A “One and Only”? Choosing Your Family in the Preexistence?

WHAT ABOUT THE BELIEF IN A “ONE AND ONLY,” OR “SOUL-MATES” CHosen IN THE PREMORTAL LIFE?

Joseph Fielding Smith said: “We have no scriptural justification for the belief that we had the privilege of choosing our parents and our life companions in the spirit world. This belief has been advocated by some, and it’s possible that in some instances it is true, but it would require too great a stretch of the imagination to believe it to be so in all, or even in the majority of cases” (Joseph Fielding Smith, Way to Perfection, 44).

Spencer W. Kimball, “Oneness in Marriage,” Ensign, March 1977, 3–5. (From a 7 September 1976 address at Brigham Young University. The full text is published in a Deseret Book Company book, Marriage and Divorce.) “Soul mates” are fiction and an illusion; and while every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD

First, you were and are a “beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents,” created in their image. “Before the world was made” (D&C 49:17), you were “in the beginning with God” (D&C 93:29), the Father of your spirit (see Hebrews 12:9). “For in him we live, and move, and have our being . . . For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28). In 1909, the First Presidency stated: “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity” (First Presidency statement, Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, “The Origin of Man,” in Improvement Era, Nov. 1909, 75-81). Presided over by a Heavenly Father, you were part of a perfect, heavenly home, a royal family. You possessed “a [unique] pre-existent, spiritual personality” (see statement of the First Presidency, Improvement Era, Mar. 1912, 417; see also Jeremiah 1:5) of which gender was an essential part. “Now, this is the truth,” said President George Q. Cannon, “we humble people, who feel ourselves sometimes so worthless, so good-for-nothing, we are not so worthless as we think. There is not one of us but what God’s love has been expended upon. There is not one of us that He has not cared for and caressed. There is not one of us that He has not desired to save and that He has not devised means to save” (Gospel Truth, Vol. 1, 1-2).

Understanding your heavenly heritage, your kinship to God, can inspire and encourage you as you face the challenges of mortality and as you try to understand and complete your mission on this earth. President David O. McKay said: “An assurance that God is our Father, into whose presence we can go for comfort and guidance, is a never-failing source of comfort” (Secrets of a Happy Life, 114). “With truth as our guide . . . we may mingle with the consciousness of our kinship with the Infinite, and all the petty trials, sorrows, and sufferings of this life will fade away as temporary, harmless visions seen in a dream” (McKay, Improvement Era, June 1969, 117). The knowledge that you are a beloved spirit son or daughter of a living Heavenly Father can help you in other ways. President Thomas S. Monson said that it can increase your “capacity to face trouble with courage, disappointment — with cheerfulness, and triumph with humility. . . . [You] cannot sincerely hold this conviction without experiencing a profound new sense of strength and power, even the strength to live the commandments of God, the power to resist the temptations of Satan” (Ensign, July 1973, 43).

Elder Boyd K. Packer said: “What could inspire one to purity and worthiness more than to possess a spiritual confirmation that we are the children of God? What could inspire a more lofty regard for oneself, or engender more love for mankind?” (Ensign, Nov. 1984, 68). That knowledge, Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, acts as a “potent antidepressant . . . [that] can strengthen each of us to make righteous choices and to seek the best that is within us. . . . [It can give us] self-respect and motivation to move against the problems of life” (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 25).

I ACCEPTED MY HEAVENLY FATHER’S PLAN

Second, “in the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan.” Over the eons of time in which you lived in premortality, you came to know and love your Heavenly Father; you were familiar with His character, attributes, and perfections; and you worshiped Him as your Eternal Father. Knowing that He was and is omniscient, omnipotent, and -- in spirit, power, and influence -- omnipresent, gave you confidence in His plan of happiness and in your potential to become like Him. You accepted His perfect plan of happiness. Then when Satan offered a counterfeit proposal for salvation, and the war in heaven commenced, you, along with all the other righteous spirits, exercised your agency in support of Heavenly Father’s plan, thus keeping your first estate (see Dallin H. Oaks, Ensign, Nov. 1993, 72). As a participant in that premortal “war of conflicting ideas” (Russell M. Nelson, Ensign, May 1989, 69), [you] overcame [Lucifer] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of [your] testimony” (Revelation 12:11). The Lord asked Job: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons [and daughters] of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7). Like Job, you were part of that premortal exultant group who demonstrated the strength of their testimonies and rejoiced over the prospects of coming to earth.

FOR MY FAITHFULNESS, I WAS GRANTED A SECOND ESTATE

Third, by virtue of your faithfulness in premortality, you were given the privilege of a “second estate,” and the opportunity to be “added upon” (see Abraham 3:26) That is, you came to earth to “obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience.” The purpose of both the physical body and earthly experience is to help you “progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [your] divine destiny as an heir of eternal life.” Mortality is a proving ground. You are here to prove your willingness to “do all things whatsoever the Lord [your] God shall command [you]” (Abraham 3:25) The physical body, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once said, is “the great prize of mortal life” (“Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments,” BYU Today, June 1988, 23; originally delivered at a BYU devotional assembly on January 12,
1988). That is true because “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:45) and “spirit and element inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:33). The inseparable connection of the spirit and body occurs through the resurrection as an unconditional gift of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Because you were faithful in premortality, your spirit was added upon with a physical body, thus qualifying you for resurrection with an immortal body that will never again be subject to physical pain, sickness, or death. A “fulness of joy,” or exaltation, does not come as an unconditional gift. That blessing is predicated upon your faithfulness to covenants and commandments and made possible only through Christ (see D&C 101:36). Forever denied the blessing of a physical body and seeking to prevent the fulness of joy, Satan seeks to capture and enslave our mortal tabernacles. Elder Melvin J. Ballard taught that “all the assaults that [Satan] . . . will make to capture us, will be through the . . . lusts, appetites, [and] the ambitions of the flesh” (“The Struggle for the Soul,” 178). Thus, part of the test of mortality is to see if your body can be mastered by the spirit that dwells within it. Additional proving occurs as we face tests of our discipleship and trials of our faith. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that, in premor-tality, “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” (Ensign, Nov. 1993, 72). Hence, at the time of your mortal birth, a veil of forgetfulness was drawn across your spirit, necessitating that you walk by faith on this earth.

I HAVE A DIVINE NATURE AND A DIVINE DESTINY

Fourth, as a “beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents . . . [you possess] a divine nature and [have a divine] destiny.” Regarding your divine nature, the First Presidency stated: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity endowed with divine attributes” (First Presidency statement, Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, “The Origin of Man,” in Improvement Era, Nov. 1909, 75-81, italics added). President Lorenzo Snow taught that we possess “the same capabilities, powers, and faculties that our Father possesses, although in an infantile state” (Journal of Discourses, Vol.14, 300-301, January 1872, italics added). Only by faith and obedience to God’s laws can we develop those embryonic attributes to maturity and achieve our divine destiny to become like Him. In a fallen world, with a fallen body that is subject to temptation, that is not easy to do. In fact, without the Savior, it would be impossible. But by following the perfect example He set while in mortality and through the mercy and grace available in His atoning sacrifice, we can “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Our highest aspiration is to become like God. “When men correctly understand and have faith in the true and living God,” taught President Marion G. Romney, “they strive to develop within themselves his virtues. He becomes the lodestar of their lives. To emulate him is their highest aspiration. . . . [By becoming like Him they] drive out of their hearts selfishness, greed, lust, hate, contentions, and war. Happiness, contentment, joy, and peace naturally follow” (Conference Report, Apr., 1970, 67).

The opportunity to achieve our divine destiny, to become like God, is available to all of Heavenly Father’s children. The scriptures teach that God is “no respecter of persons” (see Moroni 8:12; D&C 1:35; 38:16; Acts 10:34) and that “he inviteth all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female [ads. Hed or otherwise] . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). This principle is illustrated by the following statement from the Handbook of Instructions: “Children who were not born in the covenant can become part of an eternal family by being sealed to their natural or adoptive parents. These children receive the same right to blessings as if they had been born in the covenant” (75). Further, our Heavenly Father extends equally to any who are obedient to His laws, the blessings of personal revelation, wisdom, knowledge, and mercy through the atonement. “But,” one might ask, “if God is no respecter of persons, then why are some of His children born under circumstances that seem to be more favorable than the circumstances in which others of His children are born?”

Part of the answer to that question lies in understanding the omniscience of God. The Lord told Jeremiah: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). As spirit sons and daughters of God, He knew our strengths, our weaknesses, our capabilities, and our limitations. He intimately familiar with our attitudes and person-ality. Based on that knowledge He “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of [our] habitation” in mortality (Acts 17:26). That is, He determined the when and the where of our mortal birth both as a reward for our faithfulness in premortality and as the means of best helping us to achieve our divine destiny. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “All have come or will come to earth at an appointed time, in a specified place, to live among a designated people. In all of this there is no chance” (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, 512).

To be born in this last dispensation, the dispensation of the fulness of times, is one of the greatest blessings, and responsibilities, a person could receive. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “For nearly six thousand years, God has held you in reserve to make your appearance in the final days before the Second Coming. Every previous gospel dispensation has drifted into apostasy, but ours will not... God has saved for the final inning some of his strongest children, who will help bear off the kingdom triumphantly. And that is where you come in, for you are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God... All through the ages the prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes on us. Make no mistake about it— you are a marked generation” (“In His Steps,” Speeches of the Year, 1980, 59-60). You were one of the “choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work, including the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead ... Even before you were born, you, with many others, received [your] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord.
beloved spirit daughter [or son] of Heavenly Father who is man. "Regardless of your marital status, your age, or the calling, to "minister to the inhabitants of the world" the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, were foreordained to that fulfilled through his lineage in these latter days" (see promise that all the earth will be blessed by the seed of God's noble and great spirits, held in reserve to come to people to Christ. Elder Russell M. Nelson said: "You are one particularly those of Ephraim, have a mission to help bring mission. Any who are part of the seed of Abraham, and sanctified and ordained, or rather foreordained to a specific mission. Like Jeremiah, through faithful from the premortal life were chosen or foreordained to specific missions on this earth. Righteousness, the majority of the candidates for celestial glory" ("The Three Degrees of Glory," as cited in Melvin J. Ballard, Crusader of Righteousness, 218–19). "It would seem very clear, then," President Harold B. Lee taught, "that those born to the lineage of Jacob ... were born into the most illustrious lineage of any of those who came upon the earth as mortal beings. All these rewards were seemingly promised, or foreordained, before the world was. Surely these matters must have been determined by the kind of lives we had lived in that premortal spirit world. Some may question these assumptions, but at the same time they will accept without any question the belief that each one of us will be judged when we leave this earth according to his or her deeds during our lives here in mortality. Isn't it just as reasonable to believe that what we have received here in this earth [life] was given to each of us according to the merits of our conduct before we came here?" (Ensign, Jan. 1974, 5).

In addition to the blessings of being born in this last dispensation and being part of the lineage of Abraham, the faithful from the premortal life were chosen or foreordained to specific missions on this earth. Like Jeremiah, through your premortal demonstration of faith and obedience, combined with the knowledge God had of your capabilities, you were prepared to come to the earth, having been sanctified and ordained, or rather foreordained to a specific mission. Any who are part of the seed of Abraham, and particularly those of Ephraim, have a mission to help bring people to Christ. Elder Russell M. Nelson said: "You are one of God’s noble and great spirits, held in reserve to come to earth at this time (see D&C 86:8–11). In your premortal life you were appointed to help prepare the world for the great gathering of souls that will precede the Lord’s second coming. You are one of a covenant people. You are an heir to the gathering of souls that will precede the Lord’s second coming. (Ensign, Nov. 1990, 73). Those who hold the priesthood in mortality, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, were foreordained to that calling, to “minister to the inhabitants of the world” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 365). Besides your mission to help gather Israel, you may have also been foreordained to some other specific responsibility to assist our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in their important work of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. “Regardless of your marital status, your age, or the language you speak,” said Sister Sheri L. Dew, “you are a beloved spirit daughter [or son] of Heavenly Father who is destined to play a critical part in the onward movement of the gospel kingdom” (Ensign, Nov. 1997, 93; given as part of her address in the General Relief Society meeting of 27 September 1997).

“But,” you might ask, “what about the particular family I was born into or the family I was adopted into? Was that part of God’s plan for me?” Elder Alvin R. Dyer said: “The very nature of each person ... would require that the lineage of birth fit the caliber of their person... Equality of birth is not actually possible, because there is no equality of all spirit persons. Thus to bring about birth into mortality there must have been a plan to calibrate birth in a lineage and manner best suited to the need of potential growth and development in the Second Estate” (The Meaning of Truth, 23–24). Because He is omniscient, God knew where each of us would have the best opportunity to grow and reach our full potential as an heir of eternal life. Each of us is free to choose how we will respond to the mortal assignments we are given, free “to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26). Of Jesus, born into the most humble of circumstances in Bethlehem, Isaiah wrote: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:2–3; Mosiah 14:2–3). Still, Jesus became “Lord of lords, and King of kings” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelations 17:14; 19:16). Abraham, who became known as “the father of the faithful” (D&C 138:41), and the “founder of the covenant race” (Bible Dictionary, 601), was born into an idolatrous home. Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth (see Numbers 12:3), and of whom it was said “there arose not a prophet since in Israel” (Exodus 34:10) like him, was born into Israelite bondage.

In contrast, raised in the righteous home of Lehi and Sariah, murmuring Laman and Lemuel, were nonetheless "slow to remember the Lord [their] God . . . [and] were past feeling" (1 Nephi 17:45). Noah, "a just man and perfect in his generations [and who] walked with God, still lost all of his posterity, save his three sons and their wives. Cain, called Master Mahan," who gloried in his own wickedness (Moses 5:31) and became the first murderer was the son of Adam, the "Ancient of Days," (see D&C 116:1) the "archangel," (D&C 107:54), the father and patriarch of the whole human race. From these and many other scriptural examples we learn that our choices matter and that neither the circumstances of our birth nor the family into which we are born guarantee or preclude the achievement of our divine destiny. God, who is omnipotent, has the power to save all who exercise their agency to come unto Him and righteously follow His plan. Regardless of our birth circumstances, our foreordination, or anything else, salvation comes to each of us only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance from sin, and baptism by immersion in water for the remission of sins performed by one in authority. The Proclamation on the Family states: “The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.” Regardless of birth circumstances, those blessings are accessible to all who are faithful. No blessing of God will be denied to the worthy.

Now, perhaps with a desire to better understand who you are and to learn something of your genetic inheritance from
your biological parents, you may wonder if it is appropriate or advisable to seek out your birth mother and father. It is understandable that you would be curious about your birth parents and perhaps desirous to know their identities. The First Presidency has advised: “Local Church leaders should discourage adopted children and their adoptive parents from seeking to identify the children’s natural parents. However, when adopted children have genetic or medical problems, the family may seek medical information about the natural parents but should be discouraged from seeking their identities” (Handbook of Instructions, p. 147).

CONCLUSION

All of God’s children are precious in His sight. “Man and God are of the same race,” said Elder Bruce R. McConkie” (Mormon Doctrine, 465–66.). “What a piece of work is man!” wrote William Shakespeare, “how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!” (Hamlet, Act 2). David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1) sang: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps. 8:4–5). Indeed, God is mindful of man. “Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, even so will he clothe you, if ye are of little faith. Wherefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (3 Nephi 13:29–33).

Man, Elder Spencer W. Kimball said, is God’s “supreme creation” (Improvement Era, Dec. 1967, 52). Or, as Elder James E. Talmage so eloquently articulated: “What is man in this boundless setting of sublime splendor? I answer you potentially now, actually to be, he is greater and grander, more precious in the arithmetic of God than all the planets and the suns of space. For him they were created. They are the handiwork of God. Man is his son. In this world man is given dominion over a few things. It is his privilege to achieve supremacy over many things. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Incomprehensibly grand as are the physical creations of the earth and of space, they have been brought into existence as a means to an end, and are necessary to the realization of the supreme purpose which in the words of the Creator is thus declared: ‘For behold, this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’” (as quoted by Hugh B. Brown, in Improvement Era, June 1969, 31–32).

“Many people think of [love] as mere physical attraction and they casually speak of ‘falling in love’ and ‘love at first sight.’ This may be Hollywood’s version and the interpretation of those who write love songs and love fiction. True love is not wrapped in such flimsy material. One might become immediately attracted to another individual, but love is far more than physical attraction” (Spencer W. Kimball, Faith Precedes the Miracle, 157.)