



By Elder Karl D. Hirst  
*Of the Seventy*

## God's Favourite

*Being filled with God's love shields us in life's storms but also makes the happy moments happier.*

Before I begin, I should tell you that two of my children have passed out whilst speaking at pulpits, and I have never felt more connected to them than in this moment. I've got more on my mind than just the trapdoor.

Our family has six children, who sometimes tease one another that they are the favourite child. Each has different reasons for being preferred. Our love for each of our children is pure and fulfilling and complete. We could not love any one of them any more than another—with each child's birth came the most beautiful expansion of our love. I most relate to my Heavenly Father's love for me through the love that I feel for my children.

As they each rehearse their claims to be the most loved child, you might have thought that our family had never had an untidy bedroom. The sense of blemishes in the relationship between parent and child is diminished with a focus on love.

At some point, perhaps because I can see that we are heading toward an inevitable family riot, I'll say something like, "OK, you have worn me down, but I am not going to announce it; you know which one of you is my favourite." My goal is that each one of the six feels victorious and all-out war is avoided—at least until next time!

In his Gospel, John describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved,"<sup>1</sup> as if that arrangement were somehow unique. I like to think that this was because John felt so completely loved by Jesus. Nephi gave me a similar sense when he wrote, "I glory in

my Jesus."<sup>2</sup> Of course, the Saviour isn't Nephi's any more than He is John's, and yet the personal nature of Nephi's relationship with "his" Jesus led him to that tender description.

Isn't it wonderful that there are times when we can feel so fully and personally noticed and loved? Nephi can call Him "his" Jesus, and so can we. Our Saviour's love is the "highest, noblest, strongest kind of love,"<sup>3</sup> and He provides until we are "filled."<sup>4</sup> Divine love never runs dry, and we are each a cherished favourite. God's love is where, as circles on a Venn diagram, we all overlap. Whichever parts of us seem different, His love is where we find togetherness.

Is it any surprise that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love those around us?<sup>5</sup> When I see

people showing Christlike love for one another, it feels to me as if that love contains more than just *their* love; it is love that also has divinity in it.<sup>6</sup> When we love one another in this way, as completely and fully as we can, heaven gets involved too.<sup>7</sup>

So if someone we care about seems distant from a sense of divine love, we can follow this pattern—by doing things that bring us closer to God ourselves and then doing things that bring us closer to them—an unspoken beckoning to come to Christ.

I wish I could sit down with you and ask you what circumstances cause you to feel God's love. Which verses of scripture, which particular acts of service? Where would you be? What music? In whose company? General conference is a rich place to learn about connecting with heaven's love.

But perhaps you feel a long way from the love of God. Maybe there is a chorus of voices of discouragement and darkness that weighs into your thoughts, messages telling you that you are too wounded and confused, too weak and overlooked, too different or disoriented to warrant heavenly love in any real way. If you hear those ideas, then please hear this: those voices are just wrong. We can confidently disregard brokenness in any way disqualifying us from heavenly love—every time we sing the hymn that reminds us that



Mexico



India

our beloved and flawless Saviour chose to be “bruised, broken, [and] torn for us,”<sup>8</sup> every time we take broken bread. Surely Jesus removes all shame from the broken. Through His brokenness, He became perfect, and He can make us perfect in spite of our brokenness.<sup>9</sup> Broken, lonely, torn, and bruised He was—and we may feel we are—but separated from the love of God we are not. “Broken people, perfect love,”<sup>10</sup> as the song goes.

You might know something secret about yourself that makes you feel unlovable. However right you might be about what you know about yourself, you are wrong to think that you have put yourself beyond the reach of God’s love. We are sometimes cruel and impatient toward ourselves in ways that we could never imagine being toward anyone else. There is much for us to do in this life, but self-loathing and shameful self-condemnation are not on that list. However misshapen *we* might feel *we* are, *His* arms are not shortened.<sup>11</sup> No. They are always long enough to “[reach our] reaching”<sup>12</sup> and embrace each one of us.

When we don’t feel the warmth of divine love, it hasn’t gone away. God’s own words are that “the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but [His] kindness shall not depart from [us].”<sup>13</sup> So, just to be clear, the idea that God has stopped loving should be so far down the list of possible explanations in life that we don’t get to it until after the mountains have left and the hills are gone!

I really enjoy this symbolism of mountains being evidence of the certainty of God’s love. That powerful symbolism weaves into accounts of those who go to the mountains to receive revelation<sup>14</sup> and Isaiah’s description of “the mountain of the Lord’s house” being “established in the top of the mountains.”<sup>15</sup> The house of the Lord is the home of our most precious covenants and a place for us all to retreat<sup>16</sup> and sink deeply into the evidence of our Father’s love for us.<sup>17</sup> I have also enjoyed the comfort that comes to my soul when I wrap myself more tightly in my baptismal covenant and find someone who is mourning a loss or grieving a disappointment and I try to help them hold and process their feelings.<sup>18</sup> Are these ways that we can become more immersed in the precious covenantal love *hesed*?<sup>19</sup>

So if God’s love does not leave us, why don’t we always feel it? Just to manage your expectations: I don’t know. But *being* loved is definitely not the same as *feeling* loved, and I have a few thoughts that might help you as you pursue your answers to that question.

Perhaps you are wrestling with grief, depression, betrayal, loneliness, disappointment, or other powerful intrusion into your ability to feel God’s love for you. If so, these things can dull or suspend our ability to feel as we might otherwise feel. For a season at least, perhaps you will not be able to *feel* His love, and knowledge will have to suffice. But I wonder if you could

experiment—patiently—with different ways of expressing and receiving divine love. Can you take a step back from whatever is in front of you and maybe another step and another, until you see a wider landscape, wider and wider still if necessary, until you are literally “thinking celestial”<sup>20</sup> because you are looking at the stars and remembering worlds without number and through them their Creator?

Birdsong, feeling the sun or a breeze or rain on my skin, and times when nature puts my senses in awe of God—each has had a part in providing me with heavenly connection. Perhaps the comfort of faithful friends will help. Maybe music? Or serving? Have you kept a record or journal of times when your connection with God was clearer to you? Perhaps you could invite those you trust to share their sources of divine connection with you as you search for relief and understanding.

I wonder, if Jesus were to choose a place where you and He could meet, a private place where you would be able to have a singular focus on Him, might He choose your unique place of personal suffering, the place of your deepest need, where no one else can go? Somewhere you feel so lonely that you must truly be all alone but you aren’t quite, a place to which perhaps only He has travelled but actually has already prepared to meet you there when you arrive? If you are waiting for Him to come, might He already be there and within reach?

If you do feel filled with love in this season of your life, please try and hold on to it as effectively as a sieve holds water. Splash it everywhere you go. One of the miracles of the divine economy is that when we try to share Jesus’s love, we find ourselves being filled up in a variation of the principle that “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”<sup>21</sup>

Being filled with God’s love shields us in life’s storms but also makes the happy moments happier—our joyful days, when there is sunshine in the sky, are made even brighter by the sunshine in our souls.

Let’s become “rooted and

grounded”<sup>22</sup> in our Jesus and in His love. Let’s look for and treasure experiences of feeling His love and power in our lives. The joy of the gospel is available to all: not just the happy, not just the downcast. Joy is our purpose,<sup>23</sup> not the gift of our circumstances. We have every good reason to “rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.”<sup>24</sup> Let’s get full.<sup>25</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. John 21:20; see also John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7.
2. 2 Nephi 33:6; emphasis added.
3. Bible Dictionary, “Charity.”
4. In the Holy Land: Matthew 14:15–20. And in the Americas: 3 Nephi 27:16.
5. See Matthew 22:35–40.
6. See 1 John 4:12.
7. *For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices* asks that we “help [others] feel Heavenly Father’s love through [us]” ([2022], 12).

8. “Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and King,” *Hymns*, no. 181; see also Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 26:26.
9. President Russell M. Nelson explained: “Just prior to [the Savior’s] crucifixion, He said that on ‘the third day I *shall be perfected*’ [Luke 13:32; emphasis added]. Think of that! The sinless, errorless Lord—already perfect by our mortal standards—proclaimed his own state of perfection yet to be in the future. His *eternal* perfection would follow his resurrection and receipt of ‘all power . . . in heaven and in earth’ [Matthew 28:18; see also Doctrine and Covenants 93:2–23]” (“Perfection Pending,”





*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 87). The prophet Moroni invited all to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

10. “Savior of My Soul,” *2024 Youth Album*, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
11. See Isaiah 59:1.
12. “Where Can I Turn for Peace?,” *Hymns*, no. 129.
13. Isaiah 54:10.
14. For example, Nephi (see 1 Nephi 17:7), Moses (see Exodus 19:3), the eleven disciples (see Matthew 28:16), and the Saviour (see Matthew 14:23); see also Psalm 24:3.
15. Isaiah 2:2; see also verse 3. This symbolism causes me to consider further the Lord’s purposes in providing hundreds of temples for His children throughout the world.
16. My experience bears out the truth of President Nelson’s promise that the safest place to be living is inside our temple covenants (see “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 96).
17. President Nelson has assured us:  
“Time in the temple will help you to *think celestial* and to catch a vision of who you really are, who you can become, and the kind of life you can have forever. Regular temple worship will enhance the way you see yourself and how you fit into God’s magnificent plan. I promise you that . . .  
“ . . . Nothing will soothe your spirit *more* during times of pain. Nothing will open the heavens *more*. Nothing!” (“Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 121, 122).
18. See Mosiah 18:8–10, 13. “The baptismal covenant is a public witness to Heavenly Father of three specific commitments: to serve God, to keep His commandments, and to be willing to take on the name of Jesus Christ. The other facets that are frequently associated with the baptismal covenant—that we ‘bear one another’s burdens,’ ‘mourn with those that mourn,’ and ‘comfort those that [are] in need of comfort’ [Mosiah 18:8, 9]—are fruits of making the covenant rather than part of the actual covenant. These facets are important because they are what a converted soul would naturally do” (Dale G. Renlund, “Stronger and Closer Connection to God through Multiple Covenants” [Brigham Young University devotional, Mar. 5, 2024], speeches.byu.edu).
19. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 4–11.
20. See Russell M. Nelson “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117, 118.
21. Matthew 16:25.
22. Ephesians 3:17.
23. See 2 Nephi 2:25; Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 81–84.
24. Mosiah 2:4.
25. See Moroni 7:48.



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## “This Is My Gospel”—“This Is My Church”

*This is the Savior’s gospel, and this is His Church (see 3 Nephi 27:21; Mosiah 26:22; 27:13). The combination of the two is powerful and transformative.*

For centuries, black powder was the most powerful explosive available.<sup>1</sup> It could launch cannon balls, but it wasn’t effective for most mining and road construction projects. It was just too weak to shatter rock.

In 1846 an Italian chemist named Ascanio Sobrero synthesized a new explosive, nitroglycerin. This oily fluid was at least a thousand times more powerful than black powder. It could easily shatter rock. Unfortunately, nitroglycerin was unstable. If you dropped it from a small height, it’d blow up. If it got too hot, it’d blow up. If it got too cold, it’d blow up. Even placed in a cool, dark room and left alone, it’d eventually blow up. Most countries banned its transportation, and many banned its manufacture.

In 1860 a Swedish scientist named Alfred Nobel began trying to stabilize nitroglycerin. After seven years of experimentation, he achieved his goal by absorbing nitroglycerin into a nearly worthless substance known as diatomaceous earth, or kieselguhr. Kieselguhr is a porous rock that can be crumbled into a fine powder. When mixed with nitroglycerin, kieselguhr absorbs the nitroglycerin, and the resultant paste can be shaped into “sticks.” In this form, nitroglycerin was much more stable. It could be safely stored, transported, and used with undiminished explosive power. Nobel named the combination of nitroglycerin and kieselguhr “dynamite.”

Dynamite changed the world.<sup>2</sup> It also made Nobel wealthy. Without a stabilizer, nitroglycerin was just too

hazardous to be commercially valuable, as Ascanio Sobrero found out.<sup>3</sup> By itself, as I mentioned, kieselguhr was of little value.<sup>4</sup> But the combination of the two components made dynamite transformative and precious.

In a similar way, the combination of the gospel of Jesus Christ<sup>5</sup> and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides powerful and transformative benefits for us. The gospel is perfect, but a divinely commissioned church is required to preach it, maintain its purity, and administer its sacred ordinances with the Savior’s power and authority.

Consider the combination of the Savior’s gospel and His Church as established by the Book of Mormon prophet Alma. The Church was responsible for preaching “nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who [would redeem] his people.”<sup>6</sup> Using God’s authority, the Church was responsible for administering the ordinance of baptism “in the name of the Lord, as a witness [of entering] into a covenant with him [to] serve him and keep his commandments.”<sup>7</sup> The people who were baptized took on themselves the name of Jesus Christ,<sup>8</sup> joined His Church,<sup>9</sup> and were promised great power through an outpouring of the Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

People flocked to the Waters of Mormon to hear Alma preach the gospel. Though they revered those waters and the surrounding forests, the Lord’s Church was not a location or a building, nor is it today. The Church is simply ordinary people, disciples of Jesus