

The Love of God

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Love is the measure of our faith, the inspiration for our obedience, and the true altitude of our discipleship.



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is continually growing and becoming better known throughout the world. Although there will always be those who stereotype the Church and its members in a negative way, most people think of us as honest, helpful, and hardworking. Some have images of clean-cut missionaries, loving families, and friendly neighbors who don't smoke or drink. We might also be known as a people who attend church every Sunday for three hours, in a place where everyone is a brother or a sister, where the children sing songs about streams that talk, trees that produce popcorn, and children who want to become sunbeams.

Brothers and sisters, of all the things *we* want to be known for, are there attributes above all others that

should define us as members of His Church, even as disciples of Jesus Christ? Since our last general conference six months ago, I have pondered this and similar questions. Today I would like to share with you some thoughts and impressions that have come as a result of that inquiry. The first question is:

How Do We Become True Disciples of Jesus Christ?

The Savior Himself provided the answer with this profound declaration: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”¹ This is the essence of what it means to be a true disciple: those who receive Christ Jesus walk with Him.²

But this may present a problem for some because there are so many “shoulds” and “should nots” that merely keeping track of them can be a challenge. Sometimes, well-meaning amplifications of divine principles—many coming from uninspired sources—complicate matters further, diluting the purity of divine truth with man-made addenda. One person's good idea—something that may work for him or her—takes root and becomes an expectation. And gradually, eternal principles can get lost within the labyrinth of “good ideas.”

This was one of the Savior's criticisms of the religious “experts” of His day, whom He chastised for attending to the hundreds of minor details of

the law while neglecting the weightier matters.³

So how do we stay aligned with these weightier matters? Is there a constant compass that can help us prioritize our lives, thoughts, and actions?

Once again the Savior revealed the way. When asked to name the greatest commandment, He did not hesitate. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” He said. “This is the first and great commandment.”⁴ Coupled with the second great commandment—to love our neighbor as ourselves⁵—we have a compass that provides direction not only for our lives but also for the Lord's Church on both sides of the veil.

Because love is the great commandment, it ought to be at the *center* of all and everything we do in our own family, in our Church callings, and in our livelihood. Love is the healing balm that repairs rifts in personal and family relationships. It is the bond that unites families, communities, and nations. Love is the power that initiates friendship, tolerance, civility, and respect. It is the source that overcomes divisiveness and hate. Love is the fire that warms our lives with unparalleled joy and divine hope. Love should be our walk and our talk.

When we truly understand what it means to love as Jesus Christ loves us, the confusion clears and our priorities align. Our walk as disciples of Christ becomes more joyful. Our lives take on new meaning. Our relationship with our Heavenly Father becomes more profound. Obedience becomes a joy rather than a burden.

Why Should We Love God?

God the Eternal Father did not give that first great commandment because He needs us to love Him. His power and glory are not diminished should we disregard, deny, or even defile His name. His influence and



dominion extend through time and space independent of our acceptance, approval, or admiration.

No, God does not need us to love Him. But oh, how we need to love God!

For what we love determines what we seek.

What we seek determines what we think and do.

What we think and do determines who we are—and who we will become.

We are created in the image of our heavenly parents; we are God's spirit children. Therefore, we have a vast capacity for love—it is part of our spiritual heritage. What and how we love not only defines us as individuals; it also defines us as a church. Love is the defining characteristic of a disciple of Christ.

Since the beginning of time, love has been the source of both the highest bliss and the heaviest burdens. At the heart of misery from the days of Adam until today, you will

find the love of wrong things. And at the heart of joy, you will find the love of good things.

And the greatest of all good things is God.

Our Father in Heaven has given us, His children, much more than any mortal mind can comprehend. Under His direction the Great Jehovah created this wondrous world we live in. God the Father watches over us, fills our hearts with breathtaking joy, brightens our darkest hours with blessed peace, distills upon our minds precious truths, shepherds us through times of distress, rejoices when we rejoice, and answers our righteous petitions.

He offers to His children the promise of a glorious and infinite existence and has provided a way for us to progress in knowledge and glory until we receive a fulness of joy. He has promised us all that He has.

If all that is not enough reason to love our Heavenly Father, perhaps we

can learn from the words of the Apostle John, who said, "We love him, because he first loved us."⁶

Why Does Heavenly Father Love Us?

Think of the purest, most all-consuming love you can imagine. Now multiply that love by an infinite amount—that is the measure of God's love for you.⁷

God does not look on the outward appearance.⁸ I believe that He doesn't care one bit if we live in a castle or a cottage, if we are handsome or homely, if we are famous or forgotten. Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely.

He loves us because He is filled with an infinite measure of holy, pure, and indescribable love. We are important to God not because of our résumé but because we are His

children. He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken. God's love is so great that He loves even the proud, the selfish, the arrogant, and the wicked.

What this means is that, regardless of our current state, there is hope for us. No matter our distress, no matter our sorrow, no matter our mistakes, our infinitely compassionate Heavenly Father desires that we draw near to Him so that He can draw near to us.⁹

How Can We Increase Our Love of God?

Since "God is love,"¹⁰ the closer we approach Him, the more profoundly we experience love.¹¹ But because a veil separates this mortality from our heavenly home, we must seek in the Spirit that which is imperceptible to mortal eyes.

Heaven may seem distant at times, but the scriptures offer hope: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."¹²

However, seeking God with all our hearts implies much more than simply offering a prayer or pronouncing a few words inviting God into our lives. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."¹³ We can make a great production of saying that we know God. We can proclaim publicly that we love Him. Nevertheless, if we don't obey Him, all is in vain, for "he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."¹⁴

We increase our love for our Heavenly Father and demonstrate that love by aligning our thoughts and actions with God's word. His pure love directs and encourages us to become more pure and holy. It inspires us to walk in righteousness—not out of fear or obligation but out of an earnest desire to become even more like Him because we love Him. By doing so, we can become "born again . . . [and] cleansed by blood,



even the blood of [the] Only Begotten; that [we] might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory."¹⁵

My dear brothers and sisters, don't get discouraged if you stumble at times. Don't feel downcast or despair if you don't feel worthy to be a disciple of Christ at all times. The first step to walking in righteousness is simply to try. We must *try* to believe. Try to learn of God: read the scriptures; study the words of His latter-day prophets; choose to listen to the Father, and do the things He asks of us. Try and keep on trying until that which seems difficult becomes possible—and that which seems only possible becomes habit and a real part of you.

How Can We Hear the Father's Voice?

As you reach out to your Heavenly Father, as you pray to Him in the

name of Christ, He will answer you. He speaks to us everywhere.

As you read God's word recorded in the scriptures, listen for His voice.

During this general conference and later as you study the words spoken here, listen for His voice.

As you visit the temple and attend Church meetings, listen for His voice.

Listen for the voice of the Father in the bounties and beauties of nature, in the gentle whisperings of the Spirit.

In your daily interactions with others, in the words of a hymn, in the laughter of a child, listen for His voice.

If you listen for the voice of the Father, He will lead you on a course that will allow you to experience the pure love of Christ.

As we draw near to Heavenly Father, we become more holy. And as we become more holy, we will overcome disbelief and our souls will be filled with His blessed light. As we align our lives with this supernal light, it leads us out of darkness and



toward greater light. This greater light leads to the unspeakable ministrings of the Holy Spirit, and the veil between heaven and earth can become thin.

Why Is Love the Great Commandment?

Heavenly Father's love for His children is the core message of the plan of happiness, which plan is made

active through the Atonement of Jesus Christ—the greatest expression of love the world has ever known.¹⁶

How clearly the Savior spoke when He said that every other commandment hangs upon the principle of love.¹⁷ If we do not neglect the great laws—if we truly learn to love our Heavenly Father and our fellowman with all our heart, soul, and mind—all else will fall into place.

The divine love of God turns ordinary acts into extraordinary service. Divine love is the motive that transports simple words into sacred scripture. Divine love is the factor that transforms reluctant compliance with God's commandments into blessed dedication and consecration.

Love is the guiding light that illuminates the disciple's path and fills our daily walk with life, meaning, and wonder.

Love is the measure of our faith, the inspiration for our obedience, and the true altitude of our discipleship.

Love is the way of the disciple.

I testify that God is in His heaven. He lives. He knows and loves you. He is mindful of you. He hears your prayers and knows the desires of your heart. He is filled with infinite love for you.

Let me conclude as I began, my dear brothers and sisters: what attribute should define us as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Let us be known as a people who love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and who love our neighbor as ourselves. When we understand and practice these two great commandments in our families, in our wards and branches, in our nations, and in our daily lives, we will begin to understand what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus the Christ. Of this I testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. John 14:15.
2. See Colossians 2:6.
3. See Matthew 23:23.
4. Matthew 22:37, 38.
5. See Matthew 22:39.
6. 1 John 4:19.
7. See Isaiah 54:10; Jeremiah 31:3.
8. See 1 Samuel 16:7.
9. See D&C 88:63.
10. 1 John 4:8.
11. See Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:7, 16.
12. Jeremiah 29:13.
13. 1 John 5:3; see also 2 John 1:6.
14. 1 John 2:4; see also Isaiah 29:13.
15. Moses 6:59.
16. See John 15:13.
17. See Matthew 22:40.