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The Father

Each of us has the potential to become like the Father. To do so, we must worship the Father in the name of the Son.

For her entire life, my wife, Melinda, has tried with all her heart to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Yet, beginning in her youth, she felt unworthy of Heavenly Father's love and blessings because she misunderstood His nature. Fortunately, Melinda continued to keep the commandments in spite of the sadness she felt. A few years ago, she had a series of experiences that helped her better understand God's nature, including His love for His children and His gratitude for our even-imperfect efforts to do His work.

She explains how this has influenced her: "I now feel sure that the Father's plan works, that He is

personally invested in our success, and that He provides us with the lessons and experiences we need to return to His presence. I see myself and others more as God sees us. I am able to parent, teach, and serve with more love and less fear. I feel peace and confidence rather than anxiety and insecurity. Instead of feeling judged, I feel supported. My faith is more certain. I feel my Father's love more often and more deeply."¹

Having "a *correct* idea of [Heavenly Father's] character, perfections, and attributes" is essential to exercising faith sufficient to obtain exaltation.² A correct understanding of Heavenly



Father's character can change how we see ourselves and others and help us to understand God's tremendous love for His children and His great desire to help us become like Him. An incorrect view of His nature can leave us feeling as if we are incapable of ever making it back to His presence.

My objective today is to teach key doctrinal points about the Father that will allow each of us, but especially those who wonder if God loves them, to better understand His true character and to exercise greater faith in Him, His Son, and His plan for us.

The Premortal Life

In the premortal world, we were born as spirits to Heavenly Parents and lived with Them as a family.³ They knew us, taught us, and loved us.⁴ We wanted very much to be like our Heavenly Father. However, to do so, we recognized that we would have to:

1. Obtain glorified, immortal, physical bodies;⁵
2. Be married and form families by the sealing power of the priesthood;⁶ and

3. Acquire all knowledge, power, and divine attributes.⁷

Consequently, the Father created a plan that would allow us, upon certain conditions,⁸ to obtain physical bodies that would become immortal and glorified in the Resurrection; marry and form families in mortality or, for the faithful who did not have this opportunity, after mortality;⁹ progress toward perfection; and ultimately return to our Heavenly Parents and live with Them and our families in a state of exaltation and eternal happiness.¹⁰

The scriptures call this the plan of salvation.¹¹ We were so grateful for this plan that when it was presented to us, we shouted for joy.¹² Each of us accepted the conditions of the plan, including the experiences and challenges of mortality that would help us develop divine attributes.¹³

Mortal Life

During mortality, Heavenly Father provides us with the conditions we need to progress within His plan. The Father begot Jesus Christ in the flesh¹⁴

and provided Him with divine help to fulfill His mortal mission. Heavenly Father will likewise help each of us if we will strive to keep His commandments.¹⁵ The Father gives us agency.¹⁶ Our lives are in His hands, and our "days are known" and "shall not be numbered less."¹⁷ And He ensures that eventually all things work for the good of those who love Him.¹⁸

It is Heavenly Father who gives us our daily bread,¹⁹ which includes both the food we eat and the strength we need to keep His commandments.²⁰ The Father gives good gifts.²¹ He hears and answers our prayers.²² Heavenly Father delivers us from evil when we let Him.²³ He weeps for us when we suffer.²⁴ Ultimately, all of our blessings come from the Father.²⁵

Heavenly Father guides us and gives us the experiences we need based on our strengths, weaknesses, and choices so that we might bear good fruit.²⁶ The Father chastens us when necessary because He loves us.²⁷ He is a "Man of Counsel,"²⁸ who will counsel with us if we ask.²⁹

It is Heavenly Father who sends both the influence and the gift of the Holy Ghost into our lives.³⁰ Through the gift of the Holy Ghost, the glory—or intelligence, light, and power—of the Father can dwell in us.³¹ If we will strive to increase in light and truth until our eyes become single to God's glory, Heavenly Father will send the Holy Spirit of Promise to seal us up unto eternal life and reveal His face unto us—either in this life or the next.³²

Postmortal Life

In the postmortal spirit world, Heavenly Father continues to shed forth the Holy Ghost and send missionaries to those who need the gospel. He answers prayers and helps those who lack them



receive vicarious saving ordinances.³³

The Father raised up Jesus Christ and gave Him power to bring to pass the Resurrection,³⁴ which is the means by which we obtain immortal bodies. The Savior's Redemption and Resurrection bring us back into the presence of the Father, where we will be judged by Jesus Christ.³⁵

Those who rely upon “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah”³⁶ will receive glorified bodies like the Father³⁷ and dwell with Him “in a state of never-ending happiness.”³⁸ There, the Father will wipe away all our tears³⁹ and help us continue on our journey to become like Him.

As you can see, Heavenly Father is always there for us.⁴⁰

The Character of the Father

To become like the Father, we must develop His character traits. Heavenly Father's perfections and attributes include the following:

- The Father is “Endless and Eternal.”⁴¹
- He is perfectly just, merciful, kind, long-suffering, and wants only what is best for us.⁴²
- Heavenly Father is love.⁴³
- He keeps His covenants.⁴⁴
- He does not change.⁴⁵
- He cannot lie.⁴⁶
- The Father is no respecter of persons.⁴⁷
- He knows all things—past, present, and future—from the beginning.⁴⁸
- Heavenly Father is more intelligent⁴⁹ than us all.⁵⁰
- The Father has all power⁵¹ and does all that He takes into His heart to do.⁵²

Brothers and sisters, we can trust in and rely upon the Father. Because He



has an eternal perspective, Heavenly Father can see things we cannot. His joy, work, and glory are to bring to pass our immortality and exaltation.⁵³ Everything He does is for our benefit. He “wants [our] eternal happiness even more than [we] do.”⁵⁴ And He “would not require [us] to experience a moment more of difficulty than is absolutely needed for [our] benefit or for that of those [we] love.”⁵⁵ As a result, He focuses on helping us to progress, not on judging and condemning us.⁵⁶

Becoming Like Our Father

As spirit sons and daughters of God, each of us has the potential to become like the Father. To do so, we must worship the Father in the name of the Son.⁵⁷ We do this by striving to be obedient to the will of the Father, as the Savior was,⁵⁸ and by continually repenting.⁵⁹ As we do these things, we “receive grace for grace” until we receive of the Father's fulness⁶⁰ and are endowed with “his character, perfections, and attributes.”⁶¹

Given the distance between what we are as mortals and what Heavenly Father has become, it is not surprising that some feel that becoming like the Father is unattainable. Nevertheless, the scriptures are clear. If we will cleave in faith to Christ, repent, and seek God's grace through obedience, eventually we will become like the Father. I take great comfort in the fact that those who strive to be obedient will “receive grace

for grace” and ultimately “receive of his fulness.”⁶² In other words, we won't become like the Father on our own.⁶³ Rather, it will come through gifts of grace, some big but mostly small, that build upon one another until we have a fulness. But, brothers and sisters, it will come!

I invite you to trust that Heavenly Father knows how to exalt you; seek His daily, sustaining help; and press forward with faith in Christ even when you cannot feel God's love.

There is much we do not understand about becoming like the Father.⁶⁴ But I can testify with certainty that striving to become like the Father is worth every sacrifice.⁶⁵ The sacrifices we make here in mortality, no matter how great, are simply incomparable to the immeasurable joy, happiness, and love we will feel in God's presence.⁶⁶ If you are struggling to believe it is worth the sacrifices you are asked to make, the Savior calls to you, saying, “Ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath . . . prepared for you; . . . ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along.”⁶⁷

I testify that your Heavenly Father loves *you* and wants *you* to live with Him again. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Notes in possession of the author; see also D. Melinda Ashton, “The Holy Ghost: Direction, Correction, and Warning” (Brigham Young University Women's Conference, Apr. 28, 2016), byutv.org.
2. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 38.
3. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145; “Mother in Heaven,” Gospel Topics, topics.lds.org.
4. The Apostle Paul indicated that we knew the Father so well that our souls still yearn to call him *Abba*, which means “Daddy,” a term reserved for fathers with whom we are exceedingly familiar (see Romans 8:15).

5. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
7. See Matthew 5:48; see also 2 Peter 1:3–8.
8. These conditions included keeping our first estate (see Abraham 3:26) and then in mortality exercising faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repenting, being baptized by immersion by someone holding the priesthood authority of God, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end (see 3 Nephi 27:16–20).
9. President Dallin H. Oaks has taught: “Some who are listening to this message are probably saying, ‘But what about me?’ We know that many worthy and wonderful Latter-day Saints currently lack the ideal opportunities and essential requirements for their progress. Singleness, childlessness, death, and divorce frustrate ideals and postpone the fulfillment of promised blessings. . . . But these frustrations are only temporary. The Lord has promised that in the eternities no blessing will be denied his sons and daughters who keep the commandments, are true to their covenants, and desire what is right” (“The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 75).
10. See Mosiah 2:41.
11. See Alma 42:5; it is also called the plan of redemption (see, for example, Jacob 6:8) and the plan of happiness (see Alma 42:8, 16).
12. See Job 38:4–7.
13. See, for example, Hebrews 5:8; 12:11; Ether 12:27. At least at first, some of the challenges we face in mortality may seem with our limited understanding that they would preclude us from obtaining some of our most hoped-for promised blessings. In spite of these seeming contradictions, God will give us every promised blessing if we remain faithful.
14. See Luke 1:31–35; John 1:14; 1 Nephi 11:18–21; Guide to the Scriptures, “Jesus Christ,” scriptures.lds.org.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:4–5, 16–17, 19–20.
16. See Moses 7:32.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 122:9.
18. See Romans 8:28.
19. See Matthew 6:11.
20. See N. Eldon Tanner, “The Importance of Prayer,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 50–53.
21. See Luke 11:10–13; James 1:17.
22. See Luke 11:5–10; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 11:5–6 (in Luke 11:5, footnote a); 3 Nephi 13:6.
23. See Matthew 6:13.
24. See Moses 7:31–40.
25. See James 1:17.
26. See John 15:1–2; Doctrine and Covenants 122:6–7.



27. See Hebrews 12:5–11; Doctrine and Covenants 95:1.
28. Moses 7:35.
29. See Alma 37:12, 37.
30. See John 14:26; 2 Nephi 31:12.
31. See John 17:21–23, 26; Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.
32. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:53; 88:67–68.
33. See 1 Peter 4:6. Elder Melvin J. Ballard, speaking of why a man he baptized had joined the Church, said, “It was made known to me that his ancestors in the spirit world had accepted the Gospel years ago and had been praying that some one of their family on earth would open the door for them, and that their prayers had availed and the Lord had directed the missionaries to this man’s door” (in Melvin R. Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard, Crusader for Righteousness* [1966], 250).
34. See Mormon 7:5–6; see also John 5:21, 26; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Nephi 9:11–12; Alma 40:2–3; 3 Nephi 27:14.
35. See John 5:22; Jacob 6:9; Alma 11:44; Helaman 14:15–18. The Atonement of Christ overcomes all the effects of the Fall of Adam, including both physical and spiritual death, which both must be overcome to allow us to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. Those who have repented of their sins will dwell with the Father and the Son in eternity. However, those who have failed to repent will suffer the second death, which is brought about by their own sins (see Helaman 14:15–18).
36. 2 Nephi 2:8.
37. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:56; 88:28–29.
38. Mosiah 2:41.
39. See Revelation 7:17.
40. See Moses 7:30. Heavenly Father even continues to watch over and provide for those in the terrestrial kingdom through the ministrations of Jesus Christ and other celestial beings (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:77, 87) and those in the celestial kingdom through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost and angels (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:86, 88).
41. Moses 7:35; see also Psalm 90:2.
42. See Psalm 103:6–8; Luke 6:36; Moses 7:30.
43. See 1 John 4:16.
44. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:40.
45. See James 1:17.
46. See Numbers 23:19.
47. See Acts 10:34–35.
48. See 1 Nephi 9:6; Doctrine and Covenants 130:7.
49. Dictionary.com defines *intelligence* as the “capacity for learning, reasoning, understanding, and similar forms of mental activity; aptitude in grasping truths, relationships, facts, meanings, etc.” and “knowledge.”
50. See Abraham 3:19. Jesus Christ as a glorified, perfected being is also more intelligent than us all.
51. See Revelation 21:22.
52. See Abraham 3:17.
53. See Moses 1:39.
54. Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17.
55. Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” 17.
56. See John 5:22; Moses 1:39. It is Satan and we ourselves who condemn us (see Revelation 12:10; Alma 12:14).
57. See John 4:23; Doctrine and Covenants 18:40; 20:29.
58. See 3 Nephi 11:11; Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–19.
59. Repentance is the process by which we change our very nature so that we become like God. Thus, we should be continually repenting, not just repenting when we “do something wrong.”
60. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:19–20.
61. *Lectures on Faith*, 38; see also Moroni 7:48; 10:32–33; Doctrine and Covenants 76:56, 94–95; 84:33–38.
62. Doctrine and Covenants 93:20; emphasis added.
63. See Moroni 10:32–33; Doctrine and Covenants 76:69, 94–95.
64. Why can’t or won’t God reveal more about the process of becoming like Him? I don’t honestly know all the reasons. But there are at least two that I do understand. The first is that some things are simply incomprehensible in our mortal estate (see Doctrine and Covenants 78:17). It might be akin to trying to explain the internet to someone who lived in the Middle Ages. The context and perspective are just not there. And the second is that gifts of grace often come to us precisely because we must agonize and struggle through not knowing.
65. The sacrifices we are asked to make may be essential to achieving perfection (see Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:40 [in Hebrews 11:40, footnote a]).
66. See Romans 8:18.
67. Doctrine and Covenants 78:17–18.