

January 8, 2026

## “The Family is Central to the Creator’s Plan for the Eternal Destiny of His Children”<sup>1</sup>

*President Brian and Sister Melinda Ashton*  
BYU-Pathway Worldwide

**President Brian K. Ashton:** Our dear BYU-Pathway students and colleagues, we love you and pray for you. We are grateful to address you briefly in this first devotional of 2026.

We mourn the loss of President Russell M. Nelson, who died last September. We rejoice that God has called a new prophet, President Dallin H. Oaks. During the Church Board of Education Meeting in November, when the Church Educational System presidents met with the new First Presidency, I received a powerful spiritual witness that President Oaks is God’s prophet on the earth today and that President Henry B. Eyring and President D. Todd Christofferson are who God wants to serve as President Oaks’s counselors. We testify that they are called to lead Christ’s restored Church today.

**Sister Melinda Ashton:** In his general conference address last October, President Oaks reminded us that the family proclamation “declares that ‘the family is ordained of God’ and ‘is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.’”<sup>2</sup> He further reminded us that the proclamation states, “‘God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.’”<sup>3</sup>

**President Ashton:** Families are central to God’s plan because we can only be exalted in families. Exaltation, or eternal life, is “the highest state of happiness and glory in the celestial kingdom” of God.<sup>4</sup> Families are also where we can experience the greatest joy. That’s why “the end of all activity in [Christ’s] Church is to see that a man and a woman with their children are happy at home, sealed together for time and for all eternity.”<sup>5</sup>

**Sister Ashton:** President Oaks went on to say:

In the United States we are suffering from a deterioration in marriage and childbearing. For nearly a hundred years the proportion of households headed by married couples has declined, and so has the birthrate. The marriages and birthrates of our Church members are much more positive, but they have also declined significantly. It is vital that Latter-day Saints do not lose their understanding of the purpose of marriage and the value of children....

The national declines in marriage and childbearing are understandable for historic reasons, but Latter-day Saint values and practices should improve — not follow — those trends.<sup>6</sup>

**President Ashton:** Since President Oaks gave this address, we have heard concerns from students and others about marrying and/or having children. Consequently, we feel a need to reiterate the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi’s promise that “the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”<sup>7</sup>

**Sister Ashton:** For those of you who worry about being able to marry, know that God has a way for you to accomplish this commandment. Your job is to move forward prayerfully in faith. God can help you find someone who has similar beliefs, goals, hopes, and dreams. He can help you overcome barriers to your righteous desire for marriage. He can even help you afford marriage.

**President Ashton:** Likewise, God will help us to fulfill the commandment for married couples to have children. In 1993, President Oaks taught, “To the first man and woman on earth, the Lord said, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply’ ([Genesis 1:28](#); [Moses 2:28](#); [Abraham 4:28](#)).”

He further added:

How many children should a couple have? All they can care for! Of course, to care for children means more than simply giving them life. Children must be loved, nurtured, taught, fed, clothed, housed, and well started in their capacities to be good parents themselves. Exercising faith in God’s promises to bless them when they are keeping his commandments, many [Latter-day Saint] parents have large families. Others seek but are not blessed with children or with the number of children they desire. In a matter as intimate as this, we should not judge one another.<sup>8</sup>

The number of children a couple should have is a decision to be made between that couple and God. However, we should be cautious not to delay childbearing for selfish reasons or out of fear. Couples should seek to understand God’s will regarding family size.

**Sister Ashton:** Now some faithful Saints will not be able to marry or have children in this life. This is not an indication of God’s displeasure or your worthiness. Sometimes God’s timing is different than ours. While it can be difficult and painful to wait on the Lord’s timing, the Savior knows how we feel and can comfort us.

Fortunately, all faithful Saints will eventually be able to fulfill these commandments and enjoy these blessings. President Oaks taught, “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.”<sup>9,10</sup>

**President Ashton:** We have seen the promise made by Nephi in our own lives with respect to marriage and family.

Despite a strong desire to be married, I did not marry until I was 27. I dated often, but none of the relationships felt right — until Melinda agreed to marry me. As I did my best to fulfill the commandment to marry, God guided, helped me, and gave me peace.

**Sister Ashton:** After we married, Brian and I were prayerful about when to start a family. We felt it was right to do so when we were both still in graduate school. Our first child came while I was in my third year of medical school. While I had plans to return to medical school after giving birth to our son, I ultimately wasn’t able to return. While I would have liked to have finished my medical degree, God has given me peace about the path that I pursued.

**President Ashton:** Two of our children came as welcome surprises. Others came as the result of prayer and revelation. I remember that, as a bishop, I was interviewed by Elder David A. Bednar. When he asked how many children we had, I said that we had four but that Melinda wanted a fifth — implying that I did not. I’ll never forget Elder Bednar’s reply, “That’s because *she* understands the plan.”

**Sister Ashton:** Brian felt strongly that we needed to have a sixth child. I, however, did not feel like we could handle another one. But one day, the Holy Ghost told me, “You can handle another child.”

A few years later, our seventh and final child arrived just days before we left to preside over the Texas Houston South Mission.

**President Ashton:** Throughout it all, God sustained us. Raises came at just the right time to permit us to afford more children. God inspired us to know how to work with our children so that they could help us carry the burden of raising a large family. Our capacity increased.

As mission leaders, we only got about four hours of sleep a night for the first few months because our new baby was colicky, but God made it enough. And while having a large family has been hard work, our children have brought us much joy.

**Sister Ashton:** While we are not suggesting that everyone needs to have seven children, we testify that God will help and sustain you as you are prayerful and obedient to divine direction about marriage and children.

**President Ashton:** We also testify that it is the Savior's life, example, and sacrifice on our behalf that makes God's plan for His children operative. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, performing saving ordinances, and keeping the associated covenants that we can receive divine power to keep God's commandments and ultimately be exalted as families. We further testify that God does provide a way for us to fulfill His commandments and find joy in doing so. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> ["The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"](#) Gospel Library

<sup>2</sup> ["The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"](#) as quoted in Dallin H. Oaks, ["The Family-Centered Gospel of Jesus Christ,"](#) *Liahona*, Nov. 2025

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> ["Exaltation,"](#) *Guide to the Scriptures*

<sup>5</sup> Boyd K. Packer, ["The Plan of Happiness,"](#) *Liahona*, May 2015

<sup>6</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, ["The Family-Centered Gospel of Jesus Christ,"](#) *Liahona*, Nov. 2025

<sup>7</sup> [1 Nephi 3:7](#)

<sup>8</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, ["The Great Plan of Happiness,"](#) *Ensign*, Nov. 1993

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> President Oaks further taught, "Many of the most important deprivations of mortality will be set right in the Millennium, which is the time for fulfilling all that is incomplete in the great plan of happiness for all of our Father's worthy children. We know that will be true of temple ordinances. I believe it will also be true of family relationships and experiences" (["The Great Plan of Happiness,"](#) *Ensign*, Nov. 1993).