

“The Grand Story of Our Eternal Family”

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I am humbled and honored to share with you today. You are my heroes. Thank you for having the courage to take the opportunity before you even when it may feel that everything is working against you. I frequently heard my parents, who were BYU-Pathway missionaries, describe you. They inspired their 11 children by sharing your faith and courage. Your willingness to put your faith in Jesus Christ and do what you can do will continue to work miracles in your life and for those you love.

The plan of salvation is a story of a remarkable family. You and I are part of that eternal family. You are my brothers and sisters. The divine nature of our Heavenly Parents is carried in the composition of our spiritual bodies. Through Them, we have been given the capabilities, powers, and faculties They possess, though in an undeveloped state.¹

Together, we chose to follow our Father’s plan and come to earth so we could progress to become like our Heavenly Parents. Our Father ordered the Creation of this earth. Its glorious culmination was man and woman, placed on this earth as perfect complements, made in the image of God. While in the Garden of Eden, Eve and Adam made a decision they knew would bring death into the world, but it would also bring life — family life. They would be blessed with children. That family would provide the essential setting for our physical birth and the opportunity for growth and development in the process of spiritual rebirth.²

God has given us a remarkable statement of truths to guide us in that family experience: “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” It begins with the statement that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”³ This is followed by a declaration that pierces through our loneliness and any sense of shortcoming, assuring every one of us complete belonging in a family of perfect Heavenly Parents who are divine love itself. “All human beings — male and female — are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”⁴

As a social scientist, I have marveled witnessing the importance of stable, loving marriages. No other structure on earth more effectively makes possible that parents will provide the secure and stable environment of nurturing caregiving that children depend on.⁵ Marriage helps ensure that children experience the gift of the remarkable complementarity between mothers and fathers.⁶ Both a man and a woman are needed to create life, and they are designed to facilitate the nurturing of that life together. Mothers are primed to establish a bond through which the emotional communication that is essential for development can occur. Her infant is also primed to bond with her, already knowing her smell, her voice, her face. This relationship appears to shape the foundations of identity, sense of wellbeing, and emotional understanding. In a complementary way, a father’s closeness to his children

¹ Lorenzo Snow, in Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow: One of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 335

² D. Todd Christofferson, “[Why Marriage, Why Family](#)” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 50–53

³ “[The Family: A Proclamation to the World](#),” *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129

⁴ Ibid

⁵ See W. Bradford Wilcox, “[The New Progressive Argument: For Kids, Marriage Per Se Doesn’t Matter](#),” *Institute for Family Studies*, ifstudies.org/blog

⁶ See Jenet J. Erickson, “[It Takes Two: What We Learn from Social Science about the Divine Pattern of Gender Complementarity in Parenting](#),” *BYU Studies*, 62(1): 4–28

shapes their relational capacity, achievement, understanding of boundaries, and emotion management. A father's closeness offers daughters a deep experience of what protective male love feels like, strengthening her capacity for wise sexual decisions. His closeness to his sons offers an experience with masculinity that is protective and nurturing, not driven by aggression or sexual proclivities.

The distinct contributions of mothers and fathers confirm a proposition, one laid out in the proclamation: that the direct, continual, loving involvement of a married mother and a father in the home is a divine pattern for children's development.

This reality helps us understand why the sacred powers of procreation are reserved for marriage. Sexual union is designed to create and symbolize a union strong enough that a child's heart can rely upon it. Its fragmentation from a loving marriage has caused suffering to men and women, as well as increased risks for children born to unmarried parents.

In other situations, painful actions from others may necessitate divorce. Making the choice to end a marital relationship that is abusive can be a courageous and beneficial decision, taking children out of a destructive environment. At the same time, division and eventual divorce are deeply painful, increasing risks as children experience an inner division.⁷

My husband's parents divorced when he was six. He still describes the moment when his mother asked, "Michael, who do you want to live with?" His six-year-old heart could not respond. He grew up without religious faith but had deep feelings for Christmas because, on that day, his parents would come back together for a few hours, and he would feel a wholeness again.

My brothers and sisters, these are painful realities in mortality. The necessity of death brought with it the opposition that is essential for our growth. All of us will experience some deep, unfulfilled yearnings in family life. Some will not have the blessing of a loving marriage for a host of possible reasons: a lack of viable prospects, same-sex attraction, physical or mental impairments, fear of failure that overshadows faith, or having a marriage that ended leaving us with the daunting task of nurturing children alone.⁸ Others of us will feel the deep pain of not being able to bear children. Sins, weakness, and mistakes mean that we will all experience pain in these relationships.

It is in the midst of this seeming opposition that the divine plan for our learning, growth, and redemption is powerfully revealed. Our Eternal Father covenanted to send His Beloved Son to be our Savior and Redeemer. Jesus Christ is the being who brings "at-one-ment" to our souls and to all of our relationships. He is the Master Healer, the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer. He yearns to bless us with His love and pour out His healing grace in covenant relationship with Him.

We fear that our pain and loss in being single, never married, divorced, infertile, struggling in our marriage, having suffered abuse, wrestling with questions of gender or sexuality — or any other seeming difference from the ideal — marks us as less worthy, creating feelings that we do not belong. Instead, Christ says, "Come. Share it all with me. I am with you."⁹ "I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.... [Thou] wast precious in my sight ... and I have loved thee.... Fear not: for I am with thee."¹⁰

⁷ Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, 2006

⁸ D. Todd Christofferson, "[Why Marriage, Why Family](#)" *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 50–53

⁹ See also [Isaiah 43:1–2](#)

¹⁰ See also [Isaiah 43:3–5](#)

As a single woman, I yearned for marriage and children for many years. Yet despite sincere effort, I could not seem to make that reality happen. At the time, I could not see the miraculous work the Lord was bringing about in my heart through that struggle. My unfulfilled yearnings played a sacred role in inclining my heart toward my Redeemer to seek peace and direction He alone could provide and deepen my trust in His perfect love and enabling power. Daily prayer and scripture study, and especially of the words of general conference, became a lifeline of hope and direction. I felt compelled to turn to the words of my patriarchal blessing — and other priesthood blessings — to find love and direction that were personal to me from my Eternal Father. When I did finally marry, my need to be deeply anchored in Jesus Christ only continued as I faced infertility. After my husband and I were blessed with two children, I could see many weaknesses in my mothering. I wondered how could I ever create the kind of family I desired?

As I struggled it became clear to me that I was denying the reality of my Redeemer. Yes, this is the great plan of family — the Creation provided the place for the family to live. The Fall provided the place for the family to grow. But it is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that makes possible the fullness of grace that is needed for the family to become healed and eternally one.

In pouring out my heart to God, I found that the Lord Jesus Christ answers the pain and loss inherent to our mortal experience with the purest form of love, covenant, sharing our pain and weakness in the most profound form of intimacy. In that covenant relationship, His sanctifying power enters us, giving us power to do what is needed to bless our families, opening the way for us to be ever closer to Him and ever closer to others.¹¹ Miraculously, through His grace and redemption — and *His* alone — we can become the kind of people in the kinds of relationships that define heaven.

I have come to treasure the beautiful Japanese art form, *Kintsugi*, where broken pottery is pieced back together using a lacquer mixed with gold or silver. In the repair, the broken seams become beautiful artwork of golden connection, and the pottery is even more valuable than before it was broken. So our Savior heals and mends our brokenness, pouring in His healing power, symbolized in the holy sacrament where we remember and are “re-membered” by His blood and body, which fill and heal us, and we are made “at-one” — glorious and beautiful in Him.

So many of you are giving your all because of your desires to bless your families. Your efforts to further your education through BYU-Pathway, in the midst of sometimes profound difficulty, are inspired by your deep love, giving you the power to sacrifice to make a better life for those you love and will yet love. Our Redeemer walks beside you in all of it. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”¹² His great purpose is to enable us to become beings of eternal love, in the deepest form of relationship. This life is a sacred experience of both opposition and redemption, as we find in Him alone the strength, healing, and truth to bless those we love and become ever closer to Him and to one another.

I bear testimony of His infinite love and power. Our Father is gathering His children home, through His Church, and through temple ordinances where we are joined together in covenant relationship with Him and sealed eternally to one another. Yes, this is the great plan for our eternal family. Of that I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹¹ Kerry Muhlestein, *God Will Prevail*, (Covenant Communications, 2021)

¹² [John 14:6](#)