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The Family Is of God

We each belong to and are needed in the family of God.

Is anything more beautiful and profound than the simple and pure truths of the gospel taught in a Primary song? And all of you Primary girls here tonight know the song I am going to talk about. You learned it for your Primary program last year.

In the words of “The Family Is of God”¹—sung earlier in this meeting—we are reminded of pure doctrine. We learn not only that the family is of God but also that we are each part of God’s family.

The first line of the song teaches: **“Our Father has a family. It’s me! It’s you, all others too: we are His children.”** From the family proclamation, we learn, “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father.” In that realm, we learned about our eternal female identity. We knew that we were each “a beloved . . . daughter of heavenly parents.”²

Our mortal journey to earth did not change those truths. We each belong to and are needed in the family of God. Earthly families all look different. And while we do the best we can to create strong traditional families, membership in the family of God is not contingent upon any kind of status—marital status, parental status, financial status, social status, or even the kind of status we post on social media.

We belong. “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love Him.”³

The second line of the song expands on the first. **“He sent each one of us to earth, through birth, to live and learn here in families.”**

In the premortal life, we learned that we would need a period of mortality. We “accepted [Heavenly Father’s] plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”⁴

Elder Richard G. Scott explained that “we were taught in the premortal world that our purpose in coming here is to be tested, tried, and stretched.”⁵ That stretching comes in as many forms as there are individuals experiencing it. I’ve never had to live through divorce, the pain and insecurity that comes from abandonment, or the responsibility associated with being a single mother. I haven’t experienced the death of a child, infertility, or same-gender attraction. I haven’t had to endure abuse, chronic illness, or addiction. These have not been my stretching opportunities.

So right now some of you are thinking, “Well then, Sister Stephens, you just don’t understand!” And I answer that you may be right. I don’t completely understand your challenges. But through *my* personal tests and trials—the ones that have brought me to *my* knees—I have become well acquainted with the One who does understand, He who was “acquainted with grief,”⁶ who experienced all and understands all.



And in addition, I have experienced all of the mortal tests that I just mentioned through the lens of a daughter, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, and friend.

Our opportunity as covenant-keeping daughters of God is not just to learn from our own challenges; it is to unite in empathy and compassion as we support other members of the family of God in their struggles, as we have covenanted to do.

When we do so, we also come to understand and trust that the Savior knows the difficulties of the way and can guide us through whatever sorrows and disappointments may come. He is true charity, and His love “endureth forever”⁷—in part through us as we follow Him.

As daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, we then “act according to those sympathies which God has

planted” in our hearts.⁸ Our sphere of influence isn’t limited to our own family members.

I recently had the opportunity to visit with Sister Yazzie of the Chinle Arizona Stake in her hogan. When she welcomed me into her home, the first thing I noticed was the variety of framed family and missionary photos on her walls and tables. So I asked, “Sister Yazzie, how many grandchildren do you have?”

Surprised by my question, she shrugged her shoulders. Confused by her response, I looked at her daughter, Sister Yellowhair, who answered, “She doesn’t know how many grandchildren she has. We don’t count. All children call her Grandmother—she is Grandmother to everyone.”

Sister Yazzie doesn’t limit her love and influence to her biological family.

She understands what it means to expand her sphere of influence as she goes about doing good, blessing, nurturing, and defending the family of God. She understands that “whenever a woman strengthens the faith of a child, she contributes to the strength of a family—now and in the future.”⁹

The third line of the song further explains the purpose of our mortality: **“God gave us families to help us become what He wants us to be.”** The Savior taught, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”¹⁰ The family proclamation teaches that as beloved spirit daughters of heavenly parents, we have a divine nature, eternal identity, and purpose. God wants us to be one. God needs us to be one—covenant-keeping daughters, united in the diversities of our individual lives,¹¹ who desire to learn all



that is needed to be back in His presence, sealed to Him as part of His eternal family.

“Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for [us] to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”¹² The ordinances we receive and the covenants we make at baptism and in holy temples connect the family of God on both sides of the veil—connecting us to our Father through His Son, who prayed, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”¹³

As we use our time in mortality to study and apply the Savior’s teachings, we become more like Him. We come to understand that He is the way—the only way—we can overcome mortal challenges, be healed, and return back to our heavenly home.

The final line of the song returns to where it began: **“This is how He shares His love, for the family is of God.”** The Father’s plan for His children is a plan of love. It is a plan to unite His children—His family—with Him. Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, “Heavenly Father has but two desires for His children . . . : immortality and eternal life, ‘which means life with Him back home.’”¹⁴ Those desires can be realized only as we also share the love that Heavenly Father has for His family by reaching out and sharing His plan with others.

Twenty years ago, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reached out to the entire world when issuing a proclamation on the family. Since then, attacks on the family have increased.

If we are to be successful in our sacred responsibilities as daughters of God, we must understand the eternal



significance of and our individual responsibility to teach truths about our Heavenly Father’s plan for His family. President Howard W. Hunter explained:

“There is a great need to rally the women of the Church to stand with and for the Brethren in stemming the tide of evil that surrounds us and in moving forward the work of our Savior. . . .

“ . . . So we entreat you to minister with your powerful influence for good in strengthening our families, our church, and our communities.”¹⁵

Sisters, we belong. We are loved. We are needed. We have a divine purpose, work, place, and role in the Church and kingdom of God and in His eternal family. Do you know deep in your heart that your Heavenly Father loves you and desires you and those you love to be with Him? Just as “Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ are perfect . . . , Their hopes for us are perfect.”¹⁶ Their plan for us is perfect, and Their promises are sure. Of these truths I gratefully testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See “The Family Is of God,” in *Families Are Forever: 2014 Outline for Sharing Time* (2013), 28–29.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
3. “Young Women Theme,” in *Young Women Personal Progress* (booklet, 2009), 3.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
5. Richard G. Scott, “Make the Exercise of Faith Your First Priority,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 92.
6. Isaiah 53:3.
7. Moroni 7:47.
8. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 16.
9. *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 159.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
11. See Patricia T. Holland, “‘One Thing Needful’: Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 26–33.
12. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
13. John 17:21.
14. R. Scott Lloyd, “God Wants His Children to Return to Him, Elder Nelson Teaches,” Church News section of LDS.org, Jan. 28, 2014, lds.org/church/news/god-wants-his-children-to-return-to-him-elder-nelson-teaches.
15. Howard W. Hunter, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 157; see also “To the Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 96.
16. M. Russell Ballard, “Let Us Think Straight” (Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 20, 2013); speeches.byu.edu.