

The Personal Journey of a Child of God

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As covenant children of God, we love, honor, nurture, safeguard, and welcome those spirits who are coming from the premortal world.

Each of us has been affected by the worldwide pandemic, as family and friends have unexpectedly moved beyond mortality. Let me acknowledge three we dearly miss, representing all those we love so much.

This is Brother Philippe and Sister Germaine Nsondi. Brother Nsondi was serving as the patriarch of the Brazzaville Republic of Congo Stake when he passed away. He was a medical doctor who shared his talents generously with others.¹

This is Sister Clara Elisa Ruano de Villareal from Tulcán, Ecuador. She embraced the restored gospel at age 34 and was a beloved leader. Her family said goodbye singing her favorite hymn, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”²

This is Brother Ray Tuineau from Utah, with his beautiful family. His wife, Juliet, said, “I want [my boys] to [remember that their dad] always tried to put God first.”³

The Lord has said, “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.”⁴

While we weep, we also rejoice in the glorious Resurrection of our Savior. Because of Him, our loved ones and friends continue their eternal journey. As President Joseph F. Smith explained: “We can not forget them; we do not cease to love them. ... They have advanced; we are advancing; we are growing as they have grown.”⁵ President Russell M. Nelson said, “Our tears of sorrow ... turn to tears of anticipation.”⁶

We Know about Life before Birth

Our eternal perspective not only enlarges our understanding of those who are continuing their journey beyond mortality but also opens our understanding of those who are earlier in their journey and just now entering mortality.

Each person who comes to earth is a unique son or daughter of God.⁷ Our personal journey did not begin at birth. Before we were born, we were together in a world of preparation where we “received [our] first lessons in the world of spirits.”⁸ Jehovah told Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.”⁹

Some may question if life begins with the formation of an embryo, or when the heart begins to beat, or when the baby can live outside of the womb, but for us, there is no question that spirit daughters and sons of God are on their own personal journeys coming to earth to receive a body and experience mortality.

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The Amazing Contribution of Women

For a woman, having a child can be a great sacrifice physically, emotionally, and economically. We love and honor the amazing women of this Church. With intelligence and wisdom, you bear the burdens of your family. You love. You serve. You sacrifice. You strengthen faith, minister to those in need, and greatly contribute to society.

The Sacred Responsibility of Safeguarding Life

Years ago, feeling deep concern for the number of abortions in the world, President Gordon B. Hinckley addressed the women of the Church with words that are relevant for us today. He said: “You who are wives and mothers are the anchors of the family. You bear the children. What an enormous and sacred responsibility that is. ... What is happening to our appreciation of the sanctity of human life? Abortion is an evil, stark and real and repugnant, which is sweeping over the earth. I plead with the women of this Church to shun it, to stand above it, to stay away from those compromising situations which make it appear desirable. There may be some few circumstances under which it can occur, but they are extremely limited.¹⁰ ... You are the mothers of the sons and daughters of God, whose lives are sacred. Safeguarding them is a divinely given responsibility which cannot be lightly brushed aside.”¹¹

Elder Marcus B. Nash shared with me the story of a dear 84-year-old woman who, during her baptismal interview, “acknowledged an abortion [many years before].” With heartfelt emotion, she said: “I have carried the burden of having aborted a child every day of my life for forty-six years. ... Nothing I did would take the pain and guilt away. I was hopeless until I was taught the true gospel of Jesus Christ. I learned how to repent ... and suddenly I was filled with hope. I finally came to know that I could be forgiven if I truly repented of my sins.”¹²

How grateful we are for the divine gifts of repentance and forgiveness.

What Can We Do?

What is our responsibility as peaceful disciples of Jesus Christ? Let us live God’s commandments, teach them to our children, and share them with others who are willing to listen.¹³ Let us share our deep feelings about the sanctity of life with those who make decisions in society. They may not fully appreciate what we

believe, but we pray that they will more fully understand why, for us, these decisions go well beyond just what a person wants for his or her own life.

If an unanticipated child is expected, let us reach out with love, encouragement, and, when needed, financial help, strengthening a mother in allowing her child to be born and continue his or her journey in mortality.¹⁴

The Beauty of Adoption

In our family, we have been immeasurably blessed as two decades ago, a young 16-year-old learned that she was expecting a child. She and the baby's father were not married, and they could see no way forward together. The young woman believed the life she was carrying was precious. She gave birth to a baby girl and allowed a righteous family to adopt her as their own. For Bryce and Jolinne, she was an answer to their prayers. They named her Emily and taught her to trust in her Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Emily grew up. How grateful we are that Emily and our grandson, Christian, fell in love and were married in the house of the Lord. Emily and Christian now have their own little girl.

Emily recently wrote: "Throughout these last nine months of pregnancy, I had time to reflect on the events [of] my own birth. I thought of my birth mother, who was just 16 years old. As I experienced the aches and changes that pregnancy brings, I couldn't help but imagine how difficult it would have been at the young age of 16. ... The tears flow even now as I think of my birth mother, who knew she couldn't give me the life [she desired for me and unselfishly placed] me for adoption. I can't fathom what she might have gone through in those nine months—being watched with judging eyes as her body changed, the teen experiences she missed, knowing that at the end of this labor of motherly love, she would place her child into the arms of another. I am so thankful for her selfless choice, that she did not choose to use her agency in a way that would take away my own." Emily concludes, "I'm so thankful for Heavenly Father's divine plan, for my incredible parents who [loved and cared for] me, and for temples where we can be sealed to our families for eternity."¹⁵

The Savior "took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of [these] children in my name, receiveth me."¹⁶

When Righteous Desires Are Not Yet Realized

I express my love and compassion for righteous couples who marry and are unable to have the children they so eagerly anticipate and to those women and men who have not had the opportunity to marry according to God's law. The unrealized dreams of life are difficult to understand if viewed only from the perspective of mortality. As the Lord's servant, I promise you that as you are faithful to Jesus Christ and your covenants, you will receive compensating blessings in this life and your righteous desires in the eternal time line of the Lord.¹⁷ There can be

happiness in the journey of mortality even when all of our righteous hopes are not realized.¹⁸

After birth, children continue to need our help. Some need it desperately. Each year through caring bishops and your generous contributions of fast offerings and humanitarian funds, the lives of millions and millions of children are blessed. The First Presidency recently announced an additional 20 million dollars to assist UNICEF in their global efforts to administer two billion vaccines.¹⁹ Children are loved by God.

The Sacred Decision to Have a Child

It is concerning that even in some of the most prosperous countries of the world, fewer children are being born.²⁰ “God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”²¹ When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. With faith and prayer, these sacred decisions can be beautiful, revelatory experiences.²²

I share the story of the Laing family of Southern California. Sister Rebecca Laing writes:

“In the summer of 2011, life for our family was seemingly perfect. We were happily married with four children—ages 9, 7, 5, and 3. ...

“My pregnancies and deliveries [had been] high risk ... [and] we felt [very] blessed to have four children, [thinking] that our family was complete. In October while listening to general conference, I felt an unmistakable feeling that we were to have another baby. As LeGrand and I pondered and prayed, ... we knew that God had a different plan for us than we had for ourselves.

“After another difficult pregnancy and delivery, we were blessed with a beautiful baby girl. We named her Brielle. She was a miracle. Moments after her birth, while still in [the delivery room], I heard the unmistakable voice of the Spirit: ‘There is one more.’

“Three years later, another miracle, Mia. Brielle and Mia are a tremendous joy for our family.” She concludes, “Being open to the Lord’s direction and following His plan for us will always bring greater happiness than ... relying on our own understanding.”²³

The Savior loves each precious child.

“And he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them. ...

“And ... they cast their eyes towards heaven, ... and they saw angels descending out of heaven ... in the midst of fire; and [the angels] ... encircled those little ones about, ... and the angels did minister unto them.”²⁴

I testify that your own personal journey as a child of God did not begin for you as the first flow of earth’s air came rushing into your lungs, and it will not end when you take your last breath of mortality.

May we always remember that each spirit child of God is coming to earth on his or her own personal journey.²⁵ May we welcome them, safeguard them, and always love them. As you receive these precious children in the Savior's name and help them in their eternal journey, I promise you that the Lord will bless you and shower His love and approval upon you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1. Personal correspondence.
2. 2. Personal correspondence. See "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 136.
3. 3. Personal correspondence.
4. 4. Doctrine and Covenants 42:45.
5. 5. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1916, 3.
6. 6. In Trent Toone, "'A Fulness of Joy': President Nelson Shares Message of Eternal Life at His Daughter's Funeral," *Church News*, Jan. 19, 2019, thechurchnews.com.
7. 7. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
8. 8. Doctrine and Covenants 138:56.
9. 9. Jeremiah 1:5. The New Testament tells of the unborn John the Baptist leaping in the womb as Elisabeth encountered Mary, who was expecting the baby Jesus (see Luke 1:41).

10. 10. The official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes in the sanctity of human life. Therefore, the Church opposes elective abortion for personal or social convenience, and counsels its members not to submit to, perform, encourage, pay for, or arrange for such abortions.

“The Church allows for possible exceptions for its members when:

“Pregnancy results from rape or incest, or

“A competent physician determines that the life or health of the mother is in serious jeopardy, or

“A competent physician determines that the fetus has severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth.

“The Church teaches its members that even these rare exceptions do not justify abortion automatically. Abortion is a most serious matter and should be considered only after the persons involved have consulted with their local church leaders and feel through personal prayer that their decision is correct.

“The Church has not favored or opposed legislative proposals or public demonstrations concerning abortion” (“Abortion,” Newsroom, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; see also *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 38.6.1, ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

11. 11. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Walking in the Light of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 99; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 117.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

“Abortion is an ugly thing, a debasing thing, a thing which inevitably brings remorse and sorrow and regret.

“While we denounce it, we make allowance in such circumstances as when pregnancy is the result of incest or rape, when the life or health of the mother is judged by competent medical authority to be in serious jeopardy, or when the fetus is known by competent medical authority to have serious defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth.

“But such instances are rare, and there is only a negligible probability of their occurring. In these circumstances those who face the question are asked to consult with their local ecclesiastical leaders and to pray in great earnestness, receiving a confirmation through prayer before proceeding” (“What Are People Asking about Us?,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 71; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 83–84).

12. 12. See Neil L. Andersen, *The Divine Gift of Forgiveness* (2019), 25.
- On one occasion in France, during a baptismal interview, a woman spoke to me of her abortion of many years before. I was grateful for her goodness. She was baptized. About a year later, I received a phone call. This wonderful woman in the year since her baptism had been taught by the Holy Ghost. She called, sobbing: “Do you remember ... I told you about an abortion from years before? I felt sorry for what I had done. But [this] past year has changed me. ... My heart has been turned to the Savior. ... I am so pained by the seriousness of my sin that I have no way to restore.”
- I felt the Lord’s immense love for this woman. President Boyd K. Packer said: “Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ. When your desire is firm and you are willing to pay the ‘uttermost farthing’ [see Matthew 5:25–26], the law of restitution is suspended. Your obligation is transferred to the Lord. He will settle your accounts” (“The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19–20). I assured her of the Savior’s love. The Lord not only lifted the sin from her; He strengthened and refined her spirit. (See Neil L. Andersen, *The Divine Gift of Forgiveness*, 154–56.)
13. 13. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Protect the Children,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 43–46.
14. 14. Safeguarding the lives of a daughter or son of God is also the responsibility of the father. Every father has an emotional, spiritual, and financial responsibility to welcome, love, and care for the child coming to earth.
15. 15. Personal correspondence.
16. 16. Mark 9:36–37.
17. 17. See Neil L. Andersen, “A Compensatory Spiritual Power for the Righteous” (Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 18, 2015), speeches.byu.edu.
18. 18. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 75; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Choices,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 75.
19. 19. See “Bishop Caussé Thanks UNICEF and Church Members for COVID-19 Relief,” Newsroom, Mar. 5, 2021, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
20. 20. For example, if the United States had maintained its fertility rate of 2008, just 13 years ago, there would be 5.8 million more children alive today (see Lyman Stone, “5.8 Million Fewer Babies: America’s Lost Decade in Fertility,” Institute for Family Studies, Feb. 3, 2021, ifstudies.org/blog).

21. 21. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org. The scriptures record that “children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). See Russell M. Nelson, “How Firm Our Foundation,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 75–76; *Liahona*, July 2002, 83–84; see also Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and the Plan,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 27.
22. 22. See Neil L. Andersen, “Children,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 28.
23. 23. Personal correspondence, Mar. 10, 2021.
24. 24. 3 Nephi 17:21, 24.
25. 25. “In reality, we are all travelers—even explorers of mortality. We do not have the benefit of previous personal experience. We must pass over steep precipices and turbulent waters in our own journey here on earth” (Thomas S. Monson, “The Bridge Builder,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2003, 67).