

I'd like to speak today on ***How can I "know" my Heavenly Father?***

Notice how it says "know" rather than "know about" my Heavenly Father. Simply "knowing about" someone could be construed as a surface-level relationship, whereas "knowing" someone denotes building a personal relationship and coming to a deeper understanding.

In John 17:3, we read

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

It's through coming to "know" Heavenly Father that we'll find Eternal life. So, if that's the case, how do we come to know Him.

The answer is found in John 2:3. It reads.....

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."

Okay, so if we need to keep his commandments, then we better get busy because there are a lot of them – just look at the ancient Jews. There were over 613 Mitzvot (or Commandments) that they had to follow. Unfortunately, we (as Latter-day Saints) aren't too far behind that with all of the commandments, guidelines, and rules that we have today. So with that being said, let's simplify things and look at the most important ones.

Let's turn to Matthew 22:36-38

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

The greatest commandment is to Love God.

So how do we do that? Let's continue reading verses 39 & 40 to find out.....

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

There are no greater commandments than these. The answer is simple - we show our love for God by loving our neighbor.

Let's look and see what King Benjamin had to say about this. I guess this would be like his version of General Conference as he was addressing a multitude of people.

In Mosiah 5:13, we read....

13 For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?

Basically, what King Benjamin was saying is that we can't "know" Heavenly Father without serving him by serving and loving our neighbors.

Deep in the heart of Zambia and the Congo of South Africa is found the home to a fascinating tribe of people known as the Babemba. Babemba treat people who step out of line in a remarkable way. Instead of treating the person with judgment and punishment, the tribe treats the offender with love and appreciation.

If a member of the Babemba acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he or she is placed at the center of the village, alone. All work ceases, and the entire tribe gathers in a large circle around the violator. Then each person in the tribe, regardless of age, speaks to the accused, one at a time, recalling all the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his or her lifetime.

Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy is recounted. All the individual's positive attributes, good deeds, strengths and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. No one is permitted to fabricate, exaggerate or be facetious about the accomplishments or the positive aspects of the person. This tribal ceremony often lasts for several days and does not end until everyone is drained of every positive comment he or she can state about the person in question.

At the end, the circle is broken and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe with joyful celebration. It is also interesting to note... necessity for such ceremonies is rare.

Several years ago in the spring session of the YW general broadcast, Elaine Dalton, the (then serving) general YW president gave an inspired talk entitled “Remember Who You Are!”

In it, she reminds the YW of their divine heritage... that they were literally the royal daughters of our Heavenly Father... each one born to be a queen. She spoke of “deep beauty” – the kind of beauty that shines from the inside out. She spoke of their nobility and of their divine identity. Sister Dalton also admonished them to “Remember who you are!”, and to “See yourself as our Heavenly Father sees you.”

This was a beautiful talk, but I would like to take things a step further and ask all of us this question...

“Do you also see others as our Heavenly Father sees them?”

Close your eyes and imagine, for a moment, that your soul is a box of crayons, the biggest one they come in: 152 colors. Within your box are some crayons, some empty spaces for crayons, and some crayons that are broken and incomplete, but let’s keep it simpler and just say that you’ve got some colors but lack many others. Imagine that everyone’s soul is an identical crayon box, but with a different set of colors and empty spaces for colors. Some have many different colors, some are nearly destitute of colors, and some contain what appear to be all entirely broken. The drawings we make may be of our personal preference as to subject matter but are only colored in by those colors we have or keep.

As is human nature, looking inward and honestly at our own box of crayons is uncomfortable and sometimes even quite painful. Because of this, we often look sideways at the next person’s crayon box and see that his or her constellation of colors is not the same as ours, that he or she has colors where we have spaces and emptiness where we have color. It creates a tension, and often leads to misplaced or errant judgements of others and/or their drawings because they’re different and not the same as ours.

Christ, on the other hand, has the Ultimate Crayon Box. He sees and knows our divine worth, even when we don’t or can’t. Each and every one of us is a crayon in his box. He keeps all of us and can therefore color in every color. He does not only paint in pastel shades, but in the saddest deep violets, and in blood red, as well. His box contains no empty spaces where a color should be, there are no vacancies and no broken or worthless crayons.

In D&C 18:10, we read.....

“Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;”

So let’s talk about that, let’s talk about Charity – the pure love of Christ.

Pres. Monson delivered a beautiful message at a General Relief Society Broadcast. His words were very moving and I’d like to share with you part of what he said...

*"I consider charity—or the “pure love of Christ”—to be the opposite of criticism and judging. In speaking of charity, I do not at this moment have in mind the relief of the suffering through the giving of our substance. That, of course, is necessary and proper. Tonight, however, I have in mind the charity that manifests itself when we are tolerant of others and lenient toward their actions; the kind of charity that forgives; the kind of charity that is patient... Charity is having patience with someone who has let us down; it is resisting the impulse to become offended easily. It is accepting weaknesses and shortcomings. **It is accepting people as they truly are.** It is looking beyond physical appearances to attributes that will not dim through time. It is resisting the impulse to categorize others." (Thomas S. Monson)*

Mother Theresa, a Catholic nun who worked among the poor in India most of her life, spoke this profound truth.....

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

Those who love you are not fooled by the mistakes you have made or the dark images you hold about yourself. They remember your beauty when you feel ugly; your wholeness when you are broken; your innocence when you feel guilty; and your purpose when you are confused.

Let’s turn to Moroni chapter 7:45-47....

45 And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

46 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

47 But charity 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 him.

Let's be honest, pure, Christ like love, charity, is hard. I have heard the phrase "charity never faileth" a thousand times. But it was not until recently that this phrase started to mean something to me. Charity never faileth. The pure love of Christ never fails. Arguments fail. Trying to convince someone they are wrong fails. Pushing your agenda on someone else fails. But love. The scriptures tell us that love never fails.

So what does this mean for us? How do we, imperfect and opinionated humans, have a love that never fails? Especially when we feel strongly about certain topics? How do we hold charity and disagreement simultaneously? How do we show love when we are full of fear and distrust for those who do not look like us, do not act like us, or do not believe like us? How do we love those we do not understand or even want to understand?

We follow what Moroni says:

1. **We suffereth long.** We engage in patient endurance under provocation. Love does not retaliate. We do not love someone only as long as they are living up to our standards and act how we would have them act. We love them even though their beliefs and actions grate against our own. There is no greater example of long suffering than that of our Savior. He lived among those who hated and despised him. He was ridiculed, tortured, and eventually killed by a group of people who misunderstood, hated, and despised him. Yet in the end he asked the father to forgive them.
2. **We are kind.** Kindness does not require you to like, agree with, or understand another person or their beliefs or actions. Kindness is simple. Kindness is choosing to make eye contact with a homeless person. It is offering an understanding smile to the older lady holding up the checkout line in Target while she writes a check. It is recognizing that life is hard and we all need the gift of kindness and grace on a daily basis.
3. **We are not easily provoked.** We work to keep our fear, anger, and hurts in check. We cultivate the ability to recognize and celebrate the imperfections in ourselves while connecting with the imperfections in others. We take a step back and work to see those we disagree with as human. We seek to find goodness instead of fault. This is not easy. Provocation instinctually triggers a fight or flight response. We are predisposed to fight back, to argue. But we must learn to override this natural instinct. We must seek to see

the good, no matter how it is packaged and find some particle of humanity with which we can connect.

4. **We beareth all things.** We push ourselves beyond being tolerant. Tolerance is walking on eggshells with gritted teeth. Love is recognizing that we need and want someone in our lives. If our goal is to be tolerant of people who are different than we are...then we really are aiming quite low. Traffic jams are to be tolerated. People are to be celebrated.

5. **We are full of hope.** We hope in humanity. We hope in goodness. We embrace the stomach twisting knot of disagreement and we hope that God can handle the difference we struggle to contain. We hold to hope as we love in spite of our fears. We reach out to those we do not understand, those we despise, those that trigger our disgust, and we hope we can find within ourselves a well of kindness that is greater than our own discomfort.

6. **We endure, in love.** Meaning we practice loving, again and again, until we fully get it.

And what can we learn from practicing charity with those who don't believe in god? Who are pro choice? Who are pro life? Who are members of the LGBTQ community? Who are uber liberal? Who are uber conservative? Who are refugees, immigrants, and grandchildren of the founding fathers? We can learn that loving others is the most sacred experience we can engage in. We can learn that the belief that we are motivated from a place of love while those who disagree with us are motivated from a place of hate is a holy war of ideology that keeps us polarized. We can learn that we can find commonalities in a sea of difference. We can learn that love never faileth. Loving someone is always the right thing to do.

To quote president Monson, "we cannot truly love God if we do not love our fellow travelers on this mortal journey". That is how we, imperfect and opinionated humans, have a love that never fails. We recognize that all of us are travelers on a mortal journey. Life hurts and it's hard. Not because you're doing it wrong, but because it hurts for everybody. And, the only meaningful thing we can offer one another is love. Not advice, not questions about our choices, not suggestions for the future, just love, and finally, People who are hurting don't need Avoiders, Protectors, or Fixers. What we need are patient, loving witnesses. People to sit quietly and hold space for us. People to stand in helpful vigil to our pain.

That is what it means to have charity. We stand in helpful vigil to others pain. And, we are all in pain on some level.

In the October 2007 conference, Elder Wirthlin said, "Love is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the pathway of discipleship. It comforts, counsels, cures, and consoles. It leads us through valleys of darkness and through the veil of death. In the end love leads us to the glory and grandeur of eternal life."

Have charity and love others sounds overly simplistic; but it is not. It is one of the most difficult challenges we have been tasked to do. None of us have the luxury of sitting in comfort knowing we have mastered charity. For all of us have room for improvement. At a time when the lines of division are starkly drawn by religious, political, and social ideologies let us use our shared imperfection as a starting point for connection. For it is through connection that family relationships are healed, communities are strengthened, and civilizations thrive.

Charity never faileth. Love never faileth.

We are all connected. Despite all our differences, despite our race, our religion, our beliefs... despite our status, education, or our income... and despite our sexual orientation, or our political affiliations... despite it all... **we all belong to each other.** We need not agree with one another... to love one another. We need not think alike... to love alike.

It is not our place to determine the worth of a soul, for God has already done this... the worth of a soul... *every* soul... is great in his sight and understanding - Greater than we could ever comprehend... at least in this life.

May we always remember *Who We Are*, and may we also never forget the divine beauty and greatness that can be found in all. May we remember that God doesn't make mistakes. May we love, honor and recognize *the good*, and *the god*, that is in each of us.

In closing, I would like to leave you with one final thought... Psalms 82:6

*"I have said, Ye are gods; and **all** of you are children of the most High."*

May we always remember.

Amen.