

**Genesis 1:27**

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

**Isaiah 55:8-9**

8 ¶For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**Acts 17:29**

29 For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

**Romans 8:16-17**

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

**Hebrews 12:9**

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

**1 John 3:1-2**

1 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.

2 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.

**1 John 4:8-9**

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

**1 Nephi 9:6**

6 But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen.

**2 Nephi 9:20**

20 O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

**3 Nephi 12:48**

48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect

**Moroni 8:18**

18 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.

**D&C 76:4**

4 From eternity to eternity he is the same, and his years never fail.

**D&C 88:41**

41 He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever.

**D&C 130:22**

22 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. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.

**Becoming Like God - Lds.org/topics**

1. One of the most common images in Western and Eastern religions alike is of God as a parent and of human beings as God's children. Billions pray to God as their parent, invoke the brotherhood and sisterhood of all people to promote peace, and reach out to the weary and troubled out of deep conviction that each of God's children has great worth.
2. But people of different faiths understand the parent-child relationship between God and humans in significantly different ways. Some understand the phrase "child of God" as an honorary title reserved only for those who believe in God and accept His guidance as they might accept a father's. Many see parent-child descriptions of God's relationship to humanity as metaphors to express His love for His creations and their dependence on His sustenance and protection.
3. Latter-day Saints see all people as children of God in a full and complete sense; they consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential. Each has an eternal core and is "a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents."<sup>1</sup> Each possesses seeds of divinity and must choose whether to live in harmony or tension with that divinity. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people may "progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny."<sup>2</sup> Just as a child can develop the attributes of his or her parents over time, the divine nature that humans inherit can be developed to become like their Heavenly Father's.
4. The desire to nurture the divinity in His children is one of God's attributes that most inspires, motivates, and humbles members of the Church. God's loving parentage and guidance can help each willing, obedient child of God receive of His fulness and of His glory. This knowledge transforms the way Latter-day Saints see their fellow human beings. The teaching that men and women have the potential to be exalted to a state of godliness clearly expands beyond what is understood by most contemporary Christian churches and expresses for the Latter-day Saints a yearning rooted in the Bible to live as God lives, to love as He loves, and to prepare for all that our loving Father in Heaven wishes for His children.
5. Latter-day Saint beliefs would have sounded more familiar to the earliest generations of Christians than they do to many modern Christians. Many church fathers (influential theologians and teachers in early Christianity) spoke approvingly of the idea that humans can become divine. One modern scholar refers to the "ubiquity of the doctrine of deification"—the teaching that humans could become God—in the first centuries after Christ's death.<sup>11</sup> The church father Irenaeus, who died about A.D. 202, asserted that Jesus Christ "did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be what He is Himself."<sup>12</sup> Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215) wrote that "the Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God."<sup>13</sup> Basil the Great (A.D. 330–379) also celebrated this prospect—not just "being made like to God," but "highest of all, the being made God."<sup>14</sup>
6. What exactly the early church fathers meant when they spoke of becoming God is open to interpretation,<sup>15</sup> but it is clear that references to deification became more contested

- in the late Roman period and were infrequent by the medieval era. The first known objection by a church father to teaching deification came in the fifth century.<sup>16</sup> By the sixth century, teachings on “becoming God” appear more limited in scope, as in the definition provided by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. A.D. 500): “Deification ... is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him *so far as is possible*.”<sup>17</sup>
7. Why did these beliefs fade from prominence? Changing perspectives on the creation of the world may have contributed to the gradual shift toward more limited views of human potential. The earliest Jewish and Christian commentaries on the Creation assumed that God had organized the world out of preexisting materials, emphasizing the goodness of God in shaping such a life-sustaining order.<sup>18</sup> But the incursion of new philosophical ideas in the second century led to the development of a doctrine that God created the universe *ex nihilo*—“out of nothing.” This ultimately became the dominant teaching about the Creation within the Christian world.<sup>19</sup> In order to emphasize God’s power, many theologians reasoned that nothing could have existed for as long as He had. It became important in Christian circles to assert that God had originally been completely alone.
  8. Creation *ex nihilo* widened the perceived gulf between God and humans. It became less common to teach either that human souls had existed before the world or that they could inherit and develop the attributes of God in their entirety in the future.
  9. Joseph Smith continued to receive revelation on the themes of divine nature and exaltation during the last two years of his life. In a revelation recorded in July 1843 that linked exaltation with eternal marriage, the Lord declared that those who keep covenants, including the covenant of eternal marriage, will inherit “all heights and depths.” “Then,” says the revelation, “shall they be gods, because they have no end.” They will receive “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”<sup>23</sup>
  10. The following April, feeling he was “never in any nearer relationship to God than at the present time,”<sup>24</sup> Joseph Smith spoke about the nature of God and the future of humankind to the Saints, who had gathered for a general Church conference. He used the occasion in part to reflect upon the death of a Church member named King Follett, who had died unexpectedly a month earlier. When he rose to speak, the wind was blowing, so Joseph asked his listeners to give him their “profound attention” and to “pray that the L[ord] may strengthen my lungs” and stay the winds until his message had been delivered.<sup>25</sup>
  11. “What kind of a being is God?” he asked. Human beings needed to know, he argued, because “if men do not comprehend the character of God they do not comprehend themselves.”<sup>26</sup> In that phrase, the Prophet collapsed the gulf that centuries of confusion had created between God and humanity. Human nature was at its core divine. God “was once as one of us” and “all the spirits that God ever sent into the world” were likewise “susceptible of enlargement.” Joseph Smith preached that long before the world was formed, God found “himself in the midst” of these beings and “saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself”<sup>27</sup> and be “exalted” with Him.<sup>28</sup>
  12. Joseph told the assembled Saints, “You have got to learn how to be a god yourself.”<sup>29</sup> In order to do that, the Saints needed to learn godliness, or to be more like God. The process would be ongoing and would require patience, faith, continuing repentance, obedience to the commandments of the gospel, and reliance on Christ. Like ascending a ladder, individuals needed to learn the “first prin[ciples] of the Gospel” and continue beyond the limits of mortal knowledge until they could “learn the last prin[ciples] of the Gospel” when the time came.<sup>40</sup> “It is not all to be comprehended in this world,” Joseph said.<sup>41</sup> “It will take a long time after the grave to understand the whole.”<sup>42</sup>
  13. That was the last time the Prophet spoke in a general conference. Three months later, a mob stormed Carthage Jail and martyred him and his brother Hyrum.
  14. Since that sermon, known as the King Follett discourse, the doctrine that humans can progress to exaltation and godliness has been taught within the Church. Lorenzo Snow, the Church’s fifth President, coined a well-known couplet: “As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.”<sup>43</sup> Little has been revealed about the first half of this couplet, and consequently little is taught. When asked about this topic, Church President Gordon B. Hinckley told a reporter in 1997, “That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don’t know very much about.” When asked about the belief in humans’ divine potential, President Hinckley responded, “Well, as God is, man may become. We believe in eternal progression. Very strongly.”<sup>44</sup>
  15. Eliza R. Snow, a Church leader and poet, rejoiced over the doctrine that we are, in a full and absolute sense, children of God. “I had learned to call thee Father, / Thru thy Spirit from on high,” she wrote, “But, until the key of knowledge / Was restored, I knew not why.” Latter-day Saints have also been moved by the knowledge that their divine parentage includes a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. Expressing that truth, Eliza R. Snow asked, “In the heav’ns are parents single?” and answered with a resounding *no*: “Truth eternal / Tells me I’ve a mother there.”<sup>45</sup> That knowledge plays an important role in Latter-day Saint belief. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, “Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them.
  16. For some observers, the doctrine that humans should strive for godliness may evoke images of ancient pantheons with competing deities. Such images are incompatible with Latter-day Saint doctrine. Latter-day Saints believe that God’s children will always worship Him. Our progression will never change His identity as our Father and our God. Indeed, our exalted, eternal relationship with Him will be part of the “fulness of joy” He desires for us.
  17. If humans live out of harmony with God’s goodness, they cannot grow into God’s glory. Joseph Smith taught that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only [except] upon the principles of righteousness.” When humans abandon God’s selfless purposes and standards, “the heavens withdraw themselves [and] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved.”<sup>49</sup> Pride is incompatible with progress; disunity is impossible between exalted beings.

18. Latter-day Saints tend to imagine exaltation through the lens of the sacred in mortal experience. They see the seeds of godhood in the joy of bearing and nurturing children and the intense love they feel for those children, in the impulse to reach out in compassionate service to others, in the moments they are caught off guard by the beauty and order of the universe, in the grounding feeling of making and keeping divine covenants. Church members imagine exaltation less through images of what they will *get* and more through the relationships they have now and how those relationships might be purified and elevated. As the scriptures teach, “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”<sup>51</sup>
19. The teaching that human beings have a divine nature and future shapes the way Latter-day Saints view fundamental doctrine. Perhaps most significantly, belief in divine nature helps us more deeply appreciate the Atonement of Jesus Christ. While many Christian theologians have expressed the magnitude of the Savior’s Atonement by emphasizing human depravity, Latter-day Saints understand the magnitude of the Atonement of Christ in terms of the vast human potential it makes possible. Christ’s Atonement not only provides forgiveness from sin and victory over death, it also redeems imperfect relationships, heals the spiritual wounds that stifle growth, and strengthens and enables individuals to develop the attributes of Christ. Latter-day Saints believe that it is only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that we can have a sure hope of eternal glory and that the power of His Atonement is fully accessed only by faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in following the instruction and example of Christ. Thus, those who become like God and enter into a fulness of His glory are described as people who have been “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”
20. An awareness of humans’ divine potential also influences Latter-day Saints’ understanding of gospel principles such as the importance of divine commandments, the role of temples, and the sanctity of individual moral agency. Belief that human beings are actually God’s children also changes Latter-day Saints’ behavior and attitudes. For example, even in societies where casual and premarital sex are considered acceptable, Latter-day Saints retain a deep reverence for the God-given procreative and bonding powers of human sexual intimacy and remain committed to a higher standard in the use of those sacred powers. Studies suggest that Latter-day Saints place an exceptionally high priority on marriage and parenthood, a consequence in part of a strong belief in heavenly parents and a commitment to strive for that divinity.
21. Unfortunately, none of us quite lives up to everything that this title implies, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”<sup>1</sup>
22. It can be discouraging at times to know what it means to be a son of God and yet come up short. The adversary likes to take advantage of these feelings. Satan would rather that you define yourself by your sins instead of your divine potential. Brethren, don’t listen to him.
23. We have all seen a toddler learn to walk. He takes a small step and totters. He falls. Do we scold such an attempt? Of course not. What father would punish a toddler for stumbling? We encourage, we applaud, and we praise because with every small step, the child is becoming more like his parents.
24. Now, brethren, compared to the perfection of God, we mortals are scarcely more than awkward, faltering toddlers. But our loving Heavenly Father wants us to become more like Him, and, dear brethren, that should be our eternal goal too. God understands that we get there not in an instant but by taking one step at a time.
25. I do not believe in a God who would set up rules and commandments only to wait for us to fail so He could punish us. I believe in a Heavenly Father who is loving and caring and who rejoices in our every effort to stand tall and walk toward Him. Even when we stumble, He urges us not to be discouraged—never to give up or flee our allotted field of service—but to take courage, find our faith, and keep trying.
26. Our Father in Heaven mentors His children and often sends unseen heavenly help to those who desire to follow the Savior. Serving God and our fellowmen will challenge us and transform us into something greater than we ever thought possible.
27. Perhaps you might think that you are not needed, that you are overlooked or unwanted, that you are nobody.
28. I am sincerely sorry if any priesthood holder feels this way. Certainly you are not overlooked or unwanted by your Heavenly Father. He loves you. And I tell you with certainty that you are needed by your Church.
29. Do you not know that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to [put to shame] the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to [put to shame] the things which are mighty”?<sup>10</sup>
30. Perhaps it is true that we are weak. Perhaps we are not wise or mighty. But when God works through us, no one and nothing can stand against us.<sup>11</sup>
31. This is why you are needed. You have your own special contribution to make, and God can magnify that contribution in a mighty way. Your ability to contribute is not dependent upon your calling in the Church. Your opportunities for service are endless. If you are waiting on the sidelines, I encourage you to get in the game.
32. Don’t wait for a particular calling before you become fully engaged in building the kingdom of God. As a priesthood holder, you are already called to the work. Study the word of God daily, pray to Heavenly Father every day, internalize the principles of the restored gospel, give thanks to God, and ask for His guidance. Then live what you learn, first in your family but also in all situations of your life.

#### Four Titles

**Dieter F. Uchtdorf CR April 2013**

21. One title that defines all of us in the most fundamental way is *son of Heavenly Father*. No matter what else we are or do in life, we must never forget that we are God’s literal spirit children. We were His children before we came to this world, and we will be His children forevermore. This basic truth should change the way we look at ourselves, our brothers and sisters, and life itself.