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THE DOCTRINE OF THE FATHER

One of the sweetest and most fundamental truths revealed as part of the Restoration relates to the nature of our Heavenly Father and His personal connection to every person who comes to earth.

Among the first principles lost in the Apostasy was an understanding of God the Father. It is not surprising, then, that among the first principles revealed in the Restoration was an understanding of God the Father. By priority, the first declaration of faith by Latter-day Saints is “We believe in God, the Eternal Father” (Articles of Faith 1:1).

Members of the Church understand that God the Father is the Supreme Governor of the universe, the Power that gave us spiritual being, and the Author of the plan that gives us hope and potential. He is our Heavenly Father, and we lived in His presence as part of His family in the premortal life. There we learned lessons and prepared for mortality (see D&C 138:56). We came from our Heavenly Father, and our goal is to return to Him.

Among all doctrines, beliefs, and principles revealed to His children, the truths

related to His being and nature should stand as the preeminent focus. We acknowledge His existence and true nature in order to join with ancient believers and prophets in true worship (see Mosiah 4:9). The purpose of all that the Father has revealed, commanded, and initiated for the inhabitants of earth is to help us come to know Him, emulate Him, and become like Him so we can return to His holy presence. Eternal life is to know the Father and His holy Son, Jesus Christ (see John 17:3; Jacob 4:5; Moses 5:8).

The Eternal Pattern of Family

Central to knowing the Father is understanding the revealed pattern of family. The family is the most important unit in time and in eternity and is ordained of God.¹ Living in loving family relationships not only brings us great happiness, but it also helps us learn correct principles and prepares us for eternal

Missionaries and those they teach quickly learn the supernal significance of doctrine relating to the Father and the Son when learning about Joseph Smith’s First Vision or the plan of salvation because the Holy Ghost bears witness of these truths.

life.² In addition, family relationships help us know, love, and understand the Father. This is one reason Latter-day Saints have always emphasized the importance of marriage and family both in the Church and in society. God's plan provides a way for family relationships to extend beyond the grave. We can return to the presence of God, eternally united with our families.³

Our Heavenly Father has chosen not to reveal many details of our premortal life with Him. Perhaps this is because we can learn many things simply by observing the pattern for righteous families He established on the earth. Carefully observing and conscientiously living in accordance with righteous family patterns on earth is at the core of our quest to know the Father.

Heavenly Father and family are inseparably connected. When we understand the many dimensions of this connection, we can begin to comprehend more completely how personal and individual are Heavenly Father's love for and relationship to each of us. Understanding how He feels about us gives us the power to love Him more purely and fully. Personally feeling the reality, love, and power of that relationship is the source of the deepest and sweetest emotions and desires that can come to a man or woman in mortality. These deep emotions of love can motivate us and give us power in times of difficulty and trial to draw closer to our Father.

Loving Choice and Deliberate Act

Every human being is a begotten spirit son or daughter of our Heavenly Father.⁴ *Begotten* is an adjectival form of the verb *beget* and means "brought into being." *Beget* is the expression used in the scriptures to describe the process of giving life (see Matthew 1:1–16; Ether 10:31).

In God's revealed pattern for righteous families, the birth of a child is the result of a conscious and loving choice. It is the miraculous result of caring and deliberate actions taken by parents to participate with Heavenly Father in the sacred process of creating a mortal body for one of His spirit children. Knowing that our life is the result of a loving choice and a deliberate act can give us a

sense of our great personal worth in mortality. That sense of worth can reassure us of our potential and protect us from temptations.

Satan is pleased to use the less-than-ideal circumstances of some mortal births to cause some of us to question our personal worth and potential. Regardless of the circumstances of our mortal birth, we are all spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents. God is a righteous and loving father. Our spirits came into being out of love and a deliberate choice to give us life and opportunity.

One by One

Righteous parents not only make deliberate and loving choices to bring children into the world, but they also prepare, pray, and eagerly wait during the period of gestation, anticipating the birth of their child. After birth they delight in holding, talking to, caring for, and protecting their child. They learn the baby's individual patterns and needs. They know the child better than the child knows himself or herself. Regardless of the number of children parents have, each is an individual to them.

Knowing this pattern helps us understand that as spirit children we are known individually by our Heavenly Father. He has known us at least from the time we became begotten spirits. We are His precious sons and daughters, whom He loves individually.

Known by Name

Another pattern of earthly families helps us understand the individual nature of the Father's love for us. One of the initial steps in creating an individual identity, after the child is born, is for parents to give their child a name. Naming is an important part of every culture and is often accompanied with solemn rituals because a name has great significance to the personal identity of its bearer. Children do not choose their names; their parents give them their names.

In most cultures a child is given a first (and in some cases a second, or middle) name. It is also common around the world for children to be given a family name



or a name that ties them to their parents, family, and ancestors. Some cultures use other identifiers such as a second family name (the mother's last name, for example) to further identify the child's relationship to family and society.

In that same pattern, we know that our Heavenly Father identifies us personally and individually. He knows us by name. In the few scriptures that mention individuals in the premortal world, they were identified by name in a pattern similar to how we are identified in mortality. In the Father's recorded visits to individuals on earth, He uses names to express that He knows and identifies us personally and individually. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said in reference to the First Vision appearance of the Father, "One of them spake unto me, calling me by name" (Joseph Smith—History 1:17; see also Moses 1:6; 6:27).

The Father knows us because He begat each precious spirit son and daughter, giving us individual identity and being. As He told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (Jeremiah 1:5).

In His Image and with His Attributes

The Bible teaches that man and woman are created in the image of the Father (see Genesis 1:26–27). The science of genetics and personal observation both testify to the principle of offspring taking on the form, appearance, and traits of parents. Some build their sense of personal worth by comparing themselves to others. That approach can lead to feelings of inadequacy or superiority. It is preferable to look directly to our Father for our sense of self-worth.

Our mortal pedigree charts show many generations winding backward through the ages. Our individual spiritual pedigree chart,

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however, has only two generations—our Father’s and ours. Our form is His form, without the glory. “Now are we the sons [and daughters] of God, and . . . when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2; see also D&C 130:1). Within each of us lie the latent seeds of godliness that can be given flower and fruition by His blessing and by following the path of strict obedience shown to us by Jesus. There is power in saying or singing the words “I am a child of God.”⁵

The Father’s Love

One of the great distortions of the Apostasy was that it cast God the Father’s plan of salvation as overwhelmingly harsh. Frederic Farrar, the Anglican church leader, classical scholar, believer, and highly regarded author of *Life of Christ*, lamented that most Christian churches view hell and damnation incorrectly as a result of translation errors from Hebrew and Greek to English in the King James Version of the Bible.⁶

As revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, a loving Father’s plan of salvation applies to all humankind, including all those who do not hear of Jesus Christ in this life, children who die before the age of accountability, and those who have no understanding (see D&C 29:46–50; 137:7–10).

Even for those who—unlike Satan and his angels (see Isaiah 14:12–15; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7–9; D&C 76:32–37)—have lived unrighteously but have not rebelled against God, a loving Father has prepared kingdoms of glory that are superior to our existence on earth (see D&C 76:89–92). There can be no doubt of the Father’s love for His spirit children.

When we seek to know the Father through patterns of righteous family life, we begin to understand the depth of love He has for us and begin to feel a deeper love for Him. Efforts to distort and destroy the family are designed to keep the Father’s children from feeling His love drawing them back home to Him.

Abusive male authority figures, out-of-wedlock births, unwanted children, and other social challenges of our day make it harder for those who suffer them to comprehend, hope for, and have faith in a righteous, loving, and caring Father. Just as the Father seeks to help us to know Him, the adversary uses every means possible to come between the Father and us. Fortunately, there is no power, sin, or condition that can keep us from the love of the Father (see Romans 8:38–39). Because God loved us first, we can come to know Him and love Him (see 1 John 4:16, 19).

It is precisely because social ills are so prevalent today that we must teach the doctrine of the Father and family to help us heal, correct, and overcome the false ideas and practices pervasive in the world. As Eliza R. Snow (1804–87) so elegantly expressed, there are many in the world who call God “Father” but “[know] not why.”

Thankfully, “the key of knowledge” has been restored⁷ and the doctrine of the Father is upon the earth again! ■

NOTES

1. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.1.1.
2. See *Handbook 2*, 1.1.4.
3. See *Handbook 2*, 1.3.
4. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
5. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.
6. See Frederic W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (1892), xxxvi–xlii.
7. “O My Father,” *Hymns*, no. 292.

Encircled in the Arms of His Love

Name withheld

When I was six years old, my parents divorced. Though I continued to live with my mom, my dad was still present in my life after the separation. I stayed at his house on weekends and for one day in the middle of the week.

Despite his efforts to be a good father, when I was seven, he betrayed my trust in a very serious way. This breach of trust marked the beginning of a growing distance between us. When he called the house, I would avoid answering the phone. When I was older, I demanded that I be able to choose when I went to stay at my dad's house, rather than be forced to go when the custody order mandated me.

When I was in high school, visits gradually became a lot less frequent. I saw him only two or three times a month. When I went to college, the space between calls grew, until I would talk to him about once a semester. My relationship with my dad had become more of a formality than a true parent-child connection.

During my second year of college, I decided to talk to him about the incident from my childhood that I felt had damaged our relationship so many years ago. I hoped for closure, forgiveness, and a chance to start over. I e-mailed him my thoughts and waited for a reply.

Some time later I received his e-mail in reply. Before I read my father's response, I prayed and asked Heavenly Father that His Spirit be with me as I read the e-mail. This was such an important moment in my life—I was about to see what my dad had to say and what direction our relationship would take. I was scared and felt very alone.

Indeed I was alone, sitting in my room with my computer. I needed support. I continued to pray to Heavenly Father and felt His Spirit. At last I had the courage to read.

My dad replied with a very short e-mail in which he denied any memory of what I was saying and said that it was a really bad time for him to discuss our past.

The way he dismissed something that was so important to me and didn't seem to want any sort of reconciliation hurt me deeply. I felt deserted by my father, racked with grief over the troubled relationship we had had for more than a decade.

As I sat in my chair sobbing, I felt the Spirit around me. I had never felt my Heavenly Father's presence so strongly. I literally felt "encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15). I felt reassured and loved as I sat crying.

My relationship with my earthly father may have been lacking, but my Heavenly Father was with me. His presence is strong in my life. I know He loves me, cares for me, and will always want a relationship with me. I know that He is my Father. And He is not going anywhere. ■

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