

## 2. What do Latter-day Saints believe about God?

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The Latter-day Saint concept of God, like that of other Christians, is rooted in what the Father has revealed about himself to his prophets and apostles, as well as in what can be learned about him from the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

With the vast majority of their fellow Christians, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe in a God of love, who has all knowledge and all power (see 1 Nephi 11:22; 2 Nephi 1:15; 2 Nephi 9:20; D&C 38:1–3; Moses 1:6; 1 Nephi 7:12; Alma 26:35). His continued dealings with the world and with his children in it are chronicled in all four of the canonized “standard works” of the restored Church of Jesus Christ (i.e., the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price).

Latter-day Saints believe, with other Christians, in three divine persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—and they believe that they are three separate persons (see Matthew 28:19; 2 Nephi 31:21; Alma 11:44; Articles of Faith 1:1). The accounts of Jesus’ baptism at the hand of John the Baptist, for example, report that when Jesus emerged from the Jordan River, the Spirit of God descended like a dove from the sky, while the Father’s “voice from heaven” testified to the divine sonship of Jesus (see Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). The New Testament Gospels record several statements from Jesus indicating that he saw himself as separate from God the Father and subordinate to him (see, for example, John 14:28; Matthew 20:23; 26:39; John 5:19; 8:17–18; 17:1–5). In its opening verses in the original Greek, John’s Gospel appears to distinguish between the Father, who is “*the God*” (*ho theós*) and the Son, who is “*God*” (*theós*). The apostle Paul occasionally reserved the term *God* uniquely for the Father (as in 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus, too, is divine (see John 1:1; 20:28). Paul wrote of Christ that “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). The scriptures also teach, and Latter-day Saints therefore believe, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one (see 2 Nephi 31:21; Mosiah 15:4; Alma 11:44; 3 Nephi 11:36; Mormon 7:7; D&C 20:28). “I and my Father are one,” said the Savior, declaring further that “the Father is in me” (John 10:30, 38).

### One or Three?

How can this be? How can there be one God, yet three divine persons? Christian thinkers have wrestled with this issue for many centuries. The solution accepted by most Christians was reached through negotiations and debates in the great councils that were held over several centuries following the death of the apostles and their disciples. Borrowing concepts from the era’s most advanced thought, Greek philosophy, these Christian theologians attempted to describe the unity-in-multiplicity of the Godhead in philosophical terms.

Latter-day Saints, by contrast, guided not by philosophers but by modern prophets and apostles, see the unity of the Godhead in the absolute oneness of purpose and will that characterizes Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Jesus sought to establish this same oneness among his disciples. In his famous prayer, the Savior implored “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:21–23).

### Our Father

Latter-day Saints understand that God is literally the Father of the spirits of every human being (see Numbers 16:22; 27:16; Matthew 6:9; Ephesians 4:6; Hebrews 12:9). “For,” as the apostle Paul told the Athenians, “we are . . . his offspring” (Acts 17:28; compare 17:29). Because we are the children of such a Father, the Savior admonishes us to live up to our heritage, to “be . . . perfect, even as [our] Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48; compare 3 Nephi 12:48; 27:27; 28:10).

Because God is our Father, Latter-day Saints believe, he is not merely some distant judge who holds us to an abstract standard of justice. Far more perfectly than even the best mortal parents, he loves us and is concerned with our happiness and welfare (see Matthew 7:7–11). “For behold,” he told Moses, “this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Moreover, because he took upon himself mortal flesh and dwelt among us, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, understands us in all our human weaknesses, trials, and sorrows. The ancient Book of Mormon prophet Alma taught that Jesus would come to earth and submit himself to death and suffering, “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). Both the New Testament and modern revelation received through the Prophet Joseph Smith testify that Christ’s earthly mission was a triumphant success: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). “He descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; which truth shineth” (D&C 88:6–7).

## **God’s Physical Form**

Latter-day Saints take literally the many passages in the Bible that describe God as having a physical form. God created Adam “in his own image” and “after [his] likeness” (Genesis 1:26–27), and Paul taught that ordinary mortal men were in the “image” of God (1 Cor-inthians 11:7). During his earthly life, Jesus Christ was said to be “the express image” of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3). When the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in the grove in 1820, the young boy “saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Our Relationship with God**

Thus, for Latter-day Saints God is both near and distant. He is perfect. We are not. He is infinitely loving, just, merciful, and wise. We are not. He has all power and glory. We certainly do not. But he is our Father, we are akin to him, and he wants to share with us all that he has and is. “To him that overcometh,” said the Savior, “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). Accordingly, believers in the restored gospel are filled with love for God their Father, with deep gratitude and divinely inspired hope. “Beloved,” wrote the apostle John, “now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

## **Note**

3. Joseph Smith to John Wentworth, March 1842, in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:536.