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Edited by
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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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serve in Church callings. Virtually all of these activities and others of comparable spiritual significance go on in the privacy of home and heart without any public awareness of them.

All spiritual gifts are needed in the Church (1 Cor. 12), but that some are more to be desired than others is evident from Paul's writings: One is to seek the best gifts. Of special significance for all who desire "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31) is to receive and develop the gift of CHARITY. This "pure love of Christ" is a fundamental mark of true DISCIPLESHIP, a prerequisite to ETERNAL LIFE, and a quality one is therefore to pray and work for with all energy of heart (Moroni 7:47–48; 10:21; Ether 12:34). Paul's masterful exposition on charity (1 Cor. 13) further defines this attribute and confirms love as the great commandment and the Christian's crucial need. Disciples are to manifest this gift and also desire others (1 Cor. 14:1), working by the power of God and by the gifts of the Spirit (Moro. 10:25).

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GOD

Latter-day Saints declare, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost" (A of F 1). Joseph SMITH offered the following clarification: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit" (D&C 130:22; see GOD THE FATHER; HOLY GHOST; JESUS CHRIST).

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct beings who constitute one GODHEAD. Generally speaking, the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost is the Comforter and Testifier (cf. *MFP* 5:26–34; *TPJS*, p. 190). Many scriptural passages illustrate the distinct character of the members of the Godhead. For example, at the baptism of Jesus, while he was in the water, the Father's voice was heard from heaven, and the Holy Ghost descended

"like a dove" and rested upon the Son (Matt. 3:13–17; see JESUS CHRIST: BAPTISM). All three persons were manifested separately and simultaneously. Also, Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and in another place declared, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Further, Jesus pointed to the Father and himself as two separate witnesses of the divinity of his work (John 5:32–37; 8:12–18). On the MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION the heavenly Father identified the mortal Jesus to Peter, James, and John as "my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5). Moreover, the Son often prayed to his Father. In Gethsemane he prayed to the Father while in deep anguish (Mark 14:32–39; cf. Luke 22:40–46; D&C 19:16–19), and on the cross he cried out to the Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; cf. Ps. 22:1). All of these passages clearly show that the Father is a being distinct from the Son. Although they are one in mind and purpose, they are two separate individuals and bear testimony of one another (cf. 3 Ne. 11:7–11).

The way in which the Godhead is one is illustrated by Jesus' prayer that his disciples would be one, even as he and the Father are one (John 17:21–22; cf. 3 Ne. 11:27, 32–36; 28:10–11). Here he was praying for his disciples' unity of mind, purpose, and testimony, not for the merger of their identities into a single being. He prayed that they would be one in desire, purpose, and objective, exactly as he and his Father are (*TPJS*, p. 372; see UNITY).

The Father, as God, is omnipotent, omniscient, and, through his spirit, omnipresent (see LIGHT OF CHRIST). He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness. His course is one eternal round. He is a God of truth and no respecter of persons. He personifies love.

Though Latter-day Saints extensively use the scriptures to learn about God, their fundamental knowledge concerning him is based upon the Prophet Joseph Smith's FIRST VISION, the Prophet's subsequent revelatory experiences, and individual personal REVELATION. While mankind may reason or speculate concerning the existence of God, and his nature, the principal way by which they can know about God is dependent upon his revealing himself to them (see TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST).

Before A.D. 325, the date of the first Christian ecumenical council at Nicaea, the nature of God was debated by philosophers and people of faith.

Since then, the concept of God has been the subject of ecumenical councils, philosophical discussions, and creeds. None of these is the source of the LDS understanding of God. To be sure, many classical arguments for the existence of God have been advanced, including the ontological arguments of Anselm, the five “proofs” of St. Thomas Aquinas, the teleological argument of Descartes, the ethical argument of Leibniz, and the postulates of practical reason of Kant. As impressive as any of these might be as achievements of the human intellect, none of them is the source of faith in God for Latter-day Saints, whose faith is based upon personal testimony grounded in personal experience (*see* EPISTEMOLOGY; FAITH; REASON AND REVELATION).

The last chapter of the Book of Mormon records this promise: “And when ye shall receive these things [of God], I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moro. 10:4–5). The personal witness that one receives in answer to prayer is called a TESTIMONY. Latter-day Saints teach that through this source a person can receive a sure witness that God lives, a confirmation regarding the various principles that the scriptures teach, and clarification where it is needed.

Belief in God, or a measure of faith in him, is essential to finding the reality of his existence. Inasmuch as God exists, and human beings are his children, it is important for men and women to know these facts because such knowledge is a component of ETERNAL LIFE (John 17:3). Individuals need to know that they are themselves eternal beings, that they are dependent upon God for their earthly existence (cf. Mosiah 2:21), and that their future condition depends on how they relate to God and keep his commandments (*see* COMMANDMENTS; OBEDIENCE).

God loves his children and has provided the means for them to realize their divine potential (*see* GODHOOD). God has given humankind the program for his children as a whole (*see* PLAN OF SALVATION), and through the gift of the Holy Ghost he gives special guidance to individuals as they seek it (*see* INSPIRATION). God revealed his will to prophets in ancient times and to apostles in the MERIDIAN OF TIME, and he continues to reveal

himself to living prophets and apostles in the latter days.

Learning of God’s existence creates the desire to know him, and know what he would have one do or be. As one’s faith and knowledge of God increase, one desires more and more to keep God’s commandments and feel close to him (*see* FAITH). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that knowing the true character of God forms the basis for the faith that leads to salvation (*Lectures on Faith* 4:1; *see* LECTURES ON FAITH). Jesus promised that the Comforter, or Holy Ghost, would be sent to one who keeps God’s commandments (John 14:26). The ideal is to enjoy that influence continuously.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us: yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did” (*TPJS*, pp. 345–46). Further, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another” (*TPJS*, p. 345).

Thus, all humans must learn from God who they are, where they came from, why they are on earth, where they are going, and what their eternal potential is, by studying the scriptures and receiving personal revelation. All things center in God.

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