



“Ye Are the Temple of God”

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The choices we make about the use of our physical temples will affect us throughout eternity.

In family home evening lessons, Primary and Sunday School classes, and Young Women and priesthood classes, we have all learned about the fundamental purposes of our mortal existence. If you or I were asked the question “Why are we here on the earth?” I believe each and every one of us would give basically the same answer: “To receive a physical body, to live by faith rather than sight, and to be tested.” As the proclamation on the family explains, we as spirit sons and daughters of our Eternal Father “accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as . . . heir[s] of eternal life” (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). These answers are profound in both their power and in their simplicity.

I invite you to consider with me one particular element of these answers. Have we ever really considered why having a physical body is so important? Now, I know we can all say the right words when answering the question about why we are here on the earth, but do we really understand why a body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness? Do we perhaps recite this answer so frequently and routinely that we fail to recognize its true importance? I would like for us to dig a bit deeper into this eternally important question about why a body is so important. Ultimately the answer affects everything we do: what we think, how we act, where we go, what we eat, what we drink, and what we wear and how we look.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught with great clarity about the importance of our physical bodies:

“We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into a herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none.

“All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 181).

Now, I do not claim to know the complete answer to the question of why a physical body is so important. But let me share with you a few basic reasons why a body is essential to our spiritual development and our eternal progression.

Reason no. 1. Obtaining a tabernacle of flesh is an essential step in the process of becoming like our Heavenly Father. Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, depth, and intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate. As President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught, “Our physical body is the instrument of our spirit” (Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled [1991], 211). Thus, our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and respond to truth, and our ability to obey the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ are amplified through our physical bodies. In this classroom of mortality we experience tenderness, kindness, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, and even the challenges of physical limitations in ways that prepare us for eternity. Simply stated, there are lessons we must learn and experiences we must have, as the scriptures describe, “according to the flesh” (1 Ne. 19:6; Alma 7:12–13).

Reason no. 2. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son are, by nature, creators. As the sons and daughters of God, we have the potential to become like Them. The Father and the Son have entrusted us with a portion of Their creative power and provided specific guidelines for the proper use of that sacred ability to create life and establish an eternal family. How we feel about and use that sacred power in this life will determine in large measure whether additional creative power will be ours in the life to come.

Reason no. 3. As we attempt to answer the question about why we are here on the earth, we usually consider receiving a physical body and being tested as two related but separate parts of the answer. However, an essential part of the test of mortality is having and properly using a physical body. Please consider carefully the following statement by President Brigham Young (1801–77):

“The spirit is pure, and under the special control and influence of the Lord, but the body is of the earth, and is subject to the power of the Devil, and is under the mighty influence of that fallen nature that is of the earth. If the spirit yields to the body, the Devil then has power to overcome the body and spirit of that man, and he loses both.

“Recollect, brethren and sisters, every one of you, that when evil is suggested to you, when it arises in your hearts, it is through the temporal organization. When you are tempted, buffeted, and step out of the way inadvertently; when you are overtaken in a fault, or commit an overt act unthinkingly; when you are full of evil passion, and wish to yield to it, then stop and let the spirit, which God has put into your tabernacles, take the lead. If you do that, I will promise that you will overcome all evil, and obtain eternal lives. But many, very many, let the spirit yield to the body, and are overcome and destroyed” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1941], 70).

In 2 Nephi 2:26–29 [2 Ne. 2:26–29] we read:

“And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

“And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

“And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.”

I suggest that you thoroughly study and prayerfully ponder the statement of Brigham Young and these verses from 2 Nephi. Neither passage asserts that the physical body is inherently evil. Rather, they teach that we live in a fallen world. **The very elements out of which our bodies were created are by nature fallen and ever subject to the pull of sin, corruption, and death.** Thus, the Fall of Adam and its consequences affect us most directly through our physical bodies. And yet as President Young stated, we are dual creatures, for at the same time that we inhabit a physical body that is subject to the Fall, we also have a spirit that represents the eternal part of us. We are the spirit sons and daughters of God and have inherited divine qualities from Him. **The precise nature of the test of mortality, then, can be summarized in the following questions: Will my body rule over my spirit, or will my spirit rule over my body? Will I yield to the enticings of the natural man or to the eternal man? That, brothers and sisters, is the test. We are here on the earth to develop godlike qualities and to learn to bridle all of the passions of the flesh** (see Alma 38:12).

Our Bodies Are Not Our Own

I now want to try and explain a principle that is fundamental to our knowledge about and understanding of the importance of a physical body. The principle is this: **Our bodies are not our own.** First Corinthians 6:19–20 [1 Cor. 6:19–20] states:

“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

King Benjamin also taught with great clarity the truth that our bodies ultimately are not our own. In Mosiah 2:23–25 he describes how we are blessed through service and indebted to our God:

“And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

“And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

“And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you.”

Both our agency and our physical body, through which we exercise that agency in mortality, are truly “bought with a price” through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We are called to be, as the Apostle Peter wrote, “a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9). To be sure, we should be peculiar in the sense that we are distinctive, set apart from, and uncontrolled by the world. In addition, we are peculiar in a more powerful sense. As the Greek word implies, we are peculiar in that we are a purchased people.

Interestingly, I have heard many people, both outside and inside the Church, declare, “It’s my body and I can do to it what I want.” The correct doctrinal response to such a statement is quite simple. No, your body is not your own; it is on loan from God. As we read in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 [1 Cor. 3:16–17]:

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

The choices we make about the use of our personal temples will affect us throughout all eternity.

Because the physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, we should not be surprised that Lucifer seeks to thwart our progression by enticing us to use our bodies improperly. It is to me one of the ultimate ironies of eternity that the adversary, who is miserable because he has no physical body and therefore cannot progress, seeks to make us miserable “like unto himself” (2 Ne. 2:27) through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have and cannot use thus is the primary instrument through which he attempts to lure us to spiritual destruction.

Our physical bodies indeed are temples of God. Consequently, you and I must carefully consider what we take into our temple, what we put on our temple, what we do to our temple, and what we do with our temple. And we can learn a number of important lessons by comparing the Church's temples to our physical bodies as temples.

What We Take into Our Temple

A member of the Church who desires to enter a dedicated temple must be worthy to do so. The requirement of worthiness for all who enter the house of the Lord preserves the sacred nature of these special buildings and permits the ongoing presence of the Lord's Spirit.

Now, please consider the importance of worthiness to enter the house of the Lord as you review the following counsel from President Boyd K. Packer:

“Our physical body is the instrument of our spirit. In that marvelous revelation the Word of Wisdom we are told how to keep our bodies free from impurities which might dull, even destroy, those delicate physical senses which have to do with spiritual communication.

“The Word of Wisdom is a key to individual revelation. It was given as ‘a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints’ (D&C 89:3).

“The promise is that those who obey will receive ‘great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures’ (D&C 89:19). If we abuse our body with habit-forming substances, or misuse prescription drugs, we draw curtains which close off the light of spiritual communication” (Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled, 211).

The primary blessing that comes from obedience to the Word of Wisdom is spiritual in nature, not necessarily physical. Certainly, we all recognize the physical benefits of adhering to the lifestyle and dietary guidelines contained in the Word of Wisdom. But please notice how President Packer emphasized the link between what we take into our bodies and our ability to receive spiritual communication. The Word of Wisdom is about readiness and receptiveness to receive revelation. And secondarily the Word of Wisdom also produces physical benefits. Just as only worthy persons are permitted to enter into the house of the Lord, so we should likewise be careful to take into our bodies only those things that will positively affect us both spiritually and physically.

What We Put on Our Temple

The Church's temples are recognized throughout the world for their beauty. The buildings themselves are made of the finest materials and constructed with true craftsmanship. And the areas immediately surrounding a temple are always neat and well maintained. Please consider the impact of the appearance of a temple and its grounds as you review the following counsel from President Harold B. Lee:

“Do not underestimate the important symbolic and actual effect of appearance. Persons who are well groomed and modestly dressed invite the companionship of the Spirit of our Father in Heaven and are able to exercise a wholesome influence upon those around them. Persons who are unkempt and careless about their appearance, or adopt the visual symbols of those who often oppose our ideals, expose themselves and persons around them to influences that are degrading and dissonant. Outward appearance is often a reflection of inward tendencies” (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1996], 220).

Just as the Church’s temples portray light and an inner beauty through their outward appearance, so we must be thoughtful and careful about how we dress and what we put on our personal temples. Full-time missionaries have a distinctive style of dress that differentiates them from the world and is intended, in part, to be an outward manifestation of their discipleship. It would never be appropriate for the appearance or the demeanor of these special messengers to in any way detract from the sacred message they are called to deliver. Full-time members should be no less distinctive. Like it or not, other people make judgments about the restored gospel by what they see or feel in you and me. One of the most tragic lines in scripture was spoken by Alma to his errant son, Corianton: “Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

What We Do to Our Temple

Imagine the reaction you or I might have if we saw defacing graffiti on the exterior of one of our Church’s temples. The very thought of finding such inappropriate markings on a temple is offensive to all of us.

Brothers and sisters, we must be particularly careful as the fads and fashions of the world entice us to mark or to pierce or to otherwise deface or disfigure our personal temples. Consider the following counsel from President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985):

“How far, we wonder, will men and women go to pay ovations to the god of style? Will men wear rings in their noses when style dictates? Will young people still fall prey to their god of style, which they worship?” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 380).

That comment by President Kimball was made nearly 30 years ago, and I wonder what he would think if he were alive today. We now live in a world where people routinely do wear rings and other items in their noses, in their tongues, in their navels, and in their eyebrows because that is the current style (see Gordon B. Hinckley, “Your Greatest Challenge, Mother,” Ensign, Nov. 2000, 99).

It is interesting to me that these trends of the world frequently promote a false individuality that is nothing more than a superficial and curious outward conformity. True individuality is the product of spirituality and is not a function of trinkets or ornaments attached to or hanging from

parts of our body. The spiritual basis of individuality is never more evident to me than when I worship in the house of the Lord and everyone is dressed in similar white clothing, looking essentially the same. In that setting, no fads or fashion statements are necessary. The unity and outward sameness of appearance in the temple permits the individual spirit to shine through. That, brothers and sisters, is the only type of individuality that really matters. Remember, our bodies are not our own; they are on loan from God. Indeed, they are temples, and the Spirit of the Lord should dwell therein and shine through. And, may I quickly add, it is harder for the Spirit to shine in and through our physical bodies when we are dozy and dull from foolishly going to bed at 1:30 A.M. or 2:30 A.M. or later night after night after night (see D&C 88:124).

What We Do with Our Temple

The temples of our Church are built and dedicated to accomplish righteous purposes. Sacred ordinances, including the endowment and eternal marriage, are available only in the Lord's house. You and I are fortunate to live at a time when temple construction has rapidly accelerated around the world; many members who previously had great difficulty receiving temple blessings can now do so much nearer to their own homes and communities.

Please consider the sacred ordinances offered and righteous purposes accomplished in the Church's temples as we review the following teachings by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“One of the ‘plain and precious’ truths restored in this dispensation is that ‘the spirit and the body are the soul of man’ (D&C 88:15) and that when the spirit and body are separated, men and women ‘cannot receive a fulness of joy’ (D&C 93:34). That is the reason why obtaining a body is so fundamentally important in the first place, why sin of any kind is such a serious matter (namely because it is sin that ultimately brings both physical and spiritual death), and why the resurrection of the body is so central to the great triumph of Christ's Atonement.

“The body is an essential part of the soul. This distinctive and very important Latter-day Saint doctrine underscores why sexual sin is so serious. We declare that one who uses the God-given body of another without divine sanction abuses the very soul of that individual, abuses the central purpose and processes of life, ‘the very key’ (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 139; or Ensign, July 1972, 113) to life, as President Boyd K. Packer once called it. In exploiting the body of another—which means exploiting his or her soul—one desecrates the Atonement of Christ, which saved that soul and which makes possible the gift of eternal life. And when one mocks the Son of Righteousness, one steps into a realm of heat hotter and holier than the noonday sun. You cannot do so and not be burned.

“Please, never say: ‘Who does it hurt? Why not a little freedom? I can transgress now and repent later.’ Please don't be so foolish and so cruel. You cannot with impunity ‘crucify Christ afresh’ (see Heb. 6:6). ‘Flee fornication,’ Paul cries (1 Cor. 6:18), and flee ‘anything like unto it,’ the

Doctrine and Covenants adds (D&C 59:6; emphasis added). Why? Well, for one reason because of the incalculable suffering in both body and spirit endured by the Savior of the world so that we could flee (see D&C 19:15–20). We owe Him something for that. Indeed, we owe Him everything for that. ‘Ye are not your own,’ Paul says. ‘Ye [have been] bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s’ (1 Cor. 6:19–20; emphasis added; see also 1 Cor. 6:13–18). In sexual transgression the soul is at stake—the body and the spirit” (“Personal Purity,” Ensign, Nov. 1998, 76).

Brothers and sisters, both the Church’s temples and our personal temples must be used to accomplish the righteous purposes for which they were created. Our physical body is a marvelous blessing and a timeless trust. The most sacred of all our divine powers is to become a co-creator with Heavenly Father in providing physical bodies for His spirit sons and daughters and in establishing a righteous and Christ-centered family. Nothing is more holy; nothing deserves more reverence; nothing is more central to the plan of happiness. And our very souls are at stake.

I hope we now better understand why “to receive a physical body” is the first element of the answer to the important question “Why are we here on earth?” The doctrines Lucifer works most diligently to distort and attack are the ones that really matter the most to us individually, to our families, and to the world. The great plan of happiness requires that each of us obtain a physical body and makes possible a forever family. Consider the popular philosophy that many voices in our modern world would persuade us to believe: “Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin” (2 Ne. 28:8). Such an ideology is a lie inspired by the great deceiver. Where is the adversary presently directing his most direct and diabolical attacks? Upon our beliefs about and uses of the physical body and upon the family. Remember, Satan does not have a body and he cannot have a family. He desires that all of us would become miserable like unto himself. And he relentlessly works to distort the two doctrines he hates the most.

I conclude with the following statement by Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939), a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“The body that has been given to us was for the purpose of allowing the spirit to exalt itself to a nobler condition. The lightning that is seen flashing from cloud to cloud, from mountain top to mountain top, is an electrical force that may tear down buildings, set fire to property, and destroy life. Conduct electricity through the dynamo wire, and motor, and behold its wonderful results working for the service of man, accomplishing something under the control of a physical instrument, it thus becomes a power for good. So with steam, if allowed to evaporate freely it does little good, but restrain it in the boiler, send it through the engine, and under its power you may travel across the continent or sail from shore to shore. And so, too, with this highest, most potent of all spiritual forces, the intelligence that is in man; enshrine it in a spiritual body, that it may have the experiences of spiritual life; and then give it a physical body, that it may enter into

and obtain the joy and experiences of physical life, and you have enlarged its powers immeasurably” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1912, 107).

I testify we are sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father. His plan for our eternal progression is perfect. I witness that the Only Begotten Son of the Father offered Himself as the infinite atoning sacrifice required by the plan. I know the Savior lives, and He directs the affairs of His living Church through living apostles and prophets.

More on this topic:

- Boyd K. Packer, “[Ye Are the Temple of God](#),” Ensign, Nov. 2000, 72-74
- John S. Tanner, “[The Body as a Blessing](#),” Ensign, July 1993, 7-11
- Russell M. Nelson, “[The Magnificence of Man](#),” Ensign, Jan. 1988, 64-49