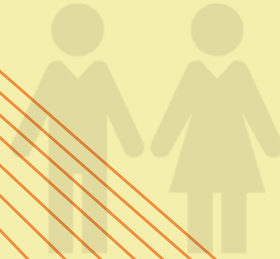


Gaining a knowledge of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness can help us understand the central role of marriage and family in that plan.



PRE-EARTH LIFE



VEIL



EARTH LIFE

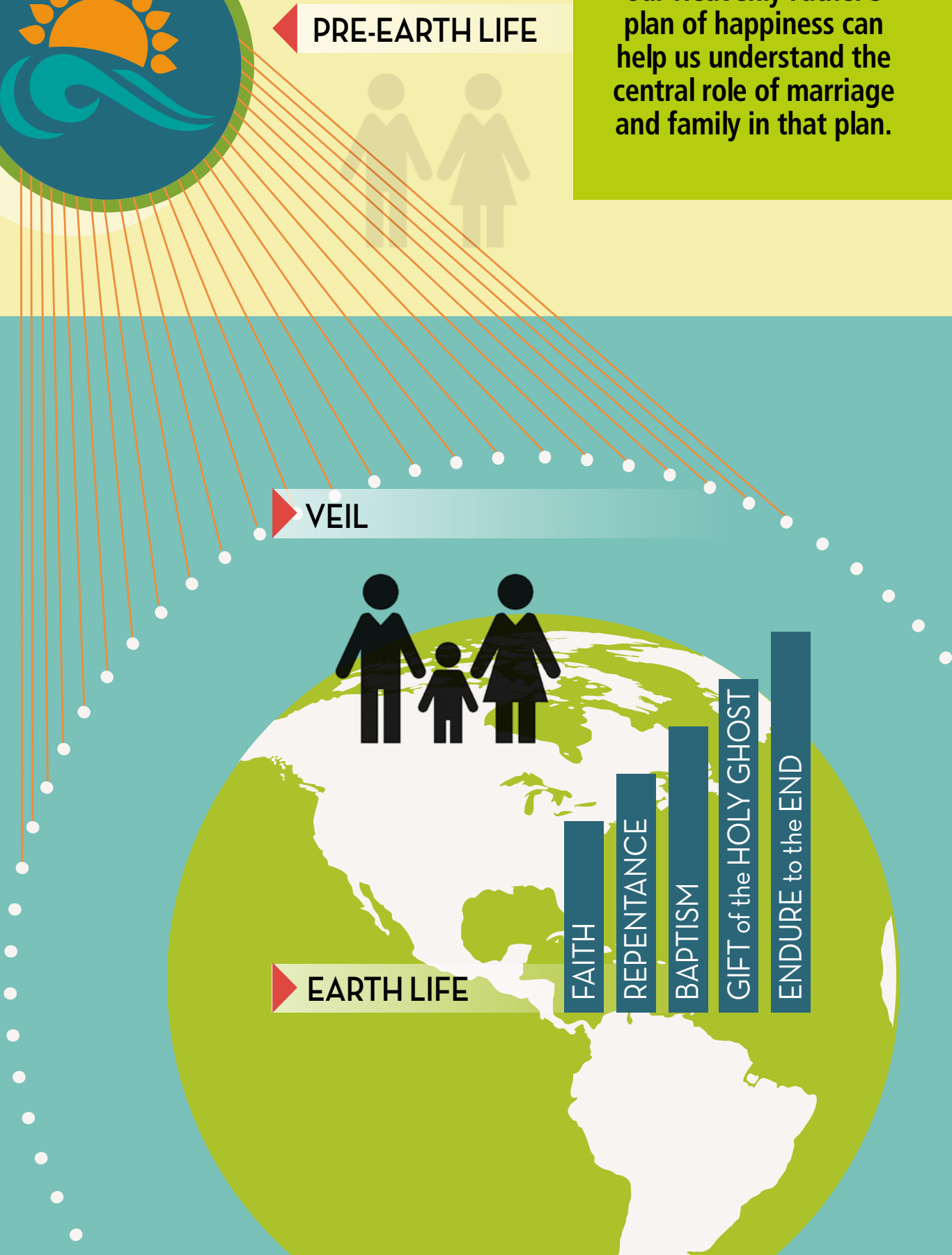
FAITH

REPENTANCE

BAPTISM

GIFT of the HOLY GHOST

ENDURE to the END



GOD'S PLAN

for FAMILIES

By Mark A. Mathews

Seminaries and Institutes

The scriptures and modern prophets teach us that one of the fundamental purposes for the Creation of this earth was to foster marriage and family life. “Marriage is ordained of God,” the Lord explained, so “that the earth might answer the end of its creation” (D&C 49:15–16). “Simply summarized,” added Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “the earth was created that families might be.”¹

Despite the plainness of these teachings, I have encountered many seminary and institute students who did not seem to fully understand how central a role marriage and family play in our Heavenly Father’s plan. As a result, these students sometimes adopt some of the thinking of the world on these important topics, which affects the way they plan for, seek, and support eternal marriage and family relationships.

I believe that understanding the doctrines of God’s plan of salvation has the power to change our attitudes and behaviors to align more faithfully with the teachings of the Lord and his prophets.² The following is a brief review of

the plan of salvation as it relates to marriage and family. These principles can help us understand why “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God” and why “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”³

The Family in Premortal Life

In our premortal life, each of us was born as “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.”⁴ As such, we were all brothers and sisters and lived as members of God’s family. Although all of us were part of this eternal family of God, the only ones who enjoyed the blessings of eternal marriage were our heavenly parents. Only they could have children and be called father and mother.

As Apostles of the Lord have explained, “The title *father* is sacred and eternal. It is significant that of all the titles of respect and honor and admiration that are given to Deity, He has asked us to address Him as Father.”⁵

Our Heavenly Father prepared a plan whereby we could progress and become like Him. A central feature of this plan includes the opportunity to be married eternally and enjoy eternal posterity of our own.

The Family through the Creation, Fall, and Atonement

Three foundational events in God’s plan combine to make marriage and family relationships possible for time and eternity.

These events are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. The scriptural account of the Creation culminates not just with the creation of man but with the establishment of marriage. A brief summary of Adam and Eve’s eternal marriage in Eden is found in Genesis 1:28, including the charge to “multiply, and replenish the earth.”

CREATION

FALL

ATONEMENT

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained: “Marriage as established in the beginning was an eternal covenant. The first man and the first woman were not married until death should part them, for at that time death had not come into the world. The ceremony on that occasion was performed by the Eternal Father himself whose work endures forever.”⁶

Thus, the crowning event of the Creation was not just when Adam and Eve were created in the image of their heavenly parents⁷ but when they were sealed in eternal marriage like their heavenly parents. From the beginning, marriage between a man and a woman was ordained of God and established as the ultimate purpose of our creation.

Although Adam and Eve enjoyed eternal marriage like our heavenly parents, they could not yet enjoy the full blessings of family life. As the prophet Lehi explained, they were originally created in a state where “they would have had no children” (2 Nephi 2:23). One reason they chose to partake of the forbidden fruit and fall to mortality was so that they would have children. “Adam fell that men might be,” Lehi explained (2 Nephi 2:25).

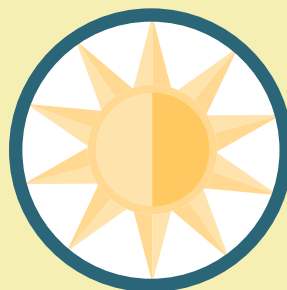
Marriage and family relationships, made possible by the Creation and the Fall, are made eternal through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As Sister Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society general president, taught: “The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. The plan of happiness, also called the plan of salvation, was a plan created for families.”⁸

The Family in Time and Eternity

For these marriage and family relationships to endure forever, they must be sealed through holy ordinances and covenants available only in the temple, with all the promised blessings being dependent on the participants’ faithfulness. The importance of these ordinances to our salvation was explained by the Lord:

“In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

“And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];



Celestial



Terrestrial



Telestial



FINAL JUDGMENT

RESURRECTION



Paradise

Spirit Prison

SPIRIT WORLD

DEATH

“And if he does not, he cannot obtain it” (D&C 131:1–3).

In other words, just as the ordinance and covenant of baptism are the gate to enter the celestial kingdom, so temple marriage is the gate to enter the highest degree of that kingdom. Those who marry in the temple and remain faithful to their covenants are promised that they shall become like God because they will enjoy the continuation of the family unit forever, just like our heavenly parents (see D&C 132:19–20).

The Family and Alternative Lifestyles

It is true that not everyone has the opportunity to marry in this life, nor is every couple blessed with children in mortality. Latter-day prophets have assured us that those who are faithful will eventually be given these blessings, either in this life or the next.⁹ Nevertheless, just because not everyone achieves the ideal does not mean we should stop holding it up as the standard to seek. Eternal marriage and family relationships should be a desire and priority for every Latter-day Saint, regardless of circumstances.

As has always been the case, Satan proposes alternatives to our Heavenly Father’s plan, and nowhere is this more apparent than with the family. In contrast to our Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness through righteousness in marriage and family life, Satan proposes alternative lifestyles that are rooted in sinfulness and selfishness. He is cursed to never marry or have a family, and he entices us to live like him instead of like our Heavenly Father. He lies to us, telling us that marriage and family are an inconvenience and a bondage. He promises us that we will find greater joy and fulfillment in some other way or through some other arrangement. He tempts us not to marry and, if we do marry, to not have children.

The deviations the adversary proposes include premarital sexual relations, pornography, abuse of spouse and children, elective abortion for personal or social convenience, marital infidelity, unjustified divorce, cohabitation, homosexual relations, and unwarranted sterilization.¹⁰ If he cannot convince us to do these things, he tempts us to support and encourage others to do them. But these alternative lifestyles will not bring the true happiness we seek in this life, nor will they bring the full blessings of salvation in

the next. Out of loyalty to our Heavenly Father’s plan and out of love for mankind, we must discourage and oppose measures that are not designed to maintain and strengthen marriage between a man and a woman and “the family as the fundamental unit of society.”¹¹

Conclusion

These doctrines of the plan of salvation lay a foundation for our understanding of the importance of marriage and family relationships. They teach us that marriage and family are not outmoded institutions but vital elements in our quest to become like our heavenly parents.

The relationships we thus form can also bring some of our greatest joys in time and eternity (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25). I was reminded of this once when my three-year-old daughter asked to trace my outline on our driveway with chalk. Willing to oblige, I lay down on the driveway. As she drew with the chalk, I smiled at her childlike coordination and was suddenly struck with an overwhelming sense of love for her. I looked up to heaven, and our Heavenly Father seemed to whisper to me, “This is just a taste of the love I feel for all of my children and the joy that exists in heaven, where families are forever.” What I felt was indescribable.

These relationships are all part of God’s plan of happiness. It is a family plan. It is the plan of salvation of families. May we all choose to support and follow that plan and not its alternatives. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Creation,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 85.
2. “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior” (Boyd K. Packer, “Little Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17).
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 129.
5. Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Father, Consider Your Ways,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 12.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:71.
7. “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity” (First Presidency of the Church, “The Origin of Man,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2002, 29). See also Abraham 4:27.
8. Julie B. Beck, “Teaching the Doctrine of the Family,” *Ensign*, March 2011, 12.
9. See, for example, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (2012), 130–31; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith* (2013), 197–98.
10. For counsel against these practices, see *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 21.4.
11. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 129.