

# “Lovest Thou Me?”

Elder Steven C. Barlow—Of the Seventy—October 2025

**1** If we want to show our love for God, we should understand how He recognizes our love.

**2** In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother initially struggled to celebrate when his younger brother returned home after a period of poor choices and “wast[ing] his substance with riotous living.” **The elder brother’s pride and self-righteousness kept him from embracing the joy of his brother’s repentant return.** We also may let opportunities pass us by without letting our loved ones know, through our words and actions, of our sincere love for them.

**3** Like the prodigal son’s elder brother, **our focus is often centered on ourselves. We are so consumed with seeking evidence of God’s love for us, and we become frustrated when we do not see it.** But the beautiful paradox is that the more we are focused on showing our love for God, the more easily we recognize His love for us.

**4** Sometimes the way we show our love to those we hold most dear is not necessarily the way they recognize love. This may be frustrating for both the giver and the receiver. It may be helpful to ask those we love how they recognize love expressed. Likewise, if we want to show our love for God, we should understand how He recognizes our love.

**5** We show our love to the Lord when we put Him above “these,” and “these” can be anyone, any activity, or anything that displaces Him from being the most important influence in our lives.

There will never be enough time in a day, a week, a month, or a year to get done all we want or need to accomplish. Part of the test of mortality is to use the precious resource of time for what is most important for our eternal good and to let go of those things that are less important.

**6** “[The Lord] saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. **He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.**”

## A Joseph Smith on Love

**[A1]** We have thought that we must separate our love of God from our love of the world. In one sense, yes. But the Prophet taught that God, who formed and beautified this world, will enable its sanctified sons and daughters to inherit it in its eventual full-flowering re-creation. (HC 5:385) Again, like has affinity with like. **When John the Beloved said, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,” he meant the corruptions of men in the world. The Prophet clarified the preposition and thus the proposition. His version reads, “Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world.”** (JS: John 2:15) The lights and shadows of Eden in all color and variety are in this world, not just as a fading racial memory but as a prophecy. (The “end of the world” for Joseph Smith is the end of rampant wickedness, not the destruction of the earth. (Teachings, p. 98.))

**[A2]** We must love the world, and what is in it, as we love all that feels and all that moves. Once again a withdrawal doctrine is transformed into a participation doctrine. The world itself is a composition of the love of God. These instances suggest the close interrelationship of love and knowledge. Our hearts cannot get closer to God than our minds. And here, once more, an assumption is uprooted. We all quietly suspect that love may destroy “objectivity” and the perception of truth, if not man to man at least man to cosmos. The Prophet taught the exact contrary. The tensions, and they are sometimes traumatic, between our struggle for God and our struggle for truth are due to our ignorance of both. We cannot apprehend nor comprehend reality as it is save through the love of God. And the Prophet taught that any imposed limitation on our pursuit of either is a limitation on love. For himself he wrote, “It feels so good not to be trammelled.” Thus, in one breath he could say that we want all men to “drink into one principle of love,” and in the next add, “One of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism’ is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.” (Teachings, p. 313.)

**[A3]** Often love is described as something that “covers” sins, a sort of “blindness” to our own or others’ defects. **Says the scripture, “Charity covereth a multitude of sins.” Perhaps so. But the Prophet strengthened the verb. “Charity,” he wrote, “preventeth a multitude of sins.”** (JS: 1 Peter 4:8) In us and in others, love is the Lord’s preventive medicine; and, as we are now learning, it is the only lasting foundation for powerful therapy, whether for sin or for suffering.

**[A4]** But does not love for God separate us from those who love Him not? The Prophet replies, writing from a damp, submerged dungeon, that **God-like love, the unique love of those who walk uprightly, is “without prejudice.”** “It gives scope to the mind which enables us to conduct ourselves with a greater liberality toward all that are not of our faith than what they have for themselves.” (Teachings p. 147) He taught, in fact, that it is a mark of our unfamiliarity with the principles of godliness when our affectionate feelings are “contracted.”

**[A5]** The closer we come to our Heavenly Father, he told some huffy sisters in Relief Society, the more we look upon perishing souls with compassion. “We feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our backs.” (Teachings p. 241) It follows, and he gave it as a lasting key, that we know something in us has passed from life to death when we hate the brethren. (Teachings pp. 136, 137, 193) Any brethren.

Truman G. Madsen *Joseph Smith and the Sources of Love* (1996)

[https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue\\_V01N01\\_122s.pdf](https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V01N01_122s.pdf)

**7** We show our love for Heavenly Father when we serve, listen to, love, lift, or minister to His children. That service may be as simple as truly seeing others without judgment. In the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, we get a glimpse of the character of those who will inherit a celestial glory: "They see as they are seen, and know as they are known." They see others as God sees them, and He sees them as they can become, with glorious divine potential.

**8** In the early days of launching a company, my business partner and I would pray earnestly before important meetings, asking for Heavenly Father's help. Time after time, God answered our prayers, and our meetings went well. After one meeting, my business partner pointed out that we had been quick to ask for help but slow to give thanks. From then on, we made it a habit to offer sincere prayers of gratitude, recognizing the Lord's hand in our successes. We show our love for God with "an attitude of gratitude."

**9** The Savior said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." This kind of obedience is neither blind nor compulsory but is a sincere and willing expression of love. **Father in Heaven wants us to want to be obedient.** Sister Tamara W. Runia called this "affectionate obedience." She said, "Even though we don't have perfect obedience yet, we try affectionate obedience now, choosing to stay, again and again, because we love Him."

**Heavenly Father gave us agency to inspire us to want to choose Him.** His work and glory is not only to bring to pass our eternal life but also includes a hope that our greatest desire is to return to Him. However, He will never force us to obey.

**10** Elder Dale G. Renlund said: "Our Heavenly Father's goal in parenting is not to have His children do what is right; it is to have His children choose to do what is right and ultimately become like Him. If He simply wanted us to be obedient, He would use immediate rewards and punishments to influence our behaviors." We show our love for God when we choose to obey and follow Him.

## **B** The 5 Love Languages

**The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate** is a 1992 nonfiction book by Baptist pastor Gary Chapman. It outlines five general ways that romantic partners express and experience love, which Chapman calls "love languages". Empirical evidence does not strongly support its core claims.

According to Chapman, the five "love languages" are:

- **Words of affirmation** - Showing love through verbal appreciation, compliments, and encouragement.
- **Quality time** - Showing love by giving undivided attention, engaging in meaningful conversations, and participating in various activities together.
- **Gifts** - Showing love through thoughtful and meaningful gifts that symbolize appreciation and affection.
- **Acts of service** - Showing love by performing various tasks that are helpful and ease the partner's burdens.
- **Physical touch** - Showing love through physical gestures such as hugging, kissing, and holding hands among others.

According to Chapman's theory, each person has one primary and one secondary love language.

To determine another person's love language, Chapman suggests observing how they express love to others, and analyze what they complain about most often and what they request from their significant other most often. He theorizes that people tend to naturally give love in the way that they prefer to receive love, and better communication between couples can be accomplished when one can demonstrate caring to the other person in the love language that resonates mostly with their partner's love language.

Gary Chapman *The 5 Love Languages* (1992)

<https://ucuilorin.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/the-5-love-languages-gary-chapman.pdf>

## **C** Opportunities for Love

**When his grandson Paxton was born with a rare genetic disorder, Elder Rasband and his family "knew Heavenly Father was blessing our family, my daughter and son-in-law in particular, with a divine opportunity.** As his father and I put our fingers on his tiny head in the first of many priesthood blessings, the words came into my mind from the ninth chapter of John: "that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3).

Paxton lived only three years, spending a third of his life in the hospital undergoing 34 surgeries. And yet he embraced life and was full of light. The Rasband family learned from him "greater patience, humility, gratitude and resilience. We learned to trust the Lord and His ways," Elder Rasband said.

"From Paxton we learned to cleave unto the Lord and accept His will."

Ronald A. Rasband *4 Ways You Can Express Your Love for God* (2022)

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-rasband-shares-4-ways-you-can-express-your-love-for-god>

<https://8ward.eu>