

## 1.

# Families and the Church in God's Plan

## 1.1

### God the Father's Plan for His Eternal Family

#### 1.1.1

##### The Premortal Family of God

The family is ordained of God. It is the most important unit in time and in eternity. Even before we were born on the earth, we were part of a family. Each of us “is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents” with “a divine nature and destiny” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). God is our Heavenly Father, and we lived in His presence as part of His family in the premortal life. There we learned our first lessons and were prepared for mortality (see Doctrine and Covenants 138:56).

#### 1.1.2

##### The Purpose of Mortality

Because of God's love for us, He prepared a plan that included our coming to the earth, where we would receive bodies and be tested so that we could progress and become more like Him. This plan is called “the plan of salvation” (Alma 24:14), “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), and “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25; see also verses 26–33).

The purpose of God's plan is to lead us to eternal life. God declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Eternal life is God's greatest gift to His children (see Doctrine and Covenants 14:7). It is exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Through the plan of salvation, we can receive this blessing of returning to God's presence and receiving a fulness of joy.

#### 1.1.3

##### The Atonement of Jesus Christ

In order to gain exaltation in the kingdom of God, we must overcome two obstacles of mortality: death and sin. Because we cannot overcome either obstacle by ourselves, Heavenly Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior and Redeemer. The Savior's atoning sacrifice made it possible for all of God's children to overcome physical death, be resurrected, and gain immortality. The Atonement also made it possible for those who repent and follow Him to overcome spiritual death, return to God's presence to dwell with Him, and obtain eternal life (see Doctrine and Covenants 45:3–5).

#### 1.1.4

##### The Role of Families in God's Plan

As part of our Heavenly Father's plan, we were born into families. He established families to bring us happiness, to help us learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare us for eternal life.

Parents have the vital responsibility to help their children prepare to return to Heavenly Father. Parents fulfill this responsibility by teaching their children to follow Jesus Christ and live His gospel.

#### 1.1.5

##### The Role of the Church

The Church provides the organization and means for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God's children. It provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them.

**1.2****Returning to the Father****1.2.1****The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

The plan of salvation is the fulness of the gospel. It includes the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and all the laws, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel. It provides the way for us to experience joy in mortality (see 2 Nephi 2:25) as well as the blessing of eternal life.

Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be cleansed and sanctified from sin and prepare to enter again into the presence of our Eternal Father. To receive this blessing, we must follow the principles and ordinances of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:3). We must:

1. Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.
2. Turn to God through sincere repentance, having a change of heart and confessing and forsaking sins.
3. Receive the saving ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins.
4. Be confirmed a member of the Church and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.
5. Endure to the end by keeping sacred covenants.

These principles have been taught since the days of Adam. As we come to understand and believe these truths and gain a firm testimony of Jesus Christ, we strive to obey His commandments and want to share our blessings with our family and others (see 1 Nephi 8:9–37). With this secure foundation of testimony, other elements of Church activity follow naturally.

Personal spiritual growth takes place as we draw close to God through prayer, scripture study, pondering, and obedience. Nephi taught:

“After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

Each of us is accountable before God to learn and keep His commandments and to live the gospel. We will be judged according to our actions, the desires of our hearts, and the kind of people we have become. As we become true followers of Jesus Christ, we experience a mighty change of heart and “have no more disposition to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2; see also Alma 5:12–15; Moroni 10:32–33). As we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, we grow line upon line, becoming more like the Savior in loving and serving others.

**1.2.2****The Role of Church Leaders and Teachers**

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers strive to help others become true followers of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 18:18–30). To assist individuals and families in this effort, they:

1. Teach and testify of the pure doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Strengthen individuals and families in their efforts to keep their sacred covenants.

3. Provide counsel, support, and opportunities for service.

In addition, certain priesthood leaders have the authority to oversee the performance of the saving priesthood ordinances.

### 1.3

## Establishing Eternal Families

Families are central to God's plan, which provides a way for family relationships to extend beyond the grave. Sacred temple ordinances and covenants, faithfully kept, help us return to the presence of God, united eternally with our families.

#### 1.3.1

### Husband and Wife

Exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom can be attained only by those who have faithfully lived the gospel of Jesus Christ and are sealed as eternal companions.

The sealing of husband and wife for time and eternity by the authority of the priesthood—also known as temple marriage—is a sacred privilege and obligation that all should strive to receive. It is the foundation of an eternal family.

The nature of male and female spirits is such that they complete each other. Men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

The Lord has commanded husbands and wives to cleave to each other (see Genesis 2:24; Doctrine and Covenants 42:22). In this commandment, the word *cleave* means to be completely devoted and faithful to someone. Married couples cleave to God and one another by serving and loving each other and by keeping covenants in complete fidelity to one another and to God (see Doctrine and Covenants 25:13).

A couple is to become one in establishing their family as the basis of a righteous life. Latter-day Saint husbands and wives leave behind their single life and establish their marriage as the first priority in their lives. They allow no other person or interest to have greater priority in their lives than keeping the covenants they have made with God and each other. Nonetheless, married couples continue to love and support their parents and siblings while focusing on their own families. Similarly, wise parents realize that their family responsibilities continue throughout life in a spirit of love and encouragement.

Being one in marriage requires a full partnership. For example, Adam and Eve worked together, prayed and worshipped together, sacrificed together, taught their children the gospel together, and mourned over wayward children together (see Moses 5:1, 4, 12, 27). They were united with each other and with God.

#### 1.3.2

### Parents and Children

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. . . . God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). By divine design, both a man and a woman are essential for bringing children into mortality and providing the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred responsibility. Parents and priesthood and auxiliary leaders should do all they can to reinforce this teaching.

Concerning the roles of fathers and mothers, Church leaders have taught: “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). When there is no father in the home, the mother presides over the family.

Parents have a divinely appointed responsibility “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”; see also Mosiah 4:14–15).

Wise parents teach their children to apply the healing, reconciling, and strengthening power of the Atonement within their family. Just as sin, mortal weaknesses, emotional hurt, and anger are conditions that separate God’s children from Him, these same conditions can separate family members from each other. Each family member has a responsibility to strive for family unity. Children who learn to strive for unity at home will find it easier to do so outside the home.

### 1.3.3

#### Unmarried Members of the Church

All members, even if they have never married or are without family in the Church, should strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. This means preparing to become worthy spouses and loving fathers or mothers. In some cases these blessings will not be fulfilled until the next life, but the ultimate goal is the same for all.

Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God.

## 1.4

### The Home and the Church

In the teachings and practices of the restored gospel, the family and the Church help and strengthen each other. To qualify for the blessings of eternal life, families need to learn the doctrines and receive the priesthood ordinances that are available only through the Church. To be a strong and vital organization, the Church needs righteous families.

God has revealed a pattern of spiritual progress for individuals and families through ordinances, teaching, programs, and activities that are home centered and Church supported. Church organizations and programs exist to bless individuals and families and are not ends in themselves. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers seek to assist parents, not to supersede or replace them. For more information on home-centered and Church-supported curriculum, see 1.4.3.

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders must endeavor to strengthen the sacredness of the home by ensuring that all Church activities support the lives of individuals and families. Church leaders need to be careful not to overwhelm families with too many Church responsibilities. Parents and Church leaders work together to help individuals and families return to our Father in Heaven by following Jesus Christ.

#### 1.4.1

##### Strengthening the Home

Followers of Christ are invited to “gather,” “stand in holy places,” and “be not moved” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:32; 87:8; 101:22; see also 2 Chronicles 35:5; Matthew 24:15). These holy places include temples, homes, and chapels. The presence of the Spirit and the behavior of those within these physical structures are what make them “holy places.”

Wherever Church members live, they should establish a home where the Spirit is present. All members

of the Church can make efforts to ensure that their place of residence provides a place of sanctuary from the world. Every home in the Church, large or small, can be a “house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:119). Church members can invite the Spirit into their homes through simple means such as wholesome entertainment, good music, and inspiring artwork (for example, a painting of the Savior or a temple).

A home with loving and loyal parents is the setting in which the spiritual and physical needs of children are most effectively met. A Christ-centered home offers adults and children a place of defense against sin, refuge from the world, healing from emotional and other pain, and committed, genuine love.

Parents have always been commanded to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; Enos 1:1) and “in light and truth” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:40). The First Presidency proclaimed:

“We call upon parents to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility.

“We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform” (First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999).

Parents have the primary responsibility for helping their children know Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (see John 17:3). Latter-day Saint fathers and mothers have been commanded to teach gospel

doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and ways of righteous living to their children (see Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28). Children who are so reared and taught are more likely to be prepared at the appropriate age to receive priesthood ordinances and to make and keep covenants with God.

Strengthening individuals and families is the focus of ministering (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:47, 51) and inspired Church programs such as home evening. As in all things, Jesus set the example of entering homes to care for, teach, and bless (see Matthew 8:14–15; 9:10–13; 26:6; Mark 5:35–43; Luke 10:38–42; 19:1–9).

#### 1.4.2 Home Evening

Latter-day prophets have counseled individuals and families to hold a weekly home evening to teach the gospel, bear testimony of its truthfulness, and strengthen family unity. Members are encouraged to hold home evening on Sunday or at other times as they choose. A family activity night could be held on Monday or at other times. Leaders should continue to keep Monday evenings free from Church meetings and activities.

Home evening may include family prayer, gospel instruction, testimony sharing, hymns and Primary songs, and wholesome recreational activities. (For information on using music in the home, see 14.8.) As part of home evening, or separately, parents may also call a periodic family council to set goals, resolve problems, coordinate schedules, and give support and strength to family members.

Home evening is sacred, private time. Priesthood leaders should not give directions as to what individuals and families should do during this time.

**1.4.3****Gospel Study at Home**

Church leaders encourage all members to participate in gospel study at home on the Sabbath day and throughout the week. Gospel study at home deepens conversion to Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthens individuals and families.

A study of the scriptures, supported by the resource *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families*, is the suggested course of gospel study at home. This resource provides a variety of study options and aligns Sunday School and Primary curriculum with home study.

Individuals and families, however, seek inspiration as they choose to study what will best meet their needs. They prayerfully consider options such as the Book of Mormon and other standard works, general conference messages, Church magazines, and other materials suggested by general or local leaders.

**1.4.4****Strengthening Individuals**

Every member of the Church is precious. God's eternal plan provides for all of His faithful children to receive every blessing of eternal life, exalted in families forever.

Church leaders should give special attention to individuals who do not presently enjoy the support of a family of strong Church members. These individuals may include children and youth whose parents are not members of the Church, others in part-member families, and single adults of all ages. They are covenant members of God's eternal family, deeply loved by Him. They should be encouraged and assisted in gospel study efforts and given opportunities for service in the Church. The Church can provide them wholesome social experiences and fellowship.

Informally and as organized by participants, individuals may gather to strengthen one another through gospel study. *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families* may be a resource for those who desire to study together.