

# Following Heavenly Father's Plan

LARRY M. GIBSON

**M**y wonderful brothers and sisters, I consider it a sacred privilege to be with you. Please know that since receiving this invitation you have been in my thoughts and prayers. I pray now that the Spirit will edify us and touch each heart.

I love this university. I studied here, was married while here, taught here, and served as a bishop here. Before my granddaughter left on her mission, she marked the fifth generation of Gibsons attending Brigham Young University, beginning with my grandfather, Robert Orson Gibson. Exactly 115 years ago, at the age of eighteen, he wrote the following for a BYU class:

*Some people want to become noble, others want to become wealthy, still others wise, and there are those who wish to become good. It would be very well to be any of these, but I would prefer, most of all, being known as good.*

This was the foundation for his plan for life. He truly was “known as good,” as he always strove to fulfill the will of Heavenly Father and treasured his family.

## The Plan

Some of us may not have a “life plan” as my grandfather did, or we might make plans that differ from Heavenly Father’s plan. To paraphrase Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your [plans] my [plans for you], saith the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8).

Heavenly Father believes in plans. He has a plan for the salvation of His children—a specific plan just for you. It is referred to as the plan of happiness because it is designed to bring us happiness in this life and a fulness of joy in the life to come. It includes

1. The creation of a world on which we would live and be united as husband and wife in marriage.
2. A fall that would allow Heavenly Father’s spirit children to come into mortal families.

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3. A Savior who, in addition to breaking the bands of death, would atone for all sin, allowing us to partake of the gift of repentance.

4. Immortality for all of God’s children through the miracle of the Resurrection.

5. The opportunity for us and for our families to return to our heavenly parents, prepared for exaltation and eternal life.

This plan was presented to us while we lived as spirit children with our heavenly parents, who are the consummate examples of a perfect husband and wife, father and mother. Oh, how we must have loved Them and wanted to be just like Them! Their perfect love for each other and for us is eternal, and They want us to have *all* that They have. We must have rejoiced when we heard of the plan that would open the way for us to become as They are, even though it meant leaving Their presence.

In her inspiring and tender hymn, Eliza R. Snow reflected on our heavenly parents:

*In the heav’ns are parents single?  
No, the thought makes reason stare!  
Truth is reason [and] truth eternal  
Tells me [I have] a mother there.  
[“O My Father,” Hymns, 2002, no. 292;  
emphasis added]*

Regarding our mother in heaven, President Spencer W. Kimball shared this thought:

*We get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return there? [“The True Way of Life and Salvation,” Ensign, May 1978, 6]*

Continuing, Sister Snow expressed the profound desire we all feel to one day return to the loving embraces of our heavenly parents:

*When I leave this frail existence,  
When I lay this mortal by,  
Father, Mother, may I meet you  
In your royal courts on high?  
Then, at length, when I’ve completed  
All you sent me [here] to do,  
With your *mutual* [approval]  
Let me come and dwell with you.*

Do you understand why “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and . . . family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102)?

We are here to experience in a mortal and imperfect way what we desired to receive in an immortal and perfect home! Family life as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, is preparing us for eternal life.

Our beloved Father is not just interested in you returning home—His desire is that you return prepared to be exalted and eternal. He knows that you cannot achieve this supreme goal on your own, and He knows that it is not good for us to be alone (see Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:11). Today I would like to highlight two companions that Father’s plan provides to help you fulfill your eternal destiny: the eternal companionship of a loving spouse and the divine companionship of the Holy Ghost.

### **A Companion to Help Us Become Divine**

I was here at BYU when I married my eternal companion, Shirley, who was already well on her way to divinity. She was pure and a light to all whom she met. I vividly remember the night she proposed to me! She might remember the conversation differently, but as I recall, she asked me this question: “Larry, do you know why I love you?”

She had never used that term before, so to me it was a proposal. I knew I must answer carefully: “No, why do you love me?”

“I love you because I know you love the Lord more than you love me. And with that love we can make it back to our heavenly home.”

That answer struck my heart. I could not imagine a young girl of nineteen wanting her future husband to love anything more than her. But she had a deep spiritual maturity.

I did not fully comprehend what she said that evening, but I wanted her to always feel that I loved the Lord above all else. She saw in me the person I could become rather than who I was. I remember going home that night and pleading with the Lord to allow me to stand at her side as her eternal companion and promising that I would always strive to be the kind of man she hoped I was. What a marvelous companion she is. I love her.

Do you remember the verse in Job that says, “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7)? I know why we sons shouted for joy. We knew that if we lived according to God’s plan, we would have the miraculous blessing of journeying through mortality—and eternity—with one of the choicest daughters of God.

It does not specifically say that the daughters of God cheered, but I am confident they did, knowing who you sons of God really are.

I believe that as we both faithfully keep our sacred covenants as husband and wife, one day we will stand in awe of the great man or woman our eternal companion really is.

When I was growing up, my parents often traveled from our home in southern Nevada to Salt Lake City to attend general conference. On one occasion my mother brought me a small copper cast of the Salt Lake Temple. It sat on my nightstand throughout my youth, serving as a visual reminder of my goal for an eternal marriage.

It’s no wonder that I always wanted to be sealed in the Salt Lake Temple, even though our closest temple was in St. George, Utah, where Shirley wanted to be married. Can you guess where we were sealed? The Manti

Temple, which is halfway in between! Now, if you were to ask Shirley, she would likely point out that the St. George Temple was closed that day, or we would have been sealed there. Either way, in our marriage we have continued to strive for a pattern of oneness and unity in all we do.

Elder David A. Bednar beautifully described this pattern:

*The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward [a fulness of glory]. . . .*

*. . . The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness. . . .*

*. . . The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other. [“Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Supporting the Family, 11 February 2006, in *Ensign*, June 2006, 83–84]*

I love and cherish the daughter of God who is my companion. I once expressed gratitude to Heavenly Father for Shirley, declaring that she was my most priceless possession. The Spirit quickly whispered, however, that she was not my possession but Father’s. If I am true and faithful to all of my covenants and keep the commandments and love her as Father loves her, then the day will come when we will be eternally together as one.

This is the greatest “work of salvation”—and we need to hasten that work by forming our eternal family in the house of the Lord and then striving to bring about Father’s plan for each family member. As husband and wife, mother and father, we are working to bring to

pass salvation for Heavenly Father’s spirit children and eternal life for our whole family. If we live worthily, this blessing will be afforded each one of us in His due time.

### A Divine Companion

We cannot accomplish this work, which is ultimately God’s work, without revelation from Him—to us individually and as companions in marriage. That brings me to another companion Heavenly Father has provided to help us fulfill His plan.

Joseph Smith made it clear that “no man [or woman] can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations” (HC 6:58; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007], 132).

The Holy Ghost is necessary for revelation, and revelation is necessary to successfully fulfill Father’s plan for us. As the third member of the Godhead, the Spirit is the witness for the Father and the Son. The righteous of all ages have enjoyed His companionship.

President Wilford Woodruff taught:

*If you have the Holy Ghost with you—and every one ought to have—I can say unto you that there is no greater gift, there is no greater blessing, there is no greater testimony given to any man [or woman] on earth. . . . I claim that the gift of the Holy Ghost is the greatest gift that can be bestowed.* [“Discourse Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff,” *Deseret Weekly*, 6 April 1889, 451; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], 49]

Of course, having this divine companion bestowed upon us is not enough. We must learn to **retain** the Holy Ghost, **rely** on Him, and appropriately **respond** to His promptings.

#### 1. Retaining the Holy Ghost

We must be worthy vessels to have this companionship. If we are not keeping the

covenants that we made at baptism and renew each week as we partake of the sacrament to “always remember [the Savior], and keep his commandments,” we cannot expect Father to keep His part of the covenant to “always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (Moroni 4:3). But if we sincerely try to keep these covenants, we are entitled to this miraculous blessing.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said:

*The teachings of the Spirit often come as feelings [such as] a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works. Truly, the still, small voice is just that, “still” and “small.”* [“Teaching and Learning by the Spirit,” *Ensign*, March 1997, 13]

For this reason we must always be spiritually sensitive to those feelings. In my experience the Holy Ghost is very sensitive to the environments in which we place ourselves. Clearly the Spirit cannot remain with us while we are reading, listening to, or viewing anything that contains violence, inappropriate language, or any kind of immodest, vile, or immoral content.

The Holy Ghost cares about your spiritual well-being, but if you engage in any of these things, you withdraw from Him, and the return is not easy. Do not let the world set your standards. The question for each of us is “How often do I want the Holy Ghost to be with me?” The Lord says “always.” Our worthiness to have this constant companionship is an excellent indicator of how well we are following Heavenly Father’s plan.

#### 2. Relying on the Holy Ghost

Sometimes we may feel overly self-sufficient and do not rely as we should on the Holy Ghost as our guide. For example, do we remember that the Holy Ghost is a teacher? This has special application as you pursue learning, both here at BYU and throughout your life. Do you sufficiently seek His influence

in your studies? The Savior promised that “the Holy Ghost . . . shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26). This is always contingent, however, on our own preparation and effort—He will not do our work for us.

The Holy Ghost is also a comforter. Occasionally we want things that we should not have. We pray and then agonize when what seems to us to be a righteous desire is not realized—an illness is not healed, we fail an examination that seems vital to our future, or the Lord says “no” or “not right now” to our prayers. In these situations, if we submit ourselves to God’s will, the Holy Ghost can soften that no. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said:

*He will comfort us and reassure us. The burdens not lifted from us, He will help us to bear, thus enabling [us] to continue with joy the soul-stretching journey. [“Apply the Atoning Blood of Christ,” *Ensign*, November 1997, 24]*

Develop the discipline to rely on the Holy Ghost always—not just in times of great need—and you will find that when those urgent moments arise, you will feel His comfort more readily and more deeply. No one can successfully fulfill Father’s plan, individually or in marriage, without relying consistently on the Holy Ghost.

### 3. Responding to the Holy Ghost

President Boyd K. Packer counseled:

*If you are slipping into things that you should not slip into or if you are associating with people who are pulling you away in the wrong direction, that is the time to assert your independence, your*

*agency. Listen to the voice of the Spirit, and you will not be led astray.*

*. . . As a servant of the Lord, I promise that you will be protected and shielded from the attacks of the adversary if you will heed the promptings that come from the Holy Spirit. [“Counsel to Youth,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 18; emphasis in original]*

The Holy Ghost is a prompter of good works. When opportunities to serve come, do not push them aside with thoughts of your busy schedule or feelings of inadequacy. We can each be instruments through whom the Holy Ghost functions. For example, you may be walking to or from class and feel an impression to call, speak to, or visit someone—perhaps your sweetheart. I have found that immediately acting on these impressions increases my ability to feel them more completely in the future and helps Heavenly Father change my life and the lives of those I love.

Respond promptly to promptings.

I know that Heavenly Father is concerned about each one of us. He is the great architect of the magnificent plan of salvation and happiness. In addition to giving us a Savior in Jesus Christ, of whom I testify, He has also provided a witness, companion, guide, and comforter in the Holy Ghost. And He has made eternal marriage essential to His plan for His sons and daughters so that we may work together to achieve our eternal destiny: the continuation of the family into eternity and the glory and power that our heavenly parents enjoy. May we live and work to qualify for the promise of these blessings in this life and their fulness in the life to come is my prayer, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.