

The Great Plan

By President Dallin H. Oaks
First Counselor in the First Presidency

We who know God's plan and who have covenanted to participate have a clear responsibility to teach these truths.

Even in the midst of unique trials and challenges, we are truly blessed! This general conference has given us an outpouring of the riches and joy of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have rejoiced in the vision of the Father and the Son that commenced the Restoration. We have been reminded of the miraculous coming forth of the Book of Mormon, whose central purpose is to testify of Jesus Christ and His doctrine. We have been renewed with the joyful reality of revelation—to prophets and to us personally. We have heard precious testimonies of the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ and of His literal Resurrection. And we have been taught other truths of the fulness of His gospel revealed to Joseph Smith after God the Father declared to that newly called prophet: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

We have been affirmed in our knowledge of the restoration of the priesthood and its keys. We have been renewed in our determination to have the Lord's restored Church known by its proper name, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And we have been invited to join in fasting and prayer to minimize the present and future effects of a devastating worldwide pandemic. This morning we were inspired by the Lord's living prophet presenting an historic proclamation of the Restoration. We affirm its declaration that “those who prayerfully study the message of the Restoration and act in faith will be blessed to gain their own witness of its divinity and of its purpose to prepare the world for the promised Second Coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”¹

The Plan

All of this is part of a divine plan whose purpose is to enable the children of God to be exalted and become like Him. Referred to in the scriptures as the “great plan of happiness,” “the plan of redemption,” and the “plan of salvation” (Alma 42:8, 11, 5), that plan—revealed in the Restoration—began with a Council in Heaven. As spirits, we desired to achieve the eternal life enjoyed by our heavenly parents. At that point we had progressed as far as we could without a mortal experience in a physical body. To provide that experience, God the Father planned to create this earth. In the planned mortal life, we would be soiled by sin as we faced the opposition necessary for our spiritual growth. We would also become subject to physical death. To reclaim us from death and sin, our Heavenly Father's plan

would provide a Savior. His Resurrection would redeem all from death, and His atoning sacrifice would pay the price necessary for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions prescribed to promote our growth. This Atonement of Jesus Christ is central to the Father's plan.

In the Council in Heaven, all the spirit children of God were introduced to the Father's plan, including its mortal consequences and trials, its heavenly helps, and its glorious destiny. We saw the end from the beginning. All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father's plan and fought for it in the heavenly contest that followed. Many also made covenants with the Father concerning what they would do in mortality. In ways that have not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world have influenced our circumstances in mortality.

Mortality and Spirit World

I will now summarize some of the principal elements of the Father's plan as they affect us during our mortal journeys and in the spirit world that follows.

The purpose of mortal life and the postmortal growth that can follow it is for the offspring of God to become like He is. This is Heavenly Father's desire for all His children. To achieve this joyful destiny, eternal laws require that we must become purified beings through the Atonement of Jesus Christ so we can dwell in the presence of the Father and the Son and enjoy the blessings of exaltation. As the Book of Mormon teaches, He invites "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; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33; see also Alma 5:49).

The divine plan for us to become what we are destined to become requires us to make choices to reject the evil opposition that tempts mortals to act contrary to God's commandments and His plan. It also requires that we be subject to other mortal opposition, such as from the sins of others or from some defects of birth. Sometimes our needed growth is achieved better by suffering and adversity than by comfort and tranquility. And none of this mortal opposition could achieve its eternal purpose if divine intervention relieved us from all the adverse consequences of mortality.

The plan reveals our destiny in eternity, the purpose and conditions of our journey in mortality, and the heavenly helps we will receive. The commandments of God warn us against straying into dangerous circumstances. The teachings of inspired leaders guide our path and give assurances that promote our eternal journey.

God's plan gives us four great assurances to assist our journey through mortality. All are given to us through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the centerpiece of the plan. The *first* assures us that through His suffering for the sins of which we repent, we can be cleansed of those sins. Then the merciful final judge will "remember them no more" (Doctrine and Covenants 58:42).

Second, as part of our Savior's Atonement, He took upon Him all other mortal infirmities. This allows us to receive divine help and strength to bear the inevitable burdens of mortality, personal and general, such as war and pestilence. The Book of Mormon provides our clearest scriptural description of this essential power of the Atonement. The Savior took upon Him "the pains and the sicknesses [and infirmities] of his people. ... He will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:11–12).

Third, the Savior, through His infinite Atonement, revokes the finality of death and gives us the joyful assurance that all of us will be resurrected. The Book of Mormon teaches, "This restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame" (Alma 11:44).

We celebrate the reality of the Resurrection in this Easter season. This gives us the perspective and strength to endure the mortal challenges faced by each of us and those we love, such things as the physical, mental, or emotional deficiencies we acquire at birth or experience during our mortal lives. Because of the Resurrection, we know that these mortal deficiencies are only temporary!

The restored gospel assures us that the Resurrection can include the opportunity to be with our family members—husband, wife, children, and parents. This is a powerful encouragement for us to fulfill our family responsibilities in mortality. It helps us live together in love in this life in anticipation of joyful reunions and associations in the next.

Fourth and finally, modern revelation teaches us that our progress need not conclude with the end of mortality. Little has been revealed about this important assurance. We are told that this life is the time to prepare to meet God and that we should not procrastinate our repentance (see Alma 34:32–33). Still, we are taught that in the spirit world the gospel is preached even to "the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth" (Doctrine and Covenants 138:29) and that those taught there are capable of repentance in advance of the Final Judgment (see verses 31–34, 57–59).

Here are some other fundamentals of our Heavenly Father's plan:

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ gives us a unique perspective on the subjects of chastity, marriage, and the bearing of children. It teaches that marriage according to God's plan is necessary for accomplishing the purpose of God's plan, to provide the divinely appointed 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" (Doctrine and Covenants 49:15–16). In this, His plan, of course, runs counter to some strong worldly forces in law and custom.

The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given His children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment to Adam and Eve, but another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse. 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 emphasis the restored gospel places on this law of chastity is because of the purpose of our procreative powers in the accomplishment of God's plan.

What Next?

During this 200th anniversary of the First Vision, which initiated the Restoration, we know the Lord's plan and we are encouraged by two centuries of its blessings through His restored Church. In this year of 2020, we have what is popularly called 20/20 vision for the events of the past.

As we look to the future, however, our vision is far less sure. We know that two centuries after the Restoration, the spirit world now includes many mortally experienced workers to accomplish the preaching that occurs there. We also know that we now have many more temples to perform the ordinances of eternity for those who repent and embrace the Lord's gospel on either side of the veil of death. All of this furthers our Heavenly Father's plan. God's love is so great that, except for the few who deliberately become sons of perdition, He has provided a destiny of glory for all of His children (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:43).

We know that the Savior will return and that there will be a millennium of peaceful reign to wrap up the mortal part of God's plan. We also know that there will be different resurrections, of the just and the unjust, with the final judgment of each person always following his or her resurrection.

We will be judged according to our actions, the desires of our hearts, and the kind of person we have become. This judgment will cause all of the children of God to proceed to a kingdom of glory for which their obedience has qualified them and where they will be comfortable. The judge of all this is our Savior, Jesus Christ (see John 5:22; 2 Nephi 9:41). His omniscience gives Him a perfect knowledge of all of our acts and desires, both those unrepented or unchanged and those repented or righteous. Therefore, after His judgment we will all confess "that his judgments are just" (Mosiah 16:1).

In conclusion, I share the conviction that has come to me from many letters and by reviewing many requests to return to the Church after name removal or apostasy. Many of our members do not fully understand this plan of salvation, which answers most questions about the doctrine and inspired policies of the restored Church. We who know God's plan and who have covenanted to participate have a clear responsibility to teach these truths and do all that we can to further them for others and in our own circumstances in mortality. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, who makes it all possible, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

