

For God So Loved Us

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Of the Seventy

God so loved us that He sent His Only Begotten Son—not to condemn us, but to save us.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The first time I noticed this verse, I was not at church or in family home evening. I was watching a sporting event on television. No matter what station I watched, and no matter what game it was, at least one person held a sign that read “John 3:16.”

I have come to equally love verse 17: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

God sent Jesus Christ, His only Son in the flesh, to lay down His life for every one of us. This He did because He loves us and designed a plan for each of us to return home to Him.

But this is not a blanket, catchall, hit-or-miss sort of plan. It is personal, set forth by a loving Heavenly Father, who knows our hearts, our names, and what He needs us to do. Why do we believe that? Because we are taught it in the holy scriptures.

Moses repeatedly heard Heavenly Father speak the words “Moses, my son” (see Moses 1:6; see also verses 7, 40). Abraham learned he was a child of God, chosen for his mission even before he was born (see Abraham 3:12, 23). By the hand of God, Esther was placed in a position of influence to save her people (see Esther 4). And God trusted a young woman, a servant, to testify of a living prophet so Naaman could be healed (see 2 Kings 5:1–15).

I especially love that good man, short in stature, who climbed a tree to see Jesus. The Savior knew he was there, stopped, looked up into the branches, and spoke these words: “Zacchaeus, ... come down” (Luke 19:5). And we cannot forget the 14-year-old who went into a grove of trees and learned how personal the plan really is: “[Joseph,] *this is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

Brothers and sisters, we are the focus of Heavenly Father’s plan and the reason for our Savior’s mission. Each of us, individually, is Their work and Their glory.

To me, no book of scripture illustrates this more clearly than has my study of the Old Testament. Chapter after chapter we discover examples of how Heavenly Father and Jehovah are intimately involved in our lives.

We have recently been studying about Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob. From his youth, Joseph was highly favored of the Lord, yet he experienced great trials at the hands of his brothers. Two weeks ago, many of us were touched by how Joseph forgave his brothers. In *Come, Follow Me* we read: “In many ways, Joseph’s life parallels that of Jesus Christ. Even though our sins caused Him great suffering, the Savior offers forgiveness, delivering all of us from a fate far worse than famine. Whether we need to receive forgiveness or extend it—at some point we all need to do both—Joseph’s example points us to the Savior, the true source of healing and reconciliation.”¹

A lesson I love in that account comes from Joseph’s brother Judah, who played a part in God’s personal plan for Joseph. When Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, Judah convinced them not to take Joseph’s life but to sell him into slavery (see Genesis 37:26–27).

Many years later, Judah and his brothers needed to take their youngest brother, Benjamin, to Egypt. Initially their father resisted. But Judah made a promise to Jacob—he would bring Benjamin home.

In Egypt, Judah’s promise was put to the test. Young Benjamin was wrongly accused of a crime. Judah, true to his promise, offered to be jailed in Benjamin’s place. “For,” he said, “how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me?” (see Genesis 44:33–34). Judah was determined to keep his promise and return Benjamin safely. Do you ever feel about others the way Judah felt toward Benjamin?

Isn’t this how parents feel about their children? How missionaries feel about people they serve? How Primary and youth leaders feel about those they teach and love?

No matter who you are or your current circumstances, someone feels exactly this way about you. Someone wants to return to Heavenly Father with you.

I am grateful for those who never give up on us, who continue to pour out their souls in prayer for us, and who continue to teach and help us qualify to return home to our Father in Heaven.

Recently a dear friend spent 233 days in the hospital with COVID-19. During that time, he was visited by his deceased father, who asked that a message be delivered to his grandchildren. Even from beyond the veil, this good grandfather desired to help his grandchildren return to their heavenly home.

Increasingly, disciples of Christ are remembering the “Benjamins” in their lives. Across the world they have heard the clarion call of God’s living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. Young men and young women are engaged in the Lord’s youth battalion. Individuals and families are reaching out in a spirit of ministering—loving, sharing, and inviting friends and neighbors to come unto Christ. Youth and

adults are remembering and striving to keep their covenants—filling God’s temples, finding names of deceased family members, and receiving ordinances on their behalf.

Why does Heavenly Father’s personalized plan for us include helping others return to Him? Because this is how we become like Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the account of Judah and Benjamin teaches us about the Savior’s sacrifice for us. Through His Atonement, He gave His life to bring us home. Judah’s words express the Savior’s love: “How shall I go up to my father, and [you] be not with me?” As gatherers of Israel, those can be our words as well.

The Old Testament is packed with miracles and tender mercies that are the hallmark of Heavenly Father’s plan. In 2 Kings 4, the phrase “it fell on a day” is used three times to emphasize to me that important events happen according to God’s timing and no detail is too small for Him.

My new friend Paul testifies of this truth. Paul grew up in a home that was sometimes abusive and always intolerant of religion. While attending school on a military base in Germany, he noticed two sisters who seemed to have a spiritual light. Asking why they were different brought the answer that they belonged to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Soon Paul began meeting with missionaries and was invited to church. The next Sunday, as he got off the bus, he noticed two men dressed in white shirts and ties. He asked them if they were elders of the Church. They answered yes, so Paul followed them.

During the service, a preacher pointed to people in the congregation and invited them to testify. At the end of each testimony, a drummer gave a drum salute and the congregation called out, “Amen.”

When the preacher pointed to Paul, he stood up and said, “I know Joseph Smith was a prophet and the Book of Mormon is true.” There was no drum salute or amens. Paul eventually realized he had gone to the wrong church. Soon, Paul found his way to the right place and was baptized.

On the day of Paul’s baptism, a member he didn’t know told him, “You saved my life.” A few weeks earlier, this man had decided to look for another church and attended a service with drums and amens. When the man heard Paul bear his testimony of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, he realized that God knew him, recognized his struggles, and had a plan for him. For both Paul and the man, “it fell on a day,” indeed!

We too know that Heavenly Father has a personal plan of happiness for each of us. Because God sent His Beloved Son for us, the miracles we need will “[fall] on [the very] day” necessary for His plan to be fulfilled.

I testify that this year we can learn more about God’s plan for us in the Old Testament. That sacred volume teaches the role of prophets in uncertain times and

of God's hand in a world that was confused and often contentious. It is also about humble believers who faithfully looked forward to the coming of our Savior, just as we look forward to and prepare for His *Second* Coming—His long-prophesied, glorious return.

Until that day, we may not see with our natural eyes the design of God for all aspects of our lives (see Doctrine and Covenants 58:3). But we can remember Nephi's response when faced with something he didn't understand: while he didn't know the meaning of all things, he knew that God loves His children (see 1 Nephi 11:17).

This is my witness on this beautiful Sabbath morning. May we write it on our hearts and allow it to fill our souls with peace, hope, and eternal joy: God so loved us that He sent His Only Begotten Son—not to condemn us, but to save us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Note

1. *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: Old Testament 2022*, 51.