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The Great Plan of Happiness: A Christ-Centered Visual Approach

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The greatest concept we can study or teach is the plan of redemption—sometimes called the plan of salvation or the plan of happiness. The doctrines of the plan of redemption have more power to bring men to God than any other truth or concept.

Many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints quickly recognize the following diagram.

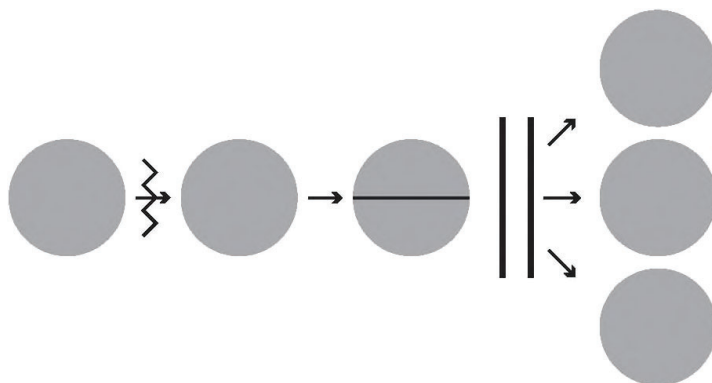


Figure 1. The common diagram. Visuals in this article based on artwork by Jolene Johnson.

Diagrams such as this are visual representations of certain aspects of that all-encompassing plan. Our Heavenly Father's plan includes our eternal past, our present life, and our eternal future. It is impossible to represent all aspects of that plan in one diagram. Neal A. Maxwell expressed: "Con conversationally, we reference this great design almost too casually at times; we even sketch its rude outlines on chalkboards and paper as if it were the floor plan for an addition to one's house. However, when we really take time to ponder the Plan, it is breathtaking and overpowering! Indeed, I, for one, cannot decide which creates in me the most awe—its very vastness or its intricate, individualized detail."¹

We could never capture such vastness and detail in a single diagram or model. Nevertheless, models and visuals can enable us to better grasp and teach key portions of this breathtaking plan.

In the Church, we have a proclivity for visual methods of learning and teaching the plan. The most common diagrams used are variations of figure 1.² This diagram utilizes various circles to portray where we were, where we are, where we will go after death, and where we will end up eternally. This common diagram also uses lines to represent the major events in our progression through the plan: birth and the veil, death, Resurrection, and Final Judgment. This basic configuration allows us to give a brief yet powerful overview of our eternal journey.

In spite of their introductory strengths, many often-used diagrams like figure 1 lack overt representation of many critical doctrines frequently discussed in the scriptures associated with the plan. It is possible, for instance, to teach the plan as depicted in figure 1 without ever mentioning the mission or role of Jesus Christ, the Creation, the Fall, spiritual death, Christ's Atonement, or the principles and ordinances of his gospel. To perpetually teach the plan with such omissions can lead people to focus solely on that which is overtly portrayed in the diagram.

To help us anchor the many key aspects of the plan in our teaching, President Benson counseled us to use "the messages and the method of teaching found in the [scriptures] to teach this great plan of the Eternal God."³ Because people tend to learn, teach, and remember the plan of redemption visually, there is a need for wide-ranging models that convey various aspects of the plan of redemption using principles and patterns used in the scriptures.

This article introduces one additional way of looking at the plan from a different "camera angle" than those presented in the past. We hope this

perspective is helpful to students and teachers who may wish for a model that depicts multiple oft-neglected core doctrines and centers around Jesus Christ and his Atonement. We intend for this diagram to supplement and enhance—rather than replace—currently used models.

The model outlined in this article visually portrays two concepts: a) the foundational doctrines of the plan and b) the states of being through which humankind must pass in order to become more Christlike and return to live forever with our heavenly parents.

Step 1: Premortal State

This leads to some fundamental questions: What is the purpose of Heavenly Father's plan? Did God give us his plan to help us *get somewhere* or to help us *become something*? Our heavenly parents⁴ intend for their children to “obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”⁵ The divine destiny of God's children includes living *with* our heavenly parents. However, as important as it will be to return to the presence of God, is that the ultimate aim of the plan?

If returning to God were the ultimate purpose of the plan, then why did he send us to earth in the first place? We were already in heaven, living with our heavenly parents as their spirit children. Merely being in their presence was apparently not ultimate happiness for us; nor was it the end of our progression. We are here on earth for a greater purpose. Our heavenly parents are perfect in every way and have glorified, resurrected bodies. We seek to be *like* them! Joseph Smith said, “If you wish to go *where* God is, you must *be like* God or possess the principles which God *possesses*.”⁶ What we become, therefore, determines our eternal destination, and the plan of happiness is God's design to enable that development.

To illustrate this concept visually, we begin with a dotted line. We are on that line if we are either like God or in his presence.

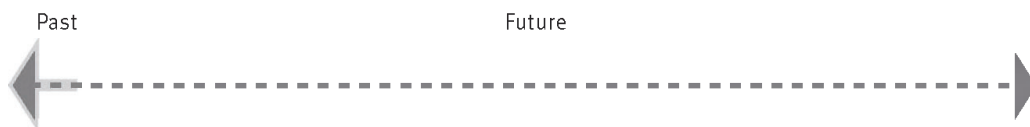


Figure 2. The presence or likeness of God.

Robert T. Barrett, *Council in Heaven*.

In the premortal realm, we had spirit bodies that lacked vital physical capacities. We also lacked an infinite level of knowledge, power, love, and experience.

The arrows on both sides of the dotted line represent the eternal past, or the premortal state of man, as well as the eternal future, the final state of humankind, which we will elaborate on later in this article. Based on teachings from Abraham 3, we began on the left side of the dotted line as intelligences⁷ who were spiritually born into heaven as sons and daughters of heavenly parents. We shaded in the left end of the dotted line to illustrate being in God's presence.

In the premortal realm, major conditions differentiated us from our heavenly parents. They had perfected bodies of flesh and bone (D&C 130:22). We had spirit bodies that lacked vital physical capacities that enable eternal happiness. We also lacked an infinite level of knowledge, power, love, and experience that they possess. In addition, our heavenly parents enjoy eternal life. We could not progress to the measure and will of our Heavenly Father while in his presence in our spirit-body state. We had to leave and experience mortality in a fallen state.

The Three Pillars of Eternity

According to his plan, God would establish three critical conditions to enable his children to grow toward becoming more like him. First, we had to have a place where we could experience mortality's tests while separated from his presence. That would require the creation⁸ of an earth. Second, God's pure creation would need, through a process of agency⁹, to enter a fallen state, thus allowing for an opposition in all things (see 2 Nephi 2:11). All things would otherwise have "remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin" (2 Nephi 2:23). Third, that fallen state would have persisted and "the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration" except there "should be an infinite *atonement*" (2 Nephi 9:7; emphasis added).¹⁰

These three foundational events—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are called the three pillars of eternity. Book of Mormon prophets repeatedly used these pillars to teach the plan. Regarding their relationship, Elder Russell M. Nelson stated, "The Book of Mormon reveals the important interrelationships between the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. One cannot fully comprehend the Atonement without first understanding the Fall; and the fall of Adam cannot be fully understood without first understanding the Creation. These three great doctrinal pillars sustain each other in God's eternal plan."¹¹

In the premortal world, before proceeding with the Creation, it was requisite that one be found who was both willing and able to perform the Atonement. This intercessor would mediate with eternal justice for our weaknesses, imperfections, and mortal condition and conquer both death and hell. These two obstacles could not be defeated for us in heaven by the premortal spirit known as Jehovah; they could only be overcome by the uniquely qualified Jesus Christ in the flesh. Due to the Savior's distinctive birth, he had

the power to descend into both death and hell and burst their bands from within. He could then ascend once again to heaven with infinite power to “draw all men unto”¹² him through the power of the Resurrection. Abraham recorded Heavenly Father’s profound premortal question as follows: “Whom shall I send?” Due to the fact that Jesus was the Father’s “Beloved and Chosen from the beginning” (Moses 4:2), it is probable that every eye in the heavenly throng turned and looked at the Lamb of God (Revelation 5:6–7) to see his response to that question. The great premortal Messiah, he who was chosen from the beginning, simply stated, “Here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27). Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Never has one individual offered, in so few words, to do so much for so many.”¹³

Notice how these three pillars form the basis for all other aspects of the plan in the diagram below.



Figure 3. The three pillars of eternity.

We place Jesus Christ and his Atonement prominently in the center of the diagram to illustrate his central role in the plan of redemption. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “the fundamental principles of our religion is the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, ‘that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven’; and all other things, are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion.”¹⁴ As Elder Bruce R. McConkie further stated, “We view the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ as the center and core and heart of revealed religion.”¹⁵

The measure of creation for God’s children in mortality is to become like their Heavenly Father. The state of being in which we dwell governs our capacity to progress. The pillars of eternity directly alter the various states of humankind. By establishing these three pillars, God gave us the opportunity to continue through further states of being in our quest for eternal progression. Book of Mormon prophets used the word *state* over fifty times in specific reference to our progression through the plan of salvation. Those same prophets also teach about the relationship between the three pillars and the states through which humankind progresses.

Step 2: A State of Innocence

When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, they were created in a “state of innocence” (2 Nephi 2:23) as immortal beings. They walked and talked with God and enjoyed his presence—hence, we solidly fill in the line between the Creation and the Fall. In this paradisiacal state, Adam and Eve did not know good or evil, joy or misery, happiness or sorrow. They were not capable of bearing children (see 2 Nephi 2:22–23).

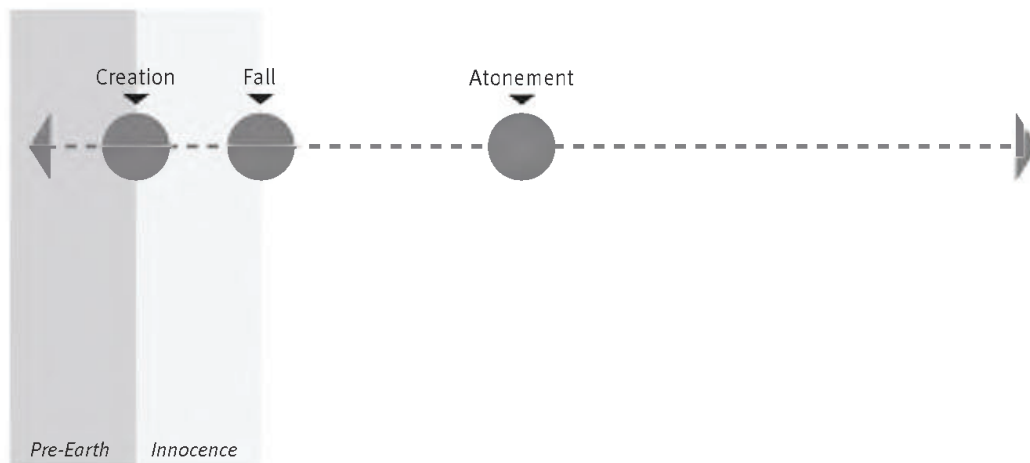


Figure 4. The state of innocence in Eden.

God did not intend for Adam and Eve to remain in a state of innocence forever. Had they remained in a state of Edenic innocence, they could not have progressed toward godliness. They needed to experience a mortal, fallen state. The Fall and the resulting opposition in a mortal state initiated the optimal conditions in which progression could occur.

Through the power of the Atonement, God graciously covers the first eight years of our life with innocence (see D&C 68:27 and Moroni 8:8–13). Thus, each of us personally passes through similar progressions as Adam and Eve. This childhood state of innocence creates a safe environment for us to begin learning how to navigate various choices in a mortal body without risk of eternal punishment for wrongdoing.

Step 3: A Fallen, Mortal State

The Fall ushered in a mortal state and introduced two major consequences for Adam, Eve, and all their subsequent posterity: physical death and spiritual death. In a gospel sense, death means separation (of two things). Physical

death is the separation of the spirit and body. Spiritual death represents our separation from God.

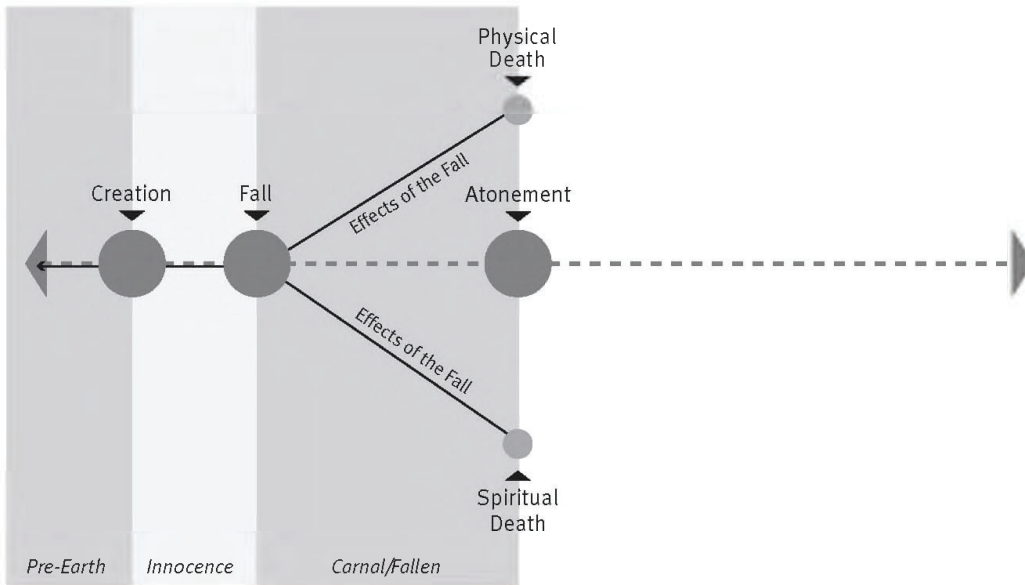


Figure 5. The two deaths.

The fallen condition of spiritual death, or separation from God, provides the situation and conditions that enable all of God’s children to be tested, learn from their own experience, and further develop the attributes of God. From birth to death, our fallen state hosts a battle, constantly played out, between our spirit (arriving to earth from the presence of God) and our body (fashioned from fallen matter). Though this body is a sacred gift, it has desires, appetites, and passions that, when left unchecked, give Satan power to bind and captivate God’s children (2 Nephi 2:29).

Stated simply, the body in a natural, carnal, fallen state seeks ease and pleasure for itself. Pleasure for the body comes in the gratification of natural appetites and passions. When our spirit fails to “bridle all [our] passions” (Alma 38:12) according to the commandments, the body’s increasingly fed appetites and passions tend to grow and subsequently lead to bondage and spiritual regression. This thought was further expressed by Elder David A. Bednar:

As sons and daughters of God, we have inherited divine capacities from Him. But we presently 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. Consequently, the Fall of Adam and its spiritual and temporal consequences affect us most directly through our physical bodies. And yet we are dual beings, for our spirit that is the eternal part of us is tabernacled in a physical body that is subject to

the Fall. As Jesus emphasized to the Apostle Peter, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

The precise nature of the test of mortality, then, can be summarized in the following question: Will I respond to the inclinations of the natural man, or will I yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and put off the natural man and become a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord (see Mosiah 3:19)? That is the test. Every appetite, desire, propensity, and impulse of the natural man may be overcome by and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We are here on the earth to develop godlike qualities and to bridle all of the passions of the flesh.¹⁶

If we came to earth for the opportunity to become more like God, why would he place us in fallen bodies of flesh that have a will toward evil?¹⁷ Why place us in bodies that, by nature, seek to pull us increasingly away from his attributes and presence? The opposition of a mortal body provides a very real test and gives us the opportunity to “[put] off the natural man and [become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Much like the strengthening effect on muscles provided by the resistance of weights, as we overcome the natural man and obey God’s commandments, we overcome the resistance of our fallen, carnal state and become more like God.

The scriptures contain many stories of people who overcame intense opposition while accomplishing marvelous works. For mortality to be a valid trial of faith and test of our reliance on the Lord, the opposition must be “in” us, rather than purely “against” us. Only then can we realize that we cannot prevail on our own. Our fallen condition and carnal nature constantly remind us of our absolute, ongoing, all-inclusive need for a Savior and his Atonement. Adam and Eve’s Fall initiates our dire need for redemption that only the Atonement can bring.

Step 4: A State of Redemption

Christ has power to redeem humankind from two things: the direct effects of the Fall and our own sins.

Through the Resurrection,¹⁸ Christ redeems all humankind unconditionally from the Fall. Without an infinite Atonement, we would forever remain in our fallen state, spiritually dead, shut out from the presence of God. The prophet Jacob used the same four-word phrase “to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:7–8) to describe what would happen to both our bodies and our spirits if the Savior had not completed an infinite Atonement for us. He further states that we would become subject to the devil and become like him. Were this so, the visual portrayals of physical and spiritual death in

figure 5 would be arrows, demonstrating the eternal, ongoing, and infinite consequences.

Jesus completed the infinite Atonement with his Resurrection and made it possible to redeem all of us from both consequences: death and hell. Many understand that resurrection overcomes physical death. Unfortunately, many misconstrue the conditions of redemption from spiritual death, or separation from God's presence, which we also inherited from Adam and Eve. This inherited spiritual death is very different from the separation caused by our own misuse of agency. As demonstrated below, the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ unconditionally redeems all of God's children from not only their physical death, but also their inherited spiritual death (see Mormon 9:13).

From atop the walls of Zarahemla, Samuel the Lamanite taught, "For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord" (Helaman 14:15). He makes the point stronger in the next verse: "Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth *all* mankind from the first death—*that spiritual death*" (v. 16; emphasis added). To make the point unmistakable, he restated it in the next verse, "But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord" (v. 17). Samuel left no question about the universality of redemption from our separation from God's presence through the Resurrection of Christ.

Samuel was not the only prophet who taught of the universality of redemption. Moroni stated, "And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, . . . and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death" (Mormon 9:13). Amulek told the people of Ammonihah, "Now, this restoration shall come to all . . . [and everyone, in a resurrected body,] shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil" (Alma 11:44). In Book of Mormon terminology, we might say that we are *redeemed* from Adam's two deaths by grace alone (see 2 Nephi 9:22; Alma

42:23; Mormon 7:6) so we can then be perfectly judged of our own works (see 2 Nephi 9:15; 28:23; Alma 12:8).

Because of this redemption, not one of God's children born into this mortal, fallen state will be punished for Adam's transgression (see second article of faith). In other words, "The way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free" (2 Nephi 2:4).

Elder D. Todd Christofferson also taught this doctrine when he said the following:

The Savior's Redemption has two parts. First, it atones for Adam's transgression and the consequent Fall of man by overcoming what could be called the direct effects of the Fall—physical death and spiritual death. Physical death is well understood; spiritual death is the separation of man from God. In the words of Paul, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). This redemption from physical and spiritual death is both universal and without condition.¹⁹

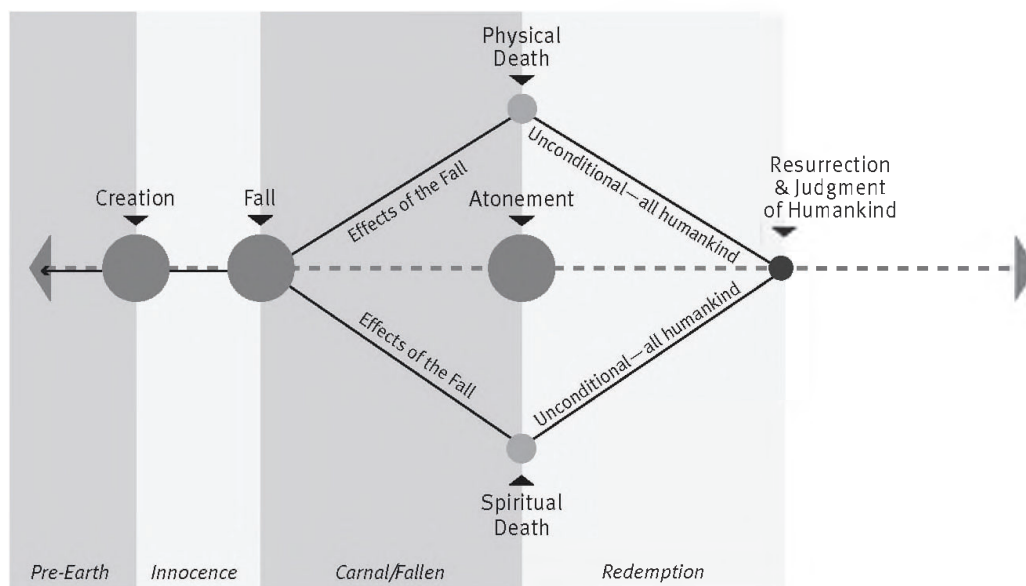


Figure 6. Universal redemption from two deaths.

Why would God want to bring everyone, the evil as well as the righteous, back into his presence? The Book of Mormon prophets are consistent on this point. The doctrine of the Resurrection is inseparably connected with the doctrine of the Judgment.²⁰ The Atonement brings to pass the Resurrection, and the Resurrection brings all humankind back into the presence of God to be judged (see Alma 42:23; Helaman 14:15–17; 2 Nephi 9:15, 21–22; Mormon 9:12–14).

Everyone will stand before the Godhead (see Alma 11:44) having been redeemed from all the direct effects of the Fall “through the merits, and mercy, and grace” of Christ *alone* (2 Nephi 2:8). He paid a price to the Father that we could not pay for ourselves (see Alma 42:11–16). In that moment, each child of God will stand liberated from all burdens inflicted by others’ choices. That state of redemption from all external consequences will allow Jesus to perfectly judge us based on our own use of agency.

Conditional Salvation from Sin

Through birth, all inherit the effects of the Fall and enter into a fallen state. Being separated from God, all but Jesus commit sin once they reach the age of accountability (see Alma 42:14; D&C 68:27). At the Judgment, all must account for those sins.

Although redemption from the Fall is unconditional for all, salvation from our own sins is granted only on the “conditions of repentance” (D&C 138:19; Alma 42:13; Helaman 5:11). Samuel taught the Nephites that Christ “bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire” (Helaman 14:18). The conditions of repentance are one of the great themes of the Book of Mormon. Often referred to as the “doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2, 21; 32:6; 3 Nephi 11:31–41), the conditions of repentance also form a major part of the gospel of Jesus Christ as he himself defined it in 3 Nephi 27:13–21.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson further taught:

The second aspect of the Savior’s Atonement is redemption from what might be termed the indirect consequences of the Fall—our own sins as opposed to Adam’s transgression. . . . Because we are accountable and we make the choices, the redemption from our own sins is conditional—conditioned on confessing and abandoning sin and turning to a godly life, or in other words, conditioned on repentance (see D&C 58:43).²¹

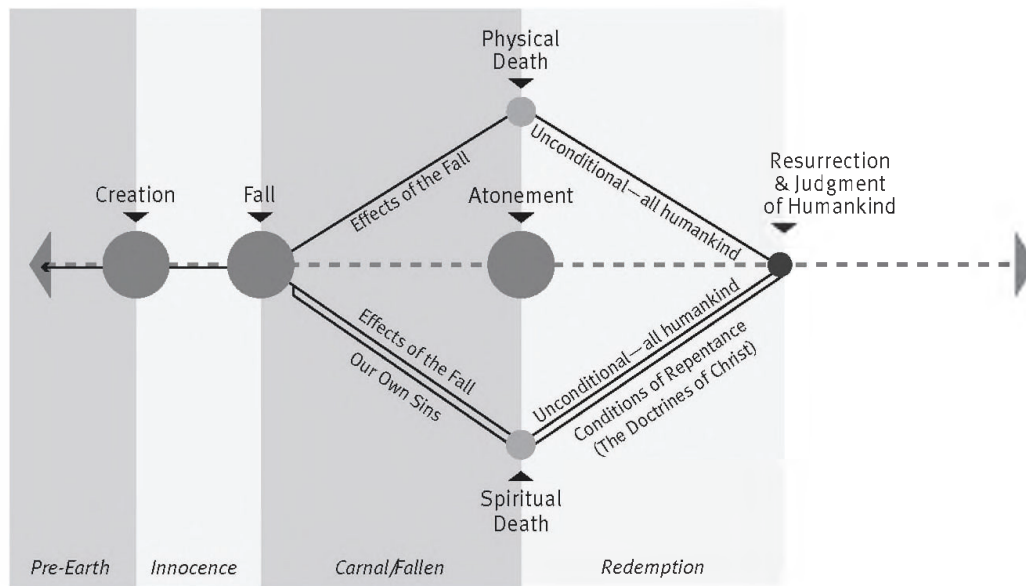


Figure 7. Redemption from our own sins.

Meeting the conditions of repentance constitutes “all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23, Alma 24:11), reconciles us to God, and opens to us the fountains of redeeming grace. Ultimately, redemption from our own sins involves making and keeping sacred covenants and receiving grace.²²

It is important to realize that our efforts to live the gospel are necessary but not sufficient for eternal salvation. The law cannot save us; it can only condemn (see 2 Nephi 2:5). Jesus Christ saves us through his grace.²³ The Book of Mormon teaches a clear relationship between what we do and what effect it has on our standing with God: “Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses [or any other law]; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation” (Alma 25:16). Thus our efforts to live the gospel of Jesus Christ do not save us; they increase our faith in Christ. Increasingly, we trust him and seek his will rather than our own. That process, fueled by his mercy and grace, changes us. We become more and more like him, and less like the natural and fallen man, who seeks only to gratify mortal desires, appetites, and passions.

Step 6: The Final State of Man

Many elements of the plan of redemption culminate at the judgment bar of God. The Judgment ushers in the final state of humankind. An angel instructed King Benjamin to teach that Jesus Christ did what he did and

suffered what he suffered “that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men” (Mosiah 3:10). Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all will be redeemed from the grave and brought back into the presence of God, but that redemptive reunion, for some, will be both painful and temporary. President Ezra Taft Benson said, “Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father and how familiar His face is to us.”²⁴

Multiple Book of Mormon prophets addressed the judgment bar response of those who fail to meet the Savior’s conditions of repentance. King Benjamin declared, “Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38; see also 3:24–25; Helaman 14:18; Moroni 9:4).

Alma the Younger also used vivid imagery to describe that event for the unrepentant: “If we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned. . . . And in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence (Alma 12:13–14; see also Mosah 16:5).

With additional revelation and clarification received through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we learn that Jesus Christ “glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him” (D&C 76:43). Excepting the sons of perdition, all humankind will be “saved” into one of three degrees of glory: celestial, terrestrial, or telestial. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “These three different degrees of glory have a special relationship to the three different members of the Godhead.”²⁵

Those who enter the celestial kingdom dwell eternally in a state of never-ending happiness (see D&C 121:45; Mosiah 2:41). In his final message, Mormon wrote, “And [Jesus] hath brought to pass the redemption of the

world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom” (Mormon 7:7). Those in the celestial kingdom “shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever” (D&C 76:62).

Those in the terrestrial kingdom “receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fullness of the Father” (v. 77). Those who receive a telestial glory “are cast down to hell and suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fullness of times. . . . But where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end” (vs. 106, 112). They will receive “not of his fullness in the eternal world, but of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the terrestrial” (v. 86).

Those who deny the Holy Ghost cannot bear a telestial glory. These sons of perdition will shrink from the presence of God to outer darkness as the only ones “on whom the second death shall have any power” (D&C 76:37; see also Alma 12:16).

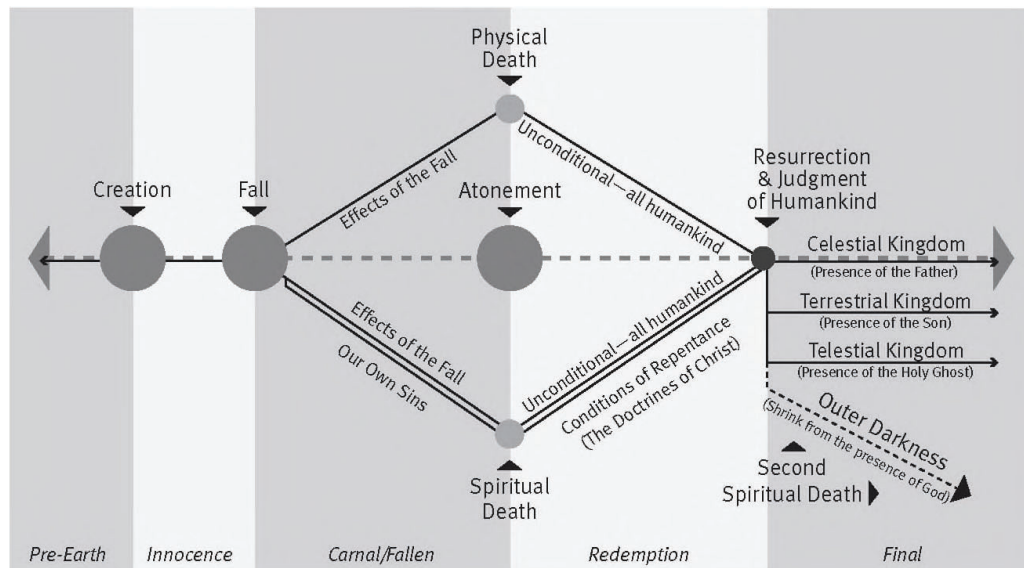


Figure 8. The plan of redemption.

At our Judgment, we will have a “perfect knowledge like unto [those] in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect” (2 Nephi 9:13). This perfect knowledge will kindle a “bright recollection of all our guilt” (Alma 11:43). In this awareness, even the hardest of hearts will acknowledge that “all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works” (Alma 12:15). God’s plan is so fair that even telestial-bound souls will “bow the knee, and . . . confess to him who sits upon the throne forever and ever” (D&C 76:110) that his glorious plan is perfectly fair.²⁶

It would be neither just nor merciful for God to force the wicked into the celestial kingdom. Could such a person feel any peace or contentment in God's kingdom, surrounded by his perfection and glory? Moroni teaches that the wicked would be more "miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of [their] filthiness before him, than [they] would to



Simon Dewey, *Christ in the Land Bountiful*.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ unconditionally redeems all of God's children from not only their physical death, but also their inherited spiritual death.

dwell with the damned souls in hell” (Mormon 9:4). Hence, God’s preparation of multiple glories shows his love for his children and the role of agency throughout the entire plan—culminating in the perfect balance of justice and mercy in their eternal judgment.

Those who repent of all their sins will receive “all that [the] Father hath” (D&C 84:38). For those who choose something less, they will “enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received” (D&C 88:32). As C. S. Lewis wrote, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”²⁷

Conclusion

Traditional location-focused models of the plan of salvation provide a wonderful introduction and overview of our journey through the eternities. The model presented here complements these widely used diagrams by focusing on the three pillars that uphold that plan and highlight the centrality of the Savior Jesus Christ and his infinite Atonement. Additionally, this model emphasizes the various states of being through which we pass in our journey through the plan. It also emphasizes other major roles of Jesus Christ as Creator and Judge within the Father’s plan.

Through the Savior’s perfect and infinite Atonement, God has enabled all of us to overcome all effects of the Fall and progress to become more like him. Everyone ever born into mortality will receive unconditional redemption from the direct effects of the fall through the Resurrection of Christ. That universal redemption will lead all to be judged on their use of agency, based on their own accountability. Eternal salvation from the indirect effects of the Fall (our own sins) is granted to those who meet the Savior’s conditions for repentance (Alma 42:27).

These doctrines (Resurrection and Judgment), taught with the pillars of eternity, have supernal power to stir God’s children to repentance. Hence, Joseph Smith taught, “The doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgment are necessary to preach among the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁸

Many prophets in the Book of Mormon follow a powerful teaching pattern. They clearly explain certain elements of the plan of salvation and then invite their audiences to act on what they taught. Those invitations often include things such as increasing one's faith in Christ, repenting of sins, being baptized, or continuing to press forward in the path that leads to eternal life (see Alma 7:14; 34:31; Helaman 7:23; 10:14; 12:23; 14:19; 3 Nephi 9:22; Mormon 5:24; 7:8; Ether 4:18).

After dying on the cross, Jesus taught the spirits in paradise based on this same pattern. "And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance" (D&C 138:19).

Studying multiple aspects of God's plan through more than one lens allows us to see more facets of what he has put into place for our eternal progression and happiness. This opens additional channels for the Holy Ghost to inspire increased faith in the Savior, repentance of our sins, and increased desires to make and keep covenants with God.

When we study and teach his plan using the words and examples that he and his prophets use, we will have a greater tendency to inspire more of his children to repent and prepare to stand before him spotless at the great and last day—having been reconciled to God through his Only Begotten Son (see 2 Nephi 10:24; 25:23; Jacob 4:11). **RE**

Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Thanks Be to God," *Ensign*, July 1982, 51.
2. This can be illustrated by a simple Internet search on the key phrase "plan of salvation." Narrowing the search to include only images reveals the dominance of the traditional circles and lines in plan visualizations. This can also be seen as the first option for teaching the plan in the Book of Mormon Teacher Resource Manual, found at <https://www.lds.org/manual/book-of-mormon-teacher-resource-manual/plan-of-salvation-overview?lang=eng>.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants," *Ensign*, May 1987, 83.
4. For reference to our Mother in Heaven, see "Mother in Heaven," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>.
5. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 2010, 129.
6. History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda, 62, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-addenda/62?; emphasis added>.
7. See specifically verses 18–28. See also the lds.org Guide to the Scriptures entry for "Intelligence, Intelligences" and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entry on "Intelligences."
8. "Creation," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/creation?lang=eng>. See also Keith Meservy, "Four Accounts of the Creation," *Ensign*, January 1986, 50.

9. “Fall of Adam,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/fall-of-adam?lang=eng>. See also Daniel K. Judd, *The Fortunate Fall: Understanding the Blessings and Burdens of Adversity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011).

10. “Atonement of Jesus Christ,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/atonement-of-jesus-christ?lang=eng>. See also Jeffrey R. Holland’s entry for “Atonement” in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.

11. Russell M. Nelson, “A Treasured Testament,” *Ensign*, July 1993, 64. Elder Bruce R. McConkie also stated something similar: “These three divine events—the three pillars of eternity—are inseparably woven together into one grand tapestry known as the eternal plan of salvation. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 81.

12. See 2 Nephi 26:24 and 3 Nephi 27:14–15.

13. Neal A. Maxwell, “Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship,” *Ensign*, March 1983, 71.

14. History, 1838–1856, volume B-1, 795–96, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/249>.

15. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 81.

16. David A. Bednar, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 42–43.

17. See 2 Nephi 2:29.

18. The LDS essay “Resurrection,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/resurrection?lang=eng> contains many additional talks, scriptures, and study materials on this subject.

19. D. Todd Christofferson, “Redemption,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 109.

20. See Terry B. Ball, “The Final Judgment,” in *The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels*, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2001), 1–18.

21. Christofferson, “Redemption,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 109–10.

22. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 60–70. See also Robert L. Millet, *By Grace Are We Saved* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989). See also Bruce C. Hafen, “Grace,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:560–63.

23. See 2 Nephi 2:6–10; Romans 3:24, 28. Note that Joseph Smith’s change in verse 24 is substantively the same as Martin Luther’s critical change in his German Bible that could be argued as the germination of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther added the word *Allein* (which means alone) after the word *faith*. Joseph added the word *only* after the word *justified*.

24. Ezra Taft Benson, “Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” *Speeches of the Year, 1974* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 313.

25. Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 86.

26. This is a powerful reference to a prophecy from Isaiah 45:22–23, where Jehovah declared that “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Paul, in two of his letters, referenced that statement, once in Romans 14:11 and then more directly in Philippians 2:11, where he stated “that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In this particular case, Paul is equating Jesus Christ with Jehovah from the Isaiah passage. This Isaiahic phrase is also used in Mosiah 27:31 and D&C 88:104.

27. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 72–73.

28. History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda, 8, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/543?>; emphasis in original.