THE ETERNAL FAMILY

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY-IDAH0
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.
Unit 1: Truth & Law (Proclamation Paragraph 1)

"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."

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1. What doctrines or principles were you taught that you consider foundational to this Unit?

2. What impressions came to you? What were you taught during this large group session?

3. What questions will you ask in following class periods that will invite increased learning on this topic?
D&C 68:4
4 And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.

...
15 And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.
20 That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made and created, and for this intent are they sanctified.
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.
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— ...

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 willeth to 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.

D&C 93:24-34 (See Also D&C 93:1-39)
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. ...
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.

D&C 130:1-11
...
4 In answer to the question—Is not the reckoning of God's time, angel's time, prophet's time, and man's time, according to the planet on which they reside?
5 I answer, Yes. But there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.
6 The angels do not reside on a planet like this earth;
7 But they reside in the presence of God, on a globe like a sea of glass and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord.
8 The place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim.
9 This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be manifest to those who dwell on it; and this earth will be Christ's.
10 Then the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known;
11 And a white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is the key word.

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.

Abr. 1
2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; …
4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed. …
15 And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands;
16 And his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, …
19 As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.
“As God is…”

The Eternal Nature of Truth

From selected readings

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 2011

When we comprehend the character of God, we comprehend ourselves and know how to approach him.

1. When we comprehend the character of God, we comprehend ourselves and know how to approach Him.

2. “There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as it respects their relationship to God. They do not know, neither do they understand the nature of that relationship; and consequently they know but little above the brute beast, or more than to eat, drink and sleep. This is all man knows about God or His existence, unless it is given by the inspiration of the Almighty.”

3. “If a man learns nothing more than to eat, drink and sleep, and does not comprehend any of the designs of God, the beast comprehends the same things. It eats, drinks, sleeps, and knows nothing more about God; yet it knows as much as we, unless we are able to comprehend by the inspiration of Almighty God. If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. I want to go back to the beginning, and so lift your minds into more lofty spheres and a more exalted understanding than what the human mind generally aspires to.”

4. “… The scriptures inform us that ‘This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ [John 17:3.]

5. “If any man does not know God, and inquires what kind of a being He is,—if he will search diligently his own heart—if the declaration of Jesus and the apostles be true, he will realize that he has not eternal life; for there can be eternal life on no other principle.

6. “My first object is to find out the character of the only wise and true God, and what kind of a being He is. …

7. “God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make Himself visible,—I say, if you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another. …

8. “… Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach Him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, He begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to Him, He is ready to come to us.”

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow, 2013

9. In the spring of 1840, Lorenzo Snow was in Nauvoo, Illinois, preparing to leave for a mission in England. He visited the home of his friend Henry G. Sherwood, and he asked Brother Sherwood to explain a passage of scripture. “While attentively listening to his explanation,” President Snow later recalled, “the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon me—the eyes of my understanding were opened, and I saw as clear as the sun at noonday, with wonder and astonishment, the pathway of God and man. I formed the following couplet which expresses the revelation, as it was shown me. …

10. “As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.”

11. Feeling that he had received “a sacred communication” that he should guard carefully, Lorenzo Snow did not teach the doctrine publicly until he knew that the Prophet Joseph Smith had taught it. Once he knew the doctrine was public knowledge, he testified of it frequently.

12. In addition to making this truth a theme for many of his sermons, he adopted it as the theme for his life. His son
It is a wonderful plea
We were born in the image
Our enemies have criticized us for
Through a continual course
God has taken these intelligences, given to them spirit
I believe that we are to
We have divinity with
LeRoi said, "This revealed truth impressed Lorenzo Snow
more than perhaps all else; it sank so deeply into his soul that it became the inspiration of his life and gave him his broad vision of his own great future and the mighty mission and work of the Church." It was his "constant light and guide" and "a bright, illuminating star before him all the time—in his heart, in his soul, and all through him."

13. We were born in the image of God our Father; he begat us like unto himself. There is the nature of deity in the composition of our spiritual organization; in our spiritual birth our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which he himself possessed, as much so as the child on its mother’s bosom possesses, although in an undeveloped state, the faculties, powers and susceptibilities of its parent.

14. I believe that we are the sons and daughters of God, and that He has bestowed upon us the capacity for infinite wisdom and knowledge, because He has given us a portion of Himself. We are told that we were made in His own image, and we find that there is a character of immortality in the soul of man. There is a spiritual organism within this tabernacle [the physical body], and that spiritual organism has a divinity in itself, though perhaps in an infantile state; but it has within itself the capability of improving and advancing, as the infant that receives sustenance from its mother. Though the infant may be very ignorant, yet there are possibilities in it that by passing through the various ordeals of childhood to maturity enable it to rise to a superiority that is perfectly marvellous, compared with its infantile ignorance.

15. We have divinity within ourselves; we have immortality within ourselves; our spiritual organism is immortal; it cannot be destroyed; it cannot be annihilated. We will live from all eternity to all eternity.

16. It is a wonderful pleasure to speak upon the great things that God proposes to bestow upon His sons and daughters, and that we shall attain to if we are faithful. … Our travel in this path of exaltation will bring to us the fullness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to stand in the presence of our Father, to receive of His fullness, to have the pleasure of increasing in our posterity worlds without end, to enjoy those pleasant associations that we have had in this life, to have our sons and our daughters, our husbands and our wives, surrounded with all the enjoyment that heaven can bestow, our bodies glorified like unto the Savior’s, free from disease and all the ills of life, and free from the disappointments and vexations and the unpleasant sacrifices that we are making here.

17. Through a continual course of progression our Heavenly Father has received exaltation and glory and he points us out the same path and, inasmuch as he is clothed with power, authority and glory, he says, “walk ye up and come in possession of the same glory and happiness that I possess.”

18. On the other hand, the whole design of the gospel is to lead us onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follet sermon (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 342–62; and emphasized by President Lorenzo Snow. It is this grand and incomparable concept: As God now is, man may become! (See The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, comp. Clyde J. Williams, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984, p. 1.)

19. Our enemies have criticized us for believing in this. Our reply is that this lofty concept in no way diminishes God the Eternal Father. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He is the greatest of all and will always be so. But just as any earthly father wishes for his sons and daughters every success in life, so I believe our Father in Heaven wishes for his children that they might approach him in stature and stand beside him resplendent in godly strength and wisdom.

20. God has taken these intelligences, given to them spirit bodies, and given them instructions and training. Then he proceeded to create a world for them and sent them as spirits to obtain a mortal body, for which he made preparation. And when they were upon the earth, he gave them instructions on how to go about developing and conducting their lives to make them perfect, so they could return to their Father in heaven after their transitions. Then came the periods of time when souls were to be placed upon the earth and born to parents who were permitted to furnish the bodies. But no parent has ever yet on this earth been the parent of a spirit, because we are so far yet from perfection. Remember what was said a while ago, that “As man is, God once was; and as God is, man may become.” They came with the definite understanding that they could return to become like God and go forward in their great development and progress.
The Eternal Family

Elder Robert D. Hales
Ensign, Nov 1996, 64.

1. I wish to speak to all those who would like to know about eternal families and about families being forever. One year ago the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a proclamation to the world concerning the family. It summarizes eternal gospel principles that have been taught since the beginning of recorded history and even before the earth was created.

2. The doctrine of the family begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them. The Apostle Paul taught that God is the father of our spirits (see Heb. 12:9). From the proclamation we read, “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped 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 his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life.” The proclamation also reiterates to the world 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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

3. From the earliest beginnings, God established the family and made it eternal. Adam and Eve were sealed in marriage for time and all eternity:

4. “And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof; and thus it was” (Moses 5:59).

5. “And Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth” (Moses 5:2).

6. The Savior Himself spoke of this sacred marriage covenant and promise when He gave the authority to His disciples to bind in heaven sacred covenants made on earth:

7. “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19).

8. In this latter day the promise of eternal families was restored in 1829 when the powers of the Melchizedek Priesthood were restored to the earth. Seven years later, in the Kirtland Temple, the keys to perform the sealing ordinances were restored, as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants:

9. “Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

10. “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi— …

11. “… The keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands” (D&C 110:13–14, 16).

12. With the restoration of these keys and priesthood authority comes the opportunity for all who are worthy to receive the blessings of eternal families. “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” (D&C 110:9).

13. What is the promise of these sealings which are performed in the temples? The Lord outlines the promise and requirements in this sacred verse:

14. “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 … 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” (D&C 132:19).

15. As taught in this scripture, an eternal bond doesn’t
just happen as a result of sealing covenants we make in the
temple. How we conduct ourselves in this life will determine
what we will be in all the eternities to come. To receive the
blessings of the sealing that our Heavenly Father has given
to us, we have to keep the commandments and conduct
ourselves in such a way that our families will want to live
with us in the eternities. The family relationships we have
here on this earth are important, but they are much more
important for their effect on our families for generations in
mortality and throughout all eternity.

16. By divine commandment, spouses are required to
love each other above all others. The Lord clearly declares,
"Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave
unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22). The proclamation
states: "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 [see D&C 83:2–4; 1 Tim. 5:8]. [By divine design,] mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their
children." By divine design, husband and wife are equal
partners in their marriage and parental responsibilities. By
direct commandment of God, "parents have a sacred duty
… to teach [their children] to love and serve one another, to
observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding
citizens [in the countries where they reside]" (Ensign, Nov.
1995, 102; emphasis added; see D&C 68:25–28; Mosiah

17. Because of the importance of the family to the eternal
plan of happiness, Satan makes a major effort to destroy the
sanctity of the family, demean the importance of the role
of men and women, encourage moral uncleanness and
violations of the sacred law of chastity, and to discourage
parents from placing the bearing and rearing of children as
one of their highest priorities.

18. So fundamental is the family unit to the plan of
salvation that God has declared a warning that those
"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
[their maker]. … The disintegration of the family will bring
upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities
foretold by ancient and modern prophets" (Ensign, Nov.
1995, 102).

19. While our individual salvation is based on our
individual obedience, it is equally important that we
understand that we are each an important and integral part
of a family and the highest blessings can be received only
within an eternal family. When families are functioning as
designed by God, the relationships found therein are the
most valued of mortality. The plan of the Father is that family
love and companionship will continue into the eternities.
Being one in a family carries a great responsibility of caring,
loving, lifting, and strengthening each member of the family
so that all can righteously endure to the end in mortality and
dwell together throughout eternity. It is not enough just to
save ourselves. It is equally important that parents, brothers,
and sisters are saved in our families. If we return home alone
to our Heavenly Father, we will be asked, "Where is the rest
of the family?" This is why we teach that families are forever.
The eternal nature of an individual becomes the eternal
nature of the family.

20. The eternal nature of our body and our spirit is a
question often pondered by those who live in mortality. All
people who will ever live on earth are members of a human
family and are eternal children of God, our loving Heavenly
Father. After birth and tasting of death in mortality, all will
be resurrected because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God the Father. Depending on
our individual obedience to the laws, ordinances, and
commandments of God, each mortal can have the blessing of
attaining eternal life; that is, returning to live in the presence
of their Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, having
eternal increase for all the eternities to come. Through
making and keeping the sacred covenants found in the
temple ordinances, individuals can return to the presence of
God and will be reunited with their families eternally.

21. The home is where we are nurtured and where we
prepare ourselves for living in eternity. It is also where we
prepare ourselves for death and for immortality because of
our belief and understanding that there is life after death, not
only for the individual but also for the family.

22. Some of the greatest lessons of gospel principles about
the eternal nature of the family are learned as we observe
how members of the Church, when faced with adversity,
apply gospel principles in their lives and in their homes.
In the past year I have witnessed the blessings of joy which
come to those who honor and revere the gospel teaching of
the eternal family during times of adversity in their lives.

23. A few months ago I had the opportunity of visiting a
man who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. As
a devoted priesthood holder, he was confronted with the
realities of mortality. He found strength, however, in the
example of the Savior, who said, in the Lord's Prayer, "After
this manner therefore pray ye: … Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10). My friend took courage in
knowing that as Jesus was required to endure great pain and
agony in the Garden of Gethsemane while completing the
atonning sacrifice, He uttered the words, "O my Father, if this
cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be
done" (Matt. 26:42).

24. My friend came to accept the phrase "Thy will be done"
as he faced his own poignant trials and tribulations. As a
faithful member of the Church, he was now confronted
with some sobering concerns. Particularly touching were
his questions, "Have I done all that I need to do to faithfully
..."
endure to the end?” “What will death be like?” “Will my family be prepared to stand in faith and be self-reliant when I am gone?”

25. We had the opportunity to discuss all three questions. They are clearly answered in the doctrine taught to us by our Savior. We discussed how he had spent his life striving to be faithful, to do what God asked of him, to be honest in his dealings with his fellowmen and all others, to care for and love his family. Isn’t that what is meant by enduring to the end? We talked about what happens immediately after death, about what God has taught us about the world of spirits. It is a place of paradise and happiness for those who have lived righteous lives. It is not something to fear.

26. After our conversation, he called together his wife and the extended family—children and grandchildren—to teach them again the doctrine of the Atonement that all will be resurrected. Everyone came to understand that just as the Lord has said, while there will be mourning at the temporary separation, there is no sorrow for those who die in the Lord (see Rev. 14:13; D&C 42:46). His blessing promised him comfort and reassurance that all would be well, that he would not have pain, that he would have additional time to prepare his family for his departure—even that he would know the time of his departure. The family related to me that on the night before he passed away, he said he would go on the morrow. He passed away the next afternoon at peace, with all his family at his side. This is the solace and comfort that comes to us when we understand the gospel plan and know that families are forever.

27. Contrast these events with an incident which happened to me when I was a young man in my early twenties. While serving in the Air Force, one of the pilots in my squadron crashed on a training mission and was killed. I was assigned to accompany my fallen comrade on his final journey home to be buried in Brooklyn. I had the honor of standing by his family during the viewing and funeral services and of representing our government in presenting the flag to his grieving widow at the graveside. The funeral service was dark and dismal. No mention was made of his goodness or his accomplishments. His name was never mentioned. At the conclusion of the services, his widow turned to me and asked, “Bob, what is really going to happen to Don?” I was then able to give her the sweet doctrine of the Resurrection and the reality that, if baptized and sealed in the temple for time and all eternity, they could be together eternally. The clergyman standing next to her said, “That is the most beautiful doctrine I have ever heard.”

28. The fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ brings great comfort in stressing times of mortality. It brings light where there is darkness and a calming influence where there is turmoil. It gives eternal hope where there is mortal despair. It is more than just beautiful doctrine. It is a reality in our lives that if we can be obedient and obtain the eternal rewards that God grants us, if we will draw nigh unto Him and embrace the eternal doctrine, we will be blessed.

29. Another incident that has touched my life recently happened when a young man with a terminal illness passed away. He knew that his illness would first take away his manual dexterity and his ability to walk, then its progression would take his ability to speak, and finally his respiratory system would cease to function. But he also had faith that families are forever. With this knowledge, he spoke to each of his children through video recordings for use when he was gone. He produced recordings to be given to his sons and daughters at important, sacred occasions in their lives, such as baptisms, priesthood ordinations, and weddings. He spoke to them with the tender love of a father who knew that while his family was forever, for a time he would not physically be able to be with them, but spiritually he would never leave their side.

30. The examples of faith shown by steadfast widows and widowers, along with that of their children, after the passing of a spouse or parent are an inspiration to all of us. Great lessons can be learned as we observe their faith and obedience as they strive to remain faithful so that they can once again be together as families through eternity.

31. The knowledge and understanding of the doctrine that God lives and Jesus is the Christ and that we have an opportunity to be resurrected and live in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, makes it possible to endure otherwise tragic events. This doctrine brings a brightness of hope into an otherwise dark and dreary world. It answers the simple questions of where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. These are truths that must be taught and practiced in our homes.

32. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. Through His Atonement we will all have the opportunity of being resurrected. This is not just an individual blessing; it is much more than that. It is a blessing to each one of us and to our families. That we may be eternally grateful, that we can live in the presence of God the Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ, that we may be together in the eternities to come, that we might understand the joy, and that we not only teach this doctrine but live true to it in our lives and in our families, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
1. Since the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith until September 23, 1995, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has issued a proclamation only four times. It has been more than fifteen years since the last one, which described the progress the Church had made in 150 years of its history. Thus you can imagine the importance our Heavenly Father places upon the subject of this most recent proclamation.

2. Newspapers and television flood us with words and pictures about issues and events to think about and worry about. One of the great blessings of having faith in living prophets is that we can know what really matters, what is worth our attention in this confusing world and in our crowded lives.

3. Because our Father loves his children, he will not leave us to guess about what matters most in this life concerning where our attention could bring happiness or our indifference bring sadness. Sometimes he will tell us directly, by inspiration. But he will, in addition, tell us through his servants. In the words of a prophet named Amos, recorded long ago, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). He does that so that even those who cannot feel inspiration can know, if they will only listen, that they have been told the truth and been warned.


5. Three things about the title are worth our careful reflection. First, the subject: the family. Second, the audience, which is the whole world. And third, those who proclaimed are those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. That means that the family must be as important to us as anything we can consider, that what the proclamation says could help anyone in the world, and that the proclamation fits the Lord’s promise when he said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).

6. Before we start to listen to the words of the proclamation together, the title tells us something about how to prepare. We can expect that God won’t just tell us a few interesting things about the family; he will tell us what a family ought to be and why. And we know at the outset that we could be easily overwhelmed with such thoughts as “This is so high a standard, and I am so weak that I can never hope for such a family.” That feeling can come because what our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ want for us is to become like them so that we can dwell with them forever, in families. We know that from this simple statement of their intent: “This is my work and my glory--to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

7. Eternal life means to become like the Father and to live in families in happiness and joy forever, so of course what he wants for us will require help beyond our powers. That feeling of our inadequacy can make it easier to repent and to be ready to rely on the Lord’s help.

8. The fact that the proclamation goes to all the world--to every person and government in it--gives us assurance that we need not be overwhelmed. Whoever we are, however difficult our circumstances, we can know that what our Father commands we do to qualify for the blessings of eternal life will not be beyond us. What a young boy said long ago when he faced a seemingly impossible assignment is true:

9. I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. [1 Nephi 3:7]

10. We may have to pray with faith to know what we are to do, and we must pray with a determination to obey, but we can know what to do and be sure that the way has been prepared for us by the Lord. As we read of what the proclamation tells us about the family, we can expect, in fact we must expect, impressions to come to our minds as to what we are to do, and we can be confident it is possible. The proclamation begins this way:

11. 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.

12. Try to imagine yourself as a little child, hearing those words for the first time and believing that they are true. This can be a useful attitude whenever we read or hear the word of God because he has told us, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:17).

13. A little child would feel safe hearing the words that marriage between a man and woman is ordained of God. The child would know that the longing to have the love of both a father and a mother, distinct but somehow perfectly complementary, exists because that is the eternal pattern, the pattern of happiness. The child would also feel safer knowing that God would help mother and father resolve differences and love each other, if only they ask for his help and try. Prayers of children across the earth would go up to God, pleading for his help for parents and for families.

14. Read in that same way, as if you were a little child, the next words of the proclamation:

15. 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.

16. In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped 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 his or her divine destiny as an heir 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.

17. Understanding these truths ought to make it easier for us to feel like a little child, not just as we read the proclamation, but throughout our lives, because we are children--but in what a family and of what parents! We can picture ourselves as we were, for longer than we can imagine, sons and daughters associating in our heavenly home with parents who knew and loved us. But now we can see ourselves home again with our heavenly parents in that wonderful place, not only as sons and daughters but as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, grandsons and granddaughters, bound together forever in loving families. And we know that in the premortal world we were men or women, with unique gifts because of our gender, and that the opportunity to be married and to become one was necessary for us to have eternal happiness.

18. With that picture before us, we can never be tempted even to think “Maybe I wouldn't like eternal life. Maybe I would be just as happy in some other place in the life after death. I’ve heard that even the lowest kingdoms are more beautiful than anything we have ever seen.”

19. We must have the goal not just in our minds but in our hearts. What we want is eternal life in families. We don't just want it if that is what works out, nor do we want something approaching eternal life. We want eternal life, whatever its cost in effort, pain, and sacrifice. Whenever we are tempted to make eternal life our hope instead of our determination, we might think of a building I took a look at a few weeks ago.

20. I was in Boston. For a little nostalgia, my wife and I walked up to the front of the boarding house I was living in when I met Kathleen, who is now my wife. That was a long time ago, so I expected to find the house a little more dilapidated than it was, since I seem to be a little more dilapidated. But to our surprise it was freshly painted and much renovated. A university has purchased it from the Sopers, the people who owned it and ran it as a boarding house.

21. The building was locked, so we couldn't get in to see the back room on the top floor, which once was mine. Costs have changed, so this will be hard for you to believe, but this was the deal the Sopers gave me: My own large room and bath, furniture and sheets provided, maid service, six big breakfasts and five wonderful dinners a week—all at the price of twenty-one dollars a week. More than that, the meals were ample and prepared with such skill that we called our landlady with some affection “Ma Soper.” Just talking about it with you makes me realize that I didn't thank Mrs. Soper often enough, nor Mr. Soper and their daughter, since it must have been some burden to have twelve single men to dinner every weekend.

22. Now, you aren't tempted by that description of a boarding house, and neither am I. It could have the most spacious rooms, the best service, and the finest eleven men you could ever know as fellow boarders and we wouldn't want to live there more than a short while. If it were beautiful beyond our power to imagine, we wouldn't want to live there forever, single, if we have even the dimmest memory or the faintest vision of a family with beloved parents and children like the one from which we came to this earth and the one that is our destiny to form and to live in forever. There is only one place where there will be families--the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. That is where we will want to be.

23. A child hearing and believing those words would begin a lifetime of looking for a holy temple where ordinances and covenants perpetuate family relationships beyond the grave and would begin striving to become worthy, and to find a potential mate who has become worthy, of such ordinances. The words of the proclamation make it clear that to receive
those blessings requires some sort of perfecting experiences. A child might not sense at first, but soon would learn, that all the making of resolutions and trying harder can produce only faltering progress toward perfection. With age will come temptations to acts that create feelings of guilt. Every child will someday feel those pangs of conscience, as we all have. And those who feel that priceless sense of guilt and cannot shake it may despair, sensing that eternal life requires a progress toward perfection that seems increasingly to be beyond them. So you and I will resolve to speak to someone who doesn't yet know what we know about how that perfection is produced. We will do that because we know that someday they will want what we want, and will then realize that we were their brother or sister and that we knew the way to eternal life. Tonight and tomorrow it won't be hard to be a member missionary if you think of that future moment when they and we will see things as they really are.

24. Some other words in the proclamation will have special meaning for us, knowing what we know about eternal life. They are in the next two paragraphs:

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. Believing those words, a child could spot easily the mistakes in reasoning made by adults. For instance, apparently wise and powerful people blame poverty and famine on there being too many people in some parts of the earth or in all the earth. With great passion they argue for limiting births as if that will produce human happiness. A child believing the proclamation will know that cannot be so, even before hearing these words from the Lord through his prophet, Joseph Smith: “For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves” (D&C 104:17).

28. A child could see that Heavenly Father would not command men and women to marry and to multiply and replenish the earth if the children they invited into mortality would deplete the earth. Since there is enough and to spare, the enemy of human happiness as well as the cause of poverty and starvation is not the birth of children. It is the failure of people to do with the earth what God could teach them to do, if only they would ask and then obey, for they are agents unto themselves.

29. We would also see that the commandment to be chaste, to employ the powers of procreation only as husband and wife, is not limiting but rather expanding and exalting. Children are the inheritance of the Lord to us not only in this life, but also in eternity. Eternal life is not only to have forever our descendants from this life. It is also to have eternal increase. This is the description of what awaits those of us married as husband and wife by a servant of God with authority to offer us the sacred sealing ordinances. Here are the words of the Lord:

30. It shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, 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.

31. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting. [D&C 132:19–20]

32. Now you can see why our Father in Heaven puts such a high standard before us in using procreative powers whose continuation is at the heart of eternal life. He told us what that was worth this way: “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” (D&C 14:7).

33. We can understand why our Heavenly Father commands us to reverence life and to cherish the powers that produce it as sacred. If we do not have those feelings in this life, how could our Father give them to us in the eternities? Family life here is the schoolroom in which we prepare for family life there. And to give us the opportunity for family life there was and is the purpose of creation. That is why the coming of Elijah was described this way:

34. 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. [JS--H 1:39]

35. For some of us, the test in the schoolroom of mortality will be to want marriage and children in this life with all our hearts, but to have it delayed or denied. Even such a sorrow can be turned to a blessing by a just and loving Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. No one who strives with full faith and heart for the blessings of eternal life will be denied. And how great will be the joy and how much deeper the appreciation then after enduring in patience and faith now.

36. The proclamation describes our schooling here for family life in the presence of our Eternal Father:

37. 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" (Psalms 127:3).

Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to 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.

38. 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.

39. Those two paragraphs are filled with practical implications. There are things we can start to do now. They have to do with providing for the spiritual and the physical needs of a family. There are things we can do now to prepare, long before the need, so that we can be at peace knowing we have done all we can.

40. To begin with, we can decide to plan for success, not for failure. Statistics are thrown at us every day to persuade us that a family composed of a loving father and mother with children loved, taught, and cared for in the way the proclamation enjoins is going the way of the dinosaurs, toward extinction. You have enough evidence in your own families that righteous people sometimes have their families ripped apart by circumstances beyond their control. It takes courage and faith to plan for what God holds before you as the ideal rather than what might be forced upon you by circumstances.

41. There are important ways in which planning for failure can make failure more likely and the ideal less so. Consider these twin commandments as an example: "Fathers are to . . . provide the necessities of life . . . for their families" and "mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children." Knowing how hard that might be, a young man might choose a career on the basis of how much money he could make, even if it meant he couldn't be home enough to be an equal partner. By doing that, he has already decided he cannot hope to do what would be best. A young woman might prepare for a career incompatible with being primarily responsible for the nurture of her children because of the possibilities of not marrying, of not having children, or of being left alone to provide for them herself. Or she might fail to focus her education on the gospel and knowledge of the world that nurturing a family would require, not realizing that the highest and best use she could make of her talents and her education would be in her home. Because a young man and woman had planned to take care of the worst, they might make the best less likely.

42. They are both wise to worry about the physical needs of that future family. The costs of buying a home, compared to average salaries, seem to be rising, and jobs seem harder to hold. But there are other ways the young man and the young woman could think about preparing to provide for that future family. Income is only one part of it. Have you noticed husbands and wives who feel pinched for lack of money, then choose ways to make their family income keep rising, and then find that the pinch is there whatever the income? There is an old formula you’ve heard that goes something like this: Income five dollars and expenses six dollars: misery. Income four dollars and expenses three dollars: happiness (see Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, chapter 12).

43. Whether the young man can provide and still be in the home and whether the young woman can be there to nurture children can depend as much on how they learn to spend as how they learn to earn. Brigham Young said it this way, speaking to us as much as he did to the people in his day:

44. If you wish to get rich, save what you get. A fool can earn money; but it takes a wise man to save and dispose of it to his own advantage. Then go to work, and save everything, and make your own bonnets and clothing. [JD 11:301]

45. In today’s world, instead of telling you to make bonnets, he might suggest you think carefully about what you really need in cars and houses and vacations and whatever else you will someday try to provide for your children. And he might point out that the difference in cost between what the world tells you is necessary and what your children really need could allow you the margin in time that a father and a mother might need with their children to bring them home to their Heavenly Father.

46. Even the most frugal spending habits and the most careful planning for employment may not be enough to ensure success, but it could be enough to allow you the peace that comes from knowing you did the best you could to provide and to nurture.

47. There is another way we could plan to succeed, despite the difficulties that might lie before us. The proclamation sets a high hurdle for us to clear when it describes our obligation to teach our children. We are somehow to teach them so that
they love one another and serve one another and keep the commandments and are law-abiding citizens. If we think of good families who have not met that test, and few meet it without some degree of failure over a generation or two, we could lose heart.

48. We cannot control what others choose to do, and so we cannot force our children to heaven, but we can determine what we will do. And we can decide that we will do all that we can to bring down the powers of heaven into that family we want so much to have forever.

49. A key for us is in the proclamation in this sentence: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

50. What could make it more likely that people in a family would love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and obey the law? It is not simply teaching them the gospel. It is in their hearing the word of God and then trying it in faith. If they do, their natures will be changed in a way that produces the happiness we seek. These words from Moroni describe exactly how that change is the natural fruit of living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

51. And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

52. And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowness of heart; and because of meekness and lowness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. [Moroni 8:25–26]

53. When we prepare a child for baptism, if we do it well, we prepare them for the process that will bring the effects of the Atonement into their lives and the powers of heaven into our home. Think of the change we need. We need the Holy Ghost to fill us with hope and perfect love so that we can endure by diligence unto prayer. And then we can dwell forever with God in families. How can it come? By the simple promise Mormon described to his son Moroni. Faith in Jesus Christ unto repentance and then baptism by those with authority leads to remission of sins. And that produces meekness and lowness of heart. And that in turn allows us to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, which fills us with hope and perfect love.

54. You know that is true; I know that is true from my own experience and from the experiences of those in my family. We found on our bedspread after a twenty-hour flight across the world a sign written in colors in a childish hand: “You must be so tired! Lie down and relax! You’re back home where we’ll take care of everything!” And in a phone call made at a stopping place on that flight home the older sister said, “Oh, I’m just vacuuming the house.”

55. How does an eleven-year-old who has never flown across the sea know the effects of jet lag on her mother and father? How does a fifteen-year-old decide to run a vacuum without being asked? Or how does a husband know the feelings of his wife, or a wife the feelings of her husband, and so understand without being told and then help without being asked? Why does a niece give up her bed to an aunt and a nephew share his house and dinner table? How do a son and a daughter-in-law find it possible to take children into their already busy home and act as if it were a blessing? It takes the powers of heaven brought down by believing these words and acting on them:

56. And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowness of heart; and because of meekness and lowness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. [Moroni 8:26]

57. And may I add the words in families.

58. The proclamation is careful in what it promises: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.” My heart aches a little to know that many who read those words will be surrounded by those who do not know or who deny the teachings of Jesus Christ. They can only do their best. But they can know this: Their placement in a family, however challenging, is known by a loving Heavenly Father. They can know that a way is prepared for them to do all that will be required for them to qualify for eternal life. They may not see how God could give them that gift, nor with whom they will share it. Yet the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ is sure:

59. But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and the Spirit beareth record. Amen. [D&C 59:23–24]

60. That peace will come from the assurance that the Atonement has worked in our lives and from the hope of eternal life that springs from it.

61. The proclamation warns that for those who fail to respond, the result will be more disastrous than simply lack of peace in this life or absence of happiness. Here is the prophetic warning and the call to action with which the proclamation ends:

62. 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.

63. 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.

64. The family unit is not only fundamental to society and to the Church but to our hope for eternal life. We begin to practice in the family, the smaller unit, what will spread to the Church and to the society in which we live in this world and what then will be what we practice in families bound together forever by covenants and faithfulness. We can start now to "promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family." I pray that we will. I pray that you will ask, "Father, how can I prepare?" Tell him how much you want what it is that he wants so much to give you. You will receive impressions, and if you act on them I promise you the help of the powers of heaven.

65. I testify that our Heavenly Father lives, that we lived with him as spirits, and that we would be lonely living anywhere but with him in the world to come.

66. I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that he made possible the changes in you and me that can give us eternal life by suffering for the sins of all of us, his spirit brothers and sisters, the children of his Heavenly Father and our Heavenly Father.

67. I testify that the Holy Ghost can fill us with hope and with perfect love.

68. And I testify that the sealing power restored to Joseph Smith and now held by President Gordon B. Hinckley can bind us in families and give us eternal life, if we do all that we can do in faith. And I so testify and express my love to you, in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.
What is Truth
President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
CES Devotionals, January 2013

1. My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear young friends, I am grateful for the privilege to be with you today. It always lifts my spirits to be surrounded by the young adults of the Church, and you inspire me to declare, “Let Zion in her beauty rise.” As you are living all around the world, you represent in a beautiful way the future and strength of the Church. Because of your righteous desires and your commitment to follow the Savior, the future of this Church looks bright.

2. I bring you the love and blessing of President Thomas S. Monson. The First Presidency prays for you often. We always ask the Lord to bless, keep, and guide you.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

3. Well over one hundred years ago, an American poet put to rhyme an ancient parable. The first verse of the poem speaks about:

4. Six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

5. In the poem each of the six travelers takes hold of a different part of the elephant and then describes to the others what he has discovered.

6. One of the men finds the elephant’s leg and describes it as being round and rough like a tree. Another feels the tusk and describes the elephant as a spear. A third grabs the tail and insists that an elephant is like a rope. A fourth discovers the trunk and insists that the elephant is like a large snake. Each is describing truth.

7. And because his truth comes from personal experience, each insists that he knows what he knows. The poem concludes:

8. And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong.

9. We look at this story from a distance and smile. After all, we know what an elephant looks like. We have read about them and watched them on film, and many of us have even seen one with our own eyes. We believe we know the truth of what an elephant is. That someone could make a judgment based on one aspect of truth and apply it to the whole seems absurd or even unbelievable. On the other hand, can’t we recognize ourselves in these six blind men? Have we ever been guilty of the same pattern of thought?

10. I suppose the reason this story has remained so popular in so many cultures and over so many years is because of its universal application. The Apostle Paul said that in this world the light is dim and we see only part of the truth as though we are looking “through a glass, darkly.” And yet it seems to be part of our nature as human beings to make assumptions about people, politics, and piety based on our incomplete and often misleading experience.

11. I am reminded of a story about a couple who had been married for 60 years. They had rarely argued during that time, and their days together passed in happiness and contentment. They shared everything and had no secrets between them—except one. The wife had a box that she kept at the top of a sideboard, and she told her husband when they were married that he should never look inside.

12. As the decades passed, the moment came that her husband took the box down and asked if he could finally know what it contained. The wife consented, and he opened it to discover two doilies and $25,000. When he asked his wife what this meant, she responded, “When we were married, my mother told me that whenever I was angry with you or whenever you said or did something I didn’t like, I should knit a small doily and then talk things through with you.”

13. The husband was moved to tears by this sweet story. He marveled that during 60 years of marriage he had only disturbed his wife enough for her to knit two doilies. Feeling extremely good about himself, he took his wife’s hand and said, “That explains the doilies, but what about the $25,000?”
14. His wife smiled sweetly and said, “That’s the money I got from selling all the doilies I’ve knitted over the years.”

15. Not only does this story teach an interesting way to deal with disagreements in marriage, but it also illustrates the folly of jumping to conclusions based on limited information.

16. So often the “truths” we tell ourselves are merely fragments of the truth, and sometimes they’re not really the truth at all.

17. Today I would like to speak of truth. As I do, I invite you to ponder a few important questions.

18. The first question is “What is truth?”

19. The second, “Is it really possible to know the truth?”

20. And third, “How should we react to things that contradict truths which we have learned previously?”

What is Truth?

21. What is truth? During the closing hours of His life, the Savior was brought before Pontius Pilate. The elders of the Jews had accused Jesus of sedition and treason against Rome and insisted that He be put to death.

22. When Pilate came face to face with the Man of Galilee, he asked, “Are you a king?”

23. Jesus replied, “For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

24. I don’t know what kind of man Pilate was, nor do I know what he was thinking. However, I suspect that he was well educated and had seen much of the known world.

25. I sense a certain weary cynicism in Pilate’s reply. I hear in his words the voice of a man who may once have been an idealist but now—after a great deal of life experience—seems a little hardened, even tired.

26. I don’t believe Pilate was encouraging a dialogue when he responded with three simple words: “What is truth?”

27. To amplify, I wonder if what he really was asking was “How can anyone possibly know the truth?”

28. And that is a question for all time and for all people.

Can Anyone Know the Truth?

29. Now, can anyone know the truth? Some of the greatest minds that have ever lived on this earth have attempted to answer that question. The elusive nature of truth has been a favorite theme of history’s great poets and storytellers. Shakespeare seemed especially intrigued with it. The next time you read one of Shakespeare’s tragedies, notice how often the plot turns on a misunderstanding of an important truth.

30. Now, never in the history of the world have we had easier access to more information—some of it true, some of it false, and much of it partially true.

31. Consequently, never in the history of the world has it been more important to learn how to correctly discern between truth and error.

32. Part of our problem in the quest for truth is that human wisdom has disappointed us so often. We have so many examples of things that mankind once “knew” were true but have since been proven false.

33. For example, in spite of one-time overwhelming consensus, the earth isn’t flat. The stars don’t revolve around the earth. Eating a tomato will not cause instant death. And, of course, man actually can fly—even break the sound barrier.

34. The scriptures are filled with stories of men and women who misinterpreted “truth.”

35. In the Old Testament, Balaam could not resist the “wages of unrighteousness” offered him by the Moabites. So he convinced himself to believe a new truth and helped the Moabites get the Israelites to curse themselves through immorality and disobedience.

36. The apostate Korihor, after leading many away from the truth, confessed that the devil had deceived him to the point where he actually believed that what he was saying was the truth.

37. In the Book of Mormon, both the Nephites as well as the Lamanites created their own “truths” about each other. The Nephites’ “truth” about the Lamanites was that they “were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people,” never able to accept the gospel. The Lamanites’ “truth” about the Nephites was that Nephi had stolen his brother’s birthright and that Nephi’s descendants were liars who continued to rob the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs. These “truths” fed their hatred for one another until it finally consumed them all.

38. Needless to say, there are many examples in the Book of Mormon that contradict both of these stereotypes. Nevertheless, the Nephites and Lamanites believed these “truths” that shaped the destiny of this once-mighty and beautiful people.

Human Nature and Truth
39. In some way we are all susceptible to such strange thinking.

40. The “truths” we cling to shape the quality of our societies as well as our individual characters. All too often these “truths” are based on incomplete and inaccurate evidence, and at times they serve very selfish motives.

41. Part of the reason for poor judgment comes from the tendency of mankind to blur the line between belief and truth. We too often confuse belief with truth, thinking that because something makes sense or is convenient, it must be true. Conversely, we sometimes don’t believe truth or reject it—because it would require us to change or admit that we were wrong. Often, truth is rejected because it doesn’t appear to be consistent with previous experiences.

42. When the opinions or “truths” of others contradict our own, instead of considering the possibility that there could be information that might be helpful and augment or complement what we know, we often jump to conclusions or make assumptions that the other person is misinformed, mentally challenged, or even intentionally trying to deceive.

43. Unfortunately, this tendency can spread to all areas of our lives—from sports to family relationships and from religion to politics.

Ignaz Semmelweis

44. A tragic example of this tendency is the story of Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian physician who practiced medicine during the mid-19th century. Early in his career, Dr. Semmelweis learned that 10 percent of the women who came to his clinic died of childbed fever, while the death rate at a nearby clinic was less than 4 percent. He was determined to find out why.

45. After investigating the two clinics, Dr. Semmelweis concluded that the only significant difference was that his was a teaching clinic where corpses were examined. He observed doctors who went directly from performing autopsies to delivering babies. He concluded that somehow the corpses had contaminated their hands and caused the deadly fevers.

46. When he began to recommend that doctors scrub their hands with a chlorinated lime solution, he was met with indifference and even scorn. His conclusions contradicted the “truths” of other doctors. Some of his colleagues even believed that it was absurd to think that a doctor’s hand could be impure or cause sickness.

47. But Semmelweis insisted, and he made it a policy for doctors in his clinic to wash their hands before delivering babies. As a consequence, the death rate promptly dropped by 90 percent. Semmelweis felt vindicated and was certain that this practice would now be adopted throughout the medical community. But he was wrong. Even his dramatic results were not enough to change the minds of many doctors of the day.

Is it Possible to Know the Truth?

48. The thing about truth is that it exists beyond belief. It is true even if nobody believes it.

49. We can say west is north and north is west all day long and even believe it with all our heart, but if, for example, we want to fly from Quito, Ecuador, to New York City in the United States, there is only one direction that will lead us there, and that is north—west just won’t do.

50. Of course, this is just a simple aviation analogy. However, there is indeed such a thing as absolute truth—unassailable, unchangeable truth.

51. This truth is different from belief. It is different from hope. Absolute truth is not dependent upon public opinion or popularity. Polls cannot sway it. Not even the inexhaustible authority of celebrity endorsement can change it.

52. So how can we find truth?

53. I believe that our Father in Heaven is pleased with His children when they use their talents and mental faculties to earnestly discover truth. Over the centuries many wise men and women—through logic, reason, scientific inquiry, and, yes, through inspiration—have discovered truth. These discoveries have enriched mankind, improved our lives, and inspired joy, wonder, and awe.

54. Even so, the things we once thought we knew are continually being enhanced, modified, or even contradicted by enterprising scholars who seek to understand truth.

55. As we all know, it is difficult enough to sort out the truth from our own experiences. To make matters worse, we have an adversary, “the devil, [who] as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

56. Satan is the great deceiver, “the accuser of [the] brethren,” the father of all lies, who continually seeks to deceive that he might overthrow us.

57. The adversary has many cunning strategies for keeping mortals from the truth. He offers the belief that truth is relative; appealing to our sense of tolerance and fairness, he keeps the real truth hidden by claiming that one person’s “truth” is as valid as any other.

58. Some he entices to believe that there is an absolute truth out there somewhere but that it is impossible for anyone to know it.
59. For those who already embrace the truth, his primary strategy is to spread the seeds of doubt. For example, he has caused many members of the Church to stumble when they discover information about the Church that seems to contradict what they had learned previously.

60. If you experience such a moment, remember that in this age of information there are many who create doubt about anything and everything, at any time and every place.

61. You will find even those who still claim that they have evidence that the earth is flat, that the moon is a hologram, and that certain movie stars are really aliens from another planet. And it is always good to keep in mind, just because something is printed on paper, appears on the Internet, is frequently repeated, or has a powerful group of followers doesn't make it true.

62. Sometimes untrue claims or information are presented in such a way that they appear quite credible. However, when you are confronted with information that is in conflict with the revealed word of God, remember that the blind men in the parable of the elephant would never be able to accurately describe the full truth.

63. We simply don't know all things—we can't see everything. What may seem contradictory now may be perfectly understandable as we search for and receive more trustworthy information. Because we see through a glass darkly, we have to trust the Lord, who sees all things clearly.

64. Yes, our world is full of confusion. But eventually all of our questions will be answered. All of our doubts will be replaced by certainty. And that is because there is one source of truth that is complete, correct, and incorruptible. That source is our infinitely wise and all-knowing Heavenly Father. He knows truth as it was, as it is, and as it yet will be. “He comprehendeth all things, … and he is above all things, … and all things are by him, and of him.”

65. Our loving Heavenly Father offers His truth to us, His mortal children.

66. Now, what is this truth?

67. It is His gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

68. If we will only have enough courage and faith to walk in His path, it will lead us to peace of heart and mind, to lasting meaning in life, to happiness in this world, and to joy in the world to come. The Savior is “not far from every one of us.” We have His promise that if we seek Him diligently, we will find Him.

Our Obligation to Seek for Truth

69. But how can we know that this “truth” is different from any other? How can we trust this “truth”?

70. The invitation to trust the Lord does not relieve us from the responsibility to know for ourselves. This is more than an opportunity; it is an obligation—and it is one of the reasons we were sent to this earth.

71. Latter-day Saints are not asked to blindly accept everything they hear. We are encouraged to think and discover truth for ourselves. We are expected to ponder, to search, to evaluate, and thereby to come to a personal knowledge of the truth.

72. Brigham Young said: “I am … afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security. … Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates.”

73. We seek for truth wherever we may find it. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “Mormonism is truth. … The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or … being … prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men.”

74. Yes, we do have the fulness of the everlasting gospel, but that does not mean that we know everything. In fact, one principle of the restored gospel is our belief that God “will yet reveal many great and important things.”

75. The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ came about because of a young man with a humble heart and a keen mind seeking for truth. Joseph studied and then acted accordingly. He discovered that if a man lacks wisdom, he can ask of God and the truth really will be given unto him.

76. The great miracle of the Restoration was not just that it corrected false ideas and corrupt doctrines—though it certainly did that—but that it flung open the curtains of heaven and initiated a steady downpour of new light and knowledge that has continued to this day.

77. So we continually seek truth from all good books and other wholesome sources. “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” In this manner we can resist the deceit of the evil one. In this manner we learn the truth “precept upon precept; line upon line.” And we will learn that intelligence cleaves unto intelligence, and wisdom receives wisdom, and truth embraces truth.

78. My young friends, as you accept the responsibility to seek after truth with an open mind and a humble heart, you
will become more tolerant of others, more open to listen, more prepared to understand, more inclined to build up instead of tearing down, and more willing to go where the Lord wants you to go.

**The Eternal Family Reading Packet**

79. Just think about it. You actually have a powerful companion and trustworthy guide in this ongoing search for truth. Who is it? It is the Holy Ghost. Our Heavenly Father knew how difficult it would be for us to sift through all the competing noise and discover truth during our mortality. He knew we would see only a portion of the truth, and He knew that Satan would try to deceive us. So He gave us the heavenly gift of the Holy Ghost to illuminate our minds, teach us, and testify to us of the truth.

80. The Holy Ghost is a revelator. He is the Comforter, who teaches us "the truth of all things; … [who] knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment."

81. The Holy Ghost is a certain and safe guide to assist all mortals who seek God as they navigate the often troubling waters of confusion and contradiction.

82. The Witness of truth from the Holy Ghost is available to all, everywhere, all around the globe. All who seek to know the truth, who study it out in their minds, and who "ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, [will know] the truth … by the power of the Holy Ghost."

83. And there is the additional, unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost available to all who qualify themselves through baptism and by living worthy of His constant companionship.

84. Yes, your loving Father in Heaven would never leave you alone in this mortality to wander in the dark. You need not be deceived. You can overcome the darkness of this world and discover divine truth.

85. Some, however, do not seek for truth so much as they strive for contention. They do not sincerely seek to learn; rather, they desire to dispute, to show off their supposed learning and thus cause contention. They ignore or reject the counsel of the Apostle Paul to Timothy: "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do [generate contention]."

86. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we know that such contention is completely inconsistent with the Spirit upon whom we depend in our search for truth. As the Savior warned the Nephites, "For 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."

87. If you follow the Spirit, your personal search for the truth inevitably leads you to the Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, for He is "the way, the truth, and the life." This may not be the most convenient way; it will probably also be the road less traveled, and it will be the path with mountains to climb, swift rivers to cross, but it will be His way—the Savior's redeeming way.

88. I add my witness as an Apostle of the Lord, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I know this with all my heart and mind. I know this by the witness and power of the Holy Ghost.

89. I ask you to spare no efforts in your search to know this truth for yourself—because this truth will make you free.

90. My dear young friends, you are the hope of Israel. We love you. The Lord knows you; He loves you. The Lord has great confidence in you. He knows your successes, and He is mindful of your challenges and questions in life.

91. It is my prayer that you will seek the truth earnestly and unceasingly, that you will yearn to drink from the fount of all truth, whose waters are pure and sweet, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

92. I bless you with confidence in the Lord and a deep-rooted desire to rightfully discern truth from error—now and throughout your life. This is my prayer and my blessing, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**What Is truth?**

(QR Code)
1. Above the Great West Door of the renowned Westminster Abbey in London, England, stand the statues of 10 Christian martyrs of the 20th century. Included among them is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a brilliant German theologian born in 1906. Bonhoeffer became a vocal critic of the Nazi dictatorship and its treatment of Jews and others. He was imprisoned for his active opposition and finally executed in a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was a prolific writer, and some of his best-known pieces are letters that sympathetic guards helped him smuggle out of prison, later published as Letters and Papers from Prison.

2. One of those letters was to his niece before her wedding. It included these significant insights: “Marriage is more than your love for each other. … In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to his glory, and calls into his kingdom. In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man. … So love comes from you, but marriage from above, from God.”

3. In what way does marriage between a man and a woman transcend their love for one another and their own happiness to become “a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind”? In what sense does it come “from above, from God”? To understand, we have to go back to the beginning.

4. Prophets have revealed that we first existed as intelligences and that we were given form, or spirit bodies, by God, thus becoming His spirit children—sons and daughters of heavenly parents. There came a time in this premortal existence of spirits when, in furtherance of His desire that we “could have a privilege to advance like himself,” our Heavenly Father prepared an enabling plan. In the scriptures it is given various names, including “the plan of salvation,” “the great plan of happiness,” and “the plan of redemption.” The two principal purposes of the plan were explained to Abraham in these words:

5. “And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [spirits] may dwell; “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; “And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; … and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.”

6. Thanks to our Heavenly Father, we had already become spirit beings. Now He was offering us a path to complete or perfect that being. The addition of the physical element is essential to the fulness of being and glory that God Himself enjoys. If, while with God in the premortal spirit world, we would agree to participate in His plan—or in other words “keep [our] first estate”—we would “be added upon” with a physical body as we came to dwell on the earth that He created for us.

7. If, then in the course of our mortal experience, we chose to “do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God [should] command [us],” we would have kept our “second estate.” This means that by our choices we would demonstrate to God (and to ourselves) our commitment and capacity to live His celestial law while outside His presence and in a physical body with all its powers, appetites, and passions. Could we bridle the flesh so that it became the instrument rather than the master of the spirit? Could we be trusted both in time and eternity with godly powers, including power to create life? Would we individually overcome evil? Those who did would “have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever”—a very significant aspect of that glory being a resurrected, immortal, and glorified physical body. No wonder we “shouted for joy” at these magnificent possibilities and promises.

8. At least four things are needed for the success of this divine plan:

9. First was the Creation of the earth as our dwelling place. Whatever the details of the creation process, we know that it
was not accidental but that it was directed by God the Father and implemented by Jesus Christ—all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.\textsuperscript{71}

10. Second is the condition of mortality. Adam and Eve acted for all who had chosen to participate in the Father’s great plan of happiness.\textsuperscript{12} Their Fall created the conditions needed for our physical birth and for mortal experience and learning outside the presence of God. With the Fall came an awareness of good and evil and the God-given power to choose.\textsuperscript{11} Finally, the Fall brought about physical death needed to make our time in mortality temporary so that we would not live forever in our sins.\textsuperscript{14}

11. Third is redemption from the Fall. We see the role of death in our Heavenly Father’s plan, but that plan would become void without some way to overcome death in the end, both physical and spiritual. Thus, a Redeemer, the Only Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, suffered and died to atone for Adam and Eve’s transgression, thereby providing resurrection and immortality for all. And since none of us will have been perfectly and consistently obedient to the gospel law, His Atonement also redeems us from our own sins on condition of repentance. With the Savior’s atoning grace providing forgiveness of sins and sanctification of the soul, we can spiritually be born again and reconciled to God. Our spiritual death—our separation from God—will end.\textsuperscript{15}

12. Fourth, and finally, is the setting for our physical birth and subsequent spiritual rebirth into the kingdom of God. For His work to succeed to “[exalt us] with himself”\textsuperscript{16} God ordained that men and women should marry and give birth to children, thereby creating, in partnership with God, the physical bodies that are key to the test of mortality and essential to eternal glory with Him. He also ordained that parents should establish families and rear their children in light and truth,\textsuperscript{17} leading them to a hope in Christ. The Father commands us:

13. “Teach these things freely unto your children, saying: “That … inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the [Holy] Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.”\textsuperscript{18}

14. Knowing why we left the presence of our Heavenly Father and what it takes to return and be exalted with Him, it becomes very clear that nothing relative to our time on earth can be more important than physical birth and spiritual rebirth, the two prerequisites of eternal life. This is, to use the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the “office” of marriage, the “post of responsibility towards … mankind,” that this divine institution “from above, from God” occupies. It is the “link in the chain of the generations” both here and hereafter—the order of heaven.

15. A family built on the marriage of a man and woman supplies the best setting for God’s plan to thrive—the setting for the birth of children, who come in purity and innocence from God, and the environment for the learning and preparation they will need for a successful mortal life and eternal life in the world to come. A critical mass of families built on such marriages is vital for societies to survive and flourish. That is why communities and nations generally have encouraged and protected marriage and the family as privileged institutions. It has never been just about the love and happiness of adults.

16. The social science case for marriage and for families headed by a married man and woman is compelling.\textsuperscript{19} And so “we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”\textsuperscript{20} But our claims for the role of marriage and family rest not on social science but on the truth that they are God’s creation. It is He who in the beginning created Adam and Eve in His image, male and female, and joined them as husband and wife to become “one flesh” and to multiply and replenish the earth.\textsuperscript{21}

17. Each individual carries the divine image, but it is in the matrimonial union of male and female as one that we attain perhaps the most complete meaning of our having been made in the image of God—male and female. Neither we nor any other mortal can alter this divine order of matrimony. It is not a human invention. Such marriage is indeed “from above, from God” and is as much a part of the plan of happiness as the Fall and the Atonement.

18. In the premortal world, Lucifer rebelled against God and His plan, and his opposition only grows in intensity. He fights to discourage marriage and the formation of families, and where marriages and families are formed, he does what he can to disrupt them. He attacks everything that is sacred about human sexuality, tearing it from the context of marriage with a seemingly infinite array of immoral thoughts and acts. He seeks to convince men and women that marriage and family priorities can be ignored or abandoned, or at least made subservient to careers, other achievements, and the quest for self-fulfillment and individual autonomy. Certainly the adversary is pleased when parents neglect to teach and train their children to have faith in Christ and be spiritually born again.

19. Brothers and sisters, many things are good, many are important, but only a few are essential.

20. To declare the fundamental truths relative to marriage and family is not to overlook or diminish the sacrifices and successes of those for whom the ideal is not a present reality.
Some of you are denied the blessing of marriage for reasons including a lack of viable prospects, same-sex attraction, physical or mental impairments, or simply a fear of failure that, for the moment at least, overshadows faith. Or you may have married, but that marriage ended, and you are left to manage alone what two together can barely sustain. Some of you who are married cannot bear children despite overwhelming desires and pleading prayers.

21. Even so, everyone has gifts; everyone has talents; everyone can contribute to the unfolding of the divine plan in each generation. Much that is good, much that is essential—even sometimes all that is necessary for now—can be achieved in less than ideal circumstances. So many of you are doing your very best. And when you who bear the heaviest burdens of mortality stand up in defense of God’s plan to exalt His children, we are all ready to march. With confidence we testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ has anticipated and, in the end, will compensate all deprivation and loss for those who turn to Him. No one is predestined to receive less than all that the Father has for His children.

22. One young mother recently confided to me her anxiety about being inadequate in this highest of callings. I felt that the issues that concerned her were small and she needn’t worry; she was doing fine. But I knew she only wanted to please God and to honor His trust. I offered words of reassurance, and in my heart I pleaded that God, her Heavenly Father, would buoy her up with His love and the witness of His approval as she is about His work.

23. That is my prayer for all of us today. May we each find approval in His sight. May marriages flourish and families prosper, and whether our lot is a fulness of these blessings in mortality or not, may the Lord’s grace bring happiness now and faith in sure promises to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes
3. See, for example, Psalm 82:6; Acts 17:29; Hebrews 12:9; Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 33; Moses 6:51; Abraham 3:22. The Prophet Joseph Smith provided this detail: “The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits [or intelligences] and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. … He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted to the rest of God before the foundation of the world was that we should take tabernacles [bodies], that through faithfulness we should overcome and thereby obtain a resurrection from the dead, in this wise obtaining glory, honor, power, and dominion.” The Prophet also stated: “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” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 211).
11. John 1:3; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24.
13. See 2 Nephi 2:15–18; Alma 12:24; Doctrine and Covenants 29:39; Moses 4:3. Joseph Smith said: “All persons are entitled to their agency, for God has so ordained it. He has constituted mankind moral agents, and given them power to choose good or evil; to seek after that which is good, by pursuing the pathway of holiness in this life, which brings peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost here, and a fulness of joy and happiness at His right hand hereafter; or to pursue an evil course, going on in sin and rebellion against God, thereby bringing condemnation to their souls in this world, and an eternal loss in the world to come.” The Prophet also noted: “Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. Our organization is such that we can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 213).
15. Even those who do not repent are redeemed from spiritual death by the Atonement in the sense that they come again into the presence of God for the Final Judgment (see Helaman 14:17; 3 Nephi 27:14–15).
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:36–40.
19. People may be loyal to one another in nonmarital relationships, and children can be born and raised, sometimes quite successfully, in other than a married two-parent family environment. But on average and in the majority of cases, evidence of the social benefits of marriage and of the comparatively superior outcomes for children in families headed by a married man and woman is extensive. On the other hand, the social and economic costs of what one commentator calls “the global flight from the family,” weigh increasingly on society. Nicholas Eberstadt catalogs the worldwide declines in marriage and childbearing and the trends regarding fatherless homes and divorce and observes: “The deleterious impact on the hardly consequential numbers of children disadvantaged by the flight from the family is already plain enough. So too the damaging role of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing in exacerbating income disparities and wealth gaps—for society as a whole, but especially for children. Yes, children are resilient and all that. But the flight from family most assuredly comes at the expense of the vulnerable young. That same flight also has unforgiving implications for the vulnerable old.” (See “The Global Flight from the Family,” Wall Street Journal, Feb. 21, 2015, wsj.com/articles/nicholas-eberstadt-the-global-flight-from-the-family-1424476179.)
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1. The Ten Commandments are fundamental to the Christian and Jewish faiths. Given by God to the children of Israel through the prophet Moses, the first two of these commandments direct our worship and our priorities. In the first, the Lord commanded, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Centuries later, when Jesus was asked, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” He answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:36–37).

2. The second of the Ten Commandments elaborates the direction to have no other gods and identifies what should be the ultimate priority in our lives as His children. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in the heavens or the earth (Exodus 20:4). The commandment then adds, “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exodus 20:5). More than merely forbidding physical idols, this states a fundamental priority for all time. Jehovah explains, “For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, … shewing mercy unto … them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5–6). The meaning of jealous is revealing. Its Hebrew origin means “possessing sensitive and deep feelings” (Exodus 20:5, footnote b). Thus we offend God when we “serve” other gods—when we have other first priorities.

3. What other priorities are being “served” ahead of God by persons—even religious persons—in our day? Consider these possibilities, all common in our world:
   - Cultural and family traditions
   - Political correctness
   - Career aspirations
   - Material possessions
   - Recreational pursuits
   - Power, prominence, and prestige

4. If none of these examples seems to apply to any one of us, we can probably suggest others that do. The principle is more important than individual examples. The principle is not whether we have other priorities. The question posed by the second commandment is “What is our ultimate priority?” Are we serving priorities or gods ahead of the God we profess to worship? Have we forgotten to follow the Savior who taught that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments? (see John 14:15). If so, our priorities have been turned upside down by the spiritual apathy and undisciplined appetites so common in our day.

5. For Latter-day Saints, God’s commandments are based on and inseparable from God’s plan for His children—the great plan of salvation. This plan, sometimes called the “great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), explains our origin and destiny as children of God—where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. The plan of salvation explains the purpose of creation and the conditions of mortality, including God’s commandments, the need for a Savior, and the vital role of mortal and eternal families. If we Latter-day Saints, who have been given this knowledge, do not establish our priorities in accord with this plan, we are in danger of serving other gods.

6. Knowledge of God’s plan for His children gives Latter-day Saints a unique perspective on marriage and family. We are correctly known as a family-centered church. Our theology begins with heavenly parents, and our highest aspiration is to attain the fulness of eternal exaltation. We know this is possible only in a family relationship. We know that the marriage of a man and a woman is necessary for the accomplishment of God’s plan. Only this marriage will provide the approved setting for mortal birth and to prepare family members for eternal life. We look on marriage and the bearing and nurturing of children as part of God’s plan and a sacred duty of those given the opportunity to do so. We believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity.

7. Because of what we understand about the potentially eternal role of the family, we grieve at the sharply declining numbers of births and marriages in many Western countries whose historic cultures are Christian and Jewish. Responsible sources report the following:
   - The United States now has the lowest birthrate in its history, and in many European Union nations and other developed countries, birthrates are below the level necessary to maintain their populations. This threatens the survival of cultures and even of nations.
In many countries and cultures (1) the traditional family of a married mother and father and children is coming to be the exception rather than the rule, (2) the pursuit of a career instead of marriage and the bearing of children is an increasing choice of many young women, and (3) the role and perceived necessity of fathers is diminishing.

8. In the midst of these concerning trends, we are also conscious that God's plan is for all of His children and that God loves all of His children, everywhere. The first chapter of the Book of Mormon declares that God's "power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth" (1 Nephi 1:14). A later chapter declares that "he hath given [his salvation] free for all men" and that "all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden" (2 Nephi 26:27–28). Consequently, the scriptures teach that we are responsible to be compassionate and charitable (loving) toward all men (see 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 John 3:17; D&C 121:45).

9. We are also respectful of the religious beliefs of all people, even of those increasing numbers who profess no belief in God. We know that through the God-given power of choice, many will hold beliefs contrary to ours, but we are hopeful that others will be equally respectful of our religious beliefs and understand that our beliefs compel us to some different choices and behaviors than theirs. For example, we believe that, as an essential part of His plan of salvation, God has established an eternal standard that sexual relations should occur only between a man and a woman who are married.

10. The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given to His children. Its use was mandated by God's first commandment to Adam and Eve (see Genesis 1:28), but other important commandments were given to forbid its misuse (see Exodus 20:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). 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. Outside the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman, all uses of our procreative powers are to one degree or another sinful and contrary to God's plan for the exaltation of His children.

11. The importance we attach to the law of chastity explains our commitment to the pattern of marriage that originated with Adam and Eve and has continued through the ages as God's pattern for the procreative relationship between His sons and daughters and for the nurturing of His children. Fortunately, many persons affiliated with other denominations or organizations agree with us on the nature and importance of marriage, some on the basis of religious doctrine and others on the basis of what they deem best for society.

12. Our knowledge of God's plan for His children explains why we are distressed that more and more children are born outside of marriage—currently 41 percent of all births in the United States—and that the number of couples living together without marriage has increased dramatically in the past half century. Five decades ago, only a tiny percentage of first marriages were preceded by cohabitation. Now cohabitation precedes 60 percent of marriages. And this is increasingly accepted, especially among teenagers. Recent survey data found about 50 percent of teenagers stating that out-of-wedlock childbearing was a "worthwhile lifestyle."

13. There are many political and social pressures for legal and policy changes to establish behaviors contrary to God's decrees about sexual morality and contrary to the eternal nature and purposes of marriage and childbearing. These pressures have already authorized same-gender marriages in various states and nations. Other pressures would confuse gender or homogenize those differences between men and women that are essential to accomplish God's great plan of happiness.

14. Our understanding of God's plan and His doctrine gives us an eternal perspective that does not allow us to condone such behaviors or to find justification in the laws that permit them. And, unlike other organizations that can change their policies and even their doctrines, our policies are determined by the truths God has identified as unchangeable.

15. Our twelfth article of faith states our belief in being subject to civil authority and "in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." But man's laws cannot make moral what God has declared immoral. Commitment to our highest priority—to love and serve God—requires that we look to His law for our standard of behavior. For example, we remain under divine command not to commit adultery or fornication even when those acts are no longer crimes under the laws of the states or countries where we reside. Similarly, laws legalizing so-called "same-sex marriage" do not change God's law of marriage or His commandments and our standards concerning it. We remain under covenant to love God and keep His commandments and to refrain from serving other gods and priorities—even those becoming popular in our particular time and place.

16. In this determination we may be misunderstood, and we may incur accusations of bigotry, suffer discrimination, or have to withstand invasions of our free exercise of religion. If so, I think we should remember our first priority—to serve God—and, like our pioneer predecessors, push our personal handcarts forward with the same fortitude they exhibited.
17. A teaching of President Thomas S. Monson applies to this circumstance. At this conference 27 years ago, he boldly declared: "Let us have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God's approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but as the determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well."

18. I pray that we will not let the temporary challenges of mortality cause us to forget the great commandments and priorities we have been given by our Creator and our Savior. We must not set our hearts so much on the things of the world and aspire to the honors of men (see D&C 121:35) that we stop trying to achieve our eternal destiny. We who know God's plan for His children—we who have made covenants to participate in it—have a clear responsibility. We must never deviate from our paramount desire, which is to achieve eternal life. We must never dilute our first priority—to have no other gods and to serve no other priorities ahead of God the Father and His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

19. May God help us to understand this priority and to be understood by others as we seek to pursue it in a wise and loving way, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes
1. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 124:84.

As He Thinketh in His Heart (excerpts) - Church Educational System “Evening with a General Authority” devotional on February 8, 2013

1. …Sometimes the most important things we can teach—the things most needed by our students—are things we teachers tend to take for granted. We can neglect to teach simple basic truths because we assume they are understood by all. For example, consider the fundamental importance of this basic Bible truth taught by the prophet Isaiah:

   2. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.
   3. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

4. Second Nephi chapter 9 has a similar teaching about the foolishness of learned men who set aside the counsel of God (see 2 Nephi 9:28). And in the book of Luke we read Jesus's response to the Pharisees who "derided" Him for His teachings: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:14–15).

5. From these scriptures I conclude that followers of Christ think differently than others…. When I say that Latter-day Saints "think differently," I do not suggest that we have a different way of reasoning in the sense of how we think. I am referring to the fact that on many important subjects our assumptions—our starting points or major premises—are different from many of our friends and associates. They are also different from many assumptions currently used in the media and in other common discourse. For example, because Latter-day Saints know our Heavenly Father’s plan for His children, we know that this mortal life is not a one-act play sandwiched between an unknowable past and an uncertain future. This life is like the second act in a three-act play. Its purpose is defined by what is revealed about our spiritual existence in act 1 and our eternal destiny in act 3. Because of our knowledge of this plan and other truths that God has revealed, we start with different assumptions than those who do not share our knowledge. As a result, we reach different conclusions on many important subjects that others judge only in terms of their opinions about mortal life.

6. … How should our youth respond when their associates and even their classroom teachers conclude that marriage is not important anymore and that children suffer no disadvantage if their parents are not married? Similarly, how should they respond to familiar
proposals to redefine the family?

7. I suggest that it may be preferable for our young people to refrain from arguing with their associates about such assertions or proposals. They will often be better off to respond by identifying the worldly premises or assumptions in the assertions they face and then by identifying the different assumptions or premises that guide the thinking of Latter-day Saints. This won't elicit agreement from persons who don't share our faith, but it can move the discussion away from arguing over conclusions to identifying the real source of disagreement.

8. … Latter-day Saints obviously begin with a different premise: there is a God who is the source of eternal law, and He has given commandments that establish a right and a wrong for many choices. Also, in the third act of His eternal plan, we will be held accountable for the extent to which our mortal deeds and desires have been in harmony with those commandments. We oppose moral relativism, and we must help our youth avoid being deceived and persuaded by reasoning and conclusions based on its false premises.

9. Where do we look for the premises with which we begin our reasoning on the truth or acceptability of various proposals? We anchor ourselves to the word of God, contained in the scriptures and in the teachings of modern prophets. Unless we are anchored to these truths as our major premises and assumptions, we cannot be sure that our conclusions are true. Being anchored to eternal truth will not protect us from the tribulation and persecution Jesus predicted (see Matthew 13:21), but it will give us the peace that comes from faith in Jesus Christ and the knowledge that we are on the pathway to eternal life.

10. … When we begin by measuring modern practices and proposals against what we know of God's plan and the premises given in the word of God and the teachings of His living prophets, we must anticipate that our conclusions will differ from persons who do not think in that way. But we are firm in this because we know that this puts us on safe ground eternally. Many others will not agree, but our explanation of why we think in this way will give others a better understanding of our positions…