

A Loving Father— An Eternal Plan

Lesson 1

Purpose To help class members understand how knowing God’s eternal plan can help us make daily decisions with an eternal perspective.

- Preparation**
1. Prayerfully study the scriptures indicated on the plan of salvation chart, found on page 3 or in the picture section of the manual.
 2. Draw on a large piece of paper or on the chalkboard an outline of the plan of salvation chart (page 3 or picture 1 in the picture section of the manual). Do not include any of the words yet. If you draw the chart on a piece of paper, save it for use in other lessons.
 3. Make a copy of the “Mortality Maze,” found on page 7, for each class member or pair of class members. If it is not feasible to make copies, draw the maze on a large piece of paper or on the chalkboard so that class members can work together to solve it.
 4. Materials needed:
 - a. Pens or pencils for class members to use in doing the maze.
 - b. A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member. Encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.

Note to the teacher *It is often difficult for young people to see beyond their everyday experiences and understand how such events are part of our Father in Heaven’s plan for them. Help class members understand that Heavenly Father loves them and that the plan of salvation is evidence of his love.*

Suggested Lesson Development

Our Earth Experience Is Part of the Plan of Salvation

Story and discussion Read the following story told by Bishop H. Burke Peterson, who was a member of the Presiding Bishopric:

“My parents and grandparents were born and raised in Utah. However, my mother and father began their married life in Phoenix, Arizona. That is where my three brothers and I were raised. Almost every summer my father and mother would take all of us to Utah . . . to enjoy the association with our cousins and other relatives.

“ . . . One spring before school was out I asked my father if I could go to Salt Lake City to work and then return to Phoenix at the end of the summer to be with my family and begin school again. After thinking it over, my parents decided it would be fine. When school was out in May, Dad took me with him to the [bus station] and, since I had no money of my own as yet, bought me a ticket to Salt Lake City. I was somewhat taken back when I found out that he had purchased for me a one-way ticket instead of a round trip. He said he would

take the responsibility to see that I arrived in Salt Lake City but it would be up to me to do what was necessary while I was there to purchase the ticket for a return home to Phoenix at the end of the summer. As you can imagine, I was most anxious to come back home after my work experience as I had burning in my memory the happy experiences we had always enjoyed in our home. I enjoyed the association with and loved my three brothers and was most happy and comfortable being with my parents.

“When I arrived in Salt Lake City I immediately set about to find work. This I was able to accomplish, and as soon as my first paycheck was given to me, guess what I did. First I paid my tithing, and then I took the rest of the money to the bus depot downtown in Salt Lake City and purchased a return trip ticket to Phoenix. I wanted to be sure that when summer was over there would be nothing to stand in the way of my returning home. I loved my home very much. For the rest of the summer I was particularly mindful of taking good care of myself and doing everything necessary to insure my return home to Phoenix. More than anything else I wanted to enjoy again the experience of being with my family.”

- Have you ever had an experience where you were away from your family and home and were anxious to return?

Give class members a few moments to comment, and then read Bishop Peterson’s comments on the story:

“We all had an experience similar to this long ago before we came to this earth. We were in a gathering where we were being instructed by our Father in heaven concerning the earth he had prepared for us. . . . He let us know that the decision to come here would be ours, and if this was our wish, he would see to it that we arrived into this mortal experience safely. Like the experience I had in Phoenix as a boy, our Father in heaven would provide a one-way ticket for us. Whether or not we returned again to him at the end of our mortal experience on earth would depend upon the things we did while we were here” (“Return Trip Ticket Home,” *New Era*, Apr. 1974, 5).

Explain that this year in Sunday School, class members will learn about Heavenly Father’s plan for us, Jesus Christ’s role in that plan, and what we must do to return to them when our earth life is over.

The Plan of Salvation Is Heavenly Father’s Plan for Us

Chart discussion

Show the plan of salvation chart you have drawn.

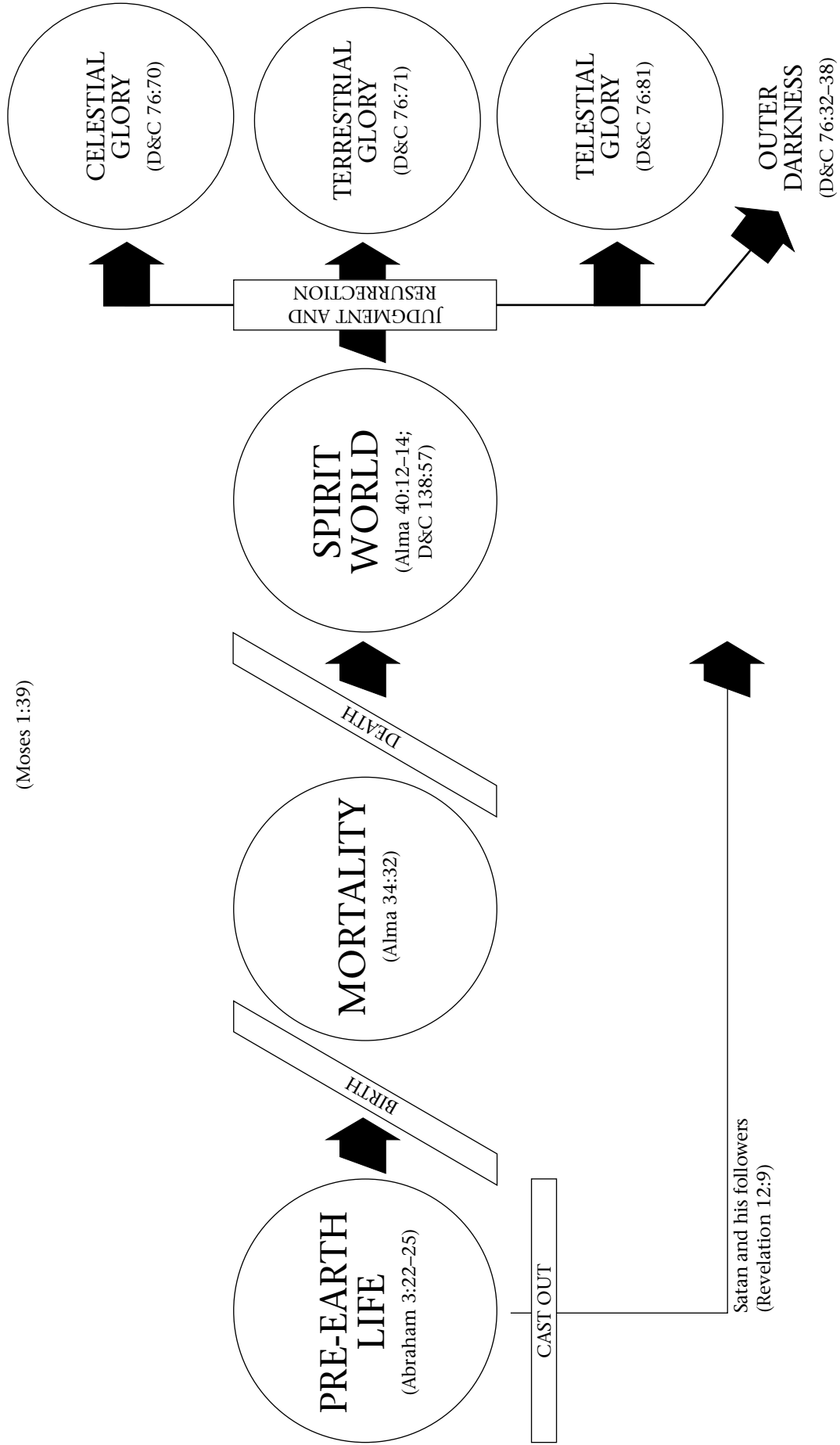
- What do these boxes and circles represent?

If class members do not immediately realize that the drawing represents the plan of salvation, label one or two of the boxes or circles. Then ask class members to fill in the rest of the chart, helping them as needed. Explain that this diagram answers three universal questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going after this life?

- Which box or circle represents where we are right now? (The circle labeled “mortality.”)

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

(Moses 1:39)



Point out that our earth life is only part of our eternal existence. We lived before we came to earth, and we will live after we die. Briefly review the plan of salvation as illustrated on the chart, and tell class members that they will be learning about it throughout the year.

Scripture discussion

Have class members turn to Moses 1:39. Ask one of them to read the verse aloud.

- What does God tell us his work is?

Point out that the scripture names two things as God's work—to bring to pass immortality and eternal life. Explain that these two words do not refer to the same thing. Immortality is a state of being resurrected, of being free from physical death. This blessing will come to all people. Eternal life is living with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in the celestial kingdom. This blessing—which is also called exaltation—comes only to those who keep the commandments and make the necessary covenants. (You may want to point out that the title of this course of study is “Preparing for Exaltation.” The lessons that will be taught in Sunday School this year focus on how we can prepare to live with Heavenly Father and Jesus again.)

- How does it make you feel to know that Heavenly Father's most important work is helping you return to live with him again? (Invite class members to answer this question to themselves if they do not wish to share their feelings with the class.)

Explain that Heavenly Father's plan of salvation provides a way for us to gain a body, learn by experience, show that we will obey his commandments, and return to him stronger and wiser. Emphasize that this plan is given because of Heavenly Father's great love for us.

Knowing the Plan Helps Us Make Wise Decisions

Activity

Give each class member or pair of class members a pen or pencil and a copy of the “Mortality Maze” (or have all class members work together on a large copy of the maze). Explain that the objective is to draw a continuous line from “Birth” to “Death,” passing through the center (“Fulfill the purpose of life”).

When class members finish the maze, explain that in life, as in this maze, we must make many decisions about which way we should go. However, when we understand that life on earth has a purpose and is part of Heavenly Father's plan, we can begin to make correct decisions. (You may want to point out that there is a second path from “Birth” to “Death,” but this path does not go through the center. Likewise, some people finish their earth life without understanding or fulfilling its purpose.)

Stories and discussion

Read or have a class member read the following stories. Discuss with class members how being aware of God's plan could influence the decisions of the person in each story. Help class members see how a knowledge of God's plan can help them better understand themselves and the decisions they will have to make in life.

Paul

All his life, Paul had planned to go on a mission. From the time he was very young, his parents had taught him the importance of serving the Lord in this

way. He had built a substantial savings account, which he called his “mission money.” It had never occurred to him that he might do anything else.

As Paul grew older, however, it became harder for him to save money for a mission. Any money he earned seemed to be spent before he got around to putting any in his savings account. In addition, he saw many expensive things he wanted to have. Paul began to doubt whether he wanted to spend so much money and time on a mission.

- What does God expect of Paul?
- How could understanding the plan of salvation help Paul make a correct decision about serving a mission?
- What difference will this decision make in Paul’s progress toward eternal life?

Note to the teacher

Good questions cause class members to think. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” (See Teaching—No Greater Call, 105–6.)

Melissa

Melissa had many friends in her ward until she began attending a new school. She made new friends at the school, and soon her new friends became very important to her. She saw her old friends in the ward less and less, and she began to feel that she had outgrown them. Her new friends seemed more exciting and mature and seemed to be doing adventurous things she had never done before.

One day Melissa attended a party at the home of one of her new friends. Everyone she thought was important was there. As the party progressed, the activities became much different from what Melissa was accustomed to. Even people she would never have expected such conduct from were drinking, and some were using drugs. Melissa wanted to have fun and be accepted by these people who were so important to her, but she was very uncomfortable. When one of her friends offered her an alcoholic drink, she thought maybe it wouldn’t hurt to drink just one.

- What do you think Melissa should do? Why?
- How could understanding the plan of salvation help Melissa make the right choice?
- If you were to talk to Melissa privately, what might you say to her to help her make the right decision?

Carl

Carl played basketball and played it well. But he did not do as well in schoolwork. Because of his interest in basketball, he devoted little time to studying for his classes. Carl’s parents told him that if his grades were poor, he would no longer be able to play on the basketball team. Carl didn’t know what to do. Then a possible solution appeared. Mike, a member of Carl’s basketball team, mentioned that the same thing had happened to him. He solved his problem by cheating on tests. He was able to get good grades without studying. Mike suggested that Carl do the same thing. Carl knew it was dishonest, but it seemed like such a simple solution to his problem.

- What could Carl do to solve his problem without cheating?
- How could a testimony of the plan of salvation help Carl decide what to do?

Understanding the Plan of Salvation Makes a Difference

Discussion

Ask class members to think about some of the decisions they face each day.

- How can understanding and having a testimony of the plan of salvation help you with your daily decisions?

Invite class members to explain how understanding that Heavenly Father has a plan for them could help them with a decision they have faced or are facing. If appropriate, share an experience in which knowing the plan of salvation helped you make a good decision in a difficult situation.

Testimony

Testify that because Heavenly Father loves us, he has given us a plan to help us return to live with him. Knowing this plan can help us make wise decisions. Explain that the best way to make a decision is to think of the eternal consequences of each choice and choose that which will lead back to Heavenly Father.

Encourage class members to keep in mind the plan of salvation when making choices.

Enrichment Activities

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. If it is available, show “Man’s Search for Happiness,” a thirteen-minute segment of the *Come unto Me* videocassette (53146), to explain the plan of salvation.

2. Display a road map.

- What is this? Why would someone use this?

Explain that life is like a journey. Heavenly Father knew that we would need directions to help us find our way back to him, so he provided the plan of salvation as a kind of map for us to follow.

- How can we “read” this map and know what we must do to reach our destination of living with Heavenly Father again? (Answers may include by studying the scriptures, following the prophets, and listening to our teachers and parents as they teach us about the gospel.)

- How would our lives be different if we did not have this map, or plan?

3. Invite a recently returned missionary to come to class and share an experience he or she had with teaching the plan of salvation in the mission field.

4. Sing with class members “I Am a Child of God” (*Hymns*, no. 301; or *Children’s Songbook*, 2).

Mortality Maze

