

# *Gift of Worth: Acts of Worthiness*

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True doctrines give us a greater sense of personal identity, personal accountability, and personal joy.<sup>1</sup> I testify that the doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the true teachings of Jesus Christ. These doctrines teach us our divine reality, who we really are, who we were, and who we will be.

Divine reality is just that: truths from God, which are eternal, unchanging. We obviously don't create divine reality; we are not the source. Our role is to discover these truths, embrace them, and live by them. To do this it is imperative that we connect to the source, that we make a direct connection with God. We may have a knowledge or awareness of these truths, but there is so much more to it.

Once in awhile experiences happen that challenge our view of things. This is a true story. Ben, a handyman, came over to my friend Connie's home to repair a light fixture on her fifteen-foot-high stucco ceiling. He climbed up his ladder and worked for a time repairing the light. When Connie came back into the room, Ben was descending the ladder. She looked at him aghast, her eyes not believing what she saw. His eyes met hers and he grabbed his head. Simultaneously they both reluctantly looked up at the ceiling, and there, hanging from the ceiling, was his hair! He scrambled back up the ladder, snatched his toupee, plopped it on his head, and, with his ladder and tools, was out the door in seconds.

What does Ben's hair have to do with his divine reality? How do we keep from losing sight of who we really are? What can we learn about our divine reality that will help us keep from "leaving it behind" or, more appropriately in this case, from "leaving it above"!

The challenge is for each one of us to have enough faith in Christ to believe "These doctrines are telling me who I really am" and to feel these so deeply that "They are a great power in my life." What are these doctrines that teach us our true reality, and how

do they become a foundation, a governing power, in our lives? As we analyze these doctrines, are you thinking, “I believe that about me with all my heart”?

### Beloved Child of God

First is the doctrine that we are literal children of our Heavenly Father. This truth was proclaimed by the prophet and all the apostles in 1995, in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”: “All human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”<sup>2</sup>

Elder Parley P. Pratt wrote: “ An intelligent being, [that is each of us] in the image of God, possesses every organ, attribute, sense, sympathy, affection of will, wisdom, love, power and gift, which is possessed by God Himself. These attributes are in embryo. And are to be gradually developed.”<sup>3</sup> Isn’t it amazing to realize that we are composed of the same organs and attributes as God!

Of course, the adversary does not want us to know that we are the same species as God, that we are God’s children. However, it is up to us to choose what we will believe. I know that Heavenly Father is my father. And knowing I am His daughter is a fact that continually gives me strength and courage and a belief in my potential so that I don’t give up on myself or on Him. Are you also enjoying great happiness because you know you are a child of God? Does knowing that you are Heavenly Father’s child make all the difference in how you think of yourself and how you live, pray, and relate to Heavenly Father?

### Sacred Soul, Body and Spirit

A second aspect of our divine reality is the sacredness of both body and spirit, which constitute the soul.<sup>4</sup> The body is “a sign of our royal birthright,”<sup>5</sup> an essential part of our being that is requisite to a fullness of joy.<sup>6</sup> Being embodied, we are like our Heavenly Parents, who have bodies of flesh and bones.<sup>7</sup> Both body and spirit are matter, created to co-exist in harmony with each other.<sup>8</sup> Because of the Atonement of Christ, each person is born innocent.<sup>9</sup> Many philosophies through the centuries have taught that the body is evil, that it is an enemy to the spirit. However, the Prophet Joseph Smith has taught that the body is sacred and is a complement to the spirit. “The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. . . . [Those] who have bodies have power over those who have not.”<sup>10</sup> We know that after we die, our own body will be reunited with our own spirit. Resurrection is universal for all mankind. The body is the temple of our spirits.<sup>11</sup> And just as temple ordinances are required for exaltation, so likewise is our body required for exaltation. That alone should teach us how sacred is the body.

President Hinckley has testified, “These remarkable and wonderful bodies are [God’s] handiwork. Does anyone think that he can deliberately injure and impair his body without affronting its Creator?”<sup>12</sup> Why is it important that we know this aspect of our divine reality, that our body is a sacred part of our whole soul? Because our body is such an

integral aspect of our soul, if we don't like our bodies, how can we like ourselves? If we are disparaging toward our own body, it makes it extremely difficult to know and trust our divine reality and to therefore derive great happiness and strength from it.

I marvel at the phenomenal sacrifice made by the Savior so that we may have our bodies for eternity, so that we may be eligible for a celestial resurrection and exaltation, for a fullness of joy. I am so grateful for my body. Do these beautiful doctrines help you appreciate the sacredness of your body? Can you muster a modicum of gratitude for your body, just as you are? We are not asking for a 10K run, here—just an attitude! An attitude of gratitude!

### Worth of Souls

A third aspect of our divine reality is the worth of each soul. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob assured his flock that “one being is as precious in his sight as the other”<sup>13</sup>. This means that the worth of each soul is a universal truth. The value of each human life is great in the sight of God. The value, importance, or worth of each one of us is a priceless aspect of our divine reality. Literally, each one of us is precious. That is the state of our being. That is the nature of our whole soul. Our body and our spirit are precious to God.

“Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

“For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.”<sup>14</sup>

This scripture teaches us that our value is great and also gives us convincing evidence that this is so. Christ suffered death because He loves each one of us greatly. And God so loved each one of us that He sent His only begotten Son to die for us.<sup>15</sup>

President Hinckley teaches us that God's love is a gift to each one of us. God's love is like the Polar Star. It is constant. “Love of God is the root from which spring all other types of love; love of God is the root of all virtue, of all goodness, of all strength of character, of all fidelity to do right. . . . Whenever other love fades, there will be that shining, transcendent, everlasting love of God for each of us and the love of His Son, who gave His life for us.”<sup>16</sup>

The adversary is delighted when we think we are of little worth. Elder Maxwell, in his inimitable way, said, “Self-contempt is of Satan; there is none of it in heaven”<sup>17</sup> To Heavenly Father, we are precious. How could it be any other way? “God is love.”<sup>18</sup> God is our perfect parent who loves us perfectly.<sup>19</sup> To help us understand and embrace our divine worth, Elder Holland explained that “the first and great commandment on earth is for us to love God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength (see D&C 59:5; Matt. 22:37) because surely the first and great promise in heaven is that he will always love us that way.”<sup>20</sup>

Feeling and trusting that Heavenly Father loves me and that I am precious to Him is the most humbling thing I have experienced. I've known His love, now, for over thirty years, and every day I still marvel to know that the God of the whole universe knows me, loves me, and cares for me. This incredible relationship redefines humility. Elder Maxwell taught, "Humility is not the disavowal of our worth; rather, it is the sober realization of how much we are valued by God."<sup>21</sup> When you know you are precious to God, you realize that every person is precious to Him, and people become precious to you, too. God's love is what keeps me going through all of life's challenges; His love is the source of my happiness and peace. I ache to have everyone seek after and receive His love.<sup>22</sup> Is God's love blessing your life? Do you really know how precious you are to Him?<sup>23</sup>

### Impact of These Truths

What does knowing that we are literal children of God—that our whole soul, body and spirit, is sacred and that we are precious to Him just as we are—what does this do for our lives? We see ourselves as we really are. It keeps us from being defined by others or by our circumstances. Just think of the significance of that! Living by our divine reality makes us personally secure; what would possibly constitute a threat to our being? When you know you are validated by Christ, what more do you need? Being yoked to Him takes stress, anxiety, and worry out of our lives. The Savior makes good on His promise that our hearts will not be troubled, that we need not be afraid.<sup>24</sup> When we are certain that we are the child of Heavenly Father and that He loves us, we can cope with anything. It is crucial to know from Him that we are His and that He loves us.<sup>25</sup>

One of the barriers to having these truths influence our lives is the human tendency to think that we somehow determine our reality, our worth. We feel as if this is all in our own hands, which puts great stress in our lives. Then we erroneously conclude that our worth is not great, that we are not important or of little value. We might even think that God cannot love us, that we are not worthy of His love. Thinking this way only reflects that we don't understand God and we don't understand His doctrines.

Worth and worthiness are very distinct in nature. The gifts of worth are the gifts of our divine reality. It is imperative to realize that the gifts of worth, of our divine reality, are not in our hands, they are inherent. However, worthiness is in our hands. And we will be most apt to choose Christ and choose to be worthy when we accept without a doubt that our worth is great to Him. When we know that we are truly precious to God, we don't want to do anything to let Him down. If we do disappoint Him, we want to repent. We feel godly sorrow because we know He is disappointed in us. Without this intimacy with Heavenly Father, what is the point? What are we doing with our lives?

### Rise to the Divinity within Us

Why does President Hinckley challenge us to "rise to the divinity within" us?<sup>26</sup> If we do know our divine reality, it is the most powerful motivation for good.

President Hinckley explains it like this: “Can you imagine a more compelling motivation to worthwhile endeavor than the knowledge that you are a child of God, the Creator of the universe, our all-wise Heavenly Father who expects you to do something with your life and who will give help when help is sought for? Respect for self is the beginning of virtue in men. That man who knows that he is a child of God, created in the image of a divine Father and gifted with a potential for the exercise of great and godlike virtues, will discipline himself against the sordid, lascivious elements to which all are exposed.”<sup>27</sup>

Considering the enormous impact that knowing our divine reality has for good, it is no wonder that the adversary has focused much of his efforts to keep us in the dark. But doesn't it make us unsettled to think we can be misled? Doesn't it lead us to question why these aspects of our divine reality are so difficult to believe about ourselves?

### Atonement

Elder Ballard explained that the Atonement is the key: “I believe that if we could truly understand the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would realize how precious is *one* son or daughter of God. . . . Our Heavenly Father has reached out to us through the Atonement of our Savior. He invites all to ‘come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption’ (Omni 1:26). . . . What possible thing in the whole world is remotely as important as to know this? . . . Brothers and sisters, never, never underestimate how precious is the *one*.”<sup>28</sup>

Elder Holland has just taught us: “My desire today is for *all* of us . . . to have more straightforward personal experience with the Savior's example. Sometimes we seek heaven too obliquely, focusing on programs or history or the experience of others. Those are important but not as important as personal experience, true discipleship, and the strength that comes from experiencing firsthand the majesty of His touch. . . .

“[Christ] is saying to us, ‘Trust me, learn of me, do what I do. . . . If you will follow me, I will lead you out of darkness.’ ”<sup>29</sup>

### Walking in Darkness at Noonday

If we take our eye off of Him and let the world define us, it is as if we are “walking in darkness at noon-day.”<sup>30</sup> The Lord rebuked the Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833 for not following His direction concerning the building of the temple. The Lord taught these Saints that when they ignore Him, they are “walking in darkness at noon-day.” They are looking to other sources for direction. When we look to the world and worldly values for a sense of our value or worth, for our reality, we are “walking in darkness at noon-day”

We lose sight of our true reality and think we have to create a reality or an identity. Instead of living the plan of salvation (the plan of happiness) we may feel as if we are living a “giant reward system.” We feel compelled to somehow earn love or to give ourselves worth or importance. We tend to compare and compete with others rather than be content with what we have been given. And our attempts to create reality are so futile.

For example, many today are unhappy with their bodies and are using surgery to recreate their appearance. In the eternal scheme of things, can people really refashion their own bodies? Which body will be resurrected, the one they made or the one Heavenly Father made?

### Comprehending Divine Reality

We can get so lost without God, “walking in darkness at noon-day.” I know; I was there for half my life. When I was in my twenties, I skated in several Olympic Games as a speed skater for the United States. At that time, I thought my value came from my accomplishments. When I achieved a great deal and nothing changed within me, I was really confused. I loved what I could do but didn’t really like myself. And no amount of success changed my negative self-talk and self-contempt. I had so much to hide. I felt that if anyone were to really get to know me, they wouldn’t like me.

It was only when I pled with Heavenly Father in a most fervent prayer to know if He loved me that my heart was changed. And that change didn’t come immediately. I knew He loved me; He told me so. He gave me a powerful answer to my most earnest prayer, “Of course I love you. You are my daughter.” But my negative self-talk had become so habitual that even though I knew He loved me, I still could not bring myself to feel love for myself. I couldn’t stand the disparity, the darkness, the loneliness I felt inside. With faith in God that He could change me, I pled with Heavenly Father night and day for some six months, and He eventually changed my heart.

The change was that I sincerely felt a tremendous gratitude for my life—grateful to be me. I honestly had never remembered feeling that I liked me, that I liked who I was. This newfound respect for myself enabled me to see myself as distinct from my behavior and my circumstances. The darkness, the negativism, the self-abasement was gone for good. He totally changed my life. No longer was I emotionally needy, no longer worried about myself, that I was never good enough, obsessed with getting others approval. Instead of being so self-absorbed, I became secure in my divine reality, that I am God’s child, that He loves me, that I am precious to Him. No trial, no rejection, no circumstance has ever caused me to doubt or question His acceptance of me. This is reality. Life now is filled with finding ways of giving rather than being obsessed with getting.

### Encircled Eternally in the Arms of His Love

I feel as did Lehi of old: “The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of His love.”<sup>31</sup>

There is no question that the source of our true reality is divine. Some of the marvelous fruits of living according to our divine reality are peace, happiness, and being blessed by God’s love every day. I wouldn’t trade these for anything.

We can do this. It is in the realm of possibility for each one of us. Each of us has a divine reality that is already there, already present. We just need enough faith in Christ to

believe that these truths actually pertain to us. I can't think of anyone who was born other than as a child of God. I can't think of anyone whose body is not sacred. And I know without a doubt that the worth of each soul is great!

I testify that Jesus is the Christ. He is my strength, my joy, my happiness. His love and power in my life have completely changed me, changed my nature. I testify that He provides for us every opportunity pertinent to becoming like Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. It is through His merits that we are saved. He, alone, will keep us from "walking in darkness at noon-day." I pray that we will "come unto Christ," yoke ourselves with Him, receive His great love for us, and live according to our true divine reality. In this way, we will "rise to the divinity within us."

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5. James Talmage, in Conference Report, October 1913, 117.
6. See D&C 93:33.
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10. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 181.
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