

# God Loves His Children

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Brothers and sisters, I rejoice with you in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I bring with me love from the resilient members in the Philippines and say, on their behalf, *Mabuhay!*

On this Easter morning, I testify of the living Christ, that He rose from the dead and that His love for us and for our Father in Heaven is pure and eternal. Today, I desire to focus on the love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ for all, which is manifest through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

When the prophet Nephi was asked by an angel about his knowledge of God, Nephi responded simply, “I know that he loveth his children” (see 1 Nephi 11:16–17).

A verse from the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ powerfully describes the Savior’s perfect love: “And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; ... they scourge him, ... they smite him, ... they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men” (1 Nephi 19:9). The Savior’s universal love is the motivating force behind all that He does. We know that it is the same love our Father in Heaven has for us, because the Savior humbly taught that He and the Father “are one” (see John 10:30; 17:20–23).

How, then, do we reciprocate and show our gratitude for Their universal love? The Savior taught us with this simple, all-encompassing invitation: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

President Dallin H. Oaks taught, “God’s universal and perfect love is shown in all the blessings of His gospel plan, including the fact that His choicest blessings are reserved for those who obey His laws.”<sup>1</sup>

I would like to share three specific ways our Heavenly Father manifests His love for us, His children.

## First, Relationships with God and Family Manifest His Love

Our most valuable relationships are with the Father and the Son and with our own families because our ties to them are eternal. The great plan of happiness is a wonderful manifestation of God's love for us. With eyes riveted on God's plan, we willingly choose to carve out soil and rocks within us that support selfish desires and replace them with foundations that build eternal relationships. In a sense, this can be called "spiritual excavation." In performing our spiritual excavation, we must first seek after God and call upon Him (see Jeremiah 29:12–13).

Seeking after Him and calling upon Him will begin the process and provide space to build and strengthen our eternal relationships. It broadens our spiritual view and helps us focus on changing what we can control rather than on fears outside our control. Studying the life and ministry of our Savior, Jesus Christ, will enable us to view these other concerns with an eternal perspective.

Distractions can sometimes prevent us from experiencing God's love in our family relationships and activities. A mother, feeling that gadgets were taking over her family relationships, came up with a solution. At the dinner table and at other family times, she just calls out, "Phones on the deck; let us have face time." She says that this is the new norm for their family and that it strengthens their relationship as a family when they have real face time. They now enjoy quality *Come, Follow Me* discussions together as a family.

## Second, He Manifests His Love to His Children by Calling Prophets

Our current world is deluged in a "war of words and tumult of opinions" (Joseph Smith—History 1:10). Paul reminds us that "there are ... so many kinds of voices in the world" (1 Corinthians 14:10). Which of all the voices rise clearly and meaningfully above the fray? It is the voice of God's prophets, seers, and revelators.

I remember vividly, after undergoing surgery in 2018 and upon returning to work, I was in the parking garage at Church headquarters. Suddenly, I heard the voice of President Russell M. Nelson calling, "Taniela, Taniela." I ran toward him, and he asked how I was doing.

I said, "I am recovering very well, President Nelson."

He gave me counsel and a hug. I truly felt the personal ministry of a prophet to the "one."

President Nelson has traveled to many nations of the earth. In my mind, he is not just ministering to thousands, but he is ministering to thousands of "ones." In doing so, he shares the love God has for all His children.

Recently, the words of President Nelson have been a source of strength and inspiration to the people of the Philippines. As with every country in the world, during 2020 the Philippines was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a volcanic eruption, earthquakes, strong typhoons, and devastating floods.

But like a pillar of light shining through dark clouds of fear, loneliness, and despair came the words of the prophet. They included the call for worldwide fasting and prayer and counsel to move forward despite the pandemic. He invited us to make our homes personal sanctuaries of faith. He called upon Latter-day Saints everywhere to respect all of God's children and to let God prevail in our lives.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise stirring were President Nelson's recent video testimony about the power of gratitude and his concluding prayer, which resonated across the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> In the province of Leyte, the video was played during an interfaith event, and it was also mentioned as part of a priest's homily. The Philippines, along with the entire world, are so blessed to feel God's love through the words of His chosen prophet.

## Third, Chastening Can Be a Manifestation of God's Love for His Children

Sometimes God manifests His love by chastening us. It is a way of reminding us that He loves us and that He knows who we are. His promised blessing of peace is open to all those who courageously walk the covenant path and are willing to receive correction.

When we recognize the chastening and are willing recipients, it becomes a spiritual surgery. Who likes surgery, by the way? But to those who need it and are willing to receive it, it can be lifesaving. The Lord chastens whom He loves. The scriptures tell us so (see Hebrews 12:5–11; Helaman 12:3; Doctrine and Covenants 1:27; 95:1). That chastening, or spiritual surgery, will bring about needed change in our lives. We will realize, brothers and sisters, that it refines and purifies our inner vessels.

Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration, was chastened. After Joseph lost the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript, the Lord both corrected and showed love by saying: "You should not have feared man more than God. ... You should have been faithful. ... Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen. ... Remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent" (Doctrine and Covenants 3:7–10).

In 2016, while serving a mission in Little Rock, Arkansas, I asked Brother Cava to deliver a package to my older sister, who lived on an island in Fiji. His response was not something that I had anticipated. "President Wakolo," he groaned, "your sister passed away and was buried 10 days ago." I had self-pity and even felt a little upset that my family did not even bother to let me know.

The next day, while my wife was teaching missionaries, this thought penetrated my soul: "Taniela, all these experiences are for your own good and development. You have been teaching and sharing your testimony about the Atonement of Jesus Christ; now live accordingly." I was reminded that "happy is the man whom God

correct[s]: therefore [we should] despise not ... the chastening of the Almighty” (Job 5:17). It was a spiritual surgery for me, and the outcome was immediate.

Just as I was contemplating the experience, I was called upon to give my concluding thoughts to the discussion. Among other things, I shared the lessons that I had just been taught: one, I had just been chastened by the Holy Ghost, and I loved it because I was the only one who heard it; two, because of the Savior’s sacrifice and ransom, I will no longer refer to my challenges as trials and tribulations but as my learning experiences; and three, because of His perfect and sinless life, I will no longer refer to my shortcomings and lack of abilities as weaknesses but rather as my development opportunities. This experience helped me know that God chastens us because He loves us.

I conclude. Our Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, show Their love by making it possible for us to have eternal relationships with Them and our family members, by calling modern-day prophets to teach and minister to us, and by chastening us to help us learn and grow. “God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son,”<sup>4</sup> our resurrected Lord, even the living Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.