

Our Divinely Based Worth

By Barbara Day Lockhart

The measure of our lives is not in what we buy or how good we look, but in our divine heritage, our possibilities as children of God, and our application of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives.

In the Book of Mormon, Jacob chastises his well-to-do brethren for thinking that because of the costliness of their apparel, their advantaged position, and their riches, they are better than others.

“Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh?” the prophet asks, his question applicable to modern readers as well. “The one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever” (Jacob 2:21).

Perhaps now more than ever, the world tells us that our sense of worth should be based on our appearance and achievements. As we look better and accomplish more, the world says, we will feel good about ourselves. However, President Ezra Taft Benson taught us that this approach to our value is linked to pride: “The proud depend upon the world to tell them whether they have value or not. Their self-esteem is determined by where they are judged to be on the ladders of worldly success” (*Ensign*, May 1989, p. 6).

I can personally attest to how easy it is to get caught up in craving acceptance through worldly achievement and wealth; I lived that way for half my life. Even while enjoying worldly success, I was not inwardly convinced that I was a valuable person. By age thirty-two, I was desperate to know if I was loved. It took me six months of praying and repenting to shift the source of my worth from the worldly to the divine and to trust Heavenly Father’s love. Then my whole life changed!

President Benson declared that “if we love God, do His will, and fear His judgment more than men’s, we will have self-esteem” (*ibid.*). Only through knowing that Heavenly Father truly loves us and wants us to come home to him can we experience an abiding peace and a sense of who we really are. As we come to realize our eternal worth, we will excel and achieve because

of our genuine gratitude to our Heavenly Father. Instead of wanting to measure up to the world's hollow, constantly fluctuating expectations, we will be motivated in all that we do by our love for our Father in Heaven, by our trust in his love for us, and by our desire to do his will.

A divine sense of our individual worth is based on the absolute, eternal principles of the gospel. Following are some fundamental concepts that have anchored and nourished me as I have tried to replace my worldly based self-perceptions with a strong and enduring sense of my divine worth as a child of Heavenly Father.

We Are the Children of Heavenly Parents

Perhaps the most essential key to a true sense of our eternal worth is the knowledge of our divine parentage. The First Presidency during the administration of President Joseph F. Smith stated that as “offspring of celestial parentage, all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity” (quoted in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols., New York: Macmillan, 1992, 2:961). Elder Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, testified that “no greater ideal has been revealed than the supernal truth that we are the children of God, and we differ, by virtue of our creation, from all other living things” (*Ensign*, May 1992, p. 67). “No idea has been more *destructive* of happiness, no philosophy has produced more sorrow, more heartbreak and mischief; no idea has done more to destroy the family than the idea that we are not the offspring of God” (ibid.).

We are children of God blessed with the knowledge, opportunity, and potential to eventually become like him. Jesus Christ demonstrated the ultimate harmony of body and spirit when he gave his Apostles and followers tangible evidence of his resurrection (see Luke 24:36–48; see also 2 Ne. 9:13; Alma 40:23). Our eternal souls begin to fulfill the measure of their creation here in mortality as we exercise faith in the Savior's atonement and become increasingly sanctified. This process becomes complete sometime after death, when the righteous “shall rise again, a spiritual body,” and those “of a celestial spirit” shall receive their glorified bodies, after the manner of the Father of our spirits (D&C 88:27–29). What a glorious destiny for the righteous! It is a destiny made possible with the blessing of a mortal body capable of being sanctified, resurrected, and glorified.

The world, however, would have us neglect our eternal spirits and be obsessed with our “outward appearance” (1 Sam. 16:7), as evidenced by today's dieting crazes and eating disorders. Laurie Harris, a past student in

Brigham Young University's Philosophy of BodyMindSpirit course, expressed in her final class paper how we can avoid being lured into worrying excessively about our physical appearance:

“We must make our physical selves into a being fit to be a god and never, never despise one of the things that set us apart from the hosts of Satan: our bodies, however flawed, however imperfect. If we respect our bodies and spirits, we cannot be false to ourselves! The face we each fashion will be the one that God has given. And so, I would ask, have you received his image in your countenance? [See Alma 5:14.]”

The body, as an integral part of our eternal souls (D&C 88:15), is a primary blessing in our process of moving forward. If we think of our body as negative, as something we would rather do without, we put ourselves in a state of conflict. The Lord said, “Be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). I think that sentiment of being one in our relations with others is also wonderfully applicable to the unity existing within our own souls. We will receive a fulness of joy when our physical bodies and spirits are forever inseparable (see D&C 93:33–34; D&C 138:17, 50). Acknowledging and appreciating our divine parentage and our complete reality as eternal souls of body and spirit (see D&C 88:15) will help us in our quest to become more like Heavenly Father and to experience joy in this life and a fulness of joy in the life to come.

Everyone Has Eternal Worth

Relief Society general president Elaine L. Jack has observed that “the world would have you believe that you are of worth only if you have money, a certain physical appearance, stylish clothes, or social position. The gospel assures you that your value is not dependent on your looks or material possessions. ... Part of what it means to be a Latter-day Saint is to know within your soul your eternal worth, who you really are, and why you are here on earth” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 88).

Over and over again, the Lord assures us of our worth and value to him. In D&C 18:10–11, he admonishes us to “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

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

Our eternal worth is given to us by God; it cannot be manipulated or decreased by anyone. Of course, if we are not living the commandments, we may lose sight of our divine worth and potential. Nevertheless, each soul's inherent worth is always great in the sight of our loving Heavenly

Father. I think that is imperative to know! Worthlessness is not an option for anyone.

John the Beloved taught us of the depth of God's love:

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:8–10).

Our Heavenly Father's love for us is communicated through the Holy Spirit. Reminded of the depth of that love, we feel prompted to love those around us. Love and respect can flow from Heavenly Father through us to others. According to Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve, “Too often we behave as if we were in massive competition with others for God's love. But we have His love, unconditionally and universally; it is our love of Him that remains to be proven” (*Even As I Am*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982, p. 63).

We Depend on Jesus for Eternal Life

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve has testified that “the reality of our total dependence upon Jesus Christ for the attainment of our goals of immortality and eternal life should dominate every teaching and every testimony and every action of every soul touched by the light of the restored gospel” (“Sins, Crimes, and Atonement,” address to employees of the Church Educational System, Salt Lake City, 7 Feb. 1992).

The world's distractions and pretensions notwithstanding, the whole of what is real and of eternal value is based on the Savior. Our real work, our real desires, and our real purpose in life are based on our love for him and the Father. Following the Lord's example, we can find satisfaction in working to improve the world without expecting anything in return. Christ is the one who will validate us, refine us, and fill our hearts. President Howard W. Hunter has said: “Why face life's burdens alone, Christ asks, or why face them with temporal support that will quickly falter? To the heavy laden it is Christ's yoke, it is the power and peace of standing side by side with a God that will provide the support, balance, and the strength to meet our challenges and endure our tasks here in the hardpan field of mortality” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1990, p. 18).

Even faithful members of the Church can drift into relying too much on themselves for meeting the challenges of mortality and attempting to

perfect themselves. Stephen E. Robinson points out that it is one thing to believe in Christ but another to believe Christ: “Many of us are trying to save ourselves, holding the atonement of Jesus Christ at arm’s distance and saying, ‘When I’ve perfected myself, then I’ll be worthy of the Atonement.’ But that’s not how it works. That’s like saying, ‘I won’t take the medicine until I’m well. I’ll be worthy of it then’” (*Ensign*, Apr. 1992, p. 9).

We are so important to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, that we are the very focus of his work and glory (see Moses 1:39). If we are to fulfill our eternal promise by becoming like him—and if we are to feel secure and excited about that prospect while we live in veiled mortality upon this earth—we must rely on him. We must firmly place our faith and center our hope in Christ, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Ne. 31:19). We need not go it alone.

“Peace Which Passeth All Understanding”

I can testify to the drastic difference that a sense of gospel-based worth has meant to my happiness, progress, and peace. Tribulations, losses, and trying times certainly haven’t gone away, but fears no longer fashion my outlook on life and my perception of myself. When firmly rooted in a gospel-centered sense of self, we need not crave worldly acceptance or let other people mar our progress or happiness. We can experience failure without being a failure. We can be rejected but still value ourselves. We can love others and forgive them even when they treat us badly.

It is difficult to make a person with a sense of divinely based worth feel angry, hurt, or resentful. Those feelings just aren’t compatible with the way such a person approaches life: staying close to the Lord, feeling the Spirit, and feeling love for others. Anything inconsistent with those efforts is not tolerated.

Of all people on the earth, it makes the least sense for a Latter-day Saint to suffer from a poor self-image. We have been blessed to know the truth, and we have been given the opportunity to take that truth to all the world. How can we be a light to others if we are trapped in mists of insecurity and self-doubt? As we love Christ, have faith in him, desire to be like him, and follow him, he will change us, perfect us, and ultimately bring us home. “Then shall [our] confidence wax strong” here in mortality (D&C 121:45). Then shall we know “the peace ... which passeth all understanding” (Philip. 4:7; see also D&C 59:23).
(*Ensign*, June 1995)