# Chapter 1: Introduction

This course focuses on doctrine and principles taught in The Family: A Proclamation to the World. The document emphasizes the importance of marriage between a man and a woman, the family as central to God's plan, and the sanctity of life. It also warns against individuals who violate covenants of chastity or fail to fulfill family responsibilities. The course aims to connect gospel principles with findings in family science, encouraging students to use the gospel as a lens to view science rather than using science as a lens to view the gospel. Topics related to marriage, family, and gender may be sensitive for some individuals, but the course invites students to focus on their identity as children of God and strive to love God and their neighbors despite differences.

## Get Started

This course focuses on doctrine and principles taught in The Family: A Proclamation to the World. Before we start our detailed study of this important document, let’s read it:

### The Family: A Proclamation to the World

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

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. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare 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.

We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

### Disclaimers and Invitations

First disclaimer: although this is a family science course, we will strive to connect the truths found in science with those found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Eternal Family course (FDREL 200) is a religion course where the intent is to teach the doctrine and principles of the gospel as they pertain to the family. Because in this course, FAML 100, we will be making connections between the doctrines and principles of the gospel and the findings in family science, you may observe some overlap. However, please be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking in your mind that you “have enough” and “need no more.” When we do that, we lose opportunities to learn “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:29-30). One invitation is to look for connections between what you are learning in family sciences and what you are learning and understand regarding the gospel. In doing this, you are encouraged to use the gospel as a lens to view science rather than using science as a lens to view the gospel. If you do this, the Lord will teach you many important truths about successful marriages and families. His ways are truly higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9).

A second disclaimer: topics related to marriage, family, and gender can be sensitive to many people for a variety of reasons. We will not list all these reasons, but there are many. Some of you may experience same-sex attraction and identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Others may experience same-sex attraction and not identify as a part of that community. Some may experience gender dysphoria and identify as transgender while others with gender dysphoria do not identify as transgender. Some of you may identify as pro-choice with abortion, while others identify as pro-life, and yet some identify as neither. Many of you have family members or friends who have either left the Church of Jesus Christ or disengaged with religion because of some of these social issues. And there are certainly some of you who struggle with the idea of an eternal family because you are divorced, single, have been abused, or had parents who were not “kind and dear” (I am a Child of God, Hymn 301). No matter your family background, position on social issues, or your current family circumstances, you are a child of God. That is your identity. Not only that, but you chose to follow Jesus Christ and were fiercely loyal to Him and the Father’s plan in the premortal life (see Revelation 12:7-11). That’s how we’ve made it this far. Having said that, mortality brings a host of challenges. One of those challenges is to allow doctrines, principles, and covenants to guide our decision-making. more so than our feelings. If you have a difficult time because you have a child who identifies as gay and you struggle with the church’s position on same-sex marriage, that’s okay. If you’ve been divorced, that’s okay. If you’ve never been married and feel alone in a church that focuses so much on family and wonder if you can keep showing up each Sunday, that’s okay. It’s okay not to feel emotionally comfortable with everything we experience in mortality.

We have been commanded to love God and to love our neighbor. Our love for God does not justify treating our neighbors poorly or without love. Our love for our neighbor does not justify a failure to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds (Matthew 22:36-40). Keeping both of these commandments is a challenge for all of us, simply because we are imperfect, and loving can be hard. This challenge can be particularly difficult within a polarized social climate, where unkindness prevails and differences invite contempt rather than understanding. In addition, the complicated nature of family doesn’t make loving one another any easier. And yet, that is the commandment and the challenge we need to figure out.

Here is another invitation: if you are uncomfortable with your current family circumstances, with certain Church teachings or policies, or with your own imperfections, [please stay in the gospel boat](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/10/stay-in-the-boat-and-hold-on?lang=eng#p1) (Ballard, 2014) and on the covenant path. Wait upon the Lord for hope, healing, and understanding. In time, it will come. Until then, let us try to show a little more patience, grace, and love toward ourselves and our neighbors, despite our differences. As we do, it will increase our capacity to love God and all of His children.

### The Eternal Family: A Part of the Plan of Salvation

Daniel Judd

The Plan of Salvation. Not only was the doctrine of the eternal family lost to mankind in the centuries following the deaths of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, but the doctrine of the premortal existence of the soul was also taken from the earth. The doctrine of premortal existence was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, affirming that prior to mortal birth each person born on earth first existed as a spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents (¶ 2; see also Abraham 2:22–23, Jeremiah 1:5; John 1:1–8). President Joseph F. Smith taught, “Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body” (Smith et al., 1909). During this premortal period, a grand council was held where God, our Heavenly Father, presented “the plan of salvation” (Moses 6:62) to all of His children (see Abraham 3:21–28 and Moses 4:1–4). The plan presented by our Father included many of the doctrines involved in the plan of salvation, including the doctrine of eternal families and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In this council, we learned that “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25) required a Savior to “take upon him the pains and the illnesses of his people'' (Alma 7:11) as well as “the sins of his people” (Alma 7:13), thus allowing those who would live and die, sin and repent, to eventually return and dwell in the presence of God. Lucifer, another of God’s spirit children, made a selfish and vain attempt to usurp the role of savior, but it was Jesus Christ, the Firstborn of the Father’s spirit children (Colossians 1:15; D&C 93:21), who was chosen to carry out God’s plan.

At some point, those who supported “the great plan of the Eternal God” (Alma 34:9) were promised that they would have the opportunity and responsibility to live in and perpetuate family relationships. We also learned that each of us would have missions to perform, such as being a son, daughter, sister, brother, husband, wife, mother, or father. We learned that understanding and fulfilling these roles was a part of our divine destiny. President Joseph F. Smith reminded us:

To do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all man-kind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman. One is universal and eternal greatness, the other is ephemeral(Smith, 1986).

Creation, Fall, and Atonement. “The great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) presented by our Heavenly Father in the premortal council was and is divinely designed “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). While containing the whole of the gospel, “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25) is founded upon three major doctrines: (a) The Creation of the earth and of all mankind, (b) the Fall of Adam, Eve, and their posterity, and (c) the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As a member of the Seventy, Elder Merrill J. Bateman stated the following in summarizing the familial nature of the Father’s plan: The creation of the earth, the fall of Adam, and the atonement of Christ are essential elements or pillars in the Father’s plan for the progression and development of his children—both as individuals and as families. . . . These three doctrinal pillars of the plan of salvation are intimately involved in the creation of new eternal families and their extension into the eternities (Bateman, 1998).

In addition to the Creation, Fall, and Atonement being literal, historic events, each are doctrines that have direct application to our personal lives. We each have experienced the Creation both spiritually and physically. Our heavenly parents created our spirit bodies in the premortal realm (¶ 2; see also Abraham 2:22–23). Our earthly parents provided our physical bodies and we were born into mortality (see Moses 3:5–7). Each of us experiences the Fall as we are born into a fallen world and are separated from God’s presence (Alma 12:22). We also experience the Fall as we face the realities of our fallen natures and suffer the consequences of our own sins and mistakes, as well as those of others (D&C 93:38–39). We learn of and receive the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ as we repent of our sins, are healed from our infirmities, and eventually experience the resurrection of our physical bodies (Alma 7:11–12, 1 Corinthians 15:21–22).

The doctrines of the Creation, Fall, and Atonement can also serve as metaphors as each can have interpretive application to many of the significant events in our lives. Each of us experiences periods of creation, such as the beginning of a marriage, the birth of a child, beginning a new school year or semester, receiving a new Church calling, starting a new job, or beginning any other important process. These periods of creation are generally times when we are optimistic and hopeful concerning the future. Times of creation are generally followed by times when we experience a “fall” as we are confronted with adversity, affliction, and opposition. Our optimistic idealism about the future often turns into recognition of the difficult reality of the present. It is important to remember that these difficult times of fallenness can be followed by experiences of healing and reconciliation as we come to understand our need for a Savior and embrace the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Consider the example of a young couple in the beginning of their relationship, when they are experiencing a Garden of Eden–like existence. In a metaphorical sense, the grass is green, the water is clear, and the sky is blue—everything in their relationship appears to be idyllic. At some point in their relationship, however, they (like Adam and Eve) are destined to experience opposition. It is a part of the Lord’s plan for them to experience the Fall as opposition and adversity comes and affliction follows. Their challenge and opportunity then becomes, as individuals and as a couple, to actively seek reconciliation and healing through the Atonement of Jesus Christ (Judd, 1998).

The Creation and Our Divine Origins and Destiny. The scriptures clearly teach that all human beings are created in the image of God (see Moses 2:26–27 and Genesis 1:26–27). As stated in the proclamation, “each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny” (¶ 2). From this brief statement, we learn several profound truths: We were created by God; we were created in the image of God; we have heavenly parents—a Father and a Mother; we are literally the spirit offspring of God; our spirit creation includes identity as male or female; we have a divine destiny. While there is much we do not know about the specifics of the Creation, latter-day prophets have taught that we have both divine origin and divine potential. In 1909, President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, issued a statement that included the following:

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and eons, of evolving into a God(Smith et al., 1909).

As mentioned, many doctrines were lost to the earth through apostasy, including the eternal nature of the family and the premortal existence of the human family. In addition, the doctrine of the divine destiny of mankind was also one of the “plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:40) lost in the generations following the death of Christ. President Lorenzo Snow taught, “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be” (Snow, 1892). This statement reveals the potential found in each of the sons and daughters of God. While the doctrine of the divine destiny of man is seen by some as being unique to the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both ancient and contemporary clerics and scholars have taught a very similar doctrine. St. Athanasius, a fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, taught, “God made himself a man in order that man might be able to become God”(Schönborn, 1995). The celebrated scholar C. S. Lewis wrote:

The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said(Lewis, 1943).

Understanding that we are literally children of heavenly parents in whose image we are created is necessary if we are to understand that we may indeed become like them. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves” (Smith, 1961).

Marriage, Families, and the Fall. The doctrine of the Fall provides an additional key to understanding our earthly existence. The proclamation teaches that we came to earth to “obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection” (¶ 3). Birth into a family was the way God chose to send His spirit children to earth. Marriage and family relationships are the central means He has prepared to achieve His purposes. We best learn the lessons of life, not in a Garden of Eden–like existence, but in a context where we face challenges, opposition, hardship, and temptation (2 Nephi 2:11). The “great plan of happiness” is designed to include adversity and sorrow, “for if [we] never should have bitter [we] could not know the sweet” (D&C 29:39).

Unlike traditional Christianity, Latter-day Saints believe the Fall was a necessary part of the Lord’s plan for us: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). While much of traditional Christianity views the Fall of Adam and Eve as a necessary evil at best, or an avoidable abomination at worst, there is evidence that some of the early Christian fathers embraced views more consistent with Latter-day Saint theology. In the fourth century AD, St. Ambrose, one of the most influential leaders of the early Catholic Church, wrote that the Fall of Adam and Eve “has brought more benefit to us than harm”(Lovejoy, 1948). Pope Gregory the Great, living in the years 540–604 AD, stated:

And certainly, unless Adam had sinned, it would not have behooved our Redeemer to take on our flesh. Almighty God saw beforehand that from that evil because of which men were to die, He would bring about a good which would overcome that evil (Lovejoy, 1948).

The Fall of Adam and Eve allowed the Lord’s plan for marriages and family to continue forward by making it possible for Adam and Eve to “have an increase” (D&C 131:4) as they added children to their family. The proclamation states: “The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (¶ 4).

The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi explained that if Adam and Eve had not partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would not have been able to fulfill the commandment God had given them to multiply and replenish the earth. The prophet Lehi taught:

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the Garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin (2 Nephi 2:22–23).

Therefore, rather than being merely a necessary evil, the Fall, “whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life”(Oaks, 1993).

The Atonement of Jesus Christ and Eternal Families Understanding the doctrines of the Creation and the Fall are essential if we are to comprehend who we are and the purposes of challenges in life. However, understanding these particular doctrines alone is not sufficient. As profound and meaningful as the doctrine of the eternal family is, this precious doctrine cannot bring joy to individuals and families in this life or eternal life in the world to come. There is one doctrine “which is of more importance than they all” (Alma 7:7), and that is the doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon prophet Helaman taught:

Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall (Helaman 5:12).

Not only does the Atonement of Jesus Christ make forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of our bodies, and eternal family relationships possible, but the Savior is also the very embodiment of the ways of living and being by which we are to live our lives. There is no other way or means by which individuals, couples, families, communities, or even nations may be saved (see Mosiah 3:17). Latter-day Saints need to especially be aware of the danger of placing the family before the Savior. This concern is dramatically illustrated in the following story from Elder Russell M. Nelson:

Years ago when Sister Nelson and I had several teenage daughters, we took our family on a vacation far away from telephones and boyfriends. We went on a raft trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. As we started our journey, we had no idea how dangerous this trip could be.

The first day was beautiful. But on the second day, when we approached Horn Creek rapids and saw that precipitous drop ahead, I was terrified. Floating on a rubber raft, our precious family was about to plunge over a waterfall! Instinctively I put one arm around my wife and the other around our youngest daughter. To protect them, I tried to hold them close to me. But as we reached the precipice, the bended raft became a giant sling and shot me into the air. I landed into the roiling rapids of the river. I had a hard time coming up. Each time I tried to find air, I hit the underside of the raft. My family couldn’t see me, but I could hear them shouting, “Daddy! Where’s Daddy?” I finally found the side of the raft and rose to the surface. The family pulled my nearly drowned body out of the water. . . .

Brothers and sisters, I nearly lost my life learning a lesson that I now give to you. As we go through life, even through very rough waters, a father’s instinctive impulse to cling tightly to his wife or to his children may not be the best way to accomplish his objective. Instead, if he will lovingly cling to the Savior and the iron rod of the gospel, his family will want to cling to him and to the Savior.

This lesson is surely not limited to fathers. Regardless of gender, marital status, or age, individuals can choose to link themselves directly to the Savior, hold fast to the rod of His truth, and lead by the light of that truth. By doing so, they become examples of righteousness to whom others will want to cling(Nelson, 2001).

The Savior taught:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30–31).

As we truly learn to love God and He who atoned for our families, we are best able to love others, especially members of our own family.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ has special relevance for marriages and families in crisis. While there is much to be gained from learning the principles of effectively functioning families, there are times when the healing power that a family requires is beyond what any mortal can provide. President Howard W. Hunter taught: “Whatever Jesus lays his hands upon lives. If Jesus lays his hands upon a marriage, it lives. If he is allowed to lay his hands on the family, it lives” (Hunter, 1979a). This is especially important for Latter-day Saints who know that marriage and family relationships can be eternal. The Atonement of Jesus Christ makes possible “eternal lives” (D&C 132:24), or life with our families in the presence of God. In order to do so, He leads families along the path—from making available sealing ordinances in the temple to healing hearts and bridging gaps for families in crisis. God’s work and glory is to unite couples and families together for time and eternity, and only through the Atonement of Christ is this possible.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ also allows each of us to grow and progress by repenting, being forgiven, and being worthy of the guiding influence of the Holy Ghost. The prophet Mormon taught his son Moroni:

“And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filled with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God (Moroni 8:26).”

Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins of the world, and it is only through faith in Him and obedience to the laws and ordinances of His gospel that salvation and exaltation are possible. Without the Atonement, no one could live in God’s presence, inherit all He has, or be sealed for eternity as families.

Eternal Life is Familial. Eternal life is more than just living forever. President Henry B. Eyring stated, “Eternal life means to become like the Father and to live in families in happiness and joy forever” (Eyring, 1998). The ecclesiastical structure of the Lord’s Church is designed to bring the benefits of the eternal sealing powers of the temple to marriage and family relationships, so those relationships can endure throughout eternity. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, “The family is where the foundation of personal, spiritual growth is built and nurtured; the Church, then, is the scaffolding that helps support and strengthen the family” (Ballard, 1996).

As stated earlier, the doctrine that eternal life includes life in family relationships is one of the unique teachings of the restored gospel. These teachings have brought joy and consolation to millions of souls. Many people from all faiths, even though their religion does not teach this principle, personally hope and anticipate that their lifelong and deeply cherished relationships with spouse and family members will continue beyond the grave. Only the teachings and temple ordinances of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can provide the realization of these blessings for all of Heavenly Father’s children.

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### The Doctrine of Eternal Families—A Blessing of the Restoration

The power to seal families that was restored through the prophet Joseph Smith was given anciently by the Savior to Peter (Matthew 16:19) and is held by all presidents of the Church today, who in turn bestow this authority on others, who then perform these sacred ordinances in the holy temples. Pertaining to these ordinances, Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the Seventy taught:

Frequently we perform marriages in the temple. These marriages are properly called celestial marriages, temple sealings, or eternal marriages. . . . The family is the most important relationship in this life. In reality, the bride and groom are called to assignments in the family from which they are never released, except by transgression. This is the one eternal unit which can exist in the presence of God  (Tuttle, 1969).

In speaking of the importance of keeping marriage covenants, President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “Marriage according to the law of the Church is the most holy and sacred ordinance. It will bring to the husband and the wife, if they abide in their covenants, the fullness of exaltation in the kingdom of God”(Smith & McConkie, 1955).

Latter-day scripture and the words of latter-day prophets teach us that not only are covenant marriages intended to last beyond the grave, but so can sibling and family relationships endure across generations. The prophet Mormon recorded:

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality . . . and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you (Mormon 6:21).

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:2). The Prophet Joseph Smith saw a vision of the celestial kingdom as it would one day exist and said, “I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept” (D&C 137:5). It is significant that of all the great and noble people Joseph could have named, he mentioned his own parents, who were still living at the time of the vision, and his beloved elder brother, Alvin. Adam, one of our “first parents” (Alma 42:2), and Abraham, the “Father of the Faithful” (Abraham 2:10), have a familial relationship with those who will live with God in the celestial kingdom. The truth that the binding of humanity into eternal families is the whole purpose of the Creation is demonstrated by the prophecy of Malachi:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:5–6).

From modern revelation we learn that Elijah appeared to the prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on April 3, 1836, in the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. Elijah, along with Elias and Moses, bestowed sacred priesthood keys that were a part of the restoration of those keys that had been lost to the earth from previous dispensations. President Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the redemption of the dead describes the blessings brought by Elijah:

The Prophet Elijah was to plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their fathers, foreshadowing the great work to be done in the temples of the Lord in the dispensation of the fulness of times, for the redemption of the dead, and the sealing of the children to their parents, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse and utterly wasted at his coming (D&C 138:47–48)

The sealing powers restored by Elijah make possible the joy of being sealed to one’s immediate family and beyond in a great chain from Adam and Eve to the last woman and man to be born upon the earth (see D&C 128:18). In addition to Elijah, Elias also appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, restoring the doctrine and the keys of celestial marriage. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:

Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, meaning the great commission given to Abraham that he and his seed had a right to the priesthood, the gospel, and eternal life. Accordingly, Elias promised those upon whom these ancient promises were then renewed that in them and in their seed all generations should be blessed. (D&C 110:12–16.) Thus, through the joint ministry of Elijah, who brought the sealing power, and Elias, who restored the marriage discipline of Abraham, the way was prepared for the planting in the hearts of the children of the promises made to the fathers. (D&C 2:2.) These are the promises of eternal life through the priesthood and the gospel and celestial marriage (McConkie, 1985).

With the restoration of “the new and everlasting covenant of marriage” (D&C 131:2), the order of the priesthood known as the patriarchal order was reestablished. President Ezra Taft Benson observed that the patriarchal order is:

…an order of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity, and to do the will and work of God throughout their mortality (Benson, 1985).

The patriarchal order, established in the days of Adam (see D&C 107:40–42), was and is an order of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The patriarchal order began with Adam and Eve and continued through Abraham and Sarah and their righteous descendants until the time Moses was translated, when the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood were taken from the people (see D&C 84:19–27).

Through the keys and authority brought and bestowed by Elijah and Elias, Joseph Smith was able to officiate in all ordinances necessary for the salvation and exaltation of men and women. Commenting on the restoration of the blessings that would come with the sealings of marriages and families, the Lord Himself stated on this occasion, “Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out” (D&C 110:9).

Although the exact nature of family relationships after this life has not been fully revealed and we do not fully comprehend what God has prepared for the righteous (1 Corinthians 2:9), the Lord has revealed that marriage is essential for exaltation in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 132:15–16). Each exalted couple will, like God, be involved in the creative process of bringing forth spirit children, who will be privileged to experience mortality for themselves (see D&C 131:4).

God and His plan are eternal. He instituted marriage and family in the beginning. God created the earth, the garden, and our first parents in order to create families for all of His children to be born into and experience mortal life—especially mortal family life. The Fall occurred because Adam and Eve chose to obey God’s commandment to multiply and replenish the earth and thus create the first family. The Savior completed the Atonement in order to reconcile God’s children with the Father and with one another. Thus, the great plan of happiness is God’s plan for happiness in time and in eternity.

God commands his children to marry and become one, and the Savior taught that “what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6, see also 1 Corinthians 11:11). Marriage and family are eternal, and priesthood keys have been given to prophets to seal on earth and in heaven. The Lord told Moses, “Behold this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), and He told the Prophet Joseph Smith that the new and everlasting covenant of marriage “was instituted for the fulness of my glory” (D&C 132:6). The work and glory of God is to assist His children to make and keep sacred covenants designed to allow them to be sealed together eternally to one another and to Him, and thereby enjoy all God enjoys. It should be the work and glory of all Latter-day Saints to make and keep these sacred covenants, to teach these transcendent truths to those who do not yet know of them, and to work in God’s holy temples to make these covenants and ordinances available to all the children of God.

The eternal nature of the marriage covenant and the promise of everlasting family association are among the most beautiful and essential doctrines of the restored gospel. In fact, the purpose of the gospel and the Church is to exalt the family. Elder Hugh B. Brown stated:

The family concept is one of the major and most important of the whole theological doctrine. In fact, our very concept of heaven itself is the projection of the home into eternity. Salvation, then, is essentially a family affair, and full participation in the plan of salvation can be had only in family units (H. B. Benson, 1966).

From the time of Adam and Eve and on to the present day, God’s covenant people rejoice in the plain and most precious doctrine of eternal families.

### Gender is an Essential Characteristic of Eternal Identity and Purpose

(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008)

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “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. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

#### Why Is Gender Essential?

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “[Gender] in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary. … The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness” (“Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan,” Liahona, June 2006, 51; Ensign, June 2006, 83).

Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president: “As spirit daughters of God, women ‘received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth’ ([D&C 138:56](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/138.56?lang=eng#p56)) on the earth. They were among the ‘noble and great ones’ ([D&C 138:55](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/138.55?lang=eng#p55)) who ‘shouted for joy’ ([Job 38:7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/job/38.7?lang=eng#p7)) at the creation of the earth because they would be given a physical body with the opportunity to be proven in a mortal sphere (see [Abraham 3:25](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/abr/3.25?lang=eng#p25)). They wished to work side by side with righteous men to accomplish eternal goals that neither can attain independently. Female roles did not begin on earth, and they do not end here. A woman who treasures motherhood on earth will treasure motherhood in the world to come” (“A ‘Mother Heart,’ ” Liahona and Ensign, May 2004, 76).

#### What Can I Do Because of My Role in Heavenly Father’s Plan?

Margaret D. Nadauld, former Young Women general president: “Women of God can never be like women of the world. The world has enough women who are tough; we need women who are tender. There are enough women who are coarse; we need women who are kind. … We have enough women of fame and fortune; we need more women of faith” (“The Joy of Womanhood,” Liahona, Jan. 2001, 18; Ensign, Nov. 2000, 15).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “The premortal and mortal natures of men and women were specified by God Himself. … [Sometimes women] ask: ‘Is a woman’s value dependent exclusively upon her role as a wife and mother?’ The answer is simple and obvious: No. … Every righteous man and woman has a significant role to play in the onward march of the kingdom of God. …

“… My dear sisters, we believe in you. We believe in and are counting on your goodness and your strength, … And we believe that God’s plan is for you to become queens and to receive the highest blessings any woman can receive in time or eternity” (“Women of Righteousness,” Liahona, Dec. 2002, 36–37; Ensign, Apr. 2002, 66–69).

### The Importance of Marriages and Families for Society

The Defining Issue of Our Generation

Future historians will likely identify the public policy controversies of the past two decades concerning the legal definition of marriage as the defining social issue for this generation of Americans. Below is an overview of the history of recognition of the importance of marriage and marital families; current insights about the importance of marriage for individuals, families, and society generally; a review of the history of the movement to legalize same-sex marriage; the relevance of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” for these and related family policy issues; some ways that people can appropriately exercise their influence as citizens concerning these public policy issues; and a brief outline of some arguments that may help to raise the quality of discourse about these issues.

#### The Critical Importance of Marriage for Individuals, Families, and Society.

The debate about whether marriage should be redefined in the law to allow same-sex couples to marry is an entirely novel public policy issue. Before the Netherlands legalized same-sex marriage in 2000, same-sex unions had never been given the legal status of marriage in any legal system in world history. However, underlying the debate about same-sex marriage are some social concerns that are as old as society.

The importance of marriage and marriage regulation has long been recognized. For example, Aristotle famously taught that marriage is “the foundation of the republic and the prototype of friendship,” and both Plato and Aristotle prescribed a set of laws governing the ideal ages, qualities, and duties of husband and wife to each other and to their children “to ensure that marital couples would remain bonded together for the sake of their children”(Witte, 2001). Aristotle also reasoned that it was the “first duty” of wise legislators to establish rules regulating marriage(Witte, 2001).

The regulation of marriage in Western civilization reflected profoundly Christian teachings about the importance of marriage (Witte & Nichols, 2008). St. Augustine called marriage a “faithful and sincere fellowship,” “the seedbed . . . of a city,” [and] the “foundation of domestic peace.” . . . [H]is Greek contemporary, St. John Chrysostom ([a.d.] 345–407), [wrote:] “The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. . . . Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced” (Witte, 2001).

The axiom that stable marriages and families are essential to the survival, stability, flourishing, and happiness of the larger communities of church, state, and civil society is deeply rooted in and throughout millennia of Western thought (Witte, 2001).

Marriage is the well-spring of social capital—those intangible resources that contribute to a strong society, economy, and nation—in any community or polis. Economists emphasize the importance of trust that facilitates exchange, while sociologists and others note the importance of social engagement, willingness to serve, and charity (Allen & Reed, 2006, p. 88).

In these times of increasing individualism, isolation, and alienation in post-industrial societies, family bonds and relations are waning (Hafen, 1991; Putnam et al., 1993; Putnam, 2000). Robert Putnam has noted that the time that families spend together eating family meals has dramatically declined in modern America, as has family attendance at religious services and even family television watching together (Putnam, 2000). More seriously, family integrity has declined as centrifugal forces such as child-bearing out of wedlock, nonmarital cohabitation, and divorce have increased, fragmenting families (Wardle, 2003). The decline in family integrity is accompanied by and associated with decline in civic participation and community life (Putnam, 2000). The relationship between family disintegration and loss of civic commitment is complex (McLean, 2000; Putnam, 2000, p. 279), but undeniably there is a significant relationship (Hafen & Hafen, 1994; Hafen, 1991).

Families not only generate but also distribute social capital (Furstenberg, 2005). “Marriage generates ‘social capital’—interfamily and intergenerational bonds that embed married couples and their children within larger social networks and direct their efforts to the good of all”(Storrow, 2006). The married union of mother and father “provides children with increased social capital and leads to increased educational achievement and security”(Michael, 2004, p. 1467). Conjugal “marriage is a powerful creator and sustainer of human and social capital for adults as well as children, about as important as education when it comes to promoting the health, wealth, and well-being of adults and communities”(Gallagher, 2000). This is due to the nature and qualities of marriage, not the label.

It is widely recognized that the marital family—the legal union of man and woman—is the foundational institution for the most promising, most potentially beneficial of family forms. Most people in the world see the family as the unit of society in which relationships, patterns of behavior, and values are first, and most firmly, inculcated and acquired. The highest judicial authorities have described the marital family as the initial and most significant source of our ideas of morality, moral order, and moral acting. The U.S. Supreme Court long has noted that marriage “giv[es] character to our whole civil polity” (Maynard v. Hill, 1888), and that marriage “is the foundation of the family and of society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress”(Maynard v. Hill, 1888). In more recent years, the Supreme Court has re-emphasized that the “institution of marriage is of peculiar importance to the people of the States,” because it relates to the States’ interest in “the stability of their social order, . . . the good morals of all their citizens, and . . . the needs of children from broken homes. The States, therefore, have particular interests in the kinds of laws regulating their citizens when they enter into, maintain, and dissolve marriages” (Boddie v. Connecticut, 401 U.S. 371 (1971).

The family transmits the most critical virtues that are essential to a republican (liberal democratic) society, especially service and commitment to the common good(Wardle, 2003), for as children are raised so will they become responsible or irresponsible citizens. In families, children acquire their first and most deeply embedded identity, their kinship identity. Families are a principal source of what distinguished BYU anthropologist Merlin Myers called “root paradigms” to explain how society prepares and guides its members to live and cope with life crises (1983). Root paradigms crystallize the formative validity beliefs of an individual, family, and society. Families inculcate root paradigms in individuals and transmit core values from one generation to the next.

Over the course of civilization, marital families have been the most secure, effective, successful form of families, producing the most valuable, long-lasting benefits for the members of the particular family and for society. The marriage-based family has “contributed enormously to the ultimate purposes of a democratic society by providing the stability and the structure that are essential to sustaining individual liberty over the long term”(B. C. Hafen, 1983). “[M]marriage has become ‘an enormously important element in the rise of stable political systems and dynamic economies'’” (R. W. Johnson, 1985; “Recognizing the Right to Family Unity in Immigration Law,” 1980).

Anthropologist David W. Murray has noted: “Marriage is a society’s cultural infrastructure” (Murray, 1994). All communities are built upon an infrastructure that consists of the basic institutions on which the preservation and functioning of the community are dependent. Marriage and marital families are part of the substructure, the foundation for social relations. Societies and communities with weak and unstable marriages and families have weak and unstable (typically corrupt and dysfunctional) economic, social, and political relations, as well, and, concomitantly, significant impediments to growth and development.

Legal historian Charles Reid has shown how ecclesiastical teachings have influenced both family law and social values about families (2004). For example, he cites the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which states:

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundation for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society (“Catechism of the Catholic Church 2207,” 2000, p. 525).

Legal scholar John Witte concludes, “A breakdown of marriage and the family will eventually have devastating consequences on these larger social institutions”(Witte, 2001). When the institution of marriage disintegrates, the transmission and inculcation of the root paradigms and core values of a society also disintegrate. Great religious leaders have emphasized this causal connection. Pope John Paul II famously said: “As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live”(Paul II, 1986). Former President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gordon B. Hinckley, likewise declared: “A nation will rise no higher than the strength of its homes. If you want to reform a nation, you begin with families” (1996, pp. 48–49). Likewise, Elder Neal A. Maxwell warned:

As parenting declines, the need for policing increases. There will always be a shortage of police if there is a shortage of effective parents! Likewise, there will not be enough prisons if there are not enough good homes.

. . . How can a nation nurture family values without consistently valuing and protecting the family in its public policies? How can we value the family without valuing parenting? And how can we value parenting if we do not value marriage? How can there be “love at home” without love in marriage? (1994, p. 89).

Evidence for Elder Maxwell’s observations is undeniable. One study by a business school professor published by the Institute for American Values and the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy reports that the public costs—costs to American taxpayers— of marital family non-formation (nonmarital childbearing) and break-up in the United States total at least $112 billion each year for American taxpayers, $70 billion in federal tax dollars and $42 billion in state and local tax dollars each year (Institute for American Values & the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, 2008, pp. 5–6, 17–21). So there is a huge public interest in protecting and strengthening the institution of marriage. There is also a substantial fiscal danger in the legalization same-sex marriage if it weakens the institution of marriage and the marital norms of monogamy, exclusivity, and permanence.

For important reasons, marriage as the union of male and female is the oldest highly preferred legal relationship. Not all intimate relationships are equal; not all provide the same benefits for adults or the same advantages for children. Marriage, the legal union of a man and a woman, creates a uniquely powerful and positive family relationship that benefits not only those members of the relationship and their family, but all of society. Mere legal positivism in the form of calling other relationships “marriages” does not magically transform them into real marriages or change their nature, characteristics, or qualities into those of dual-gender marriages. Marriage, the union of a man and a woman, is recognized as a fundamental human right, and the legal and policy battle to preserve and protect that critical social institution is a civil rights battle of enormous consequence. Marriage is the oldest legal institution to recognize gender equal rights (one man and one woman are required, not two men or two women) in the composition of the institution, and casting aside that definition of marriage will therefore have undesirable negative implications for women’s equal rights. Because marriage is of such critical importance in and to religion, the legalization of same-sex marriage raises serious issues about religious liberty; there already have been numerous incidents of harassment, persecution, and denial of civil rights of churches, clergy, and persons of faith seeking to live according to the tenets of their faith(Laycock et al., 2008).

The Movement to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage in the United States and the World. Today, perhaps as a consequence of significant recent social devaluation of marital and family relations (evidenced by the historic rates of divorce, nonmarital cohabitation, and child-bearing out of wedlock in recent times), efforts to deconstruct and redefine marriage and family relations have developed. A “leveling” of all intimate relationships has taken place in society and the law. The most radical deconstruction and redefinition of marriage is presented by the global movement to legalize same-sex marriage and marriage-equivalent domestic relations. In the United States, this transpired in 2015 with the United States Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage in Obergefell v. Hodges. At the time of this writing, 36 countries have legalized same-sex marriage: Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay. Six other countries are on “watch” in 2024: Czechia, India, Japan, Nepal, Philippines, and Thailand. (HRC Foundation, 2024)

The societal impact of the legalization of same-sex marriage has not yet been fully felt. However, when same-sex marriage is legalized in a country, in essence, it becomes written in law that marriage is more about the emotional desires and social recognition of adults than the reproduction and wellbeing of children.

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### The Proclamation: A Guide, a Banner, and the Church's Emphasis on the Family

Lloyd D. Newell

The Family: A Proclamation to the World” has been used wisely and widely since President Gordon B. Hinckley first announced it on September 23, 1995, at the annual general Relief Society meeting. As the name suggests, it is addressed to all the world: all nations, all faiths, all families. It continues to be a light in a darkening world and a bulwark in defense of the family. Elder M. Russell Ballard (Ballard, 2005)called the proclamation “a clarion call to protect and strengthen families and a stern warning in a world where declining values and misplaced priorities threaten to destroy society by undermining its basic unit” (p. 41). He continued:

I call upon members of the Church and on committed parents, grandparents, and extended family members everywhere to hold fast to this great proclamation, to make it a banner not unlike General Moroni’s “title of liberty,” and to commit ourselves to live by its precepts. As we are all part of a family, the proclamation applies to everyone (p. 42).

The proclamation has served as a guide for individuals and families, a banner to communities and nations, and a doctrinal summary of the Church’s emphasis on the family.

###

### A Guide for Individuals and Families

More than ever, families are under attack. A culture of throwaway relationships; familial apathy and permissive values; and secularism, selfishness, and immorality has made the responsibility to build strong families more challenging and more important. The eternal truths in the proclamation counteract this culture and provide individuals and families with a guide and a standard, a kind of Liahona or compass to chart their course.

For example, (Eyring, 1998) explained that the proclamation provides an eternal perspective to help us understand the value of family relations: “A child hearing and believing the words of the proclamation regarding families united eternally would begin a lifetime of looking for a holy temple where ordinances and covenants perpetuate family relationships beyond the grave” (p. 13). Truly, understanding and internalizing the principles in the proclamation changes our perspective, our goals, and our entire approach to family life.

Elder David B. Haight (Haight, 2000)spoke in general conference about the Goodrich family, whose teenage daughter, Chelsea, memorized the proclamation and told Elder Haight how it blessed her life:

As I think of the statements in that proclamation, and as I understand more of our responsibility as a family and our responsibility for the way we live and the way we should conduct our lives, the proclamation becomes a new guideline for me. As I associate with other people and when I start dating, I can think of those phrases and those sentences in the proclamation on the family. It will give me a yardstick which will help guide me. It will give me the strength that I need (p. 20).

Personal strength is just one of the many blessings that families and individuals reap when they internalize the proclamation and live by its truths. Virna Rodríguez of Guatemala said that the proclamation has blessed her family with clarity in a world of confusion. She explained, “It has helped us prioritize our activities, know our responsibilities, and recognize our blessings” (Seymour, 2005). Similarly, Lee Mei Chen Ho from Taiwan said the proclamation has helped her see how divine characteristics such as faith, patience, and love are developed in the home. “When I try to improve myself according to the proclamation,” she said, “I can experience real happiness” (Seymour, 2005).

Countless individuals and families across the world are choosing to make the proclamation a part of their lives in a variety of ways. The proclamation has been set to music, interpreted and performed in dance, and presented in various forms in homes and chapels across the world. Some families have memorized the proclamation, as Chelsea Goodrich did. One family worked at it every Monday evening for family home evenings. The mother recalls:

It took almost a year, but we memorized the entire family proclamation together. Although this might not be possible for every family, it has proven a blessing for ours. . . Our children have been exposed to activities, debates, and friends that do not support the Lord’s view of the family. I am so grateful to know that they have the words of the Lord’s chosen servants when needed (J. Johnson, 2009).

Over the past decade, I have taught a course on proclamations at Brigham Young University. I have asked scores of students about ways they and their families have brought the proclamation into their hearts and homes. In their responses, which I have collected over the years, I have sensed their love for the proclamation and their desire to make it a more meaningful part of their lives. One student, Stephanie, explained that the proclamation helped her clarify her beliefs and articulate them to others:

I always keep a proclamation posted by my desk with a picture of my family so I can remember to follow it. . . . Whenever questioned with why I want to be a mom, I can proudly say because that is my divine role. A loving Heavenly Father gave this divine role to me. He will entrust me with his children to raise them in righteousness in the gospel.

Another student, Jonathan, recalled how memorizing the proclamation with his family unified and strengthened them:

When I was 16, our stake president challenged the entire stake to memorize the family proclamation. He asked us to work together as families to accomplish this goal. My family began reading and memorizing it in our family home evenings and around our home. I remember well having multiple copies of the family proclamation pamphlet in our van. We would quiz each other and practice on car trips. As we worked together to accomplish this, we grew together.

Reed, another student, and his family did not memorize the proclamation, but they referred to it often: “My parents would refer to it as we discussed relevant issues in the news, or gospel principles, or extended family concerns. The proclamation was just always there.” Amelia wrote that her family used the proclamation to guide their family home evenings: “My parents . . . would take a phrase or a sentence or two and build a lesson around it.” Similarly, Daniel explained that as the family home evening group leader in his student ward, he and his group leader partner used the proclamation as a framework for their lessons for an entire semester. He elaborated:

We’ve encouraged those who have been assigned to teach a lesson from one of the paragraphs to pick a particular point and base their lesson around that point rather than gloss over the entirety of the paragraph. This, for myself and hopefully for other members of the group, has led to some powerful insights, understanding, and practical applications of the document.

The proclamation continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of countless individuals and families. The real test of the proclamation’s impact is how it clarifies our understanding and beliefs, how it changes our associations and interactions, and how it guides us to choices that strengthen our faith and our eternal relationships. Many Latter-day Saint families around the world have a copy of the proclamation hanging on the walls of their homes, but even more important, they have its precepts in their hearts and minds to influence their attitudes and behavior.

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### A Banner to Communities and Nations

The proclamation has been translated into more than 80 languages and distributed to thousands of citizens and leaders around the world. In it the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles extend this charge: “We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society” (¶ 9). As members of the Church who have entered a covenant with Christ, we are not only “fellow-citizens with the saints” (Ephesians 2:19), but we are also called to be “responsible citizens” who can share principles found in the proclamation with others in our communities and nations. We can do this as we converse with neighbors and associates, communicate with civic leaders, get involved in our communities and attend political and legislative forums and debates, and let our voices be heard in exercising our right to vote.

David Dollahite, a professor at Brigham Young University, says that several profamily organizations have been established since the proclamation was first introduced, and a number of those have used the proclamation “as the basis or at least as one of the sources of language or ideas to craft statements that support marriage and family life” (Seymour, 2005). For example, the Doha Declaration, which was recognized by the United Nations General Assembly on December 6, 2004, contains many of the proclamation’s central teachings, including the concepts that marriage is between man and woman and that husband and wife are equal partners(Seymour, 2005). And Bonnie D. Parkin, former Relief Society general president, relied heavily on statements from the proclamation in her speech at the European Regional Dialogue Conference on the Family in Geneva, Switzerland, in August 2004 (Seymour, 2005). All such efforts illustrate a point that Elder Merrill J. Bateman made as a member of the Seventy. Regarding the proclamation’s power to influence scholarship and world policy, he said, “The proclamation serves not only as a handbook for family living, but also as a compass for family research and advocacy” (Seymour, 2005).

Kendel Christensen, a BYU graduate and founding member of a profamily conference at BYU, says he has come to realize how badly the world needs the proclamation: “I had no idea growing up that the world would so seriously question the value of children, the importance of gender, and the meaning of marriage.” He now views the proclamation as a banner to the world that inspires the outreach efforts of the Stand for the Family Club. “We used the proclamation in our mission statement,” he says, “because we know that it is the only way for families and societies to flourish.” A journalist once interviewed him and asked why Latter-day Saints have such clear views about marriage and family while others seem confused. He gave credit to the proclamation and referred the journalist to a Church website where she could find a copy. She was impressed that the proclamation was written in 1995, well before much of the current debate about the nature of marriage and family. Christensen explained to her that “the Church’s position on marriage and family wasn’t a ‘response’ to any specific political policy, but an established doctrine.” Christensen also used the proclamation at a 2010 conference sponsored by the Ruth Institute and at another hosted by the Love and Fidelity Network at Princeton University. He recounts:

The Church’s stance on marriage was well-known by all the students because of the Church’s involvement in Proposition 8 [a 2008 California ballot initiative to recognize only marriages between a man and a woman], and as a result, they had many questions about our faith. During those discussions . . . I was able to share many copies of the proclamation. . . . To many members of other faiths, the proclamation was a very powerful statement of truth with which they agreed.

Church leaders have also used the proclamation to promote the importance of families to non–Latter-day Saint audiences. At the fifth World Congress of Families in Amsterdam during the summer of 2009, Elder Russell M. Nelson (Church News, 2009) drew on principles from the proclamation in his address on the importance of children to families and nations. He said:

History and contemporary studies have shown that marriage of a husband and a wife, with both contributing their distinctive natural traits to the family, provides the ideal context within which to rear productive, compassionate, and moral individuals. . . . Individuals and groups who would overthrow the traditional concept of marriage and family would first mutate and then mutilate these long-established, time-tested social norms. The consequences of such changes would have far-reaching implications (p. 4).

He referred to the proclamation as “a document that supports the development of happy children who are morally strong” (p. 4). He quoted extensively from the proclamation, offered free copies to conference attendees, and explained how to download the text from the Internet.

When Church officers meet with leaders from around the world, the proclamation is frequently given as a gift and memento of the visit. For example, when Elder Nelson and President Thomas S. Monson visited Brazil’s vice president, José Alencar, on June 2, 2008, the Church leaders presented him with a framed copy of the proclamation(Avant, 2008). Similarly, the Caribbean Area Presidency welcomed Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez Reyna on May 8, 2008, and presented him with a copy of the proclamation as a token of friendship (Church News Archives, 2008).

Following the example of the General Authorities, Church members have been creative in sharing the proclamation within their communities. For example, in June 1999, the Ensign reported on a project launched by members in the United States in the Waynesboro Virginia Stake; their goal was for each of the 9 units in the stake to present 10 framed copies of the proclamation to friends, associates, and community leaders. They exceeded their goal, ultimately presenting more than 100 framed proclamations and an additional 180  unframed copies throughout the area. They personalized the frames for a variety of individuals, “from CEOs to pediatricians, from local and state government leaders to radio announcers, and from fire fighters to school principals” (Sexton & Skeen, 1999, p. 69). Copies were presented in a variety of formal and informal settings: at the close of a service project, at a banquet, and at an appreciation dinner for fire and rescue workers. “In every case,” the article reported, “the proclamation has been warmly received by men and women from different backgrounds, occupations, and nationalities, and the recipients have discovered that the givers share a high regard for the family unit” (p. 69). One sister in this stake told of an experience in which the youth presented a copy of the proclamation to the mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia, on a Monday night:

At that particular meeting . . . a controversial subject was scheduled to be discussed. The large room was filled to capacity, with even the aisles being filled. The meeting was also being televised live. The first order of business was our young men and young women making a presentation to the mayor and city council of the family proclamation. The room seemed charged with tension, which dissipated as a parade of smiling youth approached the podium and made the presentation. The youth then explained that inasmuch as it was Monday evening, that this was a family home evening for members of our Church and asked their families to stand. The positive response was indicated by two ovations! The following day many favorable comments were made by people who had watched the broadcast (p. 69).

In El Salvador, Church members, in partnership with school administrators throughout the country, use the proclamation to teach lessons on families to schoolchildren. One of the teachers, after hearing these lessons, decided to learn more about the Church: “I have seen the change in my students’ lives, and I said to myself, ‘I will go to see if I can find something to help my own family,’” she said. “After visiting the presentations, I think the only thing I have to do is to make the decision to change. I want to receive the missionaries because I need help for my children”(Seymour, 2005).

I have found that as I travel and converse with others not of our faith, the proclamation is an effective missionary tool. Returned missionaries report having shared the proclamation with people as they taught investigators and as they interacted with people in the community. Church members are also finding ways to share the proclamation with their families and friends of other faiths. Jonathan, a BYU student who was planning a wedding, said:

My mother suggested placing a framed family proclamation with other pictures on a table at our wedding reception. I was immediately excited! The family proclamation is an integral part of who I am. Since my mother is a convert to the Church, I look forward to sharing my testimony on the family through the proclamation with those relatives.

Another BYU student told of giving copies of the proclamation to guests as they left her wedding reception. She considered the proclamation the best and most appropriate gift she could give to the many non-LDS family members, friends, and neighbors who came to wish her well. Other families have shared the proclamation with non-LDS friends and family as Christmas gifts, in family newsletters and birthday cards, and in family and neighborhood parties and open houses.

#### A Doctrinal Summary of the Church’s Emphasis on the Family

The Church, which is led by those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators, is at the forefront of efforts to strengthen and promote happy family life. The proclamation provides a clear and concise statement of the doctrinal foundation of such efforts.

Dan Roberts, a former bishop from the Alpine Utah North Stake, said:

While serving as a bishop I continually referred to the proclamation in my talks, in my meetings with the adults and youth, and in my counseling with ward members. I always felt that if I could just get our members to really internalize the principles of the proclamation, they would have the answers they needed and the pathway to a happy family life. The proclamation is truth, and I’ve seen its truth and power change lives.

In addition, the proclamation serves as a building block for greater Church emphasis and outreach on the family. The proclamation is available free at Church distribution centers. It is available in more than 80 languages at the Church’s website; it has been quoted from and referenced in countless conference and sacrament meeting talks, as well as Church classes and lessons; it has been cited in innumerable articles and books and is the basis for two in-depth textbooks and a foundational family course at BYU–Provo and BYU–Idaho.

The proclamation has influenced many other Church programs and publications. For example, the theme for the Church’s 2009 Primary sharing time and the children’s sacrament meeting presentation, “My Eternal Family,” came from the proclamation: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ” (¶ 7). Reproductions of the proclamation appear in publications such as For the Strength of Youth, True to the Faith, the Young Women Personal Progress book, the Aaronic Priesthood Duty to God book, Church handbooks and guidebooks, family home evening manuals, seminary and institute manuals, Sunday School manuals, and many others. It has also been placed in temple and chapel cornerstone boxes since it was first issued in 1995(Church News Archives, 2009).

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### Conclusion

Although over the past years the proclamation has become more broadly known and referenced, it has yet to be brought fully out of obscurity; there are so many hearts and homes around the world it has not reached. In some sense, though progress has been made, we have just scratched the surface of its potential impact. Just as General Authorities of the Church share the proclamation with citizens and leaders around the world, so can we. People across the globe love their families, as we do. They worry about their children and care about the strength and well-being of their families, but some may have become confused about certain vital principles of happy family life. The proclamation speaks to the hearts and minds of our neighbors, friends, and those who care about the strength of the family as it declares the sacredness of family life and calls upon us to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

The impact, power, and influence of the proclamation are found in the lived experience of quality family life—in husbands and wives who “love and care for each other and for their children” (¶ 6) and “help one another as equal partners” (¶ 7), in children who grow up with the understanding that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God” (¶ 1), in families who find true happiness through “faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities” (¶ 7).

In ever-widening ripples—like those that silently spread after a rock is thrown into a still pond—the influence of the proclamation will expand in every direction, blessing individuals, marriages, families, communities, and nations.

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