Week 51 is scheduled for study Dec. 13-19, 2021. The proclamation on the family is one of the most profound doctrinal statements in our generation. Only prophets could have given us this powerful document.

Day 1

President Dallin H. Oaks said: "I believe our attitude toward and use of the family proclamation is [a test] for this generation. I pray for all Latter-day Saints to stand firm in that test."

The family is central to the Creator's plan.

The manual suggests we look at the proclamation from the perspective of the whole plan of salvation. With that in mind, let us look at what the proclamation talks about and where those things fit into the plan.

In our premortal life, marriage was something we all looked forward to, because we were all single, and always had been. Mortality (the period of time between mortal birth and our resurrection) would be our grand opportunity to prove our willingness to be obedient to our Lord, and to experience marriage. Marriage, and having children, is the first commandment listed in the scriptures to Adam and Eve. In order to work, the whole human experience relies on us marrying and producing children. There are enough of us who are able to marry and have children in this part of mortality that this process is a major focus of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Marriage in mortality gives us

our first taste of what it will be like to live as gods, for all gods are married. Having children in this life teaches us more about God, our Father, and some of what He has had to experience with His children. It is but a taste, but a taste is more instructive than nothing.

Our life on earth is patterned after our life in the presence of God. This is why we have always been commanded to form families by marrying a companion of the opposite gender. It is because gods are only capable of having offspring because there is a union between a man and a woman that families are based on the same principle. We were gendered in the pre-existence, and that gender came with us into mortality. It will continue to be an integral part of who we are as we progress through the eternities. These are eternal truths that are in the process of being rejected by the world with wild abandon. We need to become comfortable with the idea that gender is eternal and non-negotiable. Gender has helped to define our roles in the marriage and family relationships in the past eternities, is helping to define our roles today, and will continue to do so into the future eternities.

The goal of coming into mortality, among other things, is to prepare us for godhood, to be the heads of our own eternal family. This is part of our Father's work and glory in bringing to pass our immortality and eternal glory (Moses 1:39). He is married and is a parent, and so must we become if we are to become like Him. For many of us this blessing will come after we pass to the other side of the veil. But whether we obtain this privilege here or there, we will, at some point, be given the opportunity to marry. As stated time and time again in my writing, the blessings of God have nothing to do with our earthly circumstances or the timing or location of our birth, but have everything to do with our personal willingness and worthiness. That always has been, and always will be true.

It is important to note that a married couple is a united companionship, and should act as one person. A God is not just one person, but the married unit, though each, individually is a God, there is no such thing as single Gods. Being a god means being able to have children, and that requires a companion of the opposite gender. While we are here in this current phase of mortality, many things interrupt our ability to smoothly live as couples. There are couples where one is taken early in death, so the remaining member of the couple must raise the family by him/herself. There are those who are left alone, sometimes for decades because their loved one died, leaving them a

widow or widower. Many families must both work to survive in this world, and the privilege of being able to be home with the children, especially when they are young, is denied to the couple. My point here is that marriage usually requires a great deal of flexibility beyond what we are taught as the ideal in Church. This is just part of learning to live and love as one in our marriage. We do whatever it takes to fulfill our obligations to each other and to our families, while also fulfilling our covenant commitments to the Lord.

As you reread the proclamation with the intent of seeing how it describes the plan of salvation, you will, no doubt, find other ideas to explore. These thoughts I have expressed are just the first to come to my mind. Happy hunting!

Day 2

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Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mentioned in yesterday's lesson that the world is rejecting eternal truths with wild abandon. One of the truths being rejected is that a family is defined by the union between a man and a woman. This is rejected, because the world teaches that any group of people who commit themselves to each other is a family. While that is true in spirit, that definition is not true in the real sense of what a family is supposed to be. This is difficult, because a family, based on God's definition, is flexible. Families need to be inclusive and willing to accept others into their fold. So just because God's definition of a family can be expanded to include others, it cannot be replaced by any other definition than the one He has given us. Why? Because only a family by His definition will allow the covenants needed to make that family last into the eternities. Remember that we are taught in the Doctrine and Covenants that all other contracts outside the marriage covenant will be null and void in the eternities. Only those married by God's standard of what a marriage is will be able to keep their partner in the eternities.

This means that while we are in mortality we have compassion on those who don't have covenant based marriages. All they have is what the world has given them. God will bless those who come together and love each other, commit to each other. But He cannot, and will not bless their family structure in the eternities if they do not make the eternal covenants of marriage He requires for families to be recognized in the eternities that we receive in the temple.

The family unit is how God, Himself lives. His lifestyle is the perfect and most productive way to live if you are seeking happiness. All good things flow from God, and God lives in a family. He has set the example for us, and we must learn to seek our happiness in our homes among those we love. This is not easy during mortality. We have those in our families who betray us (hmmm, looks like God had that too), those who choose evil over good (again, ditto), and who turn their backs on the covenants that bring happiness. It appears from this short list that the Lord is well aware of what we have to go through to setup and hold together families in this life. There is nothing He hasn't seen before. Yet, for all that, He still teaches us that ultimately, it is through the family that we will find our greatest happiness.

It is true that families are not perfect. Not even God's family did everything one would hope they would do. But there are more opportunities for happiness, and greater strength and support for our individual needs in a family than in any other kind of unit. Part of our struggle in mortality is to learn how to navigate creating and maintaining an eternal family. I think this is one of the reasons the Lord has promised that He will need to fix a lot of broken relationships and things before the resurrection. We just need to exercise our faith that He can fulfill those promises, even if we don't fully understand what all can be fixed.

Day 3

President Dallin H. Oaks said: "I believe our attitude toward and use of the family proclamation is [a test] for this generation. I pray for all Latter-day Saints to stand firm in that test."

I "will be held accountable before God" for the way I treat my family.

I should probably start today's lesson with a confession. The teachings of this proclamation were taught to me my whole life. When it first came out, I callously thought, "well duh, everyone knows these things." I have actually avoided reading it over the years because I was going off of my first impression, so figured I didn't need to study it. I am ashamed of my own stupidity in this thing.

Try looking at the proclamation with a new pair of eyes, as though you are now seeing it for the first time. As you do so, keep in mind that God, our Father, doesn't do anything on a whim. As God, ANYTHING that leaves His mouth comes to pass, or there are consequences for the lack of coming to pass. He neither minces words, nor does He speak frivolously or lightheartedly. Everything He says is in deadly earnest, for all that He speaks must be obeyed, for the whole universe revolves around His every word.

Go back and reread the proclamation with the seriousness of God's statements in the forefront of your mind. We are His children, the reason for all He does in the universe. Our destiny as future gods, to become like Him, is why the whole universe has been created. This is a plan that defies our ability to comprehend the breadth, depth, and scope of it all. Those who neglect His edicts about how to treat one of His children, whether that child of God is a stranger, our mortal child, or our spouse, will do it at our own eternal peril. As you read the proclamation, notice the way the prophets have worded all their statements. Each and every statement about the sacredness of our relationships with one another is treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

When you consider the text again, look at its statements about our relationships with one another, our eternal destiny, and our potential, and try to consider how God, Himself feels about each of these statements. We are each going to be held accountable for how we consider one another, how we treat one another, and in the day of judgment we will be answerable to God for all of these statements in the proclamation. As the manual points out, "If you stood before God today, what would you be confident discussing with Him about your family relationships?"

Depending on how reverent we have been in our dealings with our loved ones, we might find ourselves coming up a little short on the respect scale when we have to face our Lord about how we treated our family members. It is so easy to hurt those we are closest with, so easy to neglect those relationships that are most vital to our own happiness. How many parents have found themselves wantonly neglecting their sacred

duties to the rearing of their children? And why? Because the world tells us that our social well being or our financial prosperity is the most important thing in the world. Honestly now, do we really think God, our eternal Father cares a fig for how wealthy we are in this life, especially when the choice is between His children and our temporary satisfaction that we have outperformed our neighbor financially, or have more friends on social media than someone else? No, His whole concern is on our relationships one with another. His is a celestial outlook. Our financial or social prominence is purely a telestial outlook. And we are not here to strive to qualify for either of the lower kingdoms of glory, but the highest.

If we read the proclamation as though it comes from the mouth of God, Himself, and consider that He is teaching us about our sacred and eternal duties towards those in our own family, no matter how they behave toward us - for they will have to answer for their behavior as we have to answer for ours - we will see in the descriptions given a glimpse into the celestial lifestyle, its attitudes, and its power to do good in the universe. These attitudes are not new, for they were taught to us in our premortal life. But now we must learn to adopt them, having forgotten our relationship one with another. Only by adopting these attitudes towards those in our own family can we rediscover the power of joy and goodness, the support and comfort, the love and peace that living a celestial life has to offer. A celestial life is all about how we view and treat those around us. Herein lies the power of godliness.

Day 4

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Can I receive the promised blessings if my family situation is less than ideal?

Today's lesson is based on a great question, for who among us has the perfect family? Who among us is the perfect family member? None of us have a unique situation that isn't shared by millions of others who have come before us. It may feel like it, but with so many billions of other children of God who have already come to earth, how can we

be so arrogant as to think that we are the only ones to have been shunned, mistreated, been alienated, hated, or abused by those who should have loved us most?

The eternal principle of individual accountability is very important in answering today's question. It doesn't matter what our family life is or was like when we were growing up. It doesn't matter what it is like at this very moment. What matters is what each of us is doing to improve the relationships in the family we have been sent to. No family is perfect. No family is without flaw. We look around at other families, and we see what they hope we will see, families without error, disobedience, quirkiness, or who are loveless in their relationships. It is a mirage, for we are all weak, flawed people. We are all struggling to love and feel loved. We all rely on God for forgiveness and for the ability to forgive others. We all share this same burden in mortality, and charity is the only cure for what ails us.

Over and over again the Lord promises us that our eternal reward will be based on our personal choices. He never once said anywhere that only certain classes of people will receive certain rewards, or that a certain financial or social status is required to make it back into the celestial kingdom. Every person who ever lived has the same requirements to return home to live with God again. Every person who ever lived is judged, has been judged, and will be judged on their personal choices they made with the situations they were given. No one can rob us of our eternal glory, if that is our heart's desire. No amount of physical, social, financial, or intellectual handicap can bar us from returning home to our Father in Heaven, for He sees past all of that to the person who lives within this mortal frame. He sees us as His precious child. As "no respector of persons" God has given us a plan for our salvation that treats each of us with equal love and respect. There is no infirmity of the soul that He cannot teach us to live with here in mortality, if we seek His aid. And the reward for having met and dealt with that struggle is eternal glory. We all have those struggles with weakness and poor habits and attitudes. He can help us with every one of those things. This is the purpose of mortality, above and beyond just receiving a body. These are the conquests that make the difference in where we go in the eternities.

FHE/Personal Study

Gender issues

As an apology, I was about to state that the following is my own opinion, but that is a lie. To apologize for what God has already told us, and to believe what the world is preaching to us day and night about who and what we are, is the greater lie.

There have always been those who are born along the edges of the spectrum of gender identity. Just like there is a spectrum of (for example) masculinity that ranges from the super macho to the super effeminate and delicate, so too are there those among us who may not feel like they fit into the mainstream way of thinking about themself. But despite what the world would currently have us believe, our actual gender is not something we have a choice in. Gender is simply part of our eternal makeup. It never changes.

Isn't it at least a little bit humorous that Satan has gotten God's children to believe that what is part of our eternal character and makeup is actually something we can choose, based on how we feel when we get up in the morning? This should tell you how important gender really is in the eternal scheme of things. If Satan is so intent on bending, twisting, and destroying the whole concept of our personal identity based on our gender then our gender roles, based on God's declarations in the scriptures, and through His prophets, must be truly important to us.

One of the lies that we are taught by the world today is that because I may feel like I am attracted to those of my own gender, it is cruel to deny me to love (in a physically intimate way) the person I choose to love. The Lord clearly teaches that this "right" to love someone as we want to love them is also denied to those who are attracted to the opposite gender. And yes, there are only two genders, no more. How many people have had to live out their lives in a state of singleness, because they couldn't marry? It has been this way since Adam and Eve. How many of these people had to remain celibate their whole mortal lives? Everyone has a time in their life when they are required to be celibate, whether for a short time or a long time, this is a universal experience. Keeping God's commandments to remain chaste and pure before Him didn't change, just because we are now more open about discussing our attraction to someone of our own gender. Purity is not based on gender or social acceptance, but on behavior, and cleanliness of thought.

To be clear, the same commandments that apply to the single heterosexual applies to the homosexual. Marriage is between a man and a woman. If we are not able to live life

by that commandment then our only choice, if we want to return home to God with our head held high, is to live our life in purity and celibetness. Gender here is not the issue. What drags gender into this issue is that the world teaches that if we are attracted to those of our own gender then somehow this should give us a free pass to do whatever we like. Somehow this is supposed to make us special in some way so that God's commandments don't apply to us. This is a lie. They do. Remember yesterday's lesson on individual accountability and blessings? This applies here in spades. Our situation in mortality has nothing to do with God's requirements for celestial life. If we want to live where He lives then we must live by the commandments that will get us there. Our focus must remain on the scriptures and the words of the prophets.

In this, and many other issues in today's society, it is important to remember that covenants are only for those who want to return to live with God. Any other eternal outcome requires no covenants. This means that today we can live how we want, and do what we want, but with the understanding that living that way will bar us from returning home to God, our Father. As the scriptures teach about living like we want, we may find joy for a season, but that joy will end when the judgment comes and we are found lacking the spiritual nature that will permit us to live with others who were faithful to their covenants with God.

Our gender has nothing to do with our ability to return to God. Our obedience to His commandments is the only determining factor.

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The Family: A Proclamation to the World

Week 51