25. Joseph F. Smith said: "There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home, and every effort made to sanctify and preserve its influence is uplifting to those who toil and sacrifice for its establishment. Men and women often seek to substitute some other life for that of the home; they would make themselves believe that the home means restraint; that the highest liberty is the fullest opportunity to move about at will. There is no happiness without service, and there is no service

greater than that which converts the home into a divine institution, and which promotes and preserves family life” (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith [1998], 382).

26. Now, one may ask, how do we protect and preserve and strengthen our homes and families in a world pulling so hard in opposite directions? Let me make three simple suggestions:

27. 1. Be consistent in holding daily family prayer and weekly family home evenings. Both of these invite the Lord’s Spirit, which provides the help and power we need as parents and family leaders. The Church curriculum and magazines have many good ideas for family home evening. Also consider holding a family testimony meeting where parents and children can express their beliefs and feelings to each other in a private and personal setting.

28. 2. Teach the gospel and basic values in your home. Establish a love for reading the scriptures together. Too many of our parents are abdicating this responsibility to the Church. While seminary, auxiliaries, and priesthood quorums are important as a supplement to parental gospel instruction, the main responsibility rests in the home. You might want to choose one gospel subject or a family value and then watch for opportunities to teach it. Be wise and do not involve children or yourselves in so many activities out of the home that you are so busy that the Spirit of the Lord cannot be recognized or felt in giving you the promised guidance for yourself and your family.

29. 3. Create meaningful family bonds that give your children an identity stronger than what they can find with their peer group or at school or anyplace else. This can be done through family traditions for birthdays, for holidays, for dinnertime, and for Sundays. It can also be done through family policies and rules with natural and well-understood consequences. Have a simple family economy where children have specific chores or household duties and receive praise or other rewards commensurate to how well they do. Teach them the importance of avoiding debt and of earning, saving, and wisely spending money. Help them learn responsibility for their own temporal and spiritual self-reliance.

30. In today’s world, where Satan’s aggression against the family is so prevalent, parents must do all they can to fortify and defend their families. But their efforts may not be enough. Our most basic institution of family desperately needs help and support from the extended family and the public institutions that surround us. Brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins can make a powerful difference in the lives of children. Remember that the expression of love and encouragement from an extended family member will often provide the right influence and help a child at a critical time.

31. The Church itself will continue to be the first and foremost institution—the “scaffolding,” as it were—to help build strong families. I can assure you that those who lead the Church have great concern about the well-being of your families, and thus you will see increasing efforts to prioritize and to focus on family needs. But as your leaders, we call upon members of the Church everywhere to put family first and to identify specific ways to strengthen their individual families.

32. Further, we call upon all public institutions to examine themselves and to do less that might harm families and more that will help them.

33. We call upon the media to offer more that promotes traditional family values and is uplifting and supportive of families and less that popularizes immorality and materialism.

34. We call upon government and political leaders to put the needs of children and parents first and to think in terms of family impact in all legislation and policy making.

35. We call upon Internet providers and Web site creators to become more responsible regarding their potential for influence and to adopt the conscious objective of protecting children from violence, pornography, filth, and sleaze.

36. We call upon educational entities to teach universal values and family and parenting skills, supporting parents in their responsibility to raise children to become the leaders of families in generations yet to come.

37. We call upon our own Church members to reach out in love to neighbors and friends of other faiths and include them in the use of the many resources the Church has to help families. Our communities and neighborhoods will be safer and stronger as people of all faiths work together to strengthen families.

38. It is important to remember that all larger units of society depend on the smallest and most fundamental unit, the family. No matter who or what we are, we help ourselves when we help families.

39. Brothers and sisters, as we hold up like a banner the proclamation to the world on the family and as we live and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will fulfill the measure of our creation here on earth. We will find peace and happiness here and in the world to come. We should not need a hurricane or other crisis to remind us of what matters most. The gospel and the Lord's plan of happiness and salvation should remind us. What matters most is what lasts longest, and our families are for eternity. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Unit 6 Additional Readings

Links



Elder Quentin L. Cook, “Let There Be Light”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2010/10/let-there-be-light?lang=eng>

Elder M. Russell Ballard, “Let Our Voices Be Heard”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2003/10/let-our-voices-be-heard?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Religious Freedom”

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/transcript-elder-dallin-h-oaks-religious-freedom-dallas>

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/broadcasts/article/c-es-devotionals/2012/01/israel-israel-god-is-calling?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks “Protect The Children”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/10/protect-the-children?lang=eng>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks “Truth and Tolerance”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2013/02/balancing-truth-and-tolerance?lang=eng>

Elder Robert D. Hales “Preserving Agency, Protecting Religious Freedom”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2015/04/preserving-agency-protecting-religious-freedom?lang=eng>