

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST

LECTURES ON FAITH SERIES

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CHARACTERS AND ATTRIBUTES

One of the first steps of knowing the Lord is understanding his character and attributes.

The Lord has prepared opportunities for us to learn about his character. Revelations through the ages to prophets ancient and modern reveal the truth about his character. In the beginning of this world, the Lord made himself know to his first son and first daughter, Adam and Eve, and witnessed to them not only of his existence, but of his character. From that testimony forward we have ample witness of who he is, both from the Lord's own mouth and from his servants' words. And by knowing his character, we can develop a deep and abiding faith in him. Joseph Smith taught about the necessity of understanding the character of God in the *Lectures on Faith*.

Correct ideas of the character of God are necessary in order to the exercise of faith in him unto life and salvation, and...without correct ideas of his character, the minds of men could not have sufficient power with God to the exercise of faith necessary to the enjoyment of eternal life, and...correct ideas of his character lay a foundation as far as his character is concerned, for the exercise of faith, so as to enjoy the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, even that of eternal glory.

Lectures on Faith 4:1¹

To have sufficient faith in him to attain eternal life, and all of its associated blessings—including obtaining the Second Comforter—we must first know who God is. We must thoroughly understand him and believe that he has the power and ability to save us. King Benjamin declared, “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in Heaven and in Earth; believe that he hath all wisdom, and all power, both in Heaven and in Earth” (Mosiah 4:9).

Though there are many characteristics of God and his Son, Jesus Christ, we will only focus on six of those characteristics. These six characteristics are highlighted in Joseph Smith's teachings on the subject of faith found in the *Lectures on Faith*. In these lectures, Joseph taught the foundational principle of faith, and that by understanding these six fundamental characteristics of God one can come to have sufficient faith in him to be saved. Those characteristics include the following:

First, That he was God before the world was created, and the same God that he was, after it was created.

¹ Lectures on Faith, as found in the 1835 publication of the Doctrine & Covenants. (Hereafter, Lecture.)

Secondly, That he is merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and that he was so from everlasting, and will be to everlasting.

Thirdly, That he changes not, neither is there variableness with him; but that he is the same from everlasting to everlasting, being the same yesterday to-day and forever; and that his course is one eternal round, without variation.

Fourthly, That he is a God of truth and cannot lie.

Fifthly, That he is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him.

Sixthly, That he is love.

Lecture 3:13-18

The following sections will highlight each of these characteristics. Through scriptural reference we will discover a deeper base for understanding the Lord that we may have sufficient faith in him to secure the promises of eternal life.

THE ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD

One of the foundational characteristics of God is his eternal nature. “I am endless,” the Lord said, “for endless is my name” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:10).² He existed as God before this world was created and will continue to exist as God after the world ends. Let us be clear here: when speaking of God’s eternal nature, we are speaking of Jesus Christ as well as God the Father. After all, they are one. “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also,” the Lord told his disciples. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.... Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:7-11). So, to speak of the character of one is to also address the character of the other. They are the same in likeness and every other aspect.

Jesus Christ is the God of the Old and New Testaments. He is also our God today. And he will be our God forever. He does not replace the Father, but has become one with Father, just as we can also become one with him and with Father.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.

John 17:20-22

He lives as he has ever lived, from the foundations of this earth. “The Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made” (John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ was with the Father from the very beginning, and he will continue to the end. He also was God before the foundations of this earth and will be to its end, and beyond. To John the Beloved, Jesus proclaimed, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 21:6).

The scriptures are replete with testimonies of how God was in the beginning even before mankind came on the scene. “Worlds without number have I created,” the Lord revealed to Moses. “And I also have created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33).

TESTIMONY TO THE PATRIARCHS

Adam and Eve knew God personally from the beginning. Adam was created after his image (see Genesis 1:27; see also Moses 2:26. And even after that first couple fell from the grace of God, and even after they were cast out from the garden, the Lord still testified to Adam of his eternal nature. As the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, he heard the “record of the Father and the

² References from the Doctrine & Covenants will hereafter be annotated as D&C.

Son, saying, I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever” (Moses 5:9). From this personal testimony of Jesus Christ to the first man came a knowledge of his eternal nature. This nature, first taught to Adam and from Adam to his children, whispers through the ages to us from our first father that God is eternal.

Enoch also heard God’s word stating that he existed before the foundations of the world. “This is a decree which I have sent forth in the beginning of the world, from mine own mouth, from the foundation thereof” (Moses 6:30). Because he is an eternal God, his word has power throughout all the ages of men and extends beyond men’s existence, for God has no beginning or end. The Lord testified to Enoch, “Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name also” (Moses 7:35).

The testimonies of the great patriarchs of the ancient days passed from father to son, mother to daughter, one generation to another, giving men and women enough faith that they might call upon God. Abraham was among those who believed the testimonies of the ancient fathers more than 1,000 years after Adam heard God’s voice. “Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers”—which he would have heard through their own personal testimonies— “and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness” (Abraham 1:2).

In his grand vision of the preexistence, Abraham saw firsthand the divinity and eternal nature of Christ. He became a witness to himself of the character of God. The Lord told him in this vision, “These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all” (Abraham 3:19). Abraham observed how this one intelligence—the greatest of all intelligences—was chosen from among all the others to be the Savior. Knowing his everlasting divinity, Abraham could now have faith in the promise he received, which promise we now call the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord said the following to Abraham.

I am the Lord thy God; I dwell in heaven; the earth is my footstool; I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice; I cause the wind and the fire to be my chariot; I say to the mountains—Depart hence—and behold, they are taken away by a whirlwind, in an instant, suddenly. My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.

Abraham 2:7-8

Imagine the confidence that Abraham could have in God after hearing such a testimony from God’s own mouth.

FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING

Nearly every prophet since Adam has testified of the eternal nature of God. As such, we can have firm confidence in the saving power of God as we realize that he is the God of creation, and that he existed before the foundations of the earth, and that he will continue to exist as God after the earth. If we think about it, unless God was everlasting how could we believe his word would have “sticking power” beyond this life? Joseph Smith said to have enough faith in God to obtain eternal life a man must first believe in God’s power and eternal nature.

If he did not, in the first instance, believe him to be God, that is, the creator and upholder of all things, he could not center his faith in him for life and salvation, for fear there should be a greater than he, who would thwart all his plans, and he, like the gods of the heathen, would be unable to fulfil his promises; but seeing he is God over all, from everlasting to everlasting, the creator and upholder of all things, no such fear can exist in the minds of those who put their trust in him, so that in this respect their faith can be without wavering.

Lecture 3:19

We can trust in God because he has all power, and he is the God who created all things. Unlike the mythological gods of the Greeks and Romans who were swayed by their passions and their lusts, or rose and fell because of other rival gods, Jehovah has true power and strength. He is constant and everlasting. A psalm entitled The Prayer of Moses stated, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:1-2). This testimony of his divinity comes from God’s own words.

Moroni declared that angels likewise testify of his divinity. “God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing” (Moroni 7:22).

In this current time, the Lord gave this testimony of himself, “I am endless” (D&C 19:10). He declared to the prophet Joseph, “I am Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord; yea, even I am He, the beginning and the end, the Redeemer of the world” (D&C 19:1). What the Lord has spoken throughout the ages will surely come to fruition. “Heaven and earth shall pass away,” the Lord declared to his ancient apostles, “but my words shall not pass away” (Luke 21:33). He repeated a similar declaration to our pioneer ancestors, saying, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled” (D&C 1:38).

GOD'S ABUNDANCE OF GOODNESS

Another important aspect of coming to know God is understanding his innate goodness and mercy. God is good. That is an understatement. He is more than good. He is the personification of goodness. Jacob declared, “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:10).

Because of that absolute goodness of God, Alma confidently invited others to experiment on his goodness by “planting” faith in Christ (See Alma 34:4). Joseph Smith also called us to experiment on that goodness. He said the following about this characteristic of Christ.

Unless he was merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, long suffering, and full of goodness, such is the weakness of human nature, and so great the frailties and imperfections of men, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist; for doubt would take the place of faith, and those who know their weakness and liability to sin, would be in constant doubt of salvation, if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that he is slow to anger, and long suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. An idea of these facts does away doubt, and makes faith exceedingly strong.

Lecture 3:20

Adam experienced that goodness when he was told by the Lord, “I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the garden of Eden” (Moses 6:3).

Moses pleaded to see the glory of God. In reply, the Lord proclaimed, “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19). And so, “the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). Note that the Lord stated he would proclaim his name when he passed by Moses. The name he proclaimed included mercy, grace, long-suffering, and “abundance in goodness and truth.” Those descriptive words describe the name of the Lord. They express intrinsically who he is. He embodies an abundance of all those characteristics. “He is full of mercy, justice, grace and truth, and peace, forever and ever” (D&C 84:102).

It is a comfort to understand God’s character of goodness. “Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful” (Psalm 116:5). Mosiah provided a wonderful description of the blessing of that promise that comes through faith once one comes to know God’s character.

I say unto you, that if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long suffering towards the children of men, and also, the atonement which hath been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life; I mean the life of the mortal body; I say, that this is the man that receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world, for all mankind, which ever was ever since the fall of Adam, or which is or which ever shall be, even unto the end of the world; and this is the means whereby salvation cometh.

Mosiah 4:6-7

GOD: IMMUTABLE AND UNCHANGING

Adding God's unchangeable nature to the characteristics of his immutable and everlasting Godhood and his great abundance of goodness solidifies one's ability to exercise faith in him. To know that God does not change from one age of man to another allows us to securely seek the promises made to our ancient fathers. We can assuredly know that we can also attain the covenant promises they sought and achieved.

Malachi reported Elijah would be sent before the coming of the Lord to, "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). Joseph clarified Malachi's meaning when he reported, "It should read and he shall turn the hearts of the children to the covenant made with their fathers."³ Unless we had assurance that God could and will offer the same covenants of our fathers to us, those ancient fathers who secured salvation from God, we could not hope to secure such promises for ourselves.

Without the idea of unchangibleness in the character of the Deity, doubt would take the place of faith. But with the idea that he changes not, faith lays hold upon the excellencies in his character with unshaken confidence, believing he is the same yesterday, to-day and forever, and that his course is one eternal round.

Lecture 3:21

The Lord has declared in every age of men that he is unchanging and does not vary in his words. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). The Lord said to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, "Listen to the voice of the Lord your God, even Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, whose course is one eternal round, the same to-day as yesterday and forever" (D&C 35:1). This pronouncement has been reiterated repeatedly throughout scripture.⁴

Moroni spoke of the importance of the unchangeable nature of God. He shows that his unchangeable nature is part of the aspect of his Godhood, and that should he be changeable in nature he could not be God. Speaking of miracles, Moroni stated, "Why has God ceased to be God of miracles, and yet be an unchangeable being. And behold I say unto you, He changeth not: if so, he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is [therefore] a God of miracles" (Mormon 9:19).

His father, Mormon, wrote similar attributes to Moroni in a letter, stating, "I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity" (Moroni 8:18). Additionally, in "a prayer of the afflicted," the psalm reads,

I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days; thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

Psalms 102:24-28

After losing the first 116 pages of translated portions of the Book of Mormon, the Lord comforted Joseph Smith in his immutable nature, stating that his works cannot be frustrated. "The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God, cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to nought, for God doth not walk in crooked paths; neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left: neither doth he vary from that which he hath said: therefore his paths are strait and his course is one eternal round" (D&C 3:1-2).

What a blessing and wonder that God is the same today as he was in ancient days, and that he will be the same God in future days as he is today. We can have unshakeable faith in God knowing that he is predictable, and that we have the same access as our ancestral fathers to the great blessings and promises of God.

³ "Discourse, 13 August 1843—A, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [87], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 27, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-13-august-1843-a-as-reported-by-william-clayton/2>.

⁴ See Hebrews 13:8; 1 Nephi 4 [10:18]; 2 Nephi 1 [2:4]; 11 [27:23]; 12 [29:9]; Alma 16 [31:17]; Mormon 4 [9:9]; Moroni 10 [10:19]; D&C 2:2 [20:12].

A GOD OF TRUTH

The constancy of the Lord allows us to have assurance in his promises. Closely tied to this characteristic of being unchangeable is the characteristic of truth. They go hand in hand. If we can trust that he will be the same in our time as he was in previous ages, and trust that he does not—and cannot—lie, then our confidence in his promises can be absolutely sure. Paul in his epistle to Titus wrote “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

The idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie, is equally as necessary to the exercise of faith in him, as the idea of his unchangeableness. For without the idea that he was a God of truth and could not lie, the confidence necessary to be placed in his word in order to the exercise of faith in him, could not exist. But having the idea that he is not man that he can lie, it gives power to the minds of men to exercise faith in him.

Lecture 3:22

Recall a promise made by King Benjamin to his people. “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end, they are received into Heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God, in a state of never ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). It brings peace to know that this promise is as much given to us as anyone else. We can trust what he has said because we know he cannot lie.

It is not simply that God cannot lie. I suppose he could if he wanted to, but then he would not be who he truly is. God is the embodiment of truth. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Before the Lord would show himself to the brother of Jared, he asked him if he would believe the words he would be told. Jared’s brother exhibited deep faith in Christ because he knew the veracity of the Lord’s words. This man of faith answered, “Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie” (Ether 3:12). After that declaration, the Lord confirmed this man’s faith and appeared to him in the flesh.

God assures us that he is trustworthy in all respects. “Mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:6). These characteristics of grace and truth were qualifiers of Jesus Christ becoming the Redeemer. This is one reason why Joseph taught with confidence the assurance of the Lord’s promise of the Second Comforter. Quoting the Lord’s words to his disciples in John 14, Joseph stated that the Lord will keep his promises.

It is a privilege to view the Son of Man himself, he dwelleth with you & shall be in you, his spirit shall be in you. I will not have you comfortless, I will come to you, abide with you forever, Seal you up to Eternal life.... I will manifest myself to him. if he does not he has not told the truth.⁵

We can know the Lord will keep his promise if we keep our end of the deal, or of the covenant promises we have made with him. The Lord said, “I the Lord am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). The Lord, speaking to the early Saints said, “I the Lord promised the faithful and cannot lie” (D&C 62:6). Therefore, when the Lord says we can come and behold him, we have an assurance that we truly can come to see the face of God. He said, “Verily thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh their sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face, and know that I am” (D&C 93:1).

Our faith in Jesus Christ can be assured because we know the integrity of his character. “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). As we draw closer to the truth—truth is the “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 94:24)—we draw closer to the glory of God. We will become more like him as we are illuminated by his truth and light. Then when he finally comes, we will know him because we will be like him.

⁵ “Before 8 August 1839 (3),” *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980).

NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

One of the unique aspects of the characteristics of God is his impartiality toward mankind. This is not to suggest that he is apathetic to our needs. Quite the opposite. He is engaged and active with his children. Yet he does not esteem one man or woman over another. Everyone who ever was or will be created has equal opportunity to access God on any level they wish. This characteristic of God was displayed to Peter as he received his vision to take the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

Lehi taught his sons that Jesus Christ “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those which have a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” According to Lehi, the atonement of the Lord is not reserved for specific people, but available to everyone. All can come unto him. He adds that there is only one requirement: a broken heart and a contrite spirit, for “unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7).

Just like his father did, the prophet Nephi spoke very plainly on this topic. “For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Lord God worketh not in darkness. He doeth not anything, save it be for the benefit of the world.” He continued,

He loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life, that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying, Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, nay; but he saith, Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money, and without price. Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, nay. Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold, I say unto you, nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men unto repentance. Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold, I say unto you, nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.

2 Nephi 26:23-28

All are welcome to come to God. All are privileged to have a personal relationship with him. None are barred from him. He does have some criteria, as mentioned above—a broken heart and contrite spirit—but does not put any other qualifiers. And those conditions he set can be met by any man or woman. All are able to come and all are invited. “He inviteth them all to come unto him, and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female, and he remembereth the heathen, and all alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Moreover, he is not a respecter of any person when it comes to choosing his servants. Again, Nephi puts it very plainly, “the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one: He that is righteous, is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35). Alma referred to this concept when speaking of Melchizedek and others and their callings as high priests. He explained that all men had equal opportunity or privilege to be called and prepared by God and ordained to his priesthood, but only a few were chosen because of their faithful diligence.

And this is the manner after which they were ordained, being called and prepared from the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they being chosen good, and exercising exceeding great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such; and thus they having been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this, they might had as great privilege as their brethren. Or in fine: In the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren.

Alma 13:3-4

It is therefore exhibited that in all aspects of salvation the Lord God has provided opportunity to each person, placing them all on equal footing from the beginning. Those who follow the Christ will become his elect sons and daughters, and those who do not will receive a different reward. Yet there is no injustice, since all had the same opportunity to come to him. What if someone starts out on the wrong foot or follows a misaligned path? Are they out of luck when it comes to being chosen as a vessel of God? Absolutely not! No person is perfect. The Lord has several parables declaring his mercy to those who choose to return to the Lord, even if they at one point strayed along a different path.

One parable that comes to mind is the parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-16. In this parable, the landowner goes to the market to hire workers. Some start the labor early in the morning and work all day. Others are hired later and only work a few hours or less. When it comes time to pay out the due for the labor, the landowner pays each individual the same amount, even though they worked different lengths of time. When those who worked a full day complained, the landowner said, “Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny?” There are several other parables that give a similar tone, such as the parable of the prodigal son, among others.

It is also necessary that men should have an idea that he is no respecter of persons; for with the idea of all the other excellencies in his character, and this one wanting, men could not exercise faith in him, because if he were a respecter of persons, they could not tell what their privileges were, nor how far they were authorized to exercise faith in him, or whether they were authorized to do it at all, but all must be confusion; but no sooner are the minds of men made acquainted with the truth on this point, that he is no respecter of persons, than they see that they have authority by faith to lay hold on eternal life the richest boon of heaven, because God is no respecter of persons, and that every man in every nation has an equal privilege.

Lecture 3:23

The invitation to come to Jesus Christ is universal. The Lord declared, “O inhabitants of the earth, I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh, for I am no respecter of persons” (D&C 1:34-35). Knowing this characteristic of God brings peace to the mind and assurance that each person has the right and the privilege to receive every blessing the Lord has ever promised.

A GOD OF LOVE

One of the characteristics that we are continuously encouraged to emulate is love, and with good reason. Love is one of the most powerful tools of the Lord. It draws men and women closer to Christ more quickly than almost any other action. And this is why he said the first commandment is to love God. Even before we love others, we are asked to love God with all our hearts and minds. It is not that he needs our love, but instead we need his; and as we learn to love him, we draw nearer to him and feel his love more profoundly.

“Let us love one another,” the beloved John wrote, “for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” We come to know God through emulating him. That is why “he that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). To truly know God, you have to understand him. Have you ever wished for a friend that would truly understand you? You probably wanted more than just a friend who shared similar hobbies or interests. Those are fun friends to be with. But the closest friends are those who really understand you, who know you inside and out. So it is also with God. To simply learn about him or know about it is significantly different than truly coming to know him. How do we come to know him? By becoming like him.

God encourages us to learn charity, which Moroni said “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 them.” We are told that if we attain such, we can “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” (Moroni 7:47-48). There is the recipe. If we want to become like God, we must learn to embody charity.

Paul the apostle wrote to the Ephesians,

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17-19

The breadth, length, depth, and height of the mysteries of God can only be comprehended as we are “rooted and grounded in love,” meaning a Christ-like love. Why is that? It is because God is love, and to understand him is to understand his mysteries. Yet no matter the depth or breadth of our love to God or others, God’s love is even more full and broad and immutable toward us.

Isaiah declared God's enduring love for the covenant children of Israel, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses." He continued, "For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:7-9).

This statement by Isaiah brings to the mind the burdens the Lord carried for each of us despite our worthiness.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Isaiah 53:3-8

Understanding the characteristic of God's love helps us to develop a deep and abiding faith in the Lord. If we did not understand his motivations nor comprehend his deep concern for us individually, then the meaning of his great sacrifice is diluted. Yet knowing that God loves each man, woman, and child with such intensity gives each of us the strength and courage to seek the Savior and receive forgiveness of our sins, as well as forgive others their sins.

The frailties of human emotions often impedes our ability to understand and express perfect love. The characteristic of love seems like an easy concept to understand, yet its application can be very challenging. Though our love fluctuates, the love of God never changes nor dims. His love has no boundaries but encompasses all. Lehi, having felt the love of God firsthand, recorded, "Behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell: I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

The Lord himself extrapolated on the ubiquitous love of God when he taught Nicodemus. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

The atoning sacrifice of the Lord most deeply expresses his personalized love for each individual. It is because of that love that we are able to return to our Father. His love is so tender for all his children that he suffered for each one of them. Surely, each soul is so precious to the Lord.

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God: for behold the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him on conditions of repentance. And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth.

D&C 18:10-13

DEVELOPING FAITH IN GOD'S CHARACTER

It is through the revelations God gave to ancient and modern prophets that we begin to really comprehend his character. And by knowing his character, we can exercise unwavering faith in him. Joseph summarized these ideas in the Lectures on Faith. He wrote,

From the above description of the character of the Deity which is given him in the revelations, to men, there is a sure foundation for the exercise of faith in him among every people, nation, and kindred, from age to age, and from generation to generation. Let us here observe that the foregoing is the character which is given of God in his revelations to the Former Day Saints, and it is also the character which is given of him in his revelations to the Latter Day Saints, so that the saints of former days, and those of latter days, are both alike in

this respect; the "Latter Day Saints" having as good grounds to exercise faith in God, as the former day saints had; because the same character is given of him to both.

Lecture 3:25-26

God has provided a means to his children that they may learn of him sufficient to have unshakable faith in him. The Lord expressed that eternal life is to know God and his Beloved Son (See John 17:3). To truly know the Lord is come to know who he is by understanding and then emulating where possible his character.

First, we start with a belief, a hope. As we believe the words of God, we begin to trust him and in turn love him. Just as Alma taught, that love will blossom into a tree of everlasting life (see Alma 32:41). In the end, we can be called the sons and daughters of God, not only in a sense that describes our heritage, but one that evokes the promise we seek. So, in a real sense we become covenant sons and daughters.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

1 John 3:1-3

May we come to know Jesus Christ in every real sense and become like him, so that when he does finally come, we will know him, for we will be just like him.