

“Our True Identity”

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Brian: Our dear BYU-Pathway students, missionaries, instructors, employees, and friends, welcome to a new semester. We pray daily that you will feel God’s love and have His help in your lives. God, our Heavenly Father, lives and loves you. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. Because of Him and His Atonement, we can be forgiven of our sins, do all that is required of us in this life, and return to live with our Heavenly Father again. Jesus Christ formed His Church when He was here on the earth. That Church eventually was lost because of wickedness. In 1820, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and restored the Church of Jesus Christ once again to the earth. The rightful successor to Joseph Smith and God’s living prophet on the earth at this time is President Russell M. Nelson.

Melinda: In May 2022, President Nelson gave a devotional for young adults. In that devotional, he stated, “I believe that if the Lord were speaking to you directly tonight, the first thing He would make sure you understand is your true identity.”¹

Brian: So why is it so important to understand one’s true identity? When Melinda and I presided over the Texas Houston South Mission, I had a period when I was particularly worried about the conduct of some of the missionaries. One day as I was praying about how to help them, the Lord instructed me to take our missionaries to the House of the Lord, the holy temple, and ask them as they attended an endowment session to consider this question: “What does the temple teach you about your true identity?” I asked the missionaries to share what they learned in their next email to me. Here are a few of their responses:

- **Melinda:** “The thing I learned in the temple is that the Lord does love me; that He has great plans for me; and, in order for me to successfully fulfill my purpose, these trials are necessary. I know the Lord will give me the strength I will need to successfully endure to the end. I must simply be humble enough to accept His help and act so I may fully partake of my Savior’s grace.”
- **Brian:** “The temple helped me understand so much of the potential I have. I am also understanding more of how much of a privilege it is to be in the position I am in. Yes, it can be difficult. Yes, I am losing my hair a little bit, but I am coming closer to the Savior and that is what really matters. I know that I am not perfect and so does He, so He gives me a lot of help and then lets me struggle so that I can learn to trust Him more.”
- **Melinda:** One sister who had dated some abusive boyfriends said, “I learned that I will never be in a relationship where I get hit ever again. I learned that Heavenly Father thinks I’m beautiful no matter what.”
- **Brian:** “One thing that stuck out to me was just that I think we are all capable of doing a lot more than we realize. Each of us, being sons and daughters of God, have divine gifts and talents and abilities that we inherited from our Heavenly Father. I also really learned that God is aware of me and so is His Son, Jesus Christ.”
- **Melinda:** “One thing that was really testified to me was my individual worth. I had had a hard time seeing my individual worth. I now know that I have a divine purpose here and that I have access to more faith, hope, and power from my Heavenly Father. I also learned so much about being an agent. I realized that,

¹ Russell M. Nelson, “[Choices for Eternity](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)

for a long time, I have been an object acted upon and am now learning to be an agent for myself because I know who I am and what I can accomplish while here in the mission and in my life.”²

Brian: As you can see, understanding our true identity changes our perspective, our desires, and our actions. It helps us focus on the things that will ultimately make us truly happy. President Nelson said it this way in his address last May: “The way you think about who you really are affects every decision you will ever make.”³

Melinda: What’s more, the way we identify ourselves can and often does become our destiny. Speaking of the power of understanding one’s true identity, Elder Tad R. Callister, previously a member of the Presidency of the Seventy and former Sunday School General President, said, “[The scriptures] teach that we are the literal spirit offspring or children of God our Father. What difference does this doctrinal distinction make? The difference is monumental in its consequence because our identity determines in large measure our destiny.”⁴

You see, what we believe we are impacts what we will become.

Brian: For this reason, President Nelson asked the question: “Who are you?” He then went on to explain, “First and foremost, you are a child of God. Second, as a member of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], you are a child of the covenant. And third, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁵

What difference do these identifiers make in our lives? As a child of God, you have divine potential. Because of your spiritual parentage, you can become like God Himself. In other words, with God’s help you can do anything that is required to become as He is, including overcome every obstacle⁶ and learn everything that you need to learn.⁷

Melinda: Now as just mentioned, we need divine help to become like God. We gain access to this help by making covenants with Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We become children of the covenant when we are baptized by immersion by one holding proper priesthood authority from God. We also make additional covenants in the House of the Lord.

Once we become children of the covenant, we must keep those covenants to ultimately obtain God’s power in our lives. This power is available to us because of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. When we keep the covenants we have made with God, we become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Brian: It is for these reasons that President Nelson said:

President Nelson video clip: “I plead with you not to *replace* these three paramount and unchanging identifiers with any others, because doing so could stymie your progress or pigeonhole you in a stereotype that could

² Personal correspondence with President Brian K. Ashton and missionaries serving in the Texas Houston South Mission

³ Russell M. Nelson, “[Choices for Eternity](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)

⁴ Tad R Callister, “[Our Identify and Our Destiny](#)” (Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 14, 2012), [speeches.byu.edu](#)

⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “[Choices for Eternity](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)

⁶ See also [Doctrine and Covenants 76:60](#)

⁷ See also [Doctrine and Covenants 93:20, 28, 36](#)

potentially thwart your eternal progression. ... Worldly identifiers will *never* give you a vision of who you can ultimately become. They will never affirm your divine DNA or your unlimited, divine potential.”⁸

Brian: If understanding your true identity is so important, what can you do to come to believe that you are literally a child of God, and that being a child of the covenant and a disciple of Jesus Christ will lead to having God’s power in your life and to your obtaining eternal life?

Melinda: One answer came from Sister Wendy Nelson, wife of President Nelson, at the May worldwide devotional for young adults. She encouraged us to ask ourselves one important question: “What would a holy young adult do [in this situation]?”⁹ A holy individual is one who has chosen to dedicate himself or herself to God. A holy individual strives to do God’s work, develop Christ-like characteristics and repent each day. She then asked 30 young adults to ask themselves this question once a day for three days and to share their experiences with her. I encourage you to read their experiences as told in Sister Nelson’s message, especially in the related third footnote. In summarizing their experiences, Sister Nelson shared that the young adults found that:

Sister Nelson video clip: “This one question can increase your confidence, decrease your anxiety, motivate you, lift your mood and your sights, increase your productivity, increase your focus and clarity of thinking, help you resist temptation, help you detect deception, increase your gratitude, decrease the stress in your life, increase your capacity to love, and help you make better decisions. This one question can bring you joy, comfort, love, and peace!”¹⁰

Melinda: I know that these blessings are real because I chose to accept Sister Nelson’s invitation and have been asking myself this question. I have found that the greatest changes for me have been in my attitude and the way I think about the things I am doing. Further, in pondering this question, I take time to listen to and be directed by the Holy Ghost so that the things I do have more meaning and I feel more peace and joy. I also am more aware of my true identity. You can have these same blessings in your life.

Brian: I have found that my testimony that I am a child of God, a child of the covenant, and a disciple of Jesus Christ has been strengthened as I have consistently done the following things:

- Studied the scriptures daily. This has helped me to better understand my relationship with God and the ways in which He works with His children. This testimony is confirmed as I see God deal with me in the same ways.
- Prayed to my Heavenly Father each morning and night. Through prayer I have developed a much deeper relationship with God. As I pour out my heart to Him and ask for help and answers to questions, He responds with help, answers, solutions, and deliverance.
- Attended church each week. Partaking of the sacrament and renewing my covenants with God has helped me to maintain hope and allowed me to repent and start anew when I struggle to be all that I should be.
- Attended the House of the Lord. The covenants, ordinances, and instructions we receive in the House of the Lord are designed to help us better understand our true identity and how to obtain God’s power. You see, it wasn’t just our missionaries who learned who they are in the temple and how God sees us. Melinda and I did too.
- Maybe most importantly, my knowledge of these truths has been strengthened as I have kept my covenants in times of difficulty and trouble. I’ve had at least three major challenges in my life where I

⁸ Russell M. Nelson, “[Choices for Eternity](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)

⁹ Wendy W. Nelson, “[One Question That Can Change Your Life](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)

¹⁰ Ibid

could not see how God could keep His promises to me. Yet I had moments when I felt that He would. And I chose over long periods of time to believe that He would find a way to keep His promises to me even though it seemed impossible. These situations all lasted years. Nevertheless, in each one of these lengthy trials, God kept His promises. Somehow a way opened up for the seemingly impossible to occur. Because of these experiences, I know that God is my Heavenly Father, that covenants are real, and that as we follow Jesus Christ, we obtain divine help and power in our lives.

Melinda: Our beloved students, missionaries, instructors, employees, and friends, we invite you to ask God who you are. Study the scriptures and pray daily, attend your church meetings and the House of the Lord, and most importantly keep your covenants even when it seems like it will be impossible for God to keep His promises to you. We promise you that, as you do, you will come to know God. You are His beloved child whom He loves and wants to bless.

Brian: Now, in conclusion, let's listen to President Nelson's own words from the May devotional.

President Nelson video clip: "My dear young friends, I love you. I thank you. I believe in you. As the Lord's prophet, I bless you to know the truth about who you are and to treasure the truth about what your glorious potential really is. I bless you to take charge of your own testimony. And I bless you to have the desire and strength to keep your covenants.

"As you do, I promise that you will experience spiritual growth, freedom from fear, and a confidence that you can scarcely imagine now. You will have the strength to have a positive influence far beyond your natural capacity. And I promise that your future will be more exhilarating than anything you can presently believe.

"I so bless you and again express my gratitude and love for each of you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen."¹¹

¹¹ Russell M. Nelson, "[Choices for Eternity](https://www.broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)" (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)