

Our Bodies: Essential for Eternal Progression and Joy
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Sisters, it is so good to be with you! I love you, and I love that we can learn together.

As I have traveled around the world and visited with you, I have been overwhelmed by the love the Lord has for His daughters. I am amazed at the grand contributions you are making to His work. Thank you! We have much to do to help prepare the world for the Lord's coming; it is "all hands on deck!"

In the many gatherings, as I have interacted with sisters all over the world, Satan's attacks aimed at our physical bodies have weighed heavily on my mind. Women have always been a target for Satan; he is well aware of the great role we have to play in God's plan. One of the ways he tries to attack us is by persuading women and men to misuse, misunderstand, or minimize the importance of our bodies, relegating women's value to little more than the way we look or our sexual appeal. Both women and men fall prey to these lies.

Elder David A. Bednar taught: “One of the ultimate ironies of eternity is that the adversary, who is miserable precisely because he has no physical body, invites and entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have and cannot use is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to physical *and* spiritual destruction.”¹

Just to help us see how prevalent this is, can we do a little something? Will you raise your hand if you have ever felt frustrated, self-conscious, or disgruntled about your physical body? Will you raise two hands if these feelings have occurred more than once?

Sisters, the Prophet Joseph Smith boldly summarized that receiving a body is fundamental to our purpose here in mortality: “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body.”² That is a bold statement: “The great principle of happiness consists in having a body!” I pray that we will allow the Holy Ghost to help us more deeply understand some glorious eternal truths about our bodies.

Let’s begin with the basics.

CONTEXT OF THE PLAN

Before we came to earth, we existed as spirits, children of loving heavenly parents who were then and still are glorified corporeal beings. We desired to become like them—that is perfect or complete and inheriting in partnership with our spouse “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths.”³ That is no small inheritance. But we were stuck, having progressed as much as we could. Gratefully, our perfect Heavenly Father presented a plan that could make our glorious potential an eternal reality.

Father's plan consisted in each of us choosing to follow Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, first in that realm of spirits and then, if we proved faithful there, being "added upon" in our next estate—that is, coming to earth where our eternal spirit would unite with a physical body, thereby providing us with experiences and opportunities for progression—the chance to "prove [us] herewith"—that we could not achieve any other way.⁴

We "shouted for joy"⁵ at the prospect of such "earthly learning experiences."⁶ We could not wait; we were all in and we said *yes!*

For all who chose to follow God in that first estate—this includes all of us and everyone ever born into the human family—a promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, would sacrifice His own body and blood to ensure the unconditional gift of immortality and the conditional gift of eternal life for each of God's daughters and sons.

And so, here we are in this "next estate" phase of the plan. Perhaps during this mortal journey you don't always feel like your body brings you great joy or happiness worth shouting for. Truly, physical pain from sickness, abuse, aging, physical limitations, mental illness, and any number of mortal experiences that we face can feel crushing. Emotional and mental distress often accompany such physical challenges and may result from misconstrued perceptions about our bodies as compared to some socially constructed "ideal." This is an especially effective attack against women. We face a near constant barrage of filtered "perfection" and counterfeit messages that our appearance or sexual appeal define our worth.

One or two swipes on your favorite social media app and we are subtly (and not so subtly) encouraged to look, act, or be like those we see. We have become so accustomed to these messages that we may not even see them anymore, but they seep into our thoughts and perceptions of ourselves and tell us we don't measure up. It can be overwhelming.

Through revealed truth, we know that these views are gross distortions of the true nature and divine need for a body. The Lord revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants that the spirit and the body *together* form the soul, which is such an indispensable union that “the resurrection from the dead *is* the redemption of the soul.”⁷

Elder David A. Bednar taught: “The body and the spirit constitute our reality and identity. When body and spirit are inseparably connected, we can receive a fulness of joy; when they are separated, we cannot receive a fulness of joy.”⁸

Let’s pause for a moment and think about how our spirit and body together—our soul—have helped us experience joy. Take a minute and write down one or two ways you have felt joy because of your body and your spirit. It may be as simple as the sheer joy of eating a mint brownie today for breakfast.

Do we realize that the joy we experience through our body and spirit is a daily experience? It is a gift and a miracle.

We know that the spirits of those who have died—including our own parents, grandparents, and other loved ones who have left this mortal life—eagerly anticipate their resurrection, as they “[look] upon the ... absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage.”⁹ This body that we sometimes find limiting or constraining is the very thing they long for.

Sisters, just stop for a minute and think about the many scriptural phrases where there are references to physical attributes applied in spiritual ways. It would be interesting to note these phrases as you study your scriptures.

We talk about “feeling” the Spirit, being “encircled in the arms of God’s love”; we are invited to “walk in the meekness of [His] Spirit” and “put on the armor of God.” We are warned

to “touch no unclean thing”; the voice of the Lord “pierces” our hearts. Perhaps this would illuminate how our spiritual attributes and growth are enhanced through the joining of our spirits *and* bodies.

Sisters, there are countless directions we could go when discussing the body: social issues surrounding women’s bodies, enduring physical challenges that we face in mortality, or “body image,” with all that loaded phrase implies. Whatever concern brought you to this session today, please remember, dear friends, that the mortal bodies we have now, which are subject to a fallen world, will one day be raised to immortality. We will live again with these bodies in a glorified state through the atoning blood and bountiful grace of Jesus Christ.

For today, let’s talk about what our bodies do for us now.

DUALITY UNLOCKS POWER

Remember Father Lehi’s powerful teaching to Jacob that there “must needs be ... an opposition in all things.”¹⁰ Often we think about this opposition in terms of conflict or hostility, where one is working against the other. Lehi gives examples of this type of opposition: good and bad, holiness and misery. But there is also another kind of “opposition” that is, as Lehi taught, critical to our eternal progression. This type of opposition has to do with opposites or contrasts that work *with* rather than *against* each other to fulfill God’s purposes.

President Linda Burton gave an example of this type of opposition: “Our two hands are similar to each other but not exactly the same. Look at your hands, in fact, they are opposites, but they complement each other and are suited to each other. Working together, they are stronger.”¹¹

Some of my favorite snacks benefit from this same principle. I love the combination of a spicy cinnamon bear dipped in smooth, sweet chocolate. Or maybe it is warm cookies

accompanied by cold milk. Or perhaps the perennial favorite peanut butter and jelly; it's so universal that it has its own acronym—PB&J.

When you start to think about it, divine complementary contrasts show up frequently in God's plan: bread and water, men and women, birth and death, justice and mercy, the first and the last.

Significantly, in each set of complementary contrasts, one is not more important than the other; rather, both parts are needed and must work together in order to make either one fully efficacious. *It is their duality that unlocks their full power.*

Let's consider for a moment. It is our body and spirit together that participates in ordinances and makes covenants with Christ—covenants so vital to our eternal progression that those of us here on earth must stand proxy in the temple for those same sacred ordinances on behalf of our deceased ancestors.

It is only in the eternal pairing of our bodies and spirits that we and they can achieve our full potential and inherit eternal life. Working together, our bodies and spirits unlock greater access to power and potential than either has on its own.¹²

CHRIST "IN THE FLESH"

Let's consider the example of the Savior. It is clear from the scriptures that Christ's saving Atonement had to be carried out "in the flesh."¹³ In order to satisfy the demands of justice and provide the Savior with the power to cleanse and exalt us, it was, of necessity, a combined physical and spiritual experience.¹⁴

Alma, in one of the most stirring sermons, teaches:

"And [Christ] shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; ... he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

“And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and 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.”¹⁵

And then this beautiful truth: “Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth *according to the flesh* that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance.”¹⁶

It was not until and it was only when the spirit Jehovah, who had created the world and parted the Red Sea and been with the Father from the beginning, was combined with a physical, tangible body as Jesus Christ that His ultimate power was realized.

This significant truth is one of the reasons why, in the sacrament—the most frequent ordinance that we participate in—Christ invites us to remember the power wrought by the sacrifice of His *body* and His *blood*, freely offered in willing submission to His Father.¹⁷ This physical sacrifice, coupled with an equally weighty spiritual suffering—Jesus Himself described His suffering to be in “both body and spirit”—was *required* to “unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.”¹⁸

BY THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE

Like the Savior, we need to learn by our own experience how to use our bodies. We all love to give advice to those who are approaching milestones that we have already faced. We say to first-time expectant parents, “Get your sleep in now!” We recall to newly set-apart missionaries, “It will be the hardest and greatest time of your life!”

The same principle applies in all aspects of our growth and knowledge: trying to convey to others the magnitude of our experience is inadequate; to truly *know*, we have to experience it for ourselves.¹⁹

These mortal experiences prepare us for immortality and try our very limits physically, emotionally, even spiritually. Let's listen to two dear friends who are learning lessons of eternity through their mortal experience. First [Sister Amy Wright](#).

Thank you for sharing that tender experience. In going through the hard things, sometimes really hard things—we, like Amy, come to know the Savior Jesus Christ in a more personal way. He becomes real.

Let's listen further to [Sister Amy Antonelli](#), who shares her experience about living an unexpected life.

My thanks to these two magnificent women. Oh that we could simply absorb their lessons and spare ourselves the physical and emotional pain of growth. But even they would say it is impossible to convey the magnitude of their experience. Sisters, it is in union and harmony of our body and spirit working together toward God's righteous purposes that we are able to withstand the soul-stretching experience of mortality. It takes our physical bodies together with our spirits.

Do you see how this is an eternal principle? In the realm of spirits we had already advanced as far as we could; to continue to progress, we would need the experience of our fabulous but flawed bodies to ultimately become like our heavenly parents. We couldn't just listen to or study their experiences of having physical bodies; we had to get them for ourselves.

Elder David A. Bednar taught, "Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate."²⁰

A united spirit and physical body unlock greater access to power and potential than either have on their own.²¹

Consider that Satan's punishment for rebelling against the Father was to never receive a body.

Is it any wonder then that Satan targets our bodies so viciously in his attacks? He will never experience the power, potential, and joy that you can. Literally, he cannot. He will not ever become what you can, and that must be infuriatingly final. He will never hold a new baby in his arms or hug a beloved grandparent or friend. Indeed, when being "cast out by the Savior," the unclean spirits "asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that [they] prefer [even] a swine's body to having none."²²

In his desire that we be as miserable as he is, the adversary seeks to undermine and minimize the great power that we have, or else tempt us to misuse that power in ways that are contrary to the laws of God, thus creating the same misery for us that he dwells within. If he has to be miserable, so should we.

POWER OF TOUCH

As we've been studying the Savior's life in the New Testament this year, I, like you, have loved reading of the Savior's miracles, His expressions of mercy and compassion toward those who sought to be healed.

Isn't it amazing that the Savior's power to heal was not dependent on His physical proximity to the afflicted? Many times the Lord simply speaks a word and the miracle rolls forth.²³

It is instructive then that so often the Lord chose to incorporate physical touch into His miracles: He touched sightless eyes, anointed them with clay, or applied saliva. In the healing of

one deaf and dumb, the Lord put His fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue. He took Jairus's daughter by the hand to call her back to life. If strictly unnecessary for His power to be effective, why would He choose to accompany many of His healings with a physical touch?

His physical touch, in conjunction with His power to heal, provided additional depth that assisted these individuals not just in being whole, but in knowing and loving Him as the Christ.

There is a powerful connection that comes from the gentle, *safe* touch of those who love us: a hug, holding hands, a grandmother or aunt brushing your hair. It is something many of us struggled with during lockdowns of Covid—that lack of physical connection with others took a toll on our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Sisters, there is science to back up our need for physical connection. Oxytocin is known as the “cuddle” or “love hormone” because it is a chemical that is released when you snuggle up to someone. “Only produced from human touch and animals, oxytocin influences emotion and social behavior.” “We are meant to be held, we are meant to socialize. ... Your family needs hand to hand, eye-to-eye, body-to-body-contact.”²⁴

This kind of physical connection was easy when we were young, but it seems to get harder as we get older.

One powerful example that maternal and infant health experts globally promote is the practice of skin-to-skin contact. When circumstances allow, a new baby “is dried and laid directly on the mother's bare chest after birth, both of them covered in a warm blanket and left for at least an hour.” This seemingly simple act drives remarkable outcomes. “When a mother holds her baby in skin-to-skin contact after birth, *it initiates strong instinctive behaviors in both.*”²⁵ It calms both mother and baby and regulates the baby's heart rate, breathing, and

temperature. There are even long-term benefits cited, such as improved brain development and function as well as parental attachment.²⁶

For us, with the context of a divine plan, we know that these instincts are carefully designed and placed within us, and the associated positive outcomes are orchestrated by a loving Heavenly Father to produce the best start possible for one of His beloved children and stimulate the vital relationship of a mother and her baby.

Several years ago I learned about the emotional and physical power of an 8-second hug. This is something I tried with my adult son. When I first asked him to hug me for 8 seconds he gave me that look (you know the look), but now, it is something that helps us both feel loved, calm, and connected.

Researchers have found these same effects from “a pat on the back, a high-five, a brush on the shoulder, even eye to eye contact—any form of positive physical and social connection—counts. What really matters is that we are making the effort to connect . . . , that we are letting [those around us] know through our attention and actions that we love them, that they aren’t alone, and that they are valued.”²⁷

Sometimes, words fail us and what we need, or the best we can give, is a loving touch. Think of your own experience when a divinely timed hug was exactly what you needed.

Jesus Christ knows the power of the spirit and the body working in harmony together. In 3 Nephi 11, He models the importance of physical touch. Let’s listen to His invitation:

“Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may *thrust* your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may *know* that I am . . . the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

“And ... the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet ... one by one ... and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he.”²⁸

He knew that the best way to cement His relationship with people and to solidify their love for and knowledge of Him was through close, inspired, individual connection—the unity of the spirit and the body working in harmony to accomplish God’s purposes. He only then proceeded to teach them, heal them, and bless them.

HIS INSTRUMENTS

Can we not emulate the Savior’s perfect example in this?

So much of what we do as women is physically oriented. All women have a divine mandate to nurture God’s children who are within our sphere.²⁹ Often that nurturing, ministering work is physically demanding. But feed, clothe, clean, bandage, wash, repeat should not be menial temporal tasks!³⁰ They are precisely what the Lord did during His mortal sojourn. When done with gentleness, meekness, love, and intention, these are the very things that build strong relationships and lead us all to Christ.

President Henry B. Eyring has taught, “Never, never underestimate the spiritual value of doing temporal things well for those whom you serve.”³¹ As we are more purposeful and thoughtful in seeking the guidance of the Spirit in our daily interactions, we will witness miracles, even spiritual ones.

BE PRESENT

The rich connection that God intends for us and that is enhanced in our physical bodies is not just about the touch itself—though that is a key component. It is about being present—deeply seeing those around us.

Sister Michelle Craig taught:

“Jesus Christ sees people deeply. He sees individuals, their needs, and who they can become. Where others saw fishermen, sinners, or publicans, Jesus saw disciples; where others saw a man possessed by devils, Jesus looked past the outward distress, acknowledged the man, and healed him.

“Even in our busy lives, we can follow the example of Jesus and see individuals—their needs, their faith, their struggle, and who they can become.”³²

See if you recognize this same principle in the example of [7-year-old Molly](#) and how a few simple behaviors can have a profound impact.

Being present and connecting in real ways is increasingly vital in our digital world. Technology can be a blessing. Elder Bednar raised concerns about technology nearly 15 years ago.³³ [Let's listen.](#)

“I am raising a warning voice that we should not squander and damage authentic relationships by obsessing over contrived ones.”

“Important opportunities are missed for developing and improving interpersonal skills, for laughing and crying together, and for creating a rich and enduring bond of emotional intimacy. . . .

“To feel the warmth of a tender hug from an eternal companion or to see the sincerity in the eyes of another person as testimony is shared—all of these things experienced as they really are through the instrument of our physical body—could be sacrificed for a high-fidelity fantasy that has no lasting value.”

Have you had the experience of visiting with a friend or talking with a family member when their phone has “dinged” with an email or text that they immediately

read? Have you had the experience of sitting in a school class, church meeting, or work function where you miss what is happening in front of you because you are checking every buzz or news headline that pops up?

Do you see how this is a devious attempt by Satan to “[entice] embodied spirits to forfeit the blessings and learning experiences ‘according to the flesh’ (1 Nephi 19:6; Alma 7:12–13) that are made possible through the Father’s plan of happiness and the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son”?³⁴

Contrast that with the experience of looking into the eyes of someone during a meaningful conversation, laughing with your family or friends around the dinner table, feeling the warmth of the sunshine during your favorite hike, or reading scriptures with your grandson or niece.

Following the death of his beloved wife, President M. Russell Ballard shared: “Now that she has moved on, I am happy that I chose to sit next to her ... during the last few months of her life, to hold her hand as we watched the endings of some of her favorite musicals. ... Memories of those special hand-holding sessions are now very, very precious to me.”³⁵

While there is great value that can come from connecting with others through technology, we need to make sure that we are also having personal, physical connections with one another. These *real-life* experiences will become ever more vital as the wonders of artificial intelligence and virtual reality increase. Be present and make a difference in lives of others. Don’t fall back into those Covid-isolation habits or talk yourself out of opportunities to connect just because you have to change out of your sweats. Go to the ward activity. Gather with friends. Even if there is an awkward

moment or two, it is one of the most exhilarating ways the Father intended for us to experience joy.

INVITATION AND PROMISE

Sisters, I plead with you to recognize the glorious gift of your physical body and the power you have when your spirit and body work together to further God’s purposes. Our bodies are so much more than a temporary box to house our spirits—a box to decorate and display without impact. Can you see why we continue to teach the sanctity of the body, the need for chastity, the blessing of modesty, and the necessity to tend and care for our physical bodies?

President Russell M. Nelson taught pure truth when he said: “The gift of our physical bodies is a transcendent miracle. A unique body is given to each of us by our loving Heavenly Father. He created it . . . to assist each of us in our quest to fulfill the full measure of our creation.”³⁶

I hope you will absorb all of your soul-stretching experiences in this mortal realm and allow them to deepen, enhance, and accelerate your preparation for the promised realms of glory.

I want to echo Elder Bednar’s promise that “these eternal truths about the importance of our physical bodies will fortify you against the deception and the attacks of the adversary.”³⁷

Sisters, oh how I love you and wish I could give you all an 8-second hug. But we can connect instead through our voices. Let’s conclude by joining together, with our whole soul—body and spirit—testifying in song of the peace that comes through Christ during our mortal journey. Sing with me the beloved music “Peace in Christ.”

“I testify that God lives and is our Heavenly Father. . . . Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer, whose body was bruised, broken, and torn for us as He offered His atoning sacrifice. He is resurrected, and He lives. . . . To be ‘encircled about eternally in the arms of his love’ (2 Nephi 1:15) will be a real and not a virtual experience.”³⁸

Christ is our hope and our peace as we seek to follow Him.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” *Ensign*, June 2010, 18; emphasis added.

² “Discourse, 5 January 1841, as Reported by William Clayton,” p. 7–8, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org.

³ Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.

⁴ Abraham 3:25–26.

⁵ Job 38:7.

⁶ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 19.

⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 88:15–16; emphasis added.

⁸ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 17–18.

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 138:50.

¹⁰ 2 Nephi 2:11.

¹¹ Linda K. Burton, “We’ll Ascend Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 30.

¹² See “Discourse, 30 January 1842,” p. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org.

¹³ 2 Nephi 9:5.

¹⁴ See Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.

¹⁵ Alma 7:11–12; emphasis added.

¹⁶ Alma 7:13; emphasis added.

¹⁷ See Matthew 26:26–28.

¹⁸ “There Is a Green Hill Far Away,” *Hymns*, no. 194.

¹⁹ See Jan E. Newman, “Teaching in the Savior’s Way,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 18.

²⁰ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 17.

²¹ See “Discourse, 30 January 1842,” p. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org.

²² *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 211.

²³ See, for example, the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5–13) or the nobleman’s son (John 4:46–54).

²⁴ Christy Kane, in Travis Barton, “Hugs Are Better for Your Brain than Electronics, Says Expert,” *Riverton Journal*, Dec. 11, 2018, rivertonjournal.com.

²⁵ “Skin-to-Skin Contact,” unicef.org.uk; emphasis added.

²⁶ See “Kangaroo Care: Bonding with Your Baby,” Cleveland Clinic, my.clevelandclinic.org.

²⁷ Morgan Young, “The Value of a Hug: One Important Thing You Can Do for Your Child Today,” Medium, Apr. 24, 2019, medium.com.

²⁸ 3 Nephi 11:14–16; emphasis added.

²⁹ See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

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- ³⁰ See Julie B. Beck, “Mothers Who Know,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 76.
- ³¹ Henry B. Eyring, “The Book of Mormon Will Change Your Life,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2004.
- ³² Michelle D. Craig, “Eyes to See,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 16.
- ³³ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 20–21.
- ³⁴ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 23.
- ³⁵ M. Russell Ballard, “Giving Our Spirits Control over Our Bodies,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 107.
- ³⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “Your Body: A Magnificent Gift to Cherish,” *New Era*, Aug. 2019.
- ³⁷ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 23.
- ³⁸ David A. Bednar, “Things as They Really Are,” 25.