



# Heavenly Father Wants Us Back

*You are probably further along the path back  
to your Heavenly Father than you realize.*

**M**y parents, Aparecido and Mercedes Soares, always dreamed of serving a mission. They wanted to repay the Lord for the many blessings that had come to their family since they had joined the Church. Their opportunity came in 1989 when they accepted a call to serve in the São Paulo Brazil Temple.

Only a few months into their mission, however, my father suffered a heart attack and passed away. During his funeral, I embraced my mother as we stood before my father's casket.

"Mom, what's next for you?" I asked.

"Your father and I dreamed of this mission," she replied. "I am serving right now, and I will continue to serve—for him and for me."

A kind temple president assigned another widow to serve as my mother's companion, and my mother continued her mission for more than 20 months. Her missionary service blessed her, and her faith and example blessed my family and me.

During her mission, two of my brothers also passed away, and my wife and I lost two children. The first was born premature and did not survive, and we lost the second to miscarriage. During that trying time for our family, my mother was there in the temple every day reaffirming her faith—and strengthening ours—in the plan of salvation.

Her faith in a glorious reunion with *my* father and the promise of eternal life in the presence of *our* Heavenly Father sustained her for 29 years as a widow until the end of her days, at the age of 94.



**By Elder Ulisses Soares**

Of the Quorum  
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## The Plan of Happiness

How blessed we are as Latter-day Saints to know that the gospel has been restored. The plan of salvation truly is "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8). To the true and faithful, it promises an everlasting reward in God's presence.

As revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants, nearly all of Heavenly Father's children will enter a kingdom of glory. Through the Savior's Atonement, those who come forth "in the resurrection of the just" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:17) will be made perfect and inherit celestial glory.

Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accept this doctrine. Unfortunately, some may not believe that it applies to them personally. They make mistakes. Their spiritual progress, though steady, is slow. They wonder if they'll ever be good enough for the celestial kingdom.

If you find yourself in that group, remember the Lord's words to another group of

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believers: “Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me” (Mosiah 24:13).

God loves us and wants all of us back in His presence. You are probably further along the path back to Him than you realize.

**“Just and True”**

In Doctrine and Covenants section 76, the Lord reveals how His children can inherit the celestial kingdom. If you are a member of the Church and have a testimony, you have already started your path, as described in Doctrine and Covenants:

- We must receive “the testimony of Jesus” and believe “on his name” (verse 51).
- We must be baptized by immersion (see verse 51).
- We must “receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands” by one having priesthood authority (verse 52).

The other steps, however, take a lifetime of effort, and some members feel discouraged when they fall short. We are all working on these requirements. Thanks to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can all achieve them:

- Keep the commandments and “be washed and cleansed from all [our] sins” (verse 52).
- “Overcome by faith” (verse 53).
- Be “sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” (verse 53), which is the Holy Ghost, witnessing “to the Father that [our] saving ordinances have been performed properly and that the covenants associated with them have been kept.”<sup>1</sup> The Father promises this sealing to “all those who are just and true” (verse 53).



Being “just and true,” declared President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), is “an apt expression for those valiant in the testimony of Jesus. They are courageous in defending truth and righteousness. These are members of the Church who magnify their callings in the Church (see D&C 84:33), pay their tithes and offerings, live morally clean lives, sustain their Church leaders by word and action, keep the Sabbath as a holy day, and obey all the commandments of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Obtaining the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, which is often referred to as exaltation, has one final requirement. We must enter into “the new and everlasting covenant of marriage” (Doctrine and Covenants 131:2), performed in the temple by proper priesthood authority. According to the merciful plan of our Father, we know that celestial blessings will be made available in the next life to those who did not have an opportunity for the ordinance of temple sealing in this life but hold out faithful to the end.

We learn in the Book of Mormon that all of God’s children who keep His commandments and are faithful, regardless of the circumstances of life, will be blessed and “received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41). There is always hope for us in the merciful and loving plan of salvation of our Heavenly Father.

## The Blessing of Repentance

Our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has taught: “The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity, and purity brings power.”<sup>3</sup>

President Nelson also said that “doing and being a little better each day” brings us “strengthening power.”<sup>4</sup> As we use that strengthening power against the natural man or woman (see Mosiah 3:19), we advance further along the path back to our Father.

Because no unclean thing can dwell in God’s presence (see Moses 6:57), we work daily on genuine spiritual transformation—in our thoughts, our desires, and our behavior. In the words of the Apostle Paul, we seek to become new creatures in Christ, gradually replacing our old self with a new self (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This change comes line upon line as we strive to be a little better every day.

Following the Savior by trying to become like Him is a process of self-denial, which He has defined as taking up our cross (see Matthew 16:24–26). We take up our cross as we:

- Control our desires, appetites, and passions.
- Patiently “submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon” us (Mosiah 3:19).
- Deny ourselves of all ungodliness (see Moroni 10:32).
- Submit our will to the will of the Father, as the Savior did.

And what do we do when we stumble? We turn to our Father and ask Him to “apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins” (Mosiah 4:2). We again strive to overcome weakness and abandon sin. We pray for grace, the “enabling power and spiritual healing” of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> We pick up our cross and resume our journey, however long and hard, to the promised land of Their presence.

## Trust in His Promises

Our immortality and eternal life are God’s work and glory (see Moses 1:39). Our work to achieve that glory includes being valiant in our testimony while upon the earth.

In vision, the Prophet Joseph Smith saw that the faithful “shall overcome all things” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:60). Later, he declared, “All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be



revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:29).

As we trust in these promises, we will not give up on ourselves, on our loved ones, or on other children of God. We will strive to do our best and help others do the same. On our own, none of us will ever be good enough to be saved in the celestial kingdom, but “through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8), that blessing remains within reach.

As we continue faithful, I testify that we will inherit “never-ending happiness” in the presence of the Father and the Son. “O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). ■

## NOTES

1. Guide to the Scriptures, “Holy Spirit of Promise,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, “Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1987, 2.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 68.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” 67.
5. “Grace,” Gospel Topics, topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.