

What Is the Purpose of Our Life?



Perhaps no other questions are asked more often in the hearts and minds of people around the world than “What is the purpose of life?” “What am I doing here?” “What is going on?”

Without the knowledge of the plan of salvation, answering these universal questions about the purpose of life is almost impossible. Even for those who wax philosophical, answers like “The purpose of life is to find purpose” (an answer we really found when doing research for this chapter!) can be more confusing than helpful.

Some people who don’t know the gospel plan think that the purpose of life is to be rich, or to be famous, or to be as buff or beautiful as possible. Other people might think the purpose of life is to just have fun. Luckily for us, the Lord restored through Joseph Smith the knowledge of the great plan of salvation, and with that knowledge God restored the answer to the question: What is the purpose of life?

To Become More like God



Some people say that the purpose of life is “to live with God again.” Although that can be one of the *benefits* of the plan of salvation, it is not its primary purpose. After all, if the purpose of life were just to live with God, then why did we ever leave the premortal existence in the first place? We are trying to do something more than just *live* with God, we are trying to *become like*

Him. As a matter of fact, the entire purpose of life can be summarized in these five simple words: *to become more like God*.

What Is God Like?

If we are here to become more like God, a logical question is “What is God like?” Joseph Smith once said, “I want you all to know [God], and to be familiar with Him.”¹ If we don’t know or if we have an incorrect idea of what God is like, then it is very difficult to correctly become like Him. That’s like trying to dress up like someone for Halloween without knowing what they look like.

For example, if we think that God is a big, giant, floating Spirit, then how do we become like that? Or, if we wrongly think that God is mean and unforgiving, we won’t be able to become as He truly is. That is why *Lectures on Faith* says that we must have “a *correct* idea of [God’s] character, perfections, and attributes”² in order to have faith in God.

The scriptures teach us what our Heavenly Father is *really* like.

- God has an immortal physical body (see Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). When you picture God, please don’t picture a floating mass of spirit, or someone who is really old and tired. God is a resurrected, glorified, perfect being! (See chapter 16.)
- God is really smart. Even more than $E=mc^2$ smart. The scriptures teach us that God “knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it” (2 Nephi 9:20).
- God has divine attributes like kindness, love, patience, gentleness, mercy, and empathy (see Alma 26:35; Moroni 8:3).
- God is the father of our spirits (see Romans 8:16). We are children of “heavenly parents.”³
- God is perfect (see Matthew 5:48).



How does knowing these things about God answer the question about the purpose of life? Because if we are here to become more like God, then knowing about Him tells us what to do and who to become. Based on who God is, the following are five important tasks that help us fulfill our purpose in life:

1. Receive a body and keep it pure.
2. Gain intelligence—light and truth.
3. Develop Godlike attributes.
4. Establish an eternal marriage and family.
5. Come unto Christ and be perfected in Him.

Let's talk about how we can fulfill each of these tasks.

Receive a Body and Keep It Pure

Congratulations! By the mere fact of your birth you have fulfilled one of the fundamental purposes of life—receiving a physical body! So go thank your parents! Actually, you did a lot to gain your body. You were faithful in the premortal existence and in following the Father's plan. (See chapter 3.) If you weren't faithful in the premortal existence, you wouldn't be here!

As a matter of fact, did you know somebody is jealous of your body? The devil is—because he doesn't have one. He wishes he had a body, and he can't stand the fact that we have ours. Because of that jealousy, he tries to get us to misuse our physical bodies and sin.

Elder David A. Bednar taught: "Because a 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 frustrate our progression by tempting us to use our bodies improperly. One of the ultimate ironies of eternity is that the adversary, who is miserable precisely because he has no physical body, invites and entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very

tool he does not have and cannot use is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to physical and spiritual destruction.”⁴



In addition to receiving a physical body, how we treat it is very important. Joseph Smith taught, “We came to this earth that we might have a body and *present it pure* before God in the celestial kingdom.”⁵ Most sins are sins against the body: immorality, murder, drugs, alcohol, physical violence, tattoos or piercings, and immodesty, just to name a few. One of the purposes of this life is to show God how much we respect our bodies through obedience to His commandments—commandments that keep our bodies sacred and pure.

Gain Intelligence—Light and Truth

As BYU’s sign welcoming visitors to their campus proudly proclaims: “The glory of God is intelligence.” Doctrine and Covenants 93:36 clarifies, saying, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”

We gain this kind of intelligence “even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). So our purpose isn’t just to learn random facts to answer *Jeopardy!* questions. We aren’t fulfilling the plan of salvation if we get an “A” on a test of temples of ancient Egypt, but fail our test of temple recommend questions. We aren’t gaining true intelligence by Googling information on the web, and are just “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Elder Dallin H. Oaks said that “knowledge is not of equal value. Some knowledge is more important than others. That principle also applies to what we call spiritual knowledge.”⁶

Light and truth are only gained through obedience (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:39). Therefore, faithful people who are obedient and full of the Spirit are more “intelligent” than wicked people. Our primary goal regarding gaining intelligence is to gain spiritual knowledge—light and truth.

Of course, light and truth encompass all types of knowledge. Truth is found in science, history, geology, art, and a host of other academic subjects. That is one reason why the Lord commanded us to understand “things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:79). The modern prophets tell us, “Plan now to obtain an education. Be willing to work diligently and make sacrifices if necessary. . . . Maintain an enthusiasm for learning throughout your life.”⁷



After all, we are to become like God, and can you imagine a God who doesn’t understand history, science, art, and math? If God understands those subjects, we need to as well. Knowing that God is intelligent is one reason why “education is an important part of Heavenly Father’s plan to help you become more like Him.”⁸

Elder John A. Widtsoe of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “It is a paradox that men will gladly devote time every day for many years to learn a science or an art; yet will expect to win a knowledge of the gospel, which comprehends all sciences and arts, through perfunctory glances at books or occasional listening to sermons. The gospel should be studied more intensively than any school or college subject.”⁹



We invite you to place your scripture study as the top priority in your studies. Before you do any of your school homework, we invite you to study your scriptures *first* to show God that gaining spiritual knowledge is your main priority. (The added benefit is that you’ll no longer need to use the common excuse of not having enough time to study your scriptures.)

Develop Godlike Attributes

One of the reasons why Jesus came to earth is to show us what God the Father is like—how He would act and be (see John 14:7–9). Therefore, when we talk about trying to be like Jesus, we are also talking about trying to be like our Heavenly Father.

One way we can do that is by overcoming the tendencies of the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19). President David O. McKay said, “One chief purpose of life is to overcome evil tendencies, to govern our appetites, to control our passions—anger, hatred, jealousy, immorality. We have to overcome them; we have to subject them, conquer them.”¹⁰

Perhaps the most important positive attribute we can develop is love. After all, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). In fact, the two great commandments pertain to love. When the Savior was asked what the greatest commandments were, He said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37–39). One of our great opportunities in life is to develop God’s attribute of love.



Service is a fundamental way we can develop this attribute. When we serve others we’re serving God (see Mosiah 2:17), and whatever we do to others, we do to the Savior (see Matthew 25:40). When we provide service to others, is it because we *have* to or because we *want* to? Either way, doing service is good, but doing it because we want to, because we love those we are serving, is best. President Marion G. Romney said, “Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.”¹¹

Establish an Eternal Marriage and Family

The family proclamation states clearly that “the family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan.”¹² It makes logical sense that if we are here to become more like our Eternal Parents, then we too must become fathers and mothers, sealed to our spouse for eternity. That is why the scriptures teach that having an eternal marriage and being sealed to a spouse in the temple is necessary for exaltation and to become like God (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4; 132:18–21).



As a matter of fact, the sealing ordinances available in the temple are so necessary to fulfilling the purpose of life that the scriptures teach that “the whole earth would be utterly wasted” without them (Doctrine and Covenants 2:3). General Relief Society President Julie B. Beck taught, “When we speak of qualifying for the blessings of eternal life, we mean qualifying for the blessings of eternal families. . . . Without these blessings, the earth is wasted. . . . Without the family, there is no plan; there is no reason for it.”¹³

Come unto Christ and Be Perfected in Him

The commandment to be perfect like God (see Matthew 5:48) is impossible to fulfill by ourselves. But through the atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be made perfect and holy. The prophet Moroni ended the Book of Mormon with this plea: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected *in him*” (Moroni 10:32; emphasis added). That means that we must have faith in Him, repent of our sins, and make and keep covenants with Him until the end of our lives. It is through these sacred covenants that we become joined with Christ and can be perfected through Him (see chapter 9), enabling us to become like God.

Elder Richard G. Scott summarized almost all the points discussed in this chapter by saying,

The primary purpose of life . . . is to prove yourself obedient to the commandments of the Lord and thereby grow in understanding, capacity, and every worthy trait. It is to receive every required ordinance and to make and keep every needed covenant. It is to form and nourish a family. This experience includes having periods of trial and happiness, with the objective of returning triumphantly, having met well the challenges and opportunities of mortal life to receive the glorious blessings promised for such obedience.¹⁴

President Howard W. Hunter also promised, “As we attend the temple, we learn more richly and deeply the purpose of life.”¹⁵

We testify that this life does have a divine purpose and a divine plan. It is the great “plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13) that enables us to become like Him.



Do you want to see something really cool? Turn to page 80. No, seriously, turn there. Okay, now, whatever you do, *do not* read the next paragraph. Go watch TV. Go clean your room. Do something else.



Elder Richard G. Scott said, “Are there so many fascinating, exciting things to do or so many challenges pressing down upon you that it is hard to keep focused on that which is essential? When things of the world crowd in, all too often the wrong things take highest priority. Then it is easy to forget the fundamental purpose of life. Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction. He would have good people fill life with ‘good things’ so there is no room for the essential ones. Have you unconsciously been caught in that trap?”¹⁶

Were we able to distract you from reading that paragraph? Don’t be distracted from the true purposes of life!

Still Have Questions?

Why are we tempted if God wants us to be righteous and become like Him?

Do you remember when they used to have “shopping sprees” on television? Someone would win a shopping spree and they would have five minutes to run through a store and grab anything they wanted, and they got to keep everything they put in their shopping cart. Sometimes it was frustrating to see what people grabbed. They would blow right past the sporting goods section and grab bedspreads and pillows. Or they would ignore the candy aisle and stack up the cart with toothbrushes! What were they thinking?

Actually, the beauty of the shopping spree is this: Whatever is in the cart at the final checkout truly reflects a person’s desires and priorities. With all the options available to them, if a person ignores the hiking boots and picks up some flip-flops, it’s because she really wanted flip-flops. If the whole store contained only hiking boots, the person might choose hiking boots not because she loves to hike, but simply because what she really wanted wasn’t available.

Life is a little like a spiritual shopping spree. God allows both good and evil, righteousness and sin, on the earth, and whatever we put in the cart of our lives is what we truly desire. If alcohol and pornography and sin are on the aisles, but we pass them up and instead fill our lives with moral purity, then it shows God what we truly desire. When we pass up the immodest clothing rack and instead fill our spiritual shopping cart (or literal one!) with modesty, it shows what we truly desire.

When we show up at the checkout line at the final judgment and God looks in the cart of our life, whatever we have filled it with will reflect our true priorities and character. If God did not allow temptation, we wouldn’t have choice. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so . . . righteousness

could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Nephi 2:11).

What is the hardest test or trial to go through?



According to President Boyd K. Packer, for some people, the hardest spiritual tests aren’t tragedies, but “ease and luxury.”¹⁷ Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the First Council of the Seventy agreed and said that “the trials through which today’s young people are passing—ease and luxury—may be the most severe test of any age.”¹⁸ During our times of supposed “prosperity,” let us not be like so many of those in the past (and present) who forget God, succumb to pride, and fall into sin. By always remembering God and being humble, we can pass the hardest spiritual test of all—ease and luxury!

Teach the Plan!

What Is the Purpose of Our Life?

Objective: To help learners understand that their life has a divine, Godlike purpose, and how to fulfill that purpose.

Attention Getter: Teach the Plan #1: Ask your children the question, "What is the purpose of life?" Let each child share an answer to this foundational question. Then share the answer to this question as outlined in Teach the Plan #2.

Lesson Activity: Teach the Plan #3: Have your family explain the five truths about God that help us understand what it means to become like God. Go to <http://seek.deseretbook.com/bigpicture> and download a handout that has each of the five truths on its own page. Give one page to five different people in your family. Let each read the page and then summarize what they read for the other family members. Then ask the following discussion questions.

Discussion Questions: The following questions may help your children in understanding, identifying, and applying some gospel truths related to the purpose of life:

Teach the Plan #4: "How does understanding the fact that God has a glorified, perfected body affect how you want to treat your body?"

Teach the Plan #5: "What do you think you could do to increase your efforts to seek light and truth?"

Teach the Plan #6: "What are some connections you see between doing service and increasing in love?"

Teach the Plan #7: "How do you think establishing an eternal family relates to the purpose of life?"

Teach the Plan #9: "How might trials help us to fulfill our purpose in life?"

Activity: Do the Experiment upon the Word activity. Feel free to modify it and use another object lesson that demonstrates how distraction works. For example, ask half the family to sing one hymn, while the other half of the family sings a different hymn. Then read Elder Richard G. Scott's quote next to Teach the Plan #8. Ask your children, "How does Satan try to distract us from the purpose of life?"

Invitation to Act: Invite your children to do the Live the Plan activity and put their scripture study as a priority. Encourage them to keep a list of blessings they receive as a result.