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The Divine Nature and Destiny of Women

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The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states: “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.”¹

My focus this morning will be on the divine nature and destiny of women and the sacred role they play in the sanctification and purification of men. I’m going to start by giving you two exclusive scoops. First, males and females are different. Second, those differences are more than physical.

I developed a love and appreciation for womanhood in my childhood. My mother, sisters, grandmas, aunts, and female cousins and friends brought immeasurable love into my young life. This set the stage for the adult relationships I have with my wife, daughters, and granddaughters. All of the above have contributed to my feelings of reverence, adoration, and even veneration of righteous women. In pondering the effect women have had on my life, I have concluded that there has been a metamorphosis of my spirit that could not have taken place without these relationships.

Mothers

Of course, the first woman in my life was my mother. How can I describe the impact of my mother's love? A lullaby, being tucked in bed, "Are you warm enough?" a kiss goodnight, "Glenn, you'd better get up, you don't want to be late for school," a kiss good morning, "You are such a special boy," "Oh honey, how I love you," "I made some chocolate chip cookies," "I want to take your picture," "I'm so proud of you," "I know you can do it," "Are you going to go on a mission?" "You are going to go on a mission," "I miss you so much," frequent love notes, "Let's go look at the roses," "Did you see the full moon?" "Aren't the mountains beautiful today?" the love in her eyes, her touch, her smell, her elegance, her tender heart, her sensitivity, her femininity.

That was just a blink in a lifetime of nurturing.

Sisters

In addition to the loving care I received from my mother, I received similar nurturing from my big sister, who was my mentor and protector. When I was old enough to enter kindergarten, I was worried sick. I had watched my sister do her homework and was concerned by the fact that I didn't know how to read or do arithmetic. The night before school started, my apprehension must have shown because she came into the bedroom and started talking to me about school. I explained my concerns, and she immediately began to allay my fears. She told me about recess. I could handle that. Then she explained that I would be taught to read one word at a time, and she assured me that I was smart and wouldn't have any trouble.

Now, how would a brother handle a situation like that? "Wow, you're in big trouble! You may never graduate from kindergarten. But I'll tell you what I'm going to do. If you will give me your allowance, I'll help you."

As I mentioned earlier, men and women are different.

Daughters

My appreciation for women rose to a whole new dimension when our two daughters came into our lives. There is something angelic about daughters—at least in the eyes of their fathers. I have sometimes lamented that I wasn't born with the perspective that my daughters brought into my life. If a man could be born with that insight, his respect for and treatment of a young woman during his dating years would improve significantly.

I remember a time when my oldest daughter was just six or seven years old. I was struggling with saying my personal prayers on a consistent basis. I remember walking into her bedroom one night to listen to her say her prayers. Her room felt so peaceful, innocent, and pure that I felt like praying. I explained as best I could that I'd like to get into the habit of saying my prayers and asked if I could pray at her bedside. She looked a little puzzled but agreed. On the second or third night, as I began my silent prayer, I felt her little hand on my head. She then turned on her side and with both hands began running her fingers through my hair. I felt touched by an angel. I must admit, it felt so good that my prayers became longer. To this day, whenever there is a family gathering, I will eventually work my way over to the couch or chair where she is located, sit on the floor, and wait for her to run her fingers through my hair.

From the time my second daughter was a baby through her early grade-school years, I would rock her to sleep at night and carry her to bed. I always knew when she was asleep because tiny beads of perspiration would appear on her little nose. I would look at her angelic face and wonder if heaven could feel any better than this. I concluded it must be a great comfort to her to fall asleep in her father's arms. Now I realize the peace and comfort she transmitted to me was possibly even greater.

I have always been impressed with the love and respect our Savior bestowed upon the women in His life. As we read about these associations, our focus is generally on what He taught them and the love and understanding He gave them. Have you ever considered the possibility that these women provided immense comfort to His burdened soul? It is my belief that He needed them as He journeyed toward living a perfect life so He could provide the ultimate sacrifice.

I repeat that my associations and interplay with the righteous women in my life have created a metamorphosis of my spirit and have been purifying and sanctifying.

Adam and Eve

I'd now like to turn to the more intimate relationship of husband and wife and the impact that relationship has on our exaltation. You are all familiar with the story of the Creation. I'm going to pick up the account where Adam was placed on the earth. Please pay particular attention to the sequence of events leading up to the introduction of Eve.

And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground, and took his spirit (that is, the man's spirit), and put it into him; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

And the Gods planted a garden, eastward in Eden, and there they put the man, whose spirit they had put into the body which they had formed.

And out of the ground made the Gods to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life, also, in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Abraham 5:7-9)

Thus far there is no mention of Eve.

And out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and commanded that they should come unto Adam, to see what he would call them; and they were also living souls; for I, God, breathed into them the breath of life, and commanded that whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that should be the name thereof.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but as for Adam, there was not found an help meet for him. (Moses 3:19-20)

In summary, before Eve appeared, the world had been created, Adam had been placed in the Garden of Eden, and he had named and associated with all of the animals. He was enjoying a utopia in physical surroundings as well as open communication with God. What more could he ask for? What more could he need?

As President J. Reuben Clark put it:

Adam wandered alone in the glorious Garden in Eden, which he had dressed and adorned—the Garden of Eden with its stately trees, its lovely flowers heavy with sweet odors, its grassy swards, its magnificent vistas with the far reaches of its placid rivers, with its gaily plumed birds, its lordly and graceful beasts, all at peace, for sin was not yet in the world. Through all this magnificence Adam wandered, lonely, unsoled, unaccompanied, the only being of his kind in the whole world, his life unshared in a solitude of exquisite elegance, and, what was of far greater moment, his mission, as he knew it to be, impossible of fulfillment, except the Father gave him an helpmeet.²

I'd like to share a perspective from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* that fully resonates with my soul. Much like President Clark, Milton describes the beauty of the garden and the variety of animals. However, he goes into more detail on his perception of Adam's frustration and loneliness. In his account, Adam watches the interplay between the animals and communicates with them as best he can. However, Adam concludes something is drastically amiss. Milton wrote:

They rejoice
Each with their kind, lion with lioness;
So fitly them in pairs thou hast combin'd;
Much less can bird with beast, or fish with fowl
So well converse, nor with the ox the ape;
Worse then can man with beast, and least of all.³

In other words, Adam is saying, "What's wrong with this picture?"

Milton goes on to suggest that God delayed the introduction of Eve until Adam could fully appreciate her. Seeing that Adam is now ready for the introduction of Eve, God describes what is going to happen next. I love Milton's description of what Eve would mean to Adam:

What next I bring shall please thee, be assur'd,
Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self,
Thy wish exactly to thy heart's desire.⁴

"Thy fit help"? No, this doesn't mean she would be in good shape. It means she would be a match, a complement, a counterpart, even his "other self."

Finally, Eve stood before him, and she exceeded his highest expectations. He had never seen anything like her in the garden. Milton continues:

Under his forming hands a creature grew,
Manlike, but different sex, so lovely fair,
That what seem'd fair in all the world, seem'd now
Mean, or in her summ'd up, in her contain'd,
And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before.⁵

I hope Milton will forgive me for adding my opinion that the "sweetness" Adam felt, which was "unfelt before," was much more than that which was generated by Eve's physical appearance. Those feelings flowing into him had as their source her wellspring. His feelings were the direct result of standing in front of one of the daughters of heavenly parents who had a divine nature different from, but complementary to, his own divine nature.

I believe the Father's statement "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18) had a much more profound meaning than the obvious biological implications. It also went further than providing Adam with company. Adam's ability to obtain the purification necessary to get back into the presence of God was dependent upon his continuous association with Eve.

Remember what Adam said when Eve stood beside him for the first time: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave

unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Abraham 5:18). Many years after the creation of Adam and Eve, Paul said, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Completion of Our Nature

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it” (D&C 131:1–3). Why can’t he obtain it? It’s not just because he didn’t obey a celestial commandment. It’s because he didn’t become a celestial being. There is a limit to our spiritual development as long as we are single. There is a spiritual development that can only be obtained when a man and a woman join their incomplete selves into a complete couple. Just as conception requires the physical union of male and female, perfection requires the union of the very souls of male and female.

Elder Richard G. Scott has said, “In the Lord’s plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics.”⁶

Men and women can accomplish marvelous things alone. However, they are incomplete until united intellectually, emotionally, physically, and, most important, spiritually.

The world we live in has gone awry with its focus on the physical part of the male and female relationship. If there is too much focus on the physical, the vital areas of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual union are not being placed in an environment where they can flourish and grow. Our current society is so obsessed with “making love” that they are not developing a complete relationship that would enable them to “express love.”

Since melding our divine natures is a necessary element in bringing about perfection, we must guard against any deterioration of those natures. Sisters, keep in mind that anything that detracts from your divine nature should be avoided. You live in a time when you have more opportunities and options available to you than any other women have had throughout the history of mankind. Some of these options will complement your God-given natures. Others will chip away at it. Some things will make you strong. Others will



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make you hard. Some will increase your spiritual sensitivity. Others will separate you from the Spirit. If the world keeps chipping away at the divine nature of women, it is probable that our relationships in marriage will not bring about the sanctification necessary for exaltation; or, as a minimum, the process will be delayed.

I express my love and appreciation to my wife. She is an example of one who has retained her eternal nature through forty-seven years of marriage, six children, twenty-nine grandchildren, and putting up with me. Wearing that eternal nature well, she has supported me as a General Authority for twenty-five years. I could not have served nor would I have been qualified to serve without her love and support. She has been the crucial key to the metamorphosis I desperately needed to become worthy and able to serve.

Her eternal nature and destiny was never clearer to me than at the temple marriage of our youngest son. I have had the sacred honor of performing the temple marriages of all six of our children, and they along with their spouses were worthy to be in attendance on this occasion.

Prior to the ceremony, as I spoke of sacred things, I looked at my wife, who was seated next to our son. My spiritual eyes were opened, and I saw her shining in all of her glory as she basked in the warmth of having joy and

rejoicing in her posterity. She was radiant. I saw before me a priestess, queen, and goddess. There is absolutely nothing the world can offer that could come close to the fulfillment she was feeling. There was no accomplishment in the world she could have attained that would have made me love her more or be more proud of her efforts. Her eternal nature was then and is now still intact.

We commonly hear the phrase “Men have the priesthood and women have been given the blessing of procreation.” Without perfection, neither assignment meets the full measure of its creation. After perfection comes the ultimate role of god or goddess. These are eternal roles in which one continues to complement the other throughout all eternity.

It is the marriage ceremony in the temple in which husband and wife receive the power to perfect their relationship and, thereby, obtain their exaltation.

Elder John A. Widtsoe put it this way:

Modern revelation sets forth the high destiny of those who are sealed for everlasting companionship. They will be given opportunity for a greater use of their powers. That means progress. They will attain more readily to their place in the presence of the Lord; they will increase more rapidly in every divine power; they will approach more nearly to the likeness of God; they will more completely realize their divine destiny. And this progress is not delayed until life after death. It begins here, today, for those who yield obedience to the law.⁷

I emphasize that the power coming down from heaven on those married in the temple by the holy priesthood cannot alone bring about the progress mentioned by Elder Widtsoe. It takes the righteous interplay of male and female.

I like the Quaker proverb “Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee and we’ll both ascend together.”⁸

What will happen when we finally “ascend together”? I can put it no better than did one of the great women in our history, Eliza R. Snow, who said:

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 forth to do,
With your mutual approbation
Let me come and dwell with you.⁹

Sisters, I testify that when you stand in front of your heavenly parents in those royal courts on high and look into Her eyes and behold Her

countenance, any question you ever had about the role of women in the kingdom will evaporate into the rich celestial air, because at that moment you will see standing directly in front of you, your divine nature and destiny. **RE**

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Notes

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
2. *J. Reuben Clark: Selected Papers on Religion, Education, and Youth*, ed. David H. Yarn Jr. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 59–60.
3. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. David Hawkes (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 249; book 8, lines 392–97.
4. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 251; book 8, lines 449–51.
5. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 253; book 8, lines 470–75.
6. Richard G. Scott, “The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 73–74.
7. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 300.
8. See John Townsend Trowbridge, “A Story of the ‘Barefoot Boy’”: “If thee’ll lift me while I lift thee, / We shall go up together!” in *The Poetical Works of John Townsend Trowbridge* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 227.
9. Eliza R. Snow, “O My Father,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 292.