

THE FATHER IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Jared W. Ludlow

“**W**e believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:1). Though this is an important tenet of our faith, our discussions have a tendency to focus on only part of this fundamental truth: Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. Far too often God the Father is not the focal point of our discussions. Such is especially the case when we study the New Testament Gospels. Nowhere else do we have such a vivid portrayal of the life of Jesus, so it is easy to get caught up in his teaching, his life, and his mission. In doing so, we may forget that Jesus always referred to his Father and sought to focus his listeners’ attention on his Father. One important example of Jesus teaching about the Father is the Sermon on the Mount. What do we learn about the Father from Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?

Many discussions on the Sermon on the Mount rightly focus on Jesus, his introduction of a higher law, and his role as our exemplar. Jesus’ similar sermon given to the Nephites highlights his godly development even further. Yet Jesus’ significant teachings about his Father and his Father’s

Jared W. Ludlow is an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

role in the spiritual life of his listeners are often overlooked.¹ Jesus uses the title “Father” eighteen times within these three chapters, not to mention other titles for God.² Because the title “Father” is always connected with a possessive pronoun—your/thy, my, and our—a very personal aspect is attached. Within each of the three chapters of the sermon, Jesus makes it clear that his Father and the Father’s commandments are the standard to which disciples should strive. Jesus also reiterates he is teaching and commanding only what the Father has given him.

Within the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proposes the type of personal, spiritual relationship we should have with the Father. Jesus exhorts us to live up to the standard of the Father and highlights the blessings the Father offers to the obedient, such as forgiveness, being called his children, and seeing him. Jesus also teaches about the Father’s presence in heaven and his omniscience and generosity. The Father’s glory and how we can glorify him are also discussed. Additionally, Jesus teaches how to pray to the Father in the Lord’s Prayer.³ In order to pull out all these facets of Jesus’ teaching about his Father, this chapter examines key phrases from the sermon and their possible meanings.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

One of the principles about the Father that Jesus repeatedly mentioned was the Father’s location “in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21), also expressed in the title “heavenly Father” (6:14, 26, 32). More specifically, Jesus describes heaven as “God’s throne” (5:34), as opposed to earth which is “his footstool” (5:35). This principle is juxtaposed with the more personal title for God as “Father.” Thus perhaps Jesus is emphasizing that although he is our Father and we can enter into a special covenant relationship with him, there is still distance between us and him. He is not our buddy, and we should not diminish his status, majesty, or power by simply seeing him as our father.

The Father’s status in heaven is an indication of his righteousness as pointed out in the contrast between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father: “If ye then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father *which is in heaven* give good things to them that ask him? (7:11; emphasis added). When describing the Father, Jesus did not say “being righteous” in contrast to the previous phrase

“being evil” but instead highlighted the Father’s location in heaven as indicative of his righteous state. The Father has already gone into his glory in heaven above, and now, with his help, we need to meet him there.⁴

Within the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus expressed the desire we should have that the Father’s will be done on earth as in heaven (6:10). This seemingly simple statement indicates first, God’s will is being followed in heaven; and second, we must seek to do the same here on earth. Jesus reemphasized this later in the sermon, when he said the only ones who would enter into the kingdom of heaven would be those who did “the will of my Father which is in heaven” (7:21).

What is the Father’s will? Elder Bruce R. McConkie said salvation is

reserved for those who do the very things which constitute the will of the Father, namely: (1) Accept and believe the true gospel, thus gaining faith in Christ, and thus believing in the prophets sent by Christ to reveal his truths, Joseph Smith being the greatest of these in this dispensation; (2) Repent; (3) Be baptized by a legal administrator who has power from God to bind on earth and seal in heaven; (4) Receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, also by the authorized act of a duly appointed priesthood bearer; and (5) Endure in righteousness and devotion to the truth, keeping every standard of personal righteousness that appertains to the gospel, until the end of one’s mortal probation.⁵

Our test in mortality, therefore, is to learn to humbly submit our will to the Father’s and endure to the end. Our desires and actions must echo the Savior’s incredible example in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Perhaps related to the emphasis of the Father being in heaven is the twice-repeated phrase that the Father is “in secret” (Matthew 6:6, 18) and sees in secret (6:4, 6, 18). While the Greek text uses two different terms in these verses for this divine condition—*kruptos* and *kruphaios*—the meanings are synonymous: secret, hidden. What does it mean that the Father sees or is in secret? This could be another way of stating that the Father is not among us but is “in heaven.” Similarly, it could denote the veil that separates us from the Father so, in a sense, he is “hidden” from us

and yet can observe and bless us as expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 38:7: “I am in your midst and ye cannot see me.”

Jesus uses this condition of the Father to emphasize the personal nature of our worship and relationship to the Father. Rather than doing things in public only to be seen of men (giving alms, praying, and fasting are the examples Jesus uses here), we should do these things privately (“in secret”), without desire for recognition. Then Jesus expressed the promise that the Father would reward such private, direct worship (see Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). This was the way Jesus performed his ministry. Although Jesus performed many miracles in front of multitudes, he did not do them to attract more followers or create a public spectacle (usually he told those healed not to tell anyone). In fact, as related at the beginning of John 7, some of his brethren wanted him to go up to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles precisely for this reason—to make a public example of his greatness. They argued, “There is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world” (John 7:4).⁶ But Jesus refused to go under these pretenses. The situation is similar to one of the three temptations when Satan tried to entice Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple so that angels would save him and the people would know he was the Son of God (see Matthew 4:5–6).

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland paraphrased Satan’s temptation in this way: “Why not cast yourself down in a dramatic way and then when the angels bear you up, as the scriptures say they must, legions will follow you and believe? They need you. You need them—to save their souls. These are covenant people. How better to help them see than to cast yourself off this holy temple unharmed and unafraid?” Then Elder Holland highlighted Jesus’ superior understanding: “But Jesus refuses the temptation of the spirit. Denial and restraint are also part of divine preparation. He will gain followers and he will receive reassurance. But *not this way*.”⁷ Jesus did not want to make a public spectacle because that was not the best way for disciples to develop true faith in him. Likewise, we should overcome that natural tendency to showcase spiritual gifts or give service in very public and dramatic ways.

When discussing Jesus’ counsel to pray privately rather than for public display, Danel Bachman pointed out, “The difference between genuine

private prayer and insincere, ostentatious verbiage is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee who exalted himself in his prayer 'prayed thus with *himself*,' said Jesus, indicating a hollow emptiness in the words and an absence of the Lord's involvement. But the publican who humbled himself in his prayer 'went down to his house justified' before God. (See Luke 18:9–14; italics added.)⁸ Jesus admonishes us to commune with our Father humbly and sincerely by worshipping with proper intent, whether in a community or private setting.⁹ It is comforting that we can personally, lovingly worship the Father without making an extraordinary public spectacle.¹⁰ What a great blessing to understand that the Father knows the thoughts, intents, and prayers of our heart and rewards us accordingly!

The Sermon on the Mount shares more about heaven as it discusses various aspects of the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God. As part of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught about his Father's kingdom. Not only did Jesus express the desire that his Father's kingdom come (Matthew 6:10), but he also praised and acknowledged that it was his Father's kingdom forever (6:13). Jesus likewise acknowledged that the power and glory are the Father's forever (6:13).¹¹ Beyond the Lord's Prayer, in one of his strongest discipleship invitations, Jesus exhorted, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God" (6:33), which is clarified in the Joseph Smith Translation as "seek ye first to *build up the kingdom* of God." What is the Father's kingdom, is it the same as the kingdom of God, and how do we build it up?

Latter-day Saint theology sometimes distinguishes between two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven when discussing the chronology of the plan of our Heavenly Father.¹² The kingdom of God is the earthly establishment of the church overseeing spiritual matters under the direction of the priesthood (which seems to be consistent with Matthew 6:33 mentioned above). The kingdom of heaven is the future millennial kingdom overseeing both temporal (political) and spiritual matters with Jesus Christ as ruler and the priesthood assisting in its administration. The millennial kingdom is the last stage before this earth becomes a glorified, celestial sphere to be inherited by the meek and righteous (see Matthew 5:5; D&C 88:25–26; 130:9). The kingdom of heaven seems to be equivalent to the kingdom of the Father Jesus mentions in the Lord's Prayer.

In our Heavenly Father's plan, the kingdom of God (the Church) has been established to prepare for the kingdom of heaven. At a future time and through the reign of Christ, the two shall become one as eloquently expressed in Doctrine and Covenants: "Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, mayest be glorified in heaven so on earth, that thine enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power and glory, forever and ever" (D&C 65:6). Elder James E. Talmage states that, when Christ descends, "with Him too will come Enoch and his band of the pure in heart; and a union will be effected with the kingdom of God, or that part of the kingdom of heaven previously established as the Church of Jesus Christ on earth; and the kingdom on earth will be one with that in heaven. Then will be realized a fulfillment of the Lord's own prayer, given as a pattern to all who pray: 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'"¹³

Thus Jesus expresses the hope in the sermon that the earthly kingdom will become like the heavenly kingdom. In order for this to be accomplished, we must follow his other admonition to seek first to build up the kingdom of God. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said that this phrase "means to assign first priority to God and to his work. The work of God is to bring to pass the eternal life of his children (see Moses 1:39), and all that this entails in the birth, nurturing, teaching, and sealing of our Heavenly Father's children. Everything else is lower in priority. . . . As someone has said, if we do not choose the kingdom of God first, it will make little difference in the long run what we have chosen instead of it."¹⁴ It is clear from the sermon that ultimately the kingdom is the Father's kingdom, not ours or Christ's, and that among the many distractions of this world we must use our agency to seek to build the kingdom of God first to prepare for the return of our Lord and to be among the righteous who are worthy to inherit the kingdom of heaven—our Father's eternal kingdom.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FATHER

Within the sermon, Jesus discussed several of the characteristics of the Father. Jesus taught that the Father knows all things,¹⁵ including our need for food and clothing (Matthew 6:31–32), even before we ask for them. In his exhortation to pray, Jesus taught, "Your Father knoweth

what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (6:8). This concept may cause some to be discouraged and wonder why we should even bother praying if he already knows what we need. The Bible Dictionary offers an important corrective to this line of thinking when it states that first, a proper understanding of our relationship to God as one of child to a Father will help prayer become natural and instinctive (see Matthew 7:7–11). Secondly, “the object of prayer is not to change the will of God, but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant, but that are made conditional on our asking for them.”¹⁶ Thus if we fail to pray because the Father is omniscient or has foreknowledge of what we are going to ask, then we are forgetting our Father-child relationship to him and may forfeit blessings he is waiting to give us but are conditional upon our asking.

Throughout the sermon, Jesus lists many things the Father does on behalf of his children. Specifically from the Lord’s Prayer, we learn of things for which we can petition the Father to do on our behalf: give us daily bread, forgive our debts, deliver us from evil, and not allow us to be led into temptation (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:11–13). In a similar vein, Jesus taught that if a mortal father, being “evil,” would respond to requests for bread or fish with good gifts to his children, “how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (7:11). The symbolism in this passage may run deep as Jesus uses examples of bread and fish—early symbols of Christ himself and the extraordinary multiplication miracle near the Galilee. In one section, directed specifically to the Twelve in the Book of Mormon, Jesus taught that if the Father feeds and cares for the fowls of the air and the grass of the field, how much more will he care for his servants (6:26, 30). Jesus also taught that one of the great blessings the Father can grant us, if we are merciful and forgiving, is forgiveness (6:14). Many blessings are available if we but ask our Father, and the greatest gift of all we can receive from the Father is eternal life (see D&C 14:7). Yet even without asking, and because of his abundant mercy, the Father makes the sun rise and sends rain on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Thus Jesus highlights the Father’s generosity and care for his children in the many things he offers them.

Yet despite all the things the Father will do on behalf of his children, Jesus also warned of some of the things the Father will *not* do for his children. First, if people do righteousness merely to be seen of men, then they will “have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (6:1). Secondly, if one does not forgive others’ trespasses, “neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:15), which is the opposite rendering of the beatitude “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (5:7). These verses are in the context of our relations with others. We must have true, merciful hearts. Elder McConkie added: “The Father is kind to all men, both the righteous and the wicked, in the sense that he has given them life, and breath, and being; in the sense that he has created the earth and placed men in mortal bodies, so that through the redemptive sacrifice of his Son they all shall attain immortality; in the sense that he sends them sunshine and rain and enables them to garner the wealth of the world. But the unjust and unthankful shall not receive mercy or salvation in the day of judgment. *Temporal blessings* are bestowed upon all men in mortality, but *eternal blessings* are reserved for those who keep the commandments.”¹⁷ Jesus’ warnings in the sermon are great reminders that we cannot be hypocritical and expect eternal blessings from God.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER

Throughout the sermon, Jesus repeatedly taught and emphasized that God is our Father and we should approach him as a father, asking for things we need (see Matthew 7:7–11). Some scholars even feel that the term “Father” at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer is associated with *abba*, a more familiar title that a child or youth would use to address their father.¹⁸ This personal, familiar approach to God was probably new to Jesus’ listeners. Within the Old Testament, God is specifically referred to as Father only about a dozen times, but in the much shorter New Testament, Jesus always addresses him as “Father” in prayer, and in total refers to God as Father some 170 times.¹⁹ Within just the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses the title “Father” seventeen times.²⁰ Each of the seventeen uses of the “Father” in the Sermon is attached to a possessive pronoun indicating a close relationship—he is the Father of our spirits and created us as spirit beings (see Acts 17:29; Hebrews 12:9).

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encourages his listeners to pray using the title "Our Father," emphasizing a community aspect that should be part of our worship of the Father (he is the Father of us all). Elder McConkie wrote, "All men are the children of Deity. God is literally the Father of the spirits of all men. He begat them in pre-existence, and he invites them all, Christian and pagan alike, to address him as their Father, to hallow his holy name, to come unto him, keep his commandments and receive of his Spirit."²¹ Twice Jesus referred to the Father as "my Father" (Matthew 7:21; 3 Nephi 12:19) to explain it is his Father's will and commandments that should be followed. Mostly Jesus referred to the Father when speaking to the congregation as "your Father" or "thy Father" to encourage his listeners to remember and follow their Father.

President David O. McKay spoke of the Father-child relationship in this way,

We accept God as indeed our Father. Christ taught us to address him as 'Our Father which art in heaven.' (Matt. 6:9). To us he is so real that we accept his appearance in this dispensation as an expression of his love for his children. God is not merely a force, though he is that. He is not merely something away out of our touch, but he is as near as your father is to you and my father to me. I like to think when I have a task to perform that in secret I can say, 'Father, guide me today,' and feel that I shall have added strength to do that task. I may not succeed always. My own inhibitions and weaknesses may prevent my doing so, but there is strength in the assurance that I can go to him and ask him for help and guidance. That is what you can do.²²

Jesus' repeated use of the title "Father" also shows the distinction between him and the Father in the Godhead. One of our foundational beliefs is that the Father and the Son are two distinct beings (see D&C 130:22). The wider Christian world has developed many views on the nature of the Godhead that changed this plain and precious teaching of the Bible. As Elder Holland so ably pointed out, there are numerous "unequivocal illustrations" in the New Testament where Jesus referred to the Father as separate from himself.²³ The Sermon on the Mount

is yet another illustration when Jesus teaches that he gives the law and commandments of his Father, not of himself.

Jesus teaches that the name of the Father should be hallowed (Matthew 6:9).²⁴ Besides treating as holy and reverencing the name of “Father,” hallowing the Father’s name acknowledges his holiness and goodness and our desire to enjoy righteous communion with him. President John Taylor paraphrased the sentiment of this verse when he said, “O, God, we reverence thee; we observe thy law, and we wish to keep thy commandments, and purge ourselves from all evil, that we may be acceptable to thee. . . . We reverence thee, O, God, and attribute to thee all that we have in this world, and all that we will have in this world, and all that we expect to have in the eternities to come.”²⁵ Because many of our covenants are made in his name, keeping our covenants can be another form of hallowing his name.

Hallowing his name through righteous living relates to the conditional aspect of our relationship with our Father that is highlighted in the sermon. Twice Jesus talked about how we can *become* children of our Father. The first instance is found in the beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (5:9). The second reference comes at the end of Jesus’ giving a portion of the higher law. Either in reference to the last “antithesis” (to love our enemies) or covering all the previous examples, Jesus states that you should do the things he is commanding so “that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven” (5:45). Elder McConkie stated, “Already, as are all men, they were the spirit offspring of their Father. Through obedience to the law of gospel love, they had power to attain the adoption of sonship, to be the Father’s children in a special and exalting sense. See John 1:11–12; Romans 8:14.”²⁶

Thus, in this sense, we are not automatically true children of God unless we fulfill his expectations. It is similar to Alma’s teachings after his miraculous conversion: “And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, *becoming his sons and daughters*; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah

27:25–26; emphasis added).²⁷ When we are spiritually reborn and make and are faithful to our covenants with our Father, then we are his children indeed and will be worthy to inherit his kingdom.

To make us worthy to live in that kingdom, Jesus sets forth the Father as the ultimate standard for righteousness and perfection. In his great commandment to become perfect, Jesus admonishes that we are to become perfect as our Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Whatever meaning we attach to “perfect,” and many words have been written on this subject, it has to equate with the Father’s perfection.²⁸ The Greek sense of *teleios* as becoming complete, finished, fully developed seems to fit well here with the perfection of our Father.²⁹ Elder McConkie concluded, “It is of infinite and eternal perfection that Jesus here speaks. He is exhorting his followers to press forward in total obedience until they become like the Father—like him in power, might, and dominion; like him in wisdom, knowledge, and truth; like him in love, charity, mercy, integrity, and in all holy attributes.”³⁰ Perhaps the Beatitudes and higher law that Jesus expounded upon in the verses before verse 48 lead up to the result that we will be perfect like our Father. In that sense, those possessing the qualities of the Beatitudes are “blessed” because they are developing the very attributes of God. The Book of Mormon reminds us that we can achieve this perfection through grace, the power of God, and becoming perfect in Christ (see Moroni 10:32–33).

Jesus also taught that we must seek “the kingdom of God, and *his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33; emphasis added. The Joseph Smith Translation adds “*and to establish his righteousness,*” placing a more active role on the disciple to spread that righteousness outwards). This verse comes at the end of the chapter wherein Jesus discusses aspects of worship we should do privately before our Father (almsgiving, prayer, and fasting) and other admonitions about our priorities and motivations. It hearkens back to the first verse where a general warning is given not to practice piety (literally “righteousness,” the same Greek word as in verse 33) before others to be seen of them.³¹ To establish God’s righteousness seems to refer to implementing this proper mode of worship and Christian life, not the public display of a spiritual facade. The Father acts in true righteousness and love in all that he does, and we should obey his commandments and standards, not the precepts of man. In our pursuits of life as part of our test

here on earth, we must seek to establish the Father's righteousness and achieve that lofty standard. We must fulfill the beatitude to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (5:6) and, like Abraham, desire "to be a greater follower of righteousness" (see Abraham 1:2).

Becoming righteous and true children of our Father leads us to fulfilling perhaps the greatest promise from the Sermon on the Mount: the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8).³² Some biblical interpreters take this promise figuratively as seeing God in the world around us.³³ Many other biblical interpreters see this promise as referring only to a distant future day when the righteous see God in some fashion in the afterlife.³⁴ The Restoration of the gospel suggests a greater possibility. The Prophet Joseph Smith shattered the falsehood that the Father could never be seen in this life, and through the Restoration we can have similar opportunities—we can literally see our Father. Elder McConkie taught, "This promise is to be understood literally. Every living soul who is pure in heart shall see God, literally and personally, in this life, to say nothing of the fact that he shall dwell with and see him frequently in the celestial world hereafter."³⁵ President Spencer W. Kimball discussed the principle in this manner:

Sometimes we say, "Oh, that isn't possible." But the Savior does not deal with idle words. He says that any perfected being can see the Lord the Father. Now, there are many approaches toward this experience. There are dreams and visions and actual sight. The Prophet Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son and heard their voices, and he knew as no one else in the whole world knew at that time the personality of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. We may know by the Holy Ghost and have a testimony of these things. But every one of you here tonight can perfect your lives so that you may see God. . . . We will not seek to see our Heavenly Father to satisfy our curiosity, but only to have the great satisfaction of knowing that he is our Father.³⁶

Doctrine and Covenants 97:15–16 alludes to this promise and gives a possible location for such an experience—the temple: "And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory

shall rest upon it; yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.” Could there be any greater experience?

Regarding this promise, the Prophet taught: “If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil. . . . Search your hearts, and see if you are like God. . . . Is not God good? Then you be good; if He is faithful, then you be faithful. Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, and seek for every good thing.”³⁷ Elder Parley P. Pratt encouraged, “Never cease striving till you have seen God face to face. Strengthen your faith; cast off your doubts, your sins, and all your unbelief, and nothing can prevent you from coming to God.”³⁸

CONCLUSION

John 17:3 teaches us that one of the requirements and blessings of eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he sent. One of the purposes for Jesus’ mission was to direct his listeners and followers to a greater understanding and commitment to the Father so that they could return and live with him. The Sermon on the Mount, coming early in Jesus’ ministry, is one of the first opportunities when Jesus taught about the Father and our relationship to him. Although the sermon does not present a comprehensive doctrine of the Father, it strongly encourages developing a relationship with the Father by discussing some of his characteristics. Within the sermon, Jesus taught that the Father is indeed our Father as well. He resides in heaven with glory, power, and omniscience while being “hidden” from us. In order to be his true children, we need to seek first to build up his kingdom and establish his righteousness. He is our standard, and we must worship him truly with the right motives, for he knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Similarly, our relationships with others should be true and handled with righteous intent. The Father mercifully grants many blessings to his children but may withhold some eternal blessings if we are not worthy.

Jesus provides the perfect example of one who lived humbly and obedient to the will of the Father throughout his life. In his teaching, he acknowledged he was teaching and doing only what the Father had

commanded (see John 5:19; 8:28). Even in his invitations to come unto him, such as in the passage referring to the Father found only in the Book of Mormon account of Jesus' sermon, Jesus emphasizes the law and commandments of his Father (see 3 Nephi 12:19).³⁹ Now it is up to us to come unto the Father through Jesus Christ, purifying our hearts so we may receive the many blessings the Father has offered, most especially to see his face and enjoy eternal life. In doing so, we can become examples for others, as Jesus admonished, to let our light shine before men so "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

NOTES

1. An exception to this is a brief section by Andrew C. Skinner on some of Christ's teachings about the Father in Matthew 5 ("A Reading of the Sermon on the Mount: A Restoration Perspective," in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1: *From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 344–46.

2. Although the Greek manuscripts are not always consistent on the exact titles used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., the variants for 6:8 include "your Father," "our Father," "God, your Father," "your heavenly Father"), it is obvious that the title of "Father" was being used and emphasized. We also have further confirmation of Jesus frequently using the title of "Father" in the 3 Nephi account in the Book of Mormon. I understand the use of "God" in the Sermon on the Mount to refer to the Father.

3. "This prayer was given as a sample or illustration of how Deity might appropriately be addressed in prayer, of the praise and adoration that should be extended to him, and of the type and kind of petitions men should make to him. As far as it goes it is one of the most concise, expressive, and beautiful statements found in the scriptures" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965], 1:235).

4. Joseph Smith discussed eternal progression, paraphrasing Jesus' teaching that he does only that which he saw his Father do: "My Father worked out His kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that He may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt Him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take His place, and thereby become exalted myself. So that Jesus treads in the tracks of His Father, and inherits what God did before; and God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all His children" (*History of the Church*, ed. B. H. Roberts [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965], 6:306).

5. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:254.

6. The Revised Standard Version perhaps makes this statement clearer: “For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.”

7. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah,” *Ensign*, February 1984, 68 n.

8. Danel Bachman, “Sermon of Sermons,” *Ensign*, March 1991, 39–42.

9. Harold B. Lee stated, “I fancy that the Master, if He were among us, would say of all such, ‘Moreover when you fast, when you pray, when you worship, when you pay tithing, when you do your ward teaching, when you attend sacrament meeting, when you baptize, be not as the hypocrites. Verily, if you publicize it and dramatize it, you have your reward already’” (*Ye Are the Light of the World: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 30).

10. President Spencer W. Kimball expressed appreciation for quiet worship: “I am grateful that all through this great Church there are many people who live unselfishly, who pray in the quiet of their homes, who are far more interested in paying their tithes, of which no one knows except their bishop, than they are to pay large contributions which may be heralded far and wide. I am grateful that there are numerous people in this Church who go quietly week after week to attend their meetings; worship the Lord in their assemblies; bear testimony in their fast meetings; serve faithfully as ward teachers, stake missionaries, or in the auxiliaries or priesthood quorums without glamour, without praise, without public notice. God bless us, brothers and sisters, that we may ‘seek *first* the kingdom,’ that we may forget all else, and that we may project ourselves out of ourselves into the great world of service to our fellow men, realizing that after all, the two great commandments which the Lord gave to us did this very thing. . . . All of this is service to others—love of others, not love of nor service to ourselves. May the Lord bless us that we may be unselfish in this kingdom, give of ourselves generously that we may live by the spirit rather than by the letter” (in Conference Report, October 1951, 90).

11. Jesus’ acknowledgment of these aspects of the Father as being forever is a sign of Jesus’ meekness and humility in his role as Savior within the Father’s plan. Lucifer, on the other hand, sought to take God’s honor for himself (see Moses 4:1–2). “When the Savior undertook the work of the Father to save all mankind, He had regard only for the glory of the Father. The first words we hear from His premortal life as recorded in the scriptures are ‘Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever’ (Moses 4:2). The first words we have in the scriptures that the Savior spoke as a mortal include ‘I must be about my Father’s business’ (Luke 2:49). In Gethsemane He prayed, ‘Not my will, but thine, be done’ (Luke 22:42). His final words on the cross were ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’ (Luke 23:46) and ‘Father, it is finished, thy will is done’ (see Joseph Smith Translation, footnote to Matt. 27:50). From His premortal existence throughout His entire life, the Savior’s eye was single to doing the will of His Father” (W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Prophetic Enlightenment on the Sermon on the Mount,” *Ensign*, January 1999, 15–21).

12. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 788–89, or *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 365–68, for the distinction

between the two kingdoms. The Gospel writers do not seem to hold the distinction between the two terms, but rather seem to use them as synonyms (Mark, for example, tends to use “Kingdom of God” while Matthew tends to use “Kingdom of Heaven” when discussing the same episodes).

13. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 367.

14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Focus and Priorities,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 83–84.

15. For other scriptures on God’s perfect knowledge see Alma 40:10; D&C 130:7; Moses 1:6.

16. Bible Dictionary, “Prayer,” 753.

17. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:230; emphasis added.

18. The translation of *abba* as “daddy” is misleading, “but the widely recognized ‘nuance of intimacy’ in the vocative *Abba* does require some recognition in the interpretation of Jesus’ teaching” (Anna Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], 230). In the following discussion of Joseph Fitzmeyer’s views on Jesus’ use of “Father,” we read, “‘Father’ is no longer meant in the corporate or collective, national, or covenantal sense of old . . . but suggests an intimate relationship between the disciples and God that is akin to that of Jesus himself; God is not merely the transcendent lord of the heavens, but is near as a father to his children” (*What Did Jesus Mean?* 230).

19. See Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean?* 227. She goes on to quote Ricoeur, “The finding that is most important and at first glance most confusing is that, in the Old Testament . . . the designation of God as father is quantitatively insignificant. Specialists in Old and New Testament scholarship are in agreement in emphasizing—and at first being surprised at—this great reserve limiting the use of the epithet “father” in the writings in the Old Testament (1974: 482). It is against this background that we can understand the Lord’s Prayer: *Abba*, which we could translate as ‘dear father.’ . . . Jesus dares to address himself to God as a child to his father. The reserve to which the whole Bible testifies is broken at this precise point” (*What Did Jesus Mean?* 227–28).

20. An additional mention of the Father, 3 Nephi 12:19, is only found in the Book of Mormon version of the sermon.

21. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:236.

22. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1967, 134.

23. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 41.

24. The literal Greek meaning is “treat as holy,” “reverence.” Compare with Isaiah 29:23 (“they shall sanctify my name”) and Ezekiel 36:23 (“I will sanctify my great name”).

25. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: John Henry Smith, 1884), 24:128.

26. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:230.

27. This passage could also mean becoming “children of Christ,” although that interpretation would not negate being a faithful child of God as well. The Book of

Mormon elsewhere is more specific when talking about becoming a child or seed of Christ (see Moroni 7:19).

28. And the fact that Jesus in 3 Nephi now includes himself as a role model of perfection hints at part of what this perfection is.

29. Some Latter-day Saints scholars have said it this way: “Now that the Savior has ‘filled up’ the deficiency in the law of Moses by restoring the gospel in its fulness, the disciples can also ‘fill up’ the deficiency of goodness in their lives by living the ‘New Law’” (S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs, and Thomas W. Mackay, “Footnotes to the Gospels: The Sermon on the Mount,” *Ensign*, January 1975, 31).

30. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:231.

31. The King James Version translates this phrase with “do alms unto the poor,” however, that is mostly found in late manuscripts. Rather, verse 1 seems to be a general warning of doing righteousness or piety (*dikaïosunē*) before others which introduces the specific examples of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting discussed in the subsequent verses.

32. President Harold B. Lee quoted the following definition of “pure in heart”: “It stands for man’s immortal soul when we speak of heart. It is pure when it contains no admixture of other substance. Benevolence is pure when it contains nothing of self-seeking. Justice is pure when it contains nothing of partiality. Love is pure when it has no lust. A man’s heart is pure when it loves only the good, when its motives are right, and when all its aspirations are after the noble and true. Purity is here not synonymous with chastity, but it includes it. Just as the liar does not understand truthfulness and does not recognize it when he encounters it, so the unholy person does not understand sanctity and cannot understand God. But those who cleanse their hearts understand God in proportion to their purity and one day they shall be cleansed from all sin and shall see Him face to face” (*Ye Are the Light of the World*, 31–32).

33. See Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 67; E. H. Chapin, *Discourses on the Beatitudes* (Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1855), 115–16.

34. See M. Eugene Boring, “Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 180; Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33A: *Matthew 1–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 94; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Leicester, England: Eerdmans InterVarsity Press, 1992), 100.

35. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:216; see also *Mortal Messiah*, 2:123.

36. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 74.

37. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:588.

38. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 123.

39. Note the singular use of “law” which seems to allude to the law of Moses. This additional verse sets up Jesus’ later teachings to the Nephite multitude in 3 Nephi 15 that the law is fulfilled through him and his Atonement, but the covenant is not all fulfilled so they must keep the commandments given to them (see especially 15:4–10).