

# GOD'S LOVE

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Our hearts have been softened and our feelings tender as we unite our prayers for this great land of America. The airports were filled, and still are, with people trying to get home. When tragedy strikes and we are away from home, our only desire is to get home. Mortality sometimes feels like a terrible tragedy and we long for Home. Our way Home—our only way—is through our Savior, Jesus Christ. “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal” (“Come, Ye Disconsolate,” Hymns #115).

It is a privilege to be together as brothers and sisters and to feel strength and unity and love. I pray that the Spirit will convey that message to each one of you in whatever way is most helpful for you. The Spirit can do that.

I have been humbled to my knees many times preparing for this assignment. I am not a trained counselor nor have I had a great deal of experience with same-gender attraction. However, these past few months I have become a diligent student of this particular challenge. I don't know everything about your struggles, but I have had struggles of my own with a difficult child and I think I understand to some degree the pain. I have spent a lifetime loving someone, independent of his choices and lifestyle. At one period of time, I felt the burden was heavier than I could bear. But I knew I couldn't quit or give up because I didn't want Heavenly Father to quit or give up on me. The phrase “waiting upon the Lord” has new meaning. I can't ever say, I've had enough. I've tried long enough.” Thank heaven the Lord never says that! Only the Lord can say when it is enough. And so, we will wait on the Lord, on His time line, because He waits on us.

I have spent a lifetime of experience with the Savior and His love and mercy. My message today is: when we remember who we really are, we will never feel far from God's infinite and

eternal love for each of us. I know with absolute certainty as the years pile up for me that seeking and serving the Lord in study and prayer and service brings one of two things into our lives:

1. He either uses some way to solve our problems and answer our prayers, or
2. He gives us the strength and knowledge and gifts to endure the challenges and to succeed on His time line.

Prayers don't always get answered according to our wishes. My family and I have fasted every Friday and prayed with all our hearts and souls for nine years for a particular blessing for a relative in need. The blessing we seek has not come—yet.

I also know that we risk committing sin if we do not understand the plan of redemption. Alma explained this when he said, “God gave unto them commandments after [first] having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (see Alma 12:32).

My prayer today is that with the Spirit of the Lord I can convey His great love for you through teaching the true doctrine in the plan of redemption. During this hour I pray that you will be motivated by the Holy Ghost and buoyed up with a greater determination to be faithful to your covenants and your conscience, which is the challenge for all of us.

Evidence of our Heavenly Father's love began in the premortal world. We were all together, brothers and sisters in our heavenly family. Can you even imagine what you felt as we stood shoulder to shoulder and valiantly sustained our Father's great plan of happiness for us? Our faith in Jesus Christ began then when we heard the role He would play in our own eternal salvation. We learned that our mortal life would bring severe challenges—handicaps, illness (mental and physical), injustices, broken

promises and broken hearts; that we would all be born with weaknesses. But the good news was that our Savior, the Redeemer of the world, would make it possible for us to overcome all those things and live way beyond our own power, even to be resurrected and live again. It was there also we learned about the unequivocal, glorious, and powerful gift of agency and its accompanying consequences and responsibilities. Each of us was given “the capacity to control his or her own thoughts and actions” (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing for Something*, page 39).

When we came to earth, we were reminded by our prophet, President Hinckley, what we have always known. President Hinckley said “that God’s commandments for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force, . . . that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.” President Hinckley continues, “We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed” (Gordon B. Hinckley Writings, page 264). Even a prophet of God cannot change God’s plan and certainly legislation can’t! Rationalization and equivocation will not change God’s laws. There are no exceptions. President Hinckley said, “Self-justification is only self-deception and a miserable fraud” (*Standing for Something*, page 39). But the Spirit of the Lord will remind you that our Heavenly Father did not send any of His children to earth with impossible circumstances for them to gain their exaltation. He loves us and wants us back Home. However, the Lord Himself learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). The question is: Do we trust God enough to bear the difficulties inflicted on us? Abraham learned how strong his faith was when he was asked to sacrifice his son. The Lord knew Abraham, but Abraham needed to know for himself that his faith would allow him to obey almost impossible things.

God will give us gifts to overcome our weaknesses. Every disability or challenge conceals yet another gift we can develop.

We have heard folks declaring loudly, even celebrating their “coming out,” saying things

like, “I am so relieved. I have been hiding behind my real self all this time and now I am accepted.” They are accepted all right—by the world. (Conventionality is not morality.) They are still loved by God. Thank heaven the Church and its leaders do not reject us because of our weaknesses and struggles. That would be like the hospitals refusing to treat sick people. But wrong behavior is not accepted by God, nor can it be.

God’s prophets, from Moses to Gordon B. Hinckley, boldly and plainly teach that homosexual behavior is sinful in the eyes of God. In making that statement it is well to clearly keep in mind the difference between homosexual behavior, which is sinful, and same-gender attraction, which is not in itself necessarily sinful unless it leads to impure thoughts and unrighteous behavior. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior” (*Ensign*, October 1995, page 9).

There is only one standard for human sexual behavior which is pleasing to God. It is no different for those who struggle with same-gender attraction than for those who are heterosexual. In both instances, men and women must abstain completely from sexual relations outside of a lawful marriage between husband and wife. If an individual with heterosexual attraction has no opportunity to marry, he or she must remain celibate throughout this life in order to keep God’s commandments. The same is true of those with same-gender attraction, who despite persistent effort cannot overcome that attraction and marry someone of the opposite gender. (See Alexander Morrison, “Some Gospel Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction” presented to Evergreen International, September 16, 2000.)

There are legitimate and morally acceptable forms of love other than marriage. There is a long-honored tradition of sexually chaste but deeply rewarding friendships between and among

men and women. Thank heaven for beautiful, plain, common friendship.

There is no need to hide behind who you really are because the truth is: Your real self is who God made. Your real self is your spiritual self—the part of you that is divine, holy, and good. It is a constant battle to separate ourselves from the identity and labels the world tries to pin on us. You remember Satan tried that trick with Moses when he said, “Moses, son of man, worship me.” Moses knew who he was and confidently said, “Who art thou? For behold I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten” (Moses 1:13). Your real self is the one who has lived for eons of time with your Father in Heaven, who has been loved and cared for and taught by Him. “There is not one of us our Heavenly Father has not desired to save and that He has not devised means to save,” George Q. Cannon assures us (see *Gospel Truth*, Volume 1, page 2).

Our Father’s love is evident in this room. We are interesting and varied in our own way—wonderful, unique beings with multiple and diverse talents and perspectives. Think of the combined gifts and talents in this room. No one is totally self-sufficient because we don’t have every gift (D&C 46:11, 12); but combined, working together, helping each other, we are veritably invincible! But so many things in our society seem to push us away from the truth. With worldly appetites, pleasure diminishes while desires increase.

And thus the devil wants to cheat our souls and lead us away carefully down to hell (2 N 28:21). Satan is a master of “The Law of Diminishing Returns.” Today he is focused on destroying the family and breaking our hearts with his one-track mind on the sacred powers of procreation. You see it exploited in every media and technology available.

Someone has said, “We can manipulate, mismanage, and denature almost anything we put our minds to, and take pleasure and pride in it.” But God’s laws are still immutable.

Some folks consider it their mission to educate all America concerning its morals. New sexual freedom has become inextricably bound to the totally unrelated principle of freedom. It’s like running around with a fire extinguisher during a flood. There is no connection between so-called “sexual freedom” and true freedom. The false notion is propagated that sexual morality is unreasonably hard and what we really need is more diversity and open mindedness—an asylum for a persecuted social group.

C. S. Lewis said, “Moral laws are directions for running the human machine. Every moral law is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine . . . [which is] designed . . . to run on [God]. He . . . is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn. . . . That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way. . . . God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself” (*Mere Christianity*, pgs 54, 69). Asking for freedom without responsibility is asking for slavery. Satan assures us over and over that as long as we are basically good people—we help our neighbor, we go to church and even serve there, we are honest in most of our dealings, we are responsible citizens—then we can keep our favorite souvenirs from hell (C.S. Lewis calls them) and still live in the kingdom of God. You know the dilemma: we want to live in Zion, but keep a summer home in Babylon! Nephi warned us about those who would tell us we don’t have to be responsible:

“Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 N 28:8).

That is a lie. Holding back our favorite sins can keep us from our heavenly home that our spirits long for. The Lord told us to come to Him and offer our whole souls as an offering unto Him—holding back nothing! (Omni 1:26).

Do you remember the story of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte? She, an orphan girl, had fallen in love with Mr. Rochester and he with her, when she learned that he was married. Even so, he asked Jane to stay with him. When she refused he said, “Who cares for you, Jane?” She said, “I care for myself! My laws are not for times when there is not temptation, but for such moments as this, when my body rises in mutiny against my soul. If I could break them at my convenience, what would be their worth?” (*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, page 384).

When life is not all we’d like it to be, we can always find voices and logic that will help us justify our discontent and give us reason, if not an all-out cause, to defend our feelings of discrimination and victimization. We feel at last someone understands and verifies that, yes, indeed, we are victims. Satan has noticed that this is a temptation that works. He makes it as difficult and distracting as he can to keep us from remembering the good news of the gospel of help and hope and healing.

When we resist our spiritual nature and put on the “natural man” King Benjamin speaks of (Mosiah 3:19), we separate ourselves from God, and forget to see ourselves as our Heavenly Father sees us. This myopic perspective would have us look only at our temporal and physical circumstances and become so consumed with our own agonies that no one else’s struggles seem quite as severe. The Father of Lies has convinced us that we are entitled to be an exception to the laws of God. He gives us easy answers but empty promises.

Freedom from responsibility and claiming victimization have not only become a lucrative business but it also provides causes to champion. A remark in an editorial caught my attention. It said, “I do not see the Church taking responsibility for the lives that are being ruined.” That is an interesting comment when we are each responsible for our lives and the choices we make—including the choice to feel like a victim. But we also have the choice to acknowledge God’s goodness—that He lends everyone of us breath that we may live and move according to our will (Mosiah 2:2). Isn’t that amazing? Our

Father never says, “If you do as I ask, I will give you breath and let you live and move.” No. He gives us breath and then let’s us choose how we will live and move. That is agency—and responsibility. Let’s not get victimization and self-deception mixed up.

When feelings of unbearable loneliness, confusion, abandonment, and depression overtake us, that does not mean we are evil or God has forgotten us. Even the Savior suffered rejection and loneliness. “Take heed . . . [and] do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good . . . to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:14). If we would keep this distinction straight, we would find it easier to love the Lord and turn to Him.

Our mortal trappings give us opportunities to turn to the Lord whose kindness will never leave us (3N22:10). He will make us strong and our world safe as we recognize the gifts He steadily and regularly supplies. The great gift of communicating with our Father through prayer provides opportunities to be heard and understood. I know this. The gift of the Holy Ghost can open our hearts to righteousness and show us all the things that we should do (2N32:5).

Sacred covenants, the scriptures, the priesthood, and patriarchal blessings direct us and give us power. Our Father wants us to feel His love in every corner of our lives. His extravagant kindness speaks love. Busyness, stress, fast-track schedules, and hardships are not what He wants us to remember about our mortal life.

On the night of the Lord’s betrayal, the night of the greatest suffering the world has ever known, the Lord said to His worried and frightened disciples—and He says to us:

“Peace I leave with you,  
my peace I give unto you:  
not as the world giveth, give I unto you.  
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it  
be afraid” (John 14:27).

The world cannot give us the peace our souls seek.

Our gifts and Heavenly Father's grace improves our "school days" here on earth and helps us overcome our weaknesses. Our Father is all powerful and will never run out of resources to sustain and strengthen us. We are His work and glory (Moses 1:39). With all He is doing to regulate and create and operate universes, our happiness now and forever is His top priority.

He can and will come to our aid when we come to Him. He invites all of us who labor and are heavy laden to come to Him (Matt. 11:28).

There are challenges in mortality for all of us. That is part of the plan. Moroni explains that the Lord will show us our weaknesses so we will recognize our dependence on Him and His grace and come to Him for strength (Ether 12:27). Can we find ways to endure our challenges without bitterness or excusing ourselves? Someone said, "Pain comes, but misery is optional." There are heroes and heroines all around us who have made the decision that regardless of the hurdles and heartbreaks, they want a meaningful life. One such person wrote in your newsletter:

"It really shouldn't make me upset when others are claiming change is not possible and even unethical. I need to remember that for me the choices I have made are the right ones. My faith shouldn't be threatened by someone else's actions or inactions. I feel bad that so many excuses are made for others by well-meaning but misguided people. . . . Maybe the misconception that we should be fully free from this temptation is one of Satan's tools in this long struggle. If you can't be 'cured' then it must mean you shouldn't resist. I fell for that line at one time and so have many others. . . . However, had I given in to my pain and discomfort, imagine the anguish . . . I'd feel because I let the presumed impossibility get in the way of the goal. There is so much to be learned and so much to be thankful for" (*Evergreen Newsletter*, May 2001). This is a hero!

There is much more to a whole spiritually begotten son or daughter of God than what the world would have us believe. Please remember

that your total identity and worth as a unique individual are more encompassing than your sexual orientation. It's like the blind men looking at one small part of the elephant. Catch the vision of who you really are, who you have always been, and who you want to be, with God's help.

We all want a meaningful, happy life. Do we feel we need to continually struggle and suffer or that the world around us needs to adapt to our needs? — or did the Lord really mean it when He said He wanted us to have joy (2 N 2:25). Doesn't our Father in Heaven's pure love and desire for our happiness give us greater peace and comfort than any rally or civil rights movement?

Our capacity for healing and repairing with the Lord's help is greater than we know. Morality requires discipline, yes. But isn't the Lord's yoke of personal restraint easier in the end than promiscuity, fractured relationships, being untrue to His commandments and in the process losing our personal integrity? Weigh the sacrifice the Lord asks against the blessings received from a loving Father who reassures us over and over that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Could His yoke or "putting off the natural man" be referring to the recovery of our true, premortal selves - who we really are?

Hear three testimonials from brothers and sisters who have discovered this healing power:

- (1) "Leaving my [former] lifestyle was like coming out of the darkness into the light. I never thought it was possible, but I have changed from being a victim to feeling in control of my life. My husband and two babies know me now as I really am."
- (2) "Though the path and the struggling has been intense and often overwhelming, the joys have been likewise, only a hundred times more. I would remind all who are searching for such happiness of the 37<sup>th</sup> verse in the first chapter in Luke: 'For with God, nothing is impossible.'"

- (3) “It has been about six years since I started the process. The attractions and desires which were constant and life-dominating are now gone. I am finally free and in control of my life” (Evergreen Newsletter, May 2001).

Change is not usually like Alma the Younger or Paul experienced—immediate, almost overnight. It is usually “line upon line,” almost imperceptible. There is no quick and easy way. Some of you may struggle your whole life. But His Atonement makes blessings within our reach if we will turn our lives over and surrender each day to Him. To do otherwise would be like buying the tickets, dressing up for the event, going to the theater, and then sitting in the foyer throughout the performance. The show will go on but we will miss it. The Lord will make much more of us than we ever could by ourselves. His Atonement was infinite. It covered everything that is not perfect from the beginning of this world to the end. His Atonement was intimate because in that garden, the Redeemer of the world somehow completely paid for our own personal burdens of disappointment, sin, and guilt. That’s why His yoke is easy for us—and so heavy for Him. He did not deal with us en masse in Gethsemane. Nor does He now. We are as important and loved as if we were the only being He created. When He died, He died for each one of us individually and personally. No one has sunk so low that Jesus does not hold out for him (or her) the hope of the kingdom (John 8:11).

Elder Richard G. Scott said, “There is no burden [our Savior] cannot lift. There is no heart He cannot purify and fill with joy. There is no life He cannot cleanse and restore when one is obedient to His teachings. . . . Find Him through humble, sincere prayer, obedience, and faith” (Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, November 1988, page 77). This is the consummate love that has warmed and blessed Heavenly Father’s children through the ages. He promises that whoever comes to Him shall dwell safely in a place of peace and protection from fear or evil (Prov. 1:33); and He keeps His promises! He will never leave us comfortless (John 14:18).

The natural man is an enemy to God (Mosiah 3:19), absorbed in his own plans, desires, and pains. To grow, we have been taught how to put off the “natural” and become a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord (Mosiah 3:19). To not partake of our Savior’s Atonement is to feel the full weight of our sins and weaknesses. I have learned that when we turn to Christ, He helps us carry our burden. We make covenants with Him and take His name on us and always remember Him and then we know comfort and peace is within our reach. He is the way and we need His help every step of the way on our journey through mortality. He comforts us when we murmur and waits and calls for us when we stray. The Good Shepherd sees into our hearts and never, never forgets who we are. We are His lambs. Many of us are wounded, caught in the thickets and torn and scratched. If you ever feel like a lost or hurting lamb, as many of us do at times, envision this scene:

[PICTURE ON SCREEN:  
SAVIOR WITH SHEEP OVER HIS SHOULDERS]

“The King of love my shepherd is  
Whose goodness faileth never.  
I nothing lack if I am His  
And He is mine forever.  
Perverse and foolish oft I strayed  
And yet in love He sought me.  
And on His shoulders gently laid  
And home rejoicing, brought me.”  
(*The King of Love my Shepherd Is*)

Have there been times when you have felt you were resting on His shoulders while He carried you? There have been for me. God the Father gave us Light and Life in His Beloved Son (John 13:16) because He not only loves us, He understands us perfectly and personally. He knows how desperately we need a Savior.

George Q. Cannon said, “When we went forth into the waters of baptism and covenanted with our Father in Heaven to serve Him and keep His commandments, He bound Himself also by covenant to us that He would never desert us, never leave us to ourselves, never forget us, that in the midst of our trials and hardships, when

everything was arrayed against us, He would be near us and sustain us” (*Gospel Truth* 1:170).

Paul reassured the Romans and us that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35, 38, 39). And a modern-day apostle, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, said, “Considering the incomprehensible cost of the crucifixion, Christ is not going to turn His back on us now” (Jeffrey R. Holland, CES Fireside, March 2, 1997, page 7).

Joseph Smith taught that unless we believe Christ to be merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering and full of goodness, a willingness and ability to forgive iniquity, transgression and sin, we would never have the faith necessary to claim the blessings of heaven (*Lectures on Faith* #4).

Let’s enjoy the kind of God Heber C. Kimball knows. He said, “I am perfectly satisfied that my Father and my God is a cheerful, pleasant, lively, and good-natured Being. Why? Because I am cheerful, pleasant, lively, and good-natured when I have His Spirit” (JD 4:222, Seminary Book, page 43).

How would we ever dare turn our lives over to God if we thought He is a God of judgment? How could we trust Him if we thought He is a punishing God? How would we ever dare say, “Thy will be done,” if we thought His will to be harsh and unfeeling?

A friend thought the Lord was too involved in his life. He said, “I can’t take all those absolutes in the Church that tell me I must do this, I can’t do that.” “Morality must have absolutes” (President James E. Faust in prayer at memorial service at Tabernacle, Day of Prayer and Remembrance, 14 September 2001). My friend did not see that those absolutes are evidence of our Father’s vigilant care.

Isn’t it incredible? There are six billion people on this planet and Heavenly Father cares what I watch for entertainment, and He cares what I eat and drink and how I behave. He cares how I dress and how I earn and spend my money.

He cares what I do and don’t do. Heavenly Father cares about my happiness!

When we have faith instead of fear, we surrender our days and lives to God and we let Him use us without permission, as Mother Teresa says. In so doing we will find the ultimate peace and sweetness and joy. We will be moving in concert with our perfect, omnipotent Father whose top priority is our happiness.

Life is much nicer, much easier and more joyful when we include the Lord—in all our comings and goings and ponderings and joys—not just when we are desperate. The Lord reassures us at every turn that He is there for us—before our faces, on our right and left hand, His Spirit will be in our hearts and His angels round about to bear us up (D&C 84:88). There is a gospel truth that we need to feel with our whole heart and soul, that no matter the struggle, no matter the difficulty, we cannot sink lower than the arms of the Atonement can reach. We can’t go where His arms cannot reach. We need only to reach out and grasp the hand of the Master and feel the protective love of His touch. What greater joy and security could we have than to be encircled in the arms of His love now and forever (D&C 6:20)?

As we play the music of our lives, our Father’s divine compensation will augment our meager notes and stretch us beyond our own abilities. This principle is demonstrated in this little home video we will see. Adam James, five years old, is doing his best to play *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* while his father stands close by. Then notice how the son’s confidence waxes strong when his father joins him—working in concert to create a masterpiece and whispering in his ear, “Don’t quit. Keep playing.”

[VIDEO - STEVE AND ADAM JAMES]

In our lives, unpolished though we may be, the Master encircles us in His merciful arms and gives us the confidence to play our little tune the very best we know how, whispering to us, “Don’t quit. Keep playing.” He joins us to make our tune “magnum opus” - perfect.

God's love for us endures. He will never quit on us. His love is absolute and eternal and gives us hope and help and healing.

I close with a prayer for you and for me from one of our favorite hymns (*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* from 1948 hymnbook, page 70):

Let Thy goodness as a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.  
Prone to leave the God I love.  
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it;  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

May that be the blessing for all of us I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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