



Mother in Heaven

A Gospel
Topics Essay
Study Guide

Curated by

Ashli Carnicelli | Trina Caudle | McArthur Krishna



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DEDICATION

This book is the culmination of a journey spanning four years, three strangers who are now dear friends, and countless hours with Google Docs and chocolate to create three books honoring and celebrating our Mother in Heaven.

We are changed.

We each arrived at the doctrine of Heavenly Mother's existence at different times and from different angles, but we have been led to the same conclusion:

We know She lives. We know She loves all of Her children. We know She is a full partner to our Father in Heaven and works with Him and our brother Jesus Christ to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all humankind.

This book is dedicated to all seekers of the Divine Feminine, of our Mother.

~ Ashli, Trina, and McArthur

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Study Helps for each chapter by
Janice McArthur and Carol Pettit

THE BEATING HEART OF THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

Hallelujah! We have a Mother!

In 1909, the First Presidency proclaimed, “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.”

This doctrine anchors our souls to the ongoing restoration of the gospel. Knowing who we are and the purpose of our lives is vital to our eternal progression. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained, “Our theology begins with Heavenly Parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like Them.”

Our Savior Jesus Christ came to the earth to be the bridge. He embodies the attributes of love, kindness, and compassion of both of our Heavenly Parents. His mission and role in the plan of salvation is to assist us in returning to Them, to become like Them— both of our Heavenly Parents.

President Russell M. Nelson teaches the divine harmony of our Heavenly Family working together: “My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love. He invites us to come, follow me.”

Following the Savior ties us to “the beating heart of the eternal gospel—the love of Heavenly Parents, the atoning gift of a divine Son, the comforting guidance of the Holy Ghost ...” – Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reaffirmed the bold declaration of a Mother in Heaven through the Gospel Topics essay published in October 2015. Elder Dale G. Renlund definitively stated in the April 2022 general conference that this essay is our doctrine. The Gospel Topics essay, located in the online Gospel Library, is six short but mighty paragraphs containing a revolution of doctrinal principles and values. With nineteen references, the doctrine is supported by scriptures, historical research, and modern general conference addresses.

This study guide presents a compilation to dig into the resources provided in the Gospel Topics essay itself and reflections on this cherished doctrine. An investment of time and study can bring our hearts into greater alignment with the heart of the restored gospel of our Heavenly Family. As we seek, our Heavenly Parents promise that we will be uplifted.

"I have Divine Parents and that means that I belong to their household of God. I have rights and privileges and blessings that are associated with being Their child. ... They are teaching me and I can seek and They promise that I will find. I can ask and They promise, 'You will receive.' I am a daughter and I am hungry for knowledge and wisdom and information and progression." – Sister Sharon Eubank

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. – Matthew 5:6

First Presidency, "The Origin and Destiny of Man," Improvement Era 12 (November 1909): 78. First Presidency: Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund.
Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," April 1995 general conference.
Russell M. Nelson, "Come Follow Me," April 2019 general conference.
Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Message, the Meaning, and the Multitude," October 2019 general conference.
Dale G. Renlund, "Your Divine Nature and Eternal Destiny," April 2022 general conference.
Sharon Eubank, Relief Society general presidency counselor, 2017-22, "This is A Woman's Church," FAIR Conference, Provo UT, August 8, 2014.

1 ● THE NATURE OF GOD

“This understanding is rooted in scriptural and prophetic teachings about **the nature of God**, our relationship to Deity, and the godly potential of men and women.”

Mother in Heaven essay, paragraph 1

A CORRECT UNDERSTANDING

If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. – Joseph Smith

As we learn of God, we learn of ourselves.

The scriptures and teachings of modern prophets are unequivocal that all humankind is the offspring of God with the potential to return to the heavenly realms through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in Genesis 1, humans were created in the image of God. Psalms 82:6 says explicitly, “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” Latter-day Saints take this scripture literally – and celebrate!

We learn of the character of God through the Savior’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 and 6), with the admonition that we should do likewise – to be merciful, humble, pure in heart, peacemakers. In the New Testament, Peter also outlines attributes of godliness: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, kindness, and charity, “for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:3-8)

Primary children have sung for years, “I’m trying to be like Jesus, I’m following in His ways.” As we become more like Christ, we develop the character of God and can thus comprehend ourselves more and more.

Have you ever been told you are just like your mother, or you have your father’s smile, or all of your family have the same color eyes? The physical characteristics that we inherit from our parents are obvious. The spiritual characteristics we inherit from our Heavenly Parents have to be developed.
– President Elaine L. Jack

The Gospel Topics essay, “Mother in Heaven,” reiterates the teachings of our divine heritage of both a Father and Mother in Heaven and our potential to become like Them. Let’s seek further light and knowledge!

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, reprinted 1989) p. 343.

Andrew C. Skinner, Executive Director of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute of Brigham Young University, “The Nature and Character of God,” BYU Devotional, April 11, 2006.

Elaine L. Jack, Relief Society general president 1990-97; Young Women general presidency counselor, 1987-90, “Identity of a Young Woman,” October 1989 general conference.

THE GOD WHO LOVES ME

Malinda Wagstaff Metro

Joseph Smith once said, "If [people] do not understand the nature of God, they do not understand themselves." He was absolutely correct, but I did not realize the ramifications of this until the last few years.

Tosca

Because I am an opera singer, I'm going to set the scene with a story from my all-time favorite opera: Tosca by Giacomo Puccini. In this show, Tosca is a beautiful, fiery opera singer and a rather pious woman. In Act 2 of the drama, she finds herself faced with an impossible situation. She can either let her love, Mario, be tortured and likely killed, or she can give herself to a corrupt, vile, lustful villain.

The orchestra hums, mimicking both her pounding heart and the pulse of drums taking her love away to the gallows.

She then sings what is (in my opinion) the most beautiful aria ever written.

I lived for art,
I lived for love.
I never hurt anyone in my whole life.
I secretly went around relieving people of their misfortunes.
Always, with a sincere faith,
I said my prayers at the holy tabernacles.
Always, with a sincere faith,
I gave flowers to the altar.
In this hour of pain,
Why, Lord, why?
Why do you repay me like this?
I gave jewels for the Madonna's mantle.
I gave my songs to the stars and to heaven,
Which smiled more beautifully because of them.
In this hour of suffering,
Why, Lord?
Why do you reward me like this?

She pays her tithes, worships, says her prayers, enhances her talents, and she expects God to repay her accordingly. Then, when others use their agency to tear apart her safety and take advantage of her vulnerability, she does not know if God is still there. This can happen to anyone. It has happened to me.

The first time I sang that aria “Vissi d’arte,” I was so excited. All my favorite singers have recorded it. I felt so lucky to be learning it myself ... until I started working on it with my voice teacher. In the middle of the lesson, I burst into tears. My teacher asked what was wrong, I blurted out,

“I’m not good enough to sing this.” I didn’t mean vocally. I meant, I did not think that my worth as a person was enough to justify singing the most beautiful aria in the world. I didn’t want to sully it with my imperfections.

My teacher is very wise and encouraged me to meditate on where that belief came from.

On my way home, something happened. I realized that I expected God to help me more. I was filled with an anger and a betrayal I had never let myself feel before and it boiled down to this: God, I have worked hard for your kingdom. I’ve made and kept covenants. I’ve followed every rule any church leader ever said to me, at great personal cost sometimes. I have paid tithing and gone to activities and prayed and turned the other cheek and tried to avoid taking offense. And THIS is how you repay me? I have NO feelings of self-worth?! I can’t do what I want to do most?

I had to truly build a relationship with God.

Somewhere along the way of doing everything all the time, I had picked up the belief that God would love me less or help me less if I couldn’t do everything God wanted. Experts call this “love withdrawal” and it can commonly lead to feelings of low self-worth, toxic perfectionism, and religious scrupulosity. I believed in a God that would punish me by holding me back if I didn’t perfectly repent of every mistake I had ever made, and I knew I couldn’t do that. Despite countless talks of the infinite atonement, I figured I was the one person for whom it wouldn’t be enough, or at least not enough in this life.

As I realized that my idea of God was wrong and therefore my idea of myself was wrong, I had to untangle things I thought I knew about God. I had to untangle things I thought I knew about myself. Instead of seeing my relationship with God as a list of things to do and things not to do and a list of things I would receive in exchange (including love and self-worth), I had to truly build a relationship with God.

I won’t say this like I am finished with that journey. Is anyone truly ever finished with forming any meaningful relationship? Instead, I now consider myself a permanent scholar of the character of God, and as I study this, I learn many things about myself.

Knowing God

I love learning. My first instinct was to seek to know God the same way I sought to learn something like calculus or Romantic German poetry: I read and studied out of the best books.

Doctrine and Covenants 18:10 says, "The worth of souls is great in the sight of God." For a while, that helped and acted as a powerful mantra, but feelings of self-doubt crept in again.

He blessed me that my Heavenly Father loves me, then he paused and said, "and your Heavenly Mother too."

I studied in the New Testament where Jesus fasts in the wilderness for forty days and Satan comes to tempt Him. In one of the trials, Satan tries to make Jesus doubt who He is; Jesus responds that He knows exactly who He is and Satan could never take that away. That sounded pretty good to me! I wished I could do that. I also noted that Satan was trying to take away Jesus's self-worth, not God.

I studied the teachings of Church leaders about the love of God. Though this is not the Young Women theme I recited each week, I read the first line of the current theme over and over:

"I am a beloved daughter of Heavenly Parents, with a divine nature and eternal destiny." I wanted to believe that and really feel it. I knew that understanding this would be key to redefining my relationship with God.

I remembered a blessing my father gave me during a particularly painful period of my life. He blessed me that my Heavenly Father loves me, then he paused and said, "and your Heavenly Mother too." Asking him about it afterward, he said he heard Her voice and knew She had to be included. I felt Her love in that moment and it comforted and strengthened me to persevere.

So in my journey to understand God, I decided I had to understand my Heavenly Mother as well. I studied the Gospel Topics essay, "Mother in Heaven" and every footnote to learn as much as I could. And I learned a lot. I learned:

- I was made in Her image. While I may sometimes look in the mirror with disappointment, I look like a divine, perfect feminine being.
- She and Heavenly Father are united in purpose, working side by side. That means my dreams and ambitions matter just as much as my husband's, father's,

- and brother's, even if I'm not perfect at everything yet.
- Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father worked together to create a plan for my life. That plan is divine and the plan is to bring to pass my immortality and eternal life, and we are all here to find joy.
- My Heavenly Parents created me and helped organize the creation of this world. To create is to be like Them.
- My Heavenly Mother is a being of infinite worth and power, and I have the potential to be like Her. Everything I do to develop myself matters and is a practice in being God-like.
- President Jean B. Bingham said, "Do you think our Heavenly Parents want us to succeed? Yes! They want us to succeed gloriously. And do you think They will help us? Absolutely!" [1] That sounded different from the God waiting to punish me and withdraw from me with every mistake. In fact, Elder Holland said, "On a particularly difficult day ... what would this world's inhabitants pay to know that Heavenly Parents are reaching across ... streams and mountains and deserts, anxious to hold them close?" [2]

I realized that I needed to see both of my Heavenly Parents in my understanding of God, or I was missing some of the divinity and worth in myself. I began to see myself as a being of inherent worth, value, and love. I was freed from my fears that I was not good enough or worthy enough to deserve God's love. Doors opened for me to truly get to know God, not just to fear Heavenly Father.

Kennen vs Wissen

In other languages, they have different words for "to know." "Kennen and Wissen," "connaitre and savoir," "conoscere and sapere." The difference is often explained in a textbook as, "one is to know a fact and the other is to be familiar with or know a person." One verb is used to say "I know how to type," and another for "I know Cynthia Erivo."

I realized that I needed to see both of my Heavenly Parents in my understanding of God, or I was missing some of the divinity and worth in myself.

I realized that I knew God in only one way. I had largely relied on knowing God as a fact. Of course there had been other experiences, but I was quick to quote scripture and prophets to explain who God was, rather than explaining how I knew God personally in my own essence and being. It was time to know God with a different verb.

In the scriptures, we see some powerful examples of people who knew God, despite what other people may say were facts.

Hagar

When Abraham and Sarah found that God would give them children, they could hardly believe it so they brought in Hagar to help make sure Abraham would have a son. Institute teacher Colleen Terry Scorseby identifies this as “putting mortal limits on an immortal God.” [3]

She named God El Roi: The God who sees me.

Of course, God is more miraculous than that and Sarah was soon pregnant. Hagar was now viewed as no longer important and thrown out into the wilderness. She was likely very frightened and expected to suffer and possibly die.

God came to her in the wilderness and lifted up her son. God told Hagar that a nation would be made of her son. The facts up to this point said Hagar was less than a servant and her son would be nothing. God knew her in a different way and Hagar came to know God in that way. She named God El Roi: The God who sees me. (Genesis 16:13)

The Canaanite Woman

Another example of someone who came to know God, despite what the facts say about God, is the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15.

In this story, she comes to Jesus and asks Him to heal her daughter. After initially ignoring her and then saying He’s there to help the children of Israel, He responds, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” Ouch. She answers, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Jesus then praises her faith and her daughter is immediately healed. He essentially tells this woman, “Hey. You know I’m here for the Israelites. You’re a gentile. Am I even your Messiah?” She has the faith to say, “I may not be of the House of Israel, but I can see what You do, and I believe in You, despite what others say.” She named God as someone who cared about her personally. She named Christ as her Savior.

This story shows me that Christ is not just a nebulous Savior who vaguely came for everyone: He really is my Savior. For me. Despite what others may see about my worth, Christ believes I'm worth DYING and LIVING for.

My Journey Continues

I wanted to know God like Hagar and the Canaanite woman! I wanted to know God so much that I could give God a name like "The God who loves me." To continue this journey in a new way, I started to look for God everywhere—not like I had before, "Oh that's a pretty flower. Intellectually, I know God made it. Cool." But to really see God in the world around me and to understand what that could teach me about God and myself.

I read that "God is love" and "The Kingdom of God is within you," so if God is love and within me, God must be love and that love must be within everyone. I looked for pieces of God in everyone.

I found God in:

- The crying baby on the airplane who stopped crying just long enough to smile at a stranger.
- The homeless man taking his dog to an emergency pet clinic, using whatever savings he could.
- The elderly couple holding hands on the bus.
- The opera diva teacher who took the time to apologize for leaving my email unanswered, thus acknowledging my worth and her time.
- The person who voted differently from me but still said hi and asked how I was doing.
- The colleague who got the role I wanted and sounded so good doing it.
- And so many more people and the love they shared.

I wanted to know God so much that I could give God a name like "The God who loves me." To continue this journey in a new way, I started to look for God everywhere.

And God found me in new ways than before. I came to hear God's many voices. I felt the power and love of God in:

- An opera about motherhood and infertility and souls so esoteric that I had to study for a week before watching the show.
- My anger. Not angry outbursts, but anger that told me when things were unjust and unrighteous, prompting me to make changes.
- The cool earth after a rainstorm.
- Purple flowers. And in the quote from *The Color Purple*, "I think it [upsets] God if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. People think pleasing God is all God cares about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back."
- God found me in the mud, crying with heartbreak at disappointment. My Heavenly Parents held me and Christ listened as I wept.

I find God demanding love more than anything else: love of myself, love of my fellow children of God, love of my enemies.

I am coming to see that God is both merciful and just, not vindictive and looking to push me away. I now think of God's justice as Adam Miller describes "what is needed" rather than "what is deserved." [4] I have felt God know exactly what I need, even when it isn't what I necessarily deserved. I have felt Christ's comfort when the world gave me things I didn't deserve. When life is just downright cruel and unfair, Christ has given me what I've needed. I know that I matter because of it. I find God demanding love more than anything else: love of myself, love of my fellow children of God, love of my enemies. And as I find that, the wounds of trauma and pain from my past are healed. I am able to see myself as a beloved daughter of Heavenly Parents.

Chieko Okazaki said, "We live in a world that is held together by love- organized by love, maintained by love, and nurtured by love. Ultimately it will be redeemed by love and even now it is in the process of being redeemed by the love and kindness we offer each other." [5] Love is the power to heal, even deep emotional wounds like not knowing your own value.

I don't say that I know a lot of things about God. I'm still learning. But I believe and hope many things. I know God loves me. I believe God hears my prayers. I believe Christ knows exactly how I feel. I believe I am of infinite worth. I'm not just enough; I am everything to my Heavenly Parents and my Savior, and you are too.

SOURCES

1 Jean B. Bingham, Relief Society general president 2017-22. "How Vast is Our Purpose," BYU Women's Conference, Provo UT, May 5, 2017.

2 Jeffrey R. Holland, "Belonging: A View of Membership," *Ensign*, April 1980.

3 Colleen Terry Scoreby, seminary and institute teacher, "Latter-day Saint Women" podcast produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 16, 2023, [churchofjesuschrist.org/media/podcast/latter-day-saint-women-2021-0064-colleen-terry-scoresby-dont-put-mortal-limits-on-an-immortal-god](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/podcast/latter-day-saint-women-2021-0064-colleen-terry-scoresby-dont-put-mortal-limits-on-an-immortal-god)

4 Adam Miller, *Original Grace* (BYU Maxwell Institute, 2022), 35.

5 Chieko Okazaki, Relief Society general presidency counselor, 1990-97, *Being Enough* (Bookcraft, 2002), 157.