

A young child with dark hair is sitting in a lush green field. The child is wearing a blue and white striped tank top and blue pants with a floral pattern. The child is looking down at the grass. The background shows a clear blue sky with some clouds and a distant horizon line.

Why marriage, **Why** family?

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Above the Great West Door of the renowned Westminster Abbey in London, England, stand the statues of 10 Christian martyrs of the 20th century. Included among them is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a brilliant German theologian born in 1906.¹ Bonhoeffer became a vocal critic of the Nazi dictatorship and its treatment of Jews and others. He was imprisoned for his active opposition and finally executed in a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was a prolific writer, and some of his best-known pieces are letters that sympathetic guards helped him smuggle out of prison, later published as *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

One of those letters was to his niece before her wedding. It included these significant insights: “Marriage is more than your love for each other. ... In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to his glory, and calls into his kingdom. In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man.

In what way does marriage between a man and a woman transcend their love for one another and their own happiness to become “a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind”? In what sense does it come “from above, from God”?

“*...love
comes from you,
but marriage
from above,
from God.*”

To understand, we have to go back to the beginning.

Premortal Experience

Prophets have revealed that we first existed as intelligences and that we were given form, or spirit bodies, by God, thus becoming His spirit children—sons and daughters of heavenly parents.³ There came a time in this premortal existence of spirits when, in furtherance of His desire that we “could have a privilege to advance like himself,”⁴ our Heavenly Father prepared an enabling plan. In the scriptures it is given various names, including “the plan of salvation,”⁵ “the great plan of happiness,”⁶ and “the plan of redemption.”⁷ The two principal purposes of the plan were explained to Abraham in these words:

“And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [spirits] may dwell;

“And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

“And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; ... and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.”⁸

A Path for Us

Thanks to our Heavenly Father, we had already become spirit beings. Now He was offering us a path to complete or perfect that being. The addition of the physical element is essential to the fulness of being and glory that God Himself enjoys. If, while with God in the premortal spirit world, we would agree to participate in His plan—or in other words “keep [our] first estate”—we would “be added upon” with a physical body as we came to dwell on the earth that He created for us.

If, then in the course of our mortal experience, we chose to “do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God [should] command [us],” we would have kept our “second estate.” This means that by our choices

we would demonstrate to God (and to ourselves) our commitment and capacity to live His celestial law while outside His presence and in a physical body with all its powers, appetites, and passions. Could we bridle the flesh so that it became the instrument rather than the master of the spirit? Could we be trusted both in time and eternity with godly powers, including power to create life? Would we individually overcome evil? Those who did would “have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever”—a very significant aspect of that glory being a resurrected, immortal, and glorified physical body.⁹ No wonder we “shouted for joy” at these magnificent possibilities and promises.¹⁰

Four Requirements

First was the Creation of the earth as our dwelling place. Whatever the details of the creation process, we know that it was not accidental but that it was directed by God the Father and implemented by Jesus Christ—“all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”¹¹

Second is the condition of mortality. Adam and Eve acted for all who had chosen to participate in the Father’s great plan of happiness.¹² Their Fall created the conditions needed for our physical birth and for mortal experience and learning outside the presence of God. With the Fall came an awareness of good and evil and the God-given power to choose.¹³ Finally, the Fall brought about physical death needed to make our time in mortality temporary so that we would not live forever in our sins.¹⁴

Third is redemption from the Fall. We see the role of death in our Heavenly Father’s plan, but that plan would become void without some way to overcome death in the end, both physical and spiritual. Thus, a Redeemer, the Only Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, suffered and died to atone for Adam and Eve’s transgression, thereby providing resurrection and immortality for all. And since none of us will have been perfectly and consistently obedient to the gospel law, His Atonement also redeems us from our own sins on condition of repentance. With the Savior’s atoning grace providing forgiveness of sins and sanctification of the soul, we can spiritually be born again and reconciled to God. Our spiritual

death—our separation from God—will end.¹⁵

Fourth, and finally, is the setting for our physical birth and subsequent spiritual rebirth into the kingdom of God. For His work to succeed to “[exalt us] with himself,”¹⁶ God ordained that men and women should marry and give birth to children, thereby creating, in partnership with God, the physical bodies that are key to the test of mortality and essential to eternal glory with Him. He also ordained that parents should establish families and rear their children in light and truth,¹⁷ leading them to a hope in Christ. The Father commands us:

“That ... inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the [Holy] Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.”¹⁸

Knowing why we left the presence of our Heavenly Father and what it takes to return and be exalted with Him, it becomes very clear that nothing relative to our time on earth can be more important than physical birth and spiritual rebirth, the two prerequisites of eternal life. This is, to use the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the “office” of marriage, the “post of responsibility towards ... mankind,” that this divine institution “from above, from God” occupies. It is the “link in the chain of the generations” both here and hereafter—the order of heaven.

A family built on the marriage of a man and woman supplies the best setting for God’s plan to thrive—the setting for the birth of children, who come in purity and from God, and the environment for the learning and preparation ...

