CREATION, FALL, ATONEMENT

Constancy amid Change


I echo President Monson’s compliments to Brother Peterson, Brother Komatsu, and Brother de Jager. They have earned our greatest commendation. And I too join with others who feel a debt of gratitude to this wonderful chorus of youth from Brigham Young University.

Constancy amid change

Our youth are wonderful and especially able to ask thoughtful questions. Recently I had a conversation with “Ruth” and “John.” Ruth opened the discussion. With a sigh, she lamented, “Our world is constantly changing, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I replied, “ever since its creation — geologically and geographically. And its populations are changing — politically and spiritually. You might ask your grandparents about life when they were your age and discover their thoughts.”

“Oh, I already have,” Ruth continued. “My grandma summarized his opinion with a clever quip: ‘Give me the good old days—plus penicillin.’”

Then John expressed deep concern. “Continually changing conditions make the future shaky for us,” he said. “It’s kind of scary. We seem to be standing on shifting sand.”

Together they asked, “What can we trust? Is anything constant that will not change as we grow older?”

To that question I responded with an emphatic, “Yes! Many things!” Because Ruth and John are typical of many today who seek for unchanging constants in a changing world, I would like to address that subject, titling my remarks “Constancy amid Change.” Through the years, prophets and Apostles have spoken of many unchanging constants.1 To facilitate this discussion, I will group some of these constants into three categories: heavenly personages, plans, and principles.

1. Personages

Our Heavenly Father has a glorified body of flesh and bone, inseparably connected with His spirit.2 Scriptures state that He is “infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God” (D&C 20:17).3

His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and the chief cornerstone of our religion.4 “He is the life and the light of the world” (Alma 38:9).5 “There shall be no other name . . . nor any other way . . . whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnypotent” (Mosiah 3:17).6

Another personage is the Holy Ghost, whose enduring influence transcends time. Scripture assures that “the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:46; italics added).

Brothers and sisters, these Heavenly Beings love you. Their love is as constant as is the greatest love of earthly parents.

But there is another personage about whom you should be reminded. Satan also exists and seeks “that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).7

II. Plans

I speak now of category two — unchanging plans. A great council in heaven was once convened, in which it seems that all of us participated.8 There our Heavenly Father announced His plan. Scriptures refer to this plan of God9 by many names. Perhaps out of deference to the sacred name of Deity, or to depict its broad scope, it is also called the plan of happiness,10 the plan of salvation,11 the plan of redemption,12 the plan of restoration,13 the plan of mercy,14 the plan of deliverance,15 and the everlasting gospel.16 Prophets have used these terms interchangeably.

Regardless of designation, the enabling essence of the plan is the atonement of Jesus Christ. As it is central to the plan,17 we should try to comprehend the meaning of the Atonement. Before we can comprehend it, though, we must understand the fall of Adam. And before we can fully appreciate the Fall, we must first comprehend the Creation. These three events—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are three preeminent pillars of God’s plan, and they are doctrinally interrelated.

The Creation. The creation of the earth was a preparatory part of our Father’s plan. Then “the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, . . . male and female to form them.”

“And the Gods said: We will bless them” (Abraham 4:27–28). And bless us they did, with a plan that would give us physical bodies of our very own.

Adam and Eve were the first people to live upon the earth.18 They were different from the plant and animal life that had been created previously. Adam and Eve were children of God. Their bodies of flesh and bone were made in the express image of God’s. In that state of innocence, they were not yet mortal. They could have had no children,19 were not subject to death, and could have lived in Eden’s garden forever.20 Thus, we might speak of the Creation in terms of a paradisiacal creation.

If that state had persisted, you and I would still be stranded among the heavenly host as unborn sons and daughters of God.21 “The great plan of [happiness] would have been frustrated” (Alma 42:5).22

The Fall. That leads us to the fall of Adam. To bring the plan of happiness to fruition, God issued to Adam and Eve the first commandment ever given to mankind. It was a commandment to beget children.23 A law was explained to them. Should they eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17), their bodies would change; mortality and eventual death would come upon them.24 But partaking of that fruit was prerequisite to their parenthood.25

While I do not fully understand all the biochemistry involved, I do know that their physical bodies did change; blood began to circulate in their bodies. Adam and Eve thereby became mortal. Happily for us, they could also beget children and fulfill the purposes for which the world was created. Happily for them, “the Lord said unto Adam [and Eve]26: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden” (Moses 6:53). We and all mankind are forever blessed because of Eve’s great courage and wisdom. By partaking of the fruit first, she did what needed to be done. Adam was wise enough to do likewise. Accordingly, we could speak of the fall of Adam in terms of a mortal creation, because “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25).27

Other blessings came to us through the Fall. It activated two closely coupled additional gifts from God, nearly as precious as life itself — agency and accountability. We became “free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death” (2 Nephi
Freedom of choice cannot be exercised without accountability for choices made.28

The Atonement. Now we come to the third pillar of God’s plan—the Atonement. Just as Adam and Eve were not to live forever in the Garden of Eden, so our final destination was not to be planet earth. We were to return to our heavenly home.

Given that reality, still another change was necessary. An infinite atonement was required to redeem Adam, Eve, and all of their posterity. That atonement must enable our physical bodies to be resurrected and changed to a bloodless form, no longer liable to disease, deterioration, or death.

According to eternal law, that atonement required a personal sacrifice by an immortal being not subject to death. Yet He must die and take up His own body again. The Savior was the only one who could accomplish this. From His mother He inherited power to die. From His Father He obtained power over death. The Redeemer so explained:

“I lay down my life, that I might take it again.”

“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17–18).

The Lord declared that “this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortal and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). He who had created the earth came into mortality to fulfill the will of His Father and all the prophecies of His atonement.31 And His atonement redeems every soul from penalties of personal transgression, on the condition of repentance.32

Thus, we might speak of the Atonement in terms of the immortal creation. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

I have recounted the importance of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement, knowing that parents are accountable to teach these precepts of God’s plan to their children.33

Before leaving our discussion of unchanging principles, however, we need to remember that the adversary sponsors a cunning plan of his own.34 It invariably attacks God’s first commandment for husband and wife to beget children. It tempts with tactics that include infidelity, unchastity, and other abuses of procreative power. Satan’s band would trumpet choice but mute accountability. Nevertheless, his capacity has long been limited, “for he knew not the mind of God” (Moses 4:6).

III. Principles

I speak now of category three—unchanging principles.

Unchanging principles are so because they come from our unchanging Heavenly Father. Try as they might, no parliament or congress could ever repeal the law of earth’s gravity or amend the Ten Commandments. Those laws are constant. All laws of nature and of God are part of the everlasting gospel. Thus, there are many unchanging principles. Time will permit consideration of only a few.

Priesthood. One of them is that of the priesthood. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “the Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 157).35

We know that “the Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 157).

Scriptures certify that the priesthood has continued and will continue “through the lineage of [the] fathers” (D&C 86:8).36 Ordination to its offices has timeless implication as well. Tenure in priesthood office may extend into postmortal realms. For example, scriptures declare that one ordained as a high priest may be a high priest forever.37 Promised blessings of the priesthood extend to men, women, and children throughout the world and may endure forever.38

The use of the priesthood is carefully controlled according to conditions established by the Lord, who said:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41).

That [the rights of the priesthood] may be conferred upon [men], it is true; but when [they] undertake to cover [their] sins, or to gratify [their] pride, [their] vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood and the authority of that man” (D&C 121:37).

While the priesthood is an everlasting principle, those privileged to exercise its authority must maintain themselves daily as worthy vessels.

Moral law. Another unchanging principle is that of divine or moral law. Transgression of moral law brings retribution; obedience to it brings blessings “immutable and unchangeable” (D&C 104:2). Blessings are always predicated on obedience to law.39 So the Church teaches us to embrace the right and to renounce the wrong—that we might have joy.40

The Savior and His servants41 do not speak words of complacency but teach what people need to know. Through the ages, history attests that contemporary critics have pressured Church leaders to modify a decree of the Lord.42 But such is eternal law, and it cannot be altered. Not even for His Beloved Son could God change the law that required the Atonement. Divine doctrines cannot be squeezed into compact molds to make them fit fashionable patterns of the day. Nor can they be fully expressed on a bumper sticker.

Judgment. Another unchanging principle, brothers and sisters, is that of your eventual judgment. Each of you will be judged according to your individual works and the desires of your hearts.43 You will not be required to pay the debt of any other. Your eventual placement in the celestial, terrestrial, or telestial kingdom will not be determined by chance. The Lord has prescribed unchanging requirements for each. You can know what the scriptures teach and pattern your lives accordingly.44

Divine commandments. Other unchanging principles include divine commandments—even those that seem to be temporal. Tithing, for example, is not temporal (or temporary); it is an everlasting principle. The Lord said:

“Those who have thus been tithed shall pay one-tenth of all their interest annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever” (D&C 119:4; italics added).

We know that tithe payers shall not be burned at the Second Coming.45

Truth. Another unchanging principle is that of truth. Scripture reminds us that “the truth abideth forever and ever” (D&C 1:39).46 Even though one’s understanding of the truth may be fragmentary, truth itself does not change. Everlasting truth and wisdom come from the Lord. The first truth ever taught to man came directly from Deity. From
generation to generation, God has given additional light. Whether truth comes from a laboratory of science or directly by revelation, truth is embraced by the gospel.

Family. May I mention one more everlasting principle—the family. A family can be together forever. Though each of us will pass through the doors of death, the timing of that departure is less important than is the preparation for eternal life. Part of that preparation includes service in the Church. It is not to be a burden but a blessing to a family. The Lord said, “Thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family” (D&C 23:3:47).

Ruth, John, and each of you will more fully understand that concept in light of this scriptural promise:

“If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them . . . [they] shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, . . . exaltation and glory in all things, . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19).

A promise like that is worth your personal effort and endurance.

Constancy amid change is assured by heavenly personages, plans, and principles. Our trust can be safely anchored to them. They provide peace, eternal progression, hope, freedom, love, and joy to all who will be guided by them. They are true — now and forever — I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES
1. For example, see Albert E. Bowen, Constancy amid Change (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1944); N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, pp. 117–21; or Ensign, Nov. 1979, pp. 80–82.
2. See D&C 93:33; 130:22.
3. See also Psalm 100:3; Mormon 9:19; Moroni 8:18; D&C 54:102.
5. See also Mosiah 16:9; 3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11; Ether 4:12; D&C 10:70; 11:28; 12:9; 34:2; 39:2; 45:7.
6. See also Acts 4:12; 2 Nephi 25:20; Mosiah 5:8; Alma 38:9; Helaman 5:9; D&C 18:23.
7. See also 2 Nephi 2:18; Alma 41:4.
10. See Alma 42:8, 16.
11. See Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; 42:5; Mosiah 6:62.

The Atonement


Humbly I join the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, who asked, “Why not speak of the atonement of Christ?”1 This topic comprises our third article of faith: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

Before we can comprehend the Atonement of Christ, however, we must first understand the Fall of Adam. And before we can understand the Fall of Adam, we must first understand the Creation. These three crucial components of the plan of salvation relate to each other.2

The Creation

The Creation culminated with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were created in the image of God, with bodies of flesh and bone.3 Created in the image of God and not yet mortal, they could not grow old and die.4 “And they would have had no children”5 nor experienced the trials of life. (Please forgive me for mentioning children and the trials of life in the same breath.) The creation of Adam and Eve was a paradisiacal creation, one that required a significant change before they could fulfill the commandment to have children and thus provide earthly bodies for premortal spirit sons and daughters of God.

The Fall

That brings us to the Fall. Scripture teaches that “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”6 The Fall of Adam (and Eve) constituted the mortal creation and brought about the required changes in their bodies, including the circulation of blood and other modifications as well.8 They were now able to have children. They and their posterity also became subject to injury, disease, and death. And a loving Creator blessed them with healing power by which the life and function of precious physical bodies could be preserved. For example, bones, if broken, could become solid again. Lacerations of the flesh could heal themselves. And miraculously, leaks in the circulation could be sealed off by components activated from the very blood being lost.9

Think of the wonder of that power to heal! If you could create anything that could repair itself, you would have created life in perpetuity. For example, if you could create a chair that could fix its own broken leg, there would be no limit to the life of that chair. Many of you walk on legs that were once broken and do so because of your remarkable gift of healing.

Even though our Creator endowed us
with this incredible power, He consigned a counterbalancing gift to our bodies. It is the blessing of aging, with visible reminders that we are mortal beings destined one day to leave this “frail existence.” 10 Our bodies change every day. As we grow older, our broad chests and narrow waists have a tendency to trade places. We get wrinkles, lose color in our hair—even the hair itself—to remind us that we are mortal children of God, with a “manufacturer’s guarantee” that we shall not be stranded upon the earth forever. Were it not for the Fall, our physical, beautiful, and morticians would all be unemployed.

Adam and Eve, as mortal beings, were instructed to “worship the Lord their God, and . . . offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord.” 11 They were further instructed that “the life of the flesh is in the blood: . . . for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” 12 Prostration, procreation, and aging were all components of—and physical death was essential to—God’s “great plan of happiness.” 13

But mortal life, glorious as it is, was never the ultimate objective of God’s plan. Life and death here on planet Earth were merely means to an end—not the end for which we were sent.

The Atonement

That brings us to the Atonement. Paul said, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” 14 The Atonement of Jesus Christ became the immortal creation. He volunteered to answer the ends of a law previously transgressed. 15 And by the shedding of His blood, His6 and our physical bodies could become perfected. They could again function without blood, just as Adam’s and Eve’s did in their paradisical form. Paul taught that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; . . . this mortal must put on immortality.” 17

Meaning of atonement

With this background in mind, let us now ponder the deep meaning of the word atonement. In the English language, the components are at-one-ment, suggesting that a person is at one with another. Other languages 8 employ words that connote either expiation or reconciliation. Expiation means “to avenge for.” Reconciliation comes from Latin roots re, meaning “again”; con, meaning “with”; and sella, meaning “seat.” Reconciliation, therefore, literally means “to sit again with.”

Rich meaning is found in study of the word atonement in the Semitic languages of Old Testament times. In Hebrew, the basic word for atonement is kaphar, a verb that means “to cover” or “to forgive.” 19 Closely related is the Aramaic and Arabic word kafat, meaning “a close embrace,” no doubt related to the Egyptian ritual embrace. References to that embrace are evident in the Book of Mormon. One states that “the Lord hath redeemed my soul . . .; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.” 20 Another proffers the glorious hope of our being “clasped in the arms of Jesus.” 21

I weep for joy when I contemplate the significance of it all. To be redeemed is to be atoned—received in the close embrace of God with an expression not only of His forgiveness but of our oneness of heart and mind. What a privilege! And what a comfort to those of us with loved ones who have already passed from our family circle through the gateway we call death!

Scriptures teach us more about the word atonement. The Old Testament has many references to atonement, which called for animal sacrifice. Not any animal would do. Special considerations included:

- The selection of a firstling of the flock, without blemish. 22
- The sacrifice of the animal’s life by the shedding of its blood. 23
- Death of the animal without breaking a bone. 24
- One animal could be sacrificed as a vicarious act for another. 25

The Atonement of Christ fulfilled these prototypes of the Old Testament. He was the firstborn Lamb of God, without blemish. His sacrifice occurred by the shedding of blood. No bones of His body were broken—noteworthy in that both malefactors crucified with the Lord had their legs broken. 26 And His was a vicarious sacrifice for others.

While the words atone or atonement, in any of their forms, appear only once in the King James translation of the New Testament, 37 they appear 35 times in the Book of Mormon. 28 As another testament of Jesus Christ, it sheds precious light on His Atonement, as do the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Latter-day revelation has added much to our biblical base of understanding.

Infinite atonement

In preparatory times of the Old Testament, the practice of atonement was finite, meaning it had an end. It was a symbolic forecast of the definitive Atonement of Jesus the Christ. His Atonement is infinite—without an end. 29 It was also infinite in that all humankind was included, error from never-ending death.

It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope—it was to be done once for all. 30 And the mercy of the Atonement extends not only to an infinite number of people, but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him. 31 It was infinite beyond any human scale of measurement or mortal comprehension.

Jesus was the only one who could offer such an infinite atonement, since He was born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father. Because of that unique birthright, Jesus was an infinite Being.

The ordeal of the Atonement

The ordeal of the Atonement centered about the city of Jerusalem. There the greatest single act of love of all recorded history took place. 32 Leaving the upper room, Jesus and His friends crossed the deep ravine east of the city and came to a garden of olive trees on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. There in the garden bearing the Hebrew name of Gethsemane—meaning “oilpress”—olives had been beaten and pressed to provide oil and food. There at Gethsemane, the Lord “suffered the pain of all men, that all . . . might repent and come unto him.” 33 He took upon Himself the weight of the sins of all mankind, bearing its massive load that caused Him to bleed from every pore. 34

Later He was beaten and scourged. A crown of sharp thorns was thrust upon His head as an additional form of torture. 35 He was mocked and jeered. He suffered every indignity at the hands of His own people. “I came unto my own,” He said, “and my own received me not.” 36 Instead of their warm embrace, He received their cruel rejection. Then He was required to carry His own cross to the hill of Calvary, where He was nailed to that cross and made to suffer excruciating pain.

Later He said, “I thirst.” 37 To a doctor of medicine, this is a very meaningful expression. Doctors know that when a patient goes into shock because of blood loss, invariably that patient—if still conscious—with parched and shriveled lips cries for water.

Even though the Father and the Son knew well in advance what was to be experienced, the actuality of it brought indescribable agony. “And [Jesus] said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.” 38 Jesus then complied with
the will of His Father.39 Three days later, precisely as prophesied, He rose from the grave. He became the firstfruits of the Resurrection. He had accomplished the Atonement, which could give immortality and eternal life to all obedient human beings. All that the Fall allowed to go awry, the Atonement allowed to go aright.

The Savior’s gift of immortality comes to all who have ever lived. But His gift of eternal life requires repentance and obedience to specific ordinances and covenants. Essential ordinances of the gospel symbolize the Atonement. Baptism by immersion is symbolic of the death, burial, and Resurrection of the Redeemer. Partaking of the sacrament renews baptismal covenants and also renews our memory of the Savior’s broken flesh and of the blood He shed for us. Ordinances of the temple symbolize our reconciliation with the Lord and seal families together forever. Obedience to the sacred covenants made in temples qualifies us for eternal life—the greatest gift of God to man—40—the “object and end of our existence.”41

The Atonement enabled the purpose of the Creation to be accomplished

The Creation required the Fall. The Fall required the Atonement. The Atonement enabled the purpose of the Creation to be accomplished. Eternal life, made possible by the Atonement, is the supreme purpose of the Creation. To phrase that statement in its negative form, if families were not sealed in holy temples, the whole earth would be utterly wasted.42

The purposes of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement all converge on the sacred work done in temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The earth was created and the Church was restored to make possible the sealing of wife to husband, children to parents, families to progenitors, worlds without end.

This is the great latter-day work of which we are a part. That is why we have temples—to bring the fullest blessings of the Atonement to faithful children of God. That is why we respond to our own calls from the Lord. When we comprehend His voluntary Atonement, any sense of sacrifice on our part becomes completely overshadowed by a profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of serving Him.

As one of the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”43 I testify that He is the Son of the living God. Jesus is the Christ—our atoning Savior and Redeemer. This is His Church, restored to bless God’s children and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES
1. Jacob 4:12.
2. The relationships of these components are found linked together in several scriptures, such as Alma 18:34–39; Mormon 9:12; Doctrine and Covenants 20:17–25.
3. They were created as amortal beings—“without mortality”—not at that time subject to death.
5. 2 Nephi 2:23.
7. 2 Nephi 2:25.
8. We should remember that God forgave Adam and Eve their transgression (see Moses 6:53).
9. Such as platelets and thrombin.
11. Moses 5:5.
12. Leviticus 17:11.
14. 1 Corinthians 15:22; see also Mosiah 16:7–8.
15. See 2 Nephi 2:7; see also “Behold the Great Redeemer Die,” Hymns, no. 191.
17. 1 Corinthians 15:50–53.
18. Such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and German.
19. We might even surmise that if an individual qualifies for the blessings of the Atonement (through obedience to the principles and ordinances of the gospel), Jesus will “cover” our past transgressions from the Father.
20. 2 Nephi 1:15.
21. Mormon 5:11; additional examples are in Alma 5:33; 54:16.
27. See Romans 5:11.
28. Atonement = 24 plus atone, atoning, or atoned = 8 plus atone = 3; total 35 times.
29. See 2 Nephi 9:7; 25:16; Alma 34:10, 12, 14.
31. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:24; Moses 1:33.
32. See John 3:16.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 18:11.
35. See Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5.
36. 3 Nephi 9:16; see also Doctrine and Covenants 6:21; 10:57; 11:29; 39:3; 45:8; 133:66.
38. Mark 14:36. The word Abba is significant. Ab means “father”; Abba is an endearing and tender form of that term. The nearest English equivalent might be Daddy.
39. Centuries later, the Lord shared innermost recollections of this experience with the Prophet Joseph Smith, the record of which we read in Doctrine and Covenants 19.
40. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
42. See Doctrine and Covenants 2:3; 138:48.

“The Great Plan of Happiness”


Plan of salvation a road map of eternity

Questions like, Where did we come from? Why are we here? and Where are we going? are answered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Prophets have called it the plan of salvation and “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). Through inspiration we can understand this road map of eternity and use it to guide our path in mortality.

The gospel teaches us that we are the spirit children of heavenly parents. Before our mortal birth we had “a pre-existent, spiritual personality, as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father” (statement of the First Presidency, Improvement Era, Mar. 1912, p. 417; see also Jeremiah 1:5). We were placed here on earth to progress toward our destiny of eternal life. These truths give us a unique perspective and different values [CR, 97] to guide our decisions from those who doubt the existence of God and believe that life is the result of random processes.

The Council in Heaven

Our understanding of life begins with a council in heaven. There the spirit children of God were taught his eternal plan for their destiny. We had progressed as far as we could without a physical body and an experience in mortality. To realize a fulness of joy, we had to prove our willingness to keep the commandments of God in a circumstance where we had no memory of what preceded our mortal birth.

In the course of mortality, we would become subject to death, and we would be soiled by sin. To reclaim us from death...
and sin, our Heavenly Father’s plan provided us a Savior, whose atonement would redeem all from death and pay the price necessary for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions he prescribed (see 2 Nephi 9:19–24).

Satan had his own plan. He proposed to save all the spirit children of God, assuring that result by removing their power to choose and thus eliminating the possibility of sin. When Satan’s plan was rejected, he and the spirits who followed him opposed the Father’s plan and were cast out.

All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father’s plan and fought for it. Many of us also made covenants with the Father concerning what we would do in mortality. In ways that have not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world influence us in mortality.

**Satan seeks to destroy God’s plan**

Although Satan and his followers have lost their opportunity to have a physical body, they are permitted to use their spirit powers to try to frustrate God’s plan. This provides the opposition necessary to test how mortals will use their freedom to choose. Satan’s most strenuous opposition is directed at whatever is most important to the Father’s plan. Satan seeks to discredit the Savior and divine authority, to nullify the effects of the Atonement, to counterfeit revelation, to lead people away from the truth, to contradict individual accountability, to confuse gender, to undermine marriage, and to discourage childbearing (especially by parents who will raise children in righteousness).

**Gender, marriage, and childbearing are essential to the plan**

Maleness and femaleness, marriage, and the bearing and nurturing of children are all essential to the great plan of happiness. Modern revelation makes clear that what we call gender was part of our existence prior to our birth. God declares that he created “male and female” (D&C 20:18; Moses 2:27; Genesis 1:27). Elder James E. Talmage explained: “The distinction between male and female is no condition peculiar to the relatively brief period of mortal life; it was an essential characteristic of our pre-existent condition” (Millennial Star, 24 Aug. 1922, P. 539).

To the first man and woman on earth, the Lord said, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Moses 2:28; Genesis 1:28; see also Abraham 4:28). This commandment was first in sequence and first in importance. It was essential that God’s spirit children have mortal birth and an opportunity to progress toward eternal life. Consequently, all things related to procreation are prime targets for the adversary’s efforts to thwart the plan of God.

**Necessity of the Fall**

When Adam and Eve received the first commandment, they were in a transitional state, no longer in the spirit world but with physical bodies not yet subject to death and not yet capable of procreation. They could not fulfill the Father’s first commandment without transgressing the barrier between the bliss of the Garden of Eden and the terrible trials and wonderful opportunities of mortal life.

For reasons that have not been revealed, this transition, or “fall,” could not happen without a transgression—an exercise of moral agency amounting to a willful breaking of a law (see Moses 6:59). This would be a planned offense, a formality to serve an eternal purpose. The Prophet Lehi explained that “if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen” but would have remained in the same state in which he was created (2 Nephi 2:22).

“And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (v. 23).

But the Fall was planned, Lehi concludes, because “all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things” (v. 24).

**Eve’s wisdom and courage**

It was Eve who first transgressed the limits of Eden in order to initiate the conditions of mortality. Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. And thus Eve and “Adam fell that men might be” (v. 25).

Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve’s act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall (see Bruce R. McConkie, “Eve and the Fall,” in Woman [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979], pp. 67–68). Joseph Smith taught that it was not a “sin” because God had decreed it (see The Words of Joseph Smith, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook [Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980], p. 63). Brigham Young declared, “We should never blame Mother Eve, not the least” (in Journal of Discourses, 13:143). Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said: “I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. . . . This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin . . . for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!” (Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:114–15).

**Contrast between sin and transgression**

This suggested contrast between a sin and a transgression reminds us of the careful wording in the second article of faith: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (italics added). It also echoes a familiar distinction in the law. Some acts, like murder, are crimes because they are inherently wrong. Other acts, like operating without a license, are crimes only because they are legally prohibited. Under these distinctions, the act that produced the Fall was not a sin—inherently wrong—but a transgression—wrong because it was formally prohibited. These words are not always used to denote something different, but this distinction seems meaningful in the circumstances of the Fall.

**First parents knew the Fall’s necessity**

Modern revelation shows that our first parents understood the necessity of the Fall. Adam declared, “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10). Note the different perspective and the special wisdom of Eve, who focused [CR, 99] on the purpose and effect of the great plan of happiness: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11). In his vision of the redemption of the dead, President Joseph F. Smith saw “the great and mighty ones” assembled to meet the Son of God, and among them was “our glorious Mother Eve” (D&C 138:38–39).

When we understand the plan of salvation, we also understand the purpose and effect of the commandments God has given his children. He teaches us correct principles and invites us to govern ourselves. We do this by the choices we make in mortality.
We live in a day when there are many political, legal, and social pressures for changes that confuse gender and homogenize the differences between men and women. Our eternal perspective sets us against changes that alter those separate duties and privileges of men and women that are essential to accomplish the great plan of happiness. We do not oppose all changes in the treatment of men and women, since some changes in laws or customs simply correct old wrongs that were never grounded in eternal principles.

Use and misuse of creative power

The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given his children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment, but another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse. The emphasis we place on the law of chastity is explained by our understanding of the purpose of our procreative powers in the accomplishment of God’s plan.

The expression of our procreative powers is pleasing to God, but he has commanded that this be confined within the relationship of marriage. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that “in the context of lawful marriage, the intimacy of sexual relations is right and divinely approved. There is nothing unholy or degrading about sexuality in itself, for by that means men and women join in a process of creation and in an expression of love” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 311).

Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of the procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute of men and women. The Book of Mormon teaches that unchastity is “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5). In our own day the First Presidency of the Church has declared the doctrine of this church “that sexual sin—the illicit sexual relations of men and women—stands, in its enormity, next to murder” (in James R. Clark, comp., Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75], 6:176). Some who do not know the plan of salvation behave like promiscuous animals, but Latter-day Saints—especially those who are under sacred covenants—have no such latitude. We are solemnly responsible to God for the destruction or misuse of the creative powers he has placed within us.

Abortion

The ultimate act of destruction is to take a life. That is why abortion is such a serious sin. Our attitude toward abortion is not based on revealed knowledge of when mortal life begins for legal purposes. It is fixed by our knowledge that according to an eternal plan, all of the spirit children of God must come to this earth for a glorious purpose, and that individual identity began long before conception and will continue for all the eternities to come. [CR, 100] We rely on the prophets of God, who have told us that while there may be “rare” exceptions, “the practice of elective abortion is fundamentally contrary to the Lord’s injunction, ‘Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it’” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:6) (1991 Supplement to the 1989 General Handbook of Instructions, p. 1).

Our knowledge of the great plan of happiness also gives us a unique perspective on the subject of marriage and the bearing of children. In this we also run counter to some strong current forces in custom, law, and economics.

Marriage is necessary in God’s plan

Marriage is disdained by an increasing number of couples, and many who marry choose to forgo children or place severe limits on their number. In recent years strong economic pressures in many nations have altered the traditional assumption of a single breadwinner per family. Increases in the number of working mothers of young children inevitably signal a reduced commitment of parental time to nurturing the young. The effect of these reductions is evident in the rising numbers of abortions, divorces, child neglect, and juvenile crime.

We are taught that marriage is necessary for the accomplishment of God’s plan, to provide the approved setting for mortal birth, and to prepare family members for eternal life. “Marriage is ordained of God unto man,” the Lord said, “that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made” (D&C 49:15–17).

Our concept of marriage is motivated by revealed truth, not by worldly sociology. The Apostle Paul taught, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). President Spencer W. Kimball explained, “Without proper and successful marriage, one will never be exalted” (Marriage and Divorce [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976], p. 24).

According to custom, men are expected to take the initiative in seeking marriage. That is why President Joseph F. Smith directed his prophetic pressure at men. He said, “No man who is marriageable is fully living his religion who remains unmarried” (Gospel Doctrine [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], p. 275). We hear of some worthy LDS men in their thirties who are busy accumulating property and enjoying freedom from family responsibilities without any sense of urgency about marriage. Beware, brethren. You are deficient in a sacred duty.

Bear and nurture children

Knowledge of the great plan of happiness also gives Latter-day Saints a distinctive attitude toward the bearing and nurturing of children.

In some times and places, children have been regarded as no more than laborers in a family economic enter-prize or as insurers of support for their parents. Though repelled by these repressions, some persons in our day have no compunctions against similar attitudes that subordinate the welfare of a spirit child of God to the comfort or convenience of parents.

The Savior taught that we should not lay up treasures on earth but should lay up treasures in heaven (see Matthew 6:19–21). In light of the ultimate purpose of the great plan of happiness, I believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity.

President Kimball said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1979, p. 6; or Ensign, May 1979, p. 6).

When married couples postpone childbearing until after they have satisfied their material goals, the mere passage of time assures that they seriously reduce their potential to participate in furthering our Heavenly Father’s plan for all of his spirit children. Faithful Latter-day Saints cannot afford to look upon children as an interference with what the world calls “self-fulfillment.” Our covenants with God and the ultimate purpose of life are tied up in those little ones who reach for our time, our love, and our sacrifices.

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 LDS 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.

President Gordon B. Hinckley gave this inspired counsel to an audience of young Latter-day Saints:

“I like to think of the positive side of the equation, of the meaning and sanctity of life, of the purpose of this estate in our eternal journey, of the need for the experiences of mortal life under the great plan of God our Father, of the joy that is to be found only where there are children in the home, of the blessings that come of good posterity. When I think of these values and see them taught and observed, then I am willing to leave the question of numbers to the man and the woman and the Lord” (“If I Were You, What Would I Do?” Brigham Young University 1983–84 Fireside and Devotional Speeches [Provo: University Publications, 1984], p. 11).

No blessing will be denied

Some who are listening to this message are probably saying, “But what about me?” We know that many worthy and wonderful Latter-day Saints currently lack the ideal opportunities and essential requirements for their progress. Singleness, childlessness, death, and divorce frustrate ideals and postpone the fulfillment of promised blessings. In addition, some women who desire to be full-time mothers and homemakers have been literally compelled to enter the full-time workforce. But these frustrations are only temporary. 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.

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.

Do all things in wisdom and order

I pray that we will not let the challenges and temporary diversions of mortality cause us to forget our covenants and lose sight of our eternal destiny. We who know God’s plan for his children, we who have covenanted to participate, have a clear responsibility. We must desire to do what is right, and we must do all that we can in our own circumstances in mortality.

In all of this, we should remember King Benjamin’s caution to “see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). I think of that inspired teaching whenever I feel inadequate, frustrated, or depressed.

When we have done all that we are able, we can rely on God’s promised mercy. We have a Savior, who has taken upon him not just the sins, but also “the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). He is our Savior, and when we have done all that we can, he will make up the difference, in his own way and in his own time. Of that I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Christ and the Creation


The Lord expects us to believe and understand the true doctrine of the Creation—the creation of this earth, of man, and of all forms of life. Indeed, as we shall see, an understanding of the doctrine of creation is essential to salvation. Unless and until we gain a true view of the creation of all things we cannot hope to gain that fulness of eternal reward which otherwise would be ours.

God himself, the Father of us all, ordained and established a plan of salvation whereby his spirit children might advance and progress and become like him. It is the gospel of God, the plan of Eternal Elohim, the system that saves and exalts, and it consists of three things. These three are the very pillars of eternity itself. They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement.

Before we can even begin to understand the temporal creation of all things, we must know how and in what manner these three eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are inseparably woven together to form one plan of salvation. No one of them stands alone; each of them ties into the other two; and without a knowledge of all of them, it is not possible to know the truth about any one of them.

Be it known, then, that salvation is in Christ and comes by his atoning sacrifice. The Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the heart and core and center of revealed religion. It ransoms men from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the Fall of Adam. All men will be resurrected because our blessed Lord himself died and rose again, becoming thus the firstfruits of them that slept.

And further: Christ died to save sinners. He took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. Eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God, is available because of what Christ did in Gethsemane and at Golgotha. He is both the resurrection and the life. Immortality and eternal life are the children of the Atonement. There is no language or power of expression given to man which can set forth the glory and wonder and infinite import of the ransoming power of the great Redeemer.

But, be it remembered, the Atonement came because of the Fall. Christ paid the ransom for Adam’s transgression. If there had been no Fall, there would be no Atonement with its consequent immortality and eternal life. Thus, just as surely as salvation comes because of the Atonement, so also salvation comes because of the Fall.

Mortality and procreation and death all had their beginnings with the Fall. The tests and trials of a mortal probation began when our first parents were cast out of their Edenic home. “Because that Adam fell, we are,” Enoch said, “and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe.” (Moses 6:48.) One of the most profound doctrinal declarations ever made fell from the lips of mother Eve. She said, “We are not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.” (Moses 5:11.)

And be it also remembered that the Fall was made possible because an infinite Creator, in the primeval day, made the earth and man and all forms of life in such a state that they could fall. This fall involved a change of status. All things were so created that they could fall or change, and thus was introduced the type and kind of existence needed to put into operation all of the terms and conditions of the Father’s eternal plan of salvation.

This first temporal creation of all things, as we shall see, was paradisical in nature. In the primeval and Edenic day all forms of life lived in a higher and different state
than now prevails. The coming fall would
take them downward and forward and
onward. Death and procreation had yet
to enter the world. That death would be
Adam’s gift to man, and, then, the gift of
God would be eternal life through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Thus, existence came from God; death
came by Adam; and immortality and
eternal life come through Christ. And
thus, in Lehi’s precise and eloquent
language, all men are in a state of
probation because of the Fall. And if
Adam had not transgressed he would not
have fallen, but he would have remained
in the garden of Eden. He was then in a
state of physical immortality; meaning he
would have lived forever because there
was as yet no death. “And they [our first
parents] would have had no children”;
they would have been denied the
experiences of a mortal probation and a
mortal death; and it is out of these two
two things—oùt of death and the tests of
mortality—that eternal life comes. But—thanks be to God—Adam fell that
men might be; and men are, that they
might have joy. And the Messiah cometh
in the fulness of time, that he may
redeem the children of men from the
cull.” (2 Ne. 2:21-26.)

Knowing all these things about the plan
of salvation, we are in a position to
consider the creation of this earth, of
man, and of all forms of life. Knowing
that the Creation is the father of the Fall,
and that the Fall made possible the
Atonement, and that salvation itself
comes because of the Atonement, we are
in a position to put the revealed
knowledge about the Creation in a proper
perspective.

Our analysis properly begins with the
frank recital that our knowledge about
the Creation is limited. We do not know
the how and why and when of all things.
Our finite limitations are such that we
could not comprehend them if they were
revealed to us in all their glory, fulness,
and perfection. What has been revealed
is that portion of the Lord’s eternal word
which we must believe and understand if
we are to envision the truth about the
Fall and the Atonement and thus become
heirs of salvation. This is all we are
obligated to know in our day.

In a future day the Lord will expect more
of his Saints in this regard than he does of
us. “When the Lord shall come, he shall
reveal all things,” our latter-day
revelations tell us—“Things which have
passed, and hidden things which no man
knew, things of the earth, by which it was
made, and the purpose and the end
thereof.” (D&C 101:32-33.) Pending that
Millennial day it is our responsibility to
believe and accept that portion of the
truth about the Creation that has been
dispensed to us in our dispensation.

Christ is the Creator and Redeemer of
worlds so numerous that they cannot be
numbered by man. As to his infinite and
eternal creative and redemptive
enterprises the divine word attests: “And
worlds without number have I created,”
saith the Father, “and I also created them
for mine own purpose; and by the Son I
created them, which is mine Only
Begotten.... But only an account of this
earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I
unto you.” As to all of the other worlds
of the Lord’s creating we know only that it
is his work and his glory “to bring to
pass”—through the Redeemer—the
immortality and eternal life of all their
inhabitants. (Moses 1:33, 35, 39.)

In what is probably the most glorious
vision given to mortals in this
mortal comprehension we are frank to
accept. The Lord’s descendants are
broad. (D&C 76:20; 23-24.) Christ is thus the Creator and the
Redeemer. By him the worlds were made,
and through his infinite atonement the
inhabitants of those worlds are adopted
into the divine family as heirs with
himself. It was of this vision and of this
provision whereby the Saints become the
sons of God by faith that the Prophet
Joseph Smith wrote:

And I heard a great voice bearing
record from heav’n,
He’s the Saviour and Only Begotten of
God;
By him, of him, and through him, the
worlds were all made,
Even all that careen in the heavens so
broad.
Whose inhabitants, too, from the first
to the last,
Are saved by the very same Saviour
of ours;
And, of course, are begotten Gods
dughters and sons
By the very same truths and the very
same powers.
(Millennial Star, vol. 4, pp. 49-55;
cited in Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed.,
Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 66.)
That the infinite and eternal nature of
creation and redemption are beyond
mortal comprehension we are frank to
admit. We are grateful that the Lord has
given us this glimpse of everlasting truth
relative to his unending labors; it is a brief
view from his eternal perspective. But
this earth and all that thereon is are our
concern. It is the truths about “our’s
creation,” as it were, that will chart the
course for us in our enduring efforts to
gain eternal life.

Let us then, with Abraham, gaze upon
the great host of “noble and great ones” in
premortal existence. “Among them
stands one “like unto God.” He is the
great Jehovah, the Firstborn of the
Father. We hear him say “unto those who
were with him,” unto Michael and a great
host of valiant souls: “We will go down,
for there is space there, and we will take
of these materials, and we will make an
earth whereon these may dwell.” (Abr.
3:22, 24.)

And as we gaze and hear and ponder, our
minds are enlightened and our
understanding reaches to heaven. Truly
Christ is the Creator of the future abode
of the spirit children of the Fall. But he
does not work alone. The Creation is
an organized venture; each of the other
noble and great spirits plays his part. And
the earth is created from matter that
already exists. Truly the elements are
eternal, and to create is to organize.

As the work goes forward we see the
fulfillment of that which God spoke to
Moses in the Ten Commandments: “I will
six days the Lord made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that in them is, and
rested the seventh day. (Ex. 20:11.) It is of
the creative events that took place on
each of these “days” that we shall now
speak.

But first, what is a day? It is a specified
time period; it is an age, an eon, a division
of eternity; it is the time between two
distinguishable events. And each day, of
whatever length, has the duration
needed for its purposes. One measuring
rod is the time required for a celestial
to turn once on its axis. For
instance, Abraham says that according to
“the Lord’s time” a day is “one thousand
years” long. This is “one revolution... of
Kolob,” he says, and it is after the Lord’s
“manner of reckoning.” (Abr. 3:4.)

There is no revealed recitation specifying
that each of the “six days” involved in
the Creation was of the same duration. Our
three accounts of the Creation are the
Mosaic, the Abrahamic, and the one
presented in the temples. Each of these
stems back to the Prophet Joseph Smith.
The Mosaic and Abrahamic accounts
place the creative events on the same
successive days. We shall follow these
scriptural recitations in our analysis. The
temple account, for reasons that are
apparent to those familiar with its
teachings, has a different division of
events. It seems clear that the “six days”
are one continuing period and that there

is no one place where the dividing lines between the successive events must of necessity be placed.

The Mosaic and the temple accounts set forth the temporal or physical creation, the actual organization of element or matter into tangible form. They are not accounts of the spirit creation. Abraham gives a blueprint as it were of the Creation. He tells the plans of the holy beings who wrought the creative work. After reciting the events of the six days he says: “And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth.” (Abr. 5:3.)

Then he says they performed as they had planned, which means we can, by merely changing the verb tenses and without doing violence to the sense and meaning, also consider the Abrahamic account as one of the actual creation.

The First Day—Elohim, Jehovah, Michael, a host of noble and great ones—all these played their parts. “The God” created the atmospheric heavens and the temporal earth. It was “without form, and void”; as yet it could serve no useful purpose with respect to the salvation of man. It was “empty and desolate”; life could not yet exist on its surface; it was not yet a fit abiding place for those sons of God who shouted for joy at the prospect of a mortal probation. The “waters” of the great “deep” were present, and “darkness reigned” until the divine decree: “Let there be light.” The light and the darkness were then “divided,” the one being called “Day” and the other “Night.” Clearly our planet was thus formed as a revolving orb and placed in its relationship to our sun. (See Moses 2:1-5; Abr. 4:1-5.)

The Second Day—On this day the “waters” were “divided” between the surface of the earth and the atmospheric heavens that surround it. A “firmament” or an “expansion” called “Heaven” was created to divide “the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.” Thus, as the creative events unfold, provision seems to be made for clouds and rain and storms to give life to that which will yet grow and dwell upon the earth. (See Moses 2:6-8; Abr. 4:6-8.)

The Third Day—This is the day when life began. In it “the waters under the heaven” were “gathered together unto one place,” and the “dry land” appeared. The dry land was called “Earth,” and the assembled waters became “the Sea.” This is the day in which “the Gods organized the earth to bring forth” grass and herbs and plants and trees; and it is the day in which vegetation in all its varied forms actually came forth from the seeds planted by the Creators. This is the day when the decree went forth that grass, herbs, and trees could each grow only from “its own seed,” and that each could in turn bring forth only after its own “kind.” And thus the bounds of the plant and vegetable kingdoms were set by the hands of those by whom each varied plant and tree was made. (See Moses 2:9-13; Abr. 4:9-13.)

The Fourth Day—After seeds in all their varieties had been planted on the earth; after these had sprouted and grown; after each variety was prepared to bring forth fruit and seed after its own kind—the Creators organized all things in such a way as to make their earthly garden a productive and beautiful place. They then iorganzied the lights in the expanse of the heavens so there would be “seasons” and a way of measuring “days” and “years.” We have no way of knowing what changes then took place in either the atmosphere or the sidereal heavens, but during this period the sun, moon, and stars assumed the relationship to the earth that now is theirs. At least the light of each of them began to shine through the lifting hazes that enshrouded the newly created earth so they could play their parts with reference to life in all its forms as it soon would be upon the new orb. (See Moses 2:14-19; Abr. 4:14-19.)

The Fifth Day—Next came fish and fowl and “every living creature” whose abode is “the waters.” Their Creators placed them on the newly organized earth, and they were given the command: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the sea; and let fowl multiply in the earth.” (This command—as with a similar decree given to man and applicable to all animal life—they could not then keep, but they soon would be able to do so. Appended to this command to multiply was the heaven-sent restriction that the creatures in the waters could only bring forth “after their kind,” and that “every winged fowl” could only bring forth “after his kind.” There was no provision for evolution or change from one species to another. (See Moses 2:20-23; Abr. 4:20-23.)

The Sixth Day—The crowning day of creation is at hand. In its early hours, the great Creators “made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and every living which creepeth upon the earth after his kind.” And the same procreative restrictions applied to them that apply to all forms of life; they too are to reproduce only after their kind.

All that we have recited is now accomplished, but what of man? Is man found upon the earth? He is not. And so “the Gods,” having so counseled among themselves, said: “Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness. O So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form them, male and female to form they them.” They then did as they had counseled, and the most glorious of all the creative acts was accomplished. Man is the crowning creature to step forth according to the divine will. He is in the image and likeness of the Eternal Elohim, and to him is given “dominion” over all things. And, then, finally, that his purposes shall roll everlastingly onward, God blesses the “male and female” whom he has created and commands them: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” As the “sixth” day closes, the Creators, viewing their creative labors with satisfaction, see that “all things” which they have “made” are “very good.” (See Moses 2:24-31; Abr. 3:24-31.)

Such is the revealed account of the creation of all things. Our summary has combined elements from the Mosaic, the Abrahamic, and the temple accounts. At this point in the Mosaic record the scripture says: “Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” The Lord then rests on the “seventh day.” (See Moses 3:1-3.)

Having come this far in our analysis of the Creation, we are led to ask: Why did the Lord give us these revealed accounts of the Creation? What purposes do they serve? How does the knowledge in them help us to work out our salvation or to center our affection in Him whose we are and by whom all things were made?

It is self-evident that we have received no useless and unneeded revelations. All that the Lord does has a purpose and serves a need. He expects us to treasure up his word, to ponder in our hearts its deep and hidden meanings, and to understand its full import. Those who have done so know that the revealed accounts of the Creation are designed to accomplish two great purposes. Their general purpose is to enable us to understand the nature of our mortal probation, a probation in which all men are being tried and tested to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. (Abr. 3:25.) Their specific purpose is to enable us to understand the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, which infinite and eternal Atonement is the very foundation upon which revealed religion rests.
It is only fair to say that a mere recitation of what took place during the “six days” and of the Lord’s resting on the “seventh day” do not of themselves set forth with clarity the purposes of the creation accounts. And so the Lord, as recorded in chapter 3 of the Mosaic account, proceeds to explain the purpose and nature of the Creation. He comments about the Creation. He reveals some facts and principles without which we cannot envision what the true doctrine of the Creation is. His statements are interpolative; they are inserted in the historical account to give us its depth and meaning and import. They are not chronological recitations, but are commentary about what he had already set forth in its sequential order.

The Lord introduces his commentary about the Creation by saying that the events of the “six days,” which he has just recited, “are the generations of the heaven and of the earth, when they were created, in the day that I, the Lord God, made the heaven and the earth.” (Moses 3:4.) Thus, all things have been created; the work is finished; the account is revealed; but it can only be understood if some added truths are set forth. These deal with the premortal existence of all things and with the paradisiacal nature of the earth and of all created things when they first came from their Creator’s hand. Both of these concepts are interwoven in the same sentences, and in some instances the words used have a dual meaning and apply to both the premortal life and the paradisiacal creation.

And so the Lord says that he created “every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew… And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven I created I them.” (Moses 3:5.) Clearly he is speaking of the premortal existence of all things. This earth, all men, animals, fish, fowls, plants, all things—all lived first as spirit entities. Their home was heaven, and the earth was created to be the place where they could take upon themselves mortality.

“For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth.” Apply these words to the spirit creation, if you will, and they will be true in such a context. But they have a much more pointed and important meaning. They are followed by the statement: “For I, the Lord God, had not caused it to rain upon the face of the earth; and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air; But I, the Lord God, spake, and there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” (Moses 3:5-6.)

The Lord is here telling us about the events of which he has spoken, about the account of the physical or tangible or temporal creation set forth in chapter 2 of Moses. He says the things so made were “spiritually” created and were not “naturally upon the face of the earth,” for the reasons quoted.

At this point we must insert a statement from our tenth article of faith: “We believe… that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” (A of F 1:10) That is to say, when the earth was first created it was in a paradisiacal state, an Edenic state, a state in which there was no death. And when the Lord comes again, and the Millennial era is ushered in, the earth will return to its paradisiacal state and be renewed. It will be made new again; it will become a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. In that day, there shall be no sorrow because there is no death as we know it. (D&C 101:29.)

Thus we learn that the initial creation was paradisiacal; death and mortality had not yet entered the world. There was no mortal flesh upon the earth for any form of life. The Creation was past, but mortality as we know it lay ahead. All things had been created in a state of paradisiacal immortality. It was of this day that Lehi said: “And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.” (2 Ne. 2:22.) If there is no death, all things of necessity must continue to live eternally and without end.

Continuing the divine commentary about the Creation, we read: “And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also; nevertheless, all things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word.” (Moses 3:7.) How filled with meaning are these words! The physical body of Adam is made from the dust of this earth, the very earth to which the Gods came down to form him. His “spirit” enters his body, as Abraham expresses it. (See Abr. 5:7.) Man becomes a living, immortal soul; body and spirit are joined together. He has been created “spiritually,” as all things were because there is as yet no mortality. Then comes the Fall; Adam falls; mortality and procreation and death commence. Fallen man is mortal; he has mortal flesh; he is “the first flesh upon the earth.” And the effects of his fall pass upon all created things. They fall in that they too become mortal. Death enters the world; mortality reigns; procreation commences; and the Lords great and eternal purposes roll onward.

Thus, “all things” were created as spirit entities in heaven; then “all things” were created in a paradisiacal state upon the earth; that is, “spiritually they created,” for there was as yet no death. They had spiritual bodies made of the elements of the earth as distinguished from the mortal bodies they would receive after the Fall when death would enter the scheme of things. Natural bodies are subject to the natural death; spiritual bodies, being paradisiacial in nature, are not subject to death. Hence the need for a fall and the mortality and death that grows out of it.

Thus, as the interpolative exposition in the divine word explains, “I, the Lord God, planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there I put the man whom I had formed.” (Moses 3:8) Adam, our father, dwelt in the Garden of Eden. He was the first man of all men in the day of his creation, and he became the first flesh of all flesh through the Fall. Because of the Fall “all things” changed from their spiritual state to a natural state. And thus we read: “And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul. For it was spiritual in the day that I created it.” (Moses 3:9; italics added.)

There is no evolving from one species to another in any of this. The account is speaking of “every tree” and of “all things.” Considering them as one collective unit, the account continues: “It remainedeth in the sphere in which I, God, created it, yea, even all things which I prepared for the use of man; and man saw that it was good for food.” (Moses 3:9.)

The Lord’s commentary about the Creation also says: “Out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air;… and they were also living souls; for I, God, breathed into them the breath of life.” (Moses 3:19.) It also says, speaking figuratively, that Eve was formed from Adam’s rib. And in that primeval day, when neither death nor the probationary experiences of mortality had entered the world, “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” (See Moses 3:21-25.)

As to the Fall itself we are told that the Lord planted “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in the midst of the garden.
(Moses 3:9.) To Adam and Eve the command came: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Moses 3:16–17.) Again the account is speaking figuratively. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.

Moses 4 gives the actual account of the Fall. Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit and the earth is cursed and begins to bring forth thorns and thistles; that is, the earth falls to its present natural state. Eve is identified as “the mother of all living” (Moses 4:26); and she and Adam begin to have “sons and daughters” (Moses 5:3).

Thus, man is created in such a way that he can fall. He falls and brings mortality and procreation and death into being so that he can be redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is ransomed from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the Fall of Adam so that he can have immortality and eternal life. The Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are bound together as one.

These revealed verities about the creation of all things run counter to many of the speculations and theoretical postulates of the world. They are, however, what God’s inspired word sets forth, and we are duty bound to accept them. We are frank to admit that our knowledge of the creation of the universe, of this earth, of man, and of all living things is meager—perhaps almost misinformed—as compared to what there is to learn. But the Lord has revealed to us as much about the mystery of creation as is necessary for us in our probationary estate.

He has revealed to us the basic verities which enable us to understand the true doctrine of creation. This doctrine is that the Lord Jesus Christ is both the Creator and the Redeemer of this earth and all that on it is, save only man. It is that the Lord God himself, the Father of us all, came down and created man, male and female, in his own image and likeness. It is that the earth and all else were created in a paradisiacal state so there could be a fall. It is that the Great Creator became the Redeemer so he could ransom men from the effects of the Fall, thereby bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. It is that the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are the three pillars of eternity. It is that all who accept him as both the Creator and the Redeemer have power to become joint-heirs with him and thereby inherit all that his Father hath.

Truly Christ is both the Creator and the Redeemer, as is portrayed by the marble reproduction of Thorvaldsen’s Christus that stands in the rotunda of the visitorsi center on Temple Square. There we see the Creator in majestic marble standing in the midst of eternity. On the domed ceiling and the encircling walls are paintings of the sidereal heavens with their endless orbs, all moving through an organized cosmos. And as we gaze upon what the hand of mere man has made, our minds are opened to see in a limited manner the miracle of creation.

There we also see the nail marks in those blessed hands, the hands that healed and blessed, and also in the feet that trod the dusty lanes of that earth which his hands had made. We see the gash in his pierced side from whence came the blood and water as a sign that the Atonement had been wrought. And our minds are opened, again in a limited manner, to see the miracle of redemption.

And as we ponder upon the wonder of it all, our gaze and thoughts dwell upon the beatific face and we feel the beckoning power of the outstretched arms. And the marvel in marble seems to breathe the breath of life and say: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6.) “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28.) Come unto me and ye shall be saved. Come, inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for all who accept me as the Creator and Redeemer. Come, be one with me; I am thy God.

The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness


God’s great plan of happiness

The scriptures record, “And I, God, created man . . .; male and female created I them.” This was done spiritually in your premortal existence when you lived in the presence of your Father in Heaven. Your gender existed before you came to earth. You elected to have this earth experience as part of His plan for you. The prophets call it “the plan of mercy,”2 the “eternal plan of deliverance,”3 the plan of salvation,4 and, yes, “the great plan of happiness.”5 You were taught this plan before you came to earth and there rejoiced in the privilege of participating in it.

Obedience to the plan is a requisite for full happiness in this life and a continuation of eternal joy beyond the veil. Essential to His plan of happiness is agency—the right of personal choice. Also fundamental is the holy privilege of procreation to be exercised within the commitment of legal marriage. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. The family is ordained of God.6 As husband and wife, you have the responsibility to bear children and to nurture and train them spiritually, emotionally, and physically.7

Satan also has a plan. It is a cunning, evil, subtle plan of destruction.8 It is his objective to take captive the children of Father in Heaven and with every possible means frustrate the great plan of happiness.

Importance of marriage in God’s plan

Our Heavenly Father endowed His sons and daughters with unique traits especially fitted for their individual responsibilities as they fulfill His plan. To follow His plan requires that you do those things He expects of you as a son or daughter, husband or wife. Those roles are different but entirely compatible. In the Lord’s plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complement-ary capacities and characteristics.

Marriage allows these different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband
and wife, their children and grandchild-
ren. For the greatest happiness and
productivity in life, both husband and
wife are needed. Their efforts interlock
and are complementary. Each has
individual traits that best fit the role the
Lord has defined for happiness as a man
or woman. When used as the Lord
intends, those capacities allow a married
couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and
overcome them as one, to grow in love
and understanding, and through temple
ordinances to be bound together as one
whole, eternally. That is the plan.

Learn from the lives of Adam and Eve

You can learn how to be more effective
parents by studying the lives of Adam and Eve. Adam was Michael who helped
create the earth—a glorious, superb
divine being. Eve was his equal—a full,
powerfully contributing partner. After
they had partaken of the fruit, the Lord
spoke with them. Their comments reveal
some different characteristics of a man
and woman. To Adam He said, "Hast
thou eaten of the tree whereof I com-
manded thee that thou shouldst not eat?"9 Now, Adam’s response was char-
acteristic of a man who wants to be
perceived as being as close to right as
possible. Adam responded, "The woman
thou gavest me, and commandest that
she should remain with me, she gave me
of the fruit of the tree and I did eat."10
And the Lord said unto Eve, "What is this
thing which thou hast done?"11 Eve’s
response was characteristic of a woman.
Her answer was very simple and
straightforward: "The serpent beguiled
me, and I did eat."12

Later, "Adam blessed God . . . and began
to prophesy concerning all the families
of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of
God, for because of my transgression my
eyes are opened, and in this life I shall
have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see
God."13 Adam was thinking about his
responsibilities. He was trying to align his
performance with the desires of the Lord.
Eve said, "Were it not for our transgres-
sion we never should have had seed, and
never should have known good and evil,
and the joy of our redemption, and the
eternal life which God giveth unto all the
obedient."14 Eve’s response was char-
acteristic of a woman. She embraced all,
wanted to make sure that everyone was
considered. One response was not more
correct than the other. The two perspec-
tives resulted from the traits inherent in
men and women. The Lord intends that
we use those differences to fulfill His
plan for happiness, personal growth, and
development. By counseling together
they arrived at a broader, more correct
understanding of truth.

They worked together.15 They obeyed the
commandment to have children.16 They
knew the plan of happiness and followed
it, even though at times it resulted in
hardship and difficulty for them.

They were commanded, "Thou shalt
repent and call upon God in the name of
the Son forevermore."17 And they did.
Further, they taught their children the
plan of happiness.18 They worked
together to overcome challenges, and
they "ceased not to call upon God."19

Because Adam and Eve were obedient, the
Holy Ghost led them. As husband
and wife, you can receive direction in
your lives by qualifying for the gift of the
Holy Ghost through obedience to the
 teachings of the Savior.

Roles of wife and mother

Beware of the subtle ways Satan employs
to take you from the plan of God21 and
true happiness. One of Satan’s most
effective approaches is to demean the
role of wife and mother in the home.
This is an attack at the very heart of God’s
plan to foster love between husband and
wife and to nurture children in an
atmosphere of understanding, peace,
appreciation, and support. Much of the
violence that is rampant in the world
today is the harvest of weakened homes.
Government and social plans will not
effectively correct that, nor can the best
efforts of schools and churches fully
compensate for the absence of the tender
care of a compassionate mother and wife
in the home.

This morning President Hinckley spoke of
the importance of a mother in the home.
Study his message. As a mother guided by
the Lord, you weave a fabric of character
in your children from threads of truth
through careful instruction and worthy
example. You imbue the traits of honesty,
faith in God, duty, respect for others,
kindness, self-confidence, and the desire
to contribute, to learn, and to give in your
trusting children’s minds and hearts. No
day-care center can do that. It is your
sacred right and privilege.

Of course, as a woman you can do
exceptionally well in the workplace, but is
that the best use of your divinely
appointed talents and feminine traits? As
a husband, don’t encourage your wife
to go to work to help in your divinely
appointed responsibility of providing
resources for the family, if you can possi-

bly avoid it. As the prophets have
counseled, to the extent possible with the
help of the Lord, as parents, work
together to keep Mother in the home.22
Your presence there will strengthen the
self-confidence of your children and
decrease the chance of emotional
challenges. Moreover, as you teach truth
by word and example, those children will
come to understand who they are and
what they can obtain as divine children
of Father in Heaven.

Blessings to be given in the Lord’s
time

I know I have been speaking of the ideal,
and you may be disturbed because your
life may not now fit that mold. I promise
you that through your obedience and
continuing faith in Jesus Christ and your
understanding of the whole plan of
happiness, even if important parts of it
aren’t fulfilled in your life now, they will
be yours in the Lord’s due time. I also
promise you that you can have significant
growth and happiness now in your
present circumstances. As a daughter or
son of God, live whatever portion of the
plan you can to the best of your ability.

Your desire to be a wife and mother may
dnot have its total fulfillment here, but
it will in His time as you live in faith and
obedience to merit it.23 Don’t be lured
away from the plan of our God24 to the
ways of the world, where motherhood is
belittled, femininity is decried, and the
divinely established role of wife and
mother is mocked. Let the world go its
way. You follow the plan of the Lord for
the greatest measure of true, eternal
achievement and the fullest happiness.
The lack of promised blessings for which
you qualify will be fully rectified in this
life or in the next.25

Gratitude for what women are and
do

I often interview strong priesthood
leaders. When these men speak of their
wives, it is with deep tenderness and
obvious appreciation. Often, tears flow.
Their comments include, "She is more
spiritual, purer, and more committed
than I," "She motivates me to be a better
person," "She is the strength of my life,"
and "I couldn’t do it without her." As a
woman, please don’t judge how worth-
while, needed, and loved you are by our
inert ability to express our true feelings.
Your divinely conferred trait of giving of
self without counting the cost leads you
to underestimate your own worth.

I humbly thank our Father in Heaven for
His daughters, you who were willing to
come to earth to live under such uncer-
tain circumstances. Most men could not
handle the uncertainties you are asked to
live with. Social customs require that you
wait to be asked for marriage. You are
expected to go with your husband
wherever his employment or call takes
him. Your environment and neigh-
The blessing of nurturing children and caring for a husband often is intermingled with many routine tasks. But you do all of these things willingly because you are a woman. Generally you have no idea of how truly wonderful and capable you are, how very much appreciated and loved, or how desperately needed, for most men don’t tell you as completely and as often as needed.

How to attain happiness

How can you receive the greatest happiness and blessings from this earth experience?

• Learn the doctrinal foundation of the great plan of happiness by studying the scriptures, pondering their content, and praying to understand them. Carefully study and use the proclamation of the First Presidency and the Twelve on the family.26 It was inspired of the Lord.

• Listen to the voice of current and past prophets. Their declarations are inspired. You may verify that counsel in your own mind and heart by praying about it as it applies to your special circumstances. Ask the Lord to confirm your choices, and accept accountability for them.

• Obey the inner feelings that come as promptings from the Holy Ghost. Those feelings are engendered by your righteous thoughts and acts and your determination to seek the will of the Lord and to live it.

• When needed, seek counsel and guidance from parents and your priesthood leaders.

A choice mother wrote: “How did the pioneer women . . . respond to the challenges of their day? They listened to their prophet’s voice and followed him because they knew he spoke the will of the Lord. They met the challenges and reaped great blessings because of their faith and obedience. Their first priorities were not security, nice homes, or an easy life. . . . No sacrifice was too great for them to make for their precious husbands and children.”27

I obviously don’t know what it feels like to be a woman, but I do know what it is to love one with all of my heart and soul. I constantly express to the Lord overflowing gratitude for the unending blessings that flow to our children and so abundantly to me from the life of one of His precious daughters. I want the happiness we have found together to be yours. The


Notes

3. 2 Nephi 11:5.
8. See 2 Nephi 9:8–9; Alma 12:4–5; Helaman 2:8; 3 Nephi 1:16; Doctrine and Covenants 10:12, 23.
13. Moses 5:10; italics added.
15. See Moses 5:1.
17. Moses 5:8.
18. See Moses 5:12.