

God's Love

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What an amazing sight you are this morning! What a vibrant spirit you exude—so full of life and energy and hope for the future. I am so glad to be here with you today.

In case some of you may not have noticed, today is Valentine's Day. And of course, that being the case, our thoughts turn to love.

Love is such a wonderful thing. And there are many types of love. Love, as it is defined by the world, can be misguided, frivolous, and selfish. For instance, we may love chocolate, love shoes, or love a good joke. While appropriately enjoying and benefiting from the things of the world is part of God's plan for us, we must be sure that we keep our desire and "love" for these things in balance with life's more important blessings. The love for material things can sidetrack us from seeking those things that bring eternal happiness.

Worldly "love" between people is oftentimes nothing more than lust. This kind of love brings dissatisfaction, misery, and sorrow.

On the other hand, God's love is pure. True love as described by the prophets is deep devotion, affection, adoration, mercy, forgiveness, service, grace, gratitude, and kindness. Real love motivates us to be the best we can be. It is the most powerful force on the earth and can bring great joy and happiness. Pure love is a

gift from God and is at the very foundation of His gospel. While God's love for us is perfect, our love for Him is constantly being redefined as we learn, grow, and experience.

Today I would like to share a few thoughts about this kind of love—God's love.

Two Great Commandments

The Savior has directed our understanding. In the book of Matthew, Jesus was asked:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [Matthew 22:36–39]

In order to understand how to keep these two great commandments, we have to first understand our relationship with our Heavenly Father and we have to understand His love for us.

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We are our Heavenly Father's children. It is as we learn in the favorite Primary song: "I am a child of God, And he has sent me here" (*Songbook*, 2). He loves us because we *are*. He loves us with a perfect love that we cannot earn or destroy. Now, to be sure, we can disappoint Him and we can cause Him great sorrow. We can forfeit many of His promised blessings if we fail to be obedient. But He will never stop loving us. He loves us with a love that we cannot fully comprehend. He loves us even when we don't deserve it.

The greatest example of God's love for His children is found in the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ. In John 3:16 we read: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This means that when we do disappoint Him and make mistakes, there is a way that He has provided whereby we can be forgiven and make our way back to Him.

I am sure that if I were to ask the question "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" that probably all of you would say yes. But let me ask you this: Do you believe Him when He says He gave His life for you so that you might be forgiven of your sins and live with Him and Father in Heaven again? Do you really understand that the Atonement was made for you? Do you believe that you are worth it or worthy of it? Do you believe that anyone could possibly love you that much? I want to assure you today that you are worth it! You are loved more than you will ever know, and as we turn to our Heavenly Father in our times of need, we most assuredly can feel of His love.

Do you remember the story in John 8 of the woman who had been caught in adultery? Surely she must have felt very unworthy of Jesus' forgiveness, and yet that is exactly what He gave her after all her accusers had departed. "And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Not only did Christ not condemn her, but He gave her the opportunity to repent as He directed her to "go, and sin no more." The love of Christ is a wonderful thing.

Again referring to the two great commandments found in Matthew, we are to love God, to love others, and to love ourselves. Let's begin by looking at how we can love ourselves. It begins by opening our hearts and accepting God's love, because then and only then can we know who we are and that we are of great worth. Only then will we be able to love ourselves.

What does it mean to love ourselves? Are we talking about being selfish or self-centered? Are we talking about being self-absorbed? No, we are talking about knowing who we are, where we came from, what we are to do, and where we are going. We are talking about appreciating who we are and the blessings and opportunities we have been given. We are talking about a love that gives us the confidence to serve God and our fellowmen.

Do you really understand the difference between loving yourself in a righteous manner and, on the other hand, being selfish and turned inward? Does your life reflect this understanding? If you do understand it, how well do you love yourself? How do you demonstrate that love? Let's explore four ways we can show love for ourselves. As we do so, we will turn to the scriptures, for we are taught in 2 Nephi 32:3 that we are to "feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do."

Respect Our Bodies

One important way to show love for ourselves is to respect our bodies. What has the Lord said about this? In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 89, we find the Word of Wisdom. In verse 2 it is proclaimed to be "the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days." In this Word of Wisdom we are not only told what not to

take into our bodies, we are taught what is good for our health and well-being. Now I am sure that none of you are drinking or smoking, but do you eat the right kinds of food at the right times in order to maintain good health? Are you avoiding fad diets and other foolish practices in order to become and stay thin? Our objective regarding these things should be optimum health rather than weight loss. We are given a great promise if we will keep this Word of Wisdom:

And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. [D&C 89:18–21]

If you really love yourself, you will want all of these promised blessings.

Another principle of good health is exercise. This not only adds to our health but also invigorates the mind. It is a great way to learn discipline.

About now you may be thinking, “Wow, she sounds just like my mom!” Well, I am just like your mom. And let me tell you something: When moms tell us what to do, it is never just because they can—it is because they care and they want the very best for you.

That being the case, I am going to tell you one more thing that is important to do to respect your body, to love yourself. Actually, I am not telling you, the Lord is telling you.

In the Doctrine and Covenants we are taught:

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated. [D&C 88:124]

Listen again to the blessings associated with this commandment: to not be weary but to have invigorated minds and bodies. These are blessings that I surely need. How about you?

Do you love yourself enough to claim the blessings that are promised if we use wisdom in eating, exercising, sleeping, and practicing general good health habits?

Keep Ourselves Pure and Clean

The second way to show love to ourselves is to keep ourselves pure and clean. In 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 we read:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

If we really love and respect ourselves, we will do everything to protect ourselves from the influences of the world that would have us defile this temple called our body. Sister Susan Tanner, Young Women general president, taught the following in her October 2005 general conference talk:

*Satan . . . tries to do everything he can to get us to abuse or misuse this precious gift [our body]. He has filled the world with lies and deceptions about the body. He tempts many to defile this great gift of the body through unchastity, immodesty, self-indulgence, and addictions. He seduces some to despise their bodies; others he tempts to worship their bodies. [Susan W. Tanner, “The Sanctity of the Body,” *Ensign*, November 2005, 13]*

Knowing that we are children of God should enable us to make worthy choices when it comes to chastity, modesty, music, activities, and companions. Loving ourselves should enable us to stay clear of those things that, while acceptable and even desired by the world, would undermine our self-worth. All of us have been taught since our youth what it means to keep ourselves morally clean, and God's rules have not changed. But do we ever find ourselves standing on the very edge of those rules?

Two of my children love to rock climb. They take pictures of their adventures and bring them home to scare me to death. Even though they are roped in and use all the safety measures prescribed, to me they still look like they are in terrible danger. They look like they are barely holding on.

I have thought as I have seen those pictures that I am so glad that they do not make eternal choices in the same manner that they climb rocks. When it comes to keeping the commandments, their choices keep them firmly planted on a solid foundation, well away from the edge of disaster. In John 14:15 we are told, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Today we might add, "If you love yourself, keep His commandments."

Appreciate Who We Are

The third thing we can do to develop love for ourselves is to appreciate who we are. Give yourself credit for all of the great things you do and have done. It's an interesting exercise to write down on a piece of paper all of your good qualities and then just sit back and look at all you have done. Actually, what we are looking at is what the Lord has done. We owe all that we are to our Heavenly Father.

When we love ourselves, we recognize that our Heavenly Father has given us special gifts. We are each unique. In Doctrine and Covenants 6:10 it says, "Behold thou hast a gift, and

blessed art thou because of thy gift. Remember it is sacred and cometh from above."

It is so important that we do not compare ourselves to others but rather work to appreciate and develop who we are. It is never too late to be what you might have been (see Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman* [1857], chapter 36). Don't ever become discouraged. Set goals, work hard, be patient, and believe that you can do it. My dad always taught me that I could do anything and be anything I wanted to be if I was just willing to work hard enough. We have to work with a purpose. And when you do, and when you understand your potential, you will have the confidence that this knowledge brings. You will be willing to try new things and discover new talents. You will then be free to become all that you can be.

Loving yourself is demonstrated through a life of discipline. You don't have to become disciplined all at once. Remember the principle taught in 2 Nephi 28:30: "line upon line, precept upon precept." Do your best one day at a time—sometimes just one hour at a time. It's okay to start small—but *start!* You are in a wonderful place in your life. You have so many opportunities before you. Take advantage of your years here at school. "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118).

Now, don't misunderstand, you are young and you should enjoy your life and have fun—but never at the expense of your eternal welfare. Anything that is worth having is going to take some effort. Hard work is the only way to learn and grow, but it is important to balance that with good, wholesome fun.

Forgive Ourselves

The fourth way to love ourselves is to forgive ourselves. If we truly love ourselves, we will recognize that when we make mistakes, we can turn to our Father in Heaven and partake of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. He will

help us to turn our lives around and have the strength to get back on the right path. He loves us and will forgive us if we sincerely repent and change our lives. He will help us forgive ourselves and regain our self-respect and self-worth.

As we love ourselves the way the Lord would have us do, we are prepared to truly love others. Self-love and a love of God should become the foundation upon which a life of love and service to others is based. We have to learn to love ourselves, but then we have to forget ourselves. In Matthew 16:25 we learn, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Loving oneself and yet forgetting oneself may seem contradictory, but it is not. It is a demonstration of the kind of love offered us by the Savior. It is also a demonstration of the kind of love the Savior expects from us to Him and the Father.

A Life of Love and Service

Now, in your busy daily lives, how can you really serve others? There are the obvious ways: accepting calls in your wards, helping someone who is in need, doing service projects, paying fast offerings. But what is it that the Lord really has in mind here?

It occurs to me that many times our service is just a matter of going through the motions. We may do it because we have a sense of duty. We may do it because there is no one else there to do it. We may do it so we can check it off our list. We may do it so we won't feel guilty now. None of these motivations are bad, but is it true service? Is it the kind of service the Lord has in mind? Is it the service that is founded in the pure love of Christ?

This leads us to questions like these: Is my service really based on a love I feel deep in my heart for other people? Who is my neighbor? How can I really love him?

When we serve others just because we are supposed to, we are still serving, and it is true that we grow to love those whom we serve. But drawing close to our Father in Heaven and living worthy of the Holy Ghost in our lives can qualify us with a love that fills our heart and spills out to all those we meet.

Everyone in our lives is our neighbor. Our family is our neighbor. Our roommates are our neighbors. Our friends, our enemies, our acquaintances, and those we have never met—all of these are our neighbors. We demonstrate our love for them by nurturing feelings of tolerance, patience, kindness, helpfulness, and compassion in our hearts as well as in our actions. We overcome critical, angry feelings toward others. We look to understand rather than condemn. We accept differences as strengths and we learn from one another.

I experienced this kind of love when I traveled to Africa to do work for the Primary. I had been asked by President Hinckley, when he called me to serve as the Primary general president, to take care of the children of the world. As I prepared for this trip, I felt apprehensive about what I would see there. Would I be able to stand the conditions in which I would see the children? But what I experienced was something totally unexpected. I saw children living in terrible conditions, it is true. I realized that I could do nothing to change that. But, at the same time, I was filled with an overwhelming feeling of love for them and a realization of the love that our Heavenly Father feels for them. That love comforted my heart.

Our service may be doing things that really change others' lives for the better, or our service can be as simple as a smile that lifts a heavy heart. It can be something that may involve some sacrifice. We may have to forgo something we want in order to serve, protect, or strengthen another. When we do this, our service is sanctified, and we begin to feel the pure love of Christ.

If our life is all about “me,” we are missing the point. We are here to love and to serve one another. The motto here at BYU reflects this: “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.”

We read in Matthew 25:40: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

And the same principle is taught in Mosiah 2:17: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”

As these scriptures tell us, when we love and serve our neighbor, we are showing our love for our Father in Heaven. Our love for Him will never be judged by our words alone. Our actions must follow, and those actions must come from the inside out. They must spring naturally from love. Love for our God, for ourselves, and for others must become the very center of our being. It must become our motivation and our foundation. We can pray for that love. We can work for that love.

Mormon said:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.
[Moroni 7:48]

We began today by reading in Matthew 22. In conclusion, let us turn there again. After the Lord gives us the first two commandments, which are both based on love, He says in verse 40, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

If we can understand the law of love—for God, for others, and for ourselves—we will be able to follow all of the rest of the commandments and teachings in the scriptures and from latter-day prophets. If we can understand pure love that is charity, we will be blessed indeed: “But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

I bear my witness of the truths found in the scriptures. The scriptures are the word of the Lord. I am so grateful for our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who directs us to read them and to make them a part of our lives. I know that God lives and Jesus is the Christ. I know that They love us and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. I know that as we follow His words, there is a sweet promise, for He has said, “Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love” (D&C 6:20).

May we all feel His love and love Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.