

THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

*W*E, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE that the family which mortal life is created to be is divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its continuation in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and cherish each other and their children. "Children are born in innocence" (D&C 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness,

to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the care of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptations. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who do not fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was issued by President Gordon B. Hinckley on the steps of the Salt Lake Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah, on September 26, 1994.

The Eternal Family

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This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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Eternal Family As Taught by Prophets

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

1. The Eternal Family and the Nature of God

1.1 - Becoming Like God

LDS.ORG Essay

1. One of the most common images in Western and Eastern religions alike is of God as a parent and of human beings as God's children. Billions pray to God as their parent, invoke the brotherhood and sisterhood of all people to promote peace, and reach out to the weary and troubled out of deep conviction that each of God's children has great worth.

2. But people of different faiths understand the parent-child relationship between God and humans in significantly different ways. Some understand the phrase "child of God" as an honorary title reserved only for those who believe in God and accept His guidance as they might accept a father's. Many see parent-child descriptions of God's relationship to humanity as metaphors to express His love for His creations and their dependence on His sustenance and protection.

3. Latter-day Saints see all people as children of God in a full and complete sense; they consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential. Each has an eternal core and is "a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents."¹ Each possesses seeds of divinity and must choose whether to live in harmony or tension with that divinity. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people may "progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny."² Just as a child can develop the attributes of his or her parents over time, the divine nature that humans inherit can be developed to become like their Heavenly Father's.

4. The desire to nurture the divinity in His children is one of God's attributes that most inspires, motivates, and humbles members of the Church. God's loving parentage and guidance can help each willing, obedient child of God receive of His fulness and of His glory. This knowledge transforms the way Latter-day Saints see their fellow human beings. The teaching that men and women have the potential to be exalted to a state of godliness clearly expands beyond what is understood by most contemporary Christian churches and expresses for the Latter-day Saints a yearning rooted in the Bible to live as God lives, to love as He loves, and to prepare for all that our loving Father in Heaven wishes for His children.

What does the Bible say about humans' divine potential?

5. Several biblical passages intimate that humans can become like God. The likeness of humans to God is emphasized in the first chapter of Genesis: "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."³ After Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," God said they had "become as one of us,"⁴ suggesting that a process of approaching godliness was already underway. Later in the Old Testament, a passage in the book of Psalms declares, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High."⁵

6. New Testament passages also point to this doctrine. When Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the grounds that "thou, being a man, makest thyself God," He responded, echoing Psalms, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?"⁶ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded His disciples to become "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."⁷ In turn, the Apostle Peter referred to the Savior's "exceeding great and precious promises" that we might become "partakers of the divine nature."⁸ The Apostle Paul taught that we are "the offspring of God" and emphasized that as such "we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."⁹ The book of Revelation contains a promise from Jesus Christ that "to him that overcometh 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."¹⁰

7. These passages can be interpreted in different ways. Yet by viewing them through the clarifying lens of revelations received by Joseph Smith, Latter-day Saints see these scriptures as straightforward expressions of humanity's divine nature and potential. Many other Christians read the same passages far more metaphorically because they experience the Bible through the lens of doctrinal interpretations that developed over time after the period described in the New Testament.

How have ideas about divinity shifted over Christian history?

8. Latter-day Saint beliefs would have sounded more familiar to the earliest generations of Christians than

they do to many modern Christians. Many church fathers (influential theologians and teachers in early Christianity) spoke approvingly of the idea that humans can become divine. One modern scholar refers to the “ubiquity of the doctrine of deification”—the teaching that humans could become God—in the first centuries after Christ’s death.¹¹ The church father Irenaeus, who died about A.D. 202, asserted that Jesus Christ “did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be what He is Himself.”¹² Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215) wrote that “the Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God.”¹³ Basil the Great (A.D. 330–379) also celebrated this prospect—not just “being made like to God,” but “highest of all, the being made God.”¹⁴

9. What exactly the early church fathers meant when they spoke of becoming God is open to interpretation,¹⁵ but it is clear that references to deification became more contested in the late Roman period and were infrequent by the medieval era. The first known objection by a church father to teaching deification came in the fifth century.¹⁶ By the sixth century, teachings on “becoming God” appear more limited in scope, as in the definition provided by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. A.D. 500): “Deification ... is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.”¹⁷

10. Why did these beliefs fade from prominence? Changing perspectives on the creation of the world may have contributed to the gradual shift toward more limited views of human potential. The earliest Jewish and Christian commentaries on the Creation assumed that God had organized the world out of preexisting materials, emphasizing the goodness of God in shaping such a life-sustaining order.¹⁸ But the incursion of new philosophical ideas in the second century led to the development of a doctrine that God created the universe ex nihilo—“out of nothing.” This ultimately became the dominant teaching about the Creation within the Christian world.¹⁹ In order to emphasize God’s power, many theologians reasoned that nothing could have existed for as long as He had. It became important in Christian circles to assert that God had originally been completely alone.

11. Creation ex nihilo widened the perceived gulf between God and humans. It became less common to teach either that human souls had existed before the world or that they could inherit and develop the attributes of God in their entirety in the future.²⁰ Gradually, as the depravity of humankind and the immense distance between Creator and creature were

increasingly emphasized, the concept of deification faded from Western Christianity,²¹ though it remains a central tenet of Eastern Orthodoxy, one of the three major branches of Christianity.²²

How were ideas about deification introduced to Latter-day Saints?

12. The earliest Latter-day Saints came from a society dominated by English-speaking Protestants, most of whom accepted both ex nihilo creation and the Westminster Confession’s definition of God as a being “without body, parts, or passions.”²³ They likely knew little or nothing about the diversity of Christian beliefs in the first centuries after Jesus Christ’s ministry or about early Christian writings on deification. But revelations received by Joseph Smith diverged from the prevailing ideas of the time and taught doctrine that, for some, reopened debates on the nature of God, creation, and humankind.

13. Early revelations to Joseph Smith taught that humans are created in the image of God and that God cares intimately for His children. In the Book of Mormon, a prophet “saw the finger of the Lord” and was astonished to learn that human physical forms were truly made in the image of God.²⁴ In another early revelation, Enoch (who “walked with God” in the Bible²⁵) witnessed God weeping over His creations. When Enoch asked, “How is it thou canst weep?” he learned that God’s compassion toward human suffering is integral to His love.²⁶ Joseph Smith also learned that God desires that His children receive the same kind of exalted existence of which He partakes. As God declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”²⁷

14. In 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon experienced a vision of the afterlife. In the vision, they learned that the just and unjust alike would receive immortality through a universal resurrection, but only those “who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” would receive the fulness of God’s glory and be “gods, even the sons of God.”²⁸ Another revelation soon confirmed that “the saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance and be made equal with him.”²⁹ Latter-day Saints use the term exaltation to describe the glorious reward of receiving one’s full inheritance as a child of Heavenly Father, which is available through the Atonement of Christ, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.³⁰

15. This striking view of each human’s potential future was accompanied by revealed teachings on

humanity's past. As Joseph Smith continued to receive revelations, he learned that the light or intelligence at the core of each human soul "was not created or made, neither indeed can be." God is the Father of each human spirit, and because only "spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy," He presented a plan for human beings to receive physical bodies and progress through their mortal experience toward a fulness of joy. Earthly birth, then, is not the beginning of an individual's life: "Man was also in the beginning with God."³¹ Likewise, Joseph Smith taught that the material world has eternal roots, fully repudiating the concept of creation ex nihilo. "Earth, water, &c—all these had their existence in an elementary State from Eternity," he said in an 1839 sermon.³² God organized the universe out of existing elements.

16. Joseph Smith continued to receive revelation on the themes of divine nature and exaltation during the last two years of his life. In a revelation recorded in July 1843 that linked exaltation with eternal marriage, the Lord declared that those who keep covenants, including the covenant of eternal marriage, will inherit "all heights and depths." "Then," says the revelation, "shall they be gods, because they have no end." They will receive "a continuation of the seeds forever and ever."³³

17. The following April, feeling he was "never in any nearer relationship to God than at the present time,"³⁴ Joseph Smith spoke about the nature of God and the future of humankind to the Saints, who had gathered for a general Church conference. He used the occasion in part to reflect upon the death of a Church member named King Follett, who had died unexpectedly a month earlier. When he rose to speak, the wind was blowing, so Joseph asked his listeners to give him their "profound attention" and to "pray that the Lord may strengthen my lungs" and stay the winds until his message had been delivered.³⁵

18. "What kind of a being is God?" he asked. Human beings needed to know, he argued, because "if men do not comprehend the character of God they do not comprehend themselves."³⁶ In that phrase, the Prophet collapsed the gulf that centuries of confusion had created between God and humanity. Human nature was at its core divine. God "was once as one of us" and "all the spirits that God ever sent into the world" were likewise "susceptible of enlargement." Joseph Smith preached that long before the world was formed, God found "himself in the midst" of these beings and "saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a

privilege to advance like himself"³⁷ and be "exalted" with Him.³⁸

19. Joseph told the assembled Saints, "You have got to learn how to be a god yourself."³⁹ In order to do that, the Saints needed to learn godliness, or to be more like God. The process would be ongoing and would require patience, faith, continuing repentance, obedience to the commandments of the gospel, and reliance on Christ. Like ascending a ladder, individuals needed to learn the "first principles of the Gospel" and continue beyond the limits of mortal knowledge until they could "learn the last principles of the Gospel" when the time came.⁴⁰ "It is not all to be comprehended in this world," Joseph said.⁴¹ "It will take a long time after the grave to understand the whole."⁴²

20. That was the last time the Prophet spoke in a general conference. Three months later, a mob stormed Carthage Jail and martyred him and his brother Hyrum.

What has been taught in the Church about divine nature since Joseph Smith?

21. Since that sermon, known as the King Follett discourse, the doctrine that humans can progress to exaltation and godliness has been taught within the Church. Lorenzo Snow, the Church's fifth President, coined a well-known couplet: "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be."⁴³ Little has been revealed about the first half of this couplet, and consequently little is taught. When asked about this topic, Church President Gordon B. Hinckley told a reporter in 1997, "That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don't know very much about." When asked about the belief in humans' divine potential, President Hinckley responded, "Well, as God is, man may become. We believe in eternal progression. Very strongly."⁴⁴

22. Eliza R. Snow, a Church leader and poet, rejoiced over the doctrine that we are, in a full and absolute sense, children of God. "I had learned to call thee Father, / Thru thy Spirit from on high," she wrote, "But, until the key of knowledge / Was restored, I knew not why." Latter-day Saints have also been moved by the knowledge that their divine parentage includes a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. Expressing that truth, Eliza R. Snow asked, "In the heav'ns are parents single?" and answered with a resounding no: "Truth eternal / Tells me I've a mother there."⁴⁵ That knowledge plays an important role in Latter-day Saint belief. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, "Our theology

begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them.”[46](#)

23. Humankind’s divine nature and potential for exaltation have been repeatedly taught in general conference addresses, Church magazines, and other Church materials. “Divine nature” is one of eight core values in the Church’s Young Women program. Teaching on human beings’ divine parentage, nature, and potential features prominently in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Divine nature and exaltation are essential and beloved teachings in the Church.

Does belief in exaltation make Latter-day Saints polytheists?

24. For some observers, the doctrine that humans should strive for godliness may evoke images of ancient pantheons with competing deities. Such images are incompatible with Latter-day Saint doctrine. Latter-day Saints believe that God’s children will always worship Him. Our progression will never change His identity as our Father and our God. Indeed, our exalted, eternal relationship with Him will be part of the “fulness of joy” He desires for us.

25. Latter-day Saints also believe strongly in the fundamental unity of the divine. They believe that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost, though distinct beings, are unified in purpose and doctrine.[47](#) It is in this light that Latter-day Saints understand Jesus’s prayer for His disciples through the ages: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”[48](#)

26. If humans live out of harmony with God’s goodness, they cannot grow into God’s glory. Joseph Smith taught that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only [except] upon the principles of righteousness.” When humans abandon God’s selfless purposes and standards, “the heavens withdraw themselves [and] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved.”[49](#) Pride is incompatible with progress; disunity is impossible between exalted beings.

How do Latter-day Saints envision exaltation?

27. Since human conceptions of reality are necessarily limited in mortality, religions struggle to adequately articulate their visions of eternal glory. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”[50](#) These limitations make it easy for images of salvation to become cartoonish when represented in popular culture. For example, scriptural expressions of the deep

peace and overwhelming joy of salvation are often reproduced in the well-known image of humans sitting on their own clouds and playing harps after death. Latter-day Saints’ doctrine of exaltation is often similarly reduced in media to a cartoonish image of people receiving their own planets.

28. A cloud and harp are hardly a satisfying image for eternal joy, although most Christians would agree that inspired music can be a tiny foretaste of the joy of eternal salvation. Likewise, while few Latter-day Saints would identify with caricatures of having their own planet, most would agree that the awe inspired by creation hints at our creative potential in the eternities.

29. Latter-day Saints tend to imagine exaltation through the lens of the sacred in mortal experience. They see the seeds of godhood in the joy of bearing and nurturing children and the intense love they feel for those children, in the impulse to reach out in compassionate service to others, in the moments they are caught off guard by the beauty and order of the universe, in the grounding feeling of making and keeping divine covenants. Church members imagine exaltation less through images of what they will get and more through the relationships they have now and how those relationships might be purified and elevated. As the scriptures teach, “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”[51](#)

How important are teachings about exaltation to Latter-day Saint beliefs overall?

30. The teaching that human beings have a divine nature and future shapes the way Latter-day Saints view fundamental doctrine. Perhaps most significantly, belief in divine nature helps us more deeply appreciate the Atonement of Jesus Christ. While many Christian theologians have expressed the magnitude of the Savior’s Atonement by emphasizing human depravity, Latter-day Saints understand the magnitude of the Atonement of Christ in terms of the vast human potential it makes possible. Christ’s Atonement not only provides forgiveness from sin and victory over death, it also redeems imperfect relationships, heals the spiritual wounds that stifle growth, and strengthens and enables individuals to develop the attributes of Christ.[52](#) Latter-day Saints believe that it is only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that we can have a sure hope of eternal glory and that the power of His Atonement is fully accessed only by faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in following the

instruction and example of Christ.⁵³ Thus, those who become like God and enter into a fulness of His glory are described as people who have been “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”⁵⁴

31. An awareness of humans’ divine potential also influences Latter-day Saints’ understanding of gospel principles such as the importance of divine commandments, the role of temples, and the sanctity of individual moral agency. Belief that human beings are actually God’s children also changes Latter-day Saints’ behavior and attitudes. For example, even in societies where casual and premarital sex are considered acceptable, Latter-day Saints retain a deep reverence for the God-given procreative and bonding powers of human sexual intimacy and remain committed to a higher standard in the use of those sacred powers. Studies suggest that Latter-day Saints place an exceptionally high priority on marriage and parenthood,⁵⁵ a consequence in part of a strong belief in heavenly parents and a commitment to strive for that divinity.

32. Conclusion. All human beings are children of loving heavenly parents and possess seeds of divinity within them. In His infinite love, God invites His children to cultivate their eternal potential by the grace of God, through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ The doctrine of humans’ eternal potential to become like their Heavenly Father is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ and inspires love, hope, and gratitude in the hearts of faithful Latter-day Saints.

Resources

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 129.
3. Genesis 1:26–27.
4. Genesis 2:17; 3:22.
5. Psalm 82:6.
6. John 10:33–34.
7. Matthew 5:48. The word perfect in Matthew 5:48 can also be translated whole or complete, implying a distant objective and ongoing, concerted effort (see Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 86).
8. 2 Peter 1:4.
9. Acts 17:29; Romans 8:16–17.
10. Revelation 3:21.
11. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (2004), 6.
12. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Father Down to A.D. 325* (1977), 1:526.
13. Clement, “Exhortation to the Heathen,” in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:174.

14. Saint Basil the Great, “On the Spirit,” in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series (1994), 8:16.
15. There are likely important differences as well as similarities between the thinking of the church fathers and Latter-day Saint teachings. For a discussion of similarities and differences between exaltation as understood by Latter-day Saints and modern Eastern Orthodox understanding of statements by church fathers on deification, see Jordan Vajda, “Partakers of the Divine Nature: A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization,” *Occasional Papers Series*, no. 3 (2002), available at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu.
16. See Vladimir Kharlamov, “Rhetorical Application of Theosis in Greek Patristic Theology,” in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (2008), 115.
17. Quoted in Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 1; italics added.
18. As the second-century church father Justin Martyr said, “We have been taught that He in the beginning did of His goodness, for man’s sake, create all things out of unformed matter” (*The First Apology of Justin*, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:165; see also Frances Young, “‘Creatio Ex Nihilo’: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44, no. 1 [1991]: 139–51; Markus Bockmuehl, “Creation Ex Nihilo in Palestinian Judaism and Early Christianity,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no. 3 [2012]: 253–70).
19. For information on the second-century context that gave birth to creation ex nihilo, see Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought* (2004).
20. See Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (2010).
21. A minor resurgence of the doctrine of deification within Western Christianity occurred at the hands of a group of 17th-century English clergymen-scholars, called the Cambridge Platonists. (See Benjamin Whichcote, “The Manifestation of Christ and the Deification of Man,” in C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* [1980], 70.)
22. In “The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology,” Andrew Louth describes Eastern Orthodoxy as focused on a “greater arch, leading from creation to deification” and feels that Catholic and Protestant theologies have focused on a partial “lesser arch, from Fall to redemption” to the exclusion of that whole (in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 35).
23. Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 2 (1646). The Westminster Confession was drawn up by the Westminster Assembly of 1646 as a standard for the doctrine, worship, and government of the Church of England. Its contents have guided the worship of a number of Protestant churches since the time of its writing.
24. Ether 3:6; see also Doctrine and Covenants 130:22; Moses 6:8–9. On Joseph Smith’s teachings on the embodiment of God, see David L. Paulsen, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 13–39, available at byustudies.byu.edu.
25. Genesis 5:22.
26. See Moses 7:31–37. On the profundity of this image, see Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Makes Sense of Life* (2012).
27. Moses 1:39.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 76:53, 58.
29. Doctrine and Covenants 88:107.

30. See Dallin H. Oaks, "No Other Gods," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013; Russell M. Nelson, "Salvation and Exaltation," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008; see also *Articles of Faith* 1:3.
31. Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 33.
32. Joseph Smith, remarks, delivered before Aug. 8, 1839, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (1980), 9; also available at josephsmithpapers.org.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
34. Wilford Woodruff journal, Apr. 6, 1844, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
35. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by William Clayton, available at josephsmithpapers.org. While the King Follett discourse represents Joseph Smith's most detailed known discussion of divine nature and exaltation, it is important to note that because of the wind on the day the sermon was delivered and the limitations of transcription techniques, we are left without certainty about Joseph Smith's exact or complete wording during the sermon. The partial accounts of four witnesses and an early published account give us a record, if only an imperfect one, of what Joseph Smith taught on the occasion, and what he taught gives us insight into the meaning of numerous passages of scripture. But the surviving sermon text is not canonized and should not be treated as a doctrinal standard in and of itself. For the accounts of Willard Richards, William Clayton, Thomas Bullock, Wilford Woodruff, and the August 15, 1844, *Times and Seasons*, see "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon'" on the Joseph Smith Papers website.
36. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by Willard Richards, available at josephsmithpapers.org, spelling modernized.
37. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by William Clayton, available at josephsmithpapers.org.
38. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by Wilford Woodruff, available at josephsmithpapers.org, spelling modernized.
39. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by William Clayton, available at josephsmithpapers.org.
40. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by Thomas Bullock, available at josephsmithpapers.org.
41. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by William Clayton, available at josephsmithpapers.org.
42. Discourse, Apr. 7, 1844, as reported by Wilford Woodruff, available at josephsmithpapers.org.
43. Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (1884), 46. The couplet, which has never been canonized, has been formulated in slightly different ways. For others, see *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1996), 1–9.
44. Don Lattin, "Musings of the Main Mormon," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Apr. 13, 1997; see also David Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," *Time*, Aug. 4, 1997, 56.
45. First published as a poem, this later became a popular hymn. (Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons*, Nov. 15, 1845, 1039; "O My Father," *Hymns*, no. 292; see also Jill Mulvey Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 [1996–97]: 84–126, available at byustudies.byu.edu.) For Latter-day Saint thought on Mother in Heaven, see David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "'A Mother There': A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97, available at byustudies.byu.edu.
46. Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," *Ensign*, May 1995, 84.
47. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
48. John 17:21.
49. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36–37.

50. 1 Corinthians 2:9.
51. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
52. See Alma 7:11–12.
53. See 2 Nephi 31:20; *Articles of Faith* 1:4.
54. Doctrine and Covenants 76:69.
55. See "Mormons in America—Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society," Pew Research, Religion and Public Life Project, Jan. 12, 2012, available at pewforum.org.
56. Moroni 10:32–33; Bible Dictionary, "Grace."
57. The Church acknowledges the contribution of scholars to the content presented in this article; their work is used with permission.

1.2 - Our Identity And Our Destiny

Elder Tad R. Callister

BYU Speeches, August 14 2012



1. In keeping with the theme of this week, I would like to discuss with you a vision of who we are and what we may become. At a recent training session for General Authorities, the question was asked: "How can we help those struggling with pornography?"
2. Elder Russell M. Nelson stood and replied, "Teach them their identity and their purpose."
3. That answer resonated with me, not only as a response to that specific question but as an appropriate response to most of the challenges we face in life. And so today I speak of the true nature of our identity and a correct vision of our divine destiny.
4. First, our identity. There is a sentiment among many in the world that we are the spirit creations of God, just as a building is the creation of its architect or a painting the creation of its painter or an invention the creation of its inventor. The scriptures teach, however, a much different doctrine. They teach that we are more than creations of God; they teach that we are the literal spirit offspring or children of God our Father.¹ What difference does this doctrinal distinction make? The difference is monumental in its consequence because our identity determines in large measure our destiny. For example, can a mere creation ever become like its creator? Can a building ever become an architect? A painting a painter? Or an invention an inventor? If not, then those who believe we are creations of God, rather than His spirit offspring, reach the inevitable conclusion that we do not have the capacity to become like our creator, God. In essence, their doctrine of identity has defined and dictated a diminished destiny.
5. On the other hand, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we believe that we are the spirit offspring of God with inherited spiritual

traits that give us the divine potential to become like our parent, God the Father. As to this identity, President Packer has written:

6. You are a child of God. He is the father of your spirit. Spiritually you are of noble birth, the offspring of the King of Heaven. Fix that truth in your mind and hold to it. However many generations in your mortal ancestry, no matter what race or people you represent, the pedigree of your spirit can be written on a single line. You are a child of God!²

7. It is this doctrine of identity that defines our potential destiny of godhood. If one does not correctly understand his divine identity, then he will never correctly understand his divine destiny. They are, in truth, inseparable partners.

8. What, then, has God revealed to us about our destiny? He has spoken clearly and frequently and forthrightly on this subject from the very beginning. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they lived in a state of innocence—meaning they only had a limited knowledge of good and evil. Lehi described their condition as follows: “Wherefore they would 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).

9. Suppose for a moment my wife and I invited one of you good Saints from California to drive to our home in Utah. Further suppose I asked you to drive in neutral.

10. You might smile and respond, “That’s not possible.”

11. What if I further replied, “Just push the accelerator all the way to the floor—you know, as they say, ‘Push the pedal to the metal.’”

12. You might respond, “That would make no difference. I cannot reach your destination until I put my car in gear.”

13. So it was with Adam and Eve. They were in a state of spiritual neutral and could not progress toward their divine destiny until they were cast out of the garden and thus put in spiritual gear.

14. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they traded their innocence, meaning a lack of knowledge of good and evil, for the prospect of perfection—that was the deal. Innocence and perfection are not the same. An infant may be innocent but certainly not perfect in the sense that he or she has acquired all the attributes of godliness. Once Adam and

Eve were cast from the garden, we read in the book of Genesis that God Himself said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us [meaning like the gods]” (Genesis 3:22; emphasis added). How could that be? God then tells us why this new destiny was possible—because men now “know good and evil.” Being immersed in a world of good and evil, having the capacity to choose, and being able to draw upon the powers of the Atonement resulted in man having unlimited opportunities to progress toward his destiny of godhood.

15. We learn a great doctrinal truth in these series of events surrounding the Garden of Eden: unfallen man would have remained in a state of innocence— safe, but restricted in his progress. On the other hand, fallen man ventured into a heightened arena of risk, but, blessed with the Atonement of Jesus Christ, he gained access to unlimited possibilities and powers and potential.

16. Speaking of the effect of the Atonement on fallen man, C. S. Lewis remarked:

17. For God is not merely mending, not simply restoring a status quo. Redeemed humanity is to be something more glorious than unfallen humanity would have been, more glorious than any unfallen race now is. . . . And this super-added glory will, with true vicariousness, exalt all creatures.³

18. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, God can exalt all His children— meaning empower them to become like Him. But one might ask, “Why does God want us to become like Him?” In order to answer that question, one must first understand why man exists. Lehi gave the short and simple answer: “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). President David O. McKay confirmed that fundamental doctrinal truth: “Happiness is the purpose and design of existence.”⁴ If I were to ask you who is the happiest being in all the universe—the one with the most joy—you would no doubt respond, “God.” Accordingly, God wants us to become perfect like Him so we can experience His quality of joy and thus best fulfill the measure of our existence. That is why His plan for us is sometimes called “the plan of happiness” (see Alma 42:8, 16).

Our Quest for Godhood

19. In spite of God’s altruistic aims on our behalf, perhaps no doctrine, no teaching, no philosophy has stirred such controversy as has this: that man may become a god. It is espoused by some as blasphemous, by others as absurd. Such a concept, they challenge, lowers God to the status of man and thus deprives God

of both His dignity and divinity. Others claim this teaching to be devoid of scriptural support. It is but a fantasy, they say, of a young, uneducated schoolboy, Joseph Smith. Certainly no God-fearing, right-thinking, Bible-oriented person would subscribe to such a philosophy as this.⁵ While some of these advocates are hardened critics, others are honest and bright men who simply disagree with us on this doctrine. So wherein lies the truth? Hopefully the following will invite the Holy Ghost to whisper the quiet but certain truth to all those who honestly seek it.

20. For our search of truth, we will turn to five witnesses—first and foremost to the testimony of the scriptures; second, to the witness of the early Christian writers; third, to the wisdom of those poets and authors who drink from the divine well; fourth, to the power of logic; and fifth, to the voice of history.

21. Scriptures. First, the scriptures. Did not an angel appear unto Abraham and extend to him this heavenly mandate: “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1)?

22. “That is true,” interjects the critic. “Perfect as compared to other men, other mortals—certainly not perfect as compared to God. The word was used in its relative, not absolute sense.”

23. “Is that so?” comes the reply. “Let us then pursue the use of the word perfect as used by the Savior Himself.”

24. It was in the Sermon on the Mount when the Savior declared, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48; emphasis added).⁶ Was the Savior inviting men to be perfect as compared to other men—other mortals—or as compared to God Himself? This command was consistent with the Savior’s high priestly prayer. Speaking of the believers, He petitioned the Father: “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 17:22–23).

25. In accord with that request for perfection, Paul taught that a critical purpose of the Church was “for the perfecting of the saints . . . till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12–13; emphasis added). Note the measuring rod: not man, not some form of mini-Christ or quasi-God, but rather that we should become “a perfect man, [and then he gives us the standard we should strive for] unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Does that sound relative to you?

26. The critic is momentarily quiet. Sheepishly he responds, “Certainly those scriptures must mean something else.”

27. The scriptures supporting this doctrine, however, continue to roll forth with repeated and powerful testimony. At one point the Savior was about to be stoned by the Jews for blasphemy. He reminded them of His good works and then asked, “For which of those works do ye stone me?”

28. They replied that they were not stoning him for good works “but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.”

29. To this He readily acknowledged that He was and declared that they should be likewise: “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” (John 10:32–34; emphasis added). In other words, He said, “Not only am I a god, but all of you are potential gods.” He was referring to His own Old Testament declaration, with which the Jews should have been familiar: “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6). The Savior was merely reaffirming a basic gospel teaching that all men are children of God, and thus all might become like Him.

30. Paul understood this principle, for, when speaking to the men of Athens, he said: “Certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28). Paul knew the consequences of being the offspring of God, for, while speaking to the Romans, he declared: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17; emphasis added; see also 1 Corinthians 3:21–23 and Revelation 21:7). Not subordinate heirs, not junior, not contingent, but joint, equal heirs with Christ Himself, to share in all that He shall share. After all, is not that the same promise made by the Lord to the Apostle John? “To him that overcometh 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).

31. Is it any wonder that Paul should write to the Saints of Philippi, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Paul, who understood so very well our destiny, was striving for the reward of godhood. Peter, who also understood this doctrine, pled with the Saints that they might become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), meaning recipients of godhood. That is exactly what Jesus ordered when speaking to the Book of Mormon Saints: “Therefore, what manner

of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27; see also 1 John 3:2). And it is exactly what the Savior promised in this dispensation for all faithful Saints: “Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (D&C 132:20; see also v. 19; D&C 76:58–60). The critic, still shaking his head, responds, “But such a concept lowers God to the status of man and thus robs Him of His divinity.” “Or, to the contrary,” comes the reply, “does it elevate man in his divine-like potential?”

32. Paul well knew this argument of the critic and silenced it once and for all ages ago. Speaking to the Saints of Philippi, he said, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:5–6; emphasis added).

33. The Savior knew that for Him to be a god and for us to be thus minded would not rob God of His divinity. That makes good sense. After all, who is greater: that being who limits or that being who enhances man’s eternal progress?

34. One might ask, Who can give greater honor and glory to God—a creature of lower or more exalted status? Can an animal offer the same honor or worship with the same passion and intensity as a human? Can a mere mortal express the empyreal feelings or exercise the spiritual fervency of a potential god? One’s capacity to honor and worship is magnified with one’s intellectual, emotional, cultural, and spiritual enlightenment. Accordingly, the more we become like God, the greater our ability to pay Him homage. In that process of lifting men heavenward, God simultaneously multiplies His own honor and glory and thus is glorified more, not less.

35. Brigham Young addressed this issue:

36. [Man’s godhood] will not detract anything from the glory and might of our heavenly Father, for he will still remain our Father, and we shall still be subject to him, and as we progress, in glory and power it the more enhances the glory and power of our heavenly Father.⁷

37. That is the irony of the critic’s argument—godhood for man does not diminish God’s status; to the contrary, it elevates it by producing more intelligent, more passionate, more spiritual Saints who have enlarged capacities to understand, honor, and worship Him.

38. The Savior’s soul-stirring and thought-provoking injunction to “be ye therefore perfect” was more than the sounding of brass or tinkling of cymbals (see 1 Corinthians 13:1). It was a divine-like invitation to rise up to our full potential and become like God our Father. C. S. Lewis, as a rampant advocate of this simple but glorious truth, wrote:

39. The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. . . . The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.⁸

40. Could it be any clearer?

41. Early Christian writers. Second, early Christian writers likewise wrote of our divine destiny.⁹ As early as the second century, Irenaeus (AD 115–202) noted: “We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods.”¹⁰ On another occasion, Irenaeus clarified that exalted man would not be relegated to some type of glorified angel but literally become a god: “Passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God.”¹¹

42. Clement of Alexandria (AD 160–200), a contemporary of Irenaeus, spoke of the reward of godhood that followed long preparation: “Being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the Saviour.”¹² This same Clement of Alexandria then added this unequivocal statement about the man who lives a righteous life: “Knowing God, he will be made like God. . . . And that man becomes God, since God so wills.”¹³

43. Hippolytus (AD 170–236), bridging the second and third centuries, spoke of the unlimited potential of faithful Saints in this life: “And thou shalt be a companion of the Deity, and a co-heir with Christ. . . . For thou hast become God: . . . thou hast been deified, and begotten unto immortality.”¹⁴

44. Cyprian (AD 200–258), a well-known Christian leader of the third century, reaffirmed that men can become like Christ: “What Christ is, we Christians shall be, if we imitate Christ.”¹⁵

45. Origen (AD 185–255), also of the third century, wrote: “The true God [referring to the Father], then, is ‘The God,’ and those who are formed after Him are gods, images, as it were, of Him the prototype.”¹⁶

46. And in the fourth century St. Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 295–373) explained that “[God] was made flesh in order that we might be enabled to be made gods.”¹⁷

47. For several centuries this doctrinal truth survived, but eventually the Apostasy took its toll, and this doctrine in its purity and expansiveness was lost. The doctrine of man’s potential for godhood as taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith was not his invention—not his creation, not conjured up by some fertile mind. It was simply and solely a restoration of a glorious truth that had been taught in the scriptures and by many early Christian writers of the primitive Church.

48. Poets and authors. The third witness—inspired poets and authors. We may look to the wisdom of selected poets and authors who are men of integrity and spiritual insight. It was C. S. Lewis who again and again reaffirmed this divine proposition:

49. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which . . . you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . There are no ordinary people.¹⁸

50. How right he was. There are no ordinary people, only potential gods and goddesses in our midst.

51. It was Victor Hugo, that masterful author, who said, “The thirst for the infinite proves infinity.”¹⁹ What a powerful and sublime thought. Perhaps the thirst for godhood likewise proves godhood. Would the God you and I know plant the vision and desire for godhood within a man’s soul and then frustrate him in his ability to attain it? Shakespeare had a flash of this insight, for, when speaking through the lips of Hamlet, he said:

52. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!²⁰

53. Robert Browning’s vision that so often pierced the mortal veil did so once again in these lines from his poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra”:

54. Life’s struggle having so far reached its term.

55. Thence shall I pass, approved

56. A man, for aye removed

57. From the developed brute—a god, though in the germ.²¹

58. This insightful poet saw the seeds and germ of godhood in every man.

59. Logic. The fourth witness is the power of logic. Do not the laws of science teach us that like begets like, each after its kind? Science has taught us that a complex genetic code transferred from parent to child is responsible for the child attaining the physical attributes of his parents. If this be so, is it illogical to assume that spirit offspring receive a spiritual code giving to them the divine characteristics and potential of their parent—God—thus making them gods in embryo? No, it is but a fulfillment of the law that like begets like. This is the same truth taught by the prophet Lorenzo Snow:

60. We were born in the image of God our Father; He begat us like unto Himself. There is the nature of Deity in the composition of our spiritual organization. In our spiritual birth, our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which He possessed, as much so as the child on its mother’s bosom possesses, although in an undeveloped state, the faculties, powers and susceptibilities of its parent.²²

61. President Boyd K. Packer told of coming home one day and helping his children gather new chicks in the barn. As his little four-year-old daughter held a baby chick in her hands, he said something like, “Won’t that be a beautiful dog when it grows up?”

62. His daughter looked at him in surprise. And then he said something like, “Or perhaps it will be a cat or even a cow.” His little daughter wrinkled her nose, as if to say, “Daddy, don’t you know anything? It will grow up exactly like its parents.” Then he observed how this little four-year-old girl knew, almost instinctively, that the chick would grow up to follow the pattern of its parentage.²³

63. The Gospel of Philip, an apocryphal book, makes this simple statement of logic: “A horse sires a horse, a man begets man, a god brings forth a god.”²⁴ The difference between man and God is significant—but it is one of degree, not kind. It is the difference between an acorn and an oak tree, a rosebud and a rose, a son and a father. In truth, every man is a potential god in embryo, in fulfillment of that eternal law that like begets like.

64. Voice of history. Fifth, and finally, the voice of history will likewise verify this truth. I recall the story of the large milk truck that drove past the pasture of cows. Written on the side of the vehicle in large letters were the words “Homogenized, Pasteurized, Vitamins A and D Added.” One cow looked at the sign, turned to

the other, and said, “Makes you feel kind of inadequate, doesn’t it?”

65. I admit that is how I feel when I look at the distance between God and me, but I take comfort when I contemplate what is accomplished in the short space of a mortal life. I paraphrase these thoughts of B. H. Roberts: From the cradle have risen orators, generals, artists, and workers to perform the wonders of our age. From a helpless babe may arise a Demosthenes or Lincoln to direct the destinies of nations. From such a babe may come a Michelangelo to fill the world with beauty. From such a beginning may come a Mozart, a Beethoven to call from silence the powers and serenity of music. From such a helpless babe may arise a Joseph Smith to give light in a world of darkness.²⁵

66. Contemplate for a moment what can be accomplished in the short space of a mortal life. Suppose now that you were to remove from man the barriers of death and grant him immortality and God for his guide. What limits would you then want to ascribe to his mental, moral, or spiritual achievements? Perhaps B. H. Roberts expressed it best when he said:

67. If within the short space of mortal life there are men who rise up out of infancy and become masters of the elements of fire and water and earth and air, so that they well-nigh rule them as Gods, what may it not be possible for them to do in a few hundreds or thousands of millions of years?²⁶

68. A glimpse beyond the veil tells us that the records of history do not end at death but continue to mark man’s unlimited achievements. Victor Hugo, with an almost spiritual X-ray, saw the possibilities after death:

69. The nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of the worlds which invite me. . . . For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose and verse; history. . . . I have tried all. But I feel I have not said a thousandth part of what is in me. When I go down to the grave, I can say, like so many others, “I have finished my day’s work,” but I can not say, “I have finished my life.” My day’s work will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. . . . My work is only beginning.²⁷

70. Perfection is a quest on both sides of the veil. The scriptures remind us, “Wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13).

The Divine Possibility Becomes a Divine Reality

71. The scriptures, early Christian writers, poetry, logic, and history testify not only of the divine

possibility but of the divine reality that man may become as God. The Doctrine and Covenants refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, declaring, “And because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, . . . and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods” (D&C 132:37). For these men the divine possibility became the divine reality. This does not mean they became gods who replaced our Father in Heaven but rather exalted men who have enlarged capabilities to honor and glorify Him. Our Father in Heaven will forever stand supreme as our God, whom we will love and revere and worship, worlds without end.

72. But how is it possible that you and I, with all our faults and weaknesses and shortcomings, could ever become a god? Fortunately, a loving Heavenly Father has given us resources to lift us above our mortal restraints and propel us to divine heights. I mention but two such resources, both made possible because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, whose crowning aim is to assist us in our pursuit of godhood—so that we might be “at one”—not only with Him but also “at one” like Him. First, I mention the saving ordinances of the kingdom.

73. Joseph Smith received a revelation that explained the relationship between ordinances and godhood: “Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh” (D&C 84:20–21). In other words, participation in the saving ordinances unlocks and unleashes certain powers of godliness in our lives that are not available in any other way. These powers help refine us and perfect us. The five saving ordinances and the corresponding powers of godliness are as follows:

74. First, baptism by immersion (and the corollary ordinance of the sacrament). Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, this ordinance cleanses us from our sins and helps make us holy, thus aligning our life more closely with the Savior’s.

75. Second, the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift helps us know “the will of the Lord [and] the mind of the Lord” (D&C 68:4) and thus makes possible our acquisition of a more godlike mind.

76. Third, the priesthood. This ordinance transfers to a mere mortal the power to act for God on earth as though He Himself were present. In essence, it is a spiritual power of attorney to be God’s agent and to

invoke His power, thus helping us learn how to exercise divine powers in righteousness.

77. Fourth, the endowment. This ordinance is a gift of knowledge from God as to how we might become more like Him, accompanied by covenants to inspire us in that endeavor. There is an old saying, “Knowledge is power.” Accordingly, the righteous use of this knowledge received in the endowment ordinance results in more godly power in our own lives. That is why the Doctrine and Covenants says, “I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high” (D&C 95:8).

78. Fifth, the sealing ordinances. Death, with all its mighty power, cannot destroy those relationships sealed in a temple—which relationships can now continue beyond the grave and allow us, like God, to have eternal increase.

79. The saving ordinances are much more than a checklist of actions we must satisfy to gain entrance to the celestial kingdom—they are the keys that open the doors to heavenly powers that can lift us above our mortal limitations.

80. The second resource to assist us in our pursuit of godhood is the gifts of the Spirit. What are the gifts of the Spirit? We know them as love, patience, knowledge, testimony, and so on. In essence, each gift of the Spirit represents an attribute of godliness. Accordingly, each time we acquire a gift of the Spirit, we acquire a potential attribute of godliness. In this regard Orson Pratt taught:

81. One object [of the Church] is declared to be “For the perfecting of the Saints.” ... The ... plan ... for the accomplishment of this great object, is through the medium of the spiritual gifts. When the supernatural gifts of the Spirit cease, the Saints cease to be perfected, therefore they can have no hopes of obtaining a perfect salvation. . . . In every nation and age, where believers exist, there the gifts must exist to perfect them.²⁸

82. No wonder the Lord commands us to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31); “seek ye earnestly the best gifts” (D&C 46:8); and to “lay hold upon every good gift” (Moroni 10:30).

83. President George Q. Cannon spoke of man’s shortcomings and the divine solution. Recognizing the link between spiritual gifts and godhood, he fervently pleaded with the Saints to overcome each manifested weakness through the acquisition of a countermanding

gift of strength known as the gift of the Spirit. He spoke as follows:

84. If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. . . . No man ought to say, “Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.” He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to give strength to correct these things, and to give gifts that will eradicate them. . . . He wants His Saints to be perfected in the truth. For this purpose He gives these gifts, and bestows them upon those who seek after them, in order that they may be a perfect people upon the face of the earth, notwithstanding their many weaknesses, because God has promised to give the gifts that are necessary for their perfection.²⁹

85. What was the Lord’s response to Solomon’s prayerful request for the gift of an understanding heart? The scriptures record, “The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing,” and then the Lord noted, “Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart” (1 Kings 3:10, 12).

86. When was the last time we prayed for a gift of the Spirit that would lift us above our mortal weakness and further our pursuit of godhood? Again and again the Lord has both invited and promised, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matthew 7:7).

87. Why is it so critical to have a correct vision of this divine destiny of godliness of which the scriptures and other witnesses so clearly testify? Because with increased vision comes increased motivation. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “No doctrine is more basic, no doctrine embraces a greater incentive to personal righteousness . . . as does the wondrous concept that man can be as his Maker.”³⁰ And why not possible? Do not all Christian churches advocate Christlike behavior? Is that not what the Sermon on the Mount is all about? If it is blasphemous to think we can become as God, then at what point is it not blasphemous to become like God—90 percent, 50 percent, 1 percent? Is it more Christian to seek partial godhood than total godhood? Are we invited to walk the path of godhood—to “be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”—with no possibility of ever reaching the destination?

88. As we better understand our potential destiny, our level of self-worth and confidence and motivation is greatly heightened. Youth will understand that it is shortsighted at best to take easy classes and easy teachers rather than ones that will stretch them toward

godhood. They will catch the vision that it is godhood, not grades, for which they are striving.

89. And what of our more elderly members? They will understand there is no such thing as a retirement farm, no day when the work is done. Like Victor Hugo, they know their work has only begun. There are yet thousands of books to read and write, paintings to enjoy, music to score, and service to render. They understand the Lord's revelation to the Prophet Joseph: "Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (D&C 130:18).

90. What about those of us who feel weaknesses in our life? We can take renewed hope in the words of the Lord to Moroni: "For if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27).

91. And what about those who believe they have sinned beyond Christ's redeeming grace? They can take comfort in His promise: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Or perhaps there are some who believe their lives are shattered beyond repair. Can they not have renewed hope in these words of the Savior: "[I will] give unto them beauty for ashes" (Isaiah 61:3)? There is no problem, no obstacle to our divine destiny, for which the Savior's Atonement does not have a remedy of superior healing and lifting power. That is why Mormon said, "Ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ" (Moroni 7:41).

92. How could we not have increased faith in God and in ourselves if we knew He had planted within our souls the seeds of godhood and endowed us with access to the powers of the Atonement? "Godhood?" If not, the critic must answer, "Why not?"

93. Perhaps we could suggest three answers for the critic's consideration: Maybe man cannot become like God because God does not have the power to create a divine-like offspring. It is beyond his present level of comprehension and intelligence.

94. "Blasphemous," responds the critic. "He has all knowledge and all power."

95. Perhaps then He has created a lesser offspring because He does not love us.

96. "Ridiculous, absurd," is his reply. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

97. Well, perhaps God has not planted within us the divine spark because He wants to retain godhood for Himself; He is threatened by our progress. He can only retain His superiority by asserting man's inferiority.

98. "No, no," laments the critic. "Have you ever known a loving, kindly father who didn't want his children to become all that he is and more?"

99. And so it is with God, our Father.

100. I testify there are no ordinary people, no ciphers, no zeros—only potential gods and goddesses in our midst. While many witnesses testify of this truth, the most powerful of all are the quiet whisperings of the Spirit that confirm both to my mind and to my heart the grandeur and truth of this glorious doctrine. As Jacob so taught, "The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13).

101. I pray we will recognize our true identity as literal sons and daughters of God and grasp a vision of our divine destiny as it really may be. I pray we will be grateful to a loving Father and Son who made it so. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Acts 17:28–29; Romans 8:16–17; and Hebrews 12:9.
2. Boyd K. Packer, "To Young Women and Men," *Ensign*, May 1989, 54.
3. C. S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle," in *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 122–23; emphasis added.

1.3 - The Eternal Family

Robert D. Hales

Ensign, November 1996



1. I wish to speak to all those who would like to know about eternal families and about families being forever. One year ago the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints issued a proclamation to the world concerning the [family](#). It summarizes eternal gospel principles that have been taught since the beginning of recorded history and even before the earth was created.
2. The doctrine of the family begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them. The Apostle Paul taught that God is the father of our spirits (see [Heb. 12:9](#)). From the proclamation we read, "In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a

physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life.” The proclamation also reiterates to the world that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

3. From the earliest beginnings, God established the family and made it eternal. Adam and Eve were sealed in marriage for time and all eternity:

4. “And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof; and thus it was” ([Moses 5:59](#)).

5. “And Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth” ([Moses 5:2](#)).

6. The Savior Himself spoke of this sacred marriage covenant and promise when He gave the authority to His disciples to bind in heaven sacred covenants made on earth:

7. “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” ([Matt. 16:19](#)).

8. In this latter day the promise of eternal families was restored in 1829 when the powers of the Melchizedek Priesthood were restored to the earth. Seven years later, in the Kirtland Temple, the keys to perform the sealing ordinances were restored, as recorded in the [Doctrine and Covenants](#):

9. “Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

10. “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi— ...

11. “... The keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands” ([D&C 110:13–14, 16](#)).

12. With the restoration of these keys and priesthood authority comes the opportunity for all who are worthy to receive the blessings of eternal families. “Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants have been endowed in this house” ([D&C 110:9](#)).

13. What is the promise of these sealings which are performed in the temples? The Lord outlines the promise and requirements in this sacred verse:

14. “And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first [resurrection](#); and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life ... and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” ([D&C 132:19](#)).

15. As taught in this scripture, an eternal bond doesn’t just happen as a result of sealing covenants we make in the temple. How we conduct ourselves in this life will determine what we will be in all the eternities to come. To receive the blessings of the sealing that our Heavenly Father has given to us, we have to keep the commandments and conduct ourselves in such a way that our families will want to live with us in the eternities. The family relationships we have here on this earth are important, but they are much more important for their effect on our families for generations in mortality and throughout all eternity.

16. By divine commandment, spouses are required to love each other above all others. The Lord clearly declares, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” ([D&C 42:22](#)). The proclamation states: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families [see [D&C 83:2–4](#); [1 Tim. 5:8](#)]. [By divine design,] mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.” By divine design, husband and wife are equal partners in their marriage and parental responsibilities. By direct commandment of God, “parents have a sacred duty ... to teach [their children] to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens [in the countries where they reside]” (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102; emphasis added; see [D&C 68:25–28](#); [Mosiah 4:14–15](#)).

17. Because of the importance of the family to the eternal plan of happiness, Satan makes a major effort to destroy the sanctity of the family, demean the importance of the role of men and women, encourage moral uncleanness and violations of the sacred law of chastity, and to discourage parents from placing the bearing and rearing of children as one of their highest priorities.

18. So fundamental is the family unit to the plan of salvation that God has declared a warning that those “individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God [their maker]. ... The disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets” (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

19. While our individual salvation is based on our individual obedience, it is equally important that we understand that we are each an important and integral part of a family and the highest blessings can be received only within an eternal family. When families are functioning as designed by God, the relationships found therein are the most valued of mortality. The plan of the Father is that family love and companionship will continue into the eternities. Being one in a family carries a great responsibility of caring, loving, lifting, and strengthening each member of the family so that all can righteously endure to the end in mortality and dwell together throughout eternity. It is not enough just to save ourselves. It is equally important that parents, brothers, and sisters are saved in our families. If we return home alone to our Heavenly Father, we will be asked, “Where is the rest of the family?” This is why we teach that families are forever. The eternal nature of an individual becomes the eternal nature of the family.

20. The eternal nature of our body and our spirit is a question often pondered by those who live in mortality. All people who will ever live on earth are members of a human family and are eternal children of God, our loving Heavenly Father. After birth and tasting of death in mortality, all will be resurrected because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of [God the Father](#). Depending on our individual obedience to the laws, ordinances, and commandments of God, each mortal can have the blessing of attaining eternal life; that is, returning to live in the presence of their Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, having eternal increase for all the eternities to come. Through making and keeping the sacred covenants found in the temple ordinances, individuals can return

to the presence of God and will be reunited with their families eternally.

21. The home is where we are nurtured and where we prepare ourselves for living in mortality. It is also where we prepare ourselves for death and for [immortality](#) because of our belief and understanding that there is life after death, not only for the individual but also for the family.

22. Some of the greatest lessons of gospel principles about the eternal nature of the family are learned as we observe how members of the Church, when faced with adversity, apply gospel principles in their lives and in their homes. In the past year I have witnessed the blessings of joy which come to those who honor and revere the gospel teaching of the eternal family during times of adversity in their lives.

23. A few months ago I had the opportunity of visiting a man who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. As a devoted priesthood holder, he was confronted with the realities of mortality. He found strength, however, in the example of the Savior, who said, in the Lord’s Prayer, “After this manner therefore pray ye: ... Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” ([Matt. 6:9–10](#)). My friend took courage in knowing that as Jesus was required to endure great pain and agony in the Garden of Gethsemane while completing the atoning sacrifice, He uttered the words, “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” ([Matt. 26:42](#)).

24. My friend came to accept the phrase “Thy will be done” as he faced his own poignant trials and tribulations. As a faithful member of the Church, he was now confronted with some sobering concerns. Particularly touching were his questions, “Have I done all that I need to do to faithfully endure to the end?” “What will death be like?” “Will my family be prepared to stand in faith and be self-reliant when I am gone?”

25. We had the opportunity to discuss all three questions. They are clearly answered in the doctrine taught to us by our Savior. We discussed how he had spent his life striving to be faithful, to do what God asked of him, to be honest in his dealings with his fellowmen and all others, to care for and love his family. Isn’t that what is meant by enduring to the end? We talked about what happens immediately after death, about what God has taught us about the world of spirits. It is a place of paradise and happiness for those who have lived righteous lives. It is not something to fear.

26. After our conversation, he called together his wife and the extended family—children and grandchildren—to teach them again the doctrine of the Atonement that all will be resurrected. Everyone came to understand that just as the Lord has said, while there will be mourning at the temporary separation, there is no sorrow for those who die in the Lord (see [Rev. 14:13](#); [D&C 42:46](#)). His blessing promised him comfort and reassurance that all would be well, that he would not have pain, that he would have additional time to prepare his family for his departure—even that he would know the time of his departure. The family related to me that on the night before he passed away, he said he would go on the morrow. He passed away the next afternoon at peace, with all his family at his side. This is the solace and comfort that comes to us when we understand the gospel plan and know that families are forever.

27. Contrast these events with an incident which happened to me when I was a young man in my early twenties. While serving in the Air Force, one of the pilots in my squadron crashed on a training mission and was killed. I was assigned to accompany my fallen comrade on his final journey home to be buried in Brooklyn. I had the honor of standing by his family during the viewing and funeral services and of representing our government in presenting the flag to his grieving widow at the graveside. The funeral service was dark and dismal. No mention was made of his goodness or his accomplishments. His name was never mentioned. At the conclusion of the services, his widow turned to me and asked, “Bob, what is really going to happen to Don?” I was then able to give her the sweet doctrine of the Resurrection and the reality that, if baptized and sealed in the temple for time and all eternity, they could be together eternally. The clergyman standing next to her said, “That is the most beautiful doctrine I have ever heard.”

28. The fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ brings great comfort in stressing times of mortality. It brings light where there is darkness and a calming influence where there is turmoil. It gives eternal hope where there is mortal despair. It is more than just beautiful doctrine. It is a reality in our lives that if we can be obedient and obtain the eternal rewards that God grants us, if we will draw nigh unto Him and embrace the eternal doctrine, we will be blessed.

29. Another incident that has touched my life recently happened when a young man with a terminal illness passed away. He knew that his illness would first take away his manual dexterity and his ability to walk, then its progression would take his ability to speak, and

finally his respiratory system would cease to function. But he also had faith that families are forever. With this knowledge, he spoke to each of his children through video recordings for use when he was gone. He produced recordings to be given to his sons and daughters at important, sacred occasions in their lives, such as baptisms, priesthood ordinations, and weddings. He spoke to them with the tender love of a father who knew that while his family was forever, for a time he would not physically be able to be with them, but spiritually he would never leave their side.

30. The examples of faith shown by steadfast widows and widowers, along with that of their children, after the passing of a spouse or parent are an inspiration to all of us. Great lessons can be learned as we observe their faith and obedience as they strive to remain faithful so that they can once again be together as families through eternity.

31. The knowledge and understanding of the doctrine that God lives and Jesus is the Christ and that we have an opportunity to be resurrected and live in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, makes it possible to endure otherwise tragic events. This doctrine brings a brightness of hope into an otherwise dark and dreary world. It answers the simple questions of where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. These are truths that must be taught and practiced in our homes.

32. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. Through His Atonement we will all have the opportunity of being resurrected. This is not just an individual blessing; it is much more than that. It is a blessing to each one of us and to our families. That we may be eternally grateful, that we can live in the presence of God the Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ, that we may be together in the eternities to come, that we might understand the joy, and that we not only teach this doctrine but live true to it in our lives and in our families, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1.4 - A Mother There: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven

David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido
BYU Studies

1. In the heav'ns are parents single?

2. No, the thought makes reason stare;
3. Truth is reason—truth eternal
4. Tells me I've a mother there.

5. When I leave this frail existence—

6. When I lay this mortal by

7. Father, mother, may I meet you

8. In your royal courts on high?1

9. Penned in 1845 by Sister Eliza R. Snow (who would later serve as the Relief Society general president from December 18, 1867–December 5, 1887), these lines from our beloved hymn “O My Father” are perhaps the best-known reference in Latter-day Saint literature to a Mother in Heaven. Written and published within months of Joseph Smith’s death, these and other lines give considerable evidence that the Prophet taught of a Mother in Heaven, even if he did so only implicitly² or restrictively to certain limited audiences.³

10. Since the 1840s, this cherished doctrine has been an important, although relatively obscure, part of the Latter-day Saint understanding of the premortal origins and divine nature of mankind. This doctrine may well be among those that Joseph Smith anticipated, in which God would someday “reveal many great and important things” (A of F 9). Still, we feel it is appropriate to look carefully at all that has (and has not) been said about Mother in Heaven over the past 165 years, in order to promote clarity

11. For as long as I can remember, our beloved hymn “O My Father” has been a source of wonder, comfort, and inspiration. It was sung frequently in the Ephraim (Utah) North Ward where I was blessed as a baby and grew to young adulthood. It was sung—providentially, I believe—in a Sunday morning meeting of the Rock Island (Illinois) Branch when an investigator made her first visit to church. The spirit that she felt during the singing of the hymn was a clincher in her conversion to the restored gospel. It was the favorite hymn of my sister-in-law, Barbara Bryner, and, at the request of her family, it was sung at her funeral. Her family asked me to center my funeral talk around the teachings of the hymn. I did, and we were all comforted. My dad, who lived to age eighty-eight, survived my mother by several years. In his last days, he often pulled a photograph of Mom from his wallet and asked: “Do you remember who this is? We all miss her, don’t we?” And then we would talk about our being embraced by her and Heavenly Parents when we left “this frail existence.” In my paper “Are Christians Mormon?” published by BYU Studies in 2006, I summarized our

belief in Heavenly Mother and pointed out growing interest in the divine feminine in a number of Christian quarters.

12. No wonder, then, my puzzlement when recently I began to hear with increasing frequency people speaking of the need for “sacred silence” with respect to Heavenly Mother. This stricture did not square with my life experience and motivated me to search what Church leaders had historically taught about her. The Women’s Research Institute at BYU graciously provided funding, and members of my student staff, especially my coauthor Martin Pulido, have done extensive research. We reported our findings to appreciative, standing-room-only audiences at a Women’s Research Institute meeting and at the BYU Studies 50th Anniversary Symposium. This article is the outcome of those findings.

13. David L. Paulsen Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven academic discussions in particular and to avert possible confusion, misunderstanding, or contention in general.

Statements by Church Presidents

14. In 1909, the First Presidency of the Church wrote: “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.”⁴ In 1995, the Church officially reaffirmed the doctrine of a Heavenly Mother in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”⁵

15. Four years earlier, President Gordon B. Hinckley (Counselor in the First Presidency, November 10, 1985–March 3, 1995) addressed at length the topic of a Mother in Heaven during the 1991 general Relief Society meeting. He taught: “Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me. . . . The fact that we do not pray to our Mother in Heaven in no way belittles or denigrates her. . . . None of us can add to or diminish the glory of her of whom we have no revealed knowledge.”⁶ President Hinckley explained in the same address that, because of the Savior’s instructions and example, one does not pray to Heavenly Mother.⁷ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven” (Matt. 6:9; 3 Ne. 13:9); he himself always prayed to the Father

(Matt. 11:25; John 17:1; 3 Ne. 17:15; 19:19); he commanded his people to pray “unto the Father, always in my name” (3 Ne. 18:21; 27:9); and he concluded,

16. “That which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Ne. 27:21).

Statements by Some Claiming or Advising Silence

17. Because the Saints are instructed to pray to the Father, and, as President Hinckley pointed out, nothing has been authoritatively revealed about Heavenly Mother, some Latter-day Saints have thought that any mention of her is discouraged by the Church. Some within Mormon culture who see discussion of our Heavenly Mother as inappropriate believe that respecting her sacredness requires silence, as if to speak of her is to risk offending God. For instance, Hoyt W. Brewster Jr. claims, “The holy name of Deity is blasphemed when used in concert with gutter language and misused in everyday expressions. . . . Is it any wonder that our Father in Heaven has been so protective of the identity of our Mother in Heaven?”⁸ Similarly, at the 1991 Women’s Conference cosponsored by BYU and the Relief Society,

Methodology

18. We have attempted to identify each distinct reference to Heavenly Mother as found within content endorsed in some fashion by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1830 to present. We felt a statement could be appropriately included in this survey if it was spoken by a General Authority, recorded in a general conference, included in a Church publication, or published by a Church press. Our research has yielded an enormous amount of material, and we are unable to report all the discoveries. When we have omitted material, we have not done so out of disapproval or dislike, but out of the necessities forced upon us by a print journal’s limited space. We have made every effort to act simply as surveyors of the available historical data. We leave the appraisal of this data to others more suited to the task.

19. In an effort to provide as much information as possible, we have developed a few specific conventions within this paper relative to General Authorities. First, we refer to all General Authorities by the title of the highest priesthood office they held in their lives, out of respect for their office and service, even if they were not in that office at the time of the statement. Thus, if an individual served in the First Presidency or as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, we refer to him as “President.” If an individual

served in another general priesthood office, we refer to him as “Elder.” We also follow the convention of referring to individuals holding leadership positions within the Relief Society as “Sister.” Second, when we first quote a General Authority, we include, in parentheses, the office the individual held at the time the statement was made as well as the dates during which the individual held that office. Subsequent quotes from the same General Authority include parenthetical information only if that person’s office is different from what was reported in the immediately preceding statement of the individual’s office.

20. In performing our research, we have consulted a wide variety of sources, including Church periodicals from 1832 to present, Church Conference Reports from 1897 to present, over three hundred volumes of works from Church leaders, over five hundred volumes of works from LDS scholars, and official Church documents, such as official proclamations, hymnals, and so on. For a list of these and other sources consulted, see note 16.

21. Mormon scholar Kathryn H. Shirts recalled a “Primary class, in which someone asked the teacher, ‘If we have a Mother in Heaven, how come we never hear about her?’ The teacher’s reply was that God was protecting her name from the kinds of slander that human beings direct toward the names of the Father and the Son.”⁹ Likewise, in Amy Irvine’s 2008 memoir *Trespass*, a fictional visitor at the Monticello Utah Temple open house asks a guide about the feminine aspect of the divine and is told “that the Heavenly Mother was so special that God had said we must never, ever talk about her—that He held her on a pedestal where she was never to be seen or spoken to, for fear that her purity would be sullied.”¹⁰

22. Accounts like these have resulted in perceptions among the LDS community that Heavenly Mother deserves, or requires, a “sacred” censorship. Indeed, an informal Internet survey found that most Mormons believe that discourse about Heavenly Mother is forbidden or inappropriate.¹¹ This cultural perception has perhaps exacerbated academic claims that Heavenly Mother has always been, and continues to be, surrounded by a holy hush.¹² For instance, in his PhD dissertation on Heavenly Mother and Mormon women’s literature, professor Grant Tucker Smith makes the sweeping assumption that during the hundred and fifty years between the lives of Eliza R. Snow and Terry Tempest Williams “the Mother in Heaven was for all intents and purposes ignored, silenced, and forgotten by the male Church leadership.”¹³

23. While these scholars and writers admit that Latter-day Saints are not totally silent about Heavenly Mother, they lament that Latter-day Saints usually acknowledge her existence only, without delving further into her character or roles, or portray her as merely a silent, Victorian-type housewife valued only for her ability to reproduce.¹⁴ For instance, professor Barbara J. MacHaffie asserts that from the beginning of Mormonism, Heavenly Mother was “pointed to only when the community wished to glorify motherhood.”¹⁵

Overview of Research Regarding Statements by Church Leaders

24. These claims and expressions have persuaded us to research what Church leaders and others in Church-approved venues have actually taught about Heavenly Mother. Our investigation has led us to conclude that such claims—that the Church mandates silence or gives only simplistic portrayals of Mother in Heaven—are mostly false. In this paper, we will share important historical accounts that cast serious doubt on the specific claims that, first, a sacred silence has always surrounded this treasured Mormon doctrine and that, second, Heavenly Mother’s ascribed roles have been marginalized or trivialized. With respect to the second claim, we will share historical portrayals of Heavenly Mother as procreator and parent, as a divine person, as co-creator of worlds, as coframer of the plan of salvation with the Father, and as a concerned and loving parent involved in our mortal probation. Finally, we will sketch portrayals of her role in the eschaton.

25. In this paper, we will only report historical portrayals of Heavenly Mother’s roles. It is not our province to appraise this material. As a further disclaimer, we note that there has been much more discourse and reflection about our Heavenly Mother than we can include in this article. We have compiled over six hundred sources of all types referencing a Heavenly Mother in Mormon and academic discourse since 1844.¹⁶ While this research has been extensive, it is far from exhaustive, and we expect further investigations to uncover more information. So far, we have gathered an illuminating collection of thoughts about Mother in Heaven, her roles, her significance, and her character as given by prophets, Apostles, Church authorities, and other leaders since the restoration of the gospel. And although we do not have authoritative revelation on the specific roles and nature of Heavenly Mother, Church leaders have extrapolated much about her from our understanding of the plan of salvation, the nature of godhood, and the qualities of motherhood.

Heavenly Wife and Parent

26. Perhaps the most accepted and easily understood role of Heavenly Mother is her role as procreator and parent. Church leaders have frequently affirmed this point. The First Presidency under President Joseph F. Smith (Church President, October 17, 1901–November 19, 1918) published a declaration titled “The Father and the Son,” in which they assert that our heavenly parents passed through “several stages or estates by which [they] have attained exaltation” and together “propagate[d] that higher order of beings called spirits.”¹⁷ Apparently, neither of them alone could beget our spirit bodies.

27. Several Church leaders have testified how we as their offspring have learned and inherited several divine, moral, and intellectual attributes from them.¹⁸ President Boyd K. Packer (Acting President of Quorum of the Twelve, June 5, 1994–January 27, 2008) has taught that after this primordial birth each of us “lived in a premortal existence as an individual spirit child of heavenly parents,”¹⁹ where we were reared and nurtured. In the development of our characters, our Heavenly Mother was perhaps particularly nurturing.²⁰ Brigham Young’s daughter, Sister Susa Young Gates (member of the YLMIA²¹ general board and famous women’s rights activist) insisted that in the formation of Father Abraham’s individuality, “our great heavenly Mother was the greater molder”²²—greater than his genetics, his prenatal impressions, his cultural or natural environment, or even his earthly mother’s nurturing. Gates speculated that Heavenly Mother has played a significant role in all our lives, looking over us with “watchful care” and providing “careful training.”²³ The 1995 “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” affirms that in the eternal realms above we were reared to premortal maturity through the tutelage of our heavenly parents.²⁴

28. Obviously, these references to our heavenly parents show that Mormon leaders considered Heavenly Mother to be the wife of our Heavenly Father, an idea clearly explained by President George Q. Cannon (First Presidency, October 10, 1880–July 25, 1887) when he said, “God is a married being, has a wife. . . . We are the offspring of Him and His wife.”²⁵ President Spencer W. Kimball (Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, January 23, 1970–July 2, 1972) taught that God “made women in the image of his wife-partner.”²⁶ Others have taught that Heavenly Mother’s relationship with Heavenly Father exemplifies and ennobles the office of wife. In 1938, the Church published *A Short History of the Church of*

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that taught, “The theological conception of a Mother in heaven as well as a Father lends dignity to motherhood and wifehood.”²⁷ Elder B. H. Roberts (First Council of the Seventy, October 7, 1888–September 27, 1933) challenged the rest of Christianity to offer a doctrine that presents a “conception of the nobility of woman and of motherhood and of wifehood—placing her side by side with the Divine Father” as does our doctrine of Heavenly Mother.²⁸ We are to emulate the family structure exemplified by our Father and Mother, because, as Sister Susa Young Gates taught, “the home is patterned after the heavenly dwelling of our Divine parents.”²⁹ President Joseph F. Smith taught that “it is marriage, sanctified and God-sanctioned, upon which a glorified home is founded—that blesses, happyfies, exalts, and leads at length to companionship with our Heavenly parents, and to eternal, united life, and increase.”³⁰

A Divine Person

29. Some statements by Church authorities have led to the understanding that before Heavenly Mother became exalted and helped beget us, she was once mortal and dwelt on an earth. Elder Orson F. Whitney (bishop, July 14, 1878–April 1906) explained that “there was a time when that being whom we now worship—that our eternal Father and Mother were once man and woman in mortality.”³¹ The soul-making trials of her earthly experience, coupled with continuing growth after a celestial resurrection, helped her hone the qualities of divinity to move her from “womanhood to Godhood.”³²

30. Several Church leaders have affirmed that Heavenly Mother is a fully divine person and have used reverential titles such as “Mother God,” “God Mother,” “God the Mother,” “God their Eternal Mother,” and “Eternal Mother” in referring to her.³³ Elder John A. Widtsoe (Quorum of the Twelve, March 17, 1921–November 29, 1952) wrote: “The glorious vision of life hereafter . . . is given radiant warmth by the thought that . . . [we have] a mother who possesses the attributes of Godhood.”³⁴ This is echoed by Elder James E. Talmage (Quorum of the Twelve, December 8, 1911–July 27, 1933): “We . . . [are] literally the sons and daughters of divine parents, the spiritual progeny of God our Eternal Father, and of our God Mother.”³⁵ Furthermore, President Brigham Young (President of the Church, December 27, 1947–August 29, 1877) taught that “we were created . . . in the image of our father and our mother, the image of our God,” indicating that calling Heavenly Mother “God” is consistent with the biblical account of the creation of

both “male and female” being in “the image of God” (Gen. 1:26–27).³⁶ Sister Susa Young Gates urged that “the divine Mother, side by side with the divine Father, [has] the equal sharing of equal rights, privileges and responsibilities.”³⁷

31. However, at least one Mormon leader may have taken the opposite stance on these positions. President George Q. Cannon cautioned that there is too much of this inclination to deify “our mother in heaven.” . . .

32. Our Father in heaven should be the object of our worship. He will not have any divided worship. . . .

33. In the revelation of God the Eternal Father to the Prophet Joseph Smith there was no revelation of the feminine element as part of the Godhead, and no idea was conveyed that any such element “was equal in power and glory with the masculine.”

34. Therefore, we are warranted in pronouncing all tendencies to glorify the feminine element and to exalt it as part of the Godhead as wrong and untrue, not only because of the revelation of the Lord in our day but because it has no warrant in scripture, and any attempt to put such a construction on the word of God is false and erroneous.³⁸

35. President Cannon refers to a lack of scriptural evidence and contemporary revelation as reasons for denying Heavenly Mother’s inclusion in the Godhead and for doubting (but not going so far as to deny) that her divinity is on par “with the masculine,” and he condemns referencing scripture to provide implied evidence for Heavenly Mother’s divinity. But Mormon leaders—including Cannon in other articles—used scriptures referring to the children of God, the female image of God, spiritual parenthood, and queens in heaven as testifying of a Heavenly Mother.³⁹ In reference to scriptures affirming that male and female are created in the image of God, Elder Orson F. Whitney (Quorum of the Twelve, April 9, 1906–May 16, 1931) asked, “What is this but a virtual recognition of the feminine principle as well as the masculine principle of Deity?”⁴⁰ Furthermore, President Rudger Clawson (Quorum of the Twelve, October 10, 1989–June 21, 1943) disagreed that deifying our Heavenly Mother risked divided worship. He urged, “It doesn’t take from our worship of the Eternal Father, to adore our Eternal Mother, any more than it diminishes the love we bear our earthly fathers, to include our earthly mothers in our affections.”⁴¹ Rather, “we honor woman when we acknowledge Godhood in her eternal prototype.”⁴²

36. The doctrine of a Heavenly Mother appears to be in tension with Mormonism's trinitarian heritage.⁴³ Overemphasizing the Trinity, or the Godhead, while underemphasizing a Heavenly Mother raises questions concerning the equality of deified males and females and the nature and importance of marriage. On the other hand, overemphasizing Heavenly Mother breaks with traditional Christian, and even Mormon, understandings of the Trinity, but highlights the Church's own proclamation that the most important social unit in eternity is the family. It is no simple feat to understand how these two social relationships—the Trinity and the eternal family—can best be understood together. For one, given traditional Mormon premises, a Heavenly Mother interacts with the Trinity in a certain and irresolvable sense. As there can be no spirit children without her, presumably there would be no Son⁴⁴ without her and perhaps no Holy Ghost⁴⁵—no Heavenly Mother, perhaps no Trinity. It should be no surprise, then, that most Mormon leaders could not understand how Father or Mother could be divine alone. For either to be fully God, each must have a partner with whom to share the power of endless lives. As Elder Erastus Snow (Quorum of the Twelve, February 12, 1849–May 27, 1888) avowed:

37. "What," says one, "do you mean we should understand that Deity consists of man and woman?" Most certainly I do. If I believe anything that God has ever said about himself . . . I must believe that deity consists of man and woman. . . .

38. There can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, or ever will be a God in any other way.⁴⁶

39. We may never hope to attain unto the eternal power and the Godhead upon any other principle . . . this Godhead composing two parts, male and female.⁴⁷

40. These sentiments were later reaffirmed by President Hugh B. Brown (Quorum of the Twelve, April 10, 1958–December 2, 1975), by Elders James E. Talmage, Melvin J. Ballard (Quorum of the Twelve, January 7, 1919–July 30, 1939), and by Bruce R. McConkie (First Council of the Seventy, October 6, 1946–October 12, 1972).⁴⁸ Given the popular contemporary LDS view that the highest form of worship is to emulate character, worship of the Father is also, indirectly, worship of the Mother, as each has equally perfect moral character. Perhaps part of the disagreement among Mormon thinkers is that most have not clearly explained what they mean by "divinity," and they are consequently uncertain what it

signifies to predicate this attribute to Heavenly Mother.⁴⁹ No one denies her omnibenevolent character or divine intelligence, so the concern seems to be with her cosmic authority or status for worship. Obviously, defining divinity demands further attention, but we do not suggest any solution, for such is not our province nor is it within the scope of this paper.

Co-creator with the Father

41. Regardless of the exact nature of her divinity, some authorities have described Heavenly Mother as an active participant in the process of creation. In his 1876 semiannual general conference address, Brigham Young included "eternal mothers" and "eternal daughters" as beings after the resurrection who will "be prepared to frame earth's [sic] like unto ours and to people them in the same manner as we have been brought forth by our [heavenly] parents."⁵⁰ The *Women of Mormondom*, written by critic and playwright Edward Tullidge and edited by Sister Eliza R. Snow, affirms that the "eternal Mother [is] the partner with the Father in the creation of worlds."⁵¹ An article in the *Deseret News*, presumably written by President Charles W. Penrose (editor of the *Deseret News*, later ordained an Apostle on July 7, 1904) argued that there is a Mother in Heaven and cited the feminine gender of the divine Spirit in the morning of creation that moved upon the face of the waters as evidence.⁵² Elder Milton R. Hunter (First Council of the Seventy, April 6, 1945–June 27, 1975) taught that the exaltation and endless lives that celestial women and men share include "the power to create or organize mortal worlds."⁵³ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (First Quorum of the Seventy, April 1, 1989–June 23, 1994) and his wife, Patricia, have taught that our Mother and our Father are involved in the ongoing process of creating everything around us, and "are doing so lovingly and carefully and masterfully."⁵⁴

Co-framer of the Plan of Salvation

42. In addition to her participation in creation, Heavenly Mother helped the Father direct the plan of salvation. Elder M. Russell Ballard (Quorum of the Twelve, October 6, 1985–present) taught that "we are part of a divine plan designed by Heavenly Parents who love us."⁵⁵ The Church's 1978 *Gospel Principles* manual adds: Our heavenly parents provided us with a celestial home more glorious and beautiful than any place on earth. We were happy there. Yet they knew we could not progress beyond a certain point unless we left them for a time. They wanted us to develop the godlike qualities that they have. To do this, we needed

to leave our celestial home to be tested and to gain experience.⁵⁶

43. While serving as the first counselor in the general presidency of the Relief Society, Sister Chieko Okazaki (March 31, 1990–April 5, 1997) noted that “at the end of this process, our Heavenly Parents will have sons and daughters who are their peers, their friends, and their colleagues.”⁵⁷ According to Elder Theodore M. Burton (First Quorum of the Seventy, October 1, 1976–September 30, 1989), this is “their goal, their work, and their glory.”⁵⁸

44. Elder Milton R. Hunter explained the way by which both our heavenly parents learned to design a plan for our progression:

45. Wherever there have been intelligences, . . . fundamental principles . . . have existed. They constitute . . . the laws of eternal truth. Our Heavenly Parents have through eons of time . . . applied in Their lives an untold number of these everlasting laws. As They learned these verities and how to operate them, these laws thereby became subject unto Elohim.⁵⁹

46. The 1978 Gospel Principles manual goes on to state that as the beloved Son, Christ “was chosen to be our Savior when we all attended the great council with our heavenly parents.”⁶⁰ This would have been a moment of mixed emotion for the divine couple, when, as Sister Chieko Okazaki noted, “with . . . increased love, mingled with pride and grief, [they] accepted the willing offer of Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ According to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (Quorum of the Twelve, June 23, 1994–present), each of us also chose to endure the hardships that would be present in mortality because we “wanted the chance to become like our heavenly parents.”⁶² Lula L. Greene Richards (Primary Association General Board) wrote that Heavenly Mother smiled on her righteous children as they voted to uphold the will of the Council in Heaven and chose to come to earth.⁶³ Elder Mark E. Petersen (Quorum of the Twelve, April 20, 1944–January 11, 1984) explained that once the council was completed and the Savior chosen, our heavenly parents “sent [us to earth] to receive further instruction under different circumstances”⁶⁴ than those of our premortal state. President Thomas S. Monson (Counselor in the First Presidency, March 12, 1995–January 27, 2008) affirmed that this instruction “could come only through separation from our heavenly parents.”⁶⁵ Heavenly Mother’s role in this process has been dramatized and embellished by some Mormon authors. The fourth stanza in Sister Eliza R. Snow’s “O My Father” speaks of Heavenly Mother acting in the role of sending us

forth to undergo the trials of mortality.⁶⁶ Ruth May Fox composed a short dialogue entitled “The Parable of Ten Talents,”⁶⁷ which converts Christ’s parable into a thinly veiled story of daughters leaving the presence of their Heavenly Mother to experience mortality.⁶⁸ Before their separation, the Mother gathers them together and grants each of them a divine character trait⁶⁹ to prepare them “for the battle of life.”⁷⁰ She also advises that upon their return she will require a reporting of their accomplishments.⁷¹

47. Both Elder Orson F. Whitney and President Harold B. Lee (Quorum of the Twelve, April 10, 1941–January 23, 1970) taught that our farewell from our Heavenly Mother and Father was a bittersweet occasion.⁷² President Lee wrote:

48. There came a day, then, when Mother and Father said, “Now, my son, my daughter, it is now your time to go. This is the greatest time in the history of the world. This is the fulness of times, and now because of your faithfulness you are permitted to go down in this fulness of time upon the earth.” I suppose as Father and Mother bade us good-bye, there may have been some sadness there because they knew Satan was here and one-third of all the hosts were here [with him]. We walked, as it were, through an open door. The door was closed behind us.⁷³

49. Elder John Longden (Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, October 6, 1951–August 30, 1969) added, “It must be quite an occasion in heaven when our Heavenly Mother bids us a loving farewell for the time being! Perhaps, like earthly mothers, she thinks, ‘They are so young, and they might forget [the rules and regulations].’”⁷⁴ Longden imagined that before we parted we promised them we would remember. President George F. Richards

50. (Quorum of the Twelve, April 9, 1906–August 8, 1950) taught that our heavenly parents are “counting on [us] to honor them, to love them, and obey them. ‘Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.’”⁷⁵ This commandment applies to both earthly and heavenly parents.

Involved Parent in Our Mortality

51. Mormon leaders have affirmed that Heavenly Mother’s involvement did not completely end with premortality, but continues throughout our second estate. Sister Eliza R. Snow believed in Heavenly Mother’s continuing influence, and told a friend that the Saints would with “pray’r and supplication / plead for [her] before the throne / Of the great eternal mother.”⁷⁶ Others have emphasized that Heavenly

Mother—along with the Father—watches over us from heaven and strives to help us in our trials. In 1963, President Harold B. Lee taught:

52. Sometimes we think the whole job is up to us, forgetful that there are loved ones beyond our sight who are thinking about us and our children. We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us when we do all we can.⁷⁷

53. After noting our Heavenly Mother's concern for us, President Lee cited the story of William Dudley Pelley, who recalled one day in his office taking "a package of cigarettes from [his] desk. About to apply a light to one of them, [he] heard a voice as gently as any worried mother might caution a careless son, 'Oh, Bill, give up your cigarettes!'"⁷⁸ Pelley quickly complied by throwing the cigarettes into the trash.

54. Sister Okazaki has written that our heavenly parents are cosufferers with us in our mortal trials.⁷⁹ Elder M. Russell Ballard (Quorum of the Twelve, October 6, 1985–present) has also taught that "Our Heavenly Parents' love and concern for us continues to this very moment," and the First Presidency under President Spencer W. Kimball (President of the Church, December 30, 1973–November 5, 1985) affirmed that this love and concern never ends.⁸⁰ Similarly, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (President of BYU, May 1980 to April 1, 1989) has written how important his own children are to him and his wife. And yet he asks that if they, as parents, "can love so much and try so hard, what does that say of a more Godly love that differs from our own as the stars differ from the sun? On a particularly difficult day, . . . what would this world's inhabitants pay to know that heavenly parents are reaching across those same streams and mountains and deserts, anxious to hold them close?"⁸¹ Sister Okazaki explained that "when our rising love and joyful gratitude meet the shower of mercy and love from the Savior and from our heavenly parents, in that contact is the pure radiance and the brilliant light of glory."⁸²

55. Others state that although we are away from our Parents' celestial home, we are not completely severed from them. Elder John A. Widtsoe told members of the Church that the promises made to us in the temple "will help us understand the nearness of our heavenly parents."⁸³ Righteous living draws us toward them and their guiding influences, but as Milton R. Hunter has written, sin and ignorance draw us farther away.⁸⁴

56. Throughout this mortal journey, both of our heavenly parents are examples of the divine nature. In a recent address to Harvard Law School on the "fundamental premises of our faith," Elder Dallin H. Oaks (Quorum of the Twelve, April 7, 1984–present) affirmed that our theology "teaches that our highest aspiration is to become like our Heavenly Parents."⁸⁵ Men and women alike are to seek after and develop the divine traits exemplified by both Father and Mother. Notwithstanding this teaching that Heavenly Mother is an exemplar in our mortality, we must keep in mind the counsel given by President Gordon B. Hinckley: "I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven."⁸⁶

Mother in Heaven in the Hereafter

57. Many believe that after the end of our mortal probation, each of us will return to our heavenly parents' presence. This homecoming has been a rich topic of thought for many Mormons.⁸⁷ The fourth stanza of Joseph L. Townsend's "O, What Songs of the Heart" describes the joyous reunion that awaits: "Oh, what songs we'll employ! Oh, what welcome we'll hear! / While our transports of love are complete, / As the heart swells with joy / In embraces most dear / When our heavenly parents we meet!"⁸⁸ Elder Neal A. Maxwell (First Quorum of the Seventy, October 1, 1976–July 23, 1981) mused that "such a regal homecoming [could not] be possible without the anticipatory arrangements of a Heavenly Mother."⁸⁹ For Elder Orson Pratt (Quorum of the Twelve, April 26, 1835–Aug 20, 1842 and January 20, 1843–October 3, 1881) and President George Q. Cannon, this reunion would include vividly recalling our former life with them.⁹⁰ Other leaders have stressed that only the pure in heart who obey the gospel will return to permanently reside in their presence.⁹¹ As Ruth May Fox imagined in her narrative, Heavenly Mother will ask for a report of our accomplishments. Matilda E. Teasdale wrote, "You . . . [will] go home to Father and Mother to 'give an account of your labors.'"⁹²

58. This accounting includes our parenting. In the April 1909 general conference, Elder James G. Duffin (who previously served as president of the Southwestern and Central States Missions, 1900–1904 and 1904–1906 respectively) declared, "We, as parents, give an account to our Father and Mother in heaven of the manner in which we have conducted ourselves toward the precious souls entrusted to us."⁹³ Charles Lowell Walker recorded how Elders Heber J. Grant (Quorum of the Twelve, October 16, 1882–November 23, 1918) and Anthony W. Ivins (who later served in the First Presidency, March 10, 1921–

September 23, 1934) taught that parents are obligated to teach their children the first principles of the gospel before they reach the age of accountability; otherwise, they will stand in “condemnation before our Heavenly Parents.”⁹⁴

59. Some say that for the righteous Saints, the heavenly reunion will mark a new stage in their association with their Parents. Elder Orson F. Whitney believed that the knowledge of “returning to them, and resuming the relations of the previous life” conquered the sting of death.⁹⁵ President Spencer W. Kimball supposed that our renewed relationship with our Heavenly Mother would be immensely influential. He reasoned, “Knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return [to heaven]?”⁹⁶ Accordingly, the loving support and example of both Father and Mother will guide us in the eternities.

Conclusion

60. In this paper we have briefly shown that, historically, there has been substantial discussion and elaboration on the roles and divinity of our Heavenly Mother. Our investigation marshals evidence against some claims that General Authorities and other Church leaders have limited Heavenly Mother’s role to reproduction. It also refutes the suspicion that General Authorities have advocated a position of total sacred silence about her. As Latter-day Saints should be deeply reverent when speaking about any sacred subject, Church leaders may well caution an individual to be respectful of and to avoid teaching unorthodox views about Heavenly Mother. At the same time, we have found no public record of a General Authority advising us to be silent about our Heavenly Mother; indeed, as we have amply demonstrated, many General Authorities have openly taught about her.

61. While some have claimed that Heavenly Mother’s role has been marginalized or trivialized, we feel that the historical data provides a highly elevated view of Heavenly Mother. The Heavenly Mother portrayed in the teachings we have examined is a procreator and parent, a divine person, a co-creator, a coframer of the plan of salvation, and is involved in this life and the next. Certainly, consideration of these points reinforces several unquestionably important LDS doctrines: divine embodiment, eternal families, divine relationality, the deification of women, the eternal nature and value of gender, and the shared lineage of Gods and humans. Far from degrading either the

Heavenly Feminine or the earthly feminine, we feel that these teachings exalt both.

62. In acknowledgment of this, we can think of no more fitting conclusion than the words uttered by Elder Glenn L. Pace (First Quorum of the Seventy, October 3, 1992–October 2, 2010) at a 2010 BYU devotional: “Sisters, I testify that when you stand in front of your heavenly parents in those royal courts on high and you look into Her eyes and behold Her countenance, any question you ever had about the role of women in the kingdom will evaporate into the rich celestial air, because at that moment you will see standing directly in front of you, your divine nature and destiny.”⁹⁷

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6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” *Ensign* 31 (November 1991): 100.
7. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” 100.
8. Hoyt J. Brewster Jr., *Behold, I Come Quickly: The Last Days and Beyond* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 50. Brewster is a Mormon scholar and managing director of the Church’s Priesthood Department.
9. Shirts continued: “It was a clever reply, and, at the time, we all thought it was quite satisfying. None of us realized then that this answer described a lady not quite up to taking care of herself in a tough world, an image drawn purely from certain human conventions and not from divine reality.” Kathryn H. Shirts, “Women in the Image of the Son: Being Female and Being Like Christ,” in *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women’s Conference Co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 95. Shirts earned a master of theological studies degree at the Harvard Divinity School and is an author and a reviewer for *BYU Studies*.
10. Amy Irvine, *Trespass: Living at the Edge of the Promised Land* (New York: North Point, 2008), 302. Irvine is an author and wilderness activist.
11. Margaret Merrill Toscano, “Is There a Place for Heavenly Mother in Mormon Theology? An Investigation into Discourses of Power,” *Sunstone* 133 (July 2004): 14–15.
12. Linda P. Wilcox, “The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven,” *Sunstone* 5 (September–October 1980): 9.
13. Grant Tucker Smith, “I’ve a Mother There: Identity, Language, and Experience in Mormon Women’s Literature” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1993), 20. Smith is a professor at Viterbo University. Aaltje Baumgart also recently claimed, “The LDS Church discourages speaking of the Mother in Heaven. . . . Even

articulating Her name ‘is akin to profanity.’” Aaltje Baumgart, “Mormon and Feminist? Feminist Reactions to LDS Scripture, Doctrine, and Practices,” *AMERICAN@* 1, no. 2 (2003): 7, <http://www.uhu.es/hum676/revista/baumgart.pdf>. Baumgart attributes the phrase “akin to profanity” to Martha Pierce, “Personal Discourse on God the Mother,” in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 249. Baumgart earned her master’s degree in divinity from the University of Chicago in 2008. She is currently a chaplain resident at the Advocate Christ Medical Center. Terry Tempest Williams is a Mormon author, environmental activist, and professor at the University of Utah.

14. Robert A. Rees complains, “What we are left with is an image of our Heavenly Mother staying at home having billions of children while the men—the Father and his sons—go off to create worlds, spin galaxies, take business trips to outer space. She is happy, it would seem, to let them have all the recognition, all the glory.” See Robert A. Rees, “Our Mother in Heaven,” *Sunstone* 15 (April 1991): 49–50. See also Jerrie W. Hurd, “The Unnamed Women in Scripture,” *Sunstone* 10 (July 1985): 23–25.

15. Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 245. MacHaffie is a professor of history and religion at Marietta College. Susanna Morrill likewise claims, “Even in the early days of Mormonism, however, church leaders rarely described or even mentioned the Mother in Heaven.” Besides a few statements by leaders, Morrill believes that Heavenly Mother appeared only in the private folk theology explored in Mormon women’s journals and periodicals. See Susanna Morrill, *White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Mormon Women’s Popular Theology, 1880–1920* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 56. Danny L. Jorgensen’s survey of Mormon theological history leads him to conclude, “Everything known about the Eternal Mother confirms that she was subordinate to the Eternal Father’s authority,” and that she was not “equal to the Father God.” See Danny L. Jorgensen, “Gender-Inclusive Images of God: A Sociological Interpretation of Early Shakerism and Mormonism,” *Nova Religio* 4, no. 1 (2000): 72, 75. Carrie A. Miles’s words manifest the sad fact that some Mormon women take perceptions about Heavenly Mother’s supposed subordination personally, seeing their own roles as theologically marginalized: “We are faced with the possibility that woman’s subordination is not only universal, it is eternal as well.” See Carrie A. Miles, “The Genesis of Gender, or Why Mother in Heaven Can’t Save You,” *Sunstone* 20 (July 1997): 16. While rare, there is limited precedent for what might be perceived as eternal gender subordination. See for instance, Elder S. Dilworth Young, “The Eternal Conflict” (devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, May 30, 1978), transcript available at <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=1064>. He envisages Heavenly Mother “not making earths nor giving . . . law, But doing what a heavenly mother does, Teaching her spirit children to be true . . . What do heavenly mothers say to heavenly children? Faintly to our souls we hear her sweet reply. Obey! That is the law, Hear all of His commands. Obey each one.”

16. More specifically, we have consulted First Presidency messages; the *Journal of Discourses*; the *Collected Discourses*; Church manuals; the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; Church periodicals and newspapers like *New York Messenger* and *Advocate*, *The Prophet*, *Times and Seasons*, *Millennial Star*, *The Seer*, *The Western Standard*, *Deseret News*, *The Mormon*, *Deseret Weekly News*, *Woman’s Exponent*, *Juvenile Instructor*, *The Contributor*, *Young Woman’s Journal*, *Improvement Era*, *Latter-day Saints Southern Star*, *Deseret Evening News*, *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal*, *Relief Society Magazine*, *Children’s Friend*, *Ensign*, *Friend*, *New Era*, *Liahona*, and *Church News*; *BYU*

devotional speeches; *Women’s Conference* addresses; books written by prophets, Apostles, and other General Authorities and Church leaders; books written by Latter-day Saint historians and scholars; early Mormon almanacs; personal journals and letters of prominent Latter-day Saints; Utah and Mormon journals and newspapers like *Logan Leader*, *Salt Lake Herald*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, and *Morgan County News*; histories of Utah; academic journals like *Church History*, *Populations Studies*, *Pacific Historical Review*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Sociological Spectrum*, *Women’s Review of Books*, *Western Historical Quarterly*, *Journal of American History*, *Religion and American Culture*, *Religious Studies*, *Review of Religious Research*, *Nova Religio*, *Sociology of Religion*, *Journal of Feminist Studies*, *AMERICAN@*, *Intercultural Education*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Feminist Theology*, *BYU Studies*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, and *Dialogue*; and master’s theses and doctoral dissertations. It should be noted that material from some time periods, such as the period from 1940 to 1970, are likely lower in frequency due to our inability to access digitized or more easily available sources. Thus, some trends in the historical teachings could be corrected through further research.

17. Joseph F. Smith, “The Father and the Son,” *Improvement Era* 19 (August 1916): 942. The message stipulates that “so far as the stages of eternal progression and attainment have been made known through divine revelation, we are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring.” See also Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer* 1 (October 1853): 158.

18. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 171; “The Origin and Destiny of Woman,” *Latter-day Saints Southern Star* 1 (January 7, 1899): 45 (this article was first published on August 29, 1857, in a periodical published in New York and edited by John Taylor); Orson F. Whitney, “What Is Education?” *Deseret News* 20, no. 41 (1885): 1; Rulon S. Wells, “Believe

Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven V 89 the Truth for Truth’s Sake,” *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal* 10 (November 19, 1912): 338; James E. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism: Brief Essays on Distinctive Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Boston: Gorham, 1919), 244; Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951), 105–6; “The Origin of Man,” in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:206; Ezra Taft Benson, *So Shall Ye Reap* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 170.

19. Boyd K. Packer, “Counsel to Young Men,” *Ensign* 39 (May 2009): 50.

20. Orson F. Whitney, “Latter-day Saint Ideals and Institutions,” *Improvement Era* 30 (August 1927): 851.

21. *Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association*.

22. Susa Young Gates, “The Editor’s Department,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 2 (July 1891): 475. Sister Susa Young Gates was Brigham Young’s daughter, a famous LDS feminist, and the editor of the Church’s officialized *Young Woman’s Journal* and *Relief Society Magazine*.

23. Susa Young Gates, “In the Realm of Girlhood: Lesson V,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 17 (January 1906): 41.

24. See “Family: A Proclamation,” 102; “Origin of Man,” 205. See also *The First Presidency*, “‘Mormon’ View of Evolution,” *Improvement Era* 28 (September 1925): 1090.

25. George Q. Cannon, “Mr. Canon’s [sic] Lecture,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, April 15, 1884, 8.

26. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, Twelfth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 25.
27. John Henry Evans, *A Short History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Gordon B. Hinckley (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1938), 163.
28. B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 2:439.
29. Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 234.
30. Joseph F. Smith, "Marriage God-Ordained and Sanctioned," *Improvement Era* 5, no. 9 (1902): 717–18. This quote was republished in *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 181.
31. Orson F. Whitney, "Bishop O. F. Whitney," *Woman's Exponent* 24 (June 15, 1895): 9. Whitney was a ward bishop and professor at the time of this pronouncement. In support of Whitney's statement, James E. Talmage claimed, "It is within [man's] power to follow in the footsteps of his celestial parents and to reach the rank and station occupied by those who have trodden that path before." See James E. Talmage, "What Mormonism Stands For," *Deseret Evening News*, January 16, 1909, 25. See also Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary*, 104–6; and Eldred G. Smith, "Opposition in Order to Strengthen Us," *Ensign* 4 (January 1974): 62. Joseph Smith taught that the Father "was once a man like us," at least in that he "dwelt on an earth" as did Jesus Christ. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 376. Just as the Son was more than merely mortal during his sojourn on an earth, logically Heavenly Father and Mother may have been so as well.
32. Orson F. Whitney, "What Is Education?" *Contributor* 6, no. 9 (1885): 347; Orson Pratt, "Sunday Services," *Logan Leader* 1 (November 13, 1879): 3.
33. For instance, see Melvin J. Ballard, "The Pre-existence of Man," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 24 (June 29, 1926): 5–10; Sarah M. Kimball, "Demonstration in Honor of Bishop Hunter," *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 3 (1879): 22; Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary*, 104; James E. Talmage, "The Philosophical Basis of 'Mormonism,'" *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 13 (November 9, 1915): 307; Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 18:32; James E. Talmage, "The Eternity of Sex," *Young Woman's Journal* 25 (October 1914): 603; James E. Talmage, "Relationship of Jesus Christ to the Eternal Father," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 13 (August 24, 1915): 133; Milton R. Hunter, *Will a Man Rob God? The Laws and Doctrine of Tithing, Fast Offerings, and Observance of Fast Day* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1952), 183.
34. John A. Widtsoe, "Everlasting Motherhood," *Millennial Star* 90 (May 10, 1928): 298. Similarly, Widtsoe would write later that "since we have a Father, who is our God, we must also have a mother, who possesses the attributes of Godhood." John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology: As Taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1937), 69.
35. James E. Talmage, "The Philosophical Basis of 'Mormonism,'" *Improvement Era* 18 (September 1915): 950.
36. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, ed. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 51.
37. Susa Young Gates, "The Vision Beautiful," *Improvement Era* 23 (April 1920): 542. Sister Gates was the corresponding secretary of the Relief Society Presidency when this article was written.
38. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Zion's Book Store, 1957), 1:135–36. Cannon's remarks were first published as "Topics of the Times: The Worship of Female Deities," *Juvenile Instructor* 30 (May 15, 1895): 314–17. Here, Cannon seems to be responding to the writings of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton was in close association with Sister Emmeline B. Wells (general secretary of the Relief Society; 1888–1910), who worked as editor for the *Woman's Exponent*, an LDS-themed publication. A month and a half prior to Cannon's remarks in the *Juvenile Instructor*, Sister Wells published an excerpt from Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* in the "The Woman's Bible," *Woman's Exponent* 23 (April 1, 1895): 248. In the excerpt, Stanton claims that Genesis 1:26–27 clearly shows "a consultation in the Godhead" where "masculine and feminine elements are equally represented." This consultation involves the doctrine of a trinity, but not that of three male personages; Stanton's trinity comprises instead "Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son." Stanton claims women's dignity is being raised by this depiction and that women are recognizing that their prayers should be addressed to a Heavenly Mother as well as to a Father. She thought the biblical text made it plain that there is "a feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine." Stanton claimed that the masculine and feminine forces in the image of God . . . must have existed eternally, in all forms of matter and mind." Cannon's remarks use Stanton's wording and no doubt seem spurred by this excerpt.
39. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, 3–4, 129. Regarding queens, many Mormons look at the "queen of heaven" mentioned in Jeremiah and the queen in Psalm 45:9 as referring to the wife of God. Benjamin G. Ferris noted this in his *Utah and the Mormons: The History, Government, Doctrines, Customs, and Prospects of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), 242. The Psalms reference was also noted by Appleton Milo Harmon in his journal. He copied a letter, written in May 1852 by William W. Phelps, that defended polygamy. The letter contained the following statement: "When the suffering female kind over the great globe are acquainted with the fact that 'the daughters of Kings are among the Lord's honourable wives in heaven (Psalm 45) and on the right hand the Queen in Gold of Opher,' you will hear of more honourable women clinging to the Holy priesthood than you ever thought of. . . . Brother Gordon look into my almanac for this year and you will observe an account of the 'Eternal Mother' on the thirty second page, and on the 37th 'the philosophy of the heavens.' Try a little of the mormon clasic." See Appleton Milo Harmon, *Appleton Milo Harmon's Early History and Journal for His Travels through the United States, England, and Scotland in 1850, 1851, and 1852* (s.l., n.d.), 292, copy in Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
40. Orson F. Whitney, "Our Mother in Heaven His Theme," *Deseret Evening News*, July 16, 1906, 5. At the time, Whitney was a newly ordained member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.
41. [Rudger Clawson], "Our Mother in Heaven," *Millennial Star* 72 (September 29, 1910): 619–20. Rudger Clawson, being editor at the time, has traditionally been assumed to be the author of the article.
42. [Clawson], "Our Mother in Heaven," 620.
43. For discussions of LDS understandings of the Trinity, especially as contrasted with classical Christian views, see David L. Paulsen, "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 63–72; and David L. Paulsen and Brett McDonald, "Joseph Smith and the Trinity: An Analysis and Defense of the Social Model of the Godhead," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2008): 47–74.
44. Elder LeGrand Richards (Quorum of the Twelve, April 6, 1952–January 11, 1983) reported having said the following while

addressing an audience of evangelical and congregational clergymen: “Toward the close of my remarks, the man in charge said, ‘Now, Mr. Richards, we’ve heard it said that you believe God has a wife. Would you explain that to us?’ I think he thought he had me over a barrel or in a corner that I couldn’t get out of. Rather facetiously I said, ‘Well, I don’t see how in the world God could have a son without a wife, do you?’ They all began to twitter, and I didn’t have any trouble with that question.” LeGrand Richards, “Missionary Experiences” (devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, October 20, 1981), available at <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=499>.

45. As to the origin of the Holy Ghost, latter-day revelation does not provide, to our knowledge, any definitive statement. Yet some Latter-day Saints have taught that he is a spiritual son of God. For instance, Mormon scholar Joseph Fielding McConkie wrote: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that the Holy Ghost is a spirit man, a spirit son of God the Father.” See Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Holy Ghost,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:649. However, owing to the paucity of revealed information on the subject, such cannot be claimed with complete certitude.

46. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:269–70, March 3, 1878. There has been a history of misreading this passage to suggest that Snow was presenting a God who is a hermaphrodite. The first speculation we found started with Linda P. Wilcox in “Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven,” *Sunstone* 5 (September/October 1980): 11. Allen W. Litchfield duplicated this error in his master’s thesis, “Behind the Veil: The Heavenly Mother Concept among Members of Women’s Support Groups in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Brigham Young University, 1987), 6. Clearly these writers are not fully considering Erastus Snow’s writings on the subject. The passage reads much clearer within Mormon discourse and Snow’s own declarations if read from a perspective describing social unity in marriage. Snow declared, “It is left for us to infer this from what we see and know of all living things in the earth including man. The male and female principle is united and both necessary to the accomplishment of the object of their being, and if this be not the case with our Father in heaven after whose image we are created, then it is an anomaly in nature. But to our minds the idea of a Father suggests that of a Mother. . . . Hence when it is said that God created our first parents in His likeness—‘in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them’—it is intimated in language sufficiently plain to my understanding that the male and female principle was present with the Gods as it is with man.” Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:214, May 31, 1885. Such sentiments do not imply that God is some sort of divine hermaphrodite.

In another discourse, Snow would teach, “To [the Saints] this great truth is most precious, precious to contemplate, and it is an inexpressible privilege to be able to draw nigh unto Him and say ‘Our Father’ in simplicity and faith, knowing that He is indeed our Father and that we are His children. And immediately this great truth is impressed upon our minds, we very naturally begin to associate with it the idea of mother. This is a natural result of our knowledge and experience of human affairs; that earthly tabernacles owe their origin to mother as well as to father; that the two principles are associated together, and that by the union of the two principles, male and female, God has ordained an increase, not alone to his children but to all other branches of the animal kingdom . . . the two principles going hand and hand together. Without the two principles being thus united there is no increase. Further, we are taught that things on earth are organized after the pattern of heavenly things. Need it, therefore, be a marvel and a wonder to the world that we should irresistibly be carried forward

to this conclusion—that if we have a Father in heaven we have also a Mother there.” Erastus Snow, “Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow,” *Deseret News*, October 22, 1884, 2. The unity of the male and female principles seem to harmonize better with the statement in Genesis that male and female shall cleave one to another and “be one flesh” and Paul’s affirmation that “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord,” than with urging that God is a divine hermaphrodite (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 11:11). In the same discourse, Snow said, “That is, in the eternal power and Godhead the two principles must necessarily be connected to accomplish the objects and purposes of their being; that they cannot attain to exaltation and glory otherwise. This is also set forth by Moses in the history of the first part of Genesis, when the Father said unto the Gods that were with Him, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ and they went to and made man in the image of God. ‘In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.’ This is the language we find in Genesis used by Moses to illustrate this great truth. ‘In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.’ That being the case—that they were created both male and female and in the likeness of the Godhead—can we come to any other conclusion than that the Godhead is composed of the two same principles—male and female—and that the Apostle Paul comprehended this truth when he said that the woman was not without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord.” Snow, “Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow,” 2.

It also echoes the language of another statement of Snow’s that stresses marriage: “There is no Lord, there is no God in which the two principles are not blended, nor can be . . . but this Godhead composing two parts, male and female.” Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:272, March 3, 1878. Latter-day Saint scripture has taught that no person can reach the highest degree of the celestial kingdom without being sealed to a spouse (D&C 131:1–3). Nowhere in Mormon discourse is there teaching that individuals will become androgynous or hermaphroditic via deification. Rather, deification follows through the righteous social unity of husband and wife in the hereafter. For instance, Orson Pratt would affirm, “No man can be ‘in the Lord,’ in the full sense of this passage, that is, he cannot enter into all the fullness of his glory, ‘without the woman.’ And no woman can be ‘in the Lord,’ or in the enjoyment of a fullness, ‘without the man.’” Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer* 1 (April 1853): 59.

47. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:272–73, March 3, 1878.

48. Bryant S. Hinckley, ed., *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 205–6; Hugh B. Brown, *Continuing the Quest* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 8; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 516–17. James E. Talmage would write, “Neither of the sexes is complete in itself as a counterpart of Deity. We are expressly told that God is the Father of spirits, and to apprehend the literalness of this solemn truth we must know that a mother of spirits is an existent personality.” James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 442–43. Patriarch to the Church Eldred G. Smith remarked likewise in an address to BYU students on March 10, 1964: “The only one I know of who has been resurrected and had children—that I know of—is my Father in heaven and my Mother in heaven. You could not have a Father in heaven without a Mother in heaven. . . . Our Father in heaven must have gone through a life of mortality and become resurrected, and we have to have a Mother in heaven, because we could not have a Father without a Mother at any time, in any life. We were their children born after their resurrection.” Eldred G.

Smith, "Exaltation," in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1963–64* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1964), 6.

49. Orson Pratt is a noted exception to the usual lack of specificity. In defining "divinity," Orson Pratt claimed, "Gods . . . possess a fullness of truth, of knowledge, of wisdom, of light, of intelligence. . . . The fullness of all these attributes is what constitutes God." Then he asserted that both males and females enjoy this fullness. Orson Pratt, "The Pre-Existence of Man," *The Seer* 1 (February 1853): 24. He would also write: "The Celestial male and female, after the resurrection, will be perfected in knowledge, and in holiness, and in pure affection and love: they will know as God knows; be pure as He is pure, and love as He loves: their knowledge, their purity, and their affections, before their celestial glorification, will increase alike, and keep pace with each other, until they are perfected, when they will enjoy in fullness every attribute and affection which God himself enjoys, and will be like Him in all these things." Orson Pratt, "Celestial Marriage," *The Seer* 1 (October 1853): 158.

50. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:259, October 8, 1876; italics added.

51. Edward Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York: Tullidge and Crandall, 1877), 193–94.

52. [Charles W. Penrose], "Women in Heaven," *Millennial Star* 64 (June 26, 1902): 410. This article was originally printed in the *Deseret News*; Penrose is presumed to have been the author because he was editor of the *Deseret News* at the time.

53. Hunter, Will a Man Rob God? 183–84. See also Milton R. Hunter, "God's Greatest Gift," *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1964–1965* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1965), 6–7, available online at <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=973>.

54. Patricia T. Holland, "Filling the Measure of Our Creation," in Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 4.

55. M. Russell Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted: Continuing Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 62.

56. *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 10.

57. Chieko N. Okazaki, *Sanctuary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 59.

58. Theodore M. Burton, "A Marriage to Last through Eternity," *Ensign* 17 (June 1987): 14.

59. Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1945), 4. Hunter's work was written and published under the direction of the General Priesthood Committee of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

60. *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 19.

61. Chieko N. Okazaki, "Grace and Glory: Strength from Our Savior," in *Women in the Covenant of Grace: Talks Selected from the 1993 Women's Conference Sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Susette Fletcher Green (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 243–44.

62. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 204.

63. Lula L. Greene Richards, "A Thread of Thought," *Woman's Exponent* 29 (August 15 and September 1, 1900): 27.

64. Mark E. Petersen, "Be Ye an Exponent of Christ," in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1965–1966* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1966), 4, available online at

<http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=533>. Elder Neil L. Anderson recently shared a similar message: "We are sons and daughters of heavenly parents who love us and who have sent us on a course to become more like Them." Neil L. Anderson, "Looking Back and Looking Forward," *New Era* 39 (August 2009): 2–4.

65. Thomas S. Monson, *An Invitation to Exaltation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 4.

66. Snow wrote this poem while living in Nauvoo, and the text was published in *Times and Seasons* in 1845 under the title "My Father in Heaven." Snow, *Complete Poetry*, 313–14. Snow also published this as the first poem in her first published volume of poems under the title "Invocation or the Eternal Father and Mother." See Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 84–126. This hymn is frequently cited for espousing the unique doctrine of heavenly parentage; Elder Bruce R. McConkie comments: "Implicit in the Christian verity that all men are the spirit children of an Eternal Father is the usually unspoken truth that they are also the offspring of an Eternal Mother. . . . This glorious truth of celestial parentage, including specifically both a Father and a Mother, is heralded forth by song in one of the greatest of Latter-day Saint hymns, O My Father by Eliza R. Snow." McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 516–17; italics in original.

67. Ruth May Fox, "The Parable of the Ten Talents: A Dialogue," *Young Woman's Journal* 17 (April 1906): 172–75. At the time this story was composed, Fox was the first counselor in the general presidency of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. She would later become its third president.

68. Fox chooses ten daughters to receive the ten talents. The ten daughters are ten biblical characters: Rachel, Leah, Rebecca, Sarah, Hagar, Deborah, Naomi, Hannah, Mary, and Ruth. The character traits bestowed upon each daughter generally correspond with the positive characteristic that manifests itself through the character as depicted in the biblical text. For instance, Sarah's laughter and hope is noted, Leah is blessed with patience, and Deborah exemplifies gratitude. Fox, "Parable of the Ten Talents," 172–75.

69. This is another instance where the Heavenly Mother is seen as responsible for the shaping of our talents and nature.

70. Fox, "Parable of the Ten Talents," 172.

71. Fox, "Parable of the Ten Talents," 173–75.

72. Orson F. Whitney, "Death," *Young Woman's Journal* 27 (April 1916): 200.

73. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee: Eleventh President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 20–21.

74. John Longden, "The Worth of Souls," *Relief Society Magazine* 44 (August 1957): 492, 494.

75. "The Twelve Apostles Today," *First Intermediate Sunday School Lessons: What It Means to Be a Latter-day Saint* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1944), 73.

76. As quoted in Smith, *I've a Mother There*, 57 n. 5. Smith references the work to Sister Eliza R. Snow's *Trail Diary*, which is held in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. The poem dates from May 2, 1847. Interestingly, the trail diary version of the poem is different from the published version, which claims the saints "Will, with 'prayers and supplication, / Plead thy cause before the throne / Of the great Eternal Father, / Where thy works of love are known.'" The original trail diary suggests it can be read as "mother," especially in light of the many other poems of Sister Eliza R. Snow that refer to heavenly parents, Heavenly Mother, or the exalted mother Eve. See Snow, *Complete Poetry*, 358.

77. Harold B. Lee, "The Influence and Responsibility of Women," *Relief Society Magazine* 51 (February 1964): 85. At this time, Harold B. Lee was serving as a member of the Quorum of the

Twelve Apostles and made these remarks during the October general Relief Society meeting.

78. Lee, "Influence and Responsibility of Women," 85, citing William Dudley Pelley, "Seven Minutes in Heaven," *Improvement Era* 32 (July 1929): 717; italics in original.

79. Okazaki, *Sanctuary*, 149; see also Neal A. Maxwell, *If Thou Endure It Well* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 129.

80. M. Russell Ballard, *Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 70; The First Presidency, "Christmas Message to Children of the Church in All the World," *Friend* 4 (December 1974): 2–3. Sister Chieko Okazaki noted that our heavenly parents' "hearts yearn over [us] in joy and love. They want to give [us] all the treasures of eternity, and they hope steadfastly that [we] will be the kind of [people] who will want the riches of eternity." Okazaki, *Sanctuary*, 98. See also Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign* 8 (November 1978): 101–5; Paul H. Dunn, "The Cheering Section," *Ensign* 10 (June 1980): 4.

81. Jeffrey R. Holland, *However Long and Hard the Road* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 47. When this was published, Holland was a regional representative and president of BYU.

82. Okazaki, "Grace and Glory," 244.

83. John A. Widtsoe, "Looking toward the Temple," *Ensign* 2 (January 1972): 56.

84. Hunter, *Gospel through the Ages*, 44–45.

85. Dallin H. Oaks, "Fundamental Premises of Our Faith," *Deseret News*, 7 <http://www.deseretnews.com/media/pdf/24370.pdf>. This speech was given February 26, 2010, in Ames Courtroom, Harvard Law School. Elder Oaks had previously taught this principle in general conference: "Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them." Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," *Ensign* 25 (May 1995): 84.

86. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," *Ensign* 21 (November 1991): 100. See John 14:6: "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." See also 3 Ne. 18:19: "Ye must always pray unto the Father in my name."

87. David C. Kimball, "Reflections on the Destiny of Man," *Millennial Star* 7 (June 15, 1846): 184; Nephi Anderson, "A Little Visit to Glory-Land," *Millennial Star* 67 (September 7, 1905): 562–63; Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 25.

88. "Oh, What Songs of the Heart" was first published in the *Juvenile Instructor* and then was included in the *Deseret Sunday School Song Book* in 1892. It is hymn number 286 in the current LDS hymnal. See Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 288–89.

Sister Matilda E. Teasdale also thought the reunion would be very joyous. She wrote, "How proud our parents are of a son who has filled an honorable mission with what joy they welcome him home! Do you not think that our heavenly parents have greater joy in welcoming home their children who have been faithful and true while on their earthly missions? I think so." Matilda E. Teasdale,

"To the Young Ladies of Zion," *Young Woman's Journal* 3 (July 1892): 472. Sister Matilda E. Picton Teasdale was the wife of LDS Apostle George Teasdale. She held responsible positions in the Relief Society and the YLMIA. At the organization of the Mexican Mission, she was sustained as president of the YLMIA of the mission, and as the secretary of the Relief Society of the mission. She was a frequent contributor to the first several volumes of the *Young Woman's Journal*.

89. Neal A. Maxwell, "The Women of God," *Ensign* 8 (May 1978): 11.

90. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:241–42, August 20, 1871; George Q. Cannon, "Discourse by President George Q. Cannon," *Millennial Star* 51 (July 22, 1889): 450.

91. James E. Talmage, "Obtaining Divine Forgiveness," *Millennial Star* 54 (March 28, 1892): 194. Orson F. Whitney urged that "we must be begotten and born again, in the similitude of those other begetting's and births, or we cannot regain the presence of our eternal Father and Mother." Orson F. Whitney, *Gospel Themes: A Treatise on Salient Features of "Mormonism"* (Salt Lake City, 1914), 65. Elder Hyrum G. Smith, as presiding patriarch of the Church, addressed the Saints and told them that their reunion with heavenly parents was conditional on their faithfulness. See Hyrum G. Smith, in *Ninety-fifth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924), 16. Elder Robert L. Simpson (member of the First Quorum of the Seventy) taught how "the lofty goal of exaltation or living eternally again in the presence of our Heavenly Parents can only be achieved as a family unit, and only after that family has developed a Christlike pattern of living within a frame work of conformity to priesthood principles." Robert L. Simpson, "Q&A: Questions and Answers," *New Era* 7 (July 1977): 11. See also Norma B. Smith, "Remember, Enjoy, Prepare," *New Era* 10 (July 1980): 10–13; James T. Duke, "Marriage: Eternal Marriage," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:859.

92. Teasdale, "To the Young Ladies," 472.

93. Elder James G. Duffin, in *The 79th Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 24.

94. Charles Lowell Walker, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, ed. A. Karl Larson and Katharine Miles Larson (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1980), 2:100. This journal entry is dated January 19, 1896.

95. Orson F. Whitney, "We Walk by Faith," *Improvement Era* 19 (May 1916): 609.

96. Spencer W. Kimball, "The True Way of Life and Salvation," *Ensign* 8 (May 1978): 6.

97. Glenn L. Pace, "The Divine Nature and Destiny of Women" (devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, March 9, 2010)

2. The Plan of Salvation and the Eternal Family

2.1 - Families and The Great Plan of Happiness

Daniel K. Judd, Guy L. Dorius, David C. Dollahite
Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family, June 2000

INTRODUCTION

1. The Proclamation teaches that marriage and family relationships are fundamental to the Lord's plan for our eternal destiny.¹ Even though we are personally responsible to work out our own salvation, eternal life-life in the presence of God-is impossible without an eternal companion at our side. The Apostle Paul taught that "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Cor. 11: 11). President Joseph F Smith stated:

2. God instituted marriage in the beginning. He made man in his own image and likeness, male and female, and in their creation it was designed that they should be united together in sacred bonds of marriage, and one is not perfect without the other.²

3. Prophets have taught that if we are able to fully accept the Lord's plan, especially the "merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Ne. 2:8), we will one day be blessed to have eternal associations with other family members. The prophet Mormon recorded:

4. And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality ...and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

5. (Morm.6:21, emphasis added)

6. The eternal nature of the marriage covenant and the promise of everlasting family association are among the most beautiful and essential doctrines of the restored gospel. In fact, the purpose of the gospel and the Church is to exalt the family. Elder Hugh B. Brown stated:

7. The family concept is one of the major and most important of the whole theological doctrine. In fact, our very concept of heaven itself is the projection of the home into eternity. Salvation, then, is essentially a family affair, and full participation in the plan of

salvation can be had only in family units.³

8. The purpose of this chapter is to help the reader to comprehend the doctrinal foundation of the Proclamation on the Family. Also, we intend this overview of the "plan of salvation" (Jarom 1:2) to provide a framework for the chapters that follow (see Alma 12:32). We begin by discussing the premortal origin of the plan of salvation and then follow with applications of marriage and family relationships to the doctrines of the Creation, the fall of man, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

9. Prior to mortal birth we lived as spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents (Proclamation, paragraph 2; see also Jer. 1:5; Eccl. 12:7; John 1:1-8; and Alma 13:3).

10. During this premortal period a great council was held where Father in Heaven presented "the great plan of the Eternal God" (Alma 34:9) to all of His children (see Abr. 3:21-28 and Moses 4:1-4).⁴ While the plan presented by our Heavenly Father included many glorious doctrines, at the center was the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In this council we learned that "the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:25) required a savior to take upon himself "the sins of the world" (1 Ne. 10:10), thus allowing the obedient and repentant to return and dwell in the presence of God. Satan made a selfish and vain attempt to usurp the role of savior, but it was Jesus Christ, the "Firstborn" (see Col. 1:15; D&C 93:21) of the Father's spirit children, who was chosen.

11. At some point, all of God's children who supported Heavenly Father's plan will have the opportunity and responsibility to live in and create families. Understanding our missions as sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers is fundamental to fulfilling our divine destinies. President Joseph F Smith reminded us: "to do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all man-kind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman. One is universal and eternal greatness, the other is ephemeral."⁵

CREATION, FALL, AND ATONEMENT

12. "The great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8) presented by our Heavenly Father in the premortal council is designed "to bring to pass the immortality

and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39) and is founded upon three basic doctrines—the Creation of the earth; the Fall of Adam, Eve, and all humankind; and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie described these doctrines as the "three pillars of eternity."⁶

13. The Creation, Fall, and Atonement are historic events. They have direct application to our physical creation, separation from God, mortal experience, death, and resurrection. They have a metaphoric or interpretive application to many of the significant events in our lives, characterized by periods of creation followed by the fall or opposition and eventual achievement of reconciliation. They apply directly to our personal and family lives.⁷

The Creation

14. The scriptures teach that all human beings are created in the image of God. As stated in the Proclamation, "each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny" (paragraph 2). From this brief statement we learn several profound truths:

15. We were created by God.

16. We were created in the image of God.

17. We have heavenly parents—a Father and a Mother.

18. We are literally the spirit offspring of God.

19. Our nature or essential identity is of divine origin.

20. Our spirit creation includes identity as male or female.

21. We have a divine destiny.

22. While there is much we do not know about the specifics of the Creation, latter-day prophets have taught that we have both divine origin and divine potential. The First Presidency issued a statement in 1909:

23. Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and eons, of evolving into a God.⁸

24. Understanding that we are literally children of heavenly parents in whose image we are created is necessary if we are to know our true identity and potential. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not

comprehend themselves."⁹

Marriage, Families, and the Fall

25. The doctrine of the Fall provides an additional key to understanding our earthly existence. The Proclamation teaches we came to earth to "obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection" (paragraph 3). Birth into a family was the way God chose to send His spirit children to earth. Marriage and family relationships are the central means He has prepared to achieve His purposes. We learn the lessons of life, not in an Edenic garden, but in a context where we face challenge, opposition, hardship, and temptation (see 2 Ne. 2:11). Unlike traditional Christianity, Latter-day Saints believe the Fall was a necessary part of the Lords plan for us: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25).

26. After creating the earth and all things upon it, God created Adam and Eve. He taught them the sanctity of marriage and the importance of families. They were instructed, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In our time, many people deny the sanctity of marriage, treating it merely as a contract between two parties, but the Latter-day Saints have been taught its true significance. The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith, "Wherefore, it is lawful that he [man] should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation; And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made" (D&C 49:16-17). He was also instructed that "whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man" (D&C 49:15).

27. The eternal nature of marriage and the possibility of continued family relationships beyond the grave are essential features of the restored gospel. Priesthood ordinances and covenants make this continuity possible. The prophet Elias appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, restoring the doctrine of celestial marriage, and the prophet Elijah restored the necessary keys to make these marriages and all other ordinances binding for eternity. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the significance of these events:

28. Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, meaning the great commission given to Abraham that he and his seed had a right to the priesthood, the gospel, and eternal life. Accordingly, Elias promised those upon whom these ancient promises were then renewed that in them and

in their seed all generations should be blessed. (D&C 110:12-16.) Thus, through the joint ministry of Elijah, who brought the sealing power, and Elias, who restored the marriage discipline of Abraham, the way was prepared for the planting in the hearts of the children of the promises made to the fathers. (D&C 2:2.) These are the promises of eternal life through the priesthood and the gospel and celestial marriage. 10

29. Through those keys and authority, Joseph Smith was able to officiate in all ordinances necessary for the salvation and exaltation of men and women. President Ezra Taft Benson taught:

30. Elijah brought the keys of sealing powers—that power which seals a man to a woman and seals their posterity to them endlessly, that which seals their forefathers to them all the way back to Adam. This is the power and order that Elijah revealed—that same order of priesthood which God gave to Adam and to all the ancient patriarchs which followed after him.

31. Therefore the Proclamation states: "The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally" (paragraph 3).

32. Ordinances and covenants have important ramifications for the present and eternal nature of the family. As we enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. The Lord explains our relationship with Him: "This is eternal life to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law" (D&C 1 32:24).

33. Not only does the covenant of marriage bring with it the promises of eternity, it allows us to know God and better emulate His example in this life. The fact that the Lord provides this opportunity within the context of family is of vital importance. It seems that our relationship with God has always been in a family context, and so it is in mortality. Within the family comes the fulness of the gospel and its covenants.

34. Once a family unit is started by the marriage of a man and woman, the plan continues to unfold by the addition of children to this family. The Proclamation states:

35. The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare

that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan. (paragraph 4)

36. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were unable to fulfill this commandment to multiply and replenish the earth. The Fall was necessary for the creation of families. Lehi taught:

37. And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

38. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. (2 Ne. 2:22-23)

39. By partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and thereby becoming mortal, Adam and Eve were able to obey the first commandment given to them as husband and wife: they could become parents.

40. By obtaining the ability to bring children into the world and receiving the ordinances necessary to be sealed as families through eternity, Adam and Eve and all parents to follow became responsible to "rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, and to observe the commandments of God" (Proclamation, paragraph 6). Thus, parents have the important responsibility to rear their children in the light of the gospel. The Lord has said: "And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents" (D&C 68:25-27).

41. President Ezra Taft Benson observed that the "overarching message" of righteous Book of Mormon fathers was "the great plan of the Eternal God—the Fall, rebirth, Atonement, Resurrection, Judgment (and) eternal life."¹² The "great plan" is a family plan which not only provides children with the covenants and ordinances necessary for exaltation, but it creates a nurturing environment where children learn

the important ways of life.

The Atonement of Christ and Eternal Families

42. The doctrines of the Creation and the Fall are essential if we are to understand who we are and how life is to be lived, but they are not enough. The Proclamation teaches us that "happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ" (paragraph 7). In other words, "it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation" (Hel. 5:12). At the heart of the Savior's teachings is the doctrine of His atoning sacrifice. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught "all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it."¹¹ The Atonement of Jesus Christ makes possible "eternal lives" (D&C 132:24), or life with our families in the presence of God. God's work and glory is to unite couples and families together, and only through the Atonement of Christ is this possible.

43. According to the Proclamation, "family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" (paragraph 1). Thus, not only are family relationships of utmost importance and a source of joy and growth in this life, but as it is stated in the Proclamation: "The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. . . . Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally" (paragraph 3).

44. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins of the world and it is only through faith in Him and obedience to the laws and ordinances of His gospel that salvation and exaltation are possible (Alma 34:8). Because of the redeeming sacrifice of the Son of God, eternal families are possible. Without the Atonement, no one could live in God's presence or inherit all He has, or be sealed for eternity. The Atonement allows God's children to be reconciled to Him (Eph. 2:16); to be cleansed from all sin (D&C 76:52); to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise (D&C 76:53); to become gods (D&C 76:58) and receive all that God has (D&C 76:59); to be made perfect (D&C 76:69); and to dwell forever in the presence of God and Christ in the celestial kingdom as husbands and wives in eternal families.

ETERNAL LIFE IS FAMILIAL

45. Elder Henry B. Eyring stated that "Eternal life means to become like the Father and to live in families in happiness and joy forever."¹⁴

46. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said:

47. From the moment of birth into mortality to the time we are married in the temple, everything we have in the whole gospel system is to prepare and qualify us to enter that holy order of matrimony which makes us husband and wife in this life and in the world to come. ...There is nothing in this world as important as the creation and perfection of family units."

48. In fact, the structure of the Lord's Church is designed to bring the benefits of the eternal sealing powers of the temple to marriage and family relationships, so those relationships can endure throughout eternity. Elder M. Russell Ballard said, "The family is where the foundation of personal, spiritual growth is built and nurtured; the Church, then is the scaffolding that helps support and strengthen the family."¹⁶

49. The doctrine that eternal life is familial is one of the unique teachings of the restored gospel. These teachings have brought joy and consolation to millions of souls. Many people from all faiths, even though their religion does not teach this principle, personally hope their lifelong and deeply cherished relationships with spouse and family members will continue beyond the grave. Only the teachings and temple ordinances of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can provide the realization of these blessings for all of Heavenly Father's children.

Truths of Eternity Restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith

50. During the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith he received numerous revelations pertaining to the doctrine of eternal families. For example:

51. And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

52. And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead. (D&C 132:6-7)

53. In the same revelation, the Lord told the Prophet that if a couple is married in the new and everlasting covenant and this union is "sealed unto them by the

Holy Spirit of promise" (D&C 132:19) then will they inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths ... and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltations and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. (D&C 132:19)

54. Following the revelation of these profound truths, the Lord further explained about the "sealing power" given by Elijah and of the power and authority to seal a husband and a wife to one another and to bind their children to them:

55. And verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens. (D&C 132:46)

56. This same power was given by the Savior to Peter (Matt. 16:19) and is held by all Presidents of the Church, who in turn have bestowed this authority on others who then perform these sacred ordinances in the holy temples. Pertaining to these ordinances, Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the Seventy taught:

57. Frequently we perform marriages in the temple. These marriages are properly called celestial marriages, temple sealings, or eternal marriages. The thing that we really do is to organize the most basic unit in the Church—the family. The family is the most important relationship in this life. In reality, the bride and groom are called to assignments in the family from which they are never released, except by transgression. This is the one eternal unit which can exist in the presence of God.¹⁷

58. In speaking of the importance of keeping marriage covenants, President Spencer W. Kimball said, "Marriage according to the law of the Church is the most holy and sacred ordinance. It will bring to the husband and the wife, if they abide in their covenants, the fullness of exaltation in the kingdom of God."¹⁸

Eternal Families

59. Not only can marriage last beyond the grave, but so can sibling and family relationships endure across generations. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read, "And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy" (D&C 130:2). The Prophet Joseph Smith saw a vision of the celestial kingdom as it would one day exist and said, "I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my

mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept" (D&C 137:5). It is significant that of all the great and noble people Joseph could have named, he mentions his own parents, who were still living at the time of the vision, and his beloved elder brother Alvin. Adam, one of our "first parents" (Alma 42:2), and Abraham, the "Father of the Faithful" (Abr. 2:10) have a familial relationship with those who will live with God in the celestial kingdom.

60. Elder Robert D. Hales taught that "the plan of the Father is that family love and companionship will continue into the eternities....The family relationships we have here on this earth are important, but they are much more important for their effect on our families for generations in mortality and throughout all eternity."¹⁹ Elder Merrill J. Bateman stated the following in summarizing the family nature of the Father's plan:

61. The creation of the earth, the fall of Adam, and the atonement of Christ are essential elements or pillars in the Father's plan for the progression and development of his children—both as individuals and as families. ... These three doctrinal pillars of the plan of salvation are intimately involved in the creation of new eternal families and their extension into the eternities.²⁰

62. It follows that more of our time and attention should focus on the creation of "eternal families" and perhaps less on simply enjoying the fun and entertainment the world offers (see 1 Cor. 10:7). The truth that the binding of humanity into eternal families is the whole purpose of the creation is demonstrated by the prophecy of Malachi (see Mal. 4:5-6). President Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead states:

63. The Prophet Elijah was to plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their fathers, foreshadowing the great work to be done in the temples of the Lord in the dispensation of the fulness of times, for the redemption of the dead, and the sealing of the children to their parents, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse and utterly wasted at his coming. (D&C 138:47-48).

64. The sealing powers restored by Elijah make possible the joy of being sealed to one's immediate family and beyond in a great chain from Adam and Eve to the last woman and man (see D&C 128:18).

65. The misery of living through eternity alone is suggested by the Lord: "And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that

which was written by the prophet Moses, that they should be cut off from among the people ...and the day that cometh shall bum them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (D&C 133:62-64; see also 3 Ne. 25:1 and Mal. 4:1). Thus, part of the penalty for wickedness is being "cut off from the people" and being left with neither roots (ancestors) nor branches (descendants) throughout eternity.

66. All who will dwell in the celestial kingdom are spirit children of Heavenly Father and thus are brothers and sisters. And all the Saints from every dispensation will be sealed to one another in what the Prophet Joseph Smith called a "whole and complete and perfect union" (D&C 128:18).

67. Although the exact nature of family relationships after this life has not been fully revealed and we do not fully comprehend what God has prepared for the righteous (see 1 Cor. 2:9), the Lord has revealed that marriage is essential for exaltation in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 132:15-16). Each exalted couple will, like God, be involved in the creative process of bringing forth spirit children who will have the opportunity to experience mortality for themselves (see D&C 131:4).

CONCLUSION

68. God and His plan are eternal. God instituted marriage and family in the beginning. God created the earth, the garden, and our first parents in order to create families for all of His children to be born into and experience mortal life--especially mortal family life. The Fall occurred because Adam and Eve chose to obey God's commandment to multiply and replenish the earth and thus create the first family. The Lord Jesus Christ-the Son of God-completed the Atonement in order to reconcile God's children with God and with one another. Thus, the great plan of happiness is a plan that centers on family in time and eternity.

69. God commands his children to marry and become one, and the Savior taught that "what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt .19:6). Marriage and family are eternal and priesthood keys have been given to prophets to seal on earth and in heaven. The Lord told Moses, "Behold this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), and He told the Prophet Joseph Smith that the new and everlasting covenant of marriage "was instituted for the fulness of my glory" (D&C 132:6). The work and glory of God is to assist His children to make and keep sacred covenants designed to allow them to be sealed

together eternally to one another and to Him and thereby enjoy all God enjoys. It should be the work and glory of all of God's children-but especially all Latter-day Saints-to make and keep these sacred covenants, to teach these transcendent truths to those who do not yet know of them and to work in God's holy temples to make these covenants and ordinances available to all the children of God who desire to form eternal families.

NOTES

1. The family: A proclamation to the world (1995, November), *Ensign*, 25, 102.
2. Joseph F. Smith (1986), *Gospel doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 272; see also Conference report (1913. April), 118-119.
3. Hugh B. Brown (1966, October), in Conference report, 103; or *Improvement Era* (1966, December), 1095.
4. See M. Russell Ballard (Nov. 1993), *Ensign*, 23, 76; see also Abr. 3.
5. Joseph F. Smith (1986), *Gospel doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 285-86.
6. Bruce R. McConkie (1985), *A new witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 84.
7. See Daniel K Judd (1999), *The simpleness of the way*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.
8. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund (1909, November), The origin of man. *Improvement Era*, 13, 61.
9. Joseph Smith (1938), *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 343.
10. Bruce R. McConkie. 322.
11. Ezra Taft Benson (1985, Aug.), What I hope you will teach your children about the temple. *Ensign*, 8, 10.
12. Ezra Taft Benson (1985, November), Worthy fathers, worthy sons, *Ensign*, 15, 36.
13. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 121.
14. Henry B. Eyring (1998, February). The family, *Ensign*, 28(2), 10-18.
15. Bruce R. McConkie (1970, June), *Improvement Era*, 43-44.
16. M. Russell Ballard (1996, May), *Ensign*, 26, 81.
17. A. Theodore Tuttle (1969, December), *Improvement Era*, 107.
18. Spencer W Kimball (1962, October), The importance of keeping marriage covenants, in Conference report. 57-59.
19. Robert D. Hales (1996, November), The eternal family, *Ensign*, 26, 65.
20. Merrill J. Bateman (1998), The eternal family, *Brigham Young Magazine*, 52(4), 26.

2.2 - Marriage Is Essential To His Eternal Plan

Elder David A. Bednar
Ensign, June 2006



The Doctrinal Ideal of Marriage

1. We have been counseled strongly by the First Presidency to devote our best efforts to the strengthening of marriage and the home. Such instruction has

never been more needed in the world than it is today, as the sanctity of marriage is attacked and the importance of the home is undermined.

2. Even though the Church and its programs support marriage and [family](#) and generally are successful at doing so, we should always remember this basic truth: no instrumentality or organization can take the place of the home or perform its essential functions.

[1](#)Consequently, today I will speak with you primarily as men and women, as husbands and wives, and as mothers and fathers and secondarily as priesthood and auxiliary leaders in the Church. My assignment is to discuss the essential role of eternal marriage in our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness.

3. We will focus on the doctrinal ideal of marriage. My hope is that a review of our eternal possibilities and a reminder about who we are and why we are here in mortality will provide direction, comfort, and sustaining hope for us all, regardless of our marital status or personal present circumstances. The disparity between the doctrinal ideal of marriage and the reality of daily life may seem at times to be quite large, but you gradually are doing and becoming much better than you probably recognize.

4. I invite you to keep in mind the following questions as we discuss principles related to eternal marriage.

5. Question 1: In my own life, am I striving to become a better husband or a wife, or preparing to be a husband or a wife, by understanding and applying these basic principles?

6. Question 2: As a priesthood or auxiliary leader, am I helping those I serve to understand and apply these basic principles, thereby strengthening marriage and the home?

7. As we prayerfully ponder these questions and consider our own marriage relationships and our responsibilities in the Church, I testify the Spirit of the Lord will enlighten our minds and teach us the things we need to do and to improve (see [John 14:26](#)).

Why Marriage Is Essential

8. In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles proclaim "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children." [2](#)This keynote sentence of the proclamation teaches us much about the doctrinal significance of marriage and emphasizes the primacy of marriage and family in the Father's plan. Righteous marriage is a commandment

and an essential step in the process of creating a loving family relationship that can be perpetuated beyond the grave.

9. Two compelling doctrinal reasons help us to understand why eternal marriage is essential to the Father's plan.

10. Reason 1: The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

11. The eternal nature and importance of marriage can be fully understood only within the overarching context of the Father's plan for His children. "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and ... has a divine nature and destiny." [3](#) The great plan of happiness enables the spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experience, and to progress toward perfection.

12. "Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" [4](#)and in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary.

13. After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said it was "not good that the man should be alone" ([Gen. 2:18](#); [Moses 3:18](#)), and Eve became Adam's companion and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness. Alone, neither the man nor the woman could fulfill the purposes of his or her creation.

14. By divine design, men and women are intended to progress together toward perfection and a fulness of glory. Because of their distinctive temperaments and capacities, males and females each bring to a marriage relationship unique perspectives and experiences. The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other. "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" ([1 Cor. 11:11](#); italics added).

15. Reason 2: By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and

to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

16. The commandment given anciently to Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. “God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. ... The means by which mortal life is created [are] divinely appointed.” [5](#) Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

17. A home with a loving and loyal husband and wife is the supreme setting in which children can be reared in love and righteousness and in which the spiritual and physical needs of children can be met. Just as the unique characteristics of both males and females contribute to the completeness of a marriage relationship, so those same characteristics are vital to the rearing, nurturing, and teaching of children. “Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.” [6](#)

Guiding Principles

18. The two doctrinal reasons we have reviewed about the importance of eternal marriage in the Father’s plan of happiness suggest guiding principles for those who are preparing to marry, for those who are married, and for our service in the Church.

19. Principle 1: The importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness.

20. We frequently speak about and highlight marriage as a fundamental unit of society, as the foundation of a strong nation, and as a vital sociological and cultural institution. But the restored gospel helps us to understand that it is so much more!

21. Do we perhaps talk about marriage without adequately teaching the importance of marriage in the Father’s plan? Emphasizing marriage without linking it to the simple and fundamental doctrine of the plan of happiness cannot provide sufficient direction, protection, or hope in a world that grows increasingly confused and wicked. We would all do well to remember the teaching of Alma—that “God gave unto [the children of men] commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption” ([Alma 12:32](#); italics added).

22. Elder Parley P. Pratt expressed beautifully the blessings that come to us as we learn about, understand, and strive to apply in our lives the doctrinal ideal of marriage:

23. “It was [Joseph Smith](#) who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

24. “It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. ...

25. “I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. ... In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.

26. “Yet, at that time, my dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had ... merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity.” [7](#)

27. As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, can we see how the importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness? The doctrine of the plan leads men and women to hope and prepare for eternal marriage, and it defeats the fears and overcomes the uncertainties that may cause some individuals to delay or avoid marriage. A correct understanding of the plan also strengthens our resolve to steadfastly honor the covenant of eternal marriage. Our individual learning, our teaching, and our testifying in both the home and at church will be magnified as we ponder and more fully understand this truth.

28. Principle 2: Satan desires that all men and women might be miserable like unto himself.

29. Lucifer relentlessly assails and distorts the doctrines that matter most to us individually, to our families, and to the world. Where is the adversary focusing his most direct and diabolical attacks? Satan works unremittingly to confuse understanding about gender, to promote the premature and unrighteous use of procreative power, and to hinder righteous marriage precisely because marriage is ordained of God and the family is central to the plan of happiness. The adversary’s attacks upon eternal marriage will continue to increase in intensity, frequency, and sophistication.

30. Because today we are engaged in a war for the welfare of marriage and the home, in my latest reading of the [Book of Mormon](#) I paid particular attention to the ways the Nephites prepared for their battles against the Lamanites. I noted that the people of Nephi “were aware of the intent of [their enemy], and therefore they did prepare to meet them” ([Alma 2:12](#); italics added). As I read and studied, I learned that understanding the intent of an enemy is a key prerequisite to effective preparation. We likewise should consider the intent of our enemy in this latter-day war.

31. The Father’s plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him. Lucifer’s attacks on the plan are intended to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to halt their eternal progression. The overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become “miserable like unto himself” ([2 Ne. 2:27](#)), and he works to warp the elements of the Father’s plan he hates the most. Satan does not have a body, he cannot marry, and he will not have a family. And he persistently strives to confuse the divinely appointed purposes of gender, marriage, and family. Throughout the world, we see growing evidence of the effectiveness of Satan’s efforts.

32. More recently the devil has attempted to combine and legally validate confusion about gender and marriage. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit alternatives the adversary advocates can never lead to the completeness that is made possible through the sealing together of a man and a woman, to the happiness of righteous marriage, to the joy of posterity, or to the blessing of eternal progression.

33. Given what we know about our enemy’s intent, each of us should be especially vigilant in seeking personal inspiration as to how we can protect and safeguard our own marriages—and how we can learn and teach correct principles in the home and in our Church assignments about the eternal significance of gender and of the role of marriage in the Father’s plan.

34. Principle 3: The ultimate blessings of love and happiness are obtained through the covenant relationship of eternal marriage.

35. The Lord [Jesus Christ](#) is the focal point in a covenant marriage relationship. Please notice how the Savior is positioned at the apex of this triangle, with a woman at the base of one corner and a man at the base of the other corner. Now consider what happens in the relationship between the man and the woman as they individually and steadily “come unto Christ” and strive

to be “perfected in Him” ([Moro. 10:32](#)). Because of and through [the Redeemer](#), the man and the woman come closer together.

36. As a husband and wife are each drawn to the Lord (see [3 Ne. 27:14](#)), as they learn to serve and cherish one another, as they share life experiences and grow together and become one, and as they are blessed through the uniting of their distinctive natures, they begin to realize the fulfillment that our Heavenly Father desires for His children. Ultimate happiness, which is the very object of the Father’s plan, is received through the making and honoring of eternal marriage covenants.

37. As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, one of our paramount responsibilities is to help young men and women learn about and prepare for righteous marriage through our personal example. As young women and men observe worthiness, loyalty, sacrifice, and the honoring of covenants in our marriages, then those youth will seek to emulate the same principles in their courting and marriage relationships. As young people notice that we have made the comfort and convenience of our eternal companion our highest priority, then they will become less self-centered and more able to give, to serve, and to create an equal and enduring companionship. As young women and men perceive mutual respect, affection, trust, and love between a husband and a wife, then they will strive to cultivate the same characteristics in their lives. Our children and the youth of the Church will learn the most from what we do and what we are—even if they remember relatively little of what we say.

38. Unfortunately many young members of the Church today are fearful of and stumble in their progress toward eternal marriage because they have seen too much of divorce in the world and of broken covenants in their homes and in the Church.

39. Eternal marriage is not merely a temporary legal contract that can be terminated at any time for almost any reason. Rather, it is a sacred covenant with God that can be binding in time and throughout all eternity. Faithfulness and fidelity in marriage must not simply be attractive words spoken in sermons; rather, they should be principles evident in our own covenant marriage relationships.

40. As we consider the importance of our personal example, do you and I discern areas where we need to improve? Is the [Holy Ghost](#) inspiring our minds and softening our hearts and encouraging us to do and to become better? As priesthood and auxiliary leaders, are

we focusing our efforts on strengthening marriage and the home?

41. Husbands and wives need time together to fortify themselves and their homes against the attacks of the adversary. As we strive to magnify our callings in the Church, are we unintentionally hindering husbands and wives and mothers and fathers from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities in the home? For example, do we sometimes schedule unnecessary meetings and activities in a way that interferes with the essential relationship between a husband and a wife and their relationships with children?

42. As we sincerely ponder these questions, I am confident the Spirit is even now helping and will continue to help each of us learn the things we should do at home and in the Church.

The Spiritual Resources We Need

43. Our responsibilities to learn and understand the doctrine of the plan, to uphold and be examples of righteous marriage, and to teach correct principles in the home and at church may cause us to wonder if we are equal to the task. We are ordinary people who must accomplish a most extraordinary work.

44. Many years ago, Sister Bednar and I were busy trying to meet the countless competing demands of a young and energetic family—and of Church, career, and community responsibilities. One evening after the children were asleep, we talked at length about how effectively we were attending to all of our important priorities. We realized that we would not receive the promised blessings in eternity if we did not honor more fully the covenant we had made in mortality. We resolved together to do and to be better as a husband and a wife. That lesson learned so many years ago has made a tremendous difference in our marriage.

45. The sweet and simple doctrine of the plan of happiness provides precious eternal perspective and helps us understand the importance of eternal marriage. We have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need. We have the fulness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Ghost and revelation. We have saving ordinances, covenants, and temples. We have priesthood and prophets. We have the holy scriptures and the power of the word of God. And we have The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

46. I testify that we have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need to learn about, to teach, to strengthen, and to defend righteous marriage—and that indeed we can live together in happiness as husbands

and wives and families in eternity. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

2.3 - Teaching the Doctrine of the Family

President Julie B. Beck

Ensign, March 2011



1. This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before. If they don't know the doctrine, they can't defend it.

Teaching the Doctrine of the Family

2. As I meet with young single adults around the world, I ask them, "Why does the First Presidency care so much about you and provide so many resources for you?" These are some of the answers I get: "We are future Church leaders." "We need training so we can stay strong." "Our testimonies are strengthened in our seminary and institute classes." "We need to meet other great Latter-day Saint youth." "We are the hope of the future." I have rarely heard, "So I will someday be a better father or a better mother." Their responses are generally about self, because this is the time of life they are in.

3. Nevertheless, parents, teachers, and leaders of youth need to teach the rising generation the doctrine of the [family](#). It is essential to help them achieve eternal life (see [Moses 1:39](#)). They need to know that the theology of the family is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. They need to understand the threats to the family so they will know what they are fighting against and can prepare. They need to understand clearly that the fulness of the gospel is realized in temple ordinances and covenants.

The Theology of the Family

4. In The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints, we have a theology of the family that is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. The Creation of the earth provided a place where families could live. God created a man and a woman who were the two essential halves of a family. It was part of Heavenly Father's plan that Adam and Eve be sealed and form an eternal family.

5. The Fall provided a way for the family to grow. Adam and Eve were family leaders who chose to have a mortal experience. The Fall made it possible for them to have sons and daughters.

6. The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. The plan of happiness, also called the plan of salvation, was a plan created for families. The rising generation need to understand that the main pillars of our theology are centered in the family.

7. When we speak of qualifying for the blessings of eternal life, we mean qualifying for the blessings of eternal families. This was Christ's doctrine, and it was restored through the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#). It is recorded in [Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3](#):

8. "Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

9. "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

10. "If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."

11. This scripture is talking about temple blessings—ordinances and covenants without which "the whole earth [is] utterly wasted."

12. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" was written to reinforce that the family is central to the Creator's plan.¹ Without the family, there is no plan; there is no reason for mortal life.

Threats to the Family

13. In addition to understanding the theology of the family, we all need to understand the threats to the family. If we don't, we can't prepare for the battle. Evidence is all around us that the family is becoming less important. Marriage rates are declining, the age of marriage is rising, and divorce rates are rising. Out-of-wedlock births are growing. [Abortion](#) is rising and becoming increasingly legal. We see lower birth rates. We see unequal relationships between men and women, and we see cultures that still practice abuse within family relationships. Many times a career gains importance over the family.

14. Many of our youth are losing confidence in the institution of families. They're placing more and more value on education and less and less importance on forming an eternal family. Many don't see forming families as a faith-based work. For them, it's a selection process much like shopping. Many also distrust their own moral strength and the moral strength of their peers. Because temptations are so

fierce, many are not sure they can be successful in keeping covenants.

15. Many youth also have insufficient and underdeveloped social skills, which are an impediment to forming eternal families. They are increasingly adept at talking to someone 50 miles (80 km) away and less able to carry on conversations with people in the same room. That makes it difficult for them to socialize with each other.

16. We also face the problem that we read about in [Ephesians 6:12](#): "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Public policies are being made every day that are antifamily, and the definition of family is changing legally around the world. [Pornography](#) is rampant. For those who create pornography, their new target audience is young women. Parents are being portrayed as inept and out of touch. Antifamily media messages are everywhere. Youth are being desensitized about the need to form eternal families.

17. We see how this can happen when we read the words of Korihor, an anti-Christ: "Thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms" ([Alma 30:18](#)). Satan knows that he will never have a body; he will never have a family. So he targets young women, who will create the bodies for the future generations.

18. Korihor was an anti-Christ. Anti-Christ is antifamily. Any doctrine or principle our youth hear from the world that is antifamily is also anti-Christ. It's that clear. If our youth cease to believe in the righteous traditions of their fathers as did the people described in [Mosiah 26](#), if our youth don't understand their part in the plan, they could be led away.

Teaching the Rising Generation

19. What is it we hope this rising generation will understand and do because of what we teach them? The answers to that question as well as the key elements of the doctrine of the family are found in the family proclamation. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said that the proclamation was "a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices" that this Church has always had.²

20. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, "This order ... of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did

Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity ... is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live.”³

21. The rising generation need to understand that the command to “multiply, and replenish the earth” ([Genesis 1:28](#); [Moses 2:28](#)) remains in force. Bearing children is a faith-based work. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so.”⁴ Motherhood and fatherhood are eternal roles. Each carries the responsibility for either the male or the female half of the plan. Youth is the time to prepare for those eternal roles and responsibilities.

22. Parents, teachers, and leaders can help young people prepare for the blessings of Abraham. What are those blessings? Abraham tells us in [Abraham 1:2](#). He says he wanted “the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer; ... to be one who possessed great knowledge, ... to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.”

23. Where are these blessings Abraham received? They come only to those who have a temple sealing and marriage. A man cannot become a “father of many nations” without being sealed to his wife. Likewise, Abraham could not hold the right belonging to the fathers without a wife who had the right belonging to the mothers.

24. The stories of Abraham and Sarah and of Isaac and Rebekah are found in Genesis. Abraham and Sarah had only one son, Isaac. If Abraham was to be the “father of many nations,” how important was Isaac’s wife, Rebekah? She was so important that he sent his servant hundreds of miles to find the right young woman—one who would keep her covenants, one who understood what it meant to form an eternal family.

25. In [Genesis 24:60](#), Rebekah is blessed to be “the mother of thousands of millions.” Where do we find those kinds of blessings? They are received in the temple.

26. The story of Isaac and Rebekah is an example of the man, who has the keys, and the woman, who has the influence, working together to ensure the fulfillment of their blessings. Their story is pivotal. The blessings of the house of Israel depended on a man and a woman who understood their place in the plan

and their responsibilities to form an eternal family, to bear children, and to teach them.

27. In our day we have the responsibility to send “Isaac” and “Rebekah” forth from our homes and classrooms. Every young man and young woman should understand his or her role in this great partnership—that they are each an “Isaac” or a “Rebekah.” Then they will know with clarity what they have to do.

Live the Hope of Eternal Life

28. Parents, teachers, and leaders: live in your homes, in your families, in your marriages so that youth will develop hope for eternal life from watching you. Live and teach with so much clarity that what you teach will cut through all the noise youth are hearing and so that it will pierce their hearts and touch them.

29. Live in your home so that you’re brilliant in the basics, so that you’re intentional about your roles and responsibilities in the family. Think in terms of precision not perfection. If you have your goals and you are precise in how you go about them in your homes, youth will learn from you. They will learn that you pray, study the scriptures together, have family home evening, make a priority of mealtimes, and speak respectfully of your marriage partner. Then from your example the rising generation will gain great hope.

This I Know

30. We are preparing our youth for the temple and for eternal families. Many threats are coming to them that can discourage them from forming an eternal family. Our role in this is to teach them so they don’t misunderstand. We must be very clear on key points of doctrine, which we find in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

31. This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before. If they don’t know it, they can’t defend it. They need to understand temples and priesthood.

32. President Kimball said:

33. “Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us. ...

34. “... There are those who would define the family in such a nontraditional way that they would define it out of existence. ...

35. “We of all people, brothers and sisters, should not be taken in by the specious arguments that the family unit is somehow tied to a particular phase of development a moral society is going through. We are free to resist those moves which downplay the significance of the family and which play up the significance of selfish individualism. We know the family to be eternal.”⁵

36. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We have the fulness of the gospel this day. We are sons and daughters of heavenly parents, who sent us forth to have this earthly experience to prepare us for the blessing of eternal families. I bear you my testimony of our Savior, Jesus Christ, that through His Atonement we can become perfect and equal to our responsibilities in our earthly families and that through His Atonement we have the promise of eternal life in families.

The Family Is Eternal

37. “The family is not an accident of mortality. It existed as an organizational unit in the heavens before the world was formed; historically, it started on earth with Adam and Eve, as recorded in Genesis. Adam and Eve were married and sealed for time and all eternity by the Lord, and as a result their family will exist eternally.”

38. Elder [Robert D. Hales](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” in Dawn Hall Anderson, ed., *Clothed with Charity: Talks from the 1996 Women’s Conference* (1997), 134.

To Teachers

39. “Your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the gospel of the Lord [Jesus Christ](#) as that has been revealed in these latter days. You are to teach this gospel using as your sources and authorities the standard works of the Church and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days.”

40. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961), *First Counselor in the First Presidency, The Charted Course of the Church in Education*, rev. ed. (1994), 10; see also *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders* (2001), 4.

41. Using “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”

- Hang a copy of the proclamation in your home or classroom.

- Encourage youth to keep a copy of the proclamation in their scriptures.
- Link key statements in the proclamation to lessons taught from the scriptures.
- Study and refer to the proclamation in family home evening.

42. We have a theology of the family that is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement.

43. We are preparing our youth for the temple and for eternal families.

44. Among the threats to the family is divorce, which is on the rise.

45. Parents, as well as leaders and teachers of youth, should teach the doctrine of the family to the rising generation as found in the scriptures and the family proclamation.

Notes

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 100.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, 6.
4. Spencer W. Kimball, “Fortify Your Homes against Evil,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 6.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “Families Can Be Eternal,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 4.

2.4 - The Great Plan of Happiness

Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, November 1993



1. Questions like, Where did we come from? Why are we here? and Where are we going? are answered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Prophets have called it the plan of salvation and “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). Through inspiration we can understand this road map of eternity and use it to guide our path in mortality.

2. The gospel teaches us that we are the spirit children of heavenly parents. Before our mortal birth we had “a pre-existent, spiritual personality, as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father” (statement of the First Presidency, Improvement Era, Mar. 1912, p. 417; also see Jer. 1:5). We were placed here on earth to progress toward our destiny of eternal life. These truths give us a unique perspective and different values to guide our decisions from those who doubt the existence of God and believe that life is the result of random processes.

3. Our understanding of life begins with a council in heaven. There the spirit children of God were taught his eternal plan for their destiny. We had progressed as far as we could without a physical body and an experience in mortality. To realize a fulness of joy, we had to prove our willingness to keep the commandments of God in a circumstance where we had no memory of what preceded our mortal birth.

4. In the course of mortality, we would become subject to death, and we would be soiled by sin. To reclaim us from death and sin, our Heavenly Father's plan provided us a Savior, whose atonement would redeem all from death and pay the price necessary for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions he prescribed (see 2 Ne. 9:19–24).

5. Satan had his own plan. He proposed to save all the spirit children of God, assuring that result by removing their power to choose and thus eliminating the possibility of sin. When Satan's plan was rejected, he and the spirits who followed him opposed the Father's plan and were cast out.

6. All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father's plan and fought for it. Many of us also made covenants with the Father concerning what we would do in mortality. In ways that have not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world influence us in mortality.

7. Although Satan and his followers have lost their opportunity to have a physical body, they are permitted to use their spirit powers to try to frustrate God's plan. This provides the opposition necessary to test how mortals will use their freedom to choose. Satan's most strenuous opposition is directed at whatever is most important to the Father's plan. Satan seeks to discredit the Savior and divine authority, to nullify the effects of the Atonement, to counterfeit revelation, to lead people away from the truth, to contradict individual accountability, to confuse gender, to undermine marriage, and to discourage childbearing (especially by parents who will raise children in righteousness).

8. Maleness and femaleness, marriage, and the bearing and nurturing of children are all essential to the great plan of happiness. Modern revelation makes clear that what we call gender was part of our existence prior to our birth. God declares that he created "male and female" (D&C 20:18; Moses 2:27; Gen. 1:27). Elder James E. Talmage explained: "The distinction between male and female is no condition peculiar to the relatively brief period of mortal life; it was an essential characteristic of our pre-existent condition" (Millennial Star, 24 Aug. 1922, p. 539).

9. To the first man and woman on earth, the Lord said, "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Moses 2:28; see also Gen. 1:28; Abr. 4:28). This commandment was first in sequence and first in importance. It was essential that God's spirit children have mortal birth and an opportunity to progress toward eternal life. Consequently, all things related to procreation are prime targets for the adversary's efforts to thwart the plan of God.

10. When Adam and Eve received the first commandment, they were in a transitional state, no longer in the spirit world but with physical bodies not yet subject to death and not yet capable of procreation. They could not fulfill the Father's first commandment without transgressing the barrier between the bliss of the Garden of Eden and the terrible trials and wonderful opportunities of mortal life.

11. For reasons that have not been revealed, this transition, or "fall," could not happen without a transgression—an exercise of moral agency amounting to a willful breaking of a law (see Moses 6:59). This would be a planned offense, a formality to serve an eternal purpose. The Prophet Lehi explained that "if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen" (2 Ne. 2:22), but would have remained in the same state in which he was created.

12. "And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin" (2 Ne. 2:23).

13. But the Fall was planned, Lehi concludes, because "all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things" (2 Ne. 2:24).

14. It was Eve who first transgressed the limits of Eden in order to initiate the conditions of mortality. Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. And thus Eve and "Adam fell that men might be" (2 Ne. 2:25).

15. Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve's act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall (see Bruce R. McConkie, "Eve and the Fall," *Woman*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, pp. 67–68). Joseph Smith taught that it was not a "sin," because God had decreed it (see *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, Provo,

Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980, p. 63). Brigham Young declared, “We should never blame Mother Eve, not the least” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:145). Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said: “I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. ... This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin ... for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 1:114–15).

16. This suggested contrast between a sin and a transgression reminds us of the careful wording in the second article of faith: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (emphasis added). It also echoes a familiar distinction in the law. Some acts, like murder, are crimes because they are inherently wrong. Other acts, like operating without a license, are crimes only because they are legally prohibited. Under these distinctions, the act that produced the Fall was not a sin—inherently wrong—but a transgression—wrong because it was formally prohibited. These words are not always used to denote something different, but this distinction seems meaningful in the circumstances of the Fall.

17. Modern revelation shows that our first parents understood the necessity of the Fall. Adam declared, “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10).

18. Note the different perspective and the special wisdom of Eve, who focused on the purpose and effect of the great plan of happiness: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11). In his vision of the redemption of the dead, President Joseph F. Smith saw “the great and mighty ones” assembled to meet the Son of God, and among them was “our glorious Mother Eve” (D&C 138:38–39).

19. When we understand the plan of salvation, we also understand the purpose and effect of the commandments God has given his children. He teaches us correct principles and invites us to govern ourselves. We do this by the choices we make in mortality.

20. We live in a day when there are many political, legal, and social pressures for changes that confuse gender and homogenize the differences between men

and women. Our eternal perspective sets us against changes that alter those separate duties and privileges of men and women that are essential to accomplish the great plan of happiness. We do not oppose all changes in the treatment of men and women, since some changes in laws or customs simply correct old wrongs that were never grounded in eternal principles.

21. The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given his children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment, but another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse. The emphasis we place on the law of chastity is explained by our understanding of the purpose of our procreative powers in the accomplishment of God’s plan.

22. The expression of our procreative powers is pleasing to God, but he has commanded that this be confined within the relationship of marriage. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that “in the context of lawful marriage, the intimacy of sexual relations is right and divinely approved. There is nothing unholy or degrading about sexuality in itself, for by that means men and women join in a process of creation and in an expression of love” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, p. 311).

23. Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of the procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute of men and women. The Book of Mormon teaches that unchastity is “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5). In our own day, the First Presidency of the Church has declared the doctrine of this Church “that sexual sin—the illicit sexual relations of men and women—stands, in its enormity, next to murder” (“Message of the First Presidency,” 3 Oct. 1942, as quoted in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75, 6:176). Some who do not know the plan of salvation behave like promiscuous animals, but Latter-day Saints—especially those who are under sacred covenants—have no such latitude. We are solemnly responsible to God for the destruction or misuse of the creative powers he has placed within us.

24. The ultimate act of destruction is to take a life. That is why abortion is such a serious sin. Our attitude toward abortion is not based on revealed knowledge of when mortal life begins for legal purposes. It is fixed by our knowledge that according to an eternal plan all

of the spirit children of God must come to this earth for a glorious purpose, and that individual identity began long before conception and will continue for all the eternities to come. We rely on the prophets of God, who have told us that while there may be “rare” exceptions, “the practice of elective abortion is fundamentally contrary to the Lord’s injunction, ‘Thou shalt not ... kill, nor do anything like unto it’ (D&C 59:6)” (1991 Supplement to the 1989 General Handbook of Instructions, p. 1).

25. Our knowledge of the great plan of happiness also gives us a unique perspective on the subject of marriage and the bearing of children. In this we also run counter to some strong current forces in custom, law, and economics.

26. Marriage is disdained by an increasing number of couples, and many who marry choose to forgo children or place severe limits on their number. In recent years strong economic pressures in many nations have altered the traditional assumption of a single breadwinner per family. Increases in the number of working mothers of young children inevitably signal a reduced commitment of parental time to nurturing the young. The effect of these reductions is evident in the rising numbers of abortions, divorces, child neglect, and juvenile crime.

27. We are taught that marriage is necessary for the accomplishment of God’s plan, to provide the approved setting for mortal birth, and to prepare family members for eternal life. “Marriage is ordained of God unto man,” the Lord said, “that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made” (D&C 49:15–17).

28. Our concept of marriage is motivated by revealed truth, not by worldly sociology. The Apostle Paul taught “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11). President Spencer W. Kimball explained, “Without proper and successful marriage, one will never be exalted” (Marriage and Divorce, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, p. 24).

29. According to custom, men are expected to take the initiative in seeking marriage. That is why President Joseph F. Smith directed his prophetic pressure at men. He said, “No man who is marriageable is fully living his religion who remains unmarried” (Gospel Doctrine, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 275). We hear of some worthy LDS men in their thirties who are busy accumulating property and enjoying freedom from family

responsibilities without any sense of urgency about marriage. Beware, brethren. You are deficient in a sacred duty.

30. Knowledge of the great plan of happiness also gives Latter-day Saints a distinctive attitude toward the bearing and nurturing of children.

31. In some times and places, children have been regarded as no more than laborers in a family economic enterprise or as insurers of support for their parents. Though repelled by these repressions, some persons in our day have no compunctions against similar attitudes that subordinate the welfare of a spirit child of God to the comfort or convenience of parents.

32. The Savior taught that we should not lay up treasures on earth but should lay up treasures in heaven (see Matt. 6:19–21). In light of the ultimate purpose of the great plan of happiness, I believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity.

33. President Kimball said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so” (Ensign, May 1979, p. 6). When married couples postpone childbearing until after they have satisfied their material goals, the mere passage of time assures that they seriously reduce their potential to participate in furthering our Heavenly Father’s plan for all of his spirit children. Faithful Latter-day Saints cannot afford to look upon children as an interference with what the world calls “self-fulfillment.” Our covenants with God and the ultimate purpose of life are tied up in those little ones who reach for our time, our love, and our sacrifices.

34. How many children should a couple have? All they can care for! Of course, to care for children means more than simply giving them life. Children must be loved, nurtured, taught, fed, clothed, housed, and well started in their capacities to be good parents themselves. Exercising faith in God’s promises to bless them when they are keeping his commandments, many LDS parents have large families. Others seek but are not blessed with children or with the number of children they desire. In a matter as intimate as this, we should not judge one another.

35. President Gordon B. Hinckley gave this inspired counsel to an audience of young Latter-day Saints:

36. “I like to think of the positive side of the equation, of the meaning and sanctity of life, of the purpose of this estate in our eternal journey, of the need for the experiences of mortal life under the great plan of God

our Father, of the joy that is to be found only where there are children in the home, of the blessings that come of good posterity. When I think of these values and see them taught and observed, then I am willing to leave the question of numbers to the man and the woman and the Lord” (“If I Were You, What Would I Do?” Brigham Young University 1983–84 Fireside and Devotional Speeches, Provo, Utah: University Publications, 1984, p. 11).

37. Some who are listening to this message are probably saying, “But what about me?” We know that many worthy and wonderful Latter-day Saints currently lack the ideal opportunities and essential requirements for their progress. Singleness, childlessness, death, and divorce frustrate ideals and postpone the fulfillment of promised blessings. In addition, some women who desire to be full-time mothers and homemakers have been literally compelled to enter the full-time work force. But these frustrations are only temporary. The Lord has promised that in the eternities no blessing will be denied his sons and daughters who keep the commandments, are true to their covenants, and desire what is right.

38. Many of the most important deprivations of mortality will be set right in the Millennium, which is the time for fulfilling all that is incomplete in the great plan of happiness for all of our Father’s worthy

children. We know that will be true of temple ordinances. I believe it will also be true of family relationships and experiences.

39. I pray that we will not let the challenges and temporary diversions of mortality cause us to forget our covenants and lose sight of our eternal destiny. We who know God’s plan for his children, we who have covenanted to participate, have a clear responsibility. We must desire to do what is right, and we must do all that we can in our own circumstances in mortality.

40. In all of this, we should remember King Benjamin’s caution to “see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). I think of that inspired teaching whenever I feel inadequate, frustrated, or depressed.

41. When we have done all that we are able, we can rely on God’s promised mercy. We have a Savior, who has taken upon him not just the sins, but also “the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). He is our Savior, and when we have done all that we can, he will make up the difference, in his own way and in his own time. Of that I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

3. Jesus Christ: The Sure Foundation of Eternal Marriage

3.1 - In the Strength of the Lord

Elder David A. Bednar

Ensign, November 2004



1. Brothers and sisters, my heart is filled to overflowing, my mind is spinning, my knees are weak and wobbly, and I find that words are totally inadequate to communicate effectively the feelings and thoughts I desire to share with you. I

pray for and invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost for me and for you as I speak with you briefly this Sabbath morning.

2. In the hours since President Hinckley extended this new call to serve, I have heeded the admonition of Nephi to “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Ne. 19:23) with a greater sense of purpose and intensity than I have ever done before.

3. I have reflected on the teaching of Paul that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound

the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27). This morning I take great comfort in knowing that I am one of the truly weak things of the world.

4. I have pondered the instruction of Jacob as contained in the Book of Mormon:

5. “Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

6. “Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things” (Jacob 4:6–7).

7. Brothers and sisters, please pay particular attention to the word grace as it is used in the verse I just read. In the Bible Dictionary we learn that the word grace

frequently is used in the scriptures to connote a strengthening or enabling power:

8. “The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

9. “... It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts” (p. 697).

10. Thus, the enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity. I testify and witness that the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement is real. Without that strengthening power of the Atonement, I could not stand before you this morning.

11. Can we sense the grace and strengthening power of Christ in the testimony of Ammon? “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever” (Alma 26:12). Truly, brothers and sisters, in the strength of the Lord we can do and endure and overcome all things.

12. As I walked out of the Church Administration Building after my interview with President Hinckley on Friday afternoon, I recalled the words of Enoch:

13. “And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?

14. “And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good” (Moses 6:31–32).

15. For all of us who feel unprepared and overwhelmed and unequal to a new calling or responsibility, the promise of the Lord to Enoch is

equally applicable. The promise was true in Enoch’s day, and it is true today.

16. On the night of June 20, 2000, several colleagues and I were working late in the executive offices of then Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. We were making final preparations for an unexpected and historic assembly on our campus the next morning and the announcement by President Hinckley that Ricks College would become a baccalaureate-degree-granting institution and take on the name of Brigham Young University–Idaho. As an administrative team we were just beginning to realize the monumental nature of the responsibility and challenges that were before us.

17. As we walked out of the building that night, one of my colleagues asked, “President, are you scared?” As best as I can recall, I answered something like this: “If I thought we had to execute this transition relying exclusively upon our own experience and our own judgment, then I would be terrified. But we will have help from heaven. Because we know who is in charge and that we are not alone, then no, I am not scared.” And we who serve at BYU–Idaho unitedly testify that there has been help from heaven, miracles have occurred, revelations have been received, doors have been opened, and we have been greatly blessed as individuals and as an institution.

18. Please permit me now to express gratitude and appreciation. I am thankful for my progenitors—for those faithful and steady men and women whom I respect and honor and to whom I owe everything. I love and appreciate my mother and father and my wife’s mother and father. I am grateful for their love and support and teaching and strength.

19. My wife, Susan, is a virtuous woman and a righteous mother. You will quickly see that purity and goodness are evident in her countenance. I love her and appreciate her more than words can express. I thank her for the woman she is, for the lessons she has taught me, and for the love we share.

20. Susan and I have been blessed with three stalwart sons. I love and thank them. And our growing little family now includes two righteous daughters-in-law and three brilliant and beautiful and charming granddaughters. As we have opportunities to be together, we are blessed to see just a glimpse of the family unit in eternity.

21. My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for you. As I see you assembled here in the Conference Center and envision you in meetinghouses all over the

earth, I am blessed by your faithfulness and devotion to the Savior. As your arms were raised to the square on Saturday, I felt a sustaining influence flow into my soul that was most remarkable. Few of you know who I am, yet you know from whom the call has come, and you are so willing to sustain and support. I express my thanks to you and pledge my whole soul and all of my energy to this sacred work.

22. I will go where the Lord and the leaders of His Church want me to go, I will do what they want me to do, I will teach what they want me to teach, and I will strive to become what I should and must become. In the strength of the Lord and through His grace, I know that you and I can be blessed to accomplish all things.

23. As one of the weakest of the weak, I testify that God lives. I testify and witness that Jesus is the Christ. He is our Redeemer and our Savior, and He lives. And I testify that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His true Church have been restored to the earth in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Priesthood keys and authority and saving ordinances are again found on the earth. By the power of that priesthood, families truly can be together forever. The Book of Mormon is the word of God and the keystone of our religion. And, brothers and sisters, the heavens are not closed. God speaks—to us individually and to the leaders of His latter-day kingdom on earth. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord’s prophet on the earth today. Of these things I testify and declare my witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

3.2 - Is Faith In The Atonement Of Jesus Christ Written In Our Hearts?

Linda K. Burton
Ensign, May 2015



1. My beloved sisters, you have been on my mind and in my heart for months as I have pondered this challenging responsibility. Though I don’t feel equal to the responsibility placed upon me, I know that the call has come from the Lord through His chosen prophet, and for now, that is enough. The scriptures teach that “whether by [the Lord’s] voice or by the voice of [His] servants, it is the same.”¹

2. One of the precious gifts associated with this calling is the assurance that Heavenly Father loves all of His daughters. I have felt His love for each of us!

3. Like you, I love the scriptures! In the book of Jeremiah we find a scripture that is very dear to my heart. Jeremiah lived in a difficult time and place, but the Lord allowed him to foresee “a time of hope during the latter-day gathering of Israel”²—our day. Jeremiah prophesied:

4. “After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. ...

5. “... They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”³

6. We are the people Jeremiah saw. Have we invited the Lord to write the law, or doctrine, in our hearts? Do we believe that the [forgiveness](#) available through the Atonement that Jeremiah refers to applies to us personally?

7. A few years ago, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared his feelings about the deep-rooted faith of pioneers who pushed toward the Salt Lake Valley even after the deaths of their children. He said, “They didn’t do that for a program, they didn’t do it for a social activity, they did it because the faith of the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) was in their soul, it was in the marrow of their bones.”

8. He expressed, with tender emotion:

9. “That’s the only way those mothers could bury [their babies] in a breadbox and move on, saying, ‘The promised land is out there somewhere. We’re going to make it to the valley.’

10. “They could say that because of covenants and doctrine and faith and revelation and spirit.”

11. He concluded with these thought-provoking words: “If we can keep that in our families and in the Church, maybe a lot of other things start to take care of themselves. Maybe a lot of other less-needed things sort of fall out of the wagon. I’m told those handcarts could only hold so much. Just as our ancestors had to choose what they took, maybe the 21st century will drive us to decide, ‘What can we put on this handcart?’ It’s the substance of our soul; it’s the stuff right down in the marrow of our bones.”⁴ Or, to put it another way, it is what is written in our hearts!

12. As a new Relief Society presidency, we have sought the Lord earnestly to know what essential things He would have us put in our Relief Society handcart to continue moving His work forward. We have felt that Heavenly Father would first have us help

His beloved daughters understand the doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As we do so, we know our faith will increase, as will our desire to live righteously. Second, as we have considered the critical need to strengthen families and homes, we have felt that the Lord would have us encourage His beloved daughters to cheerfully cleave to their covenants. When covenants are kept, families are strengthened. Finally, we feel He would have us work in unity with the other auxiliaries and with our priesthood leaders, striving to seek out and help those in need to progress along the path. It is our fervent prayer that each of us will open our hearts and let the Lord engrave in them the doctrines of the Atonement, covenants, and unity.

13. How can we expect to strengthen families or help others unless we first have written in our own hearts a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement? Tonight I would like to share three principles of the Atonement that, if written in our hearts, will increase our faith in Jesus Christ. It is my hope that understanding these principles will bless each of us, whether we are new to the Church or lifelong members.

14. Principle 1: “All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”⁵

15. We, with you, bear witness of the Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our testimonies, like yours, have been written in our hearts as we have faced assorted soul-stretching challenges and adversities. Without an understanding of Heavenly Father’s perfect plan of happiness and the Savior’s Atonement as the central feature of that plan, these challenges could seem unfair. We all share in the trials of life together. But in faithful hearts is written, “All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”

16. Why does the Lord allow suffering and adversity to come to us in this life? Simply put, it is part of the plan for our growth and progress! We “shouted for joy”⁶ when we knew we would have the opportunity to come to earth to experience mortality. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “Our needed conversions are often achieved more readily by suffering and adversity than by comfort and tranquillity.”⁷

17. The example of a faithful pioneer sister illustrates this truth. Mary Lois Walker was married at age 17 to John T. Morris in St. Louis, Missouri. They crossed the plains with the Saints in 1853, entering the Salt Lake Valley shortly after their first anniversary. On their journey they had suffered the privations typical of other Saints. But their sufferings and adversity did not

end when they reached the Salt Lake Valley. The following year Mary, then 19, wrote: “A son was born to us. ... One evening when he was two or three months old ... something whispered to me, ‘You will lose that little one.’”

18. During the winter the baby’s health declined. “We did all we could, ... but the baby grew steadily worse. ... On the second of February he passed away ... and so I drank the bitter cup of parting from my own flesh and blood.” But her trials were still not over. Mary’s husband was also stricken, and three weeks after losing her baby, he died.

19. Mary wrote: “So was I, while yet in my teens, bereft in the short period of 20 days, of my husband and my only child, in a strange land hundreds of miles from my blood kin and with a mountain of difficulty before me ... and I wished that I too, might die and join my loved one[s].”

20. Mary continues: “One Sunday evening I was taking a walk with my friend. ... I was reminded of [my husband’s] absence and my intense loneliness, and as I wept bitterly I could see, as it were in mental vision, the steep hill of life I should have to climb and felt the reality of it with great force. A deep depression settled upon me, for the enemy knows when to attack us, but our [Savior, Jesus Christ,] is mighty to save. Through ... the help given of the Father, I was able to battle with all the force which seemed to be arrayed against me at this time.”⁸

21. Mary learned at the tender age of 19 that the Atonement gives us the assurance that all things that are unfair in this life can and will be made right—even the deepest sorrows.

22. Principle 2: There is power in the Atonement to enable us to overcome the natural man or woman and become true disciples of Jesus Christ.⁹

23. There is a way to know when we have learned a doctrine or principle of the gospel. It is when we are able to teach the doctrine or principle in a way that a child can understand it. A valuable resource to teach children to understand the Atonement is an analogy that is found in a Primary lesson. Perhaps this can help us as we teach our own children, grandchildren, or friends of other faiths who desire to understand this essential doctrine.

24. “A [woman] walking along a road fell into a pit so deep [she] could not climb out. No matter what [she] did, [she] could not get out by [herself]. The [woman] called for help and rejoiced when a kind passerby heard [her] and lowered a ladder down into the pit.

This allowed [her] to climb out of the pit and regain [her] freedom.

25. “We are like the [woman] in the pit. Sinning is like falling into the pit, and we can’t get out by ourselves. Just as the kind passerby heard the [woman’s] cry for help, Heavenly Father sent his Only Begotten Son to provide the means of escape. Jesus Christ’s atonement could be compared to lowering a ladder into the pit; it gives us the means to climb out.”¹⁰ But the Savior does more than lower the ladder, He “comes down into the pit and makes it possible for us to use the ladder to escape.”¹¹ “Just as the [woman] in the pit had to climb up the ladder, we must repent of our sins and obey the gospel principles and ordinances to climb out of our pit and make the Atonement work in our lives. Thus, after all we can do, the Atonement makes it possible for us to become worthy to return to Heavenly Father’s presence.”¹²

26. Recently I was privileged to meet a modern-day pioneer, a beloved daughter of God and recent convert to the Church in Chile. She is a single mother with two young sons. Through the power of the Atonement, she has been enabled to put her past behind her and is now earnestly striving to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ. As I think of her, a principle taught by Elder David A. Bednar comes to mind: “It is one thing to know that Jesus Christ came to earth to die for us—that is fundamental and foundational to the doctrine of Christ. But we also need to appreciate that the Lord desires, through His Atonement and by the power of the [Holy Ghost](#), to live in us—not only to direct us but also to empower us.”¹³

27. As this Chilean sister and I discussed how to stay on the path leading to eternal life, she enthusiastically assured me that she was determined to continue on the path. She had been off the path most of her life, and she declared that there was nothing “out there” off the path that she wanted to have back in her life again. The enabling power of the Atonement is living inside of her. It is being written in her heart.

28. That power not only enables us to climb out of the pit but also gives us power to continue on the strait and narrow path leading back to the presence of our Heavenly Father.

29. Principle 3: The Atonement is the greatest evidence we have of the Father’s love for His children.

30. We would do well to ponder this stirring thought from Elder Oaks: “Think how it must have grieved our Heavenly Father to send His Son to endure

incomprehensible suffering for our sins. That is the greatest evidence of His love for each of us!”¹⁴

31. That supreme act of love ought to send each of us to our knees in humble prayer to thank our Heavenly Father for loving us enough that He sent His Only Begotten and perfect Son to suffer for our sins, our heartaches, and all that seems unfair in our own individual lives.

32. Remember the woman President Dieter F. Uchtdorf spoke of recently? He said: “One woman who had been through years of trial and sorrow said through her tears, ‘I have come to realize that I am like an old 20-dollar bill—crumpled, torn, dirty, abused, and scarred. But I am still a 20-dollar bill. I am worth something. Even though I may not look like much and even though I have been battered and used, I am still worth the full 20 dollars.’”¹⁵

33. This woman knows that she is a beloved daughter of her Heavenly Father and that she was worth enough to Him to send His Son to atone for her, individually. Every sister in the Church should know what this woman knows—that she is a beloved daughter of God. How does knowing our worth to Him change how we keep our covenants? How does knowing our worth to Him affect our desire to minister to others? How does knowing our worth to Him increase our desire to help those who need to understand the Atonement as we do—way down deep? When each of us has the doctrine of the Atonement written deep in our hearts, then we will begin to become the kind of people the Lord wants us to be when He comes again. He will recognize us as His true disciples.

34. May the Atonement of Jesus Christ cause a “mighty change” to be wrought in our hearts.¹⁶ As we awaken to this doctrine, declared by an angel of God to be “glad tidings of great joy,”¹⁷ I promise that we will feel as King Benjamin’s people felt. After they had prayed mightily that the Atonement would be applied in their lives, “they were filled with joy”¹⁸ and were “willing to enter into a covenant with ... God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things.”¹⁹ Making, keeping, and rejoicing in our covenants will be the evidence that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is truly written in our hearts. Please remember these three principles, sisters:

1. “All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”²⁰

2. There is power in the Atonement to enable us to overcome the natural man or woman and become true disciples of Jesus Christ.²¹

3. The Atonement is the greatest evidence we have of the Father's love for His children.[22](#)

35. "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."[23](#) I invite us to ask the Lord to write these principles of the Atonement in our hearts. I testify that they are true. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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15. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "You Are My Hands," Liahona and Ensign, May 2010, 69.
16. See [Alma 5:12–14](#).
17. [Mosiah 3:3](#).
18. See [Mosiah 4:1–3](#).
19. See [Mosiah 5:2–5](#).
20. Preach My Gospel, 52.
21. See David A. Bednar, Liahona, Apr. 2012, 12–19; Ensign, Apr. 2012, 40–47.
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23. [Jeremiah 31:33](#); emphasis added.

3.3 - Justification And Sanctification

Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Ensign, June 2001



1. Justification and sanctification are at the center of God's gracious plan of salvation and are the essence of our witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. While justification and sanctification may be viewed as distinct topics, in reality I believe they are elements of a single divine process

that qualifies us to live in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

2. I have organized my discussion of this doctrine into three sections based upon statements from "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles."

3. "As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice."

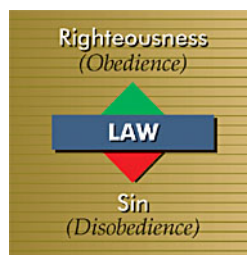
4. "He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth."

5. "He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts" (Ensign, Apr. 2000, 2–3; emphasis added).

"The Infinite Virtue of His Great Atoning Sacrifice"

6. Justification and sanctification are the fruit of the Atonement's "infinite virtue," which virtue we also refer to as mercy or grace. A verse in the Book of Mormon lays a helpful foundation: "And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away" (2 Ne. 2:13).

7. Lehi taught: "If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness" (2 Ne. 2:13).



8. Lehi here remarks on the foundational nature of law, the divine law that governs in the universe. Elsewhere in the scriptures, as in Alma 42 for example, the word

justice is used with similar meaning. So justice, or law, is something of a platform that sustains certain other fundamentals.

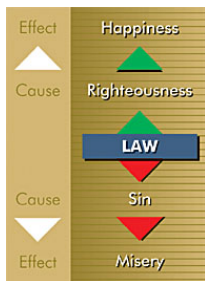
9. Lehi states that if there were no law, there would be no sin: “If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin.” Why cannot sin exist if law does not exist? What is sin? Quite simply it is disobedience to law. Obviously, where there is nothing to obey or disobey, there cannot be disobedience.

10. Lehi continues, “If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness.” Again the question, why? What is righteousness but obedience?

11. Just as law must exist for sin or disobedience to be possible, so law must exist to give rise to the possibility of obedience or righteousness.

12. Lehi next observes, “If there be no righteousness there be no happiness.” One may ask why. To me the answer is clear: happiness is the product of righteousness. It is a question of cause and effect. Happiness, the effect or result, can exist only when its necessary cause, righteousness, is first present.

13. Completing the symmetry, Lehi adds, “If there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery.” Why so? Again, it is a matter of cause and effect: misery is the consequence of sin, its natural result.



Righteousness leads to happiness, and sin leads to misery.

14. Without any of these things and the necessary predicate or foundation of law, Lehi concludes, there could be no God, no earth, no mankind, “for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon.” Without law, one could not predict or control outcomes of actions. Without awareness of cause and effect, there would really be no such thing as choice. Existence would simply be chaos, the action of random forces. God could not work His will, and if we existed at all, we would lack the means to be actors; we would only be “acted upon.”

15. Fortunately, reality is otherwise. Lehi affirms, “There is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:14).

16. Nevertheless, we still face a dilemma. Lehi states it earlier in this same chapter: “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Ne. 2:5).

17. With nothing more, by virtue of the Fall and our own disobedience, the law condemns us to temporal and spiritual death. Law, or justice, is not a pleasant concept when one is condemned by it and “miserable forever.” Worldly philosophies attempt to resolve this misery and guilt by endeavoring to erase divine law or define it out of existence. As we have already observed, if we could get rid of the law, there would be no such thing as sin and thus no misery. With Corianton, there are many today who “try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). This approach, however, if it could succeed, would also eliminate our potential for happiness. We need to preserve justice for our own sakes, for our own potential happiness.

18. There is a better way. That better way is not to deny the law, but to come out from under its condemnation. The righteous are supported by law, a pleasant position to be in. But to achieve that status, we need more than the law alone. We need a Savior. We need a Mediator.

19. Again, Lehi:

20. “Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

21. “Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Ne. 2:6–7).

22. Because of “the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice,” Jesus Christ can satisfy or “answer the ends of the law” on our behalf. Pardon comes by the grace of Him who has satisfied the demands of justice by His own suffering, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). He removes our condemnation without removing the law. We are pardoned and placed in a condition of righteousness with Him. We become, like Him, without sin. We are

sustained and protected by the law, by justice. We are, in a word, justified.

23. Thus, we may appropriately speak of one who is justified as pardoned, without sin, or guiltless. For example, “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Yet glorious as the remission of sins is, the Atonement accomplishes even more. That “more” is expressed by Moroni:

24. “And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:33; emphasis added).

25. To be sanctified through the blood of Christ is to become clean, pure, and holy. If justification removes the punishment for past sin, then sanctification removes the stain or effects of sin. The Prophet Joseph Smith testified:

26. “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—

27. “That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear [justify] the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness” (D&C 76:40–41).

28. Speaking of certain priesthood brethren in ancient times, Alma said:

29. “Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

30. “Now, they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:11–12).

31. We may appropriately speak of sanctification as the baptism of the Spirit, or being “baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost” (Moses 6:66).

32. “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because

of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

33. “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:19–20; emphasis added).

34. It will seem a natural thing for those who have been sanctified to enter into the rest or kingdom of God, for they will have become like Him (see 1 Jn. 3:2; Moro. 7:48). As the Lord said to Adam after he had been baptized by water and by the Spirit, “Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:68).

35. “His Was a Great Vicarious Gift”

36. This marvelous pardon that relieves us of the punishment that justice would otherwise exact for disobedience and the purifying sanctification that follows are best described as gifts, or the gift of grace. “His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth” (“The Living Christ,” 2). Given the magnitude of the gift of grace, we would never suppose, even with all the good we could possibly do in this life, that we had earned it. It is just too great. “We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do,” says Nephi (2 Ne. 25:23). It is, and will always be, in truth, the gift of God through His divine Son.

37. But, as Nephi implies, there is something we can do, something that all who are accountable must do. To have effect, the gift must be accepted: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).

38. Thus, it is not that we earn these gifts, but rather that we choose to seek and accept justification and sanctification. Since the Savior paid for our sins and satisfied justice for us, we become debtors to Him rather than to justice. We must therefore meet the stipulations He has established for forgiveness and cleansing. Otherwise, He withdraws His proffered mediation, and we are left to deal alone with the demands of justice, lacking the means to become pure. One must choose Christ to receive what Christ offers.

39. How does one choose Christ? We noted earlier Lehi’s declaration that it requires “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Ne. 2:7). Nephi elaborates: “Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for,

for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17).

40. I repeat the Savior’s succinct declaration in 3 Nephi: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:20).

41. Referring to the diagram on page 24, we see that the gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost. This action of acceptance on our part opens the door for the process of justification (remission, or pardoning, of sins) and sanctification (cleansing from sin) to work in us—something we may refer to as being born again:

42. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

43. “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?

44. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3–5).

45. This rebirth was described more fully to Adam as recorded in the book of Moses. God taught Adam that it was necessary for men to repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. Adam, seeking deeper understanding, asked why (see Moses 6:50–53). God explained that man must be clean in order to dwell in His presence and that this requires a cleansing birth into the kingdom of God:

46. “By reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and 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 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;

47. “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:59–60).

48. We see here the elements that bring about our second birth or entry into the kingdom of God analogized to the elements that accompany our birth into mortality (water, blood, and spirit). This birth from mortal life into eternal life requires the interaction of (1) covenants (symbolized by water, the principal feature of our first covenant: baptism), (2) the grace of Christ (symbolized by His blood), and (3) the Holy Spirit, the medium through whom atoning grace is applied to remit sins and sanctify souls.

49. Justification and sanctification are accomplished by the grace of Christ, which grace is a gift to man based on faith. But our moral agency is also a necessary element in this divine process. We must will to repent and act to repent. We must elect to be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost, and we must elect to remain loyal to our covenants thereafter. To receive the gift we must act in the manner He has ordained.

50. “Each of Us Will Stand to Be Judged”

51. It is clear that our acceptance of the gift of grace is not a single act occurring at a single moment in time, but is instead an ongoing process and obligation. The words of the Savior in 3 Nephi that we have already referred to make this point:

52. “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled [with the Holy Ghost]; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

53. “And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, ...

54. “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Ne. 27:16–17, 19; emphasis added).

55. We are warned:

56. “There is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God;

57. “Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;

58. “Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:32–34).

59. In due course, Jesus Christ will judge the world, both those who have rejected His grace and those who have accepted His mercy:

60. “There is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

61. “But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored to his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

62. “For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:22–24).

63. To be classed among the truly penitent, random acts of obedience will not be adequate. We must properly enter into the covenants and persist in keeping them to the point that our expectation of salvation is affirmed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (see D&C 132:7, 19). It is not simply the promise of obedience in our contracts with Deity that brings grace, but the performance of our promises: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13).

The gift of grace

64. The gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost.

65. None of us, of course, is perfectly obedient, and thus we rely on our baptismal covenant to bring a remission of sins after baptism just as it has done for our lives before baptism. We rely on repentance to reinvigorate that covenant, to bring the Holy Spirit and, with it, atoning grace. The process of cleansing and sanctifying through the baptisms of water and of the Holy Ghost can be continued weekly as we worthily partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The tokens of the Atonement, the bread and water, become symbolic cleansing agents and the sign of our renewed covenant, similar to the symbolism of the water in which we were immersed at baptism. It is as if we were being baptized afresh and the door once again opened for the Holy Spirit to enter, “that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). Thus, we need not fear judgment. Having our sins remitted or pardoned and our garments spotless through the blood

of Christ, we can imagine we hear the voice of the Lord in the Day of Judgment saying, “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

66. This personal persistence in the path of obedience is something different than achieving perfection in mortality. Perfection is not, as some suppose, a prerequisite for justification and sanctification. It is just the opposite: justification (being pardoned) and sanctification (being purified) are the prerequisites for perfection. We only become perfect “in Christ” (see Moro. 10:32), not independently of Him. Thus, what is required of us in order to obtain mercy in the day of judgment is simple diligence. As the Prophet Joseph Smith counseled from the dank prison of Liberty, Missouri: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17; see also Mosiah 4:27).

67. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once expressed our obligation this way:

68. “Everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he’s on the straight and narrow, he’s going to go on to eternal reward in his Father’s kingdom.

69. “We don’t need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. ... The way it operates is this: you get on the path that’s named the ‘straight and narrow.’ You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The straight and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that’s called eternal life. ... Now is the time and the day of your salvation, so if you’re working zealously in this life—though you haven’t fully overcome the world and you haven’t done all you hoped you might do—you’re still going to be saved” (“The Probationary Test of Mortality,” Salt Lake Institute of Religion devotional, 10 Jan. 1982, 12).

70. When we stand before the Savior to be judged of Him, it will be “according to our works and the desires of our hearts” (“The Living Christ,” 3; see also D&C 137:9). Where we can act, where we have the capacity and the means, we must act if we are to retain a justified and sanctified status. But where we legitimately and truly cannot act, the Lord will accept the desire for the deed. An application of this principle

can be found in King Benjamin's statements about our obligations to the poor. To those with means and power to help, he counseled: "And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants" (Mosiah 4:26).

71. To those who lack means to assist, he said: "And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

72. "And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless" (Mosiah 4:24–25).

73. The Savior offers to all who will have faith and accept it, the gifts of being justified or pardoned before the law and also being sanctified—that is, being made spotless and holy. There is no other name, nor way, nor means whereby such redemption may occur (see Mosiah 3:17; Moses 6:52). And truly His grace is sufficient to achieve it (see Moro. 10:32). So my witness to each member of the Church, and our witness to the world, is as recorded in the scripture of this last and greatest dispensation:

74. "And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true;

75. "And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength" (D&C 20:30–31).

3.4 - The Gift of Grace

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Ensign, May 2015



1. On Easter Sunday we celebrate the most long-awaited and glorious event in the history of the world.

2. It is the day that changed everything.

3. On that day, my life changed.

4. Your life changed.

5. The destiny of all God's children changed.

6. On that blessed day, the Savior of mankind, who had taken upon Himself the chains of sin and death that held us captive, burst those chains and set us free.

7. Because of the sacrifice of our beloved Redeemer, death has no sting, the grave has no victory,¹ Satan has no lasting power, and we are "begotten ... again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."²

8. Truly, the Apostle Paul was correct when he said we can "comfort one another with these words."³

God's Grace

9. We often speak of the Savior's Atonement—and rightly so!

10. In Jacob's words, "Why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him?"⁴ But as "we talk of Christ, ... rejoice in Christ, ... preach of Christ, [and] prophesy of Christ"⁵ at every opportunity, we must never lose our sense of awe and profound gratitude for the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God.

11. The Savior's Atonement cannot become commonplace in our teaching, in our conversation, or in our hearts. It is sacred and holy, for it was through this "great and last sacrifice" that Jesus the Christ brought "salvation to all those who shall believe on his name."⁶

12. I marvel to think that the Son of God would condescend to save us, as imperfect, impure, mistake-prone, and ungrateful as we often are. I have tried to understand the Savior's Atonement with my finite mind, and the only explanation I can come up with is this: God loves us deeply, perfectly, and everlastingly. I cannot even begin to estimate "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ... [of] the love of Christ."⁷

13. A powerful expression of that love is what the scriptures often call the grace of God—the divine assistance and endowment of strength by which we grow from the flawed and limited beings we are now into exalted beings of "truth and light, until [we are] glorified in truth and [know] all things."⁸

14. It is a most wondrous thing, this grace of God. Yet it is often misunderstood.⁹ Even so, we should know about God's grace if we intend to inherit what has been prepared for us in His eternal kingdom.

15. To that end I would like to speak of grace. In particular, first, how grace unlocks the gates of heaven and, second, how it opens the windows of heaven.

First: Grace Unlocks the Gates of Heaven

16. Because we have all “sinned, and come short of the glory of God”¹⁰ and because “there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God,”¹¹ every one of us is unworthy to return to God’s presence.

17. Even if we were to serve God with our whole souls, it is not enough, for we would still be “unprofitable servants.”¹² We cannot earn our way into heaven; the demands of justice stand as a barrier, which we are powerless to overcome on our own.

18. But all is not lost.

19. The grace of God is our great and everlasting hope.

20. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the plan of mercy appeases the demands of justice¹³ “and [brings] about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.”¹⁴

21. Our sins, though they may be as scarlet, can become white as snow.¹⁵ Because our beloved Savior “gave himself a ransom for all,”¹⁶ an entrance into His everlasting kingdom is provided unto us.¹⁷

22. The gate is unlocked!

23. But the grace of God does not merely restore us to our previous innocent state. If salvation means only erasing our mistakes and sins, then salvation—as wonderful as it is—does not fulfill the Father’s aspirations for us. His aim is much higher: He wants His sons and daughters to become like Him.

24. With the gift of God’s grace, the path of discipleship does not lead backward; it leads upward.

25. It leads to heights we can scarcely comprehend! It leads to exaltation in the celestial kingdom of our Heavenly Father, where we, surrounded by our loved ones, receive “of his fulness, and of his glory.”¹⁸ All things are ours, and we are Christ’s.¹⁹ Indeed, all that the Father hath shall be given unto us.²⁰

26. To inherit this glory, we need more than an unlocked gate; we must enter through this gate with a heart’s desire to be changed—a change so dramatic that the scriptures describe it as being “born again; yea, born of God, changed from [our worldly] and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters.”²¹

27. Second: Grace Opens the Windows of Heaven

28. Another element of God’s grace is the opening of the windows of heaven, through which God pours out blessings of power and strength, enabling us to achieve things that otherwise would be far beyond our reach. It

is by God’s amazing grace that His children can overcome the undercurrents and quick sands of the deceiver, rise above sin, and “be perfect[ed] in Christ.”²²

29. Though we all have weaknesses, we can overcome them. Indeed it is by the grace of God that, if we humble ourselves and have faith, weak things can become strong.²³

30. Throughout our lives, God’s grace bestows temporal blessings and spiritual gifts that magnify our abilities and enrich our lives. His grace refines us. His grace helps us become our best selves.

Who Can Qualify?

31. In the Bible we read of Christ’s visit to the home of Simon the Pharisee.

32. Outwardly, Simon seemed to be a good and upright man. He regularly checked off his to-do list of religious obligations: he kept the law, paid his tithing, observed the Sabbath, prayed daily, and went to the synagogue.

33. But while Jesus was with Simon, a woman approached, washed the Savior’s feet with her tears, and anointed His feet with fine oil.

34. Simon was not pleased with this display of worship, for he knew that this woman was a sinner. Simon thought that if Jesus didn’t know this, He must not be a prophet or He would not have let the woman touch him.

35. Perceiving his thoughts, Jesus turned to Simon and asked a question. “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: ... one owed five hundred pence, ... the other fifty.

36. “And when they [both] had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

37. Simon answered that it was the one who was forgiven the most.

38. Then Jesus taught a profound lesson: “Seest thou this woman? ... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”²⁴

39. Which of these two people are we most like?

40. Are we like Simon? Are we confident and comfortable in our good deeds, trusting in our own righteousness? Are we perhaps a little impatient with those who are not living up to our standards? Are we on autopilot, going through the motions, attending our

meetings, yawning through Gospel Doctrine class, and perhaps checking our cell phones during sacrament service?

41. Or are we like this woman, who thought she was completely and hopelessly lost because of sin?

42. Do we love much?

43. Do we understand our indebtedness to Heavenly Father and plead with all our souls for the grace of God?

44. When we kneel to pray, is it to replay the greatest hits of our own righteousness, or is it to confess our faults, plead for God's mercy, and shed tears of gratitude for the amazing plan of redemption?²⁵

45. Salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience; it is purchased by the blood of the Son of God.²⁶ Thinking that we can trade our good works for salvation is like buying a plane ticket and then supposing we own the airline. Or thinking that after paying rent for our home, we now hold title to the entire planet earth.

Why Then Obey?

46. If grace is a gift of God, why then is obedience to God's commandments so important? Why bother with God's commandments—or repentance, for that matter? Why not just admit we're sinful and let God save us?

47. Or, to put the question in Paul's words, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Paul's answer is simple and clear: "God forbid."²⁷

48. Brothers and sisters, we obey the commandments of God—out of love for Him!

49. Trying to understand God's gift of grace with all our heart and mind gives us all the more reasons to love and obey our Heavenly Father with meekness and gratitude. As we walk the path of discipleship, it refines us, it improves us, it helps us to become more like Him, and it leads us back to His presence. "The Spirit of the Lord [our God]" brings about such "a mighty change in us, ... that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."²⁸

50. Therefore, our obedience to God's commandments comes as a natural outgrowth of our endless love and gratitude for the goodness of God. This form of genuine love and gratitude will miraculously merge our works with God's grace. Virtue will garnish our thoughts unceasingly, and our confidence will wax strong in the presence of God.²⁹

51. Dear brothers and sisters, living the gospel faithfully is not a burden. It is a joyful rehearsal—a preparation for inheriting the grand glory of the eternities. We seek to obey our Heavenly Father because our spirits will become more attuned to spiritual things. Vistas are opened that we never knew existed. Enlightenment and understanding come to us when we do the will of the Father.³⁰

52. Grace is a gift of God, and our desire to be obedient to each of God's commandments is the reaching out of our mortal hand to receive this sacred gift from our Heavenly Father.

All We Can Do

53. The prophet Nephi made an important contribution to our understanding of God's grace when he declared, "We labor diligently ... to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."³¹

54. However, I wonder if sometimes we misinterpret the phrase "after all we can do." We must understand that "after" does not equal "because."

55. We are not saved "because" of all that we can do. Have any of us done all that we can do? Does God wait until we've expended every effort before He will intervene in our lives with His saving grace?

56. Many people feel discouraged because they constantly fall short. They know firsthand that "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."³² They raise their voices with Nephi in proclaiming, "My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities."³³

57. I am certain Nephi knew that the Savior's grace allows and enables us to overcome sin.³⁴ This is why Nephi labored so diligently to persuade his children and brethren "to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God."³⁵

58. After all, that is what we can do! And that is our task in mortality!

59. Grace Is Available to All

60. When I think of what the Savior did for us leading up to that first Easter Sunday, I want to lift up my voice and shout praises to the Most High God and His Son, Jesus Christ!

61. The gates of heaven are unlocked!

62. The windows of heaven are opened!

63. Today and forevermore God's grace is available to all whose hearts are broken and whose spirits are

contrite.³⁶ Jesus Christ has cleared the way for us to ascend to heights incomprehensible to mortal minds.³⁷

64. I pray that we will see with new eyes and a new heart the eternal significance of the Savior's atoning sacrifice. I pray that we will show our love for God and our gratitude for the gift of God's infinite grace by keeping His commandments and joyfully "walk[ing] in [a] newness of life."³⁸ In the sacred name of our Master and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See 1 Corinthians 15:55; Mosiah 16:8.
2. 1 Peter 1:3; emphasis added.
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:18; see also verses 13–17.
4. Jacob 4:12.
5. 2 Nephi 25:26.
6. Alma 34:10, 15.
7. Ephesians 3:18–19.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 93:28.
9. Truly we are "little children, and ... have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for [us]" (Doctrine and Covenants 78:17).
10. Romans 3:23.
11. 1 Nephi 15:34; see also 1 Nephi 10:21; Moses 6:57.
12. Mosiah 2:21.
13. See Alma 42:15.

14. Alma 34:15.
15. See Isaiah 1:18.
16. 1 Timothy 2:6.
17. See 2 Peter 1:11.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 76:56.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:59.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
21. Mosiah 27:25.
22. Moroni 10:32.
23. See Ether 12:27.
24. See Luke 7:36–50; emphasis added.
25. Christ's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector illustrates this point clearly (see Luke 18:9–14).
26. See Acts 20:28.
27. Romans 6:1–2.
28. Mosiah 5:2.
29. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
30. See John 7:17.
31. 2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added.
32. Matthew 26:41; see also Romans 7:19.
33. 2 Nephi 4:17.
34. See 2 Nephi 4:19–35; Alma 34:31.
35. 2 Nephi 25:23.
36. See 3 Nephi 9:19–20.
37. See 1 Corinthians 2:9.
38. Romans 6:4.

4. The Role of Prophets, Seers, and Revelators

4.1 - Approaching Mormon Doctrine

LDS.org - Newsroom, May 2007

1. SALT LAKE CITY- Much misunderstanding about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints revolves around its doctrine. The news media is increasingly asking what distinguishes the Church from other faiths, and reporters like to contrast one set of beliefs with another.
2. The Church welcomes inquisitiveness, but the challenge of understanding Mormon doctrine is not merely a matter of accessing the abundant information available. Rather, it is a matter of how this information is approached and examined.
3. The doctrinal tenets of any religion are best understood within a broad context, and thoughtful analysis is required to understand them. News reporters pressed by daily deadlines often find that problematic. Therefore, as the Church continues to grow throughout the world and receive increasing media attention, a few simple principles that facilitate a better understanding may be helpful:
4. Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. With divine inspiration, the [First Presidency](#) (the prophet and his two counselors) and the [Quorum of the Twelve Apostles](#) (the second-highest governing body of the Church) counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four “standard works” of scripture (the [Holy Bible](#), the [Book of Mormon](#), the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) and the [Pearl of Great Price](#)), official declarations and proclamations, and the [Articles of Faith](#). Isolated statements are often taken out of context, leaving their original meaning distorted.
5. Some doctrines are more important than others and might be considered core doctrines. For example, the precise location of the Garden of Eden is far less important than doctrine about [Jesus Christ](#) and His atoning sacrifice. The mistake that public commentators often make is taking an obscure teaching that is peripheral to the Church’s purpose and placing it

at the very center. This is especially common among reporters or researchers who rely on how other Christians interpret Latter-day Saint doctrine.

6. Based on the scriptures, [Joseph Smith](#) declared: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”
7. Because different times present different challenges, [modern-day prophets](#) receive [revelation](#) relevant to the circumstances of their day. This follows the [biblical pattern](#) ([Amos 3:7](#)), in which God communicated messages and warnings to His people through prophets in order to secure their well-being. In our day, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910-2008) has repeatedly emphasized the importance of [the family](#) in our increasingly fractional society. In addition, the Church does not preclude future additions or changes to its teachings or practices. This living, dynamic aspect of the Church provides flexibility in meeting those challenges. According to the Articles of Faith, “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.”
8. Latter-day Saints place heavy emphasis on the application of their faith in daily life. For example, the active participation of Latter-day Saints in their community and worldwide [humanitarian programs](#) reflects concern for other people. As Jesus Christ declared, “[By their fruits ye shall know them](#).”
9. Individual members are encouraged to independently strive to receive their own spiritual confirmation of the truthfulness of Church doctrine. Moreover, the Church exhorts all people to approach the gospel not only intellectually but with the intellect and the spirit, a process in which reason and faith [work together](#).
10. Those writing or commenting on Latter-day Saint doctrine also need to understand that certain words in the [Mormon vocabulary](#) have slightly different meanings and connotations than those same words have in other religions. For example, Latter-day Saints generally view being born again as a process of conversion, whereas many other Christian

denominations often view it as a conversion that happens in one defining moment. Sometimes what some may consider an argument or dispute over doctrine is really a misunderstanding of simple differences in terminology.

11. Journalists, academics and laymen alike are [encouraged](#) to pursue their inquiries into the Church by recognizing the broad and complex context within which its doctrines have been declared, in a spirit of reason and good will.

4.2 - Live According To The Words Of The Prophets

Carol F. McConkie

Ensign, November 2014



1. Our Father in Heaven loves all of His children and desires that they know and understand His plan of happiness. Therefore, He calls prophets, those who have been ordained with power and authority to act in God's name for the salvation of His children. They are messengers of righteousness, witnesses of [Jesus Christ](#) and the infinite power of His Atonement. They hold the keys of the kingdom of God on earth and authorize the performance of saving ordinances.

2. In the Lord's true Church, "there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred."¹ We sustain President Thomas S. Monson as our prophet, seer, and revelator. He reveals the word of the Lord to guide and direct our entire Church. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. explained, "The President of the Church ... alone has the right to receive revelations for the Church."²

3. Concerning the living prophet, the Lord commands the people of His Church:

4. "Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

5. "For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

6. "For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you."³

7. To be in harmony with heaven's divine purposes, we sustain the prophet and choose to live according to his words.

8. We also sustain President Monson's counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. "They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of [the Lord] ... , subject to ... the President of the Church."⁴ They speak in the name of Christ. They prophesy in the name of Christ. They do all things in the name of Jesus Christ. In their words we hear the voice of the Lord and we feel the Savior's love. "And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the [Holy Ghost](#) shall be scripture ... and the power of God unto salvation."⁵ The Lord Himself has spoken: "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same."⁶

9. We are grateful for a church "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."⁷ The Lord's house is a house of order, and we need never be deceived about where to look for answers to our questions or uncertain about which voice to follow. We need not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."⁸ God reveals His word through His ordained servants, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God."⁹ When we choose to live according to the words of the prophets, we are on the covenant path that leads to eternal perfection.

10. From a single mother struggling to survive a season of famine, we learn what it means to sustain a prophet. The Lord instructed the prophet Elijah to go to Zarephath, where he would find a widow woman whom God had commanded to sustain him. As Elijah approached the city, he saw her gathering sticks. He called to her, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."¹⁰

11. "And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her [again], and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12. "And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

13. Elijah responded, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son."¹¹

14. Imagine for a moment the difficulty of what the prophet was asking a starving mother to do. Certainly,

God Himself could have provided food for His faithful servant. But, acting in the name of the Lord, Elijah did as directed, which was to ask a beloved daughter of God to sacrifice that which she had in order to sustain the prophet.

15. But Elijah also promised a blessing for obedience: “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail.”¹² The Lord gave the widow the opportunity to choose to believe and obey the words of the prophet.

16. In a world threatened by a famine of righteousness and spiritual starvation, we have been commanded to sustain the prophet. As we give heed to, uphold, and affirm prophetic word, we witness that we have the faith to humbly submit to the will, the wisdom, and the timing of the Lord.

17. We heed prophetic word even when it may seem unreasonable, inconvenient, and uncomfortable. According to the world’s standards, following the prophet may be unpopular, politically incorrect, or socially unacceptable. But following the prophet is always right. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”¹³ “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”¹⁴

18. The Lord honors and favors those who will heed prophetic direction. For the widow of Zarephath, obedience to Elijah saved her life and ultimately the life of her son. As the prophet had promised, “she, and he, and her house, did eat many days ... according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.”¹⁵

19. The Lord “will feed those who trust Him.”¹⁶ The words of the prophets are like manna to our souls. When we partake, we are blessed, protected, and preserved both temporally and spiritually. When we feast upon their words, we learn how to come unto Christ and live.

20. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote that through the prophets “the Lord reveals the truths of salvation, ... the salvation that is in Christ; and he charts ... the course leading to eternal life. ... In every age the Lord gives his people the direction they need at the moment of their peril and danger. And surely in the days ahead there will be times when nothing but the wisdom of God, descending from heaven and flowing forth from prophetic lips, will be able to save his people.”¹⁷

21. For me, the words of prophets taught by my Laurel teacher gave me a vision of what a covenant marriage relationship should look like. The words of

the prophets gave me the faith and hope that I could prepare for and obtain a happy home. Consistently studying the teachings of the prophets, both ancient and modern, sustained me during the strenuous and often exhausting years of bearing, teaching, and nurturing seven children. The words of the prophets in the scriptures and taught from this pulpit are words of comfort, love, strength, and good cheer that embrace us all.

22. When we heed the words of the prophets, we build our homes and our lives upon an eternally sure foundation, “the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, ... that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to ... misery and endless wo.”¹⁸

23. We have a choice. We may choose to ignore, trifle with, trample upon, or rebel against the words of Christ spoken by His ordained servants. But the Savior taught that those who do so will be cut off from His covenant people.¹⁹

24. As we prayerfully read and study sacred prophetic word with faith in Christ, with real intent, the Holy Ghost will speak truth to our minds and hearts. May we open our ears to hear, our hearts to understand, and our minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to our view.²⁰

25. I bear my witness that [Joseph Smith](#) was and is the prophet called of God to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ and His priesthood to the earth. And I testify that in President Monson we are led by a true prophet of God today. May we choose to stand with the prophets and live according to their words until we become unified in faith, purified in Christ, and filled with the knowledge of the Son of God. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sources

1. [Doctrine and Covenants 132:7](#); see also Handbook 2: Administering the Church (2010), 2.1.1: “Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood pertaining to His Church. He has conferred upon each of His Apostles all the keys that pertain to the kingdom of God on earth. The senior living Apostle, the President of the Church, is the only person on earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys.”
2. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are the Writings and Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?” (address to seminary and institute personnel, Brigham Young University, July 7, 1954).
3. [Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–6](#); emphasis added.
4. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are the Writings and Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?”
5. [Doctrine and Covenants 68:4](#).

6. [Doctrine and Covenants 1:38](#).
7. [Ephesians 2:20](#).
8. [Ephesians 4:14](#).
9. [Ephesians 4:12–13](#).
10. [1 Kings 17:10](#).
11. [1 Kings 17:11–13](#); emphasis added.
12. [1 Kings 17:14](#).
13. [Isaiah 55:9](#).
14. [Proverbs 3:5](#).
15. [1 Kings 17:15–16](#).
16. Roger Hoffman, “Consider the Lilies.”
17. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Deseret Book Company, 1985), 478; punctuation modified; used by permission.
18. [Helaman 5:12](#).
19. See [3 Nephi 20:23](#).
20. See [Mosiah 2:9](#).

4.3 - On Dealing with Uncertainty

Bruce C. Hafen

Ensign, August 1979



1. Early in life, most of us think of things in terms of black or white—there is very little gray in either the intellectual or the spiritual dimension of our perspective. Thus, most of the freshmen at places like Brigham Young University

and Ricks College have a childlike optimism and loyalty that may make them wonderfully teachable and pleasant. I consider it one of the great blessings of my life to be associated with so many young people at this point in their lives at Ricks. It is typical of these young men and women to trust their teachers, to believe what they read, and to respond with boundless enthusiasm to invitations for Church service.

2. Where else but in a student ward comprised mostly of freshmen would you find a Church member so thrilled to be called by the bishop as song book coordinator, [sacrament](#) bread coordinator, or Relief Society Sunday morning orange juice specialist? As one returned missionary recently told me, one thing he likes best about being in a ward of freshmen and sophomores is that when topics like faith and repentance are raised for discussion, nobody yawns.

3. As time goes on, however, experiences often accumulate that introduce a new dimension to a student's perspective. In general, I would characterize this new dimension as a growing awareness that there is a kind of gap between the real and ideal, between what is and what ought to be. To illustrate, I ask you to imagine in your minds two circles, one inside the other. The inner boundary is the real, or what is. The outer boundary is the ideal, or what ought to be. We stand at the inner boundary, reaching out, trying to pull reality

closer to the inspired ideals to which we have committed ourselves. When we sense that some things about ourselves or the circumstances we witness are not all we wish they were, we become aware of the distance between these two boundaries. At that point some frustrations can arise. Let me offer some examples.

4. Students at a large Church college may become disillusioned when they lose some battle with the great red-tape machine, when they remain unknown and nameless to their student ward bishop for weeks or even months, or when they brush up against a faculty member whose Church commitments seem to them to be in doubt. At a more personal and spiritual level, perhaps an important prayer seemingly goes too long unanswered or one suffers some devastating setback with grades, with good health, with the prospects for marriage, and the heavens seem closed in a time of great need. One may also become increasingly conscious of the imperfections of others, including parents, other Church members, or even a bishop or a stake president. When we become more familiar with those who have been our heroes, we may begin to see their human limitations. One may also begin to confront controversial topics, such as the role of women or differing political philosophies among Church members.

5. It is also not uncommon for missionaries to encounter the gap between the real and the ideal because new missionaries often make more idealistic commitments than they have ever made before. And yet, in spite of their most valiant efforts, they may find themselves more than once fighting back the tears of disappointment when the promised fruits of a positive mental attitude somehow elude them. There is a kind of poignancy in those moments when we first discover that there might be some limitations to the idea that you can do anything you make up your mind to do. I once gave everything I had to that proposition, in my determination to be the greatest shot putter in the history of my junior high school. But I simply was not big enough—it really was hopeless.

6. Experiences such as these can produce confusion and uncertainty—in a word, ambiguity—and one may yearn with nostalgia for simpler, easier times, when things seemed not only more clear but more under our control. There may be the beginnings of skepticism, of criticism, and unwillingness to respond to authority or to invitations to reach for ideals that seem beyond our grasp.

7. Not everybody will encounter what I have been describing, and I do not mean to suggest that everyone must encounter such experiences. But college students are probably more likely to encounter “ambiguity” than almost any other group.

8. The fundamental teachings of the restored gospel are potent, clear, and unambiguous. However, it is possible on occasion to encounter some ambiguity even in studying the scriptures. Consider, for example, the case of Nephi, who slew Laban in order to obtain the scriptural record. That situation is not free from ambiguity until the reader realizes that God himself, who gave the commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” was also the origin of the instructions to Nephi in that exceptional case.

9. Consider also the case of Peter on the night he denied any knowledge of his Master three times in succession. Some of us commonly regard Peter as something of a weakling, whose commitment was not strong enough to make him rise to the Savior’s defense. But I once heard President Spencer W. Kimball offer an alternative interpretation of Peter’s behavior. In a talk to a BYU audience in 1971, President Kimball, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, said that the Savior’s statement that Peter would deny him three times before the cock crowed just might have been a request to Peter, not a prediction. Jesus just might have been instructing his chief apostle to deny any association with him in order to insure strong leadership for the Church after the crucifixion. As President Kimball asked, who could doubt Peter’s willingness to stand up and be counted when you think of his boldness in striking off the ear of the guard with his sword when the Savior was arrested in Gethsemane. President Kimball did not offer this view as the only interpretation, but he did suggest there is enough justification for it that it should be considered. So what is the answer—was Peter a coward, or was he so crucial to the survival of the Church that he was prohibited from risking his life? We are not sure. This is a scriptural incident in which there is some ambiguity inhibiting our total understanding.

10. Let us compare some other scriptural passages. The Lord has said that he cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance (see [D&C 1:31](#)). Yet elsewhere he said to the adulteress, “Where are those thine accusers? ... Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” ([John 8:10–11](#).) There is indeed a principle of justice, but there is also a principle of mercy. At times these two correct principles collide

with each other as the unifying higher principle of the atonement does its work.

11. Another example: The Savior said, “Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” ([Matt. 6:1](#)). But he also said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works” ([Matt. 5:16](#)).

12. One more illustration. He once said, “In me ye might have peace” ([John 16:33](#)). And the angels, in announcing his coming, sang “On earth peace, good will toward men” ([Luke 2:14](#)). “For unto us a child is born ... the Prince of Peace” ([Isa. 9:6](#)). Yet elsewhere he said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” ([Matt. 10:34](#)).

13. These passages illustrate that even though God has given us correct principles by which we are to govern ourselves, it is not always easy to apply them to particular situations in our lives.

14. We face concrete examples of that process every day as we attempt to fulfill our duties to [family](#), church, community, and professional concerns. I remember hearing a young mother of several children who has a responsible Church position and a busy, faithful husband express her dismay as she tried to decide what should come first in her life and when. She was told, “Well, just be sure you put the Lord’s work first.” Her reply was, “But what if it is all the Lord’s work?” Similarly, my wife and I often wonder how we should deal with our children in one of the four thousand incidents that were not anticipated by any of the books on child rearing. Sometimes one of us has a clear feeling about what should be done, but often I simply have to tell her with great conviction, “Well, dear, just be sure you do the right thing.”

15. Church and family life are not the only places where the right answer is not always on the tip of our tongues. If you would stretch your mind about the implications of ambiguity, you might think once again of the Viet Nam war—should our nation have tried to do more than it did? or less than it did? or perhaps you could consider whether we should sell all we have and donate our surplus to the millions of people who are starving. You might also ask yourself how much governmental intervention into the regulation of business and private life is too much. The people on the extreme sides of these questions convey great certainty about what should be done. However, I think some of these people would rather be certain than right.

16. Turning to one more fertile field to illustrate the naturalness of ambiguity, I remember Arthur Henry King's statement that most truly great literary works will raise some profound question about a human problem, explore the question skillfully and in depth, and then leave the matter for the reader to resolve. He added that if the resolution seems too clear or too easy, the literature is perhaps not very good or else those reading it have missed its point. Take, for example, Dostoevsky's novel, *The Idiot*, where the question is seriously raised whether it is possible for a true [Christian](#) to love unselfishly. The main character of the story is a pure and good person who loves two different women in two very different ways. One he loves as most men love women—she cares for him, she helps him, he is attracted to her romantically, and she could make his life very happy. The other woman—a pathetically inadequate person—he loves primarily because she needs him desperately and he has a compassionate heart. Posing the dilemma of which of these two the man should marry, Dostoevsky seems to ask if it is possible for mortal men to be totally devoted to the unselfish ideals of Christianity. As you might expect, he leaves that huge question unresolved, forcing the reader to ponder it for himself.

17. I have intentionally tried to suggest a wide variety of instances in which the answers we may seek are not as quickly apparent as we might have expected. My suggestion is that some uncertainty is characteristic of mortal experience. The mists of darkness in Lehi's dream are, for that very reason, a strong symbolic representation of life as we face it on this planet. There are, of course, many things very certain and very clear, as so beautifully represented by the iron rod in Lehi's dream; but there is enough complexity to make the topic of ambiguity worthy of discussion.

18. Given, then, the existence of a gap for most of us between where we stand and where we would like to be, and given that we will have at least some experiences that make us wonder, what are we to do? I think there are three different levels of dealing with ambiguity.

19. At level one, there are two typical attitudes, one of which is that we simply do not—perhaps cannot—even see the problems that exist. Some seem almost consciously to filter out any perception of a gap between the real and the ideal. Those in this category are they for whom the gospel at its best is a firm handshake, an enthusiastic greeting, and a smiley button. Their mission was the best, their student ward is the best, and every new day is probably going to be the best day they ever had. These cheerful ones are

happy, spontaneous, optimistic, and they always manage to hang loose. They are able to weather many storms that would seem formidable to more pessimistic types, though one wonders if the reason is often that they have somehow missed hearing that a storm was going on.

20. A second group at level one has quite a different problem with the gap between what is and what ought to be. Those in this category eliminate the frustrations created by sensing a distance between the real and the ideal by, in effect, erasing the inner circle of reality. They cling to the ideal so single-mindedly that they are able to avoid feeling the pain that would come from facing the truth about themselves, about others, or about the world around them. I suppose it is this category that is so frequently represented in the letters to the editor of the school papers at BYU and Ricks, where such shock is occasionally expressed that some person or some part of the institution has fallen short of perfection and the writer is aghast—"surely not at the Lord's university." One of the problems experienced by those in this group is that they seem unable to distinguish between imperfections that matter a great deal and those that may not matter so much. I think Hugh Nibley must have had them in mind when he spoke of those who find it more commendable to get up at 5 A.M. to write a bad book than it is to get up at 9 A.M. to write a good book. While self-discipline is a virtue, it is obvious to Brother Nibley that the exact hour when we arise is not as important as what we do once we are up.

21. I recall a group of students I knew who once discussed which of the two types of people I have just described offered the most appropriate model for their emulation. They felt they had to choose between being relaxed and happy about the gospel or being an intense perfectionist. After listening to the discussion, I felt that both of these categories suffer from the same limitation. It is not much of a choice to select between a frantic concern with perfection and a forced superficial happiness. Both perspectives lack depth; they understand things too quickly, and they may draw conclusions from their experience too easily. Neither is well prepared for adversity, and I fear that the first strong wind that comes along will blow them over. I believe this is primarily because their roots have not sunk enough into the soil of experience to establish a firm foundation. Both also reflect the thinness of a philosophy that is untempered by common sense. In both cases, it would be helpful simply to be more realistic about life's experiences, even if that means facing some questions and limitations that leave us a

bit uncomfortable. That very discomfort can motivate us toward real growth. As President Harold B. Lee said, the true Church is intended not only to comfort the afflicted, but to afflict the comfortable.

22. I invite you then to step up to level two, where you see things for what they are, for only then can you deal with them in a meaningful and constructive way.

23. If we are not willing to grapple with the frustration that comes from facing bravely the uncertainties we encounter, we may never develop the kind of spiritual maturity that is necessary for our ultimate preparations. Heber C. Kimball once said that the Church had yet to pass through some very close places and that those who were living on borrowed light would not be able to stand when those days came. Thus, we need to develop the capacity to form judgments of our own about the value of ideas, opportunities, or people who may come into our lives. We won't always have the security of knowing whether a certain idea is "Church approved," because new ideas just don't always come along with little tags attached to them saying whether the Church has given them the stamp of approval. Whether in the form of music, books, friends, or opportunities to serve, there is much that is lovely, of good report and praiseworthy, that is not the subject of detailed discussion in Church manuals or courses of instruction. Those who will not risk exposure to experiences that are not obviously related to some Church word or program will, I believe, live less abundant and meaningful lives than the Lord intends.

24. We must develop sufficient independence of judgment and maturity of perspective that we are prepared to handle the shafts and whirlwinds of adversity and contradiction as they come to us. When those times come, we cannot be living on borrowed light. We should not be deceived by the clear-cut labels others may use to describe circumstances that are, in fact, not so clear. Our encounters with reality and disappointment are, in fact, vital stages in the development of our maturity and understanding.

25. Despite the value of a level-two awareness, however, there are some serious hazards at this level. One's acceptance of the clouds of uncertainty may be so complete that the iron rod fades into the receding mist and skepticism becomes a guiding philosophy. Often, this perspective comes from erasing the outer circle representing the ideal, or what ought to be, and focusing excessively on the inner circle of reality.

26. As a teacher in the BYU Law School, I noticed how common it was among first-year law students to

experience great frustration as they discovered how much our legal system is characterized not by hard, fast rules, but by legal principles that often appear to contradict each other. I think, for example, of one new student who approached me after class expressing the confusion he was encountering in his study of the law. He said he had what he called "a low tolerance for ambiguity" and had been wondering if part of his problem was that he had only weeks before returned from a mission, where everything was crisp and clear, where even the words he was to speak were provided for him. To feel successful, all he had to do was follow the step-by-step plan given him for each day and each task on his mission. Law school was making him feel totally at sea as he groped for simple guidelines that would tell him what to do. His circumstance was only another example of what I have previously tried to describe as typical of college and university students in the early years of their experience. However, by the time our law students reached their third year of study, it was not at all uncommon for them to develop such a high tolerance for ambiguity that they were skeptical about everything, including some dimensions of their religious faith. Where formerly they felt they had all the answers, but just did not know what the questions were, they now seemed to have all the questions but few of the answers.

27. I found myself wanting to tell our third-year law students that those who take too much delight in their finely honed tools of skepticism and dispassionate analysis will limit their effectiveness, in the church and elsewhere, because they can become contentious, standoffish, arrogant, and unwilling to commit themselves. I have seen some of these try out their new intellectual tools in some context like a priesthood quorum or a Sunday School class. A well-meaning teacher will make a point they think is a little silly, and they will feel an irresistible urge to leap to their feet and pop the teacher's bubble. If they are successful, they begin looking for other opportunities to point out the exception to any rule anybody can state. They begin to delight in cross-examination of the unsuspecting, just looking for somebody's bubble up there floating around so that they can pop it with their shiny new pin of skepticism. And in all that, they fail to realize that when some of those bubbles pop, out goes the air, and with it goes much of the feeling of trust, loyalty, harmony, and sincerity so essential to preserving the Spirit of the Lord.

28. If that begins to happen in your ward, in your home, or in your marriage, you will have begun to destroy the fragile fabric of trust that binds us together

in all loving relationships. People may come away from some of their encounters with you wondering how you can possibly have a deep commitment to the Church and do some of the things you do.

29. I am not suggesting that we should always just smile and nod our approval, implying that everything is wonderful and that our highest hope is that everybody have a nice day. That is level one. I am suggesting that you realize the potential for evil as well as good that may come with what a college education can do to your mind and your way of dealing with other people.

30. The dangers of which I speak are not limited to our relations with others. They can become very personal, prying into our own hearts in unhealthy ways. The ability to acknowledge ambiguity is not a final form of enlightenment. Having admitted to a willingness temporarily to suspend judgment on questions that seem hard to answer, having developed greater tolerance and more patience, our basic posture toward the Church can, if we are not careful, gradually shift from being committed to being noncommittal. That is not a healthy posture. Indeed, in many ways, a Church member who moves from a stage of commitment to a stage of being tentative and noncommittal is in a worse position than one who has never experienced a basic commitment. The previously committed person may too easily assume that he has already been through the “positive-mental-attitude” routine and “knows better” now, as he judges things. He may assume that being submissive, meek, obedient, and humble are matters with which he is already familiar, and that he has finally outgrown the need to work very hard at being that way again. Those are the assumptions of a hardened heart.

31. I once had an experience that taught me a great lesson about the way a highly developed tolerance for “being realistic” can inhibit the workings of the Spirit in our lives. When I had been on my mission in Germany about a year, I was assigned to work with a brand new missionary named Elder Keeler, who had just arrived fresh from converting, so he thought, all the stewardesses on the plane from New York to Frankfurt. Within a few days of his arrival, I was called to a meeting in another city and had to leave him to work in our city with another inexperienced missionary whose companion went with me. I returned late that night. The next morning I asked him how his day had gone. He broke into an enthusiastic smile and said he had found a family who would surely join the Church. In our mission, it was rare to see anyone join the Church, let alone a whole family. I asked for more details, but he had forgotten to write down either the

name or the address. All he could remember was that the family lived on the top floor of a big apartment house. “Oh, that’s great,” I thought to myself as I contemplated all those flights of stairs. He also explained that he knew so little German that he had exchanged but a few words with the woman who answered the door. But he did think she wanted us to come back—and he wanted to go find her and have me talk to her that very minute. I explained that all the people who don’t slam the door in our faces did not intend to join the Church. But off we went to find her, mostly to humor him. He couldn’t remember the right street either, so we picked a likely spot and began climbing up and down those endless polished staircases.

32. After a frustrating hour, I decided I had to level with him. Based on my many months of experience, I said, it was simply not worth our time to try any longer to find her. I had developed a tolerance for the realities of [missionary work](#) and simply knew more than he did about it. His eyes filled with tears and his lower lip began to tremble. “Elder Hafen,” he said, “I came on my mission to find the honest in heart. The Spirit told me that that woman will someday be a member of the Church.” So I decided to teach him a lesson. I raced him up one staircase after another, until he was ready to drop, and so was I. “Elder Keeler,” I asked, “had enough?” “No,” he said. “We’ve got to find her.” I began to smolder. I decided to work him until he begged to stop—then maybe he would get the message.

33. Finally at the top of a long flight of stairs, we found the apartment. She came to the door. He thrashed my ribs with his elbows, and whispered loudly, “That’s her, elder. That’s the one. Talk to her!”

34. Brothers and sisters, not long ago that woman’s husband sat in my living room. He was in Utah for general conference. He is the bishop of the Mannheim Ward. His two boys are preparing for missions. His wife and daughter are pillars of the Church. That is a lesson I can never forget about the limitations of the skepticism and the tolerance for ambiguity that come with learning and experience. I hope that I will never be so aware of “reality” that I am unresponsive to the whisperings of heaven.

35. It seems to me that the most productive response to ambiguity is at level three, where we not only view things with our eyes wide open, but with our hearts wide open as well. When we do that, there will be many times when we are called upon to take some action at a point where we think we need more evidence before knowing what to do. Such occasions

may range from following the counsel of the Brethren on birth control to accepting a home teaching assignment. My experience has taught me always to give the Lord and his church the benefit of any doubts I may have when some such case seems too close to call. I stress that the willingness to be believing and accepting in these cases is a very different matter from blind obedience. It is rather, a loving and knowing kind of obedience.

36. The English writer G. K. Chesterton once addressed questions similar to those I have raised today. He distinguished among “optimists,” “pessimists,” and “improvers,” which roughly correspond to my three levels of dealing with ambiguity. He concluded that both the optimists and the pessimists looked too much at only one side of things. He observed that neither the extreme optimist nor the extreme pessimist would ever be of much help in improving the human condition, because people can’t solve problems unless they are willing to acknowledge that a problem exists and yet also retain enough genuine loyalty to do something about it. More specifically, Chesterton wrote that the evil of the excessive optimist (level one) is that he will “defend the indefensible. He is the jingo of the universe; he will say, ‘My cosmos, right or wrong.’ He will be less inclined to the reform of things; more inclined to a sort of front-bench official answer to all attacks, soothing everyone with assurances. He will not wash the world, but whitewash the world.”

37. On the other hand, the evil of the pessimist (level two), wrote Chesterton, is “not that he chastises gods and men, but that he does not love what he chastises.” In being the so-called “candid friend,” the pessimist is not really candid. Chesterton continued: “He is keeping something back—his own gloomy pleasure in saying unpleasant things. He has a secret desire to hurt, not merely to help. ... He is using the ugly knowledge which was allowed him [in order] to strengthen the army, to discourage people from joining it.” (Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Garden City, N.Y.: Image Book, 1959, pp. 69–70).

38. In going on to describe the “improvers,” or level three, Chesterton illustrates by referring to women, who tend to be so loyal to those who need them. “Some stupid people started the idea that because women obviously back up their own people through everything, therefore women are blind and do not see anything. They can hardly have known any women. The same women who are ready to defend their men through thick and thin ... are almost morbidly lucid about the thinness of his excuses or the thickness of his

head. ... Love is not blind; that is the last thing that it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind.” (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 71.)

39. Perhaps President Harold B. Lee was thinking of Chesterton’s point about women when he used to say, “Behind every great man, there is an amazed woman.”

40. Chesterton’s arranging of these categories makes me think of one other way to compare the differing levels of perspective that people bring to the way they cope with ambiguity. Consider the metaphorical image of “lead, kindly light.” At level one, people either do not or cannot see that there are both a kindly light and an encircling gloom, or that if there are both, that there is no real difference between the two. At level two, the difference is acutely apparent, but one’s acceptance of the ambiguity may be so wholeheartedly pessimistic as to say, “Remember that the hour is darkest just before everything goes completely black.”

41. How different are these responses from that calm but honest prayer at level three,

42. “Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom;

43. lead thou me on. ...

44. I do not ask to see

45. the distant scene—one step enough for me.”

46. (Hymns, no. 112.)

47. All I ask, then, is that we may be honest enough and courageous enough to face whatever uncertainties we may encounter, try to understand them, and then do something about them. Perhaps then we will not be living on borrowed light. “Love is not blind; that is the last thing that it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind.” In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

4.4 - The Doctrine of Christ

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

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1. Our deepest [gratitude](#) and love to Sister Beck, Sister Allred, and Sister Thompson, and the Relief Society board.

2. We have seen of late a growing public interest in the beliefs of The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints. This is something we welcome because, after all, our fundamental commission is to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, His

doctrine, in all the world (see [Matthew 28:19–20](#); [D&C 112:28](#)). But we must admit there has been and still persists some confusion about our doctrine and how it is established. That is the subject I wish to address today.

3. The Savior taught His doctrine in the meridian of time, and His Apostles struggled mightily to preserve it against a barrage of false tradition and philosophy. New Testament Epistles cite numerous incidents demonstrating that serious and widespread apostasy was already under way during the Apostles' ministry.¹

4. The centuries that followed were illuminated by occasional rays of gospel light until, in the 19th century, a brilliant dawn of Restoration broke upon the world, and the gospel of Christ, full and complete, was once again upon the earth. This glorious day began when, in “a pillar of light ... above the brightness of the sun” ([Joseph Smith—History 1:16](#)), [God the Father](#) and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, visited young [Joseph Smith](#) and initiated what would become a virtual flood of revelation linked with divine power and authority.

5. In these revelations we find what might be termed the core doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ reestablished upon the earth. Jesus Himself defined that doctrine in these words recorded in the [Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ](#):

6. “This is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the [Holy Ghost](#) beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

7. “And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

8. “And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

9. “... And whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost. ...

10. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” ([3 Nephi 11:32–35, 39](#)).

11. This is our message, the rock upon which we build, the foundation of everything else in the Church. Like all that comes from God, this doctrine is pure, it is

clear, it is easy to understand—even for a child. With glad hearts, we invite all to receive it.

12. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “we believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” ([Articles of Faith 1:9](#)). This is to say that while there is much we do not yet know, the truths and doctrine we have received have come and will continue to come by divine revelation. In some faith traditions, theologians claim equal teaching authority with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and doctrinal matters may become a contest of opinions between them. Some rely on the ecumenical councils of the Middle Ages and their creeds. Others place primary emphasis on the reasoning of post-apostolic theologians or on biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. We value scholarship that enhances understanding, but in the Church today, just as anciently, establishing the doctrine of Christ or correcting doctrinal deviations is a matter of divine revelation to those the Lord endows with apostolic authority.²

13. In 1954, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., then a counselor in the First Presidency, explained how doctrine is promulgated in the Church and the preeminent role of the President of the Church. Speaking of members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he stated: “[We] should [bear] in mind that some of the General Authorities have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people, subject to the over-all power and authority of the President of the Church. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment and authority covering their teaching; they have a resulting limitation, and the resulting limitation upon their power and authority in teaching applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Furthermore, as just indicated, the President of the Church has a further and special spiritual endowment in this respect, for he is the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the whole Church.”³

14. How does the Savior reveal His will and doctrine to prophets, seers, and revelators? He may act by messenger or in His own person. He may speak by His own voice or by the voice of the Holy Spirit—a communication of Spirit to spirit that may be expressed

in words or in feelings that convey understanding beyond words (see [1 Nephi 17:45](#); [D&C 9:8](#)). He may direct Himself to His servants individually or acting in council (see [3 Nephi 27:1–8](#)).

15. I cite two illustrations from the New Testament. The first was a revelation directed to the head of the Church. Early in the book of Acts, we find the Apostles of Christ declaring the gospel message only to Jews, following the pattern of Jesus’s ministry (see [Matthew 15:24](#)), but now, in the Lord’s timetable, the time had come for a change. In Joppa, Peter had a dream in which he saw a variety of animals lowered to earth from heaven in “a great sheet knit at the four corners” ([Acts 10:11](#)) and was commanded to “kill, and eat” ([Acts 10:13](#)). Peter was reluctant since at least some of the animals were “unclean” under the law of [Moses](#), and Peter had never violated the commandment against eating such. Nevertheless, the voice said to Peter in his dream, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” ([Acts 10:15](#)).

16. The meaning of this dream became clear when soon afterward, several men sent from the Roman centurion Cornelius arrived at Peter’s lodging with a request that he come teach their master. Cornelius had gathered a sizable group of relatives and friends, and finding them expectantly waiting to receive his message, Peter said:

17. “God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ...

18. “... Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

19. “But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” ([Acts 10:28, 34–35](#); see also [verses 17–24](#)).

20. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

21. “And they [who accompanied Peter] were astonished ... because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

22. “... Then answered Peter,

23. “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” ([Acts 10:44–47](#)).

24. By this experience and revelation to Peter, the Lord modified the practice of the Church and revealed a more complete doctrinal understanding to His disciples. And so the preaching of the gospel expanded to encompass all mankind.

25. Later in the book of Acts, we find another somewhat related illustration, this time showing how revelation on matters of doctrine may come in a council setting. A controversy arose about whether circumcision required under the law of Moses should carry over as a commandment in the gospel and Church of Christ (see [Acts 15:1, 5](#)). “And the apostles and elders came together for to consider ... this matter” ([Acts 15:6](#)). Our record of this council is certainly incomplete, but we are told that after “much disputing” ([Acts 15:7](#)), Peter, the senior Apostle, rose up and declared what the Holy Spirit had confirmed to him. He reminded the council that when the gospel began to be preached to the uncircumcised Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, they received the Holy Ghost just as had the circumcised Jewish converts. God, he said, “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

26. “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

27. “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” ([Acts 15:9–11](#); see also [verse 8](#)).

28. After Paul, Barnabas, and perhaps others spoke in support of Peter’s declaration, James moved that the decision be implemented by letter to the Church, and the council was united “with one accord” ([Acts 15:25](#); see also [verses 12–23](#)). In the letter announcing their decision, the Apostles said, “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us” ([Acts 15:28](#)), or in other words, this decision came by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit.

29. These same patterns are followed today in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The President of the Church may announce or interpret doctrines based on revelation to him (see, for example, [D&C 138](#)). Doctrinal exposition may also come through the combined council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see, for example, [Official Declaration 2](#)). Council deliberations will often include a weighing of canonized scriptures, the teachings of Church leaders, and past practice. But in the end, just as in the New Testament Church, the objective is not simply consensus among council members but revelation from God. It is a process involving both reason and faith for obtaining the mind and will of the Lord.⁴

30. At the same time it should be remembered that not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is

commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.”⁵ President Clark, quoted earlier, observed:

31. “To this point runs a simple story my father told me as a boy, I do not know on what authority, but it illustrates the point. His story was that during the excitement incident to the coming of [Johnston’s] Army, Brother Brigham preached to the people in a morning meeting a sermon vibrant with defiance to the approaching army, and declaring an intention to oppose and drive them back. In the afternoon meeting he arose and said that Brigham Young had been talking in the morning, but the Lord was going to talk now. He then delivered an address, the tempo of which was the opposite from the morning talk. ...

32. “... The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost’; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest.”⁶

33. The Prophet Joseph Smith confirmed the Savior’s central role in our doctrine in one definitive sentence: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁷ Joseph Smith’s testimony of Jesus is that He lives, “for [he] saw him, even on the right hand of God; and [he] heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” ([D&C 76:23](#); see also [verse 22](#)). I appeal to all who hear or read this message to seek through prayer and study of the scriptures that same witness of the divine character, the Atonement, and the [Resurrection](#) of Jesus Christ. Accept His doctrine by repenting, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and then throughout your life following the laws and covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

34. As our Easter celebration approaches, I express my own witness that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Son of God, the very Messiah of ancient prophecy. He is the Christ, who suffered in Gethsemane, died on the cross, was buried, and who indeed rose again the third day. He is the resurrected Lord, through whom we shall all be resurrected and by whom all who will may be redeemed and exalted in His heavenly kingdom.

This is our doctrine, confirming all prior testaments of Jesus Christ and stated anew for our own time. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sources

1. See Neal A. Maxwell, “From the Beginning,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 18–19: “James decried ‘wars and fightings among’ the Church ([James 4:1](#)). Paul lamented ‘divisions’ in the Church and how ‘grievous wolves’ would not spare ‘the flock’ ([1 Cor. 11:18](#); [Acts 20:29–31](#)). He knew an apostasy was coming and wrote to the Thessalonians that Jesus’ second coming would not occur ‘except there come a falling away first’; further advising that ‘iniquity doth already work’ ([2 Thes. 2:3, 7](#)). “Near the end, Paul acknowledged how very extensive the falling away was: ‘All they which are in Asia be turned away from me’ ([2 Tim. 1:15](#)). ... “Widespread fornication and idolatry brought apostolic alarm (see [1 Cor. 5:9](#); [Eph. 5:3](#); [Jude 1:7](#)). John and Paul both bemoaned the rise of false Apostles (see [2 Cor. 11:13](#); [Rev. 2:2](#)). The Church was clearly under siege. Some not only fell away but then openly opposed. In one circumstance, Paul stood alone and lamented that ‘all men forsook me’ ([2 Tim. 4:16](#)). He also decried those who ‘subvert[ed] whole houses’ ([Titus 1:11](#)). “Some local leaders rebelled, as when one, who loved his preeminence, refused to receive the brethren (see [3 Jn. 1:9–10](#)). “No wonder President Brigham Young observed: ‘It is said the Priesthood was taken from the Church, but it is not so, the Church went from the Priesthood’ (in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:69). “In the course of time, as Elder Maxwell expressed it, “reason, the Greek philosophical tradition, dominated, then supplanted, reliance on revelation, an outcome probably hastened by well-intentioned Christians wishing to bring their beliefs into the mainstream of contemporary culture. ... “... Let us [too] be wary about accommodating revealed theology to conventional wisdom” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 19–20).

2. Apostles and prophets such as Joseph Smith declare God’s word, but in addition, we believe men and women generally and even children can learn from and be guided by divine inspiration in response to prayer and study of the scriptures. Just as in the days of the ancient Apostles, members of the Church of Jesus Christ are given the gift of the Holy Ghost, which facilitates an ongoing communication with their Heavenly Father, or, in other words, personal revelation (see [Acts 2:37–38](#)). In this way, the Church becomes a body of committed, spiritually mature individuals whose faith is not blind but seeing—informed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that every member speaks for the Church or can define its doctrines but that each can receive divine guidance in dealing with the challenges and opportunities of his or her life.

3. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?” *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 9–10; see also [Doctrine and Covenants 28:1–2, 6–7, 11–13](#).

4. The required preparation and qualifications for council participants are “righteousness, ... holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, ... faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; “Because the promise is, if these things abound in them they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord” ([Doctrine and Covenants 107:30–31](#)).

5. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:265.

6. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “Church Leaders’ Words,” 10. Of the story his father told him about Brigham Young, President Clark further wrote: “I do not know if this ever happened, but I say it illustrates a

principle—that even the President of the Church, himself, may not always be ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost,’ when he addresses the people. This has happened about matters of doctrine (usually of a highly speculative character) where subsequent Presidents of the Church and the peoples themselves have felt that in declaring the doctrine, the announcer was not ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost.’ “How shall the Church know when these adventurous expeditions of the brethren into these highly speculative principles and doctrines meet the requirements of the statutes that the announcers thereof have been ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost’? The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost’; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest” (“Church Leaders’ Words,” 10).

7. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith(2007), 49

4.5 - What Is Truth?

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
CES Devotional, 2013



1. My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear young friends, I am grateful for the privilege to be with you today. It always lifts my spirits to be surrounded by the young adults of the Church, and you inspire me to declare, “Let Zion in her beauty rise.” As you are living all around the world, you represent in a beautiful way the future and strength of the Church. Because of your righteous desires and your commitment to follow the Savior, the future of this Church looks bright.

2. I bring you the love and blessing of President Thomas S. Monson. The First Presidency prays for you often. We always ask the Lord to bless, keep, and guide you.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

3. Well over one hundred years ago, an American poet put to rhyme an ancient parable. The first verse of the poem speaks about:

4. Six men of Indostan

5. To learning much inclined,

6. Who went to see the Elephant

7. (Though all of them were blind),

8. That each by observation

9. Might satisfy his mind.

10. In the poem each of the six travelers takes hold of a different part of the elephant and then describes to the others what he has discovered.

11. One of the men finds the elephant’s leg and describes it as being round and rough like a tree. Another feels the tusk and describes the elephant as a spear. A third grabs the tail and insists that an elephant is like a rope. A fourth discovers the trunk and insists that the elephant is like a large snake.

12. Each is describing truth.

13. And because his truth comes from personal experience, each insists that he knows what he knows.

14. The poem concludes:

15. And so these men of Indostan

16. Disputed loud and long,

17. Each in his own opinion

18. Exceeding stiff and strong,

19. Though each was partly in the right,

20. And all were in the wrong!¹

21. We look at this story from a distance and smile. After all, we know what an elephant looks like. We have read about them and watched them on film, and many of us have even seen one with our own eyes. We believe we know the truth of what an elephant is. That someone could make a judgment based on one aspect of truth and apply it to the whole seems absurd or even unbelievable. On the other hand, can’t we recognize ourselves in these six blind men? Have we ever been guilty of the same pattern of thought?

22. I suppose the reason this story has remained so popular in so many cultures and over so many years is because of its universal application. The Apostle Paul said that in this world the light is dim and we see only part of the truth as though we are looking “through a glass, darkly.”² And yet it seems to be part of our nature as human beings to make assumptions about people, politics, and piety based on our incomplete and often misleading experience.

23. I am reminded of a story about a couple who had been married for 60 years. They had rarely argued during that time, and their days together passed in happiness and contentment. They shared everything and had no secrets between them—except one. The wife had a box that she kept at the top of a sideboard, and she told her husband when they were married that he should never look inside.

24. As the decades passed, the moment came that her husband took the box down and asked if he could finally know what it contained. The wife consented, and he opened it to discover two doilies and \$25,000.

When he asked his wife what this meant, she responded, “When we were married, my mother told me that whenever I was angry with you or whenever you said or did something I didn’t like, I should knit a small doily and then talk things through with you.”

25. The husband was moved to tears by this sweet story. He marveled that during 60 years of marriage he had only disturbed his wife enough for her to knit two doilies. Feeling extremely good about himself, he took his wife’s hand and said, “That explains the doilies, but what about the \$25,000?”

26. His wife smiled sweetly and said, “That’s the money I got from selling all the doilies I’ve knitted over the years.”

27. Not only does this story teach an interesting way to deal with disagreements in marriage, but it also illustrates the folly of jumping to conclusions based on limited information.

28. So often the “truths” we tell ourselves are merely fragments of the truth, and sometimes they’re not really the truth at all.

29. Today I would like to speak of truth. As I do, I invite you to ponder a few important questions.

30. The first question is “What is truth?”

31. The second, “Is it really possible to know the truth?”

32. And third, “How should we react to things that contradict truths which we have learned previously?”

What Is Truth?

33. What is truth? During the closing hours of His life, the Savior was brought before Pontius Pilate. The elders of the Jews had accused Jesus of sedition and treason against Rome and insisted that He be put to death.

34. When Pilate came face to face with the Man of Galilee, he asked, “Are you a king?”

35. Jesus replied, “For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”³

36. I don’t know what kind of man Pilate was, nor do I know what he was thinking. However, I suspect that he was well educated and had seen much of the known world.

37. I sense a certain weary cynicism in Pilate’s reply. I hear in his words the voice of a man who may once

have been an idealist but now—after a great deal of life experience—seems a little hardened, even tired.

38. I don’t believe Pilate was encouraging a dialogue when he responded with three simple words: “What is truth?”⁴

39. To amplify, I wonder if what he really was asking was “How can anyone possibly know the truth?”

40. And that is a question for all time and for all people.

Can Anyone Know the Truth?

41. Now, can anyone know the truth? Some of the greatest minds that have ever lived on this earth have attempted to answer that question. The elusive nature of truth has been a favorite theme of history’s great poets and storytellers. Shakespeare seemed especially intrigued with it. The next time you read one of Shakespeare’s tragedies, notice how often the plot turns on a misunderstanding of an important truth.

42. Now, never in the history of the world have we had easier access to more information—some of it true, some of it false, and much of it partially true.

43. Consequently, never in the history of the world has it been more important to learn how to correctly discern between truth and error.

44. Part of our problem in the quest for truth is that human wisdom has disappointed us so often. We have so many examples of things that mankind once “knew” were true but have since been proven false.

45. For example, in spite of one-time overwhelming consensus, the earth isn’t flat. The stars don’t revolve around the earth. Eating a tomato will not cause instant death. And, of course, man actually can fly—even break the sound barrier.

46. The scriptures are filled with stories of men and women who misinterpreted “truth.”

47. In the Old Testament, Balaam could not resist the “wages of unrighteousness”⁵ offered him by the Moabites. So he convinced himself to believe a new truth and helped the Moabites get the Israelites to curse themselves through immorality and disobedience.⁶

48. The apostate Koriath, after leading many away from the truth, confessed that the devil had deceived him to the point where he actually believed that what he was saying was the truth.⁷

49. In the Book of Mormon, both the Nephites as well as the Lamanites created their own “truths” about each other. The Nephites’ “truth” about the Lamanites was

that they “were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people,”⁸ never able to accept the gospel. The Lamanites’ “truth” about the Nephites was that Nephi had stolen his brother’s birthright and that Nephi’s descendants were liars who continued to rob the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs.⁹ These “truths” fed their hatred for one another until it finally consumed them all.

50. Needless to say, there are many examples in the Book of Mormon that contradict both of these stereotypes. Nevertheless, the Nephites and Lamanites believed these “truths” that shaped the destiny of this once-mighty and beautiful people.

Human Nature and Truth

51. In some way we are all susceptible to such strange thinking.

52. The “truths” we cling to shape the quality of our societies as well as our individual characters. All too often these “truths” are based on incomplete and inaccurate evidence, and at times they serve very selfish motives.

53. Part of the reason for poor judgment comes from the tendency of mankind to blur the line between belief and truth. We too often confuse belief with truth, thinking that because something makes sense or is convenient, it must be true. Conversely, we sometimes don’t believe truth or reject it—because it would require us to change or admit that we were wrong. Often, truth is rejected because it doesn’t appear to be consistent with previous experiences.

54. When the opinions or “truths” of others contradict our own, instead of considering the possibility that there could be information that might be helpful and augment or complement what we know, we often jump to conclusions or make assumptions that the other person is misinformed, mentally challenged, or even intentionally trying to deceive.

55. Unfortunately, this tendency can spread to all areas of our lives—from sports to family relationships and from religion to politics.

Ignaz Semmelweis

56. A tragic example of this tendency is the story of Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian physician who practiced medicine during the mid-19th century. Early in his career, Dr. Semmelweis learned that 10 percent of the women who came to his clinic died of childbed fever, while the death rate at a nearby clinic was less than 4 percent. He was determined to find out why.

57. After investigating the two clinics, Dr. Semmelweis concluded that the only significant difference was that his was a teaching clinic where corpses were examined. He observed doctors who went directly from performing autopsies to delivering babies. He concluded that somehow the corpses had contaminated their hands and caused the deadly fevers.

58. When he began to recommend that doctors scrub their hands with a chlorinated lime solution, he was met with indifference and even scorn. His conclusions contradicted the “truths” of other doctors. Some of his colleagues even believed that it was absurd to think that a doctor’s hand could be impure or cause sickness.

59. But Semmelweis insisted, and he made it a policy for doctors in his clinic to wash their hands before delivering babies. As a consequence, the death rate promptly dropped by 90 percent. Semmelweis felt vindicated and was certain that this practice would now be adopted throughout the medical community. But he was wrong. Even his dramatic results were not enough to change the minds of many doctors of the day.

60. Is It Possible to Know the Truth?

61. The thing about truth is that it exists beyond belief. It is true even if nobody believes it.

62. We can say west is north and north is west all day long and even believe it with all our heart, but if, for example, we want to fly from Quito, Ecuador, to New York City in the United States, there is only one direction that will lead us there, and that is north—west just won’t do.

63. Of course, this is just a simple aviation analogy. However, there is indeed such a thing as absolute truth—unassailable, unchangeable truth.

64. This truth is different from belief. It is different from hope. Absolute truth is not dependent upon public opinion or popularity. Polls cannot sway it. Not even the inexhaustible authority of celebrity endorsement can change it.

So how can we find truth?

65. I believe that our Father in Heaven is pleased with His children when they use their talents and mental faculties to earnestly discover truth. Over the centuries many wise men and women—through logic, reason, scientific inquiry, and, yes, through inspiration—have discovered truth. These discoveries have enriched mankind, improved our lives, and inspired joy, wonder, and awe.

66. Even so, the things we once thought we knew are continually being enhanced, modified, or even contradicted by enterprising scholars who seek to understand truth.

67. As we all know, it is difficult enough to sort out the truth from our own experiences. To make matters worse, we have an adversary, “the devil, [who] as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”[10](#)

68. Satan is the great deceiver, “the accuser of [the] brethren,”[11](#) the father of all lies,[12](#) who continually seeks to deceive that he might overthrow us.[13](#)

69. The adversary has many cunning strategies for keeping mortals from the truth. He offers the belief that truth is relative; appealing to our sense of tolerance and fairness, he keeps the real truth hidden by claiming that one person’s “truth” is as valid as any other.

70. Some he entices to believe that there is an absolute truth out there somewhere but that it is impossible for anyone to know it.

71. For those who already embrace the truth, his primary strategy is to spread the seeds of doubt. For example, he has caused many members of the Church to stumble when they discover information about the Church that seems to contradict what they had learned previously.

72. If you experience such a moment, remember that in this age of information there are many who create doubt about anything and everything, at any time and every place.

73. You will find even those who still claim that they have evidence that the earth is flat, that the moon is a hologram, and that certain movie stars are really aliens from another planet. And it is always good to keep in mind, just because something is printed on paper, appears on the Internet, is frequently repeated, or has a powerful group of followers doesn’t make it true.

74. Sometimes untrue claims or information are presented in such a way that they appear quite credible. However, when you are confronted with information that is in conflict with the revealed word of God, remember that the blind men in the parable of the elephant would never be able to accurately describe the full truth.

75. We simply don’t know all things—we can’t see everything. What may seem contradictory now may be perfectly understandable as we search for and receive more trustworthy information. Because we see through

a glass darkly, we have to trust the Lord, who sees all things clearly.

76. Yes, our world is full of confusion. But eventually all of our questions will be answered. All of our doubts will be replaced by certainty. And that is because there is one source of truth that is complete, correct, and incorruptible. That source is our infinitely wise and all-knowing Heavenly Father. He knows truth as it was, as it is, and as it yet will be.[14](#) “He comprehendeth all things, ... and he is above all things, ... and all things are by him, and of him.”[15](#)

77. Our loving Heavenly Father offers His truth to us, His mortal children.

78. Now, what is this truth?

79. It is His gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life.”[16](#)

80. If we will only have enough courage and faith to walk in His path, it will lead us to peace of heart and mind, to lasting meaning in life, to happiness in this world, and to joy in the world to come. The Savior is “not far from every one of us.”[17](#) We have His promise that if we seek Him diligently, we will find Him.[18](#)

Our Obligation to Seek for Truth

81. But how can we know that this “truth” is different from any other? How can we trust this “truth”?

82. The invitation to trust the Lord does not relieve us from the responsibility to know for ourselves. This is more than an opportunity; it is an obligation—and it is one of the reasons we were sent to this earth.

83. Latter-day Saints are not asked to blindly accept everything they hear. We are encouraged to think and discover truth for ourselves. We are expected to ponder, to search, to evaluate, and thereby to come to a personal knowledge of the truth.

84. Brigham Young said: “I am ... afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security. ... Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates.”[19](#)

85. We seek for truth wherever we may find it. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “Mormonism is truth. ... The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation

or ... being ... prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men.”[20](#)

86. Yes, we do have the fulness of the everlasting gospel, but that does not mean that we know everything. In fact, one principle of the restored gospel is our belief that God “will yet reveal many great and important things.”[21](#)

87. The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ came about because of a young man with a humble heart and a keen mind seeking for truth. Joseph studied and then acted accordingly. He discovered that if a man lacks wisdom, he can ask of God and the truth really will be given unto him.[22](#)

88. The great miracle of the Restoration was not just that it corrected false ideas and corrupt doctrines—though it certainly did that—but that it flung open the curtains of heaven and initiated a steady downpour of new light and knowledge that has continued to this day.

89. So we continually seek truth from all good books and other wholesome sources. “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”[23](#) In this manner we can resist the deceit of the evil one. In this manner we learn the truth “precept upon precept; line upon line.”[24](#) And we will learn that intelligence cleaves unto intelligence, and wisdom receives wisdom, and truth embraces truth.[25](#)

90. My young friends, as you accept the responsibility to seek after truth with an open mind and a humble heart, you will become more tolerant of others, more open to listen, more prepared to understand, more inclined to build up instead of tearing down, and more willing to go where the Lord wants you to go.

The Holy Ghost—Our Guide to All Truth

91. Just think about it. You actually have a powerful companion and trustworthy guide in this ongoing search for truth. Who is it? It is the Holy Ghost. Our Heavenly Father knew how difficult it would be for us to sift through all the competing noise and discover truth during our mortality. He knew we would see only a portion of the truth, and He knew that Satan would try to deceive us. So He gave us the heavenly gift of the Holy Ghost to illuminate our minds, teach us, and testify to us of the truth.

92. The Holy Ghost is a revelator. He is the Comforter, who teaches us “the truth of all things; ... [who] knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment.”[26](#)

93. The Holy Ghost is a certain and safe guide to assist all mortals who seek God as they navigate the often troubling waters of confusion and contradiction.

94. The Witness of truth from the Holy Ghost is available to all, everywhere, all around the globe. All who seek to know the truth, who study it out in their minds,[27](#) and who “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, [will know] the truth ... by the power of the Holy Ghost.”[28](#)

95. And there is the additional, unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost available to all who qualify themselves through baptism and by living worthy of His constant companionship.

96. Yes, your loving Father in Heaven would never leave you alone in this mortality to wander in the dark. You need not be deceived. You can overcome the darkness of this world and discover divine truth.

97. Some, however, do not seek for truth so much as they strive for contention. They do not sincerely seek to learn; rather, they desire to dispute, to show off their supposed learning and thus cause contention. They ignore or reject the counsel of the Apostle Paul to Timothy: “Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do [generate contention].”[29](#)

98. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we know that such contention is completely inconsistent with the Spirit upon whom we depend in our search for truth. As the Savior warned the Nephites, “For verily ... I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention.”[30](#)

99. If you follow the Spirit, your personal search for the truth inevitably leads you to the Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, for He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”[31](#) This may not be the most convenient way; it will probably also be the road less traveled, and it will be the path with mountains to climb, swift rivers to cross, but it will be His way—the Savior’s redeeming way.

100. I add my witness as an Apostle of the Lord, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I know this with all my heart and mind. I know this by the witness and power of the Holy Ghost.

101. I ask you to spare no efforts in your search to know this truth for yourself—because this truth will make you free.[32](#)

102. My dear young friends, you are the hope of Israel. We love you. The Lord knows you; He loves you. The Lord has great confidence in you. He knows your

successes, and He is mindful of your challenges and questions in life.

103. It is my prayer that you will seek the truth earnestly and unceasingly, that you will yearn to drink from the fount of all truth, whose waters are pure and sweet, “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”³³

104. I bless you with confidence in the Lord and a deep-rooted desire to rightfully discern truth from error—now and throughout your life. This is my prayer and my blessing, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. John Godfrey Saxe, *The Poems of John Godfrey Saxe* (1873), 135–36, books.google.com.
2. [1 Corinthians 13:12](#).
3. [John 18:37](#).
4. See [John 18:33–38](#).
5. [2 Peter 2:15](#).
6. For Balaam’s story, see [Numbers 22–24](#); see also [Numbers 31:16](#); [Revelation 2:14](#).
7. See [Alma 30:52–53](#).
8. [Mosiah 10:12](#).

9. See [Mosiah 10:12](#); [Alma 20:13](#).
10. [1 Peter 5:8](#).
11. [Revelation 12:10](#).
12. See [John 8:44](#).
13. See [Doctrine and Covenants 50:3](#).
14. See [Doctrine and Covenants 93:24](#).
15. [Doctrine and Covenants 88:41](#).
16. [John 14:6](#).
17. [Acts 17:27](#).
18. See [Deuteronomy 4:29](#); [Proverbs 8:17](#); [Acts 17:27](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 88:63](#).
19. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1941), 135.
20. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 264.
21. [Articles of Faith 1:9](#).
22. See [James 1:5](#).
23. [Articles of Faith 1:13](#).
24. [Isaiah 28:10](#).
25. See [Doctrine and Covenants 88:40](#).
26. [Moses 6:61](#).
27. See [Doctrine and Covenants 9:8](#).
28. [Moroni 10:4](#).
29. [2 Timothy 2:23](#).
30. [3 Nephi 11:29](#).
31. [John 14:6](#).
32. See [John 8:32](#).

The Eternal and Essential Nature of Gender

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

5. Gender is an Essential Characteristic

5.1 - Eternal Marriage: Principles, Possibilities, and Promises

Michael Goodman

Voices of Hope, 2011



1. Few things are as discouraging as being told there is an ideal we should embrace and yet believing we never can reach it, worlds without end. Good people stuck in that situation often react in various ways. For some, the incongruence creates a barrier to acceptance so high that they simply cannot bring themselves to believe in the ideal. Some of those who cannot believe turn away in anger. Others mourn, wishing they could believe. Others not only believe in the ideal but also know that it is real; and yet, feeling that they can never be part of that reality, they are left in despair and without hope. Yet hope is possible and ultimately essential.

2. Without hope, there is no way to overcome the despair and approach the ideal. Hope is the necessary ingredient that makes the ideal both possible and inevitable. An experience I had while serving as a mission president cemented this truth in my mind. I worked with dozens of missionaries who became so homesick they wanted to go home. Though none went home early, I learned much from helping them through their homesickness. One thing became clear early on. As long as they were hopeless—as long as they believed they would continue to feel gut-wrenching pain—they could not progress. It was almost always essential that they have hope for a better tomorrow to help them make the right choices today. A rare few had such a strong sense of duty and honor to commitment that even without hope their sheer obedience pulled them through. These missionaries, however, were the exceptions.

3. I believe the need for greater hope is real for many Latter-day Saints who have feelings of same-gender attraction. There must be hope for a bright future. There must be hope that life can be filled with joy and fulfillment. Ultimately, there must be hope that the eternal joys of marriage, family, and all associated intimacies await faithful members who experience same-gender attraction.

4. From their youth, most Latter-day Saints have been taught the ideal of eternal marriage. Most start out expecting a future marriage filled with the kind of love and intimacy that, as they are taught, give meaning to life. For those with same-gender attraction, however, at some point that dream begins to fade.

5. In order for the doctrines and principles in this chapter to help, hope must somehow be rekindled. Ideally, there must be faith that all will work out and that life can be filled with joy, purpose, and fulfillment, whether we are married or single. For some, however, hope and faith may seem as impossible as eternal marriage itself. The prophet Alma gave a key that may unlock the door to that hope. He taught, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27).

Hope For Eternal Marriage

6. Ultimately (eternally), it is not possible to receive a fullness of joy without entering the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see D&C 131:1-4). This doctrine can seem hard when juxtaposed with the reality that, for a variety of reasons, many of Heavenly Father's children do not marry in this life. Often, through no fault of their own, this central part of the gospel plan isn't realized in mortality for these individuals. Elder Richard G. Scott said, "The Lord knows the intent of your heart. His prophets have stated that you [all of Heavenly Father's children] will have that blessing [eternal marriage] as you consistently live to qualify for it."¹ As we try to understand the doctrine of eternal marriage and develop a hope for it, we must not make the mistake of believing that we have to wait on marriage before happiness can begin in this life. Heavenly Father will not deny His faithful children a rich and fulfilling life based on things outside their control. This will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

7. As Alma taught, sometimes faith and hope have to start with simple desire. Desire can make hope and faith possible. There are many reasons to desire eternal marriage, both in this life and in the life to come. The Brethren have regularly tried to help members of the Church understand the joy that comes from eternal marriage. President Boyd K. Packer has taught: "In marriage all of the worthy yearnings of the human soul, all that is physical and emotional and spiritual,

can be fulfilled Marriage is meant to be eternal."2 Yes, marriage, eternal marriage, is worth desiring. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, "Marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive." 3 Some sincerely try to find this kind of happiness in relationships contrary to the principles of revealed truth. No alternative relationship, however, can ever bring the true eternal joy that comes from a righteous eternal marriage.4

8. As the prophets have taught, there is reason to desire and hope for eternal marriage. It is important to understand that this ideal is ultimately within the reach of all of God's children who choose to be faithful to His gospel plan. None, including those who struggle with same-gender attraction, are excluded. The following statement from the pamphlet *God Loveth His Children*, published by the Church, declares this truth:

9. "While many Latter-day Saints, through individual effort, the exercise of faith, and reliance upon the enabling power of the Atonement, overcome same-gender attraction in mortality, others may not be free of this challenge in this life. However, the perfect plan of our Father in Heaven makes provision for individuals who seek to keep His commandments but who, through no fault of their own, do not have an eternal marriage in mortal life. As we follow Heavenly Father's plan, our bodies, feelings, and desires will be perfected in the next life so that every one of God's children may find joy in a family consisting of a husband, a wife, and children " It further states: "All of Heavenly Father's children desire to love and be loved, including many adults who, for a variety of reasons, remain single. God assures His children, including those currently attracted to persons of the same gender, that their righteous desires will eventually be fully satisfied in God's own way and according to His timing."5

10. The possibility of having to wait until the next life to enjoy the full blessings of eternal marriage may seem of little help to those who desire the blessing of intimate companionship right now. But by more thoroughly understanding the doctrine of eternal marriage, we can receive power and help beyond what we might expect. The more we understand the real nature of eternal marriage, the more we desire it. This is true not only for those dealing with same-gender attraction but also for all of Heavenly Father's children, single or married. It is also true that the more we understand the importance of the doctrinal foundations of eternal marriage, the more we are willing to do whatever it takes not to lose the possibility of those blessings in the future. Therefore, with the assurance

that all should hope for the promised blessings, let's try to lay a foundation.

Importance of Eternal Marriage

11. President Packer has taught that "true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior."6 There are few areas where understanding true doctrine is more important than in relation to marriage. The very definitions of marriage and family understood by mankind for millennia are no longer considered valid by many. In fact, the leading scholarly journal in the field of marriage and family recently changed its name from *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* to *The Journal of Marriage and Family* to indicate that there is no longer any universally accepted definition of the family. However, the institution of marriage is only changeable by man if it is a man-made institution to start with. Even though much of the world believes that marriage is man-made, those with a testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ know otherwise.

12. Eternal marriage, as the name indicates, has no beginning and will have no end. Marriage on this earth, instituted by God, began with the creation of Adam and Eve. In the first chapter of the Bible, we read of the creation of man and woman (see Genesis 1:26-27). The first recorded commandment given to man and woman was to multiply and replenish the earth (see Genesis 1:28). This commandment presupposes Adam and Eve's marriage. In Genesis 2, after the symbolic account of Adam and Eve's creation, the scripture record declares, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). But this becoming one was more than just a "till death do you part" ritual. President Henry B. Eyring explained:

13. "The requirement that we be one is not for this life alone. It is to be without end. The first marriage was performed by God in the garden when Adam and Eve were immortal. He placed in men and women from the beginning a desire to be joined together as man and wife forever to dwell in families in a perfect, righteous union."7 Thus eternal marriage becomes the focal point of the creation of man from the beginning of sacred writ.

14. There is no shortage of statements by those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators pertaining to the divine origin and centrality of marriage and family in the gospel plan. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that marriage involves "an eternal principle ordained before the foundation of the world and instituted on this earth before death came into it."8 Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, "Marriage and the

family unit are the central part of the plan of progression and exaltation. All things center in and around the family unit in the eternal perspective."⁹ President Brigham Young taught that marriage "lays the foundation for worlds, for angels, and for the Gods; for intelligent beings to be crowned with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. In fact, it is the thread which runs from the beginning to the end of the holy Gospel of Salvation."¹⁰ President Kimball taught that marriage and family are not only central to Heavenly Father's plan but that the "family is the great plan of life as conceived and organized by our Father in Heaven."¹¹

15. These statements and countless similar statements leave little ambiguity as to the importance of marriage in God's plan of happiness. However, though they hint at the reasons behind the centrality of marriage, they do not lay out a doctrinal foundation for it. Even though Church members may understand the significance of a given doctrine due to such overarching statements, they often struggle to find the intersection between knowing that the doctrine is important and finding the motivation and purpose necessary to implement that doctrine in their lives. One example of this phenomenon is the doctrine of chastity. We can quote Alma 39:5 (which teaches that violating the law of chastity is "most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost") in an attempt to teach members the seriousness of violating the law of chastity, but often it isn't until they understand the doctrinal foundations of the law that they find the strength and determination to live it. In a similar vein, it is one thing to be able to quote prophetic statements on the importance of marriage and another thing to understand the doctrinal foundations of marriage to the point that the doctrine dictates the path of life we choose to follow.

Doctrinal Foundations of Eternal Marriage

16. *Eternal destiny.* President Kimball's statement that family is the plan hints at a doctrinal truth that may elude some members of the Church. I believe that if you asked most members what the purpose of life is, they would respond that our purpose is to so live that we can joyfully return to be with God in heaven forever. There is ample scriptural evidence that this answer is right, at least partially (see 2 Nephi 2:25; Matthew 5:3, 10, 12; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22; Mosiah 2:41; Alma 11:37; Helaman 3:30; D&C 6:37; 20:24; 127:4; Moses 7:21). Sometimes the scriptures refer to this aspect of our eternal destiny as "everlasting life" (John 3:16; 3 Nephi 5:13; D&C 45:5). Although the term everlasting life is descriptive of the duration of

our eternal destiny, it is less descriptive of the quality. A more descriptive term appears in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:70). Both concepts, duration and quality, are brought together in Moses 1:39: "Behold, this is my work and my glory-to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." Though living forever is an important part of our destiny, it is important to make a distinction between immortality and eternal life. Satan and all who follow him are immortal inasmuch as they have no end; they will exist forever. However, they certainly won't enjoy eternal life. They will not have resurrected bodies capable of celestial glory and the ability to become as God is.

17. *God is married.* We learn from Doctrine and Covenants 19:11 that eternal is another name for God. Therefore, eternal life is another way of saying God's life, or the kind of life that God lives. God's work and glory is to bring to pass not only our immortality but also our eternal life. Our eternal destiny is nothing less than becoming as God is now. This doctrine is clearly taught in the famous couplet by Lorenzo Snow: "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be."¹² If our eternal destiny is to become like our Father in Heaven, we need to gain an understanding of who He is and what He is like. How else can we live our life in accordance with His will and nature? As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, in order for us to have faith in God (not to mention in God's plan), we need to have a correct idea of God's "character, perfections, and attributes."¹³

18. Obviously, even the entire scriptural canon cannot contain all there is to know about the character, perfection, and attributes of God, so this chapter certainly won't try to detail them all. God's character is made up of all that is beautiful, virtuous, and good in infinite measure. However, there is one aspect of who He is that must be understood above all else in relation to eternal marriage. That truth is that God Himself is a married being.¹⁴

19. The very definition of godhood, or exaltation, depends on the union of a man and woman, eternally married. Elder Erastus Snow taught, "There can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, nor ever will be, a God in any other way."¹⁵ We learn in the Doctrine and Covenants that "in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest [to be exalted like Heavenly Father], a man must enter into this order of the

priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:1-4).

20. Eternal marriage is necessary for exaltation because there is no such thing as a single god. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19 teaches that those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and are faithful to it will "pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever."

21. It is only through the union of man and woman, eternally married, that a "continuation of the seeds forever and ever" is possible. President Harold B. Lee, referencing the hymn "O My Father," explained: "That great hymn 'O My Father' puts it correctly when Eliza R. Snow wrote, 'In the heav'ns are parents single? No, the thought makes reason stare! Truth is reason; truth eternal tells me I've a mother there.' Born of a Heavenly Mother, sired by a Heavenly Father, we knew Him, we were in His house." 16

22. *God is our father.* Though we know few details regarding Heavenly Father's marriage, there can be few things more central to His nature. If you were to ask, "What does God do for a living; what is His life's work?" the answer would have to be that he is a full-time husband and father. All that He does is intended for the welfare and eternal salvation of His children. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught: "The work of God is to bring to pass the eternal life of His children (see Moses 1:39), and all that this entails in the birth, nurturing, teaching, and sealing of our Heavenly Father's children. Everything else is lower in priority." 17 Elder Dennis E. Simmons explained: "He [God] has already achieved god-hood. Now His only objective is to help us-to enable us to return to Him and be like Him and live His kind of life eternally." 18

23. This doctrine is at the foundation of our understanding of eternal marriage. The destiny of mankind is to become like Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother in an eternal covenant and creative union. This capacity is part of our premortal, mortal, and postmortal nature. The First Presidency of Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, and Charles W. Nibley taught, "Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so that undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable,

by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God." 19

24. In an article on same-gender attraction, Elder Oaks taught that "the purpose of mortal life and the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for their destiny-to become like our heavenly parents." 20

25. *We are God's children.* Through a comprehensive understanding of the nature of God, we are enabled to better understand our own nature and the privileges that come with it. This understanding is essential if we are to live up to the potential within us. President Packer taught that "we all live far below our privileges." 21 Part of the challenge is that at times we lack a correct understanding of our nature. The corresponding doctrine to God being our Father is that we are His children. Few doctrines are more apparent through a study of the scriptures. In the beginning, the Lord declared to Adam: "Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons" (Moses 6:68). God refers to Moses, and Moses refers to himself, as a son of God seven times in the book of Moses. In the same book, as the Lord introduces Himself to Enoch, He calls him "my son" (Moses 6:27). And in the book of Abraham, the Lord refers to Abraham as "my son" (Abraham 1:17).

26. President Marion G. Romney explained that this is "the most important knowledge available to mortals. Such knowledge is beyond the ken of the uninspired mind. Neither logic, science, philosophy, nor any other field of worldly learning has ever been, or ever will be, able to find it out. . . . Fortunately for us, as has already been shown, it has been so revealed repeatedly from Adam until today.

27. "The aspirations, desires, and motivations of one who accepts, believes, and by the power of the Holy Spirit obtains a witness to the truth that he is a begotten son or daughter unto God differs from the aspirations of him who believes otherwise, as the growing vine differs from the severed branch (2 Timothy 3:7)." 22

28. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, hope is often the child of desire. President Romney taught that the knowledge that we are children of a God who loves us and gave His only begotten Son for us helps us to change our desires, aspirations, and motivations.

29. However, some who know this to be true still struggle. Once we gain a basic knowledge of our divine heritage, we must deepen our understanding of what it actually means in our daily life. 23 How often have members of the Church sung the words to the

children's hymn "I Am a Child of God" without really drinking deeply from its meaning? President Gordon B. Hinckley asked us if we really understand the significance of this doctrine:

30. "I challenge every one of you who can hear me to rise to the divinity within you. Do we really realize what it means to be a child of God, to have within us something of the divine nature? . . . We can either subdue the divine nature and hide it so that it finds no expression in our lives, or we can bring it to the front and let it shine through all that we do."²⁴

31. A deep and abiding testimony that we are children of God will help us live up to our "infinite capacities to grow spiritually and become more like [God]."²⁵ It is a knowledge that protects as well as directs. Our spiritual security increases as we come to more deeply sense our identity as children of God. Sheri Dew taught that "the more dearly we understand our divine destiny, the more immune we become to Satan" and ultimately to Satan's counterfeits to Heavenly Father's plan.²⁶

32. *Understanding our nature.* Through understanding the nature of God and our relationship to Him, we come to understand that our nature is nothing less than His nature in embryo. Because God by nature is a heterosexually creative being, we too must have the seeds of that same eternal nature within us. If our eternal destiny depends on our being eternally married to someone of the opposite sex, our deepest, most innate spiritual nature-buried within the human development and experience that LDS psychologist Allen Bergin calls our "mortal overlay"²⁷ must be in line with that destiny. As President Howard W. Hunter taught, "My spiritual reasoning tells me that because God is an exalted being, holy and good, that man's supreme goal [and destiny] is to be like him."²⁸ Being like Him means that our supreme goal and destiny is linked to our relationship with our future spouse. Elder Oaks taught that "attraction between man and woman was instilled by the Creator."²⁹ This is true even if that attraction is temporarily hidden or absent.

33. Understanding this aspect of our nature helps us understand that we can never find real happiness in this life or in the next by living contrary to that nature. Jesus explained why those who allow their nature to become carnal can never find lasting happiness (see Alma 41: 10-11). It is true that there can be momentary pleasure and even a sense of joy "for a season," but that season always ends in pain and sorrow (3 Nephi 27: 11). Alma taught that those who give into their carnal nature "are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are

in a state contrary to the nature of happiness" (Alma 41:11). God's nature (and our true nature as His children) is the nature of happiness. This is why Helaman taught that those who were living contrary to God's nature and commandments could never truly be happy. He explained that they seek "for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head" (Helaman 13:38). Hence, any attempt to live contrary to our divine nature will unavoidably fail to bring the eternal happiness we seek.

Implications for Those Struggling with Same-Gender Attraction

34. *It's not easy.* Understanding our true nature does not make everything easy when our current fallen nature seems to be telling us that we are different from what the scriptures and prophets tell us we are. Many of Heavenly Father's children for one reason or another do not feel an attraction to members of the opposite sex. This chapter does not discuss what we know about the reasons for this. But by truly understanding what our eternal nature and destiny is, we can begin to live, or continue our efforts to live our life in such a way as to make our eternal destiny a reality. The following discussion contains principles that can assist those who seek to live their lives in accordance with Heavenly Father's plan for them.

35. *Do not label yourself.* One of the sophistries often used to justify inappropriate behavior connected with same-gender attraction is that you shouldn't deny your true nature. In other words, some would claim that if you are attracted to those of the same-gender, you are going against your true nature by not granting romantic or sexual expression to those feelings. However, as explained above, our true nature can never be homosexual—it is to become like God. But for reasons beyond our current understanding and often through circumstances outside of our control, a God-instilled attraction to members of the opposite sex may be temporarily absent from our life. The Lord has not given us a full understanding of why this is so. It likely involves social, psychological, and biological issues. Though they may wish it were otherwise, some people do feel attracted to persons of the same gender. The answer is not to deny this reality but to see it for what it is: a temporary condition or part of one's nature in mortality that will eventually be fully understood and resolved.

36. Understanding this truth does not make dealing with the challenge of same-gender attraction easy, but it helps those struggling with it to avoid the mistake of

labeling or defining themselves in a way that is characteristic of a permanent, eternal state of being. Elder Oaks said:

37. "We should note that the words homosexual, lesbian, and gay are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. Our religious doctrine dictates this usage. It is wrong to use these words to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual behavior.

38. "Feelings are another matter. Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of 'nature and nurture.' All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior." 30

39. As we refuse to accept the world's labels, we are subsequently free to choose what will define us. Speaking of those who refuse to give in to such labeling, one author wrote, "They are those who, recognizing we are not named by what tempts us, eschew the label 'gay' to take upon them the name of Christ instead." 31

40. *Have hope for the future.* As stated earlier, one of the most important things any person can do is to nurture hope. In an interview with Elder Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman of the Seventy, Elder Wickman explained: "The good news for somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is this: 1) It is that 'I'm not stuck with it forever.' It's just now. Admittedly, for each one of us, it's hard to look beyond the 'now' sometimes. But nonetheless, if you see mortality as now, it's only during this season. 2) If I can keep myself worthy here, if I can be true to gospel commandments, if I can keep covenants that I have made, the blessings of exaltation and eternal life that Heavenly Father holds out to all of His children apply to me. Every blessing-including eternal marriage-is and will be mine in due course."

41. He also stated: "What we look forward to, and the great promise of the gospel, is that whatever our inclinations are here, whatever our shortcomings are here, whatever the hindrances to our enjoying a fulness of joy here, we have the Lord's assurance for every one

of us that those in due course will be removed. We just need to remain faithful." 32 Even if, as with Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7), same-gender attraction is not immediately removed or ever removed in this lifetime, it is important to continue hoping for all that Heavenly Father has promised us. We must understand that it is within our realm of control, our agency, to choose what we will do and who we will be.

42. *Agency is the key.* Agency is one of the most essential characteristics of premortal, mortal, and postmortal life. Since the beginning, Satan has sought to destroy the agency of man, but our Father in Heaven has never allowed him to succeed. A third of the hosts of heaven were lost over this battle in the premortal realm. Surely we must understand that Heavenly Father wouldn't allow anything to rob us of our agency now. Elder Oaks taught: "Satan would like us to believe that we are not responsible in this life. That is the result he tried to achieve by his contest in the pre-existence. A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was 'born that way' is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven." 33 The scriptures teach that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Understanding this principle enables us to realize that even in the challenge of same-gender attraction, we still have our agency and must use that agency to choose the path that will ultimately lead us back to our Heavenly Father and to ultimate happiness.

43. *Agency and marriage.* God would have us use our agency to help bring to pass our eternal life as well as that of our brothers and sisters. But how can I use my agency in relation to eternal marriage when I face this challenge? What is my responsibility when it comes to eternal marriage? First and foremost, it must be understood that getting married, eternally or otherwise, is not a method for overcoming same-gender attraction. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, "Marriage is not an all-purpose solution. Same-gender attractions run deep, and trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them." 34

44. But the time may come when a person feels ready to begin dating members of the opposite sex. The decision as to when a person is ready for such a move is deeply personal and likely to involve personal revelation.

45. The closer we can come to living the ideal, the

better off we will be. This does not mean we seek unrighteous alternatives to marriage. It means that we live our lives as close to the ideal as we can. We live the gospel of Jesus Christ to the fullest. We develop and enjoy healthy relationships with people of both genders. We value and seek to strengthen our commitments to marriage and families, including our birth families. We learn all we can about marriage and family from the words of the living prophets and apostles. We invite the Atonement of Jesus Christ to help remake us in the image of our Redeemer. Elder Scott counseled us to come as close to the ideal as possible because that will result in the greatest happiness:

46. "Throughout your life on earth, seek diligently to fulfill the fundamental purposes of this life through the ideal family. While you may not have yet reached that ideal, do all you can through obedience and faith in the Lord to consistently draw as close to it as you are able. Let nothing dissuade you from that objective. If it requires fundamental changes in your personal life, make them. When you have the required age and maturity, obtain all of the ordinances of the temple you can receive. If for the present, that does not include sealing in the temple to a righteous companion, live for it. Pray for it. Exercise faith that you will obtain it. Never do anything that would make you unworthy of it. If you have lost the vision of eternal marriage, rekindle it. If your dream requires patience, give it. . . . Don't become overanxious. Do the best you can. We cannot say whether that blessing will be obtained on this side of the veil or beyond it, but the Lord will keep His promises. In His infinite wisdom, He will make possible all you qualify in worthiness to receive. Do not be discouraged. Living a pattern of life as close as possible to the ideal will provide much happiness, great satisfaction, and impressive growth while here on earth regardless of your current life circumstances." 35

47. *Overcoming loneliness.* Those who are currently not ready for marriage are not destined to a life of loneliness even though some loneliness is likely a part of everyone's life, even those who are married. The same counsel the Brethren give to all of us regarding overcoming loneliness applies equally well to those struggling with same-gender attraction. Counsel given by President Hinckley to single women has strong application here. He taught that we should not wait for marriage to make us happy:

48. "Do not give up hope. And do not give up trying. But do give up being obsessed with it. The chances are that if you forget about it and become anxiously engaged in other activities, the prospects will brighten

immeasurably.

49. "I believe that for most of us the best medicine for loneliness is work, service in behalf of others. I do not minimize your problems, but I do not hesitate to say that there are many others whose problems are more serious than are yours. Reach out to serve them, to help them, to encourage them."36

50. Elder Oaks taught similar principles when he said: "If you are just marking time waiting for a marriage prospect, stop waiting. You may never have the opportunity for a suitable marriage in this life, so stop waiting and start moving. Prepare yourself for life—even a single life—by education, experience, and planning. Don't wait for happiness to be thrust upon you. Seek it out in service and learning. Make a life for yourself. And trust in the Lord. Your dedication of a lifetime should follow King Benjamin's advice to be 'calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come' (Mosiah 4: 11)."37

51. Each of us is able to find meaning in our lives as we choose to live according to the gospel that Jesus Christ gave us. As the Savior taught, the best way to find ourselves is to lose ourselves in love and service to others (see Matthew 10:39).

52. *A broader definition of intimacy.* Each of us longs for the type of intimacy that gives meaning and purpose to life. Those who experience same-gender attraction but who are committed to the gospel will choose not to take part in sexual intimacy until they are married to someone of the opposite sex. However, every other aspect of human intimacy is available and worthy of our cultivation in our relationships with both men and women. Dr. Charles Beckert has identified ten different kinds of intimacy available to us all. Only one of them involves sexual intimacy. The other facets of intimacy include:

- Emotional intimacy: being on the same wavelength and feeling close
- Intellectual intimacy: sharing thoughts and ideas
- Aesthetic intimacy: sharing the beauties of the world
- Creative intimacy: sharing acts of creating together
- Recreational intimacy: playing together
- Work intimacy: sharing common tasks in closeness

- Conflict intimacy: facing and struggling with challenges and differences
- Crisis intimacy: coping together with problems and pain
- Spiritual intimacy: experiencing the "uniting of spirits"³⁸

53. Even physical intimacy of a nonsexual nature is an important and beautiful part of life that all can appropriately enjoy. Sexual intimacy is important and sacred, but each of us, married or single, is capable of greater intimacy with friends and loved ones. In truth, sexual intimacy without the other aspects of human intimacy is devoid of true beauty and meaning. Outside of marriage, sexual intimacy can be nothing but selfish and degrading. The day may come when sexual intimacy is a part of our life, but we need not await that day before we experience the many forms of closeness and intimacy that cast away the shadows of loneliness.

54. *Learning from personal experience.* The reality of mortal life is that we all have many experiences we would not necessarily choose for ourselves. Each of us has personal challenges, our own "thorn in the flesh" that we have to cope with. This does not mean we are broken. Though each of us is fallen and subject to the fall of Adam, we can approach wholeness now through a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ.

55. Alma promised that "now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you" (Alma 34:31). Through this knowledge, we can seek to learn from our experiences as we move forward in life. We can pray to the Father that He will help us see what we can learn and how we can grow—not despite our trials but through our trials. He can whisper peace to our troubled souls and teach us how to experience peace and fulfillment now.

Conclusion

56. No sacrifice is too great when exaltation and eternal life are the goal. Through living righteously, through striving to lose ourselves in service to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters, everyone, including those who struggle with same-gender attraction, is able to live richly and experience joy in this life and a fulness in the life to come. A thorough understanding of eternal marriage is one of the keys by which we unlock the vision and ability to live our life to the fullest and ultimately overcome every challenge we face, including challenges with same-gender attraction.

Sources

1. Scott, "Receive the Temple Blessings," 27.
2. Packer, "Marriage," 15.
3. Kimball, Teachings, 305.
4. See Packer, "Marriage," 13.
5. God Loveth His Children, 3-4; emphasis added.
6. Packer, "Do Not Fear," 79.
7. Eyring, "That We May Be One," 66.
8. Smith, The Way to Perfection, 251.
9. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 1: 546.
10. Young, Discourses of Brigham Young, 195.
11. Kimball, "The Family Influence," 15.
12. Snow, "Devotion to a Divine Inspiration," 656.
13. Smith, Lectures on Faith, 38.
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16. Lee, Teachings, 22.
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18. Simmons, "But If Not ...," 73.
19. Grant, Ivins, Nibley, in Clark, Messages of the First Presidency, 5:244.
20. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," 7.
21. Packer, in Staheli, "Obedience-Life's Great Challenge," 81.
22. Romney, "Man-A Child of God," 14.
23. See Ballard, "One More," 71.
24. Hinckley, "Each a Better Person," 99.
25. Morrison, "Come and See," 12.
26. Dew, No Doubt about It, 47.
27. Bergin, Eternal Values, 29.
28. Hunter, Teachings, 15.
29. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," 7.
30. Ibid., 9.
31. Name Withheld, "Compassion for Those Who Struggle," 59.
32. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," 10.
33. Ibid.
34. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle," 44.
35. Scott, "First Things First," 7.
36. Hinckley, "Women of the Church," 68.
37. Oaks, "The Dedication of a Lifetime."
38. Beckert, in Living a Covenant Marriage, 221-22.

5.2 - "Let Us Think Straight"

M. Russell Ballard

BYU Speeches, Aug 20, 2013



1. My brothers and sisters, I hope you are having a wonderful time while here at BYU during Campus Education Week. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the plan of happiness our Heavenly Father has given to us.

There is so much information that I always feel we need to be cautious and wise to ever keep uppermost in our minds the simple doctrine and gospel of Christ. Simply stated, it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion for the

remission of sin, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.

2. Sister Ballard and I returned a few days ago from England, where we had the privilege, along with several of the Brethren and their wives, to watch the first-ever presentation of the British Pageant. Some 200 cast members, and several hundred other volunteer members, told the story in song, dance, and the spoken word about the arrival of Elders Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding, and a few others who came to establish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in England.

3. As I watched that story unfold, it brought great memories flooding back to my mind of my experience sixty-five years ago arriving in England to serve a full-time mission as a young man. And as the story progressed, I was deeply touched by the overwhelming contribution converts in the British Isles, and, of course, some from Scandinavia, made in building up and strengthening The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1837 and even on through to today. These fearless early missionaries, bearers of the priesthood and the message of the Restoration, touched hundreds and later thousands of lives through their testimonies, priesthood blessings, and love for the people of Great Britain. They reaped a great harvest of wonderful converts.

4. As I watched the pageant, I thought to myself, “How did they do this?” The early Saints did not have any proselytizing systems. They did not have Preach My Gospel. They did not have a Missionary Training Center. They did not have easy ways of transportation. But what they did have was an abiding, deep testimony that Joseph Smith knelt in the presence of the Father and the Son as They appeared to him in 1820 and opened the way of the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Father and the Son gave him the principles of the doctrine of Christ that I have previously mentioned.

5. As I pondered the miracle of the mission to Great Britain, it seemed to me that the simple gospel truths, powerfully explained by those great apostles of yesteryear, just penetrated the hearts of the people. I was also deeply impressed—in fact, so much so that I changed what I had in mind to share with you today because of the impressions that came to me about the power and the importance of the faith and testimony of the dear women and even the children who joined the Church during that formative era. As I watched and remembered, it was overwhelming. They withstood the challenges of the journey to Zion because of their faith,

their own study and knowledge of the Book of Mormon, and their unwavering acceptance of Joseph Smith as the prophet of this dispensation. The women of the British Isles who made their way here—many arriving without their companion and some of their children whom they buried along the way—were in many ways the heart of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in those early days.

6. The same is true now. In so many ways women are the heart of the Church. So today, with the help of the Lord, I would like to pay tribute to the faithful women and young women of the Church today. To you dear sisters, wherever you live in the world and whether you hear this address or read it, please know of the great affection and trust that the First Presidency and the Twelve have in you.

7. In 1948, when I arrived in England, it was after World War II, and many of the little branches that grew into wards and stakes were really held together by the faith—the simple faith—and trust in our Heavenly Father and His plan of those sisters who remained behind while their husbands and sons went off to fight in World War II. Had it not been for the sisters and their faith and their strength during those difficult days, we would have had to start our work from scratch in several of the branches where I served.

8. Brothers and sisters, I pray that the Lord will bless me that I may follow the counsel of a small plaque in my office that reads, “Above all else, brethren, let us think straight.” These were the last words spoken in mortality by my grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, who was in the hospital suffering end-stage leukemia in 1939.

9. My father, who was sitting at Grandfather’s bedside, told me that Grandfather pushed himself up in bed, looked around his hospital room as though he were addressing a congregation or a group, and said clearly, “And above all else, brethren, let us think straight.” I don’t go into my office any day of the week that I don’t see those words.

10. “Thinking straight” for all of us has always been important, but never more so than today.

11. From the beginning of time there have been articulate men and women who have had unusual powers of persuasion. Those with gifts of communication have always had great influence, but the influence of persuasive communicators has never been greater than it is today. Because of the Internet, and particularly the popularity and proliferation of social media—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and

heaven only knows what else has become popular that I'm not aware of yet—anyone can talk to anyone about anything. Today anyone who is clever, articulate, and glib can find an audience and develop a following. Unfortunately, not everyone who has cultivated the ability to communicate uses their powers of expression to spread or teach truth. And not everyone has the help of the Holy Ghost to think straight.

12. In what I say this morning please keep in mind and think straight about the basic doctrines of Christ that include the love our Father in Heaven has for His daughters who are precious and essential to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I encourage you brethren to listen carefully as well as the sisters because I believe there are some truths that both women and men need to understand about the essential role women have in strengthening and building up the kingdom of God on the earth.

13. You have come to Campus Education Week to learn new things and to take refresher courses on things you may have forgotten or not focused on for a while. So let me begin with a refresher course about what we are doing here—and I don't mean what we are doing here at BYU today. I'm referring to what we are doing here on earth.

14. We are beloved spirit sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. We lived with Him in the premortal realms. In order to fulfill the mission of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), Heavenly Father created a plan designed to help His children achieve their ultimate potential. Our Father's plan called for man to fall and to be separated from Him for a time by being born into mortality, gaining a body, and entering a period of testing and probation. His plan provided for a Savior to redeem mankind from the Fall. The Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ provides the way through gospel ordinances and sacred covenants to return to the presence of God. Because we would live in a mortal environment filled with danger and distractions, Heavenly Father and His Son knew we would need access to power greater than our own. They knew we would need access to Their power. The gospel and doctrine of Christ give all who will accept it power to achieve eternal life and power to find joy in the journey.

15. There are those who question the place of women in God's plan and in the Church. I've been interviewed enough by national and international media to tell you that most journalists with whom I have dealt have had preconceived notions about this topic. Through the

years many have asked questions implying that women are second-class citizens in the Church. Brothers and sisters, nothing could be further from the truth.

16. Let me suggest five key points for you to ponder and think straight about regarding this important topic.

Number 1

17. I repeat: Our Heavenly Father created both women and men, who are His spirit daughters and sons. This means that gender is eternal. He has a plan designed to help all who choose to follow Him and His Son Jesus Christ achieve their destiny as heirs of eternal life.

18. Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ are perfect. They are omniscient and understand all things. Further, Their hopes for us are perfect. Their work and Their glory is to see Their children exalted—to bring about the immortality and eternal life of mankind.

19. Surely if our eventual exaltation is Their essential goal and purpose, and if They are omniscient and perfect as we know They are, then They understand best how to prepare, teach, and lead us so that we have the greatest chance to qualify for exaltation. There was an old-time television program called Father Knows Best, in which the father in the family was depicted as having all the answers. Well, we all know that no father on this earth is infallible. But there is one father, our Father in Heaven, who knows all, foresees all, and understands all. His comprehension, His wisdom, and His love for us are perfect. Surely we must agree that our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ know best which opportunities the sons and daughters of God need to best prepare the human family for eternal life.

20. Most everyone has family or friends who have been caught up in various troubling contemporary social issues. Arguing about the issues generally does not bring any resolution and, in fact, can create contention. There are some questions about the Church's position on sensitive issues that are hard to answer to anyone's satisfaction. However, when we seek the Lord in prayer about how to feel and what to do in these situations, the impression comes: “Do you believe in Jesus Christ and do you follow Him and the Father?” I believe most everyone in the Church at one time or another will wonder if they can do all they are asked to do. But if we really believe in the Lord, the reassurance comes: “I believe Jesus Christ, and I'm willing to do whatever He needs me to do.” So we move forward. How powerful are the words “I believe Jesus Christ”!

21. When all is said and done, each of us has the privilege of choosing whether or not we will believe that God is our Father, that Jesus is the Christ, and that They have a plan designed to help us return home to Them. This, of course, requires faith, which is why faith is the first principle of the gospel. Our testimonies and our peace of mind and our well-being begin with the willingness to believe that our Father in Heaven does indeed know best.

Number 2

22. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's Church, and His Church is governed by and through priesthood authority and priesthood keys.

23. Priesthood keys are the authority God has given to priesthood leaders to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth. The exercise of priesthood authority is governed by those who hold its keys (see D&C 65:2; 81:2; 124:123). Those who hold priesthood keys have the right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction. ["Priesthood Keys," Handbook 2: Administering the Church (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 2.1.1 (p. 8)]

24. Those who have priesthood keys—whether that be a deacon who has keys for his quorum or a bishop who has keys for his ward or a stake president who has keys for his stake or the president of the Church who holds all priesthood keys—literally make it possible for all who serve or labor faithfully under their direction to exercise priesthood authority and have access to priesthood power.

25. All men and all women serve under the direction of those who have keys. This is how the Lord governs His Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years" (HC 3:386; quoted in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007], 104).

26. President David O. McKay further explained:

27. Priesthood is inherent in the Godhead. It is authority and power which has its source only in the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ. . . .

28. In seeking the source of the priesthood, . . . we can conceive of no condition beyond God himself. In him it centers. From him it must emanate. Priesthood, being thus inherent in the Father, it follows that he alone can give it to another. [CR, October 1965, 103;

quoted in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay (2003), 115]

29. Let me repeat something I stated in the April 2013 general conference:

30. In our Heavenly Father's great priesthood-endowed plan, men have the unique responsibility to administer the priesthood, but they are not the priesthood. Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. . . . In the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife. ["This Is My Work and Glory," Ensign, May 2013, 19]

31. Why are men ordained to priesthood offices and not women? President Gordon B. Hinckley explained that it was the Lord, not man, "who designated that men in His Church should hold the priesthood" and that it was also the Lord who endowed women with "capabilities to round out this great and marvelous organization, which is the Church and kingdom of God" ("Women of the Church," Ensign, November 1996, 70). When all is said and done, the Lord has not revealed why He has organized His Church as He has.

32. When thinking about those things we do not fully understand, I am reminded of these words by my deceased friend and Apostle, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, who said, "What we already know about God teaches us to trust him for what we do not know fully" (Deposition of a Disciple [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 56).

33. And Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated in this last April general conference, "In this Church, what we know will always trump what we do not know" ("Lord, I Believe," Ensign, May 2013, 94).

34. Brothers and sisters, this matter, like many others, comes down to our faith. Do we believe that this is the Lord's Church? Do we believe that He has organized it according to His purposes and wisdom? Do we believe that His wisdom far exceeds ours? Do we believe that He has organized His Church in a manner that would be the greatest possible blessing to all of His children, both His sons and His daughters?

35. I know these things are true and testify that they are true. I testify that this is the Lord's Church. Women are integral to the governance and work of the Church through service as leaders in Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary; through their service as teachers, full-time missionaries, and temple ordinance workers;

and in the home, where the most important teaching in the Church occurs.

36. Let us not forget that approximately one-half of all of the teaching that takes place in the Church is done by sisters. Much of the leadership provided is from our sisters. Many service opportunities and activities are planned and directed by women. The counsel and other participation of women in ward and stake councils and in general councils at Church headquarters provide needed insight, wisdom, and balance.

37. Elder Quentin L. Cook told about a life-changing role a stake Relief Society president had in Tonga. During a stake conference held while Elder Cook was there, the names of sixty-three prospective elders were sustained for ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood. When Elder Cook asked how this “miracle” had been accomplished, the stake president told him that in a stake council meeting, the stake Relief Society president spoke of many men in their late twenties and early thirties who had not served missions and who were in various stages of activity. She suggested that the council focus on priesthood ordinations and temple ordinances for them as well as for their wives—some of whom were less active or not members.

38. “As she spoke, the Spirit confirmed to the [stake] president that what she was suggesting was true,” Elder Cook related.

39. It was decided that the men of the priesthood and the women of the Relief Society would reach out to rescue these men and their wives. . . . Those involved in the rescue focused primarily on preparing them for the priesthood, eternal marriage, and the saving ordinances of the temple. During the next two years, almost all of the 63 men who had been sustained to the Melchizedek Priesthood at the conference I attended were endowed in the temple and had their spouses sealed to them. This account is but one example of how critical our sisters are in the work of salvation. [“LDS Women Are Incredible!” Ensign, May 2011, 20–21]

40. For more than twenty years I have been teaching the importance of councils, including the vital participation of sister leaders, and the work of councils is emphasized in the current Church handbooks. As I say these things, however, I acknowledge that there are some men, including some priesthood leaders, who have not yet seen the light and who still do not include our sister leaders in full partnership in ward and stake councils. I also acknowledge that there are some men who oppress women and in some rare circumstances are guilty of abusing women. This is abhorrent in the

eyes of God. I feel certain that men who in any way demean women will answer to God for their actions. And let me add that any priesthood leader who does not involve his sister leaders with full respect and inclusion is not honoring and magnifying the keys he has been given. His power and influence will be diminished until he learns the ways of the Lord.

41. Now, sisters, in speaking this frankly with men, may I also exercise a moment of candor with you. While your input is significant and welcomed in effective councils, you need to be careful not to assume a role that is not yours. Ward and stake councils that are the most successful are those in which priesthood leaders trust their sister leaders and encourage them to contribute to the discussions and in which sister leaders fully respect and sustain the decisions of the council made under the direction of priesthood leaders who hold keys. Families are helped and individuals are activated through council meetings in which this partnership exists and in which the focus is on people. Units in the Church are strengthened by members who love and desire to help one another as they serve the Lord.

42. The proclamation on the family teaches foundational truths about the separate roles of men and women, particularly as they relate to their positions as husbands and wives:

43. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. [“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, November 1995, 102]

44. It takes a man and a woman to create a new life. And it takes both men who respect women and the distinctive spiritual gifts they have and women who respect the priesthood keys held by men to invite the full blessings of heaven in any endeavor in the Church.

Number 3

45. Men and women are equal in God’s eyes and in the eyes of the Church, but equal does not mean, brothers and sisters, that they are the same. The responsibilities and divine gifts of men and women differ in their nature but not in their importance or influence. Our Church doctrine places women equal to and yet different from men. God does not regard either gender as better or more important than the other.

President Gordon B. Hinckley declared to you women that “our Eternal Father . . . never intended that you should be less than the crowning glory of His creations” (“Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 98).

46. I mention this simply because there are those at times who become confused and fail to think straight when comparing the assignments of men to those of women and the assignments of women to those of men.

47. I have been surrounded by women my entire life. I have three sisters. I was the only boy. I have five daughters, twenty-four granddaughters, and nineteen great-granddaughters. And, of course, I have been blessed through sixty-two years of marriage to my wife, Barbara. I learned long ago to listen to her. I learned that when she said she’d been thinking about something or had strong feelings about a matter pertaining to the family, I had better pay attention, because in nearly every case she had been inspired. I know firsthand how young adult sisters and young mothers sometimes feel and sometimes question their self-worth and their ability to contribute. But I am a witness that when one’s thoughts turn toward the Savior, a strength and conviction that Heavenly Father and the Lord understand will bless them.

48. Women come to earth with unique spiritual gifts and propensities. This is particularly true when it comes to children and families and also to the well-being and nurturing of others in the Church as well as in the family.

49. Men and women have different gifts, different strengths, and different points of view and inclinations. That is one of the fundamental reasons why we need each other. It takes a man and a woman to create a family, and it takes men and women to carry out the work of the Lord in the Church. A husband and wife righteously working together complete each other. Let us be careful that we do not attempt to tamper with our Heavenly Father’s plan and purposes in our lives.

Number 4

50. When men and women go to the temple, they are both endowed with the same power, which by definition is priesthood power. While the authority of the priesthood is directed through priesthood keys, and priesthood keys are held only by worthy men, access to the power and the blessings of the priesthood is available to all of God’s children.

51. As President Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

52. The blessings of the priesthood are not confined to men alone. These blessings are also poured out upon . . . all the faithful women of the Church. . . . The Lord offers to his daughters every spiritual gift and blessing that can be obtained by his sons. [“Magnifying Our Callings in the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 66]

53. Those who have entered the waters of baptism and subsequently received their endowment in the house of the Lord are eligible for rich and wonderful blessings. The endowment is literally a gift of power. All who enter the house of the Lord officiate in the ordinances of the priesthood. This applies to men and women alike.

54. Our Father in Heaven is generous with His power. All men and all women have access to this power for help in our own lives. All who have made sacred covenants with the Lord and who honor those covenants are eligible to receive personal revelation, to be blessed by the ministering of angels, to commune with God, to receive the fulness of the gospel, and, ultimately, to become heirs alongside Jesus Christ of all our Father has.

55. Elder John A. Widtsoe explained that the Priesthood is for the benefit of all members of the Church. Men have no greater claim than women upon the blessings that issue from the Priesthood and accompany its possession.

56. Woman does not hold the Priesthood, but she is a partaker of the blessings of the Priesthood. [Priesthood and Church Government (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 83]

57. And Elder James E. Talmage taught:

58. It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless . . . woman shares with man the blessings of the Priesthood. . . . In the glorified state of the blessed hereafter, husband and wife will administer in their respective stations, seeing and understanding alike, and co-operating to the full in the government of their family kingdom. . . . Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God. [“The Eternity of Sex,” *Young Woman’s Journal*, October 1914, 602–3]

Number 5

59. We need now for you women of the Church to know the doctrine of Christ and to bear testimony of the Restoration in every way that you can. Never has there been a more complex time in the history of the earth. Satan and his minions have been perfecting the weapons in their arsenal for millennia, and they are experienced at destroying faith and trust in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ among the human family.

60. All of us—men, women, young adults, youth, and boys and girls—have the Lord and His Church to defend, to protect, and to spread throughout the earth. We need more of the distinctive, influential voices and faith of women. We need you to learn the doctrine and to understand what we believe so that you can bear your testimonies about the truth of all things—whether those testimonies be given around a campfire at girls’ camp, in a testimony meeting, in a blog, or on Facebook. Only you can show the world what women of God who have made covenants look like and believe.

61. None of us can afford to stand by and watch the purposes of God be diminished and pushed aside. I invite particularly you sisters here and throughout the Church to seek the guidance of heaven in knowing what you can do to let your voice of faith and testimony be heard. The Brethren of the General Authorities and the sisters who are general officers cannot do it alone. The full-time missionaries cannot do it alone. Priesthood leaders and auxiliary leaders cannot do it alone. We must all defend our Father in Heaven and His plan. We must all defend our Savior and testify that He is the Christ, that His Church has been restored to the earth, and that there is such a thing as right and wrong.

62. If we are to have the courage to speak out and defend the Church, we must first prepare ourselves through study of the truths of the gospel. We need to solidify our own testimonies through diligent, daily study of the scriptures and by invoking Moroni’s promise, which is that we can “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5) if we seek it through humble prayer and study. Do not spend time trying to overhaul or adjust God’s plan. We do not have time for such. It is a pointless exercise to try and determine how to organize the Lord’s Church differently. The Lord is at the head of this Church, and we all follow His direction. Both men and women need increased faith and testimony of the life and the Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ and increased knowledge of His teachings and doctrine. We need clear minds so that the Holy Ghost can teach us what to do and what to

say. We need to think straight in this world of confusion and disregard for the things of God.

63. Sisters, your sphere of influence is a unique sphere—one that cannot be duplicated by men. No one can defend our Savior with any more persuasion or power than you, the daughters of God, can—you who have such inner strength and conviction. The power of a converted woman’s voice is immeasurable, and the Church needs your voices now more than ever.

64. “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid . . . : for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deuteronomy 31:6). Take comfort in this counsel from Moses to Joshua as you let your voices be heard, for, as President Hinckley said:

65. You cannot simply take for granted this cause, which is the cause of Christ. You cannot simply stand on the sidelines and watch the play between the forces of good and evil. . . .

66. . . . You can be a leader. You must be a leader, as a member of this Church, in those causes for which this Church stands. [“Stand up for Truth,” BYU devotional address, 17 September 1996]

67. Let us never forget that we are the sons and daughters of God, equal in His sight with differing responsibilities and capabilities assigned by Him and given access to His priesthood power as we make and keep sacred covenants and counsel together. Be careful that you continually strive to live and sustain the great plan of happiness that is our Father’s revealed plan of salvation for His sons and His daughters. Surely we will be able to think straight if we stay focused on God’s eternal plan and doctrine and use our strength in reaching out and helping others to do the same as we share our testimonies and our knowledge of the basic and simple message of the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The restoration of the priesthood power of God is the authority to do His work in helping to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children. Brothers and sisters, let us stand together, bound by our testimonies, and do our work just as did the Saints of Kirtland, Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, and Preston, England, in the 1830s and the 1840s.

68. I leave you my witness and my testimony that we are in a day and a time when we must stand in unity. We must stand together—men and women, young men and young women, boys and girls. We must stand for the plan of our Heavenly Father. We must defend Him. He is being pushed aside. We cannot stand idly by as

members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and allow that to continue to happen without being courageous enough to let our voices be heard.

69. May God bless you to have the courage to study and to know the simple truths of the gospel and then to share them every chance you get.

70. I leave you my witness, my testimony, that Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of God. He does live. This is His Church we have been talking about, and I have been testifying to you of His great plan of happiness that He has given to us—all of which I do very humbly in the sacred and beloved name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

5.3 - Same-Gender Attraction

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, October 1995



1. Every Latter-day Saint knows that God has forbidden all sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage. Most are also aware of the Savior's teaching that it is sinful for a man to look upon and lust after a woman (see Matt. 5:28;

D&C 42:23; D&C 63:16).

2. Attraction between man and woman was instilled by the Creator to ensure the perpetuation of mortal life and to draw husband and wife together in the family setting he prescribed for the accomplishment of his purposes, including the raising of children. In contrast, deviations from God's commandments in the use of procreative powers are grave sins. President Joseph F. Smith taught:

3. "Sexual union is lawful in wedlock, and if participated in with right intent is honorable and sanctifying. But without the bonds of marriage, sexual indulgence is a debasing sin, abominable in the sight of Deity." 1

4. Some Latter-day Saints face the confusion and pain that result when a man or a woman engages in sexual behavior with a person of the same sex, or even when a person has erotic feelings that could lead toward such behavior. How should Church leaders, parents, and other members of the Church react when faced with the religious, emotional, and family challenges that accompany such behavior or feelings? What do we say to a young person who reports that he or she is attracted toward or has erotic thoughts or feelings about persons of the same sex? How should we respond when a person announces that he is a homosexual or she is a lesbian and that scientific

evidence "proves" he or she was "born that way"?

How do we react when persons who do not share our beliefs accuse us of being intolerant or unmerciful when we insist that erotic feelings toward a person of the same sex are irregular and that any sexual behavior of that nature is sinful?

Gospel Doctrines

5. Our attitudes toward these questions are dictated by gospel doctrines we know to be true.

1. God created us "male and female" (D&C 20:18; Moses 2:27; Gen. 1:27). What we call gender was an essential characteristic of our existence prior to our birth. 2

2. The purpose of mortal life and the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for their destiny—to become like our heavenly parents.

3. Our eternal destiny—exaltation in the celestial kingdom—is made possible only through the atonement of Jesus Christ (through which we became and can remain "innocent before God" [D&C 93:38]) and is only available to a man and a woman who have entered into and been faithful to the covenants of an eternal marriage in a temple of God (see D&C 131:1–4; D&C 132).

4. Through the merciful plan of our Father in Heaven, persons who desire to do what is right but through no fault of their own are unable to have an eternal marriage in mortal life will have an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in a period following mortality, if they keep the commandments of God and are true to their baptismal and other covenants. 3

5. In addition to the cleansing effect of the Atonement, God has given us agency—the power to choose between good (the path of life) and evil (the path of spiritual death and destruction [see 2 Ne. 2:27; Moses 4:3]). Although the conditions of mortality can limit our freedom (such as by restricting our mobility or our power to act on certain options), when we have reached the age or condition of accountability (see Moro. 8:5–12; D&C 68:27; D&C 101:78) no mortal or spiritual power can deprive us of our agency.

6. To accomplish one of the purposes of mortal life, it is essential that we be tested against opposition to see if we will keep the commandments of God (see 2 Ne. 2:11; Abr. 3:25–26). To provide that opposition, Satan and his

followers are permitted to tempt us to use our agency and our freedom to choose evil and to commit sin.

7. Because Satan desires that “all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Ne. 2:27), his most strenuous efforts are directed at encouraging those choices and actions that will thwart God’s plan for his children. He seeks to undermine the principle of individual accountability, to persuade us to misuse our sacred powers of procreation, to discourage marriage and childbearing by worthy men and women, and to confuse what it means to be male or female.

8. In all of this, the devil, who has no body, seeks to persuade mortals to corrupt their bodies by “choos[ing] eternal death, according to the will of the flesh . . . , which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring [them] down to hell, that he may reign over [them] in his own kingdom” (2 Ne. 2:29).

9. The First Presidency has declared that “there is a distinction between [1] immoral thoughts and feelings and [2] participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior.”⁴ Although immoral thoughts are less serious than immoral behavior, such thoughts also need to be resisted and repented of because we know that “our thoughts will also condemn us” (Alma 12:14). Immoral thoughts (and the less serious feelings that lead to them) can bring about behavior that is sinful.

10. Because of God’s great love for his children, even the worst sinners (or almost all of them) will ultimately be rewarded with assignment to a kingdom of glory. 5 Persons who have lived good lives and received most of the ordinances of salvation but have failed to qualify for exaltation through eternal marriage will be saved in a lesser place in the celestial kingdom where there is no eternal increase (see D&C 131:1–4).

11. In the midst of the challenges and choices of mortal life, we are all under the Savior’s commandment to “love one another” (John 15:12, 17). As the First Presidency said in a recent message:

6. “We are asked to be kinder with one another, more gentle and forgiving. We are asked to be slower to anger and more prompt to help. We are asked to extend the hand of friendship and resist the hand of retribution. We are called upon to be true disciples of

Christ, to love one another with genuine compassion, for that is the way Christ loved us.”⁶

7. Kindness, compassion, and love are powerful instruments in strengthening us to carry heavy burdens imposed without any fault of our own and to do what we know to be right.

Application of Doctrines and Responsibilities

8. These doctrines, commandments, and responsibilities guide us in answering the questions posed earlier in this article.

9. Our doctrines obviously condemn those who engage in so-called “gay bashing”—physical or verbal attacks on persons thought to be involved in homosexual or lesbian behavior.

10. We should extend compassion to persons who suffer from ill health, including those who are infected with HIV or who are ill with AIDS (who may or may not have acquired their condition from sexual relations). We should encourage such persons to participate in the activities of the Church.

11. Applying the First Presidency’s distinction to the question of same-sex relationships, we should distinguish between (1) homosexual (or lesbian) “thoughts and feelings” (which should be resisted and redirected), and (2) “homosexual behavior” (which is a serious sin).

12. We should note that the words homosexual, lesbian, and gay are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. Our religious doctrine dictates this usage. It is wrong to use these words to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual behavior.

13. Feelings are another matter. Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of “nature and nurture.” All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior.

14. Different persons have different physical characteristics and different susceptibilities to the various physical and emotional pressures we may

encounter in our childhood and adult environments. We did not choose these personal susceptibilities either, but we do choose and will be accountable for the attitudes, priorities, behavior, and “lifestyle” we engraft upon them.

15. Essential to our doctrinal position on these matters is the difference between our freedom and our agency. Our freedom can be limited by various conditions of mortality, but God’s gift of agency cannot be limited by outside forces, because it is the basis for our accountability to him. The contrast between freedom and agency can be illustrated in the context of a hypothetical progression from feelings to thoughts to behavior to addiction. This progression can be seen on a variety of matters, such as gambling and the use of tobacco and alcohol.

16. Just as some people have different feelings than others, some people seem to be unusually susceptible to particular actions, reactions, or addictions. Perhaps such susceptibilities are inborn or acquired without personal choice or fault, like the unnamed ailment the Apostle Paul called “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7). One person may have feelings that draw him toward gambling, but unlike those who only dabble, he becomes a compulsive gambler. Another person may have a taste for tobacco and a susceptibility to its addiction. Still another may have an unusual attraction to alcohol and the vulnerability to be readily propelled into alcoholism. Other examples may include a hot temper, a contentious manner, a covetous attitude, and so on.

17. In each case (and in other examples that could be given) the feelings or other characteristics that increase susceptibility to certain behavior may have some relationship to inheritance. But the relationship is probably very complex. The inherited element may be nothing more than an increased likelihood that an individual will acquire certain feelings if he or she encounters particular influences during the developmental years. But regardless of our different susceptibilities or vulnerabilities, which represent only variations on our mortal freedom (in mortality we are only “free according to the flesh” [2 Ne. 2:27]), we remain responsible for the exercise of our agency in the thoughts we entertain and the behavior we choose. I discussed this contrast in a talk I gave at Brigham Young University several years ago:

18. “Most of us are born with [or develop] thorns in the flesh, some more visible, some more serious than others. We all seem to have susceptibilities to one

disorder or another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and the power to control our thoughts and our actions. This must be so. God has said that he holds us accountable for what we do and what we think, so our thoughts and actions must be controllable by our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim ‘I was born that way’ does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. We need to learn how to live so that a weakness that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving the goal that is eternal.

19. “God has promised that he will consecrate our afflictions for our gain (see 2 Ne. 2:2). The efforts we expend in overcoming any inherited [or developed] weakness build a spiritual strength that will serve us throughout eternity. Thus, when Paul prayed thrice that his ‘thorn in the flesh’ would depart from him, the Lord replied, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Obedient, Paul concluded:

20. “‘Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

21. “‘Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong’ (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

22. “Whatever our susceptibilities or tendencies [feelings], they cannot subject us to eternal consequences unless we exercise our free agency to do or think the things forbidden by the commandments of God. For example, a susceptibility to alcoholism impairs its victim’s freedom to partake without addiction, but his free agency allows him to abstain and thus escape the physical debilitation of alcohol and the spiritual deterioration of addiction.

23. “... Beware the argument that because a person has strong drives toward a particular act, he has no power of choice and therefore no responsibility for his actions. This contention runs counter to the most fundamental premises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

24. “Satan would like us to believe that we are not responsible in this life. That is the result he tried to achieve by his contest in the pre-existence. A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was ‘born that way’ is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven. We are responsible, and if we argue otherwise, our efforts become part of the propaganda effort of the Adversary.

25. “Individual responsibility is a law of life. It applies in the law of man and the law of God. Society

holds people responsible to control their impulses so we can live in a civilized society. God holds his children responsible to control their impulses in order that they can keep his commandments and realize their eternal destiny. The law does not excuse the short-tempered man who surrenders to his impulse to pull a trigger on his tormentor, or the greedy man who surrenders to his impulse to steal, or the pedophile who surrenders to his impulse to satisfy his sexual urges with children. ...

26. "There is much we do not know about the extent of freedom we have in view of the various thorns in the flesh that afflict us in mortality. But this much we do know; we all have our free agency and God holds us accountable for the way we use it in thought and deed. That is fundamental." 7

The Insights of Science

27. In contrast to our doctrinal approach, many persons approach the problems of same-sex attraction solely from the standpoint of current science. While I am not qualified as a scientist, with the aid of scientific literature and with the advice of qualified scientists and practitioners, I will attempt to refute the claim of some that scientific discoveries demonstrate that avowed homosexuals and lesbians were "born that way."

28. We live in a time of accelerating scientific discoveries about the human body. We know that our inheritance explains many of our physical characteristics. At the same time, we also know that our behavior is profoundly influenced by psychosocial factors such as parental and sibling relationships (especially during the formative years) and the culture in which we live. The debate over whether, or the extent to which, specific behavior is attributable to "nature" or to "nurture" is centuries old. Its application to the subject of same-sex feelings and behaviors is only one manifestation of a highly complex subject on which scientific knowledge is still in its infancy.

29. Some scientists deny that behavior is genetically influenced. 8 Others are advocates of evidence or theories suggesting that "there is substantial evidence for genetic influence on sexual orientation." 9

30. We are, of course, aware of evidence that inheritance explains susceptibilities to certain diseases like some cancers and some other illnesses like diabetes mellitus. There are also theories and some evidence that inheritance is a factor in susceptibilities to various behavior-related disorders like aggression, alcoholism, and obesity. It is easy to hypothesize that inheritance plays a role in sexual orientation. However,

it is important to remember, as conceded by two advocates of this approach, that "the concept of substantial heritability should not be confused with the concept of inevitable heritability. ... Most mechanisms probably involve interactions between constitutional predispositions and environmental events." 10

31. Wherever they fall along the spectrum between outright rejection and total acceptance of biological determinism of sexual orientation, most scientists concede that the current evidence is insufficient and that firm conclusions must await many additional scientific studies.

32. A study of fifty-six pairs of identical male twins in which one twin classified himself as "gay" reported that 52 percent of the co-twins also classified themselves as gay. 11 A similar study of female identical twins yielded approximately the same proportion of co-twins who classified themselves as gay (thirty-four of seventy-one pairs, 48 percent). 12 If these studies show some inherited influence on whatever causes a man or woman to classify himself or herself as homosexual or lesbian, it is clear that this influence is not determinative. As a prominent scientist observed, "Even the identical twin of a gay man has a 50 percent or more chance of being heterosexual—even though he has the exact same genes and is reared by the same parents." 13 We should also note that the results of these studies (and others described below) are based on the subjects' self-classifications, a shaky foundation for scientific conclusions when "there is still no universally accepted definition of homosexuality among clinicians and behavioral scientists—let alone a consensus regarding its origins." 14

33. In any emerging area of knowledge, a new source of evidence is most welcome. In July 1993, Dr. Dean Hamer made worldwide headlines when he announced that he had found "a statistically significant correlation between the inheritance of genetic markers [an identifiable strip of DNA] on chromosomal region Xq28 and sexual orientation in a selected group of ... homosexual men and their relatives over age 18." In other words, "it appears that Xq28 contains a gene that contributes to homosexual orientation in males." 15 Putting the most positive interpretation on his discovery, Dr. Hamer's subsequent book concludes:

34. "We can make only educated guesses about the importance of Xq28 in the population at large. On the high side, the region couldn't possibly influence more than 67 percent of gay men, the proportion 'linked' to this region in our highly selected group of gay siblings.

On the low side, if much of homosexuality is caused by environmental factors, or by a large number of interacting genes, Xq28 could account for as little as a few percent of the variation in male sexual orientation. The median range, taken from our linkage data and from the available twin and family studies, suggests that Xq28 plays some role in about 5 to 30 percent of gay men. The broad range of these estimates is proof that much more work remains to be done.” 16

35. “Some role in about 5 to 30 percent” of self-classified “gay” men surely falls far short of justifying the claim that science has shown that “homosexuality” is “caused by” genetic inheritance. One eminent scientist identified two of the uncertainties:

36. “What evidence exists thus far of innate biological traits underlying homosexuality is flawed. ... Confirmation of genetic research purporting to show that homosexuality is heritable makes clear neither what is inherited nor how it influences sexual orientation.” 17

37. In their impressive reappraisal of biologic theories of human sexual orientation, Drs. Byne and Parsons of Columbia University’s Department of Psychiatry offer these important cautions and suggestions:

38. “It is imperative that clinicians and behavioral scientists begin to appreciate the complexities of sexual orientation and resist the urge to search for simplistic explanations, either psychosocial or biologic.

39. “Conspicuously absent from most theorizing on the origins of sexual orientation is an active role of the individual in constructing his or her identity. ... We propose an interactional model in which genes or hormones do not specify sexual orientation per se, but instead bias particular personality traits and thereby influence the manner in which an individual and his or her environment interact as sexual orientation and other personality characteristics unfold developmentally.” 18

40. This observation, but one of many suggestions from scientists, is particularly persuasive because it takes account of the vital element of individual choice that we know to be a true principle of our mortal condition.

The Responsibilities of Church Officers and Members

41. In their 14 November 1991 letter concerning the importance of the law of chastity, the First Presidency declared: “Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife appropriately expressed within the

bonds of marriage. Any other sexual contact, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior, is sinful.”

42. Consistent with that direction, Church officers are responsible to call transgressors to repentance and to remind them of the principle the prophet Samuel taught the wicked Nephites: “Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head” (Hel. 13:38).

43. Persons cannot continue to engage in serious sin and remain members of the Church. And discipline can be given for encouraging sin by others. There is no Church discipline for improper thoughts or feelings (though there is encouragement to improve them), but there are consequences for behavior. In the same sermon in which he taught that men should not be “cast out,” the Savior commanded his servants that “ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily ... ; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy ... ye shall forbid him” (3 Ne. 18:28–29). The Savior also commanded, “But if he repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people” (3 Ne. 18:31; see also Mosiah 26:36; Alma 5:56–61). Consequently, if transgressors do not respond to calls to repentance, the shepherds of the Church flock must take disciplinary action in fulfillment of their God-given responsibilities.

44. At the same time, we should always distinguish between sinful acts and inappropriate feelings or potentially dangerous susceptibilities. We should reach out lovingly to those who are struggling to resist temptation. The First Presidency did this in their 14 November 1991 letter. After reaffirming the sinful nature of “fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior,” the Presidency added:

45. “Individuals and their families desiring help with these matters should seek counsel from their bishop, branch president, stake or district president. We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues. Many will respond to Christlike love and inspired counsel as they receive an invitation to come back and apply the atoning and healing power of the Savior. (See Isa. 53:4–5; Mosiah 4:2–3.)”

46. Similarly, in a conference address on this same subject, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “I desire now to say with emphasis that our concern for the bitter fruit of sin is coupled with Christlike sympathy for its victims, innocent or culpable. We advocate the

example of the Lord, who condemned the sin, yet loved the sinner. We should reach out with kindness and comfort to the afflicted, ministering to their needs and assisting them with their problems.” 19

47. Despite such invitations and assurances, the Church and its members continue to experience misunderstandings about our positions on these matters. Last fall in an interview with a television reporter, one of our Church officials was asked, “What is being done in the Church to try to stop the atmosphere of hate towards homosexuals?” Nine years ago, during a television interview on this subject, I was questioned about reports that the Church taught or implied “that these people are somehow pariahs ... and these people hate themselves and that this is an attitude brought forth by the Church.”

48. More significantly, we also receive such questions from faithful members.

49. A recent letter is illustrative:

50. “Another concern we have is the way in which our sons and daughters are classified as people who practice deviant and lascivious behavior. Perhaps some do, but most do not. These young men and women want only to survive, have a spiritual life, and stay close to their families and the Church. It is especially damaging when these negative references are spoken from the pulpit. We believe such talks only create more depression and a tremendous amount of guilt, shame, and lack of self-worth, which they have endured throughout their entire lives. There is sometimes a real lack of the pure love of Christ expressed to help them through their ordeals. We will all appreciate anything you can do to help with the plight of these much misunderstood children of our Father in Heaven. If some of the General Authorities could express more sensitivity to this problem, it would surely help to avoid suicides and schisms that are caused within families. Many simply cannot tolerate the fact that Church members judge them as ‘evil people,’ and they, therefore, find solace in gay-oriented lifestyles.” 20

51. These communications surely show the need for improvement in our communications with brothers and sisters who are struggling with problems—all types of problems. Each member of Christ’s church has a clear-cut doctrinal responsibility to show forth love and to extend help and understanding. Sinners, as well as those who are struggling to resist inappropriate feelings, are not people to be cast out but people to be loved and helped (see 3 Ne. 18:22–23, 30, 32). At the same time, Church leaders and members cannot avoid their responsibility to teach correct principles and

righteous behavior (on all subjects), even if this causes discomfort to some.

52. Church leaders are sometimes asked whether there is any place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for persons with homosexual or lesbian susceptibilities or feelings. Of course there is. The degree of difficulty and the pattern necessary to forgo behavior and to control thoughts will be different with different individuals, but the message of hope and the hand of fellowship offered by the Church is the same for all who strive.

53. I tried to describe the crucial distinctions in my answer to the television reporter who implied that the Church taught that “these people are somehow pariahs.” I said:

54. “The person that’s working [to resist] those tendencies ought not to feel himself to be a pariah. Now, quite a different thing is sexual relations outside of marriage. A person engaging in that kind of behavior should well feel guilt. They should well feel themselves estranged from God, who has given commandments against that kind of behavior. It’s not surprising to me that they would feel estranged from their church. What surprises me is that they would feel that the Church can revoke God’s commandments. ... To the woman taken in adultery (which is a pretty good precedent for us), ... [the Savior] was merciful and loving ... , but he said, ‘Go thy way and sin no more.’ He loved the sinner; he condemned the sin. I think the Church does the same thing, imperfectly perhaps, but that’s what we teach our members: love the sinner, condemn the sin.” 21

55. The struggles of those who are troubled by same-sex attraction are not unique. There are many kinds of temptations, sexual and otherwise. The duty to resist sin applies to all of them.

56. The most important help the Church can offer to persons who have surrendered to sin or to those who are struggling to resist it is to fulfill its divine mission to teach true doctrine and administer the divine ordinances of the restored gospel. The gospel applies on the same basis to everyone. Its central truth is our Savior’s atonement and resurrection, that we might have immortality and eternal life. To achieve that destiny, an eternal marriage is the divine and prescribed goal for every child of God, in this life or in the life to come. Nevertheless, this sacred goal must come about in the Lord’s way. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley has declared that “marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve

problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices.” 22

57. Through Christ and his church, those who struggle can obtain help. This help comes through fasting and prayer, through the truths of the gospel, through church attendance and service, through the counsel of inspired leaders, and, where necessary, through professional assistance with problems that require such help. Another important source of help is the strengthening influence of loving brothers and sisters. All should understand that persons (and their family members) struggling with the burden of same-sex attraction are in special need of the love and encouragement that is a clear responsibility of Church members, who have signified by covenant their willingness “to bear one another’s burdens” (Mosiah 18:8) “and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

58. The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us the light and the strength to overcome the obstacles of mortality and to use our God-given agency to choose the behavior that will lead us to our divine destiny. We are promised: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Conclusion

59. The differing perspectives of scientific evidence and religious doctrine can be likened to the difference between studying about an automobile by observing its operation and disassembling and analyzing its various parts or by reading the operator’s manual written by the manufacturer. Much can be learned by observation and analysis, but that method will yield only partial knowledge of the function and potential of a machine. The best and most complete knowledge about the operation and potential of a machine will be revealed by studying the manual written by its manufacturer. The operator’s manual for our bodies and souls is the scriptures, written by the God who created us and interpreted by his prophets. These are the best sources of knowledge about the purpose of life and the behavior and thoughts we should cultivate in order to live in happiness and to achieve our divine destiny.

60. All who struggle with the challenges of mortality can identify with the lament in the psalm of Nephi:

61. “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

62. “I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Ne. 4:17–18).

63. To have the will and strength to resist sin, we must trust in God and pray for his help. Nephi rejoiced in the Lord, who had supported him and led him through his afflictions (see 2 Ne. 4:20). “Why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh?” Nephi asked (2 Ne. 4:27), adding a prayer that the Lord would redeem his soul and “make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin” (2 Ne. 4:31).

64. Nephi concludes with words that apply directly to those who seek to find their way through the difficulties discussed in this article:

65. “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

66. “Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh” (2 Ne. 4:34–35).

67. He who has commanded us to be perfect has shed his blood to provide us the opportunity to achieve our divine destiny. His confidence in our ability to achieve eternal life is manifest in his incredible invitation: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27).

Notes

1. Gospel Doctrine, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939), p. 309.
2. Statement of the First Presidency, 31 Jan. 1912; printed in Improvement Era, Mar. 1912, p. 417; see also Millennial Star, 24 Aug. 1922, p. 539.
3. Lorenzo Snow, Millennial Star, 31 Aug. 1899, p. 547; discussed in Dallin H. Oaks, Pure in Heart (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), pp. 61–62.
4. Letter of the First Presidency, 14 Nov. 1991.
5. See D&C 76; discussed in Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” Ensign, May 1995, pp. 86–87.
6. “An Easter Greeting from the First Presidency,” Church News, 15 Apr. 1995, p. 1.
7. “Free Agency and Freedom,” Brigham Young University 1987–88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches (Provo: BYU Publications, 1988), pp. 46–47; the edited version printed here is found in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), pp. 13–15.
8. R. C. Lewontin and others, Not in Our Genes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); R. Hubbard and E. Wald, Exploding the Gene Myth (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

9. R. C. Friedman and J. Downey, "Neurobiology and Sexual Orientation: Current Relationships," *Journal of Neuropsychiatry* 5 (1993): 149.
10. Ibid.
11. J. M. Bailey and R. C. Pillard, "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48 (1991): 1089–96.
12. J. M. Bailey, R. C. Pillard, and others, "Heritable Factors Influence Sexual Orientation in Women," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 217–23.
13. D. Hamer and P. Copeland, *The Science of Desire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 218.
14. W. Byne and B. Parsons, "Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 228.
15. Dean Hamer and others, "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261(16 July 1993): 321–27.
16. *The Science of Desire*, pp. 145–46.
17. W. Byne, "The Biological Evidence Challenged," *Scientific American*, May 1994, pp. 50, 55.
18. Byne and Parsons, "Human Sexual Orientation," pp. 236–37.
19. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Reverence and Morality," *Ensign*, May 1987, p. 47.
20. Letter to Dallin H. Oaks, 3 Sept. 1994.
21. Television interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks, 3 Dec. 1986; answer not telecast; excerpts printed in "Apostle Reaffirms Church's Position on Homosexuality," *Church News*, 14 Feb. 1987, pp. 10, 12.
22. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Reverence and Morality," p. 47.

5.4 - The Divine Institution of Marriage

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Newsroom*

Introduction

1. In 1995, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," which declares the following truths about marriage:
2. We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . .
3. The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.^[1]

4. Since the publication of that statement, there have been many challenges to the institution of marriage. Prominent among these challenges has been the recognition by several national governments and some states and provinces that same-sex marriage—formal unions between two individuals of the same gender—are the equivalent of traditional marriage. Yet God's purposes for establishing marriage have not changed. One purpose of this document is to reaffirm the Church's declaration that marriage is the lawful union of a man and a woman.

5. Another purpose is to reaffirm that the Church has a single, undeviating standard of sexual morality: intimate relations are acceptable to God only between a husband and a wife who are united in the bonds of matrimony.

6. A third purpose is to set forth the Church's reasons for defending marriage between a man and a woman as an issue of moral imperative. The Church's opposition to same-sex marriage derives from its doctrine and teachings, as well as from its concern about the consequences of same-sex marriage on religious freedom, society, families, and children.

7. A fourth purpose of this document is to reaffirm that Church members should address the issue of same-sex marriage with respect and civility and should treat all people with love and humanity.

The Vital Importance of Marriage

8. Marriage is sacred and was ordained of God from before the foundation of the world. Jesus Christ affirmed the divine origins of marriage: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"^[2]

9. From the beginning, the sacred nature of marriage was closely linked to the power of procreation. After creating Adam and Eve, God commanded them to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,"^[3] and they brought forth children, forming the first family. Only a man and a woman together have the natural biological capacity to conceive children. This power of procreation—to create life and bring God's spirit children into the world—is divinely given. Misuse of this power undermines the institution of the family.^[4]

10. For millennia, strong families have served as the fundamental institution for transmitting to future generations the moral strengths, traditions, and values that sustain civilization. In 1948, the world's nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

affirming that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.”[\[5\]](#)

11. Marriage is far more than a contract between individuals to ratify their affections and provide for mutual obligations. Rather, marriage is a vital institution for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults. Throughout the ages, governments of all types have recognized marriage as essential in preserving social stability and perpetuating life. Regardless of whether marriages were performed as a religious rite or a civil ceremony, in almost every culture marriage has been protected and endorsed by governments primarily to preserve and foster the institution most central to rearing children and teaching them the moral values that undergird civilization.

12. It is true that some couples who marry will not have children, either by choice or because of infertility. The special status granted marriage is nevertheless closely linked to the inherent powers and responsibilities of procreation and to the innate differences between the genders. By contrast, same-sex marriage is an institution no longer linked to gender—to the biological realities and complementary natures of male and female. Its effect is to decouple marriage from its central role in creating life, nurturing time-honored values, and fostering family bonds across generations.

13. In recent decades, high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births have resulted in an exceptionally large number of single parents. Many of these single parents have raised exemplary children. Extensive studies have shown, however, that a husband and wife who are united in a loving, committed marriage generally provide the ideal environment for protecting, nurturing, and raising children.[\[6\]](#) This is in part because of the differing qualities and strengths that husbands and wives bring to the task by virtue of their gender. As an eminent academic on family life has written:

14. The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to child rearing is unique and irreplaceable. . . . The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child’s overall development.[\[7\]](#)

15. In view of the close links that have long existed between marriage, procreation, gender, and parenting, same-sex marriage cannot be regarded simply as the granting of a new “right.” It is a far-reaching redefinition of the very nature of marriage itself. It

marks a fundamental change in the institution of marriage in ways that are contrary to God’s purposes for His children and detrimental to the long-term interests of society.

Threats to Marriage and Family

16. Our modern era has seen traditional marriage and family—defined as a husband and wife with children in an intact marriage—come increasingly under assault, with deleterious consequences. In 2012, 40% of all births in the United States were to unwed mothers.[\[8\]](#) More than 50% of births to mothers under age 30 were out of wedlock. Further, the marriage rate has been declining since the 1980s. These trends do not bode well for the development of the rising generation.

17. A wide range of social ills has contributed to this weakening of marriage and family. These include divorce, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, pornography, the erosion of fidelity in marriage, abortion, the strains of unemployment and poverty, and many other social phenomena. The Church has a long history of speaking out on these issues and seeking to minister to our members with regard to them. The focus of this document on same-sex marriage is not intended to minimize these long-standing issues.

18. More recently, the movement to promote same-sex marriage as an inherent or constitutional right has gained notable ground in recent years. Court rulings, legislative actions, and referenda have legalized same-sex marriage in a number of nations, states, and jurisdictions. In response, societal and religious leaders of many persuasions and faiths have made the case that redefining marriage in this way will further weaken the institution over time, resulting in negative consequences for both adults and children.[\[9\]](#)

19. A large number of people around the world recognize the crucial role that traditional marriage has played and must continue to play if children and families are to be protected and moral values propagated. Because the issue of same-sex marriage strikes at the very heart of the family and has the potential for great impact upon the welfare of children, the Church unequivocally affirms that marriage should remain the lawful union of a man and a woman.

Unchanging Standards of Morality

20. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that God has established clear standards of morality for His children, who are accountable before Him for their behavior. Such standards cannot be changed by the reasoning, emotions, personal interests, or opinions of mortal beings.[\[10\]](#) Without the higher

authority of God, as revealed in scripture and by His prophets, secular society will flounder and drift.

21. Many advocates of same-sex marriage argue that traditional standards of sexual morality have changed and that “tolerance” requires that these new standards be recognized and codified in law. If tolerance is defined as showing kindness for others and respect for differing viewpoints, it is an important value in all democratic societies. But as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has observed, “Tolerance does not require abandoning one’s standards or one’s opinions on political or public policy choices. Tolerance is a way of reacting to diversity, not a command to insulate it from examination.”[\[11\]](#)

22. The Savior taught that we should love the sinner without condoning the sin. In the case of the woman taken in adultery, He treated her kindly but exhorted her to “sin no more.”[\[12\]](#) His example manifested the highest love possible.

23. In addition to using the argument of tolerance to advocate redefining marriage, proponents have advanced the argument of “equality before the law.” No mortal law, however, can override or nullify the moral standards established by God. Nor can the laws of men change the natural, innate differences between the genders or deny the close biological and social link between procreation and marriage.

How Would Same-Sex Marriage Affect Religious Freedom?

24. As governments have legalized same-sex marriage as a civil right, they have also enforced a wide variety of other policies to ensure there is no discrimination against same-sex couples. These policies have placed serious burdens on individual conscience and on religious organizations.[\[13\]](#)

25. Same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws have already spawned legal collisions with the rights of free speech and of action based on religious beliefs. For example, advocates and government officials in certain states have challenged the long-held right of religious adoption agencies to follow their religious beliefs and place children only in homes with both a mother and a father. As a result, Catholic Charities in several states was forced to give up its adoption services rather than be forced to place children with same-sex couples.[\[14\]](#)

26. In the United States, the First Amendment right of free exercise of religion is coming under pressure from proponents of same-sex marriage. Some of these proponents advocate that tax exemptions and benefits

should be withdrawn from any religious organization that does not accept such marriages.[\[15\]](#) The First Amendment may protect clergy from being forced to perform same-sex marriages, but other people of faith have faced and likely will continue to face legal pressures and sanctions. The same will happen with religiously affiliated institutions and educational systems. For example, a Georgia counselor contracted by the Centers for Disease Control was fired after an investigation into her decision to refer someone in a same-sex relationship to another counselor. In New Jersey, a ministry lost its tax-exempt status for denying a lesbian couple the use of its pavilion for their wedding. New Mexico’s Human Rights Commission prosecuted a commercial photographer for refusing to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony. When public schools in Massachusetts began teaching students about same-sex civil marriage, a Court of Appeals ruled that parents had no right to exempt their students.[\[16\]](#)

27. Similar limitations on religious freedom have already become the social and legal reality in several European nations, and the European Parliament has recommended that laws protecting the status of same-sex couples be made uniform across the European Union.[\[17\]](#) Where same-sex marriage becomes a recognized civil right, it inevitably conflicts with the rights of believers, and religious freedom is diminished.

How Would Same-Sex Marriage Affect Society?

28. The possible diminishing of religious freedom is not the only societal implication of legalizing same-sex marriage. Perhaps the most common argument that proponents of same-sex marriage make is that it is essentially harmless and will not affect the institution of traditional heterosexual marriage in any way. “It won’t affect your marriage, so why should you care?” is the common refrain. While it may be true that allowing same-sex marriage will not immediately and directly affect existing marriages, the real question is how it will affect society as a whole over time, including the rising generation and future generations.

29. In addition to undermining and diluting the sacred nature of marriage, legalizing same-sex marriage brings many practical implications in the sphere of public policy that will be of concern to parents and society.[\[18\]](#) When a government legalizes same-sex marriage as a civil right, it will almost certainly enforce a wide variety of other policies to enforce this. The implications of these policies are critical to

understanding the seriousness of condoning same-sex marriage.

30. The all-important question of public policy must be: what environment is best for the child and for the rising generation? While some same-sex couples will obtain guardianship over children, traditional marriage provides the most solid and well-established social identity for children.^[19] It increases the likelihood that they will be able to form a clear gender identity, with sexuality closely linked to both love and procreation. By contrast, the legal recognition of same-sex marriage may, over time, erode the social identity, gender development, and moral character of children. No dialogue on this issue can be complete without taking into account the long-term consequences for children.

31. As one example of how children will be adversely affected, the establishment of same-sex marriage as a civil right will inevitably entail changes in school curricula. When the state says that same-sex marriages are equivalent to heterosexual marriages, public school administrators will feel obligated to support this claim.^[20] This has already happened in many jurisdictions, where from elementary school through high school, children are taught that marriage can be defined as a legal union between two adults of any gender, that the definition of family is fluid, and in some cases that consensual sexual relations are morally neutral.^[21] In addition, in many areas, schools are not required to notify parents of this curriculum or to give families the opportunity to opt out.^[22] These developments are already causing clashes between the agenda of secular school systems and the right of parents to teach their children deeply held standards of morality.

32. Throughout history, the family has served as an essential bulwark of individual liberty. The walls of a home provide a defense against detrimental social influences and the sometimes overreaching powers of government. In the absence of abuse or neglect, government does not have the right to intervene in the rearing and moral education of children in the home. Strong, independent families are vital for political and religious freedom.

Civility and Kindness

33. The Church acknowledges that same-sex marriage and the issues surrounding it can be divisive and hurtful. As Church members strive to protect marriage between a man and a woman, they should show respect, civility, and kindness toward others who have different points of view.

34. The Church has advocated for legal protection for same-sex couples regarding “hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the traditional family or the constitutional rights of churches.”^[23] In Salt Lake City, for example, the Church supported ordinances to protect gay residents from discrimination in housing and employment.^[24]

35. The Church’s affirmation of marriage as being between a man and a woman “neither constitutes nor condones any kind of hostility toward gays and lesbians.”^[25] Church members are to treat all people with love and humanity. They may express genuine love and kindness toward a gay or lesbian family member, friend, or other person without condoning any redefinition of marriage.

Conclusion

36. Strong, stable families, headed by a father and mother, are the anchor of society. When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identities as men or women. Some will find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose.

37. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, along with many other churches, organizations, and individuals, will continue to defend the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, because it is a compelling moral issue of profound importance to our religion and to the future of society.

38. The final words in the Church’s proclamation on the family are an admonition to the world from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”^[26]

This document is a revised and updated version of “The Divine Institution of Marriage,” first published by the Church in 2008 ([.pdf file](#)).

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5.5 - The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood

Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Ensign, May 2014



1. At this conference we have seen the release of some faithful brothers, and we have sustained the callings of others. In this rotation—so familiar in the Church—we do not “step down” when we are released, and we do not “step up” when we are called. There is no “up or down” in the service of the Lord. There is only “forward or backward,” and that difference depends on how we accept and act upon our releases and our callings. I once presided at the release of a young stake president who had given fine service for nine years and was now rejoicing in his release and in the new calling he and his wife had just received. They were called to be the nursery leaders in their ward. Only in this Church would that be seen as equally honorable!

2. While addressing a women’s conference, Relief Society general president Linda K. Burton said, “We hope to instill within each of us a greater desire to better understand the priesthood.”¹ That need applies to all of us, and I will pursue it by speaking of the keys and authority of the priesthood. Since these subjects are of equal concern to men and to women, I am pleased that these proceedings are broadcast and

published for all members of the Church. Priesthood power blesses all of us. Priesthood keys direct women as well as men, and priesthood ordinances and priesthood authority pertain to women as well as men.

3. President Joseph F. Smith described the priesthood as “the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family.”² Other leaders have taught us that the priesthood “is the consummate power on this earth. It is the power by which the earth was created.”³ The scriptures teach that “this same Priesthood, which was in the beginning, shall be in the end of the world also” (Moses 6:7). Thus, the priesthood is the power by which we will be resurrected and proceed to eternal life.

4. The understanding we seek begins with an understanding of the keys of the priesthood. “Priesthood keys are the authority God has given to priesthood [holders] to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth.”⁴ Every act or ordinance performed in the Church is done under the direct or indirect authorization of one holding the keys for that function. As Elder M. Russell Ballard has explained, “Those who have priesthood keys ... literally make it possible for all who serve faithfully under their direction to exercise priesthood authority and have access to priesthood power.”⁵

5. In the controlling of the exercise of priesthood authority, the function of priesthood keys both enlarges and limits. It enlarges by making it possible for priesthood authority and blessings to be available for all of God’s children. It limits by directing who will be given the authority of the priesthood, who will hold its offices, and how its rights and powers will be conferred. For example, a person who holds the priesthood is not able to confer his office or authority on another unless authorized by one who holds the keys. Without that authorization, the ordination would be invalid. This explains why a priesthood holder—regardless of office—cannot ordain a member of his family or administer the sacrament in his own home without authorization from the one who holds the appropriate keys.

6. With the exception of the sacred work that sisters do in the temple under the keys held by the temple president, which I will describe hereafter, only one who holds a priesthood office can officiate in a priesthood ordinance. And all authorized priesthood ordinances are recorded on the records of the Church.

7. Ultimately, all keys of the priesthood are held by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose priesthood it is. He is the one

who determines what keys are delegated to mortals and how those keys will be used. We are accustomed to thinking that all keys of the priesthood were conferred on Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple, but the scripture states that all that was conferred there were “the keys of this dispensation” (D&C 110:16). At general conference many years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball reminded us that there are other priesthood keys that have not been given to man on the earth, including the keys of creation and resurrection.⁶

8. The divine nature of the limitations put upon the exercise of priesthood keys explains an essential contrast between decisions on matters of Church administration and decisions affecting the priesthood. The First Presidency and the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, who preside over the Church, are empowered to make many decisions affecting Church policies and procedures—matters such as the location of Church buildings and the ages for missionary service. But even though these presiding authorities hold and exercise all of the keys delegated to men in this dispensation, they are not free to alter the divinely decreed pattern that only men will hold offices in the priesthood.

9. I come now to the subject of priesthood authority. I begin with the three principles just discussed: (1) priesthood is the power of God delegated to man to act for the salvation of the human family, (2) priesthood authority is governed by priesthood holders who hold priesthood keys, and (3) since the scriptures state that “all other authorities [and] offices in the church are appendages to this [Melchizedek] priesthood” (D&C 107:5), all that is done under the direction of those priesthood keys is done with priesthood authority.

10. How does this apply to women? In an address to the Relief Society, President Joseph Fielding Smith, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said this: “While the sisters have not been given the Priesthood, it has not been conferred upon them, that does not mean that the Lord has not given unto them authority. ... A person may have authority given to him, or a sister to her, to do certain things in the Church that are binding and absolutely necessary for our salvation, such as the work that our sisters do in the House of the Lord. They have authority given unto them to do some great and wonderful things, sacred unto the Lord, and binding just as thoroughly as are the blessings that are given by the men who hold the Priesthood.”⁷

11. In that notable address, President Smith said again and again that women have been given authority. To

the women he said, “You can speak with authority, because the Lord has placed authority upon you.” He also said that the Relief Society “[has] been given power and authority to do a great many things. The work which they do is done by divine authority.” And, of course, the Church work done by women or men, whether in the temple or in the wards or branches, is done under the direction of those who hold priesthood keys. Thus, speaking of the Relief Society, President Smith explained, “[The Lord] has given to them this great organization where they have authority to serve under the directions of the bishops of the wards . . . , looking after the interest of our people both spiritually and temporally.”⁸

12. Thus, it is truly said that Relief Society is not just a class for women but something they belong to—a divinely established appendage to the priesthood.⁹

13. We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman—young or old—is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function. The same is true when a woman is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization under the direction of one who holds the keys of the priesthood. Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties.

14. Whoever exercises priesthood authority should forget about their rights and concentrate on their responsibilities. That is a principle needed in society at large. The famous Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is quoted as saying, “It is time . . . to defend not so much human rights as human obligations.”¹⁰ Latter-day Saints surely recognize that qualifying for exaltation is not a matter of asserting rights but a matter of fulfilling responsibilities.

15. The Lord has directed that only men will be ordained to offices in the priesthood. But, as various Church leaders have emphasized, men are not “the priesthood.”¹¹ Men hold the priesthood, with a sacred duty to use it for the blessing of all of the children of God.

16. The greatest power God has given to His sons cannot be exercised without the companionship of one of His daughters, because only to His daughters has God given the power “to be a creator of bodies . . . so that God’s design and the Great Plan might meet

fruition.”¹² Those are the words of President J. Reuben Clark.

17. He continued: “This is the place of our wives and of our mothers in the Eternal Plan. They are not bearers of the Priesthood; they are not charged with carrying out the duties and functions of the Priesthood; nor are they laden with its responsibilities; they are builders and organizers under its power, and partakers of its blessings, possessing the complement of the Priesthood powers and possessing a function as divinely called, as eternally important in its place as the Priesthood itself.”¹³

18. In those inspired words, President Clark was speaking of the family. As stated in the family proclamation, the father presides in the family and he and the mother have separate responsibilities, but they are “obligated to help one another as equal partners.”¹⁴ Some years before the family proclamation, President Spencer W. Kimball gave this inspired explanation: “When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a full partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be silent partners or limited partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a contributing and full partner.”¹⁵

19. In the eyes of God, whether in the Church or in the family, women and men are equal, with different responsibilities.

20. I close with some truths about the blessings of the priesthood. Unlike priesthood keys and priesthood ordinations, the blessings of the priesthood are available to women and to men on the same terms. The gift of the Holy Ghost and the blessings of the temple are familiar illustrations of this truth.

21. In his insightful talk at BYU Education Week last summer, Elder M. Russell Ballard gave these teachings:

22. “Our Church doctrine places women equal to and yet different from men. God does not regard either gender as better or more important than the other. . . .

23. “When men and women go to the temple, they are both endowed with the same power, which is priesthood power. . . . Access to the power and the blessings of the priesthood is available to all of God’s children.”¹⁶

24. I testify of the power and blessings of the priesthood of God, available for His sons and daughters alike. I testify of the authority of the priesthood, which functions throughout all of the offices and activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints. I testify of the divinely directed function of the keys of the priesthood, held and exercised in their fulness by our prophet/president, Thomas S. Monson. Finally and most important, I testify of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose priesthood this is and whose servants we are, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Ordinances and Covenants

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

6. Eternal Covenants and Ordinances

6.1 - Covenants

Russell M. Nelson

Ensign, November 2011



1. One week after a recent assignment to create the first stake in Moscow, Russia,¹ I attended a district conference in St. Petersburg. While speaking about my [gratitude](#) for early missionaries and local leaders who brought strength to the Church in Russia, I mentioned the name of Vyacheslav Efimov. He was the first Russian convert to become a mission president. He and his wife did wonderfully well in that assignment. Not long after they had completed their mission, and much to our sorrow, President Efimov suddenly passed away.² He was only 52 years of age.

2. While speaking of this pioneering couple, I felt impressed to ask the congregation if Sister Efimov might be present. Far in the rear of the room, a woman stood. I invited her to come to the microphone. Yes, it was Sister Galina Efimov. She spoke with conviction and bore a powerful testimony of the Lord, of His gospel, and of His restored Church. She and her husband had been sealed in the holy temple. She said they were united forever. They were still missionary companions, she on this side of the veil and he on the other side.³ With tears of joy, she thanked God for sacred temple covenants. I wept too, with full realization that the everlasting unity exemplified by this faithful couple was the righteous result of making, keeping, and honoring sacred covenants.

3. One of the most important concepts of revealed religion is that of a sacred covenant. In legal language, a covenant generally denotes an agreement between two or more parties. But in a religious context, a covenant is much more significant. It is a sacred promise with God. He fixes the terms. Each person may choose to accept those terms. If one accepts the terms of the covenant and obeys God's law, he or she receives the blessings associated with the covenant. We know that "when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated."⁴

4. Through the ages, God has made covenants with His children.⁵ His covenants occur throughout the entire plan of salvation and are therefore part of the fulness of

His gospel.⁶ For example, God promised to send a Savior for His children,⁷ asking in turn for their obedience to His law.⁸

5. In the [Bible](#) we read of men and women in the Old World who were identified as children of the covenant. What covenant? "The covenant which God made with [their] fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."⁹

6. In the [Book of Mormon](#) we read of people in the New World who were also identified as children of the covenant.¹⁰ The resurrected Lord so informed them: "Behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."¹¹

7. The Savior explained the importance of their identity as children of the covenant. He said, "The Father having raised me up unto you first, ... sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant."¹²

8. The covenant God made with Abraham¹³ and later reaffirmed with Isaac¹⁴ and Jacob¹⁵ is of transcendent significance. It contained several promises, including:

- Jesus the Christ would be born through Abraham's lineage.
- Abraham's posterity would be numerous, entitled to an eternal increase, and also entitled to bear the priesthood.
- Abraham would become a father of many nations.
- Certain lands would be inherited by his posterity.
- All nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed.¹⁶
- And that covenant would be everlasting—even through "a thousand generations."¹⁷

9. Some of these promises have been fulfilled; others are still pending. I quote from an early Book of Mormon prophecy: "Our father [Lehi] hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham."¹⁸ Isn't that amazing? Some 600 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, prophets

knew that the Abrahamic covenant would be finally fulfilled only in the latter days.

10. To facilitate that promise, the Lord appeared in these latter days to renew that Abrahamic covenant. To the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#), the Master declared:

11. “Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins—from whose loins ye are, ... my servant Joseph. ...

12. “This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham.”[19](#)

13. With this renewal, we have received, as did they of old, the holy priesthood and the everlasting gospel. We have the right to receive the fulness of the gospel, enjoy the blessings of the priesthood, and qualify for God’s greatest blessing—that of eternal life.[20](#)

14. Some of us are the literal seed of Abraham; others are gathered into his [family](#) by [adoption](#). The Lord makes no distinction.[21](#) Together we receive these promised blessings—if we seek the Lord and obey His commandments.[22](#) But if we don’t, we lose the blessings of the covenant.[23](#) To assist us, His Church provides patriarchal blessings to give each recipient a vision for his or her future as well as a connection with the past, even a declaration of lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[24](#)

15. Brethren of the covenant have the right to qualify for the oath and covenant of the priesthood.[25](#) If you are “faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods ... and the magnifying [of your] calling, [you] are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of [your] bodies.”[26](#) That is not all. Men who worthily receive the priesthood receive the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), and those who receive the Lord receive [God the Father](#).[27](#) And those who receive the Father receive all that He has.[28](#) Incredible blessings flow from this oath and covenant to worthy men, women, and children in all the world.

16. Ours is the responsibility to help fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. Ours is the seed foreordained and prepared to bless all people of the world.[29](#) That is why priesthood duty includes [missionary work](#). After some 4,000 years of anticipation and preparation, this is the appointed day when the gospel is to be taken to the kindreds of the earth. This is the time of the promised gathering of Israel. And we get to participate! Isn’t that exciting? The Lord is counting on us and our sons—and He is profoundly grateful for our daughters—who worthily serve as missionaries in this great time of the gathering of Israel.

17. The Book of Mormon is a tangible sign that the Lord has commenced to gather His children of covenant Israel.[30](#) This book, written for our day, states as one of its purposes that “ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel ... is already beginning to be fulfilled. ... For behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.”[31](#)

18. Indeed, the Lord has not forgotten! He has blessed us and others throughout the world with the Book of Mormon. One of its purposes is for “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.”[32](#) It helps us to make covenants with God. It invites us to remember Him and to know His Beloved Son. It is [another testament of Jesus Christ](#).

19. Children of the covenant have the right to receive His doctrine and to know the plan of salvation. They claim it by making covenants of sacred significance. Brigham Young said: “All Latter-day Saints enter the new and everlasting covenant when they enter this Church. ... They enter the new and everlasting covenant to sustain the Kingdom of God.”[33](#) They keep the covenant by obedience to His commandments.

20. At [baptism](#) we covenant to serve the Lord and keep His commandments.[34](#) When we partake of the [sacrament](#), we renew that covenant and declare our willingness to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. Thereby we are adopted as His sons and daughters and are known as brothers and sisters. He is the father of our new life.[35](#) Ultimately, in the holy temple, we may become joint heirs to the blessings of an eternal family, as once promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity.[36](#) Thus, celestial marriage is the covenant of exaltation.

21. When we realize that we are children of the covenant, we know who we are and what God expects of us.[37](#) His law is written in our hearts.[38](#) He is our God and we are His people.[39](#) Committed children of the covenant remain steadfast, even in the midst of adversity. When that doctrine is deeply implanted in our hearts, even the sting of death is soothed and our spiritual stamina is strengthened.

22. The greatest compliment that can be earned here in this life is to be known as a covenant keeper. The rewards for a covenant keeper will be realized both here and hereafter. Scripture declares that “ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, ... and if they hold out faithful to

the end they are received into heaven ... [and] dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.”[40](#)

23. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. His Church has been restored to bless all people. President Thomas S. Monson is His prophet today. And we, as faithful children of the covenant, will be blessed now and forever. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sources

1. The Moscow Russia Stake was created on Sunday, June 5, 2011.
2. Vyacheslav Efimov was president of the Russia Yekaterinburg Mission from 1995 to 1998. He died on February 25, 2000.
3. See [Doctrine and Covenants 138:57](#).
4. [Doctrine and Covenants 130:21](#).
5. For example, after the great Flood, He stated that “the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant, which I have made between me and you ... ; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh” ([Genesis 9:14–15, footnote 15b](#); from Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 9:20).
6. See [Doctrine and Covenants 66:2](#); [133:57](#).
7. See [John 3:16](#).
8. See [Abraham 3:25](#).
9. [Acts 3:25](#).
10. See [3 Nephi 20:26](#).
11. [3 Nephi 20:25](#).
12. [3 Nephi 20:26](#).
13. See [Genesis 17:1–10, 19](#); [Leviticus 26:42](#); [Acts 3:25](#); Bible Dictionary, “Abraham, Covenant of.”
14. See [Genesis 26:1–5, 24](#).
15. See [Genesis 28:1–4, 10–14](#); [35:9–13](#); [48:3–4](#).
16. See references listed above in endnotes 13–15.
17. [Deuteronomy 7:9](#); [1 Chronicles 16:15](#); [Psalm 105:8](#).
18. [1 Nephi 15:18](#); emphasis added.
19. [Doctrine and Covenants 132:30–31](#). The Lord also told the Prophet Joseph Smith, “As I said unto Abraham concerning the kindreds of the earth, even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed” ([Doctrine and Covenants 124:58](#)).
20. See [Doctrine and Covenants 14:7](#).
21. See [Acts 10:34–35](#).
22. See [Exodus 19:5](#).
23. Scripture declares that “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” ([Doctrine and Covenants 82:10](#)).
24. On September 21, 1823, this covenantal concept was first revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The angel Moroni declared that Elijah the prophet would come as a messenger from heaven to plant in the hearts of the children a knowledge of promises once made to the fathers of the house of Israel (see [Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3](#)).
25. See [Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–34, 39–40](#).
26. [Doctrine and Covenants 84:33](#).
27. See [Doctrine and Covenants 84:35, 37](#).
28. See [Doctrine and Covenants 84:38](#).
29. See [Alma 13:1–9](#).
30. See [3 Nephi 29](#).
31. [3 Nephi 29:1, 3](#).
32. Title page of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.
33. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), 62.
34. See [Doctrine and Covenants 20:37](#).

35. “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, ... that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” ([2 Nephi 25:26](#)).

36. See [Galatians 3:29](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 86:8–11](#).

37. This concept pertains to us: “Many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fullness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—and at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” ([1 Nephi 15:13–14](#)).

38. See [Isaiah 55:3](#); [Jeremiah 31:33](#); [Romans 2:15](#); [2 Corinthians 3:2–3](#); [Hebrews 10:16](#).

39. See [Psalm 95:7](#); [100:3](#); [Jeremiah 24:7](#); [31:33](#); [32:38](#); [Ezekiel 11:20](#); [37:23, 27](#); [Zechariah 8:8](#); [2 Corinthians 6:16](#); [Hebrews 8:10](#).

40. [Mosiah 2:41](#).

6.2 - Divorce

Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, May 2007



1. I have felt impressed to speak about divorce. This is a sensitive subject because it evokes such strong emotions from persons it has touched in different ways. Some see themselves or their loved ones as the victims of divorce.

Others see themselves as its beneficiaries. Some see divorce as evidence of failure. Others consider it an essential escape hatch from marriage. In one way or another, divorce touches most families in the Church.

2. Whatever your perspective, please listen as I try to speak plainly about the effects of divorce on the eternal [family](#) relationships we seek under the gospel plan. I speak out of concern, but with hope.

3. We live in a world in which the whole concept of marriage is in peril and where divorce is commonplace.

4. The concept that society has a strong interest in preserving marriages for the common good as well as the good of the couple and their children has been replaced for many by the idea that marriage is only a private relationship between consenting adults, terminable at the will of either. [1](#)

5. Nations that had no divorce law have adopted one, and most nations permitting divorces have made them easier to obtain. Unfortunately, under current no-fault divorce laws, it can be easier to sever a marriage relationship with an unwanted spouse than an employment relationship with an unwanted employee.

Some even refer to a first marriage as a “starter marriage,” like a small home one uses for a while before moving on.

6. The weakening of the concept that marriages are permanent and precious has far-reaching consequences. Influenced by their own parents’ divorce or by popular notions that marriage is a ball and chain that prevents personal fulfillment, some young people shun marriage. Many who marry withhold full commitment, poised to flee at the first serious challenge.

7. In contrast, modern prophets have warned that looking upon marriage “as a mere contract that may be entered into at pleasure ... and severed at the first difficulty ... is an evil meriting severe condemnation,” especially where children are made to suffer. [2](#)

8. In ancient times and even under tribal laws in some countries where we now have members, men have power to divorce their wives for any trivial thing. Such unrighteous oppression of women was rejected by the Savior, who declared:

9. “[Moses](#) because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

10. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” ([Matthew 19:8–9](#)).

11. The kind of marriage required for exaltation—eternal in duration and godlike in quality—does not contemplate divorce. In the temples of the Lord, couples are married for all eternity. But some marriages do not progress toward that ideal. Because “of the hardness of [our] hearts,” the Lord does not currently enforce the consequences of the celestial standard. He permits divorced persons to marry again without the stain of immorality specified in the higher law. Unless a divorced member has committed serious transgressions, he or she can become eligible for a temple recommend under the same worthiness standards that apply to other members.

12. There are many good Church members who have been divorced. I speak first to them. We know that many of you are innocent victims—members whose former spouses persistently betrayed sacred covenants or abandoned or refused to perform marriage responsibilities for an extended period. Members who have experienced such abuse have firsthand knowledge of circumstances worse than divorce.

13. When a marriage is dead and beyond hope of resuscitation, it is needful to have a means to end it. I saw examples of this in the Philippines. Two days after their temple marriage, a husband deserted his young wife and has not been heard from for over 10 years. A married woman fled and obtained a divorce in another country, but her husband, who remained behind, is still married in the eyes of the Philippine law. Since there is no provision for divorce in that country, these innocent victims of desertion have no way to end their married status and go forward with their lives.

14. We know that some look back on their divorces with regret at their own partial or predominant fault in the breakup. All who have been through divorce know the pain and need the healing power and hope that come from the Atonement. That healing power and that hope are there for them and also for their children.

15. Now I speak to married members, especially to any who may be considering divorce.

16. I strongly urge you and those who advise you to face up to the reality that for most marriage problems, the remedy is not divorce but repentance. Often the cause is not incompatibility but selfishness. The first step is not separation but reformation. Divorce is not an all-purpose solution, and it often creates long-term heartache. A broad-based international study of the levels of happiness before and after “major life events” found that, on average, persons are far more successful in recovering their level of happiness after the death of a spouse than after a divorce. [3](#)Spouses who hope that divorce will resolve conflicts often find that it aggravates them, since the complexities that follow divorce—especially where there are children—generate new conflicts.

17. Think first of the children. Because divorce separates the interests of children from the interests of their parents, children are its first victims. Scholars of family life tell us that the most important cause of the current decline in the well-being of children is the current weakening of marriage, because family instability decreases parental investment in children. [4](#) We know that children raised in a single-parent home after divorce have a much higher risk for drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, poor school performance, and various kinds of victimization.

18. A couple with serious marriage problems should see their bishop. As the Lord’s judge, he will give counsel and perhaps even discipline that will lead toward healing.

19. Bishops do not counsel members to divorce, but they can help members with the consequences of their decisions. Under the law of the Lord, a marriage, like a human life, is a precious, living thing. If our bodies are sick, we seek to heal them. We do not give up. While there is any prospect of life, we seek healing again and again. The same should be true of our marriages, and if we seek Him, the Lord will help us and heal us.

20. Latter-day Saint spouses should do all within their power to preserve their marriages. They should follow the marriage enrichment counsel in the First Presidency's message in the April 2007 Ensign and Liahona. [5](#) To avoid so-called "incompatibility," they should be best friends, kind and considerate, sensitive to each other's needs, always seeking to make each other happy. They should be partners in family finances, working together to regulate their desires for temporal things.

21. Of course, there can be times when one spouse falls short and the other is wounded and feels pain. When that happens, the one who is wronged should balance current disappointments against the good of the past and the brighter prospects of the future.

22. Don't treasure up past wrongs, reprocessing them again and again. In a marriage relationship, festering is destructive; forgiving is divine (see [D&C 64:9–10](#)). Plead for the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord to forgive wrongs (as President Faust has just taught us so beautifully), to overcome faults, and to strengthen relationships.

23. If you are already descending into the low state of marriage-in-name-only, please join hands, kneel together, and prayerfully plead for help and the healing power of the Atonement. Your humble and united pleadings will bring you closer to the Lord and to each other and will help you in the hard climb back to marital harmony.

24. Consider these observations of a wise bishop with extensive experience in counseling members with marriage problems. Speaking of those who eventually divorced, he said:

25. "Universally, every couple or individual said they recognized that divorce was not a good thing, but they all insisted that their situation was different.

26. "Universally, they focused on the fault of the spouse and attributed little responsibility to their own behavior. Communication had withered.

27. "Universally, they were looking back, not willing to leave the baggage of past behavior on the roadside and move on.

28. "Part of the time, serious sin was involved, but more often they had just 'fallen out of love,' saying, 'He doesn't satisfy my needs anymore,' or, 'She has changed.'

29. "All were worried about the effect on the children, but always the conclusion was 'it's worse for them to have us together and fighting.'"

30. In contrast, the couples who followed this bishop's counsel and stayed together emerged with their marriages even stronger. That prospect began with their mutual commitment to keep the commandments, stay active in their Church attendance, scripture reading, and prayer, and to work on their own shortcomings. They "recognized the importance and power of the Atonement for their spouse and for themselves," and "they were patient and would try again and again." When the couples he counseled did these things, repenting and working to save their marriages, this bishop reported that "healing was achieved 100 percent of the time."

31. Even those who think their spouse is entirely to blame should not act hastily. One study found "no evidence that divorce or separation typically made adults happier than staying in an unhappy marriage. Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce reported being happily married five years later." [6](#) A woman who persisted in an intolerable marriage for many years until the children were raised explained: "There were three parties to our marriage—my husband and I and the Lord. I told myself that if two of us could hang in there, we could hold it together."

32. The power of hope expressed in these examples is sometimes rewarded with repentance and reformation, but sometimes it is not. Personal circumstances vary greatly. We cannot control and we are not responsible for the choices of others, even when they impact us so painfully. I am sure the Lord loves and blesses husbands and wives who lovingly try to help spouses struggling with such deep problems as [pornography](#) or other addictive behavior or with the long-term consequences of childhood abuse.

33. Whatever the outcome and no matter how difficult your experiences, you have the promise that you will not be denied the blessings of eternal family relationships if you love the Lord, keep His commandments, and just do the best you can. When

young Jacob “suffered afflictions and much sorrow” from the actions of other family members, Father Lehi assured him, “Thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” ([2 Nephi 2:1–2](#)). Similarly, the Apostle Paul assured us that “all things work together for good to them that love God” ([Romans 8:28](#)).

34. In conclusion, I speak briefly to those contemplating marriage. The best way to avoid divorce from an unfaithful, abusive, or unsupportive spouse is to avoid marriage to such a person. If you wish to marry well, inquire well. Associations through “hanging out” or exchanging information on the Internet are not a sufficient basis for marriage. There should be dating, followed by careful and thoughtful and thorough courtship. There should be ample opportunities to experience the prospective spouse’s behavior in a variety of circumstances. Fiancés should learn everything they can about the families with whom they will soon be joined in marriage. In all of this, we should realize that a good marriage does not require a perfect man or a perfect woman. It only requires a man and a woman committed to strive together toward perfection.

35. President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “Two individuals approaching the marriage altar must realize that to attain the happy marriage which they hope for they must know that marriage ... means sacrifice, sharing, and even a reduction of some personal liberties. It means long, hard economizing. It means children who bring with them financial burdens, service burdens, care and worry burdens; but also it means the deepest and sweetest emotions of all.” [7](#)

36. From personal experience, I testify to the sweetness of the marriage and family life that the family proclamation describes as founded upon a husband and wife’s “solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children” and “upon the teachings of the Lord [Jesus Christ](#).” [8](#) I testify of Him as our Savior and pray in His name for all who strive for the supreme blessings of an eternal family, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

6.3 - Marriage In The Lord’s Way, Part One

Elder Cree-L Kofford
Ensign, June 1998



1. Dear Kerstyn and Tom, I was delighted to receive the announcement of your upcoming wedding. I was even more delighted to see that you have chosen to start your life together in the temple of the Lord. Congratulations! You have made the right choice.

2. You’ll love it in the temple—it’s like no other place you have ever been. Just think, you have been invited into the Lord’s house—His house upon the earth! His house of prayer, His house of fasting, His house of faith, His house of learning, His house of glory, His house of order—yes, the house of God (see D&C 88:119).

Physical Beauty

3. You will be impressed by the understated elegance of His house. I have always felt that the magnificent simplicity of the temple tells a lot about its owner. The feeling there reminds me of how I feel when I sit in the mountains and watch a beautiful stream tumble over the rocks above, winding its way to the valley below. It’s a feeling you sense more than see. That’s the way you’ll feel as you experience the physical beauty of the temple.

Spiritual Beauty

4. But as architecturally beautiful as is His house, it is not in the physical beauty that you will find your greatest sensation. Rather, it is in the emotion you will experience as you visit His house. Everything there will awaken your senses to a deeper feeling of love and reverence—for each other, for your respective families, for other people, for your Heavenly Father, and for His Son, Jesus Christ.

5. You will find yourself saying, “Now I know why the Prophet Joseph and the early Saints gave all that they had—and more—to build a temple.”

6. As the spirit of His house touches your soul, you will wonder, “Where have I felt this before?” You will search your memory, and in your search you will recall the love you felt as a child. You will remember the first time you were able to say, “I know the Book of Mormon is true,” and the first time you began to glimpse the genuine love the Savior has for each of us. But as you search, you will come to realize that this

time the feeling is even deeper. It will touch the very depths of your being. Kerstyn and Tom, I wish I had the ability to describe how you'll feel in the temple, but I don't. Perhaps it's because I'm limited to man's words in trying to describe the Lord's way.

The Lord's Way

7. Know this: your feelings will be greatly different than those you have seen in evidence at marriages conducted in country clubs, wedding parlors, cathedrals, or even Latter-day Saint chapels. You'll quickly realize that the temple is the real thing.

8. Once in a while, I'll talk to a young Latter-day Saint couple who think it's more important to "walk down the aisle" or "have a big wedding" or be surrounded by human symbols of beauty—my heart aches for them. They simply do not understand. You cannot improve on the Lord's way. It was planned by Him. The ordinance is His. The authority is His. The words are His, and the house is His. Who would dare to compare the tinsel of the temporal with the gold of God? I commend you for understanding the difference.

How Is Temple Marriage Different?

9. Kerstyn, you asked the question, "How is being married in the temple different?" First, let me say I prefer to call the Lord's way of marriage the "sealing ordinance" or "being sealed" rather than just "being married in the temple." All too often, our young men and women form the erroneous conclusion that the only difference from a civil marriage is the location. While marriage in a chapel allows you to be married for time only, the sealing ordinance makes you eligible to have your marriage last forever. To compare a civil marriage to one performed in the Lord's way is like comparing a big flashlight to the sun.

10. A civil marriage has two basic ingredients:

1. The bride and groom make certain promises to each other.
2. The bride and groom can then legally live together under the laws of the land.

11. Of course, the one officiating will dress it up as much as possible. There will be counsel about the role of the husband and the wife and the need for love. There will also be sage comments about the institution of marriage.

12. But no matter how it's packaged, that's all a civil marriage will ever be. The addition of words from scriptures, so often incorporated into civil ceremonies, such as "What therefore God hath joined together, let

not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6), does not change that fact. Just as the baptisms conducted without authority in the meridian of time (see Acts 19:2–5) were eternally powerless, so too is a civil marriage powerless to do anything but qualify the man and the woman to live together under the laws of the land. Adorning the ceremony with a minister or even an LDS bishop, a beautiful church or other building, tuxedos, limousines, music, and all of the other trappings will not change that. An empty box is not given substance by the most beautiful gift wrapping. So it is with a civil marriage. It is not the Lord's way, and no amount of rationalizing will ever change that unchangeable fact.

13. In the temple you make covenants and promises to Heavenly Father. The authority for the promises in a celestial marriage comes from God, and the consequences of your failure to honor those promises also will come from God. In a civil marriage, the authority for the promises between bride and groom is the integrity of the two people. It rises no higher than that. It cannot. Its authority comes from man and not from God.

14. Even the counsel you hear in the temple takes on more significance when received within the confines of His sacred house in the context of an eternal priesthood ordinance.

What Does Being "Sealed" Mean?

15. Some of your friends may have a misunderstanding about the phrase "being sealed." Sometimes the word "sealed" is visualized as attaching or bonding a man and a woman together. While that is one of the results of being sealed, it is much too restrictive to be accurate. It has always seemed to me that the word "sealed" refers much more to the act of conferring the blessings of God upon the husband and wife individually and jointly (and upon their children) than it does to just "uniting" a man and a woman.

16. The word "sealed" also indicates that God is putting His seal or stamp of approval upon the ordinance in which you will participate. The term "celestial marriage" is also appropriate to describe what occurs in the sealing ordinance. That is because the two words together constitute a title which describes not only the joining of a man and a woman together in marriage but also all of the other elements of the sealing ordinance.

The Sealing Ordinance

17. You see, Kerstyn and Tom, the sealing ordinance isn't a marriage in the way that word is commonly

used. When you go to the temple to become man and wife, you are really going to participate in a sacred and divinely appointed ordinance called the “sealing ordinance.” It is an ordinance established by God and is the same as that ordinance by which Adam and Eve were joined together as husband and wife in the Garden of Eden. Oh, it’s true that one result of being sealed in a celestial marriage is that you are authorized to live together as husband and wife under the laws of the land and you do make certain promises to each other, but that is the beginning and end of any similarity between a civil marriage and the sealing ordinance.

18. As you have already learned from your seminary and institute classes, a religious ordinance in the Church is a specific rite or ceremony performed under the power of the holy priesthood. In the sealing ordinance, a major requirement has been added: the one officiating must hold the power to perform the sealing ordinance. This power is referred to as the sealing authority—the power by which, conditioned upon obedience to the covenants made, eternal family units are formed.

19. As President Boyd K. Packer, now Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has observed: “In the Church we build other buildings of many kinds. In them we worship, we teach, we find recreation, we organize. We can organize stakes and wards and missions and quorums and Relief Societies in these buildings or even in rented halls. But, when we organize families according to the order that the Lord has revealed, we organize them in the temples. Temple marriage, that sealing ordinance, is a crowning blessing that you may claim in the holy temple” (The Holy Temple [1980], 8).

20. To help you understand just how different it is from a civil marriage, let’s review what is encompassed in the sealing ordinance.

Elements of the Sealing Ordinance

21. Having already received your individual endowment and dressed in appropriate temple clothing, both of you will kneel on opposite sides of an altar in the sealing room and there you will receive good and proper counsel. Then, under the direction of the officiator—one of those few men on the earth upon whom the prophet of the Lord has authorized the sealing power to be conferred—you will participate in the ordinance of celestial marriage.

1. Individual covenants and blessings. Each of you will individually and separately make promises,

commitments, and covenants with your Heavenly Father and will individually receive promises of blessings conditioned on your individual worthiness. The individual nature of these promises is such that even if one of you were to cease being obedient following your participation in the sealing ordinance and so lose the promises made to you, the other partner who remained faithful would continue to be eligible to receive the promised blessings.

2. Joint covenants and blessings. The two of you jointly will make promises, commitments, and covenants with your Heavenly Father and will make covenants to receive each other as husband and wife. You then will jointly receive promises of blessings conditioned upon your joint faithfulness. The continued faithful obedience of both of you is essential if the promised blessings are to be received jointly. This is because the promises are made to you as one—that is, as a single unit consisting of two halves.

3. Joining in celestial marriage. This element qualifies you to live together as husband and wife under the laws of the land. It is here that you are united forever, becoming one flesh before the Lord and forming a new family unit that, if you are faithful and obedient, will last forever.

4. Blessings for children born in the covenant. All children born to the two of you are born under the blessings of the sealing covenant; thus, it is common to say that your children are “born in the covenant.” They are entitled to blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, including:

- a. The gospel
- b. The priesthood
- c. Celestial marriage
- d. Eternal life (see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 13).

22. It is revealing to know that even if the two of you cease to be faithful in keeping the covenants you make in the temple, these blessings will still flow to your children. It is equally comforting to know the Lord has provided that adopted children and children born to a couple before they are sealed in the temple (as with new converts to the Church) may be sealed to their parents, and upon such sealing they also become entitled to these same promises and blessings.

23. In the temple all of the promises, commitments, and covenants you make will be witnessed by two

Melchizedek Priesthood holders of your choosing and will be recorded in heaven as well as on earth.

Importance of the Sealing Ordinance

24. We learn from a revelation received by the Prophet Joseph Smith that the sealing ordinance, which eternally unites man and woman, is a requirement for exaltation, which means living with God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ His Son in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, where the power for continuing to extend the family throughout eternity is present. That revelation, found in section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants, reads as follows:

25. “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

26. “And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

27. “And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

28. “He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:1–4).

29. Many people reading this section of the Doctrine and Covenants do not grasp its full import. Accordingly, I thought both of you might benefit from a brief comment or two about its meaning. The gospel, which is called “the new and everlasting covenant,” includes many specific covenants, one being called “the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.” This title, or name, is simply another way of saying “patriarchal order.” Thus, that portion of section 131 could read: “And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into the patriarchal order of the priesthood.”

30. The patriarchal order refers to priesthood government by family organization. It originated in the time of Adam and extended down to the days of Moses, when that order was withdrawn (see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* [1956], 3:83–84). It has been restored in our day and time (see D&C 110). You will want to know that the city of Enoch, which because of its righteousness was taken into heaven, was also established on the patriarchal order (see Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 271).

31. Furthermore, we learn that “the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood is patriarchal authority” and that “the patriarchal order of the priesthood is the right of worthy priesthood-holding fathers to preside over their descendants through all ages; it includes the ordinances and blessings of the fulness of the

priesthood shared by husbands and wives who are sealed in the temple” (in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], 3:1067, 1135).

32. The Lord has told us that the patriarchal order will be the order of things in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom; thus, without participation in the sealing ordinance, you simply cannot qualify for admission to that high and holy place. Of course, some individuals, through no fault of their own, may not have the opportunity to marry in this life; they will yet have that opportunity (see Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde G. Williams [1996], 256–57).

33. Perhaps now you can see why I prefer to use the term “sealing ordinance”; it is more—so much more—than what the term marriage suggests to most.

34. I hope you have both begun to grasp the tremendous depth of the sealing ordinance and the significance attached to it. Can you now begin to understand why my heart weeps for those people who say they can’t see much difference between this magnificent ordinance and the “fool’s gold” of a civil marriage?

The Holy Spirit of Promise

35. There is one more thing pertaining to your upcoming sealing I really want you to think about. Don’t forget that every blessing promised to you in the temple, whether individually or jointly, is conditioned upon your faithful obedience to the covenants you make in the temple. If you cease to be obedient to those covenants, you lose blessings associated with the covenants. Of course, the repentance process may requalify you for those blessings.

36. The principle of obedience is outlined specifically in section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which essentially teaches:

1. The ordinance must be performed by someone who possesses the sealing power. As we’ve already discussed, the authority to confer the sealing power rests with the President of the Church and is conferred by the laying on of hands, either by the President or as he may direct by other members of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

2. The covenants, commitments, and promises that each of you make (verse 7 calls them “covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or

expectations”) must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

37. The Holy Spirit of Promise is another way of saying the Holy Ghost. What the scriptures mean when they say that something must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is that it must receive the approval of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost can see into the heart of each of us and can consequently discern deceit, half-truths, or misrepresentations. Thus, when a sealing ordinance is “sealed by the Holy Spirit,” the Holy Ghost is satisfied that the parties to the sealing ordinance have been obedient in order to enter into the sealing ordinance and afterward obedient to the covenants they have made.

38. There is much more that needs to be said, so I’ll write you again as soon as I am able. Remember, some of what I have written will require careful reading, pondering, and prayer to fully understand. I urge you to do so.

39. Your friend,

40. Elder Cree-L Kofford

6.4 - Marriage In The Lord’s Way, Part Two

Elder Cree-L Kofford
Ensign, July 1998



1. Kerstyn and Tom, It was thoughtful of you to respond to my recent letter (see *Ensign*, June, 1998, 6). I will attempt to answer the various questions you raised and add a few thoughts of my own. You will recall that we earlier discussed many aspects of the Lord’s way, including the physical and spiritual beauty of His home, why temple marriage is different, what the sealing ordinance is, and the significance of the Holy Spirit of Promise.

Why Should You Marry in the Temple?

2. Tom, you mentioned that one of your friends couldn’t see why you felt it was so important to have your marriage solemnized in the temple. I hope you took the opportunity to share parts of my earlier letter with him. You might find the following list of reasons useful in your future discussions:

1. Because God said so. I don’t mean to be disrespectful, but I don’t know any other way to say it. It seems to me that the Lord has said in about as many ways as it can be said that there is

only one way—His way. I don’t know that those who would like to be Saints of God need any reason other than that.

2. Because being sealed in the temple is the only way you can begin to qualify to:

- a. Have your marriage continue forever.
- b. Have your family, stretching in both directions from you, joined together in a family organization forever.
- c. Have the opportunity of eternal increase.
- d. Have the opportunity one day to become like our Heavenly Father.

3. Because there are special blessings for which you qualify by having your marriage solemnized in the temple. These blessings flow out of your obedience and will continue to come as you continue to be obedient to your covenants.

4. Because it tells you a lot about your wife, with whom you’re going to be spending the rest of this life and all of eternity:

- a. She believes as you do and has the same spiritual goals you have.
- b. She has been obedient to the commandments of God and hence qualifies to be allowed to enter the house of the Lord.
- c. She is willing to make commitments to God, to you, and to herself that will lead to eternal life.

5. Because it serves as a great self-assessment for you as to your individual worthiness and commitment.

What Should You Do to Prepare to Go to the Temple?

3. Preparing to go to the temple involves the obvious steps of living the commandments, fasting, and praying. Beyond the obvious, I recommend the following steps. I suggest you:

1. Carefully and honestly evaluate your level of obedience to God’s commandments. To do that, find some place to be alone. I suggest you take a piece of paper and write down every commandment you have been counseled to live. Arrange those commandments in descending order with the hardest for you to live on the top. Then figuratively look yourself in the eye and do an inventory on how you are doing on each of those items. I hope you will not stop that self-interview

until you have committed yourself to full and total obedience. Then go out and be obedient.

4. All too often, we get ourselves enmeshed in the process of trying to understand why God gave us a particular commandment. We want to rationalize. I don't know where that is more evident than in watching movies. Young people know they should not watch R- or X-rated movies, and yet time after time I hear them say, "Well it's only rated R because it's violent." What difference does it make why it is rated R? The fact is, a prophet of God has said not to go to R-rated movies (see, for example, Ezra Taft Benson, "To the 'Youth of the Noble Birthright,'" Ensign, May 1986, 45). That ought to be good enough.

There is no substitute for obedience.

5. Obedience has been described as the first law of heaven, and the longer I live, the more convinced of that I become. I never cease to thrill at the story of Helaman and his stripling warriors told in the Book of Mormon. Even though 2,060 of the young men "fought most desperately" (Alma 57:19) in battle, not one lost his life. What everyone may not know is that they qualified for this mighty miracle by their obedience. Their leader, Helaman, says of them: "They did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness" (Alma 57:21; emphasis added).

2. Using the Topical Guide in the LDS scriptures, read and ponder the references under "endowment," "marriage," and "temples."

3. Seek to find out as much as possible about the temple from published sources. In that regard, I would particularly recommend the following:

- a. The Holy Temple, by President Boyd K. Packer.
- b. Ensign, February 1995, 2–5, 32–51.
- c. New Era, June 1971, February 1987, and March 1997.

4. Participate in a stake-sponsored temple preparation class. Every stake or district in the Church has, or should have, a program designed to review with every person going to the temple for the first time various items of information which have been made available from Church headquarters. Usually this is done on a stake wide or districtwide basis by someone designated by the presiding authority. The resource material provides great help.

5. Seek to focus yourself spiritually so you are spiritually prepared when you enter the temple. In this way the techniques of instruction used in the temple will be more understandable to you, and you will be thrilled by the depth and beauty of the teachings you will experience.

Why Do You Need a Recommend to Go to the Temple?

6. As both of you already know, you are required to obtain authorization from your bishop and your stake president before you're allowed to enter the house of the Lord. If you qualify, they will issue you a temple recommend. Before they issue that recommend, they will each interview you thoroughly. They will ask you a series of questions from which you and they will make a determination as to your readiness to enter the house of the Lord. Among other things, those questions will deal with testimony, integrity, chastity, faithfulness in living various commandments, personal habits, and affiliations. Your bishop will be happy to review these with you. Set up an early interview with your bishop or branch president to review the temple recommend questions and to ensure you can honestly and properly answer each of those questions. In that way, if a change of conduct or repentance will be required, you will be able to discuss it with your bishop or branch president in adequate time to allow it to occur before seeking a recommend.

7. Occasionally, someone will want to know why you have to have a temple recommend to get in the temple. The following thoughts may help you answer the question:

1. First, once you enter the temple, you are expected and required to live the covenants you will make there. If you have any doubt about your willingness or ability to live those covenants, then my counsel is that you wait to go to the temple until you don't have any doubts.

8. One scripture which deals with this is Doctrine and Covenants 132:3 [D&C 132:3]: "Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same" (emphasis added).

9. If you understand that scripture, you begin to understand why the Lord has set sentries at His doors for the protection of those who would unwittingly enter in and become subject to living covenants which they are not prepared to live. Thus, in a real way, the temple recommend is an indication of the Lord's love for His

children, a measure to ensure our readiness to attend the temple. The temple recommend interview allows us to evaluate ourselves and determine whether or not we are prepared to undertake the covenants that we will make. When a recommend is not issued, far from indicating the person has been rejected, it is in reality an expression of caring concern for the unprepared.

2. A second reason is suggested by several scriptures, one of them recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 109:20 [D&C 109:20]: “No unclean [unworthy] thing shall be permitted to come into thy house to pollute it.”

10. This and similar verses place a commandment upon those who are administratively responsible to safeguard the temples that no unclean thing should enter. Thus, the temple recommend not only serves as a safeguard for the person seeking admission to the temple but also serves to allow those who have responsibility for guarding the gateway to the temple to discharge their duty and to fulfill their covenants. A stake president or a bishop who knowingly or negligently allows someone who is unclean to enter the house of the Lord is accountable for that disobedience. Similarly, an individual seeking to gain admission to the temple who lies or withholds important information during the interview process likewise is held accountable.

11. Thus, as this principle applies to you, a temple recommend interview allows you, as an individual son or daughter of God, to determine if, in fact, you are sufficiently worthy to enter the house of the Lord. Thus, once you have given full and honest answers to the interview questions, and have been found by yourself and your priesthood leaders to be worthy to enter the house of the Lord, you may know that you are there in compliance with the admonition that no unclean thing should enter His house. I have always taken great comfort from the fact that even though I am not perfect, and even though I make mistakes, I am living at a level satisfactory to allow me entrance to the Lord’s house. That comfort is based upon the availability of the temple recommend interview.

Should You Receive Your Endowment on the Day Scheduled for Your Sealing?

12. Kerstyn, I know you’ve been wrestling with whether you should receive your endowment before the day you’re scheduled to be sealed. I’m unaware of any edict or requirement one way or the other, but in my opinion it is preferable, where possible, to go to the temple and receive your endowment a few days before the sealing.

13. Occasionally, I am asked whether I think a young couple should go through an endowment session on the day of their sealing but prior to being sealed, even though they have been previously endowed. I think that is a matter of individual preference, even though I think it tends to put your mind in the proper frame to participate in the sealing ordinance. A challenge to receiving your endowment and participating in the sealing ordinance on the same day is that sometimes the exhaustion factor can make it hard to fully appreciate your experience in the temple. Just try to understand yourself, know what the advantages and disadvantages are, and then make a decision based upon your individual circumstances.

Is There Anything Special You Should Do on the Day You Go to the Temple?

14. During our discussions, we’ve talked a time or two about the day you go to the temple, whether that’s for your own endowment, as will be the case with Kerstyn, or whether it’s to participate in the sealing ordinance. Here are one or two suggestions I hope will be helpful:

1. Try to organize your activities, time, and commitments in the days prior to going to the temple in such a way as to get quality rest and appropriate exercise so that on the day of the temple experience you will be in good physical condition.
2. Read, meditate, and study the scriptures on a regular basis. In suggesting this, I’m not so concerned about your learning new things from the scriptures as I am about refining your spirit. Reading and pondering the scriptures simply has a way of doing that.
3. Sometime shortly before you go to the temple ask your father and mother to dedicate a family home evening to instruction on the temple, followed by a period of testimony sharing and expressions of family love. If your circumstances are such that this is not possible, then perhaps a period of time with your home teachers, your priesthood or Relief Society leaders, or the bishop would be helpful.
4. On the day of attending the temple, wear appropriate clothing so that as you enter the house of the Lord, you do so as a welcome guest. Avoid immodest clothing and ostentatious jewelry.
5. Plan the activities of the temple day such that they focus on the spiritual. I realize that is extremely hard to do when you’re talking about

being sealed. There are many times when people come from out of town who want to express their best wishes. Sometimes there is a meal; usually there is a reception. All too often you are so exhausted you are unable to comprehend the significance of what you have experienced. Frequently you become so caught up in the things of the world that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to fully appreciate the things of God. Realizing that sometimes it simply can't be done, do everything you can to move as many social commitments off that day as possible. Often we cheat ourselves out of the greatest spiritual experiences of our lifetime by being too wrapped up in temporal things.

6. Remember that your wedding day is not a social experience with a tinge of the spiritual, but rather it is a spiritual experience with a tinge of the social.

How Many Should You Invite to Witness Your Sealing?

15. At different times during our talks, you have both raised the question of how many you should invite to go with you to the temple. I hope that by now you've had enough counsel in my letters that you can answer that question yourselves. However, just to be sure that we understand each other, let's review one or two facts:

1. The sealing ordinance is a crowning ordinance of the temple.
2. The sealing ordinance is the gateway to eternal life—that is, the kind of life God lives.
3. The sealing ordinance has been established by God for His children, and as such it is the Lord's way.

16. Based on the foregoing, my opinion would be that you invite those people to participate in witnessing your sealing who meet the following criteria:

1. Their relationship is so meaningful to you that it would contribute to the spiritual character of that which you are about to experience.
2. They have the spiritual maturity to understand what is occurring and provide you with the spiritual support which you will need and desire.

17. Usually these guidelines mean fewer people, not more. I realize there are some practicalities involved in the counsel I'm giving. I know there is always a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or someone else who really

doesn't fit what I've outlined but who would be highly offended if they were not invited. In those circumstances, I would seek the counsel of your parents or bishop.

What about Nonmember Parents or Relatives?

18. Kerstyn, you have expressed concern about the nonmembers in your family. One of the greatest emotional pressures on brides or grooms is when parents or other close relatives are not members of the Church. They generally don't understand what's going on, nor do they have any appreciation for it. In the case of parents, their whole lives have been lived in anticipation of the time when they would see their son or daughter married in the only kind of marriage with which they have any familiarity. So when you announce to them that you are going to the temple and they cannot attend, they naturally feel a great loss and a great exclusion. What do you do? How do you handle it? The answers are probably as different as the various kinds of individuals involved, but here are a few ideas that might help:

1. First, be very understanding of their feelings, and, as much as possible, help them comprehend what's going to occur and why they can't be with you. Some of the thoughts I have already expressed may be of some help in accomplishing this objective.
2. Even as you do that, however, I would not do it in a tone of apology but in great love. You need not be apologetic about God's ways. You should, however, be empathetic and understanding of their emotions.
3. Try to make them feel as much a part of what's going on that day as you can. Invite them to come to the temple, and arrange for someone to be with them while you are in the temple. It's possible they might like to go through the visitors' center, if available, or do any of a number of other activities available, including just enjoying the beautiful grounds that surround the temple. As you leave the temple for pictures and other activities, you can rejoin your relatives and involve them in all that's going on.

19. You may want to arrange with your bishop to hold a meeting for those who don't have temple recommends. This meeting could include prayer, music, and remarks by a priesthood holder, but it should not include a ceremony or the exchange of vows.

20. Over the years, I've seen such activities a number of times, and when they were handled properly I have never yet seen a nonmember or less-active member take offense. If they know how much this temple ordinance means to you, they will give you the support you desire.

4. The Brethren counsel Church members not to perform a marriage ceremony following the temple sealing. Occasionally, you'll find a young couple who will want to do a mock ceremony "so my mother won't feel left out." But that makes a mockery out of your temple sealing. It will impact all that happens to you in the temple. You will not enjoy the same level of spiritual involvement and spiritual enlightenment you would otherwise have received. And you will find that you do not satisfy those not able to attend the temple ceremony. Your bishop will be happy to discuss with you those kinds of activities which would be appropriate following the temple sealing.

What Should You Know about Wearing the Temple Garment?

21. Kerstyn, having never been to the temple, you're going to have questions about how to wear the temple garment. You'll have the basis for answering most of those questions if you will listen to the counsel given to you in the temple. Always remember that one of the covenants we make is to wear the garment properly. Though it would be inappropriate to discuss some items about the garment in this letter, here are some thoughts I hope will be useful.

22. My counsel is that you wear the temple garment at all times, with a few exceptions which your bishop is prepared to discuss with you. Never tuck, pin, sew, cut, or fold the temple garment in order to make it fit under the clothing you may desire to wear. Wear the garment as it was designed to be worn, and then find outer clothing which appropriately covers it. If you find yourself in circumstances where clothing styles are not consistent with wearing the garment, then change clothing styles. That may mean you don't wear shorts, tank tops, or other articles of clothing that are just not consistent with properly wearing the garment. The length of dresses, shorts, and other articles of clothing should be consistent with that guideline.

23. Frequently, people will want to know if it's all right to take off the garment to mow the lawn, wash the car, or participate in other household or business activities. The answer in one word is no. What if you're participating in athletics? It is possible to wear the temple garment properly while participating in a large number of athletic activities. In those situations

where that is not possible, then, as we've been instructed, it would be permissible to remove the garment during the period of time you are engaging in that particular activity. I would not, however, remove my garment a long time prior to participating, and I would replace it as soon as I could appropriately do so after I had completed participation. Activities such as swimming, competitive basketball, and competitive tennis may fall in this category.

24. I will add, strictly as a personal opinion because of what the garment means to me, that if I had a hobby that did not allow me to wear my garment properly, I would rather change hobbies than go without the garment.

Does a Temple Sealing Guarantee You Will Live Happily Ever After?

25. Kerstyn and Tom, I would like to talk to you about one last critical subject. Before doing so, let me once again tell you how proud I am of the two of you for being worthy of the high and holy honor of participating in the sealing ordinance. It will grace your lives as long as you live, and you will forever be grateful for the privilege of participating in this singular ordinance.

26. However, you need to understand that even being married in the Lord's way does not necessarily mean there won't be disagreements, arguments, moments of despair, and times of trial. Being sealed in the temple is a great start, but it only works as long as you're both totally obedient to the covenants you make. There isn't anything about being sealed at the altar of the temple that will stop you from having disagreements on various aspects of your relationship, particularly in the early years.

27. You'll face dozens of questions, as all of us who have been married before you have faced. Do you sleep with the window open or closed? Which kind of toothpaste will you use? How much is too much to pay for an item of clothing? What's acceptable entertainment? And the list goes on and on. Just know that the hundreds of thousands of us who have preceded you in marriage have gone through lists like yours. We've succeeded in resolving most of them and, in some cases, have agreed to disagree on others. But through it all, three things have been very clear to all of us who stand ahead of you in the line of marriage: we made a commitment to God, we made a commitment to each other, and we will keep those commitments.

28. I don't mean to imply that being sealed in the temple doesn't give you an edge. It definitely does! In

the first place, you will have come into the marriage free of serious sin, clean and pure in the eyes of the Lord. You have come to Him in obedience to His commandments, and as a result you become heirs to the blessings which that obedience brings. As you live the covenants, commitments, and promises you make, you will find that other matters simply tend to disappear. One thing I can tell you with absolute certainty: whenever there is a difficulty between a husband and wife in their marriage relationship that is serious enough to threaten that relationship, one or the other (or both) is not living the gospel of Jesus Christ. That means that one or both of the marriage partners are not keeping the covenants, commitments, and promises they made at the altar of the temple. If you love God enough and follow His teachings, everything else will work out just fine and you will be blessed to find solutions.

29. Your marriage, even though started in the sealing room of the temple, will still require dedicated effort. It will require understanding, love, forgiveness, patience, and every other virtue of which you can possibly think. There may be days when you cry, and there may be disagreements. But remember this—you are working and building a relationship that will live through eternity. That can and will occur so long as you both love your Heavenly Father and live His teachings. One day you'll wake up and realize that you're married to the most marvelous person in the world, and you'll thank God for the fact that you can be together forever.

30. Your friend,

31. Elder Cree-L Kofford

6.5 - Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

LDS.org

1. Latter-day Saints believe that the marriage of one man and one woman is the Lord's standing law of marriage. In biblical times, the Lord commanded some to practice plural marriage—the marriage of one man and more than one woman.¹ By revelation, the Lord commanded Joseph Smith to institute the practice of plural marriage among Church members in the early 1840s. For more than half a century, plural marriage was practiced by some Latter-day Saints under the direction of the Church President.²

2. Latter-day Saints do not understand all of God's purposes in instituting, through His prophets, the practice of plural marriage. The Book of Mormon identifies one reason for God to command it: to increase the number of children born in the gospel covenant in order to "raise up seed unto [the Lord]."³

3. Plural marriage did result in the birth of large numbers of children within faithful Latter-day Saint homes. It also shaped 19th-century Mormon society in many ways: marriage became available to virtually all who desired it; per-capita inequality of wealth was diminished as economically disadvantaged women married into more financially stable households; and ethnic intermarriages were increased, which helped to unite a diverse immigrant population. Plural marriage also helped create and strengthen a sense of cohesion and group identification among Latter-day Saints. Church members came to see themselves as a "peculiar people," covenant-bound to carry out the commands of God despite outside opposition.⁴

The Beginnings of Plural Marriage in the Church

4. Polygamy had been permitted for millennia in many cultures and religions, but, with few exceptions, it was rejected in Western cultures. In Joseph Smith's time, monogamy was the only legal form of marriage in the United States.

5. The revelation on plural marriage, recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 132, emerged partly from Joseph Smith's study of the Old Testament in 1831. Latter-day Saints understood that they were living in the latter days, in what the revelations called the "dispensation of the fulness of times."⁵ Ancient principles—such as prophets, priesthood, and temples—would be restored to the earth. Plural marriage, practiced by ancient patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, was one of those ancient principles.⁶

6. The same revelation that taught of plural marriage was embedded within a revelation about eternal marriage—the teaching that marriage could last beyond death. Monogamous and plural marriages performed by priesthood power could seal loved ones to each other for eternity, on condition of righteousness.⁷

7. The revelation on marriage stated general principles; it did not explain how to implement plural marriage in all its particulars. In Nauvoo, Joseph Smith married additional wives and authorized other Latter-day Saints to practice plural marriage. The practice was introduced carefully and incrementally, and

participants vowed to keep their participation confidential, anticipating a time when husbands and wives could acknowledge one another publicly.

Plural Marriage and Families in 19th-Century Utah

8. Between 1852 and 1890, Latter-day Saints openly practiced plural marriage. Most plural families lived in Utah. Women and men who lived within plural marriage attested to challenges and difficulties but also to the love and joy they found within their families. They believed it was a commandment of God at that time and that obedience would bring great blessings to them and their posterity. Church leaders taught that participants in plural marriages should seek to develop a generous spirit of unselfishness and the pure love of Christ for everyone involved.

9. Although some leaders had large polygamous families, two-thirds of polygamist men had only two wives at a time. Church leaders recognized that plural marriages could be particularly difficult for women. Divorce was therefore available to women who were unhappy in their marriages; remarriage was also readily available. Women sometimes married at young ages in the first decade of Utah settlement, which was typical of women living in frontier areas at the time. At its peak in 1857, perhaps one half of all Utah Latter-day Saints experienced plural marriage as a husband, wife, or child. The percentage of those involved in plural marriage steadily declined over the next three decades.

10. During the years that plural marriage was publicly taught, not all Latter-day Saints were expected to live the principle, though all were expected to accept it as a revelation from God. Indeed, this system of marriage could not have been universal due to the ratio of men to women. Women were free to choose their spouses, whether to enter into a polygamous or a monogamous union, or whether to marry at all. Some men entered plural marriage because they were asked to do so by Church leaders, while others initiated the process themselves; all were required to obtain the approval of Church leaders before entering a plural marriage.

Anti-polygamy Legislation and the End of Plural Marriage

11. Beginning in 1862, the U.S. government passed laws against the practice of plural marriage. After the U.S. Supreme Court found the anti-polygamy laws to be constitutional in 1879, federal officials began prosecuting polygamous husbands and wives during the 1880s. Believing these laws to be unjust, Latter-day Saints engaged in civil disobedience by continuing to

practice plural marriage and by attempting to avoid arrest by moving to the homes of friends or family or by hiding under assumed names. When convicted, they paid fines and submitted to jail time.

12. One of the anti-polygamy laws permitted the U.S. government to seize Church property. Federal officers soon threatened to take Latter-day Saint temples. The work of salvation for both the living and the dead was now in jeopardy. In September 1890, Church President Wilford Woodruff felt inspired to issue the Manifesto. “Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages,” President Woodruff explained, “I hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.”⁸

13. The full implications of the document were not apparent at first. The Lord’s way is to speak “line upon line; here a little, there a little.”⁹ Like the beginning of plural marriage in the Church, the end of the practice was gradual and incremental, a process filled with difficulties and uncertainties.

14. The Manifesto declared President Woodruff’s intention to submit to the laws of the United States, and new plural marriages within that jurisdiction largely came to an end. But a small number of plural marriages continued to be performed in Mexico and Canada, under the sanction of some Church leaders. As a rule, these marriages were not promoted by Church leaders and were difficult to get approved. Either one or both of the spouses who entered into these unions typically had to agree to remain in Canada or Mexico. On an exceptional basis, a smaller number of plural marriages were performed within the United States between the years 1890 and 1904.

15. The Church’s role in these marriages became a subject of intense public debate after Reed Smoot, an Apostle, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1903. At the April 1904 general conference, Church President Joseph F. Smith issued a forceful statement, known as the Second Manifesto, making new plural marriages punishable by excommunication.¹⁰ Since President Smith’s day, Church Presidents have repeatedly emphasized that the Church and its members are no longer authorized to enter into plural marriage and have underscored the sincerity of their words by urging local leaders to bring noncompliant members before Church disciplinary councils.

Conclusion

16. Plural marriage was among the most challenging aspects of the Restoration. For many who practiced it, plural marriage was a trial of faith. It violated both cultural and legal norms, leading to persecution and revilement. Despite these hardships, plural marriage benefited the Church in innumerable ways. Through the lineage of these 19th-century Saints have come many Latter-day Saints who have been faithful to their gospel covenants as righteous mothers and fathers; loyal disciples of Jesus Christ; devoted Church members, leaders, and missionaries; and good citizens and prominent public officials. Modern Latter-day Saints honor and respect these faithful pioneers who gave so much for their faith, families, and community.

Resources

Doctrine and Covenants 132:34–38; Jacob 2:30; see also Genesis 16.
Doctrine and Covenants 132:7. The Church President periodically set apart others to perform plural marriages.
Jacob 2:30.
1 Peter 2:9; see also Jacob 1:8; Acts 5:41.
Doctrine and Covenants 112:30; 124:41; 128:18.
See Doctrine and Covenants 132:1, 34–38.
Doctrine and Covenants 132:7; 131:2–3.
Official Declaration 1; “Official Declaration,” Deseret Evening News, Sept. 25, 1890.
Isaiah 28:10, 13; see also 2 Nephi 28:30; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12.
“Official Statement by President Joseph F. Smith,” Deseret Evening News, Apr. 6, 1904, 1.

Preparation for Eternal Marriage

7. Dating and Courtship

7.1 - Choosing and Being the Right Spouse

Thomas B. Holman
Ensign, September 2002



1. Prophetic counsel teaches us that finding a marriage partner takes spiritual sensitivity, maturity, and preparation—including preparing ourselves to be the right spouse.

2. President Gordon B. Hinckley has counseled that marriage “will be the most important decision of your life. . . . Marry the right person in the right place at the right time.” [1](#) But who is the right person? Where is the right place? When is the right time?

3. Fortunately, President Hinckley and other Church leaders have given us inspired counsel concerning these questions. Moreover, some 60 years of research confirms the wisdom of their counsel.

4. The right place is, of course, the temple. “There is no substitute for marrying in the temple,” counsels President Hinckley. “It is the only place under the heavens where marriage can be solemnized for eternity. Don’t cheat yourself. Don’t cheat your companion. Don’t shortchange your lives.” [2](#)

5. But how to find the right person?

6. We sometimes are given false expectations by movies, plays, and fiction based on the idea that there is a “one-and-only” somewhere out there whom we are intended to marry. This would mean that finding a mate is simply a matter of waiting to lock eyes with the right someone “across a crowded room,” as the song in *South Pacific* says, [3](#) heading off hand in hand to the closest temple and then living happily ever after. No matter how romantic this idea is, it is not supported by prophetic counsel. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught: “‘Soul mates’ are fiction and an illusion; and while every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price.” [4](#)

The Right Person

7. Many of us have the mote and beam problem (see [Matt. 7:3–5](#))—that is, we can easily see the faults of others, but not our own. So before we start holding others up to scrutiny to see if they are worthy of us, maybe we ought to work first on becoming a “right person” for someone else. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles offered this counsel: “If the choice is between reforming other Church members [including fiancés, spouses, and children] or ourselves, is there really any question about where we should begin? The key is to have our eyes wide open to our own faults and partially closed to the faults of others—not the other way around! The imperfections of others never release us from the need to work on our own shortcomings.” [5](#) Therefore, when we focus on finding the right person, we should also focus on becoming the right person for someone else. The strengths we bring to a marriage will undoubtedly contribute to the success of the marriage.

8. The first quality many young people look for in a potential spouse is someone with whom they can “fall in love,” which often means someone for whom they feel a strong physical attraction. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “The right person is someone for whom the natural and wholesome and normal affection that should exist does exist.” But he went on to add, “It is the person who is living so that he or she can go to the temple of God and make the covenants that we there make.” [6](#)

9. Being “in love” and attracted to a person is a good start, but clearly not enough. President Gordon B. Hinckley and Elder [Richard G. Scott](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have suggested several other factors we should keep in mind.

10. “Choose a companion of your own faith. You are much more likely to be happy,” said President Hinckley. “Choose a companion you can always honor, you can always respect, one who will complement you in your own life, one to whom you can give your entire heart, your entire love, your entire allegiance, your entire loyalty.” [7](#)

11. Elder Scott suggested several attributes of a potential spouse that will contribute to happiness in marriage: “a deep love of the Lord and of His commandments, a determination to live them, one that

is kindly understanding, forgiving of others, and willing to give of self, with the desire to have a [family](#) crowned with beautiful children and a commitment to teach them the principles of truth in the home.” [8](#)

Some Factors to Consider

12. More than 60 years of research studies bear out the truth of these inspired recommendations by priesthood leaders. So do my personal experience and observation through years of teaching university classes about good marriage relationships. Research suggests several areas that we need to look at in choosing a spouse [9](#) if we want to have the greatest chance of success in marriage. These are the individual attributes and deeply held values of the person, the quality of the relationship we are able to build with that person, the person’s background, and the things in our own lives that affect our decisions. Let’s consider each of these.

13. First, we need to know a lot about the person we are thinking of marrying. As Elder Scott suggested, the person’s beliefs about family life are very important. Research confirms that the more a potential spouse values marriage and family life, the better that marriage can be. Studies show also that the kind of person President Hinckley advises seeking—someone to honor, respect, and give our whole heart to, someone who inspires love, allegiance, and loyalty—will usually have good mental and emotional health, including maturity, self-control, and a healthy sense of self-respect.

14. The self-respect that prepares one well for marriage is not, as President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) said, “an abnormally developed self-esteem that becomes haughtiness, conceit, or arrogance, but a righteous self-respect that might be defined as ‘belief in one’s own worth, worth to God, and worth to man.’” [10](#) One young wife’s comments about her husband illustrate how a poor sense of self-worth can harm a marriage. “I love him and I hope he will change. He has poor self-esteem. In any discussion of problems in our relationship, he puts up defenses and throws everything back on me or says he is worthless.”

15. Two immature behaviors are impulsive spending and losing one’s temper. One young woman broke up with a young man after she observed his problem in controlling his anger. She said to me: “He had a bad temper, and he was power oriented and controlling. I really thought that he would abuse me or my children if I married him.”

16. There is a need to find a person not only of good character but also one with whom we can have a good relationship. The way we communicate in dating and courtship is a key to building a solid marital relationship. Sincere, positive communication practiced in dating and courtship increases the likelihood of greater commitment, better conflict resolution, and more love between partners in marriage.

17. Good communication begins with a righteous heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” ([Matt. 12:34](#)). On the other hand, communication from a selfish heart is generally just manipulation. Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “If we would know true love and understanding one for another, we must realize that communication is more than a sharing of words. It is the wise sharing of emotions, feelings, and concerns. It is the sharing of oneself totally.” [11](#)

18. Steve and Linda, who divorced after five years of marriage, realized this on looking back. Linda said it this way: “We had problems, I think, from the time we started dating. Neither of us is really good at communicating. I think I am a little better now than when we were dating. But neither one of us discussed our thoughts and feelings; we would get full of anger and neither one of us would talk.”

The Effect of Heritage

19. In addition to weighing a potential spouse’s character and our ability to create a good couple relationship with that person, we need to consider past and present family relationships. President David O. McKay (1873–1970) taught, “In choosing a companion, it is necessary to study the disposition, the inheritance, and training of the one with whom you are contemplating making life’s journey.” [12](#)

20. Both research studies and experience show the wisdom of President McKay’s counsel. Good family environments and family relationships tend to lead to good quality marriages by the children; poor family environments and family relationships often foreshadow poor marriages by the children from these homes. Young adults from divorced families, for example, may experience some depression and anger and have trouble trusting or committing to others as a result of the trauma of parental divorce. Whether their parents divorced or not, some individuals may have been exposed to poor models of communication and conflict resolution in their families. Children from families that were emotionally cold and distant, chaotic, dangerous, unpredictable, detached, full of

conflict, or where addictions or violence were chronic problems may need special help in overcoming such an upbringing.

21. Fortunately, however, our backgrounds do not have to control the outcome of our lives or our marriages. While we can do little to change our “gene pool,” we can choose how to respond to the events and conditions of our upbringing, and courtship is one of the most opportune times to do so. President McKay also said: “In our early youth, our environment is largely determined for us, but ... in courtship and marriage we can modify, aye, can control to a very great extent, our environment. Morally speaking, we can carve the very atmosphere in which we live.” [13](#)

22. Even if we came from a less-than-perfect family environment, we are not doomed to suffer the consequences of our parents’ iniquities “unto the third and fourth generation” ([Deut. 5:9](#)). The very scriptures that warn of wickedness being passed on unto the third and fourth generation also show the way out of a troubled family background. [Doctrine and Covenants](#) 124:50 [[D&C 124:50](#)], for example, tells us that the iniquities of the fathers will be visited upon the head of the children “so long as they [the children] repent not, and hate me.” Thus repentance and loving the Lord help free us from the sins of our parents.

23. The [Book of Mormon](#) is also full of examples of how to deal with parental influences. It talks about these influences in terms of “the traditions of their fathers” ([Alma 9:17](#)). The story of the Lamanites who responded to the teaching of Ammon and his brethren is a powerful example of a people who overcame generations of wicked traditions. In brief, the Book of Mormon teaches us that we can overcome these negative effects by having faith in the Lord, allowing ourselves to be taught by inspired leaders, learning the lessons of the scriptures, suffering in patience the afflictions that parents may have brought upon us, and repenting of any of the unrighteous habits and behaviors we may have picked up (see [Mosiah 1:5](#); [Alma 9:16–17](#); [Alma 17:9, 15](#); [Alma 25:6](#); [Hel. 15:7](#)).

It is important to have family and friends on our side and supportive of the upcoming marriage, Elder Richard L. Evans (1906–71) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles advised. “Don’t let this choice [of a marriage partner] ever be made except with earnest, searching, prayerful consideration, confiding in parents, [and] in faithful, mature, trustworthy friends.” [14](#) Loving parents who genuinely want the best for us, and “faithful, mature, trustworthy friends,” can often

act as a sounding board and counsel us on how best to proceed.

The Right Time

24. President Hinckley offered this counsel about timing: “I hope you will not put off marriage too long. I do not speak so much to the young women as to the young men whose prerogative and responsibility it is to take the lead in this matter. Don’t go on endlessly in a frivolous dating game. Look for a choice companion, one you can love, honor, and respect, and make a decision.” [15](#)

25. Waiting too long is clearly ill advised. But jumping into marriage too quickly can also be a problem. President Lee advised that a young man not think of marriage until he is able to take care of a family of his own, to be independent. “He must make sure that he has found the girl of his choice, they have gone together long enough that they know each other, and that they know each other’s faults and they still love each other. ... Brethren, think more seriously about the obligations of marriage for those who bear the holy priesthood at a time when marriage should be the expectation of every man who understands [his] responsibility.” [16](#) Women also need to wait until they are mature enough to assume the responsibilities of a wife and mother, without waiting too long while pursuing less important things.

Making the Decision

26. After thoughtfully and prayerfully considering all of these factors, we must be sure the decision we make is based on inspiration, not infatuation or desperation. As we seek a spiritual confirmation, we need to keep at least five things in mind.

27. First, we must be worthy to receive the inspiration we need.

28. Second, we must understand the balance between agency and inspiration. As Elder McConkie taught, “We make our own choices, and then we present the matter to the Lord and get his approving, ratifying seal.” [17](#) The experience of one young man illustrates this: “There are two things in my life that I’ve always felt would be important: a career and marriage. Yet at the time I didn’t feel like I was getting a response. I prayed, ‘Heavenly Father, this is so important, I need to know whether or not it’s right.’ Then toward the end of our courtship, I went to the temple. I was so frustrated because I wasn’t getting an answer either way. After praying and waiting for an answer, I got more frustrated and gave up. That was when an impression came to me: ‘You already know the

answer.’ Then I realized that God had answered my prayers. The decision to marry Becky always made sense and felt right. I can see now that God had been telling me in my heart and in my mind that it was a good decision. And later, at the time of the ceremony, I had another confirmation that what I was doing was right.”

29. Third, we may seek several witnesses if we feel the need for additional confirmation. Sometimes we may have difficulty distinguishing between spiritual impressions and our own emotions, desires, or fears. A spiritual witness may be confirmed again in various ways. In His infinite love, mercy, and patience, our Heavenly Father is generous with His counsel and response to His children.

30. Fourth, we can learn to discern the differences between inspiration, infatuation, and desperation. Inspiration, as we have already seen, comes when one is living worthily, exercises agency righteously, and studies the situation out carefully. It can be confirmed by multiple spiritual enlightenments and peaceful feelings (see [D&C 6:15, 22–23](#)). Infatuation is usually manifest by an immature “love” that includes great anxiety, possessiveness, selfishness, clinging, and overdependence; this may be more likely with individuals who lack emotional and spiritual maturity. Desperation is often associated with social or cultural circumstances that create an atmosphere (at least in the person’s mind) of “now or never”; pressure from peers, family, or cultural norms may lead to an unwise decision. A desire to get away from an unpleasant family situation or fear of failure in school or work can cause someone to look desperately to marriage as a way out of a problem. Such fears and anxieties often speak so loudly in our minds that we cannot hear the still, small whisperings of the Holy Spirit.

31. Fifth, the spiritual confirmation needs to come to both parties involved. A person should not feel that if his or her prospective partner receives a confirmation, he or she is therefore released from the necessity of seeking a similar personal confirmation. Elder [Dallin H. Oaks](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has discussed this issue: “If a revelation is outside the limits of stewardship, you know it is not from the Lord, and you are not bound by it. I have heard of cases where a young man told a young woman she should marry him because he had received a revelation that she was to be his eternal companion. If this is a true revelation, it will be confirmed directly to the woman if she seeks to know. In the meantime, she is under no obligation to heed it. She should seek her own guidance and make up her own mind. The man can

receive revelation to guide his own actions, but he cannot properly receive revelation to direct hers. She is outside his stewardship.” [18](#)

32. Not long ago, my wife, Linda, and I were reminiscing about our courtship, and as I looked back, it seemed to me that I had been immature and inexperienced. I asked how she had dared to marry me. Her simple answer was, “I saw potential.”

33. In that same vein, as we search for a mate with whom we can spend the eternities, we would do well to remember Elder Scott’s counsel to recognize potential for growth: “I suggest that you not ignore many possible candidates who are still developing these attributes, seeking the one who is perfected in them. You will likely not find that perfect person, and if you did, there would certainly be no interest in you. These attributes are best polished together as husband and wife.” [19](#)

Notes

1. “Life’s Obligations,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1999, 2.
2. *Ensign*, Feb. 1999, 2.
3. Oscar Hammerstein II, “Some Enchanted Evening,” 1949.
4. *Marriage and Divorce* (1976), 16.
5. “A Brother Offended,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 39.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1955, 13.
7. *Ensign*, Feb. 1999, 2.
8. “Receive the Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 26.
9. Thomas B. Holman and others, *Premarital Prediction of Marital Quality and Break Up* (2001), 13.
10. *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (1974), 7.
11. “Family Communications,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 52.
12. *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 459.
13. *Gospel Ideals*, 462.
14. “This You Can Count On,” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1969, 73.
15. “Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1990, 6.
16. “President Harold B. Lee’s General Priesthood Address,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 100.
17. “Agency or Inspiration?” *New Era*, Jan. 1975, 42.
18. “Revelation,” in *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 1981(1982), 25.
19. *Ensign*, May 1999, 26.

7.2 - Dating Advice From Prophets And Apostles

New Era, April 2010

1. You know there is wise and wonderful counsel on dating standards in *For the Strength of Youth*. This inspired pamphlet from the First Presidency is a great resource as you prepare for and begin dating. Below you will find additional insights from prophets and apostles about whom, why, when, and how you should date.

Choosing Whom to Date

2. “You young people ... have an important responsibility in choosing not only whom you will date but also whom you will marry. President Gordon B. Hinckley admonished: ‘Your chances for a happy and lasting marriage will be far greater if you will date those who are active and faithful in the Church.’” (“Four B’s for Boys,” Ensign, Nov. 1981, 41.)

3. President [Thomas S. Monson](#), “Whom Shall I Marry?” New Era, Oct 2004, 4–6.

4. “While you should be friendly with all people, select with great care those whom you wish to have close to you. They will be your safeguards in situations where you may vacillate between choices, and you in turn may save them.”

5. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” New Era, Jan. 2001, 11.

6. “In a dating and courtship relationship, I would not have you spend five minutes with someone who belittles you, who is constantly critical of you, who is cruel at your expense and may even call it humor.”

7. Elder [Jeffrey R. Holland](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “How Do I Love Thee?” New Era, Oct. 2003, 6.

Good Reasons to Date

8. “Simple and more frequent dates allow both men and women to ‘shop around’ in a way that allows extensive evaluation of the prospects. The old-fashioned date was a wonderful way to get acquainted with a member of the opposite sex. It encouraged conversation. It allowed you to see how you treat others and how you are treated in a one-on-one situation. It gave opportunities to learn how to initiate and sustain a mature relationship. None of that happens in hanging out.”

9. Elder [Dallin H. Oaks](#), “Dating versus Hanging Out” Ensign, June 2006, 13.

General Counsel on Dating

10. “When you are old enough, you ought to start dating. It is good for young men and young women to learn to know and to appreciate one another. It is good for you to go to games and dances and picnics, to do all of the young things. We encourage our young people to date. We encourage you to set high standards of dating.

11. “When are you old enough? Maturity may vary from individual to individual, but we are convinced that dating should not even begin until you are 16. And

then, ideal dating is on a group basis. Stay in group activities; don’t pair off. Avoid steady dating. Steady dating is courtship, and surely the beginning of courtship ought to be delayed until you have emerged from your teens.”

12. President [Boyd K. Packer](#), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “You’re in the Driver’s Seat,” New Era, June 2004, 8.

13. “The Lord has made us attractive one to another for a great purpose. But this very attraction becomes as a powder keg unless it is kept under control. It is beautiful when handled in the right way. It is deadly if it gets out of hand.

14. “It is for this reason that the Church counsels against early dating. This rule is not designed to hurt you in any way. It is designed to help you, and it will do so if you will observe it.

15. “Steady dating at an early age leads so often to tragedy. Studies have shown that the longer a boy and girl date one another, the more likely they are to get into trouble.

16. “It is better, my friends, to date a variety of companions until you are ready to marry. Have a wonderful time, but stay away from familiarity. Keep your hands to yourself. It may not be easy, but it is possible.”

17. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” New Era, Jan. 2001, 13.

Be Careful

18. “Be careful to go to places where there is a good environment, where you won’t be faced with temptation. ...

19. “... Because sexual intimacy is so sacred, the Lord requires self-control and purity before marriage, as well as full fidelity after marriage. In dating, treat your date with respect, and expect your date to show that same respect for you.”

20. President [Thomas S. Monson](#), “That We May Touch Heaven,” Ensign, Nov. 1990, 45, 47.

21. “Kissing has ... degenerated to develop and express lust instead of affection, honor, and admiration. To kiss in casual dating is asking for trouble. What do kisses mean when given out like pretzels and robbed of sacredness?”

22. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 281.

23. “In dating relationships with the opposite sex, making a wrong choice early may limit making the right choice later.”

24. President James E. Faust (1920–2007), *Second Counselor in the First Presidency*, “Where Do I Make My Stand?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 21.

25. “Any dating or pairing off in social contacts should be postponed until at least the age of 16 or older, and even then there should still be much judgment used in selections and in the seriousness. Young people should still limit the close contacts for several years, since the boy will be going on his mission when he is 19 years old.

26. “Dating and especially steady dating in the early teens is most hazardous. It distorts the whole picture of life. It deprives the youth of worthwhile and rich experiences; it limits friendships; it reduces the acquaintance which can be so valuable in selecting a partner for time and eternity.”

27. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), “President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 96.

Safety in Standards

28. “How foolish is the youth who feels that the Church is a fence around love to keep him out. Oh, youth, if you could know! The requirements of the Church are the highway to love and to happiness, with guardrails securely in place, with guideposts plainly marked, and with help along the way.

29. “How unfortunate to resent counsel and restraint. How fortunate are you who follow the standards of the Church, even if just from sheer obedience or habit. You will find a rapture and a joy fulfilled.”

30. President [Boyd K. Packer](#), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “You’re in the Driver’s Seat,” *New Era*, June 2004, 6.

The Culmination of Dating

31. “Do you want capability, safety, and security in dating and romance, in married life and eternity? Be a true disciple of Jesus. Be a genuine, committed, word-and-deed Latter-day Saint. Believe that your faith has everything to do with your romance, because it does. You separate dating from discipleship at your peril. [Jesus Christ](#), the Light of the World, is the only lamp by which you can successfully see the path of love and

happiness. How should I love thee? As He does, for that way ‘never faileth.’”

32. Elder [Jeffrey R. Holland](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “How Do I Love Thee?” *New Era*, Oct. 2003, 8.

33. “I would admonish you to maintain an eternal perspective. Make certain that the marriage in your future is a temple marriage. There is no scene so sweet, no time so sacred as that very special day of your marriage. Then and there you glimpse celestial joy. Be alert; do not permit temptation to rob you of this blessing.”

34. President [Thomas S. Monson](#), “Whom Shall I Marry?” *New Era*, Oct 2004, 6.

35. A Kiss before the First Date?

36. The first day I saw Frances, I knew I’d found the right one. The Lord brought us together later, and I asked her to go out with me. I went to her home to call on her. She introduced me, and her father said, “‘Monson’—that’s a Swedish name, isn’t it?”

37. I said, “Yes.”

38. He said, “Good.”

39. Then he went into another room and brought out a picture of two missionaries with their top hats and their copies of the [Book of Mormon](#).

40. “Are you related to this Monson,” he said, “Elias Monson?”

41. I said, “Yes, he’s my grandfather’s brother. He too was a missionary in Sweden.”

42. Her father wept. He wept easily. He said, “He and his companion were the missionaries who taught the gospel to my mother and my father and all of my brothers and sisters and to me.” He kissed me on the cheek. And then her mother cried, and she kissed me on the other cheek. And then I looked around for Frances. She said, “I’ll go get my coat.”

43. President [Thomas S. Monson](#), “Abundantly Blessed,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 111.

7.3 - Dating Versus Hanging Out

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, June 2006



1. In his address at the BYU spring 2005 commencement exercise, Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Seventy referred to an article in a recent issue of *Time* magazine. It states that the years from 18 to 25 have become “a distinct and

separate life stage, a strange, transitional never-never land between adolescence and adulthood in which people stall for a few extra years, [postponing] ... adult responsibility.” The article describes these transitional individuals as “permanent adolescents, ... twenty something Peter Pans.” ¹ Putting this analysis in terms more familiar to his audience of BYU graduates and their families, Elder Tingey spoke of “the indecision some college graduates have in ... accepting the responsibilities of marriage and [family](#).” ²

2. This tendency to postpone adult responsibilities, including marriage and family, is surely visible among our Latter-day Saint young adults. The average age at marriage has increased in the last few decades, and the number of children born to LDS married couples has decreased. It is timely to share some concerns about some current practices in the relationships of young LDS singles in North America.

3. Knowledgeable observers report that dating has nearly disappeared from college campuses and among young adults generally. It has been replaced by something called “hanging out.” ³ You young people apparently know what this is, but I will describe it for the benefit of those of us who are middle-aged or older and otherwise uninformed. Hanging out consists of numbers of young men and young women joining together in some group activity. It is very different from dating.

4. For the benefit of some of you who are not middle-aged or older, I also may need to describe what dating is. Unlike hanging out, dating is not a team sport. Dating is pairing off to experience the kind of one-on-one association and temporary commitment that can lead to marriage in some rare and treasured cases.

5. What has made dating an endangered species? I am not sure, but I can see some contributing factors:

1. The cultural tides in our world run strongly against commitments in family relationships. For example, divorce has been made legally easy, and

childbearing has become unpopular. These pressures against commitments obviously serve the devil’s opposition to the Father’s plan for His children. That plan relies on covenants or commitments kept. Whatever draws us away from commitments weakens our capacity to participate in the plan. Dating involves commitments, if only for a few hours. Hanging out requires no commitments, at least not for the men if the women provide the food and shelter.

2. The leveling effect of the women’s movement has contributed to discourage dating. As women’s options have increased and some women have become more aggressive, some men have become reluctant to take traditional male initiatives, such as asking for dates, lest they be thought to qualify for the dreaded label “male chauvinist.”

3. Hanging out is glamorized on TV programs about singles.

4. The meaning and significance of a “date” has also changed in such a way as to price dating out of the market. I saw this trend beginning among our younger children. For whatever reason, high school boys felt they had to do something elaborate or bizarre to ask for a date, especially for an event like a prom, and girls felt they had to do likewise to accept. In addition, a date had to be something of an expensive production. I saw some of this on the BYU campus during the ’70s. I remember seeing one couple having a dinner catered by friends on the median strip between lanes of traffic just south of the BYU football stadium.

6. All of this made dating more difficult. And the more elaborate and expensive the date, the fewer the dates. As dates become fewer and more elaborate, this seems to create an expectation that a date implies seriousness or continuing commitment. That expectation discourages dating even more. Gone is the clumsy and inexpensive phone call your parents and grandparents and I used to make. That call went something like this: “What’re ya doin’ tonight? How about a movie?” Or, “How about taking a walk downtown?” Cheap dates like that can be frequent and nonthreatening, since they don’t seem to imply a continuing commitment.

7. Simple and more frequent dates allow both men and women to “shop around” in a way that allows extensive evaluation of the prospects. The old-fashioned date was a wonderful way to get acquainted with a member of the opposite sex. It encouraged conversation. It allowed you to see how you treat

others and how you are treated in a one-on-one situation. It gave opportunities to learn how to initiate and sustain a mature relationship. None of that happens in hanging out.

8. My single brothers and sisters, follow the simple dating pattern and you don't need to do your looking through Internet chat rooms or dating services—two alternatives that can be very dangerous or at least unnecessary or ineffective.

9. There is another possible contributing factor to the demise of dating and the prominence of the culture of hanging out. For many years the Church has counseled young people not to date before age 16. Perhaps some young adults, especially men, have carried that wise counsel to excess and determined not to date before 26 or maybe even 36.

10. Men, if you have returned from your mission and you are still following the boy-girl patterns you were counseled to follow when you were 15, it is time for you to grow up. Gather your courage and look for someone to pair off with. Start with a variety of dates with a variety of young women, and when that phase yields a good prospect, proceed to courtship. It's marriage time. That is what the Lord intends for His young adult sons and daughters. Men have the initiative, and you men should get on with it. If you don't know what a date is, perhaps this definition will help. I heard it from my 18-year-old granddaughter. A "date" must pass the test of three p's: (1) planned ahead, (2) paid for, and (3) paired off.

11. Young women, resist too much hanging out, and encourage dates that are simple, inexpensive, and frequent. Don't make it easy for young men to hang out in a setting where you women provide the food. Don't subsidize freeloaders. An occasional group activity is OK, but when you see men who make hanging out their primary interaction with the opposite sex, I think you should lock the pantry and bolt the front door.

12. If you do this, you should also hang up a sign, "Will open for individual dates," or something like that. And, young women, please make it easier for these shy males to ask for a simple, inexpensive date. Part of making it easier is to avoid implying that a date is something very serious. If we are to persuade young men to ask for dates more frequently, we must establish a mutual expectation that to go on a date is not to imply a continuing commitment. Finally, young women, if you turn down a date, be kind. Otherwise you may crush a nervous and shy questioner and

destroy him as a potential dater, and that could hurt some other sister.

13. My single young friends, we counsel you to channel your associations with the opposite sex into dating patterns that have the potential to mature into marriage, not hanging-out patterns that only have the prospect to mature into team sports like touch football. Marriage is not a group activity—at least, not until the children come along in goodly numbers.

14. Up to this point I have concentrated primarily on the responsibilities of single men. Now I have a few words for single women.

15. If you are just marking time waiting for a marriage prospect, stop waiting. You may never have the opportunity for a suitable marriage in this life, so stop waiting and start moving. Prepare yourself for life—even a single life—by education, experience, and planning. Don't wait for happiness to be thrust upon you. Seek it out in service and learning. Make a life for yourself. And trust in the Lord. Follow King Benjamin's advice to call "on the name of the Lord daily, and [stand] steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come" ([Mosiah 4:11](#)).

16. Now, single sisters, I have an expert witness to invite to the stand at this time. It is my wife, Kristen, who, as an adult, was single for about 35 years before we married. I am asking her to come up and tell us what is in her heart.

17. Sister Kristen Oaks: Thank you, Elder Oaks. I was married in my middle 50s, and I feel like I'm becoming the poster girl for "old."

18. Before I start, I feel to tell you how much you are loved by your Heavenly Father. We are in Oakland, and I've just been to the visitors' center across the way with President Robert Bauman of the mission. We saw the Christus and the video Special Witnesses of Christ, and they went into my heart.

19. This is your time. Make it count by dedicating your time to your Heavenly Father.

20. I love what President [Boyd K. Packer](#) says about the Atonement. The Atonement is not something that happens at the end of our lives. It is something that happens every day of our lives. And so I say to our single sisters, make it count.

21. It can be very painful to be single for such a long time, especially in a church of families. I know how it feels. On my 50th birthday my brother-in-law was reading the newspaper. He said, "Hey, it says here in the paper that at age 50 your chances for getting killed

by terrorists are better than your chances for getting married.” I knew that dating was tough when he said that, but don’t give up. It isn’t a terrorist activity.

22. I would also say to you, be balanced. As a single woman, I had to go forward. I got a doctorate and became so involved in my profession that I forgot about being a good person. I would say to everyone in this room, always remember that your first calling is as a mother or as a father. Develop those domestic talents, talents of love and talents of service. As a single, I had to go searching for service projects, and now I have one every night across the table. I’m so thankful for that.

23. In closing, I think about the painful times in our lives. They will happen whether you are single or whether you are married. You may have a child who is very ill or experience the death of someone close to you or have a period of life that is very lonely. You may lose a child or have a situation you have no control over, such as a lingering disease. I would ask you to consecrate that to Heavenly Father. In [Helaman 3:35](#) we read that if we yield our hearts unto God, all our actions serve to sanctify us, and so any time becomes a blessed time.

24. You are my favorite group in the world. You are most dear to me because I know what it feels like to be in your shoes. I was in them for a very long time.

25. I want you to know that this is the Church of the living God, The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints. It is His Church. I’m so thankful that we have a living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. And most of all, I know that we have a Heavenly Father who loves us, as He was my best friend when there was no one else to love me. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

26. Elder [Dallin H. Oaks](#): Thank you, Kristen. Now, brothers and sisters, if you are troubled about something we have just said, please listen very carefully to what I will say now. Perhaps you are a young man feeling pressured by what I have said about the need to start a pattern of dating that can lead to marriage, or you are a young woman troubled by what we have said about needing to get on with your life.

27. If you feel you are a special case, so that the strong counsel I have given doesn’t apply to you, please don’t write me a letter. Why would I make this request? I have learned that the kind of direct counsel I have given results in a large number of letters from members who feel they are an exception, and they

want me to confirm that the things I have said just don’t apply to them in their special circumstance.

28. I will explain why I can’t offer much comfort in response to that kind of letter by telling you an experience I had with another person who was troubled by a general rule. I gave a talk in which I mentioned the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” ([Ex. 20:13](#)). Afterward a man came up to me in tears saying that what I had said showed there was no hope for him. “What do you mean?” I asked him.

29. He explained that he had been a machine gunner during the Korean War. During a frontal assault, his machine gun mowed down scores of enemy infantry. Their bodies were piled so high in front of his gun that he and his men had to push them away in order to maintain their field of fire. He had killed a hundred, he said, and now he must be going to hell because I had spoken of the Lord’s commandment “Thou shalt not kill.”

30. The explanation I gave that man is the same explanation I give to you if you feel you are an exception to what I have said. As a General Authority, I have the responsibility to preach general principles. When I do, I don’t try to define all the exceptions. There are exceptions to some rules. For example, we believe the commandment is not violated by killing pursuant to a lawful order in an armed conflict. But don’t ask me to give an opinion on your exception. I only teach the general rules. Whether an exception applies to you is your responsibility. You must work that out individually between you and the Lord.

31. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) taught this same thing in another way. When he was asked how he governed such a diverse group of Saints, he said, “I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves.” [4](#) In what I have just said, I am simply teaching correct principles and inviting each one of you to act upon these principles by governing yourself.

32. Brothers and sisters, I pray that the things that have been said this evening will be carried into your hearts and understood by the power of the [Holy Ghost](#) with the same intent that they have been uttered, which is to bless your lives, to give comfort to the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable.

33. This is the Church of Jesus Christ. He suffered and He died in the terrible agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary in order to give us the assurance of [immortality](#) and the opportunity for eternal life. I pray that the Lord will bless each of us as we seek to keep the commandments of the Lord, to set our sights ever

higher, and to accomplish in our day-to-day decisions what I've called the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. This is the Church of Jesus Christ, restored in these latter days, with the power of the priesthood and the fulness of His gospel. Of that I bear witness.

Notes

1. Lev Grossman, "Grow Up? Not So Fast," Time, Jan. 24, 2005, 44, 42.
2. Brigham Young University commencement address, Apr. 21, 2005.
3. See Bruce A. Chadwick, "Hanging Out, Hooking Up, and Celestial Marriage," in Brigham Young University 2002–2003 Speeches (2003), 1–8.
4. Quoted in John Taylor, "The Organization of the Church," Millennial Star, Nov. 15, 1851, 339.

7.4 - Finding Your Sweetheart

Elder Lynn G. Robbins

Brigham Young University-Idaho, February 2002



1. I'm grateful to be here at BYU–Idaho with President and Sister Bednar and each one of you to speak at today's devotional. When I received this assignment from the First Presidency asking me to speak two days before

Valentine's Day, I'll bet you can't guess what topic I chose for my speech. I'm grateful for Valentine's Day and that my valentine is here with me today.

2. Valentine traditions are fun. As we explore some of them today, I pray that you will gain some new insights and understanding that will both help you in finding your eternal sweetheart and in enriching the life you share together afterwards.

3. There is nothing more powerful than love, nothing so motivating or that touches so many lives. There have doubtless been more books written, more movies made, and more songs sung about love and falling in love than any other topic and, perhaps, all other topics combined. Finding your eternal valentine is the ultimate treasure hunt.

4. "The Lord has ordained that we should marry," President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, "that we shall live together in love and peace and harmony The time will come when you will fall in love. It will occupy all of your thoughts and be the stuff of which your dreams are made You will know no greater happiness than that found in your home The truest mark of your success in life will be the quality of your marriage This choice will be the most important of all the choices you make in your life" [\(1\)](#) (emphasis added).

5. If you were to ask a child to draw a valentine, what shape would the child draw? If you are thinking of a heart, you came up with the same answer that I did. Why a heart? Well, one reason might be for the artists, songwriters, and poets. In old versions of the Bible the word "bowel" was often used to depict love, such as in "let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men." [\(2\)](#) Can you imagine the headache for songwriters if the word "heart" had not replaced the word "bowel"? For example, "I left my bowels in San Francisco . . ."

6. Back to the question: Why the heart as a symbol? Is love something exclusively of the heart--a feeling? Another valentine tradition or drawing that we often see with the heart is Cupid with a bow and arrow. Why? Is love something that you are smitten with, something that strikes you like Cupid's arrow without any say so? Is it a game of chance like the tradition of the daisy--he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, HE LOVES ME!!? These are all interesting traditions that lead people into thinking that love is not a choice, that agency plays no role in matters of love.

7. If we live in a world of agency wouldn't it make sense that the most important decision made in mortality would be our choice and not left in Cupid's hands?

8. Somewhere in the history of the English language the expression "fall in love" began to be used to describe the Cupid experience. While it is a beautiful idiom, there was inherent risk involved in selecting the verb fall because it mostly means accidental, involuntary, with no choice involved. And subtly, it has also led to the use of its distressing corollary, "We fell out of love," an all too common phrase used nowadays as an excuse for a failed marriage. "Falling in love" and "falling out of love" are phrases that make love sound like something out of our control.

9. Many who feel they are falling out of love with their spouse throw their hands up in resignation as if they were victims of an outside influence that controls them. They begin to wonder, "Do I really want to be married to this man (or woman) for eternity?" Having fallen out of love, as they suppose, they begin to drift apart, often saying things to hurt one another. "I don't love you anymore" is a common assertion. They tolerate one another for the children's sake, resenting one another; or they separate, believing their differences to be irreconcilable. The result is a damaged or destroyed family, another casualty of Satan's assault on the home.

10. How could something so glorious and beautiful as falling in love end up in misery for so many marriages? What goes wrong?

11. Perhaps you've heard the marketing phrase that "people buy on emotion and then later try and justify their purchase with facts"--or purchasing with their heart and not their head. That kind of purchasing often leads to what is known as "buyers remorse."

Sometimes that happens with love. For some people, falling in love is a magical encounter, something that seems to happen at first sight, like that scene in the movie Bambi where Thumper becomes "twitterpated" at the first sight of a beautiful little bunny rabbit. He is instantly smitten by her lovely charm, his eyes become glazed over and dilate to twice their normal size in a hypnotic, enamored stare and his little rabbit's foot begins to thump the ground at 90 miles and hour. You also see a huge smile of contentment emerge on his face that even the cartoonists can't erase. Bambi similarly becomes twitterpated with a beautiful young doe named Faline. I think cartoons may be able to illustrate love at first sight better than poets.

12. For others, it isn't so much "falling in love" as it is "rising in love." Their love is a growing affinity and attraction toward another, like budding blossoms that flower into a beautiful bouquet. Though the "Thumper/Bambi" love at first sight may also "rise" and bloom like the second, it is often merely glandular, a cotton candy kind of love that has no substance and later dissolves away leaving nothing but decay and one more divorce statistic.

13. On the other hand, "divine" love, as President Spencer W. Kimball called it, "is not like that association of the world which is misnamed love, but which is mostly physical attraction. When marriage is based on this only, the parties soon tire of each other. There is a break and a divorce, and a new fresher physical attraction comes with another marriage, which in turn may last only until it too becomes stale. The love of which the Lord speaks is not only physical attraction, but also faith, confidence, understanding and partnership. It is devotion and companionship, parenthood, common ideals and standards. It is cleanliness of life and sacrifice and unselfishness. This kind of love never tires nor wanes. It lives on through sickness and sorrow, through prosperity and privation, through accomplishment and disappointment, through time and eternity." (3)

14. Many popular songs and films make reference to loving forever or an everlasting love. For the world, these lyrics are simply poetic; for us, they are genuine expressions of our divine potential. We believe that eternal love, eternal marriage, and eternal families are "central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children." (4) However, every couple will

encounter some struggles on their journey toward this glorious destiny. There are no perfect marriages in the world. Do you know why? Because there are no perfect husbands. Actually, it's because there are no perfect people. But our doctrine teaches us how to nurture our marriages toward perfection and how to keep the romance in them along the way. No one need ever "fall out of love." Falling out of love is a cunning myth which causes many broken hearts and homes.

15. "The family is falling apart all over the world," President Hinckley said. "The old ties that bound together father and mother and children are breaking everywhere. We must face this in our own midst. There are too many broken homes among our own . . . Can we not do better? Of course we can." (5)

16. At Valentines there are billions of little candy hearts produced--you've seen them--with words on them that you can combine and make love phrases, like "my girl," "kiss me" (little children always make that word combination--so do big kids), "she's cute," and, of course, "I love you"--all word combinations for Valentines. What combination are you looking for in your "sweet" heart? If you could print up your own candy hearts to depict the ideal man or woman, what would you look for?

17. Have you ever seen that game show called Family Feud? What a title! That's a word combination you won't find in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Anyway, that's the game where they say "100 people surveyed, top 5 answers on the board?" When asked "what are the most important things to look for in a potential spouse," how did the world answer that question? Do you want to see the top 18 answers on the board? Here they are from the Journal of Marriage and the Family ranked both for men and for women (6)

18. What is most important to look for in a potential spouse?

	Men Said	Women Said
Mutual attraction, love	1	1
Dependable character	2	2
Emotional stability, maturity	3	3
Pleasing disposition	4	4

Education, intelligence	5	5
Good health	6	9
Sociability	7	8
Good looks	8	13
Desire for home, children	9	6
Ambition, industriousness	10	7
Refinement, neatness	11	12
Similar education background	12	10
Good financial prospect	13	11
Good cook, housekeeper	14	16
Similar religious background	15	14
Pre-marital Chastity	16	17
Favorable social status	17	15
Similar political background	18	18

19. How does the world's list compare with your list? Do you like this list? While there are definitely some good things on this list, did you notice where "similar religious background" ranked? (#15) or "pre-marital chastity"? (#16) I guess the world hasn't figured out what chastity has to do with its #2 selection, "dependable character" or #3 "emotional stability," or #6 "good health."

20. Let's now look at the Lord's list and see how it is different from the world's. While the world's list has many desirable traits, it leaves out the more important elements that should come first--that not only help prevent family feuds, but also lead to eternally happy families. The Lord said, "A new commandment I give

unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). To love as He loved is different from the way the world loves. Paul identified this same love as the love that should exist between sweethearts when he said, "Husbands, love your wives, [How?] even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (7) Let's look at the Lord's list of 14 behaviors showing how he loved the church and apply it to the loving relationship that should exist between sweethearts. We find it in 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7. By the way, if you would like to ponder this list in more depth refer to the October 2000 Ensign, p. 16, under the title "Agency and Love in Marriage."

21. True love suffereth long. Have you ever seen this word combination on those little hearts? The most important things don't make it to the world's list. "Suffereth long" means patient instead of impatient and tolerant of imperfections instead of intolerant. Helpful instead of critical of weaknesses. It does not criticize, is not cranky, and does not complain. And is kind, is happy, thoughtful, helpful, interested in others, is a good Samaritan, merciful, gives comfort. It is not mean or miserly; is not sarcastic or cruel or inconsiderate; is not indifferent, uninterested, unresponsive or unconcerned. By the way, can you "fall out of kindness?" That's a question worth pondering. In fact, can you fall out of any of the attributes the Lord gives us in his definition of love? It Envieth not--is content, grateful for blessings by seeing the glass half full and not half empty, is generous, lives frugally; is not covetous, resentful, jealous, or greedy; avoids unnecessary debt; is a full tithe payer. Is not selfish or vain and lives within income.

22. Is not puffed up--is humble and teachable. Does not seek attention. Praises others. Does not murmur, and never belittles. Does not treat spouse with a "holier" or "smarter-than-thou" attitude. Doth not behave itself unseemly--is courteous, well mannered, reverent, respectful, and mindful; is clean, neat and considerate of other's property and feelings. Is not crude or indecent or improper. Seeketh not her own--is tender hearted, caring, sharing, sensitive, compassionate, generous, and united; sacrifices by putting desires of spouse first; considers money ours and not mine; thinks we not I; listens; Seeks to please God and others; is not demanding, controlling, or manipulative; does not blame; says I'm sorry; does not withhold affection. Is not easily provoked--is forgiving, patient, calm, gentle, respectful; is a peacemaker and does not get angry; is not irritable or vengeful; is not abusive in word or deed; does not

swear or quarrel. Thinketh no evil--is not judgmental, but respectful and trusting, pure and obedient; does not think evil of others by gossiping or finding fault; is modest in thought, dress and speech; is not deceitful, cruel or dishonest; avoids inappropriate music, pornography, and dirty jokes. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth--has a temple recommend and wants an eternal marriage; stays close to the Spirit through regular scripture study and prayer; is responsible; is not light-minded. Beareth all things--is bold and patient with affliction and trials (this does not mean that abuse victims should silently bear cruelty, or follow a spouse disobedient to God); is grateful; does not insult others; is not defensive, irritable, touchy or grouchy; is not weary in well doing; is easily entreated or approachable and willing to listen empathetically and communicate without any contempt. Believeth all things--sees the eternal potential of spouse like Johnny Lingo saw in Mohana for those of you who remember that story; makes the least of the worst and the most of the best; shows by actions that there is a firm belief in eternal families; holds fast to the iron rod. Has goals, dreams, a vision and plans for a happy successful life together. Is cheerful. Hopeth all things--is an optimist and looks for the best; praises and builds up; expresses and shows affection. Spouse is best friend. Continues courting throughout marriage. Is not a pessimist, nagger, or faultfinder. Endureth all things--doesn't complain or murmur; is steadfast; accepts responsibility and is industrious, for the man a provider; shows initiative. Charity never faileth.

23. Repeating President Kimball again, "This kind of love never tires nor wanes. It lives on through sickness and sorrow, through prosperity and privation, through accomplishment and disappointment, through time and eternity." (8) Never failing means never flirting with others. It means that love is blind in yet another sense with no wandering eyes. This love is committed by covenant and commandment.

24. It should be obvious to you that the Lord is describing a love here that deals with behavior on all 14 points. And behavior isn't something you fall into or out of. Behavior is very definitely something you control and decide. Agency is obviously involved here.

25. We also know that any commandment by God involves agency. We can obey or disobey, but there is always a choice. When the Lord uses the command form of the verb love in "Thou shalt love thy wife with all they heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22), He is not leaving this love in Cupid's hands. His commandment is a directive, not to the heart, but with the heart, and to the mind with an

expectation of thought, reasoning, decision making and obedience--you can't fall out of love if it's a commandment to stay in love.

26. Let me return to one of these 14 attributes. Pure love seeketh not her own. Look at the cartoon of this couple in a bookstore. There is a powerful story told in this scene. You ought to memorize it. What do you see here? The "spouse improvement" section is sold out, but the self-improvement section has scarcely sold a book. What does that tell you about human nature? Does it remind you of any of the Savior's teachings dealing with "motes" and "beams" in eyes? You've heard of the cartoon "The Far Side," well, this cartoon could be labeled "The Selfish Side." Your success in marriage will largely depend on your ability to reverse this cartoon and focus on improving yourself, rather than trying to reshape your spouse. It will depend more on being the right one--even more than finding the right one. "Don't just pray to marry the one you love. Instead, pray to love the one you marry." (9)

27. Your success in marriage will be enhanced if you focus on making your spouse happy more than in hoping your spouse makes you happy. There is greater power in giving than in getting. This is counsel that comes from the wisest of all marriage counselors, "Pure love seeketh not her own." The Savior is wise. His list is powerful. His wisdom is beyond ours. We should trust Him. He is never wrong.

28. There is a story of a troubled young couple in a marriage counselor's office. The counselor reminds them of their marital vows saying, "don't you remember you married for better or for worse?" The wife says, that's right--he couldn't have done better and I couldn't have done worse." It would be a mistake to think that you are the perfect one while your sweetheart is the source of any problems. "The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none," said Thomas Carlyle. (10) I read that quote while reading the Miracle of Forgiveness. It is the quote that President Spencer W. Kimball chose to begin the third chapter titled, "... None Righteous, No, Not One." Pride is like bad breath, it is obvious to everyone but the offender. It is pride that keeps us from seeing our own faults. Only the humble are teachable. I loved Carlyle's quote and used it for several years and then came across the story which perhaps inspired the quote. Listen to his story:

29. Thomas Carlyle lived from 1795 until 1881. He was a Scot essayist and historian. During his lifetime he became one of the world's greatest writers. But he was a human, and humans make mistakes.

30. On October 17, 1826, Carlyle married his secretary Jane Welsh. She was an intelligent, attractive, and somewhat temperamental daughter of a well-to-do doctor. They had their quarrels and misunderstandings, but still loved each other dearly. After their marriage, Jane continued to serve as his secretary. After several years of marriage, Jane became ill. Being a hard worker, Carlyle became so absorbed in his writings that he let Jane continue working for several weeks after she became ill. She had cancer, and it was one of the slow growing kind. Finally, she became confined to her bed. Although Carlyle loved her dearly, he very seldom found time to stay with her long. He was busy with his work.

31. When Jane died they carried her to the cemetery for the service. The day was a miserable day. It was raining hard, and the mud was deep. Following the funeral Carlyle went back to his home. He was taking it pretty hard. He went up the stairs to Jane's room and sat down in the chair next to her bed. He sat there thinking about how little time he had spent with her and wishing so much he had a chance to do it differently. Noticing her diary on a table beside the bed, he picked it up and began to read in it.

32. Suddenly he seemed shocked. He saw it. There, on one page, she had written a single line. "Yesterday he spent an hour with me and it was like heaven; I love him so." Something dawned on him that he had not noticed before. He had been too busy to notice that he meant so much to her. He thought of all the times he had gone about his work without thinking about and noticing her.

33. Then Carlyle turned the page in the diary. There he noticed written some words that broke his heart. "I have listened all day to hear his steps in the hall, but now it is late and I guess he won't come today." Carlyle read a little more in the book. Then he threw it down and ran out of the house. Some of his friends found him at the grave, his face buried in the mud. His eyes were red from weeping. Tears continued to roll down his cheeks. He kept repeating over and over again, "If I had only known, if I had only known." But it was too late for Carlyle. She was dead. [\(11\)](#)

34. Perhaps it was this experience that motivated Thomas Carlyle to write the phrase, "The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none." We would, indeed, be foolish if we saw no need to improve ourselves to strengthen our marriages.

35. "In selecting a companion for life and for eternity," said President Spencer W. Kimball, "certainly the most careful planning and thinking and

praying and fasting should be done to be sure that, of all the decisions, this one must not be wrong. In true marriage there must be a union of minds as well as of hearts. Emotions must not wholly determine decisions, but the mind and the heart, strengthened by fasting and prayer and serious consideration, will give one a maximum chance of marital happiness" [\(12\)](#)

36. When praying over this most important decision, there are some principles to keep in mind. First of all there is no such thing as a one and only. President Kimball continues, "Soul mates are a fiction and an illusion; and while every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price." [\(13\)](#) Looking for a soul mate is to make yourself a victim of what has been called the Lois Lane syndrome-searching for Superman. Young women, he isn't out there. Young men, Superwoman isn't out there either. If she were and you found her, she wouldn't want you.

37. A misunderstanding of this principle of looking for a soul mate can and has led to divorce. Let me illustrate. It is almost humorous to observe a young unmarried couple in love. After spending an entire day together, they are back together again on the phone that same night. It's sheer torture for them to be separated. Even in their thoughts they can hardly focus on anything else. Love begins to disrupt their studies or work. Everything else in life becomes a nuisance and an interruption that keeps them apart until they can be together again. In their minds there was never, in the history of the world, a truer love than theirs. They often believe they have found their soul mate. We call this level of pre-marriage intensity "infatuation."

38. After they marry, this intensity tapers off. Living under the same roof, they each begin to discover a few peculiar idiosyncracies in the other that they had not seen before. The love that was blind before now has its eyes wide open. Some of these idiosyncracies are irritating. He is no longer "Superman," but now simply Clark Kent and something less than "super." The infatuation begins to fade. Those who have confused infatuation for love begin to worry and wonder if they are falling out of love, and if they made a mistake, and that their one-and-only must still be out there somewhere. Their relationship is at a critical crossroad. If they believe they have fallen out of love, they may begin to drift apart. Those who think they made a

mistake sometimes divorce to free themselves for a renewed search for their one-and-only.

39. It is at this critical juncture when a dose of true love is needed to rekindle a relationship that is being tested. True love may not restore the same emotional intensity of early courtship or change Clark Kent back into Superman, but it will help love remain alive and blooming. Forty years later, Grandpa can go fishing, love Grandma dearly, but more easily endure a short absence from her than he could at a youthful age when smitten with infatuation. Their love is stronger, more mature, and still blossoming.

40. Do you remember the movie, "Fiddler on the Roof"? You may recall that in this movie about Russian Jews, Tevia and Golda met one another on their wedding day, the result of the matchmaking tradition in their town of Anatevka. With no time to fall in love they had to learn to love one another. With permission granted from MGM, please watch a 2½ minute segment of "Fiddler on the Roof" to see if they did learn to love one another.

41. Tevia: Golda, do you love me?

Golda: Do I what?

Tevia: Do you love me?

Golda: Do I love you?

Tevia: Well?

Golda: With our daughter's getting married and this trouble in the town, you're upset, you're worn out, go inside, go lie down--maybe it's indigestion.

Tevia: A-h-h, no! Golda, I am asking you a question. Do you love me?

Golda: You're a fool.

Tevia: I know, but do you love me?

Golda: Do I love you?

Tevia: Well?

Golda: For 25 years, I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked your cow, after 25 years why talk about love right now?

Tevia: Golda, the first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared.

Golda: I was shy.

Tevia: I was nervous.

Golda: So was I.

Tevia: But my father and my mother said we'd learn to love each other. And now, I am asking--Golda, do you love me?

Golda: I'm your wife!

Tevia: I know! But do you love me?

Golda: Do I love him?

Tevia: Well?

Golda: For 25 years, I've lived with him, fought with

him, starved with him, 25 years my bed is his, if that's not love, what is?

Tevia: Then you love me!

Golda: I suppose I do.

Tevia: And I suppose I love you too!

Tevia/Golda: It doesn't change a thing, but even so--after 25 years, it's nice to know.

42. While I'm not a proponent of matchmaking--that would deny agency--the story illustrates the point President Kimball was making, that any good man and any good woman can learn to love one another and have a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price. If a husband and wife are willing to apply the scriptural definition of love to their relationship, even a stale marriage and romance can be revived. Stephen R. Covey relates the following experience:

43. At one seminar, after I'd spoken of the importance of demonstrating character within the family, a man came up and said, 'I like what you're saying, but my wife and I just don't have the same feelings for each other that we used to. I guess we don't love each other anymore. What can I do?'

44. Love her,' I replied.

45. He looked puzzled. 'How do you love when you don't feel love?'

46. My friend,' I responded, 'love is a verb. The feeling of love is the fruit of love. So love your wife. You did it once, you can do it again. Listen. Empathize. Appreciate. It's your choice. Are you willing to do that?'

47. Of course, I was asking this man if he was willing to search within himself for the character required to make his marriage work. All our relationships follow the contours of life; they have ups and downs. This is why our families provide a critical measure of our character -- and the opportunity, again and again to nurture it. [\(14\)](#)

48. The choice of an eternal companion is up to each individual. Father in Heaven respects your agency, especially with this most important of all decisions. He won't make the decision for you. He gives guidelines and principles, but the choice is ours. Because there is no such thing as soul mates or a one and only, it would be more appropriate in a prayer to ask Father in Heaven if this is "a one," than to ask Him if this is "the one." Ask Him to bless you with the wisdom to recognize the attributes of Godliness in your potential spouse. Is this a good man who will honor his priesthood? Is this a woman who will nurture our children in loving kindness? Is this a man or woman

enough like me that we can have a happy life together? Be worthy of the inspiration you seek. You will not be exempt from the counsel the Lord gave to Oliver Cowdery found in D&C 9:7-8:

49. "Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it [the answer] unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right."

50. After you have studied and fasted and prayed and feel like your potential spouse is the kind of "good" person that President Kimball mentioned, then pray to the Lord for a confirmation, remembering to ask if this is "a one" not "the one." After marriage they will then become your one and only with all other options left behind.

51. Another principle of revelation that applies here is that each person is entitled to their own revelation, but not entitled to receive revelation for another. The only exception to this principle is for those who have been given a stewardship by God, that would authorize them to receive revelation concerning individuals over whom they preside, like a father presiding over his family or a bishop presiding over his ward. If a young man receives confirmation that his girlfriend would make a good wife, she is not obligated or bound by that revelation. She is entitled to her own revelation.

52. In conclusion, the decision of who you marry is the most important of your life. It is a decision that will be made with both your heart and your head. The decision will take into account your feelings and your thoughts. Isn't it interesting to note that this is the formula for revelation as described by the Lord.

53. "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation . . ." (D&C 8:2-3). In other words, your feelings and your thoughts will be in harmony. It will feel right in your heart and make sense in your mind.

54. May the Lord bless you. May you know and feel of His love and concern for each one of you, and his desire for your success and happiness in life is my prayer and my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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7.5 - Priesthood Power

Thomas S. Monson

Ensign, May 2011



1. I prayed and studied long about what I might say tonight. I wish not to offend anyone. I thought, "What are the challenges we have? What do I deal with every day that causes me to weep sometimes late into the night?" I thought that I would try to address a few of those challenges tonight. Some will apply to the young men. Some will apply to those who are middle aged. Some will apply to those who are a little bit above middle age. We don't talk about old age.

2. And so I simply want to begin by declaring, it has been good for us to be together this evening. We've heard wonderful and timely messages concerning the priesthood of God. I, with you, have been uplifted and inspired.

3. Tonight I wish to address matters which have been much on my mind of late and which I have felt impressed to share with you. In one way or another, they all relate to the personal worthiness required to receive and exercise the sacred power of the priesthood which we hold.

4. May I begin by reciting to you from section 121 of the [Doctrine and Covenants](#):

5. "The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and ... the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

6. “That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.”¹

7. Brethren, that is the definitive word of the Lord concerning His divine authority. We cannot be in doubt as to the obligation this places upon each of us who bear the priesthood of God.

8. We have come to the earth in troubled times. The moral compass of the masses has gradually shifted to an “almost anything goes” position.

9. I’ve lived long enough to have witnessed much of the metamorphosis of society’s morals. Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it’s growing ever wider.

10. Many movies and television shows portray behavior which is in direct opposition to the laws of God. Do not subject yourself to the innuendo and outright filth which are so often found there. The lyrics in much of today’s music fall in the same category. The profanity so prevalent around us today would never have been tolerated in the not-too-distant past. Sadly, the Lord’s name is taken in vain over and over again. Recall with me the commandment—one of the ten—which the Lord revealed to [Moses](#) on Mount Sinai: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”² I am sorry that any of us is subjected to profane language, and I plead with you not to use it. I implore you not to say or to do anything of which you cannot be proud.

11. Stay completely away from [pornography](#). Do not allow yourself to view it, ever. It has proven to be an addiction which is more than difficult to overcome. Avoid alcohol and tobacco or any other drugs, also addictions which you would be hard pressed to conquer.

12. What will protect you from the sin and evil around you? I maintain that a strong testimony of our Savior and of His gospel will help see you through to safety. If you have not read the [Book of Mormon](#), read it. I will not ask for a show of hands. If you do so prayerfully and with a sincere desire to know the truth, the [Holy Ghost](#) will manifest its truth to you. If it is true—and it is—then [Joseph Smith](#) was a prophet who

saw [God the Father](#) and His Son, [Jesus Christ](#). The Church is true. If you do not already have a testimony of these things, do that which is necessary to obtain one. It is essential for you to have your own testimony, for the testimonies of others will carry you only so far. Once obtained, a testimony needs to be kept vital and alive through obedience to the commandments of God and through regular prayer and scripture study. Attend church. You young men, attend seminary or institute if such is available to you.

13. Should there be anything amiss in your life, there is open to you a way out. Cease any unrighteousness. Talk with your bishop. Whatever the problem, it can be worked out through proper repentance. You can become clean once again. Said the Lord, speaking of those who repent, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow,”³ “and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”⁴

14. The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world.⁵ We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded.

15. Now, I have thought a lot lately about you young men who are of an age to marry but who have not yet felt to do so. I see lovely young ladies who desire to be married and to raise families, and yet their opportunities are limited because so many young men are postponing marriage.

16. This is not a new situation. Much has been said concerning this matter by past Presidents of the Church. I share with you just one or two examples of their counsel.

17. Said President Harold B. Lee, “We are not doing our duty as holders of the priesthood when we go beyond the marriageable age and withhold ourselves from an honorable marriage to these lovely women.”⁶

18. President Gordon B. Hinckley said this: “My heart reaches out to ... our single sisters, who long for marriage and cannot seem to find it. ... I have far less sympathy for the young men, who under the customs of our society, have the prerogative to take the initiative in these matters but in so many cases fail to do so.”⁷

19. I realize there are many reasons why you may be hesitating to take that step of getting married. If you are concerned about providing financially for a wife and [family](#), may I assure you that there is no shame in a couple having to scrimp and save. It is generally during these challenging times that you will grow

closer together as you learn to sacrifice and to make difficult decisions. Perhaps you are afraid of making the wrong choice. To this I say that you need to exercise faith. Find someone with whom you can be compatible. Realize that you will not be able to anticipate every challenge which may arise, but be assured that almost anything can be worked out if you are resourceful and if you are committed to making your marriage work.

20. Perhaps you are having a little too much fun being single, taking extravagant vacations, buying expensive cars and toys, and just generally enjoying the carefree life with your friends. I've encountered groups of you running around together, and I admit that I've wondered why you aren't out with the young ladies.

21. Brethren, there is a point at which it's time to think seriously about marriage and to seek a companion with whom you want to spend eternity. If you choose wisely and if you are committed to the success of your marriage, there is nothing in this life which will bring you greater happiness.

22. When you marry, brethren, you will wish to marry in the house of the Lord. For you who hold the priesthood, there should be no other option. Be careful lest you destroy your eligibility to be so married. You can keep your courtship within proper bounds while still having a wonderful time.

23. Now, brethren, I turn to another subject about which I feel impressed to address you. In the three years since I was sustained as President of the Church, I believe the saddest and most discouraging responsibility I have each week is the handling of cancellations of sealings. Each one was preceded by a joyous marriage in the house of the Lord, where a loving couple was beginning a new life together and looking forward to spending the rest of eternity with each other. And then months and years go by, and for one reason or another, love dies. It may be the result of financial problems, lack of communication, uncontrolled tempers, interference from in-laws, entanglement in sin. There are any number of reasons. In most cases divorce does not have to be the outcome.

24. The vast majority of requests for cancellations of sealings come from women who tried desperately to make a go of the marriage but who, in the final analysis, could not overcome the problems.

25. Choose a companion carefully and prayerfully; and when you are married, be fiercely loyal one to another. Priceless advice comes from a small framed plaque I once saw in the home of an uncle and aunt. It

read, "Choose your love; love your choice." There is great wisdom in those few words. Commitment in marriage is absolutely essential.

26. Your wife is your equal. In marriage neither partner is superior nor inferior to the other. You walk side by side as a son and a daughter of God. She is not to be demeaned or insulted but should be respected and loved. Said President Gordon B. Hinckley: "Any man in this Church who ... exercises unrighteous dominion over [his wife] is unworthy to hold the priesthood. Though he may have been ordained, the heavens will withdraw, the Spirit of the Lord will be grieved, and it will be amen to the authority of the priesthood of that man."⁸

27. President Howard W. Hunter said this about marriage: "Being happily and successfully married is generally not so much a matter of marrying the right person as it is being the right person." I like that. "The conscious effort to do one's part fully is the greatest element contributing to success."⁹

28. Many years ago in the ward over which I presided as the bishop, there lived a couple who often had very serious, heated disagreements. I mean real disagreements. Each of the two was certain of his or her position. Neither one would yield to the other. When they weren't arguing, they maintained what I would call an uneasy truce.

29. One morning at 2:00 a.m. I had a telephone call from the couple. They wanted to talk to me, and they wanted to talk right then. I dragged myself from bed, dressed, and went to their home. They sat on opposite sides of the room, not speaking to each other. The wife communicated with her husband by talking to me. He replied to her by talking to me. I thought, "How in the world are we going to get this couple together?"

30. I prayed for inspiration, and the thought came to me to ask them a question. I said, "How long has it been since you have been to the temple and witnessed a temple sealing?" They admitted it had been a very long time. They were otherwise worthy people who held temple recommends and who went to the temple and did ordinance work for others.

31. I said to them, "Will you come with me to the temple on Wednesday morning at 8:00? We will witness a sealing ceremony there."

32. In unison they asked, "Whose ceremony?"

33. I responded, "I don't know. It will be for whoever is getting married that morning."

34. On the following Wednesday at the appointed hour, we met at the Salt Lake Temple. The three of us went into one of the beautiful sealing rooms, not knowing a soul in the room except Elder El Ray L. Christiansen, then an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, a General Authority position which existed at that time. Elder Christiansen was scheduled to perform a sealing ceremony for a bride and groom in that very room that morning. I am confident the bride and her family thought, “These must be friends of the groom” and that the groom’s family thought, “These must be friends of the bride.” My couple were seated on a little bench with about a full two feet (0.6 m) of space between them.

35. Elder Christiansen began by providing counsel to the couple who were being married, and he did so in a beautiful fashion. He mentioned how a husband should love his wife, how he should treat her with respect and courtesy, honoring her as the heart of the home. Then he talked to the bride about how she should honor her husband as the head of the home and be of support to him in every way.

36. I noticed that as Elder Christiansen spoke to the bride and the groom, my couple moved a little closer together. Soon they were seated right next to one another. What pleased me is that they had both moved at about the same rate. By the end of the ceremony, my couple were sitting as close to each other as though they were the newlyweds. Each was smiling.

37. We left the temple that day, and no one ever knew who we were or why we had come, but my friends were holding hands as they walked out the front door. Their differences had been set aside. I had not had to say one word. You see, they remembered their own wedding day and the covenants they had made in the house of God. They were committed to beginning again and trying harder this time around.

38. If any of you are having difficulty in your marriage, I urge you to do all that you can to make whatever repairs are necessary, that you might be as happy as you were when your marriage started out. We who are married in the house of the Lord do so for time and for all eternity, and then we must put forth the

necessary effort to make it so. I realize that there are situations where marriages cannot be saved, but I feel strongly that for the most part they can be and should be. Do not let your marriage get to the point where it is in jeopardy.

39. President Hinckley taught that it is up to each of us who hold the priesthood of God to discipline ourselves so that we stand above the ways of the world. It is essential that we be honorable and decent men. Our actions must be above reproach.

40. The words we speak, the way we treat others, and the way we live our lives all impact our effectiveness as men and boys holding the priesthood.

41. The gift of the priesthood is priceless. It carries with it the authority to act as God’s servants, to administer to the sick, to bless our families, and to bless others as well. Its authority can reach beyond the veil of death, on into the eternities. There is nothing else to compare with it in all this world. Safeguard it, treasure it, live worthy of it.[10](#)

42. My beloved brethren, may righteousness guide our every step as we journey through life. Today and always, may we be worthy recipients of the divine power of the priesthood we bear. May it bless our lives and may we use it to bless the lives of others, as did He who lived and died for us—even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. This is my prayer in His sacred name, His holy name, amen.

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8. The True Nature of Love

8.1 - Agency or Inspiration—Which?

Bruce R. McConkie

BYU Speeches, February 1973



1. I've been many places with my wife when, as we have met members of the Church, Stake presidencies, high councils, and the like, they've said to me: "We're surely glad to meet you, Brother McConkie, and we're most pleased to have Sister Smith with us." I've assured her that that was all right with me, as long as they didn't call me Brother Smith. And now that's happened.*

2. I've sought the Lord diligently, as is my custom, to be guided and directed this morning in what ought to be said—sought him both for myself and for you, so that I might speak and you might hear by the power of the Holy Spirit. Two subjects have occurred to me. I thought that on the one hand I might talk about "Agency or Inspiration—Which?" Or, on the other hand, I might talk about how to choose a wife. It occurred to me I might consult the student body, but then I said to myself, "No, it doesn't make a particle of difference which subject it is; I'm going to say exactly the same things anyway."

3. My wife and I were having a serious discussion recently, in which we were counting our many blessings. We named a host of things that have come to us, because of the Church, because of our family, because of the glorious restoration of eternal truth that has taken place in this day; and then she climaxed the discussion by asking this question: "What's the greatest blessing that has ever come into your life?"

4. Without a moment's hesitation I said, "The greatest blessing that has ever come to me was on the thirteenth day of October in 1937, at 11:20 a.m., when I was privileged to kneel in the Salt Lake Temple at the Lord's altar and receive you as an eternal companion."

5. She said, "Well, you passed that test."

6. I believe that the most important single thing that any Latter-day Saint ever does in this world is to marry the right person, in the right place, by the right authority; and that then—when they have been so sealed by the power and authority which Elijah the prophet restored—the most important remaining thing that any Latter-day Saint can ever do is so to live that

the terms and conditions of the covenant thus made will be binding and efficacious now and forever. And so I'd like, if properly guided, to make some suggestions that apply in all fields of choice—in all fields, at least all major fields, of activity—but which apply particularly to the matter of eternal marriage, singling that out as the one thing paramount above all other.

7. When we dwelt in the presence of God our Heavenly Father, we were endowed with agency. This gave us the opportunity, the privilege, to choose what we would do—to make a free, untrammelled choice. When Father Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, he was given this same power, and we now possess it. We're expected to use the gifts and talents and abilities, the sense and judgment and agency with which we are endowed.

8. But on the other hand, we're commanded to seek the Lord, to desire his Spirit, to get the spirit of revelation and inspiration in our lives. We come unto the Church and a legal administrator places his hands upon our head and says, "Receive the Holy Ghost." This gives us the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead, based on faithfulness.

9. And so we're faced with two propositions. One is that we ought to be guided by the spirit of inspiration, the spirit of revelation. The other is that we're here under a direction to use our agency, to determine what we ought to do on our own; and we need to strike a fine balance between these two, if we're going to pursue a course that will give us joy and satisfaction and peace in this life and lead to eternal reward in our Father's kingdom.

10. When we were with our Father in the preexistent sphere, he observed and studied us; he knew how we would respond to his laws when we were in his presence, when we had the knowledge that he was our Father and that the teachings presented to us came from him. We walked by sight. Now he's finding out how we'll respond when we walk by faith, when we're outside his presence and we have to rely on other things than the personal counsel that we once received from him.

11. Well, I'd like, if I may, to present three case studies, out of which, perhaps, we can draw some very realistic and sound conclusions as to what ought to be

in our lives. I'll take these illustrations out of the revelations that the Lord has given us.

"You Have Not Understood"

12. Case study number one: There was a man named Oliver Cowdery. In the early days, he operated as an amanuensis to the Prophet. He was the scribe. He wrote down the words that the Prophet dictated while the Spirit rested upon him in the translation processes (the Book of Mormon was then being translated). Brother Cowdery was relatively spiritually immature at that time, and he sought and desired to do something beyond his then present spiritual capacity. He himself wanted to translate. And so he importuned the Prophet, the Prophet took the matter up with the Lord, and they got a revelation. The Lord said, "Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive." And then one thing he might receive is defined as "a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which as been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit."

13. Having thus dealt with the specific problem, then the Lord revealed a principle that applies to it and all other like situations: "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation" (D&C 8:1-3).

14. Well now, Oliver did what a good many of us would have done. He had the instructions I have read, and he assumed that they meant what they seemed on the surface to say, which was that if in faith he asked God he'd have power to translate. But in his condition of relative spiritual immaturity, he hadn't yet learned what was involved in asking of God, or how to generate the kind of faith or do the specific thing that has to be done in order to get an answer to a prayer. And so he asked. And as you know, he failed; he was totally unable to translate. This caused some concern, I suppose, to him and the Prophet. The matter was referred back to the Lord, whose promise they had been attempting to conform to; and the answer came, the reason came, why he couldn't translate: "You have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me" (D&C 9:7).

15. Now, seemingly, that's all he'd been instructed to do, to ask in faith; but implicit in asking in faith is the precedent requirement that we do everything in our power to accomplish the goal that we seek. We use the agency with which we have been endowed. We use every faculty and capacity and ability that we possess to bring about the eventuality that may be involved. Now this is translating the Book of Mormon, it's choosing a wife, it's choosing employment, it's doing any one of ten thousand important things that arise in our lives.

16. The Lord continued:

17. I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

18. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. [D&C 9:8-9]

19. How do you choose a wife? I've heard a lot of young people from Brigham Young University and elsewhere say, "I've got to get a feeling of inspiration. I've got to get some revelation. I've got to fast and pray and get the Lord to manifest to me whom I should marry." Well, maybe it will be a little shock to you, but never in my life did I ever ask the Lord whom I ought to marry. It never occurred to me to ask him. I went out and found the girl I wanted; she suited me; I evaluated and weighed the proposition, and it just seemed a hundred percent to me as though this ought to be. Now, if I'd done things perfectly, I'd have done some counseling with the Lord, which I didn't do; but all I did was pray to the Lord and ask for some guidance and direction in connection with the decision that I'd reached. A more perfect thing to have done would have been to counsel with him relative to the decision and get a spiritual confirmation that the conclusion, which I by my agency and faculties had arrived at, was the right one.

"Why Are You Asking Me?"

20. Now, case study number two: There was a man whose name is not so much as preserved to us in the ancient record. He's known as the brother of Jared. From other sources we know his name was Moriancumer. He was the spiritual leader, initially, of the Jaredite people. As they started their progress from the Tower of Babel to their American promised land, he was the one that got in communion with the Lord to

get the direction, the spiritual guidance, that they, as a people, needed.

21. And some very interesting things occurred. They got to the waters that they were going to cross, and the Lord said to him, “Build some barges.” But interestingly, the Lord didn’t tell him how to build the barges. He’d done it on a previous occasion; he didn’t need instruction; there wasn’t any revelation that was necessary to guide him. So he built the barges.

22. But this time they were going to be used under some peculiar and difficult circumstances, and he needed something more than was now present in them: he needed some air. And this was a problem that was beyond him. So he took that matter up with the Lord, and because it was totally beyond his capacity to solve, the Lord solved it for him and said, “Do thus and so and you’ll have air.”

23. But then the brother of Jared—having confidence because he was talking to the Lord, because he was communing and getting answers—asked another question: he asked for a solution to a problem that he should have figured out by himself and not taken up with the Lord. He said, “What will we do for light in the vessels?”

24. And the Lord talked to him about it a little and then he said this: “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Eth. 2:23). In effect, “What are you asking me for? This is something you should have solved.” And he talked a little more, and he repeated in essence the question: “What will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?” (Eth. 2:25). In other words, “Moriancumer, this is your problem. Why are you troubling me? I’ve given you your agency; you are endowed with capacity and ability. Get out and solve the problem.”

25. Well, the brother of Jared got the message. He went up into a mount called Shelem, and the record says he “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass” (Eth. 3:1).

26. I hold here a little piece of amorphous quartz that’s clear as transparent glass. I picked this up in a wilderness area outside of a little community called Crystalina, in a nation called Brazil, in South America. The Brethren thought I was off touring missions, but actually I was doing a little rock hunting. And in that connection, I hope you got the message that the brother of Jared was a rock hound also.

27. Well, the brother of Jared took sixteen little crystals of some sort (he could hold all of them in his hands); he took them up on the mount. The record says, “He did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount” (Eth. 3:1), and then he said in effect to the Lord, “Now this is what I hope you will do.” You really don’t tell the Lord what to do, but you get some inspiration and you use your judgment, and then you talk the matter over with him. And so Moriancumer said to the Lord: “Touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea” (Eth. 3:4).

28. And the Lord did what the brother of Jared asked, and this is the occasion when he then saw the finger of the Lord; and, while he was in tune, he received revelation that exceeded anything that any prophet had ever gained up to that moment. The Lord revealed more to him about his nature and personality than ever theretofore had come forth, and it all came about because he’d done everything that he could do and because he counseled with the Lord.

29. There’s a fine balance between agency and inspiration. We’re expected to do everything in our power that we can, and then to seek an answer from the Lord, a confirming seal that we’ve reached the right conclusion; and sometimes, happily, in addition, we get added truths and knowledge that we hadn’t even supposed.

“They Shall Counsel Between Themselves and Me”

30. Now case study number 3: In the early history of the Church, the Lord commanded the Saints to assemble in a certain place in Missouri. The decree went forth: “Assemble.” Specifically, the decree went forth, “Let the Presiding Bishop come here and do such and such.” Now notice what happened. The Lord is talking:

31. As I spake concerning my servant Edward Partridge, this land is the land of his residence, and those whom he has appointed for his counselors; and also the land of the residence of him whom I have appointed to keep my storehouse;

32. Wherefore, let them bring their families to this land, [and here’s the point] as they shall counsel between themselves and me. [D&C 58:24–25]

33. You see, the Lord said “assemble” to Zion. The details and the arrangements, however, the how and the when and the circumstances are to be determined by the agency of those who are called to assemble, but

they are to counsel with the Lord. Now, when you counsel with the Lord, you talk something over. I bring my children in and we counsel on a problem. I don't tell them what ought to be; I say, "What do you think? What's your evaluation? What do you want to do in this situation? What's the best thing to do?" And they tell me what they think, and if I happen to have any wisdom or judgment on the matter, I express my views. Well now, the Lord has all wisdom, all knowledge, and all power; he knows how to govern and control and direct us in a perfect manner. He lets us determine what we should do, but he expects us to counsel with him.

34. Now, after the Lord had said this to the Presiding Bishopric of the Church, he gave the principle that governed in that situation, and it governs in all situations. And this is one of our glorious revealed truths. He said:

35. For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

36. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

37. For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

38. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. [D&C 58:26–29]

39. You know, they said to the Prophet Joseph Smith, "How do you govern so great and diverse a people as the Latter-day Saints?"

40. He said, "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves."

41. Now, that's the order of heaven. That's how the Almighty operates. That's how the Church is supposed to operate. We're supposed to learn correct principles and then govern ourselves. We make our own choices, and then we present the matter to the Lord and get his approving, ratifying seal.

"Counsel with the Lord in All Thy Doings"

42. Now, those are the three case studies; let us come to the revealed conclusion. There was a man named Alma, a mighty and a great prophet. He had a son named Helaman, who was a holy and righteous man,

following the pattern that his father had set. And to Helaman, Alma said this: "O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support" (Al. 37:35–36). Do you think that if you're counseled to pray to the Lord for support, both temporal and spiritual, that that's all you have to do? The Lord's prayer says, "Give us this day our daily bread." Do you go out and sit down in the desert or on the mountain and pray with all the fervor you can possess, "Give us this day our daily bread," or do you go out and plant crops and raise herds and do everything that you can in your situation to accomplish the end result?

43. Well, continuing: "Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever" (Al. 37:36). Now note: "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good" (Al. 37:37).

44. What was Oliver Cowdery's problem? "You took no thought save it was to ask. . . . You must study it out in your mind" (D&C 9:7–8).

45. Well, do you want a wife? Do you want anything that's right and proper? You go to work and you use the agency and power and ability that God has given you. You use every faculty, you get all the judgment that you can centered on the problem, you make up your own mind, and then, to be sure that you don't err, you counsel with the Lord. You talk it over. You say, "This is what I think; what do you think?" And if you get the calm, sweet surety that comes only from the Holy Spirit, you know you've reached the right conclusion; but if there's anxiety and uncertainty in your heart, then you'd better start over, because the Lord's hand is not in it, and you're not getting the ratifying seal that, as a member of the Church who has the gift of the Holy Ghost, you are entitled to receive.

46. "Yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day" (Al. 37:37). If you learn how to use the agency that God has given you, and if you try to make your own decisions, and if you reach conclusions that are sound and right, and you counsel with the Lord and get his ratifying seal of approval upon the conclusions you've reached, then you've received revelation, for one thing; and for another thing, you're going to have the great reward of eternal

life, be lifted up at the last day. Now, we're not all equal by any means; some have one talent and capacity and some another. But if we use the talents we have, somehow we'll come out all right.

47. On the recent Monday when we were celebrating Washington's birthday, I was down at my mother's sawing a log in the backyard. She came out to give me some direction and see how I was doing it, and she wasn't very pleased. She thought I ought to do it differently. She went back into the house and in a few minutes my younger brother arrived. She said to him, "I think you'd better go out in the backyard and give Bruce some help and see that he does this thing right." And then she said to him, "Bruce isn't very bright." Well, so I'm not. So I start where I am, and I go forward from there. I start using such talent as I have, and I begin to apply principles of eternal truth to my life. And I consult and counsel with the Lord in the process. And no matter where I am, the gospel takes me forward and onward and upward, and blessings flow to me that will ennoble and sanctify and improve me in this life and eventually give me glory and honor and dignity in the life to come.

We Have the Spirit of Revelation

48. Now, I think we've said enough; the principles are before us. Let me just do one thing more. Let me do, in effect, what my friend Alma would do. After he'd preached a sermon, he said, "And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?" (Al. 5:45). That is, he'd given them the case studies, he'd quoted the revelations, he'd told them what was involved, and then he bore personal testimony. This is what we ought to do in the Church. We ought to learn how to teach by the power of the Spirit, so that when we get through talking about the gospel subjects we'll know whether what we've said is right, and we'll be in a position to bear testimony, not alone of the truth and the divinity of the work, but also that the doctrine we proclaim and the everlasting truths which we expound are right, that they are the mind and voice and will of the Lord. Now, the glorious, wondrous thing about this work and about these doctrines is that they are true. There isn't anything in this world, no truth that we can conceive of, to compare with the truth that the work we're engaged in is true, that the Lord's hand is here. It's a literal fact that we have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. We have the spirit of revelation, the spirit of testimony, the spirit of prophecy. These things must be, or else we're not the church and kingdom of God; we're not the Lord's people.

49. Now, the fact is that we do have them; revelation works. Don't shy away from getting revelation. Joseph Smith said, "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 149). We're entitled to the spirit of revelation. But what I'm attempting to teach this morning is that there's a how and a procedure, and there are conditions precedent, and it is our obligation to go to work on our problems and then counsel with the Lord and get the ratifying seal of the Holy Spirit on the conclusions that we've reached; and that ratifying seal is the spirit of revelation.

50. God grant us wisdom in these things. God grant us the courage and the ability to stand on our own feet and use our agency and the abilities and capacities we possess; then let's be sufficiently humble and amenable to the Spirit to bow our will to his will, to get his ratifying, confirming seal of approval, to get in our lives, in that way, the spirit of revelation. And if we so do, there's no question about the result: it's peace in this life; it's glory and honor and dignity in the life to come. Which may God grant for all of us. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

8.2 - Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, March 2000



1. Beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now.

2. There is a lesson in the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#)'s account of the First

Vision which virtually every Latter-day Saint has had occasion to experience, or one day soon will. It is the plain and very sobering truth that before great moments, certainly before great spiritual moments, there can come adversity, opposition, and darkness. Life has some of those moments for us, and occasionally they come just as we are approaching an important decision or a significant step in our lives.

3. In that marvelous account which we read too seldom, Joseph said he had scarcely begun his prayer when he felt a power of astonishing influence come over him. "Thick darkness," as he described it, gathered around him and seemed bent on his utter destruction. But he exerted all his powers to call upon

God to deliver him out of the power of this enemy, and as he did so a pillar of light brighter than the noonday sun descended gradually until it rested upon him. At the very moment of the light's appearance, he found himself delivered from the destructive power which had held him bound. What then followed is the greatest epiphany since the events surrounding the Crucifixion, [Resurrection](#), and Ascension of [Christ](#) in the meridian of time. The Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith, and the dispensation of the fulness of times had begun. [1](#)

4. Most of us do not need any more reminders than we have already had that there is one who personifies "opposition in all things," that "an angel of God" fell "from heaven" and in so doing became "miserable forever." What a chilling destiny! Because this is Lucifer's fate, "he sought also the misery of all mankind," Lehi teaches us. [2](#)

The Fight Goes On

5. An entire article could be devoted to this subject of the adversary's strong, preliminary, anticipatory opposition to many of the good things God has in store for us. But I want to move past that observation to another truth we may not recognize so readily. This is a lesson in the parlance of the athletic contest that reminds us "it isn't over until it's over." It is the reminder that the fight goes on. Unfortunately we must not think Satan is defeated with that first strong breakthrough which so dramatically brought the light and moved us forward.

6. To make my point a little more vividly, may I go to another passage of scripture, indeed, to another vision. You will recall that the book of [Moses](#) begins with him being taken up to "an exceedingly high mountain" where, the scripture says, "he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses." What then followed was what happens to prophets who are taken to high mountains. The Lord said to Moses:

7. "Look, and I will show thee the workmanship of mine hands. ... Moses looked, and ... beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God. And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not." [3](#)

8. This experience is remarkable by every standard. It is one of the great revelations given in human history. It stands with the greatest accounts we have of any prophet's experience with Divinity.

9. But Moses' message to you today is: Don't let your guard down. Don't assume that a great revelation, some marvelous, illuminating moment, the opening of

an inspired path, is the end of it. Remember, it isn't over until it's over.

10. What happens to Moses next, after his revelatory moment, would be ludicrous if it were not so dangerous and so true to form. Lucifer—in an effort to continue his opposition, in his unfailing effort to get his licks in later if not sooner—appears and shouts in equal portions of anger and petulance after God has revealed Himself to the prophet: "Moses, worship me." But Moses is not having it. He has just seen the real thing, and by comparison this sort of performance is pretty dismal.

11. "Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? ... Where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?"

12. "For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me. ... But I can look upon thee in the natural man. ...

13. "Where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God. ...

14. "Get thee hence, Satan; deceive me not."

15. The record then depicts a reaction that is both pathetic and frightening:

16. "And now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me.

17. "And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell. Nevertheless, calling upon God [the very phrase used by Joseph Smith], he received strength, and he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship, which is the God of glory.

18. "And now Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook. ...

19. "And it came to pass that Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he departed hence," [4](#) always to come again, we can be sure, but always to be defeated by the God of glory—always.

Do Not Draw Back

20. I wish to encourage every one of us regarding the opposition that so often comes after enlightened decisions have been made, after moments of revelation and conviction have given us a peace and an assurance we thought we would never lose. In his letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage new members who had just joined the Church, who undoubtedly had had spiritual experiences and received the pure light of testimony, only to discover that their

troubles had not ended but that some of them had just begun.

21. Paul pleaded with those new members in much the same way President Gordon B. Hinckley is pleading with new members today. The reminder is that we cannot sign on for a battle of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence without knowing it will be a fight—a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless. Paul says to those who thought a new testimony, a personal conversion, a spiritual baptismal experience would put them beyond trouble—to these he says, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” Then this tremendous counsel, which is at the heart of my counsel to you: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

22. “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. ...

23. “... If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

24. “... We are not of them who draw back unto perdition.” [5](#)

25. In Latter-day Saint talk that is to say, Sure it is tough—before you join the Church, while you are trying to join, and after you have joined. That is the way it has always been, Paul says, but don’t draw back. Don’t panic and retreat. Don’t lose your confidence. Don’t forget how you once felt. Don’t distrust the experience you had. That tenacity is what saved Moses and Joseph Smith when the adversary confronted them, and it is what will save you.

26. I suppose every returned missionary and probably every convert reading these words knows exactly what I am talking about. Appointments for discussions canceled, the Book of Mormon in a plastic bag hanging from a front doorknob, baptismal dates not met. And so it goes through the teaching period, through the commitments and the [baptism](#), through the first weeks and months in the Church, and more or less forever—at least, the adversary would pursue it forever if he thought he could see any weakening of your resolve, any chink in your armor.

27. This opposition turns up almost any place something good has happened. It can happen when you are trying to get an education. It can hit you after your first month in your new mission field. It certainly happens in matters of love and marriage. It can occur in situations related to your [family](#), Church callings, or career.

28. With any major decision there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a

good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don’t give up when the pressure mounts. Certainly don’t give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness. Face your doubts. Master your fears. “Cast not away therefore your confidence.” Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you.

The Spirit of Revelation

29. To help us make our way through these experiences, these important junctures in our lives, let me draw from another scriptural reference to Moses. It was given in the early days of this dispensation when revelation was needed, when a true course was being set and had to be continued.

30. Most Latter-day Saints know the formula for revelation given in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants—the verses about studying it out in your mind and the Lord promising to confirm or deny. What most of us don’t read in conjunction with this is the section which precedes it: section 8.

31. In that revelation the Lord has said, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.” I love the combination there of both mind and heart. God will teach us in a reasonable way and in a revelatory way—mind and heart combined—by the Holy Ghost. “Now, behold,” He continues, “this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground.” [6](#)

32. Why would the Lord use the example of crossing the Red Sea as the classic example of “the spirit of revelation”? Why didn’t He use the First Vision? Or the example from the book of Moses we just used? Or the vision of the brother of Jared? Well, He could have used any of these, but He didn’t. Here He had another purpose in mind.

33. Usually we think of revelation as a downpour of information. But this is too narrow a concept of revelation. May I suggest how section 8 broadens our understanding, particularly in light of these “fights of affliction” we have been discussing.

Questions Often Precede Revelation

34. First of all, revelation almost always comes in response to a question, usually an urgent question—not always, but usually. In that sense it does provide information, but it is urgently needed information, special information. Moses’ challenge was how to get himself and the children of Israel out of this horrible predicament they were in. There were chariots behind them, sand dunes on every side, and a lot of water

immediately ahead. He needed information to know what to do, but it wasn't a casual thing he was asking. In this case it was literally a matter of life and death.

35. You will need information too, but in matters of great consequence it is not likely to come unless you want it urgently, faithfully, humbly. Moroni calls it seeking "with real intent." [7](#) If you can seek that way and stay in that mode, not much that the adversary can counter with will dissuade you from a righteous path. You can hang on, whatever the assault and affliction, because you have paid the price for real conviction.

36. Like Moses in that vision, there may come after the fact some competing doubts and confusion, but it will pale when you measure it against the real thing. Remember the real thing. Remember how urgently you have needed help in earlier times and you got it. The Red Sea will open to the honest seeker of revelation. The adversary has power to hedge up the way, to marshal Pharaoh's forces and dog our escape right to the water's edge, but he can't produce the real thing. He cannot conquer if we will it otherwise. Exerting all our powers, the light will again come, the darkness will again retreat, the safety will be sure. That is lesson number one about crossing the Red Sea by the spirit of revelation.

Do Not Fear

37. Lesson number two is closely related. It is that in the process of revelation and making important decisions, fear plays a destructive, sometimes paralyzing role. To Oliver Cowdery, who missed the opportunity of a lifetime because he didn't seize it in the lifetime of the opportunity, the Lord said, "You did not continue as you commenced." Does that sound familiar to those who have been illuminated and then knuckled under to second thoughts and returning doubts? "It is not expedient that you should translate now," the Lord said in language that must have been very hard for Oliver to hear. "Behold, it was expedient when you commenced; but you feared, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now." [8](#)

38. Everyone runs the risk of fear. For a moment in Moses' confrontation with the adversary, "Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell." [9](#) That's when you see it—when you are afraid.

39. That is exactly the problem that beset the children of Israel at the edge of the Red Sea, and it has everything to do with holding fast to your earlier illumination. The record says, "And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid." Some (just like those Paul

described earlier) said words to this effect: "Let's go back. This isn't worth it. We must have been wrong. That probably wasn't the right spirit telling us to leave Egypt." What they actually said to Moses was: "Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? ... It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." [10](#) And I have to say, "What about that which has already happened? What about the miracles that got you here? What about the frogs and the lice? What about the rod and the serpent, the river and the blood? What about the hail, the locusts, the fire, the firstborn sons?"

40. How soon we forget. It would not have been better to stay and serve the Egyptians, and it is not better to remain outside the Church, nor to put off marriage, nor to reject a mission call or other Church service, and so on and so on forever. Of course our faith will be tested as we fight through these self-doubts and second thoughts. Some days we will be miraculously led out of Egypt—seemingly free, seemingly on our way—only to come to yet another confrontation, like all that water lying before us. At those times we must resist the temptation to panic and give up. At those times fear will be the strongest of the adversary's weapons against us.

41. "And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. ... The Lord shall fight for you." In confirmation the great Jehovah said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." [11](#)

42. That is the second lesson of the spirit of revelation. After you have gotten the message, after you have paid the price to feel His love and hear the word of the Lord, go forward. Don't fear, don't vacillate, don't quibble, don't whine. You may, like Alma going to Ammonihah, have to find a route that leads an unusual way, but that is exactly what the Lord is doing here for the children of Israel. Nobody had ever crossed the Red Sea this way, but so what? There's always a first time. With the spirit of revelation, dismiss your fears and wade in with both feet. In the words of Joseph Smith, "Brethren [and sisters], shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!" [12](#)

God Will Help Us

43. The third lesson from the Lord's spirit of revelation in the miracle of crossing the Red Sea is that along with the illuminating revelation that points us toward a righteous purpose or duty, God will also provide the means and power to achieve that purpose.

Trust in that eternal truth. If God has told you something is right, if something is indeed true for you, He will provide the way for you to accomplish it. That is true of joining the Church or raising a family, of going on a mission, or any one of a hundred other worthy tasks in life. Remember what the Savior said to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. What was the problem in 1820? Why was Joseph not to join another church? It was at least in part because “they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” [13](#) God’s grace is sufficient! The Lord would tell Joseph again and again that just as in days of old the children of Israel would be “led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched-out arm. . . . Therefore, let not your hearts faint. . . . Mine angels shall go up before you, and also my presence, and in time ye shall possess the goodly land.” [14](#)

44. What goodly land? Well, your goodly land. Your promised land. Your new Jerusalem. Your own little acre flowing with milk and honey. Your future. Your dreams. Your destiny. I believe that in our own individual ways, God takes us to the grove or the mountain or the temple and there shows us the wonder of what His plan is for us. We may not see it as fully as Moses or Nephi or the brother of Jared did, but we see as much as we need to see in order to know the Lord’s will for us and to know that He loves us beyond mortal comprehension. I also believe that the adversary and his pinched, calculating little minions try to oppose such experiences and then try to darken them after they happen. But that is not the way of the gospel. That is not the way of a Latter-day Saint who claims as the fundamental fact of the Restoration the spirit of revelation. Fighting through darkness and despair and pleading for the light is what opened this dispensation. It is what keeps it going, and it is what will keep you going. With Paul, I say to all of you:

45. “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

46. “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

[15](#)

47. I acknowledge the reality of opposition and adversity, but I bear witness of the God of glory, of the redeeming Son of God, of light and hope and a bright future. I promise you that God lives and loves you, each one of you, and that He has set bounds and limits to the opposing powers of darkness. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the victor over death and hell and the fallen one who schemes there. The gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) is true, and it has been restored.

48. “Fear ye not.” And when the second and third and fourth blows come, “fear ye not. . . . The Lord shall fight for you.” [16](#) Cast not away therefore your confidence.

Notes

1. See [JS—H 1:15–17](#).
2. See [2 Ne. 2:11, 17–18](#).
3. [Moses 1:1–2, 4, 8, 27–28](#).
4. [Moses 1:12–16, 19–22](#).
5. [Heb. 10:32, 35–36, 38–39](#); emphasis added.
6. [D&C 8:2–3](#); emphasis added.
7. [Moro. 10:4](#).
8. [D&C 9:5, 10, 11](#); emphasis added.
9. [Moses 1:20](#).
10. [Ex. 14:10–12](#).
11. [Ex. 14:13–15](#); emphasis added.
12. [D&C 128:22](#).
13. [JS—H 1:19](#).
14. [D&C 103:17, 19–20](#).
15. [Heb. 10:35–36](#).
16. [Ex. 14:13–14](#).

8.3 - How Do I Love Thee?

Elder Jeffery R. Holland

BYU Speeches, February 2000



1. I am delighted to be with you the day after Valentine’s Day and the day before Sister Holland’s birthday. Guess what is on my mind! Guess what I am going to talk about! Yes, I am going to talk about love, because Shakespeare made me do it. You see, it is the fifteenth of February. If it were the fifteenth of March, it would be the ides of March. And everybody remembers what Brutus did to Julius Caesar on the ides of March—and it befell Mark Antony to get back at Brutus in the great funeral oration, the same Mark Antony who let Cleopatra take him for the proverbial trip up the Nile without a paddle. Never mind that the ides of February were actually the day before yesterday. I am certainly not going to let that stop me from speaking about love and romance and marriage—a topic absolutely foreign to the interests of those on the BYU campus and one scarcely mentioned here this entire month. Indulge me. Pretend you are interested—if only because Sister Holland is my valentine and it is her birthday tomorrow.

2. You know, winning Sister Holland was not an easy thing to do. I worked at it and worked at it and worked at it until I finally had the courage to ask for her hand. In a romantic setting I said as meekly and humbly as I could, “Pat, will you marry me?”

3. To which she said, “Oh, dearest darling, dearest loved one, yes. Yes, yes, yes. When shall we set the

date? Oh, we have got to reserve the temple. I know exactly what colors I want for the bridesmaids. Should we have the reception indoors or out? And someone must be at the guest book. And I can just see in my mind the cake that we want. . . .”

4. Then she stopped mid-sentence and said, “Oh, darling. You are so overcome you are speechless. Here I have just gone on and on. Wouldn’t you like to say something on this night of nights?”

5. To which I replied, “I think I have said too much already.”

6. She counters that story by reminding me that when I arrived for our first date, her little brother shouted to her, “Hey, dreamboat, your barnacle is here!”

7. Actually neither of those stories is true, but who knows? Maybe you can use them someday when you have to speak at BYU on love and marriage.

8. Do let me now be serious. What I have learned of romantic love and the beauty of marriage I have learned from Sister Holland. I am honored to be her husband and am happy for you that she is on this campus again this morning, if only for an hour or two. As I once said of her, paraphrasing what Mark Twain’s Adam said of his Eve, “Wherever she was, there was paradise” (see “Adam’s Diary”).

9. I wish to speak to you this morning about Christlike love and what I think it can and should mean in your friendships, in your dating, in serious courtship, and, ultimately, in your marriage.

10. I approach the subject knowing full well that, as a newly engaged young woman said to me just last month, “There is certainly a lot of advice out there!” I don’t want to add needlessly to this rhetoric on romance, but I believe that second only to your membership in the Church, your “membership in a marriage” is the most important association you will have in time and eternity—and to the faithful what doesn’t come in time will come in eternity. So perhaps all of you will forgive me for offering, yes, more advice. But I wish it to be scriptural advice, gospel advice. Advice, if you will, that is as basic to life as it is to love—counsel that is equally applicable to men and to women. It has nothing to do with trends or tides of the time or tricks of the trade but has everything to do with the truth.

11. So may I put your friendships and dates and eventually your marriages in a scriptural context this morning and speak to you of what I will try to communicate as true love.

12. After a long wonderful discourse by Mormon on the subject of charity, the seventh chapter of Moroni tells us that this highest of Christian virtues is more accurately labeled “the pure love of Christ.”

13. And it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him [and her].

14. Wherefore, . . . pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; . . . that we may be purified even as he is pure. [Moroni 7:47–48]

15. True charity, the absolutely pure, perfect love of Christ, has really been known only once in this world—in the form of Christ Himself, the living Son of the living God. It is Christ’s love that Mormon goes to some length to describe for us and that Paul the Apostle did as well some years before, writing to the Corinthians in New Testament times. As in everything, Christ is the only one who got it all right, did it all perfectly, loved the way we are all to try to love. But even though we fall short, that divine standard is there for us. It is a goal toward which we are to keep reaching, keep striving—and, certainly, a goal to keep appreciating.

16. And as we speak of this, may I remind you, as Mormon explicitly taught, that this love, this ability, capacity, and reciprocation we all so want, is a gift. It is “bestowed”—that is Mormon’s word. It doesn’t come without effort and it doesn’t come without patience, but, like salvation itself, in the end it is a gift, given by God to the “true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ.” The solutions to life’s problems are always gospel solutions. Not only are answers found in Christ, but so is the power, the gift, the bestowal, the miracle of giving and receiving those answers. In this matter of love, no doctrine could be more encouraging to us than that.

17. I have taken for a title to my remarks Mrs. Browning’s wonderful line “How do I love thee?” (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* [1850], no. 43.) I am not going to “count the ways” this morning, but I am impressed with her choice of adverb—not when do I love thee nor where do I love thee nor why do I love thee nor why don’t you love me, but, rather, how. How do I demonstrate it, how do I reveal my true love for you? Mrs. Browning was correct. Real love is best shown in the “how,” and

it is with the how that Mormon and Paul help us the most.

18. The first element of divine love—pure love—taught by these two prophets is its kindness, its selfless quality, its lack of ego and vanity and consuming self-centeredness. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind, [charity] envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own” (Moroni 7:45). I have heard President Hinckley teach publicly and privately what I suppose all leaders have said—that most problems in love and marriage ultimately start with selfishness. In outlining ideal love in which Christ, the most unselfish man who ever lived, is the great example, it is not surprising that this scriptural commentary starts here.

19. There are many qualities you will want to look for in a friend or a serious date—to say nothing of a spouse and eternal companion—but surely among the very first and most basic of those qualities will be those of care and sensitivity toward others, a minimum of self-centeredness that allows compassion and courtesy to be evident. “That best portion of a good man’s life [is] his . . . kindness,” said Mr. William Wordsworth (Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey [1798], lines 33–35). There are lots of limitations in all of us that we hope our sweethearts will overlook. I suppose no one is as handsome or as beautiful as he or she wishes, or as brilliant in school or as witty in speech or as wealthy as we would like, but in a world of varied talents and fortunes that we can’t always command, I think that makes even more attractive the qualities we can command—such qualities as thoughtfulness, patience, a kind word, and true delight in the accomplishment of another. These cost us nothing, and they can mean everything to the one who receives them.

20. I like Mormon and Paul’s language that says one who truly loves is not “puffed up.” Puffed up! Isn’t that a great image? Haven’t you ever been with someone who was so conceited, so full of themselves that they seemed like the Pillsbury Doughboy? Fred Allen said once that he saw such a fellow walking down Lovers’ Lane holding his own hand. True love blooms when we care more about another person than we care about ourselves. That is Christ’s great atoning example for us, and it ought to be more evident in the kindness we show, the respect we give, and the selflessness and courtesy we employ in our personal relationships.

21. Love is a fragile thing, and some elements in life can try to break it. Much damage can be done if we are not in tender hands, caring hands. To give ourselves totally to another person, as we do in marriage, is the

most trusting step we take in any human relationship. It is a real act of faith—faith all of us must be willing to exercise. If we do it right, we end up sharing everything—all our hopes, all our fears, all our dreams, all our weaknesses, and all our joys—with another person.

22. No serious courtship or engagement or marriage is worth the name if we do not fully invest all that we have in it and in so doing trust ourselves totally to the one we love. You cannot succeed in love if you keep one foot out on the bank for safety’s sake. The very nature of the endeavor requires that you hold on to each other as tightly as you can and jump in the pool together. In that spirit, and in the spirit of Mormon’s plea for pure love, I want to impress upon you the vulnerability and delicacy of your partner’s future as it is placed in your hands for safekeeping—male and female, it works both ways.

23. Sister Holland and I have been married for nearly 37 years, just a half-dozen or so years short of twice as long as we have lived without each other. I may not know everything about her, but I know 37 years’ worth, and she knows that much of me. I know her likes and dislikes, and she knows mine. I know her tastes and interests, hopes and dreams, and she knows mine. As our love has grown and our relationship has matured, we have been increasingly free with each other about all of that.

24. The result is that I know much more clearly now how to help her, and, if I let myself, I know exactly what will hurt her. In the honesty of our love—love that can’t truly be Christlike without such total devotion—surely God will hold me accountable for any pain I cause her by intentionally exploiting or hurting her when she has been so trusting of me, having long since thrown away any self-protection in order that we could be, as the scripture says, “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). To impair or impede her in any way for my gain or vanity or emotional mastery over her should disqualify me on the spot to be her husband. Indeed, it should consign my miserable soul to eternal incarceration in that large and spacious building Lehi says is the prison of those who live by “vain imaginations” and the “pride of the world” (1 Nephi 11:36, 12:18). No wonder that building is at the opposite end of the field from the tree of life representing the love of God! In all that Christ was, He was not ever envious or inflated, never consumed with His own needs. He did not once, not ever, seek His own advantage at the expense of someone else. He delighted in the happiness of others, the happiness He could bring them. He was forever kind.

25. In a dating and courtship relationship, I would not have you spend five minutes with someone who belittles you, who is constantly critical of you, who is cruel at your expense and may even call it humor. Life is tough enough without having the person who is supposed to love you leading the assault on your self-esteem, your sense of dignity, your confidence, and your joy. In this person's care you deserve to feel physically safe and emotionally secure.

26. Members of the First Presidency have taught that "any form of physical or mental abuse to any woman is not worthy of any priesthood holder" and that no "man who holds the priesthood of God [should] abuse his wife in any way, [or] demean or injure or take undue advantage of [any] woman"—and that includes friends, dates, sweethearts, and fiancées, to say nothing of wives (James E. Faust, "The Highest Place of Honor," *Ensign*, May 1988, 37, and Gordon B. Hinckley, "Reach Out in Love and Kindness," *Ensign*, November 1982, 77).

27. If you are just going for pizza or to play a set of tennis, go with anyone who will provide good, clean fun. But if you are serious, or planning to be serious, please find someone who brings out the best in you and is not envious of your success. Find someone who suffers when you suffer and who finds his or her happiness in your own.

28. The second segment of this scriptural sermon on love in Moroni 7:45 says that true charity—real love—"is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity." Think of how many arguments could be avoided, how many hurt feelings could be spared, how many cold shoulders and silent treatments could be ended, and, in a worst-case scenario, how many breakups and divorces could be avoided if we were not so easily provoked, if we thought no evil of one another, and if we not only did not rejoice in iniquity but didn't rejoice even in little mistakes.

29. Temper tantrums are not cute even in children; they are despicable in adults, especially adults who are supposed to love each other. We are too easily provoked; we are too inclined to think that our partner meant to hurt us—meant to do us evil, so to speak; and in defensive or jealous response we too often rejoice when we see them make a mistake and find them in a fault. Let's show some discipline on this one. Act a little more maturely. Bite your tongue if you have to. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32). At least one difference between a tolerable marriage and a great one may be that

willingness in the latter to allow some things to pass without comment, without response.

30. I mentioned Shakespeare earlier. In a talk on love and romance you might well expect a reference to *Romeo and Juliet*. But let me refer to a much less virtuous story. With *Romeo and Juliet* the outcome was a result of innocence gone awry, a kind of sad, heartbreaking mistake between two families that should have known better. But in the tale of *Othello* and *Desdemona* the sorrow and destruction is calculated—it is maliciously driven from the beginning. Of all the villains in Shakespeare's writing, and perhaps in all of literature, there is no one I loathe so much as I loathe Iago. Even his name sounds evil to me, or at least it has become so. And what is his evil, and *Othello's* tragic, near-inexcusable susceptibility to it? It is the violation of Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians 13. Among other things, they sought for evil where none existed, they embraced imaginary iniquity. The villains here rejoiced not "in the truth." Of the innocent *Desdemona*, Iago said, "I turn her virtue into pitch; / And out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all" (William Shakespeare, *Othello*, act 2, scene 3, lines 366–68). Sowing doubt and devilish innuendo, playing on jealousy and deceit and finally murderous rage, Iago provokes *Othello* into taking *Desdemona's* life—virtue turned into pitch, goodness twisted into a fatal net.

31. Now, thank heavens, here in Happy Valley this morning we are not talking of infidelity, real or imagined, or of murder; but in the spirit of a university education, let's learn the lessons being taught. Think the best of each other, especially of those you say you love. Assume the good and doubt the bad. Encourage in yourself what Abraham Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature" (First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1861). *Othello* could have been saved even in the last moment when he kissed *Desdemona* and her purity was so evident. "That [kiss] dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword!" he said (act 5, scene 2, lines 16–17). Well, he would have been spared her death and then his own suicide if he had broken what he considered justice's sword right then and there rather than, figuratively speaking, using it on her. This tragically sad Elizabethan tale could have had a beautiful, happy ending if just one man, who then influenced another, had thought no evil, had rejoiced not in iniquity, but had rejoiced in the truth.

32. Thirdly and lastly, the prophets tell us that true love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Once again that is ultimately a description of Christ's love—

He is the great example of one who bore and believed and hoped and endured. We are invited to do the same in our courtship and in our marriage to the best of our ability. Bear up and be strong. Be hopeful and believing. Some things in life we have little or no control over. These have to be endured. Some disappointments have to be lived with in love and in marriage. These are not things anyone wants in life, but sometimes they come. And when they come, we have to bear them; we have to believe; we have to hope for an end to such sorrows and difficulty; we have to endure until things come right in the end.

33. One of the great purposes of true love is to help each other in these times. No one ought to have to face such trials alone. We can endure almost anything if we have someone at our side who truly loves us, who is easing the burden and lightening the load. In this regard, a friend from our BYU faculty, Professor Brent Barlow, told me some years ago about Plimsoll marks.

34. As a youth in England, Samuel Plimsoll was fascinated with watching ships load and unload their cargoes. He soon observed that, regardless of the cargo space available, each ship had its maximum capacity. If a ship exceeded its limit, it would likely sink at sea. In 1868 Plimsoll entered Parliament and passed a merchant shipping act that, among other things, called for making calculations of how much a ship could carry. As a result, lines were drawn on the hull of each ship in England. As the cargo was loaded, the freighter would sink lower and lower into the water. When the water level on the side of the ship reached the Plimsoll mark, the ship was considered loaded to capacity, regardless of how much space remained. As a result, British deaths at sea were greatly reduced.

35. Like ships, people have differing capacities at different times and even different days in their lives. In our relationships we need to establish our own Plimsoll marks and help identify them in the lives of those we love. Together we need to monitor the load levels and be helpful in shedding or at least readjusting some cargo if we see our sweetheart is sinking. Then, when the ship of love is stabilized, we can evaluate long-term what has to continue, what can be put off until another time, and what can be put off permanently. Friends, sweethearts, and spouses need to be able to monitor each other's stress and recognize the different tides and seasons of life. We owe it to each other to declare some limits and then help jettison some things if emotional health and the strength of loving relationships are at risk. Remember, pure love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," and helps loved ones do the same.

36. Let me close. In Mormon's and Paul's final witnesses, they declare that "charity [pure love] never faileth" (Moroni 7:46, 1 Corinthians 13:8). It is there through thick and thin. It endures through sunshine and shadow, through darkest sorrow and on into the light. It never fails. So Christ loved us, and that is how He hoped we would love each other. In a final injunction to all his disciples for all time, He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34; emphasis added). Of course such Christlike staying power in romance and marriage requires more than any of us really have. It requires something more, an endowment from heaven. Remember Mormon's promise: that such love—the love we each yearn for and cling to—is "bestowed" upon "true followers of Christ." You want capability, safety, and security in dating and romance, in married life and eternity? Be a true disciple of Jesus. Be a genuine, committed, word-and-deed Latter-day Saint. Believe that your faith has everything to do with your romance, because it does. You separate dating from discipleship at your peril. Or, to phrase that more positively, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, is the only lamp by which you can successfully see the path of love and happiness for you and for your sweetheart. How should I love thee? As He does, for that way "never faileth." I so testify and express my love for you and for Him, in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

8.4 - True Love

Elder Richard Turley

BYU-I Devotional, October 2007



1. Most of you students listening to this talk today have great dreams and aspirations. For some of you, these dreams have been systematically recorded as written goals. For others, they may be just wispy hopes of how life will turn out to be. Hope springs eternal in the hearts of the young—especially those seeking a college education. What would your dreams sound like if reduced to writing?

2. About this time every year, some people begin to compose their annual Christmas letters, the newsy epistles they stuff into envelopes with their Christmas cards. Christmas letters are a custom in the United States, especially among Latter-day Saints. Let's fast forward twenty-five or thirty years and read a Christmas letter that reflects the fulfillment of some of the dreams you and your classmates may have. We'll pretend this one is written by you or your spouse.

3. “Dear family and friends,” the letter begins inauspiciously. But it builds from there. “Our Christmas greetings this year come from the sunny beaches of Hawaii, where Mary and I are spending the holidays with all of our children. Actually, Mary and I have been here since we stopped by on our way back from Oslo, Norway, where we jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize.”

4. With humility, the letter continues: “If the truth be known, the Peace Prize came as a total surprise to us. After I won the prize for chemistry a few years ago and Mary won the one for literature, we thought we were done. For most recipients, as you know, a Nobel Prize is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But life is full of surprises.

5. “Anyway,” the letter continues, “enough about the two of us. The children are all doing great. John Jr. finished his mission this year as assistant to the president and returned home in time to start spring football practice. He’s able to spend only a couple of days with us here in the islands because he has to get back to prepare for the BCS championship game. Being quarterback for the number one team in the nation does have its drawbacks.

6. “While we were in Oslo, we were pleased but stunned to learn that John Jr. had won the Heisman Trophy—again. It came as a real shock to us, especially after the two years he took off for a mission. In hindsight, I guess we should have known he was a serious candidate, since he also won the trophy during his freshman, sophomore, and junior years. But we didn’t want to assume anything. And if the truth be known, the fourth Heisman wasn’t quite as thrilling as the first. When he graduated from high school at age sixteen and immediately became starting quarterback on his college team, we were thrilled. When he won the Heisman that same year, we just couldn’t believe it.

7. “Our daughter Ann is following in her mother’s footsteps. She brushed up that novel she wrote during her sophomore year and sold it to a major New York publisher. It’s been at the top of the Times bestseller list for twenty-six weeks now, and sales show no signs of slowing down. She’s having a tough time deciding which offer for movie rights she should accept. We’re pleased that she won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize while still in college—and she’s only nineteen.

8. “Finally, our dear little Suzie is quite the prodigy, if we do say so ourselves. Participating in both the summer and winter Olympics, she has now won twelve gold medals. Although she’s just seventeen, she

received her third technology patent last month and already has royalties running in the millions. After passing by offers to teach at Harvard, Oxford, Julliard, and M.I.T., she has focused on musical performance, and her first recording just reached platinum status. She’s been interested in politics for a long time, and officials in our state are already talking about running her for senator—that is, when she gets old enough to qualify.

9. “We all love our church callings. I really enjoyed serving as bishop at age twenty-five, stake president at thirty, and mission president at forty, especially after I sold my start-up company for billions and was able to retire young. Mary has been serving as stake Relief Society president and has nearly worn herself out on the fireside circuit. Being on the cover of Time, Newsweek, and half the fashion magazines this past year has been flattering for our family, but I think we liked being on the cover of the recent Church News most of all.

10. “Well, we hope the past year has been as good to you as it has been to us. Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.”

11. A little over the top? Perhaps. But most young people have dreams of life that end, like fairy tales, with the line, “And they lived happily ever after.”

12. Please don’t misunderstand me. The Book of Mormon teaches us, “Men are, that they might have joy.”¹ Happiness really is life’s purpose and will ultimately be our blessing if we live the laws on which it is predicated. But it may not come in quite the way we expect it. We sometimes think that being happy means avoiding all problems, and we may grow disillusioned if our superficial dreams seem to shatter. We may forget that one of life’s requirements is to face opposition and overcome it—and we don’t always get to choose the kind of opposition we will face.

13. Simply put, mortality’s tests mean that life won’t turn out exactly the way we planned it. For example, most young Latter-day Saints plan to marry. They hope for spouses who are spiritual giants, besides being physically attractive, mentally brilliant, and emotionally strong, supportive, and fun-loving. In addition, many just assume that someday they will be rich—or at least prosperous enough not to worry about money. Many young people plan to be healthy their whole lives, living to a ripe, old age while retaining all the beauty and vigor of youth. Most hope to have children someday, children who are born whole and healthy and who grow up to be well-behaved and accomplished, both spiritually and temporally.

14. If we have such typical dreams, at some point in life disappointing reality may set in, bringing with it heartache. For example, despite a strong desire to marry, many persons go through life without ever having the opportunity to do so. Some who marry experience the distress of watching a spouse wander from the path of righteousness. Others struggle with their spouses through physical or mental illnesses or tragic accidents that may permanently alter some aspects of the marriage relationship. Still others experience the pain of becoming widowed or divorced.

15. Many couples who long for children find themselves childless. Others have children, only to lose them to death. Still others help bring children into the world who face challenging physical or mental handicaps. Many teach the gospel to their children, only to watch, in dismay, as they wander into sinful paths or make other serious mistakes that might have been avoided.

16. Despite dreams of riches, most people end up facing financial challenges that create deep worries. Some students struggle through school only to find that the “real world” is even colder and crueler than they expected. Some dream of acceptance into a particular graduate school or program, only to face rejection. Others make it in and work hard but fail to achieve the worldly success or recognition for which they hoped.

17. Even those who seem to succeed in school and land high-potential jobs may still face reverses. Health problems, family difficulties, economic downturns, layoffs, and other challenges can derail or destroy careers.

18. Why am I telling you all this?

19. Not to discourage you—quite the contrary. What I want to do today is focus our thoughts on one simple concept that will lead to the kind of success that really matters in life—success that lasts beyond the grave. That simple concept is true love.

20. “What?” some of you are thinking. “I thought he just told us that true love may never be ours in this life!”

21. If you’re thinking about “true love” in the mushy, oozy-goopy, Hollywood sense, you’re right. But that’s not what I’m talking about. In fact, Hollywood’s version of “true love” may be a contradiction in terms. The kind of “love” often touted on television and in movies seems to be an endless pursuit of a selfish romantic high. When one partner fails to deliver the required fix, the so-called lover moves on to the next one, trying to regain the high, like a drug addict

seeking more or harder drugs. I have watched people move from one girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse to another—sometimes with the cloak of legalized marriage, sometimes without—all in the hopeless pursuit of Hollywood’s version of “true love.” But what could be less true than such unfaithful chasing of what turns out to be merely a mirage?

22. No, the kind of “true love” I am talking about today is not something that we chase. Rather, it is something that we choose, using the divine gift of agency. Anyone—regardless of physical appearance, emotional appeal, or marital status—can have this true love. It has two components: (1) a selfless attitude, and (2) selfless action.

23. To illustrate what I mean by real true love and to contrast it further with its counterfeit, let me give an example from the marriage context—though once again I emphasize that it is not restricted to marriage. One reason I’m using this marriage example is that many of us in this audience today will not be fooled by Hollywood’s counterfeit love, but we may fall into our own version of it if we are not careful.

24. So here’s the scenario, BYU–Idaho style: A young man and young woman meet and begin to date. At some point, they begin feeling a romantic attachment for one another. The feeling grows intense. Soon they feel that they can’t live without each other. Being faithful and honorable people, they maintain the standards of the Church and of the Honor Code. Before long, arms wrapped around each other, they are gazing longingly at the Rexburg temple. They get engaged. Eager to be married, they pine for their temple wedding day. Finally it comes, fulfilling a lifetime goal and followed by a blissful honeymoon. True love, right?

25. Well, not exactly. Let’s call it an opportunity for, or perhaps even the beginning of, true love. But true love in its fullness will come only over time as our commitment and faithfulness is tested. Remember the definition of true love: (1) a selfless attitude, and (2) selfless action. In our BYU–Idaho example, how much of what happens during the dating, engagement, and honeymoon comes about because of selfless attitudes and actions? If we are not careful, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking more about ourselves in such settings than about the other person. However wonderful we may feel at the time, that is not true love.

26. We laugh when we hear the old joke about the young woman on her wedding day who sighs to her Mother, “At last, I am at the end of all my troubles.” Her wise mother responds, “Yes, dear. You just don’t

know at which end.” We laugh because there is so much truth to this statement. Even in our own Latter-day Saint culture, many men and women on their wedding days are focused inwardly on themselves. Just look at the pronouns in our example: “At last, I am at the end of all my troubles.” It is this inwardly focused attitude that makes me hesitate in calling our BYU–Idaho version of romance true love, at least in its fullness. Remember again that true love is a selfless attitude combined with selfless action.

27. For those fortunate enough to marry, loving a companion is comparatively easy during the heady, euphoric days of dating, courtship, and the honeymoon when beautiful bodies, shared dreams, and raging hormones make spending eternity together seem incredibly attractive. The real test of love comes when beauty, intellect, and emotions fade and much of what we hoped to get from marriage may seem no longer possible—at least in this life. Contrast the popular concept of romantic ecstasy with true love in the full, mature sense. President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, “I am satisfied that a happy marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one’s companion. . . . Selfishness is the antithesis of love.”²

28. My windows in the Church Office Building let me look out onto the plaza south of the building and east of the Salt Lake Temple. Most weeks of the year, and especially from spring through fall when the weather is warm, brides and grooms fresh from the temple walk across to the plaza to have wedding pictures taken. Local visitors and tourists often stroll through the Church administration block and Temple Square to see the flowers and fountains for which they are famous. When they see brides in their wedding dresses and grooms in their formal attire, they often stop and watch, as if to say, “Ah, young love . . .” And it is a lovely sight, a picture of hope for the future, a future that can be glorious if the newly married man and woman can shed selfishness and focus on giving, not just receiving.

29. When I want to see true love—genuine true love—I look at Temple Square and the adjacent Church campus blocks to behold not just the brides and grooms but to watch the hundreds of young and senior missionaries who pass in, out, and through the blocks going to and from their assignments. I see mature couples, sometimes wrinkled and bent with age, walking hand in hand after a lifetime together that has seen trials and tests of their love. I see young and elderly singles likewise going to their assignments, focused on the Lord’s work and their opportunities to

serve others. I see them all going to and from missionary assignments that are sometimes routine or thankless but utterly unselfish, assignments that contribute to benefiting others with little recognition or personal gratification of a worldly nature. Old or young, married or single, walking or wheelchair-bound, they help bring to pass the Lord’s work and glory.

30. Some of these missionaries come from humble circumstances, others from more affluent homes. Some have attained worldly recognition in their careers, others very little. But they have one thing in common: they will all someday die. Life, for all its wonders, is a terminal condition. Be it today or a century from now, all of us will someday pass beyond the veil into the next life and come to the judgment bar, where our attitudes and actions will be weighed in the balance. What will be the verdict then?

31. Think about King Belshazzar mentioned in the fifth chapter of Daniel in the Old Testament. He was rich and renowned and reveled in luxury and lust. He threw a party for “a thousand of his lords,” and “they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.” In their eating, drinking, and merriment, they forgot about tomorrow until suddenly there “came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote” a message on “the plaister of the wall of the king’s palace.” Suddenly the merrymaking came to a screeching halt; “the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.”³

32. The king called for his “wise men”—“the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers”—“but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.” Finally, at the queen’s suggestion, they called for Daniel, a man filled with the Spirit of God. They offered him the same enticements they had offered the others: that he should be “clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and . . . be the third ruler in the kingdom” if he would just interpret the writing on the wall.⁴

33. “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another,” Daniel replied unselfishly, “yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.” And interpret he did, clearly and unflinchingly. “This is the interpretation of the thing,” Daniel said. “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it . . . Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” That night was the king’s last.⁵ What reward in the eternities do you think was his?

34. Brothers and sisters, the writing is on the wall for us too. Will we spend our days in the selfish pursuit of fame and fortune, lust and luxury? If so, we too will be “weighed in the balances, and . . . found wanting.” Or will we spend it instead selflessly serving the Lord and our fellowman?

35. “Which is the great commandment in the law?” a lawyer asked Jesus in Matthew 22:36. Jesus answered:

36. 37 . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

37. 38 This is the first and great commandment.

38. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

39. What are the two great commandments on which the rest of the scriptures hang? Love of God and love of our fellow human beings. True love. Love that combines a selfless attitude with selfless action.

40. But what about getting an education, making a living, and developing talents? Aren’t those righteous goals? Don’t they count for anything? Of course they do. But in the end, they have little value unless combined with true love—what the scriptures call charity. Moroni 7:47 tells us that “charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.”

41. It all comes back to charity—true love—unselfish attitudes and unselfish actions. It doesn’t matter what else we accomplish in life. If we obtain degrees, wealth, and honors untold, we are nothing without charity and will be found wanting at the last day. The same is true even of great spiritual gifts. Without charity, they profit us nothing. Paul concludes his treatise on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 by admonishing us to “covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet,” he adds, “shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

42. Then follows his masterful discourse on charity in chapter 13. Think about education, wealth, talents, fame, and spiritual gifts in light of his words:

43. 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

44. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

45. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

46. What’s he saying? Can we exercise spiritual gifts or have great faith or give all our wealth to feed the hungry and still lack charity? Yes, if we do those things with selfish intent, for personal recognition, or primarily for our own satisfaction or advancement. True charity subjugates all those desires to unselfish intent. Paul continues:

47. 4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

48. 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

49. 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

50. 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

51. 8 Charity never faileth: . . .

52. 13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

53. This great principle of charity—pure love, true love—requires both unselfish intent and unselfish action.

54. Applying charity may mean giving up some of our lifetime hopes and dreams in favor of something better, though it be difficult and even painful at times. It means facing the challenging parts of keeping our covenants, fulfilling assignments, and living righteously, even if doing so causes agony.

55. The perfect example of unselfish attitude and behavior is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Despite planning His whole life to work out the great atonement in our behalf, He in all His wisdom and perfection was surprised by how hard it finally turned out to be. We read the following in Mark 14, beginning with verse 32:

56. 32 And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: . . .

57. 33 And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;

58. 34 And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: . . .

59. 35 And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

60. 36 And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

61. How did God the Father react to this prayer?

62. He could, of course, have taken the cup away—but not without spoiling the great plan of happiness. He could remove pain in the present, but not without spoiling the future. In His great love—His pure unselfish love for His Only Begotten and for all of us—He permitted the pain to continue that Christ could win the victory over death. Of one thing, we can all rest assured. God knows us; He loves us; and He will bless us with whatever we need to be ultimately happy. But that happiness will come from bending our will to His, learning of His purposes for us, and serving in whatever circumstances He provides for us.

63. That may mean changing our plans, shelving our dreams, and facing realities we hoped never to confront. Bending our will to the Lord's may be our greatest challenge in life. He knows better than we do what is best for us and allows us to face agony that at times seems unbearable. Bending our will to His includes accepting His timing. God's greatest blessings come in His own due time, often after much pain. We must wait patiently for these blessings, which may or may not come not in this life but will come eventually to the faithful. How often have we been guilty of praying, "Please bless me with patience . . . and I want it right now!"

64. While we are waiting for unrealized but righteously desired blessings, we should not languish or murmur. If marriage, children, economic security, or any other blessing sought with unselfish intent does not come to us soon or ever in this life, we should, like the Lord, say to the Father, "nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt." Meanwhile, we should recognize and take advantage of the opportunities the Lord does provide. They are all around us, but we need to open our spiritual eyes to see them.

65. Alma the Younger was converted after an angel spoke to him with a voice of "thunder, which shook the earth."⁶ It should not surprise us that as a missionary, Alma thought it would be nice to try the same conversion technique on others. He cried out, "O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto

every people!"⁷ Alma's conversion was the exception and not the rule, however, and he realized the need to bend his will to the Lord's: "But behold," Alma concluded, "I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me."⁸

66. Like Alma, we should all be content with what the Lord has allotted to us, difficult or painful or frustrating though it may be at times. President Spencer W. Kimball taught:

67. If we looked at mortality as the whole of existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life would be calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the premortal past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.

68. Is there not wisdom in his giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified?

69. If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.⁹

70. As President Kimball taught, we should live by faith, accept what has been allotted to us, and go forward unselfishly in the spirit of true love to advance the Lord's purposes.

71. If we live by the Spirit and break out of the selfish shell of self-pity, we will recognize the Lord's purposes and become an instrument in His hands. Sometimes life's greatest challenges are the problems or handicaps that seem irreversible in this life, those that aren't healed miraculously as we might hope. Yet charity, the scriptures tell us, "envieth not" and "seeketh not her own."¹⁰ Seeking not our own means that we don't have to wait to be perfected, or to be healed ourselves, or to have all of our own needs met before we reach out to others. Some of the greatest examples of love come from those who disregard their own needs to help others.

72. In general conference a year ago, Elder Don R. Clarke of the Seventy told how his grandfather went blind and could no longer care for his farm on his own. He received a notice requiring him to make a \$195 mortgage payment, something that seemed impossible given the family's reduced circumstances. Then a

miracle occurred. Elder Clarke's grandfather later wrote:

73. I shall never forget that cold evening, just before Christmas of 1919. It looked as though we would lose the farm. My daughter, Gladys, laid a slip of paper in my hand and said, "This came in the mail today." I took it to her mother and asked her what it was. This is what my wife read to me, "Dear Brother Larsen, I've had you on my mind all day today. I am wondering if you are in financial trouble. If you are, I have \$200 you may have." The letter was signed "Jim Drinkwater." Jim was a small, crippled man, and he would have been the last man on earth that anyone would have thought had that much money on hand. I went to his house that night and he said, "Brother Larsen, I received a wireless message from heaven this morning, and I could not get you off my mind all day. I was sure you were in financial trouble." Brother Drinkwater gave me \$200 and we sent the \$195 to the mortgage company, and with the extra \$5 we bought boots and clothes for the children. Santa Claus did come that year.¹¹

74. Jim Drinkwater, the "small, crippled man," demonstrated true love. How easy it might have been for him to wallow in self-pity or to think of the comforts he could buy with his money. Instead, he prepared himself by righteous living to be in tune with the Spirit of the Lord. He had selfless intent, and when the "wireless message from heaven" came, he took selfless action.

75. The hymn "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief," sung by John Taylor just before the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, contains the following verse:

Stript, wounded, beaten nigh to death,

I found him by the highway side.

I roused his pulse, brought back his breath,

Revived his spirit, and supplied

Wine, oil, refreshment—he was healed.

I had myself a wound concealed,

But from that hour forgot the smart,

And peace bound up my broken heart.¹²

76. The character in this hymn chose to look past his own wound to bind up someone else's. That is true love. That is what the Savior freely gave to us. That is what we must choose to give if we will be happy.

77. As it was in Daniel's day, the writing is on the wall for all to see. It is in the scriptures, in the words of our modern prophets, on the Internet, and even on posters held up behind home plate and the end zone during television sports broadcasts: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."¹³ His Son gave His all for us and commanded, "Love one another; as I have loved you."¹⁴ The pure love of Christ—charity—is selfless intent and selfless action. At the final judgment bar, will our selfish pursuit of worldly aims lead to the verdict, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting"?¹⁵ Or will a lifetime of true love instead bring the welcome words, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord"?¹⁶ Remember, "Man is that he might have joy." Choose true love.

78. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1 2 Nephi 2:25.

2 Gordon B. Hinckley, "What God Hath Joined Together," *Ensign* 21 (May 1991): 73.

3 Daniel 5:1, 4-6.

4 Daniel 5:7-8, 16.

5 Daniel 5:17, 26-27, 30.

6 Mosiah 27:18.

7 Alma 29:1.

8 Alma 29:3.

9 Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 15.

10 1 Corinthians 13:4-5; Moroni 7:45.

11 Don R. Clarke, "Becoming Instruments in the Hands of God," *Ensign* 36 (November 2006): 97.

12 "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 29, verse 5.

13 John 3:16.

14 John 13:34, 15:12.

15 Daniel 5:27.

16 Matthew 25:21

Chastity and Intimacy

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

9. The Law of Chastity

9.1 - Do What Is Right

Elder Richard G. Scott
Ensign, June 1997



1. Happiness in this life and in eternity depends on your making correct decisions and holding fast to them.

2. I know that most of you have a determination to do what is right. You have had those feelings in your heart to

live worthily no matter what others may say. I speak also to others who want to have such feelings. You are of the finest generation that has come to earth. You have prepared yourself well in the premortal existence and have been selected to come forth in this singularly important time in the unfolding of Father in Heaven's plan. I am deeply moved to be in your presence. I realize that the majority of you do not have the slightest idea of how truly capable, noble, and wonderful you are.

3. I have prayed about, pondered over, and worked on this message because each one of you is an exceptional daughter or son of our Father in Heaven and I want to help you. Early on, I strongly felt impressed to discuss with you how to make your noble dreams and aspirations a reality. I am sure that each one of you has treasured dreams of what you want your life to be. Having moved down the path of life ahead of you, I have learned that while there are growing challenges along the way, life is most beautiful. As you continue to exercise faith in the Master and are obedient to His commandments, you will receive magnificent blessings. Some of those blessings you will have dreamed about. Other blessings He plans for you are beyond anything you can conceive of now. My earnest desire is to help you live so that your worthy dreams become realities.

4. I have wrestled with many different ways to communicate principles that I know—if understood and applied—would greatly help you. I realized I did not yet have a satisfactory way to express what I know to be true. Then a peace enveloped me. I felt that if I strive the best I can to talk to you, and you listen with an open mind and heart, with real intent, having faith in the Lord, then it won't matter too much what I say. You will have impressions come to you that will be individually tailored to your needs. As you write those

impressions down and follow them, they will be guidelines for your life and will help you realize your righteous dreams.

5. You are at a time of life when there are many critically important decisions to be made, and you are understandably unsure of your capacity to make them. You live in a world where it is increasingly more difficult to assure that your worthy dreams and aspirations will come true by avoiding the allurements and temptations that Satan would put in your path to destroy you. You may have doubts about your own self-worth. You want to be accepted. You have questions about your future and about how to gain true and enduring friendships. You want to find an eternal companion who has the same deep desire to live worthily and to accomplish much of good in this life. For many, you want to know if the person you have growing feelings for is indeed the one to be your eternal companion. But you are not sure of your ability to decide. You are growing in spiritual discipline—that is, your ability to discern the promptings of the Spirit and your capacity to follow them. Over time, that capacity will increase and grow stronger until it becomes easier and easier to automatically do the right things. You have built a shield against temptation. But now, while that spiritual discipline is developing, you must be very careful to avoid choices that would take you from the path of happiness.

6. I have learned from personal experience how being helped to make the right decision at a critical time can bless your entire life. I have also seen by working closely with individuals who made wrong decisions how devastating that can be on the rest of their lives. My intent is to give you suggestions on how to be sure you make the right choices. I will share four personal experiences that taught me important lessons, with a sincere desire to help you gain confidence in making the right choices consistently in your life. Then I will try to identify how Satan works so that you will be more prepared to avoid the pitfalls he will place in your path.

7. In college I was given the privilege of joining a very elect honorary engineering society. As I attended the initiatory activities, everyone was drinking. I asked for a soft drink and was handed a glass. As I raised it to my lips, I could smell alcohol. I looked around the room. All the eyes were on me. These were

professionals who had just given me a great honor. Should I pretend to drink so as not to offend? No. I set the glass down and then noticed that three other inductees also set their glasses aside. Do what is right, and others will follow your example. Every time you make the right choice in the face of potential criticism, you build strength that makes it easier the next time. The reverse is also true. Satan counts on that.

8. One summer as a teenager, I worked on an oyster boat off the coast of Long Island in New York to earn funds for college. The other members of the crew were seasoned oystermen, hardened by the harsh winter environment in which they spent much of their lives battling the icy ocean and raw wind to secure their catch. I was an enigma to them, easier to distrust than to understand. They shunned me as a company spy, then as a crazy kid who didn't know how to be a man. Later, I became better at my duties and tried to build friendships. They offered to make me "a real man" by inviting me to join all-night indulgences. I thanked them but declined, and the tension grew more intense.

9. The summer weather was beautiful and the ocean magnificent. We were engaged in relatively simple tasks, such as transferring small oysters to a more distant portion of the sound where the nutrients accelerated their growth and improved their flavor. Except when a dredge full of oysters was dumped onto the deck, signaling a flurry of intense activity, there was much time for contemplation. While my deck mates dozed by their shovels, I read and pondered the content of the [Book of Mormon](#). I cannot adequately express the powerful awakening within me that came from those weeks of study of the Book of Mormon under singularly unusual circumstances.

10. We slept in envelope-type bunks sandwiched into the restricted space between the ship's diesel engine and hull. One night at dockside I retired early since some of the crew planned unrighteous activity outside our boat. I was suddenly shaken into consciousness by the powerful hand of a deck mate, Toddy, a giant of a man. He was brandishing a hammer in my face, and his breath reeked of alcohol. Stunned, I realized that there was no way that I could escape him. I thought I had come to the end of the road. Then I heard what he was shouting: "Scotty, get your fins and mask. There's a man overboard, and you can save him."

11. That night I learned a lesson I have never forgotten. Publicly the crew members ridiculed me, but privately they respected me for my standards. The confidence that came from that knowledge let me

quietly help three of them with some serious personal challenges.

12. I know that you will find the same response as you consistently choose to obey your principles. You are establishing a reputation. When you make it clear that you will not vary from your standards, you will be led to individuals like yourself and the criticism from others will become less intense. Often those who publicly deride you for your high standards privately do not want you to violate them. They need your good example. Whether it be turning your back on an off-color joke, refusing to see an R-rated movie or videocassette, or walking out of a party that is moving in the wrong direction, make your standards clear to others by quietly making the right choices when the temptation is first presented. A decisive, correct choice made once and consistently kept thereafter will avoid much heartache. You then can use your energy in keeping your resolve rather than repeatedly wrestling with the same challenge. Also, you will greatly reduce the possibility that you will be overcome by temptation.

13. I grew up in a home where my father was not a member of the Church and my mother was less active. That all changed later, and they spent much of their life as temple workers. With that background I didn't know much about the Church, even though I thought I did. When I was about to graduate from the university, the Lord brought an angel into my life. Her name was Jeanene Watkins. She was a beautiful girl. It took me a long time to date her because so many others recognized her wonderful qualities. As we began to date, I discovered that she was all I had ever dreamed of finding. I fell completely in love with her. I could tell she had deep feelings for me also. One night when we were talking about the future, she carefully wove into the conversation an important comment. She said, "When I marry, it will be to a returned missionary in the temple." I don't remember anything else she said. I hadn't thought much about a mission and didn't understand much about temple marriage. I went home and couldn't think of anything else. I was awake all night. I couldn't do anything at the university the next day. Soon I was at the bishop's office, having prayed about the importance of a mission. Jeanene and I both went on missions and when we returned were sealed in the temple. Much later I came to realize that she would have left me had I not made the right choices. Jeanene's courage in standing up for her dream of a temple marriage to a returned missionary, regardless of her love for me, has made all of the difference in our

lives together. I will never be able to thank her adequately for not compromising her righteous dreams.

14. Your decisions are like switch points on a railroad system. They determine where you will end up in life. When you consistently make the right choices, you are the happiest, receive the greatest personal growth, and have the most productive life. When you make the wrong choices, you may find yourself at an entirely different destination than you want. While there is the process of repentance to come back, it is often painful and sometimes leaves permanent physical scars that cannot be cured as well as your spirit can.

15. At one time I worked on the immediate staff of a very hardworking, demanding, misunderstood man who became the father of the nuclear navy that provided great protection for the United States at a critical time in world conditions. His name is Hyman Rickover. I have great respect for him. After 11 years in that service, I received a call from the First Presidency to preside over a mission. I knew I would have to tell Admiral Rickover immediately. As I explained the call and that it would mean I would have to quit my job, he became rather excited. He said some unrepeatable things, broke the paper tray on his desk, and in the comments that followed, clearly established two points: “Scott, what you are doing in this defense program is so vital that it will take a year to replace you, so you can’t go. Second, if you do go, you are a traitor to your country.”

16. I said, “I can train my replacement in the two remaining months, and there won’t be any risk to the country.”

17. There was more conversation, and he finally said, “I never will talk to you again. I don’t want to see you again. You are finished, not only here, but don’t ever plan to work in the nuclear field again.”

18. I responded, “Admiral, you can bar me from the office, but unless you prevent me, I am going to turn this assignment over to another individual.”

19. He asked, “What’s the name of the man who wants you?”

20. I told him, “President David O. McKay.”

21. He added, “If that’s the way Mormons act, I don’t want any of them working for me.”

22. I knew he would try to call President McKay (1873–1970), who was ill, and that conversation would benefit no one. I also knew that in the Idaho Falls area there were many members of the Church whose families depended upon their working in our program.

I didn’t want to cause them harm. I also knew that I had been called by the Lord. I didn’t know what to do. Then, the words of the song we sang tonight began to run through my mind: “Do what is right; let the consequence follow” (Hymns, number 237). While I had never contacted a General Authority in my life, I had been interviewed by Elder Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, so I had a feeling to call him. I explained that the admiral would try to call President McKay and would make some negative comments, but everything was all right and I would be able to accept my call. While doing that, my heart kept saying, “Is this going to turn out all right or will somebody be innocently hurt who depends on our program for livelihood?” The song would come back: “Do what is right; let the consequence follow.” True to his word, the admiral ceased to speak to me. When critical decisions had to be made, he would send a messenger or I would communicate through a third party. We accomplished the changeover.

23. On my last day in the office I asked for an appointment with him, and his secretary gasped. I went with a copy of the Book of Mormon in my hand. He looked at me and said, “Sit down, Scott. What do you have? I have tried every way I can to force you to change. What is it you have?”

24. There followed a very interesting, quiet conversation. There was more listening this time. He said he would [read the Book of Mormon](#). Then something I never thought would occur happened. He added, “When you come back from the mission, I want you to call me. There will be a job for you.”

25. You will have challenges and hard decisions to make throughout your life. Be determined now to always do what is right and let the consequence follow. The consequence will always be for your best good. You will learn that it is easiest over the long run to stand for what is right and do the difficult thing to begin with. Once you take that position, following through is not too hard. An individual who cuts corners and justifies some departure from true standards, for whatever reason, finds that seeds are planted that produce problems later. Those problems are far more difficult to overcome than taking a correct stand initially.

26. Do what is right even though it seems you will be alone in so doing, that you are going to lose friends, that you will be criticized. What you will find is that by doing what is right, after a period of testing, the finest friends will be discovered and you can mutually support each other in your resolve to be obedient to all

of the commandments of the Lord. I have never been sorry on any occasion that I stood for what was right even against severe criticism. You will learn that truth. You will also discover that when you have taken a determined stand for right, when you have established personal standards and made covenants to keep them, when temptations come and you act according to your standards, you will be reinforced and given strength beyond your own capacity, if that is needed. Difficulty comes when you enter the battle of temptation without a fixed plan. That is what Satan desires, for then you are ripe for defeat.

27. Now I want to deal with sensitive issues that are easier to talk about one on one—so, in my mind, I am going to try as hard as I can to imagine you as an individual wanting to know how to make your hopes and dreams for the future come true. I am going to try and block out everything and everybody else so that we can talk privately. You may want to do the same thing.

28. At this time of life, it is most important that your thoughts and acts be clean and pure so that the [Holy Ghost](#) can guide you. Satan is determined at this critical time of your life to overpower you, not with an onslaught of serious temptation suddenly presented, but by carefully placed, alluring, but seemingly unimportant infractions of your long-established standards. He would use these temptations to skillfully lead you away from the path of righteousness. Satan knows that as long as you can be led by the Holy Spirit, you can resist him. He has no power over a righteous person. The Lord has made it possible for you to resist the devil's temptations. When obedient, you will be inspired to know what to do and have the capacity to do it.

29. So that you will be forewarned, I will try to show you how Satan works. Let us pretend that to your right are all of the good things that can be done in life. The farther to your right, the better they are. To your left are all of the wrong things that can be done. The farther to your left, the worse they are. In the middle it is difficult to discern where something is just a little good or a little bad. This is where Satan works with righteous people. This is the twilight zone where you cannot clearly discern between that which is good and that which is bad. It is easy to become confused here. Live well within the wonderful area of good the Lord has defined and you won't have any problems with temptation. If you are not sure whether something is appropriate to look at, to listen to, to think about, or to do—don't do it. You could be headed for one of Satan's traps.

30. Now, observe how Satan works. A righteous returned missionary meets a pure, lovely young woman. They are at an age where they can think seriously about marriage. They begin to date. He develops deep, beautiful feelings of love for her and she for him. Neither one intends to do anything that is wrong. They have decided not to cross the boundary into Satan's territory. When he is with her he wants to express the feelings he has for her—somehow, after a while, holding her hand doesn't quite communicate what he feels. Each time they are together they do what they did the time before and a little more to physically express their feelings. They move closer and closer to the boundary, but they are determined not to cross it. One day Satan plants the seeds of rationalization in their minds. By that I mean that he tempts them to believe that something that is really wrong can be twisted or justified to be acceptable because of their special circumstances. Rationalization is one of the devil's most effective tools. These thoughts are planted: "You really love one another. You plan to be sealed in the temple. You both are worthy and will be true to each other. You are an exception. You have not reached the limit." The boundary is moved farther to the left. So they continue their physical expressions. They are very much in love. Each time they become a little more intimate. Strong, powerful emotions are aroused, but they are sure they can control them. They are going to be sealed in the temple. Then those emotions become overpowering, and they commit acts that they had determined they would never perform outside of marriage. Their lives are terribly complicated—tragically and unnecessarily.

31. Please recognize that you cannot barely cross the boundary and not encounter the high risk of slipping and being led to places you have no intent of ever visiting or experiences you have no desire to ever have. That is how Satan works. He knows that the powerful emotions of sexual transgression are addictive. One act leads to another and to another. Appetites are generated and powerful emotions experienced until the transgressor loses all perspective of reality and is led deeper and deeper into sin, without recognizing how far he or she has wandered or how rapidly he or she is being imprisoned. You have seen how others begin with experimentation and then are drawn deeper and deeper into sin, apparently without any recognition of how far they have fallen.

32. How can two people in love avoid crossing the boundary and falling into temptation? First, let us define love. To love another righteously is to protect, to elevate, to keep pure and undefiled, to sacrifice

oneself for the benefit of the other. To love is to hold in reserve sacred, intimate experiences for the sanctity of marriage. There, when they are properly used, they draw a couple together and strengthen them for the growing responsibilities of parenthood. They result in the formation of physical bodies for the spirit children Father in Heaven entrusts to a mother and father. In this sacred setting appropriate intimate expression is beautiful and purposeful.

33. Satan's agents speak of love, but it is really lust. It is the increasing gratification of personal appetites at the expense of another. It leads to serious violation of the commandments of God. Why does Satan concentrate so intently on sexual transgression? Because he knows that immorality feeds upon itself. At the same time it numbs spiritual sensitivity and will neutralize the will to resist. There is never any place for Satan's kind of love in your life. If elements of it have found place in a relationship, get rid of them—now.

34. Now some specific suggestions to help you keep from crossing the boundary:

- Choose voluntarily to do what is right. Only willing obedience yields the full blessings that come from obeying the commandments of God.
- Firmly establish personal standards. Choose a time of deep spiritual reflection, when there is no pressure on you and you can confirm your decisions by sacred impressions. Decide then what you will do and what you will not do to express feelings. The Spirit will guide you. Then do not vary from those decisions no matter how right it may seem when the temptation comes. Don't take the first step, as innocent as it may seem. The realization of your dreams depends upon your determination to never betray your standards.
- Recognize that the boundary between good and evil never changes, but you can be tempted to color your perception of that boundary through rationalization. I mean by trying to justify something you suspect or know is wrong as being acceptable in your special case.
- Surround yourself with good friends by being in the right places doing the right things. None of us are up all of the time. When you are down it is easier to make a serious mistake. Often, when you are down a good friend will be up and can serve as a reminder of your worthy goals. Some are so anxious for friendship and popularity that they compromise their standards. You will not obtain desirable friends that way, but you can lose your worthy dreams.

- Stay close to the Church. You will have a constant refreshment of your resolve to do what is right and will be strengthened by the example of others doing it.

- A safe rule to follow is to never do anything alone that you wouldn't do in the presence of parents shortly before marriage.

- Do not be misled by what the world defines as acceptable. To intentionally excite emotions that are reserved for sacred purposes within the covenant of marriage is seriously wrong. I solemnly witness that it is transgression to touch the private, sacred parts of another person's body except within the bonds of marriage between a man and woman. Satan has spread abroad the idea that among consenting individuals much intimacy is permissible short of the final act. That is a devastating lie. Such activity is a violation of the law of chastity, and it requires repentance. It is not only wise not to be immoral, it is a fundamental commandment of God that He considers to be very important.

35. Your spirit body was created by your Heavenly Father. Your physical body is made in His image. He can lead you to happiness beyond what you can imagine now. His purpose is to help you realize your fullest potential in growth, accomplishment, and happiness while you are here on earth. His objective is your eternal happiness.

36. There is another who is extremely gifted, powerful, and brilliant—but devilish—whose purpose is to bind you to be his servant. One of the most powerful tools he has to take you from the course of happiness is to tempt you to experiment with intimate acts. Sexual transgression feeds upon itself. It stimulates powerful, physical emotions that become increasingly addictive. At the same time it numbs spiritual sensitivity and neutralizes your will to resist. Immorality is foreign to your nature. Knowing that, Satan will tempt you to begin with small addictive doses rather than tempting you to step from a clean and pure life directly into serious immoral transgression.

37. Nephi gave you a powerful way to succeed in overcoming temptation. He said: "Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction" ([1 Ne. 15:24](#)).

38. If there is anyone who reads this message who has seriously transgressed, with all of the tenderness of my heart, I ask you to decide to repent, now. It is not good

to violate the commandments of the Lord. It is tragic to do nothing about it. Sin is like cancer in the body. It will never heal itself. It will become progressively worse unless cured through repentance. You can be made completely whole, new, purified, and clean every whit, through the miracle of repentance. If you have transgressed, please decide to see your bishop now so that your worthy dreams can be made reality.

39. For those who commit a serious mistake, Satan whispers: “Your life is ruined. There is no way back. You might as well continue in the path you are on.” That is a lie. The Savior gave His life that even the most serious transgressions can be overcome and an individual can be made new, clean, and pure through repentance and obedience to the Lord’s commandments. To believe otherwise would be to deny the efficacy of the Atonement of our Savior.

40. In summary, your happiness—now, throughout this life, and on into eternity—depends upon your making correct decisions and holding fast to them. Some make choices based only on their own personal experience and trust little else. Some make choices by blindly following their peer leaders. Others choose what they think will provide the most friends and greatest success. Some wait for a challenge to present itself and then decide what to do. Each of these alternatives can be disastrous.

41. With all of the love in my heart, I ask you to resolutely decide to keep the standards of the Lord. Please live so that the Holy Ghost can inspire you to consistently do what is right. I testify that as a result, your worthy dreams or something even better will be yours. Your Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son love you. They want your happiness even more than you can now possibly know. They will help you attain that happiness as you steadfastly do all you can to obey Their commandments. I testify They love you and will help you, in the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

9.2 - Sexual Purity

The First Presidency
For The Strength of Youth

1. Physical intimacy between husband and wife is beautiful and sacred. It is ordained of God for the creation of children and for the expression of love between husband and wife. God has commanded that sexual intimacy be reserved for marriage.

2. When you are sexually pure, you prepare yourself to make and keep sacred covenants in the temple. You

prepare yourself to build a strong marriage and to bring children into the world as part of an eternal and loving family. You protect yourself from the spiritual and emotional damage that come from sharing sexual intimacy outside of marriage. You also protect yourself from harmful diseases. Remaining sexually pure helps you to be confident and truly happy and improves your ability to make good decisions now and in the future.

3. The Lord’s standard regarding sexual purity is clear and unchanging. Do not have any sexual relations before marriage, and be completely faithful to your spouse after marriage. Do not allow the media, your peers, or others to persuade you that sexual intimacy before marriage is acceptable. It is not. In God’s sight, sexual sins are extremely serious. They defile the sacred power God has given us to create life. The prophet Alma taught that sexual sins are more serious than any other sins except murder or denying the Holy Ghost (see [Alma 39:5](#)).

4. Never do anything that could lead to sexual transgression. Treat others with respect, not as objects used to satisfy lustful and selfish desires. Before marriage, do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person’s body, with or without clothing. Do not do anything else that arouses sexual feelings. Do not arouse those emotions in your own body. Pay attention to the promptings of the Spirit so that you can be clean and virtuous. The Spirit of the Lord will withdraw from one who is in sexual transgression.

5. Avoid situations that invite increased temptation, such as late-night or overnight activities away from home or activities where there is a lack of adult supervision. Do not participate in discussions or any media that arouse sexual feelings. Do not participate in any type of pornography. The Spirit can help you know when you are at risk and give you the strength to remove yourself from the situation. Have faith in and be obedient to the righteous counsel of your parents and leaders.

6. Homosexual and lesbian behavior is a serious sin. If you find yourself struggling with same-gender attraction or you are being persuaded to participate in inappropriate behavior, seek counsel from your parents and bishop. They will help you.

7. Victims of sexual abuse are not guilty of sin and do not need to repent. If you have been a victim of abuse, know that you are innocent and that God loves you. Talk to your parents or another trusted adult, and seek your bishop’s counsel immediately. They can support

you spiritually and assist you in getting the protection and help you need. The process of healing may take time. Trust in the Savior. He will heal you and give you peace.

8. If you are tempted to commit any form of sexual transgression, seek help from your parents and bishop. Pray to your Father in Heaven, who will help you resist temptation and overcome inappropriate thoughts and feelings. If you have committed sexual transgression, talk to your bishop now and begin the process of repentance so that you can find peace and have the full companionship of the Spirit.

9. Make a personal commitment to be sexually pure. By your words and actions, encourage others to do the same.

9.3 - Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments

Jeffrey R. Holland
BYU Speeches, January 1988



1. This responsibility to speak to you never gets any easier for me. I think it gets more difficult as the years go by. I grow a little older, the world and its litany of problems get a little more complex, and your hopes and dreams

become evermore important to me the longer I am at BYU. Indeed, your growth and happiness and development in the life you are now living and in the life you will be living in the days and decades ahead are the central and most compelling motivation in my daily professional life. I care very much about you now and forever. Everything I know to do at BYU is being done with an eye toward who and what you are, and who and what you can become. The future of this world's history will be quite fully in your hands very soon--at least your portion of it will be--and an education at an institution sponsored and guided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the greatest academic advantage I can imagine in preparation for such a serious and significant responsibility.

2. But that future, at least any qualitative aspect of it, must be vigorously fought for. It won't "just happen" to your advantage. Someone said once that the future is waiting to be seized, and if we do not grasp it firmly, then other hands, more determined and bloody than our

own, will wrench it from us and follow a different course.

3. It is with an eye to that future--your future--and an awareness of this immense sense of responsibility I feel for you, that I approach this annual midyear devotional message. I always need the help and sustaining Spirit of the Lord to succeed at such times, but I especially feel the need for that spiritual help today.

Human Intimacy

4. My topic is that of human intimacy, a topic as sacred as any I know and more sacred than anything I have ever addressed from this podium. If I am not careful and you are not supportive, this subject can slide quickly from the sacred into the merely sensational, and I would be devastated if that happened. It would be better not to address the topic at all than to damage it with casualness or carelessness. Indeed, it is against such casualness and carelessness that I wish to speak. So I ask for your faith and your prayers and your respect.

5. You may feel this is a topic you hear addressed too frequently at this time in your life, but given the world in which we live, you may not be hearing it enough. All of the prophets, past and present, have spoken on it, and President Benson himself addressed this very subject in his annual message to this student body last fall.

I am thrilled that most of you are doing wonderfully well in the matter of personal purity. There isn't as worthy and faithful a group of university students anywhere else on the face of the earth. You are an inspiration to me. I acknowledge your devotion to the gospel and applaud it. Like Jacob of old, I would prefer for the sake of the innocent not to need to discuss such topics. But a few of you are not doing so well, and much of the world around us is not doing well at all.

6. The national press recently noted, In America 3,000 adolescents become pregnant each day. A million a year. Four out of five are unmarried. More than half get abortions. "Babies having babies." [Babies] killing [babies]. ["What's Gone Wrong with Teen Sex," People, 13 April 1987, p. 111]

7. That same national poll indicated nearly 60 percent of high school students in "mainstream" America had lost their virginity, and 80 percent of college students had. The Wall Street Journal (hardly in a class with the National Enquirer) recently wrote,

8. AIDS [appears to be reaching] plague like proportions. Even now it is claiming innocent victims:

newborn babies and recipients of blood transfusions. It is only a matter of time before it becomes widespread among heterosexuals. . . .

9. AIDS should remind us that ours is a hostile world. . . . The more we pass ourselves around, the larger the likelihood of our picking something up. . . .

10. Whether on clinical or moral grounds, it seems clear that promiscuity has its price. [Wall Street Journal, 21 May 1987, p. 28]

11. Of course, more widespread in our society than the indulgence of personal sexual activity are the printed and photographed descriptions of those who do. Of that lustful environment a contemporary observer says,

12. We live in an age in which voyeurism is no longer the side line of the solitary deviate, but rather a national pastime, fully institutionalized and [circularized] in the mass media. [William F. May, quoted by Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 178]

13. In fact, the rise of civilization seems, ironically enough, to have made actual or fantasized promiscuity a greater, not a lesser, problem. Edward Gibbon, the distinguished British historian of the eighteenth century who wrote one of the most intimidating works of history in our language (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*), said simply, Although the progress of civilization has undoubtedly contributed to assuage the fiercer passions of human nature, it seems to have been less favourable to the virtue of chastity. . . . The refinements of life [seem to] corrupt, [even as] they polish the [relationship] of the sexes. [Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 40 of *Great Books of the Western World*, 1952, p. 92]

14. I do not wish us to spend this hour documenting social problems nor wringing our hands over the dangers that such outside influences may hold for us. As serious as such contemporary realities are, I wish to discuss this topic in quite a different way, discuss it specifically for Latter-day Saints--primarily young, unmarried Latter-day Saints, even those attending Brigham Young University. So I conspicuously set aside the horrors of AIDS and national statistics on illegitimate pregnancies and speak rather to a gospel-based view of personal purity.

15. Indeed, I wish to do something even a bit more difficult than listing the do's and don'ts of personal purity. I wish to speak, to the best of my ability, on

why we should be clean, on why moral discipline is such a significant matter in God's eyes. I know that may sound presumptuous, but a philosopher once said, tell me sufficiently why a thing should be done, and I will move heaven and earth to do it. Hoping you will feel the same way as he and fully recognizing my limitations, I wish to try to give at least a partial answer to "Why be morally clean?" I will need first to pose briefly what I see as the doctrinal seriousness of the matter before then offering just three reasons for such seriousness.

The Significance and Sanctity

16. May I begin with half of a nine-line poem by Robert Frost. (The other half is worth a sermon also, but it will have to wait for another day.) Here are the first four lines of Frost's "Fire and Ice."

17. Some say the world will end in fire,

18. Some say in ice.

19. From what I've tasted of desire

20. I hold with those who favor fire.

21. A second, less poetic but more specific opinion is offered by the writer of Proverbs:

22. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

23. Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? . . .

24. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.

25. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. [Proverbs 6:27-33]

26. In getting at the doctrinal seriousness, why is this matter of sexual relationships so severe that fire is almost always the metaphor, with passion pictured vividly in flames? What is there in the potentially hurtful heat of this that leaves one's soul--or perhaps the whole world, according to Frost--destroyed, if that flame is left unchecked and those passions unrestrained? What is there in all of this that prompts Alma to warn his son Corianton that sexual transgression is "an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost" (Alma 39:5; emphasis added)?

27. Setting aside sins against the Holy Ghost for a moment as a special category unto themselves, it is LDS doctrine that sexual transgression is second only

to murder in the Lord's list of life's most serious sins. By assigning such rank to a physical appetite so conspicuously evident in all of us, what is God trying to tell us about its place in his plan for all men and women in mortality? I submit to you he is doing precisely that--commenting about the very plan of life itself. Clearly God's greatest concerns regarding mortality are how one gets into this world and how one gets out of it. These two most important issues in our very personal and carefully supervised progress are the two issues that he as our Creator and Father and Guide wishes most to reserve to himself. These are the two matters that he has repeatedly told us he wants us never to take illegally, illicitly, unfaithfully, without sanction.

28. As for the taking of life, we are generally quite responsible. Most people, it seems to me, readily sense the sanctity of life and as a rule do not run up to friends, put a loaded revolver to their heads, and cavalierly pull the trigger. Furthermore, when there is a click of the hammer rather than an explosion of lead, and a possible tragedy seems to have been averted, no one in such a circumstance would be so stupid as to sigh, "Oh, good. I didn't go all the way."

29. No, "all the way" or not, the insanity of such action with fatal powder and steel is obvious on the face of it. Such a person running about this campus with an arsenal of loaded handguns or military weaponry aimed at fellow students would be apprehended, prosecuted, and institutionalized if in fact such a lunatic would not himself have been killed in all the pandemonium. After such a fictitious moment of horror on this campus (and you are too young to remember my college years when the sniper wasn't fictitious, killing twelve of his fellow students at the University of Texas), we would undoubtedly sit in our dorms or classrooms with terror on our minds for many months to come, wondering how such a thing could possibly happen--especially here at BYU.

30. No, fortunately, in the case of how life is taken, I think we seem to be quite responsible. The seriousness of that does not often have to be spelled out, and not many sermons need to be devoted to it.

31. But in the significance and sanctity of giving life, some of us are not so responsible, and in the larger world swirling around us we find near criminal irresponsibility. What would in the case of taking life bring absolute horror and demand grim justice, in the case of giving life brings dirty jokes and four-letter lyrics and crass carnality on the silver screen, home-owned or downtown.

32. Is such moral turpitude so wrong? That question has always been asked, usually by the guilty. "Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness" (Proverbs 30:20). No murder here. Well, maybe not. But sexual transgression? "He that doeth it destroyeth his own soul." Sounds near fatal to me.

33. So much for the doctrinal seriousness. Now, with a desire to prevent such painful moments, to avoid what Alma called the "inexpressible horror" of standing in the presence of God unworthily, and to permit the intimacy it is your right and privilege and delight to enjoy in marriage to be untainted by such crushing remorse and guilt--I wish to give those three reasons I mentioned earlier as to why I believe this is an issue of such magnitude and consequence.

The Doctrine of the Soul

34. First, we simply must understand the revealed, restored Latter-day Saint doctrine of the soul, and the high and inextricable part the body plays in that doctrine. One of the "plain and precious" truths restored to this dispensation is that "the spirit and the body are the soul of man" (D&C 88:15; emphasis added) and that when the spirit and body are separated, men and women "cannot receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:34). Certainly that suggests something of the reason why obtaining a body is so fundamentally important to the plan of salvation in the first place, why sin of any kind is such a serious matter (namely because its automatic consequence is death, the separation of the spirit from the body and the separation of the spirit and the body from God), and why the resurrection of the body is so central to the great abiding and eternal triumph of Christ's atonement. We do not have to be a herd of demonically possessed swine charging down the Gadarene slopes toward the sea to understand that a body is the great prize of mortal life, and that even a pig's will do for those frenzied spirits that rebelled, and to this day remain dispossessed, in their first, unembodied estate.

35. May I quote a 1913 sermon by Elder James E. Talmage on this doctrinal point:

36. We have been taught . . . to look upon these bodies of ours as gifts from God. We Latter-day Saints do not regard the body as something to be condemned, something to be abhorred. . . . We regard [the body] as the sign of our royal birthright. . . . We recognize . . . that those who kept not their first estate . . . were denied that inestimable blessing. . . . We believe that these bodies . . . may be made, in very truth, the temple of the Holy Ghost. . . .

37. It is peculiar to the theology of the Latter-day Saints that we regard the body as an essential part of the soul. Read your dictionaries, the lexicons, and encyclopedias, and you will find that nowhere [in Christianity], outside of the Church of Jesus Christ, is the solemn and eternal truth taught that the soul of man is the body and the spirit combined. [CR, October 1913, p. 117]

38. So partly in answer to why such seriousness, we answer that one toying with the God-given--and satanically coveted--body of another, toys with the very soul of that individual, toys with the central purpose and product of life, "the very key" to life, as Elder Boyd K. Packer once called it. In trivializing the soul of another (please include the word body there), we trivialize the Atonement that saved that soul and guaranteed its continued existence. And when one toys with the Son of Righteousness, the Day Star himself, one toys with white heat and a flame hotter and holier than the noonday sun. You cannot do so and not be burned. You cannot with impunity "crucify Christ afresh" (see Hebrews 6:6). Exploitation of the body (please include the word soul there) is, in the last analysis, an exploitation of him who is the Light and the Life of the world. Perhaps here Paul's warning to the Corinthians takes on newer, higher meaning:

39. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. . . .

40. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. . . .

41. Flee fornication. . . . He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. . . .

42. . . . Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

43. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. [1 Corinthians 6:13-20; emphasis added]

44. Our soul is what's at stake here--our spirit and our body. Paul understood that doctrine of the soul every bit as well as James E. Talmage did, because it is gospel truth. The purchase price for our fullness of joy body and spirit eternally united--is the pure and innocent blood of the Savior of this world. We cannot then say in ignorance or defiance, "Well, it's my life," or worse yet, "It's my body." It is not. "Ye are not your own," Paul said. "Ye are bought with a price." So in answer to the question, "Why does God care so much

about sexual transgression?" it is partly because of the precious gift offered by and through his Only Begotten Son to redeem the souls--bodies and spirits--we too often share and abuse in cheap and tawdry ways. Christ restored the very seeds of eternal lives (see D&C 132:19, 24), and we desecrate them at our peril. The first key reason for personal purity? Our very souls are involved and at stake.

A Symbol of Total Union

45. Second, may I suggest that human intimacy, that sacred, physical union ordained of God for a married couple, deals with a symbol that demands special sanctity. Such an act of love between a man and a woman is--or certainly was ordained to be--a symbol of total union: union of their hearts, their hopes, their lives, their love, their family, their future, their everything. It is a symbol that we try to suggest in the temple with a word like seal. The Prophet Joseph Smith once said we perhaps ought to render such a sacred bond as "welding"--that those united in matrimony and eternal families are "welded" together, inseparable if you will, to withstand the temptations of the adversary and the afflictions of mortality. (See D&C 128:18.)

46. But such a total, virtually unbreakable union, such an unyielding commitment between a man and a woman, can only come with the proximity and permanence afforded in a marriage covenant, with the union of all that they possess--their very hearts and minds, all their days and all their dreams. They work together, they cry together, they enjoy Brahms and Beethoven and breakfast together, they sacrifice and save and live together for all the abundance that such a totally intimate life provides such a couple. And the external symbol of that union, the physical manifestation of what is a far deeper spiritual and metaphysical bonding, is the physical blending that is part of--indeed, a most beautiful and gratifying expression of--that larger, more complete union of eternal purpose and promise.

47. As delicate as it is to mention in such a setting, I nevertheless trust your maturity to understand that physiologically we are created as men and women to fit together in such a union. In this ultimate physical expression of one man and one woman they are as nearly and as literally "one" as two separate physical bodies can ever be. It is in that act of ultimate physical intimacy we most nearly fulfill the commandment of the Lord given to Adam and Eve, living symbols for all married couples, when he invited them to cleave unto

one another only, and thus become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

48. Obviously, such a commandment to these two, the first husband and wife of the human family, has unlimited implications--social, cultural, and religious as well as physical--but that is exactly my point. As all couples come to that moment of bonding in mortality, it is to be just such a complete union. That commandment cannot be fulfilled, and that symbolism of "one flesh" cannot be preserved, if we hastily and guiltily and surreptitiously share intimacy in a darkened corner of a darkened hour, then just as hastily and guiltily and surreptitiously retreat to our separate worlds--not to eat or live or cry or laugh together, not to do the laundry and the dishes and the homework, not to manage a budget and pay the bills and tend the children and plan together for the future. No, we cannot do that until we are truly one--united, bound, linked, tied, welded, sealed, married.

49. Can you see then the moral schizophrenia that comes from pretending we are one, sharing the physical symbols and physical intimacy of our union, but then fleeing, retreating, severing all such other aspects--and symbols--of what was meant to be a total obligation, only to unite again furtively some other night or, worse yet, furtively unite (and you can tell how cynically I use that word) with some other partner who is no more bound to us, no more one with us than the last was or than the one that will come next week or next month or next year or anytime before the binding commitments of marriage?

50. You must wait--you must wait until you can give everything, and you cannot give everything until you are at least legally and, for Latter-day Saint purposes, eternally pronounced as one. To give illicitly that which is not yours to give (remember--"you are not your own") and to give only part of that which cannot be followed with the gift of your whole heart and your whole life and your whole self is its own form of emotional Russian roulette. If you persist in sharing part without the whole, in pursuing satisfaction devoid of symbolism, in giving parts and pieces and inflamed fragments only, you run the terrible risk of such spiritual, psychic damage that you may undermine both your physical intimacy and your wholehearted devotion to a truer, later love. You may come to that moment of real love, of total union, only to discover to your horror that what you should have saved has been spent, and--mark my words--only God's grace can recover that piecemeal dissipation of your virtue.

51. A good Latter-day Saint friend, Dr. Victor L. Brown, Jr., has written of this issue:

52. Fragmentation enables its users to counterfeit intimacy. . . .

53. If we relate to each other in fragments, at best we miss full relationships. At worst, we manipulate and exploit others for our gratification. Sexual fragmentation can be particularly harmful because it gives powerful physiological rewards which, though illusory, can temporarily persuade us to overlook the serious deficits in the overall relationship. Two people may marry for physical gratification and then discover that the illusion of union collapses under the weight of intellectual, social, and spiritual incompatibilities. . . .

54. Sexual fragmentation is particularly harmful because it is particularly deceptive. The intense human intimacy that should be enjoyed in and symbolized by sexual union is counterfeited by sensual episodes which suggest--but cannot deliver--acceptance, understanding, and love. Such encounters mistake the end for the means as lonely, desperate people seek a common denominator which will permit the easiest, quickest gratification. [Victor L. Brown, Jr., *Human Intimacy: Illusion and Reality* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Parliament Publishers, 1981), pp. 5-6]

55. Listen to a far more biting observation by a non-Latter-day Saint regarding such acts devoid of both the soul and symbolism we have been discussing. He writes:

56. Our sexuality has been animalized, stripped of the intricacy of feeling with which human beings have endowed it, leaving us to contemplate only the act, and to fear our impotence in it. It is this animalization from which the sexual manuals cannot escape, even when they try to do so, because they are reflections of it. They might [as well] be textbooks for veterinarians. [Fairlie, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 182]

57. In this matter of counterfeit intimacy and deceptive gratification, I express particular caution to the men who hear this message. I have heard all my life that it is the young woman who has to assume the responsibility for controlling the limits of intimacy in courtship because a young man cannot. What an unacceptable response to such a serious issue! What kind of man is he, what priesthood or power or strength or self-control does this man have that lets him develop in society, grow to the age of mature accountability, perhaps even pursue a university education and prepare to affect the future of colleagues and kingdoms and the course of the world, but yet does not have the mental

capacity or the moral will to say, "I will not do that thing"? No, this sorry drugstore psychology would have us say, "He just can't help himself. His glands have complete control over his life--his mind, his will, his entire future."

58. To say that a young woman in such a relationship has to bear her responsibility and that of the young man's too is the least fair assertion I can imagine. In most instances if there is sexual transgression, I lay the burden squarely on the shoulders of the young man--for our purposes probably a priesthood bearer--and that's where I believe God intended responsibility to be. In saying that I do not excuse young women who exercise no restraint and have not the character or conviction to demand intimacy only in its rightful role. I have had enough experience in Church callings to know that women as well as men can be predatory. But I refuse to buy some young man's feigned innocence who wants to sin and call it psychology.

59. Indeed, most tragically, it is the young woman who is most often the victim, it is the young woman who most often suffers the greater pain, it is the young woman who most often feels used and abused and terribly unclean. And for that imposed uncleanness a man will pay, as surely as the sun sets and rivers run to the sea.

60. Note the prophet Jacob's straightforward language on this account in the Book of Mormon. After a bold confrontation on the subject of sexual transgression among the Nephites, he quotes Jehovah:

61. For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land. . .

62. And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people . . . shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

63. For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction. [Jacob 2:31-33; emphasis added]

64. Don't be deceived and don't be destroyed. Unless such fire is controlled, your clothes and your future will be burned. And your world, short of painful and perfect repentance, will go up in flames. I give that to you on good word--I give it to you on God's word.

A HOLY SACRAMENT

65. That leads me to my last reason, a third effort to say why. After soul and symbol, the word is sacrament,

a term closely related to the other two. Sexual intimacy is not only a symbolic union between a man and a woman--the uniting of their very souls--but it is also symbolic of a union between mortals and deity, between otherwise ordinary and fallible humans uniting for a rare and special moment with God himself and all the powers by which he gives life in this wide universe of ours.

66. In this latter sense, human intimacy is a sacrament, a very special kind of symbol. For our purpose here today, a sacrament could be any one of a number of gestures or acts or ordinances that unite us with God and his limitless powers. We are imperfect and mortal; he is perfect and immortal. But from time to time--indeed, as often as is possible and appropriate--we find ways and go to places and create circumstances where we can unite symbolically with him, and in so doing gain access to his power. Those special moments of union with God are sacramental moments--such as kneeling at a marriage altar, or blessing a newborn baby, or partaking of the emblems of the Lord's supper. This latter ordinance is the one we in the Church have come to associate most traditionally with the word sacrament, though it is technically only one of many such moments when we formally take the hand of God and feel his divine power.

67. These are moments when we quite literally unite our will with God's will, our spirit with his spirit, where communion through the veil becomes very real. At such moments we not only acknowledge his divinity, but we quite literally take something of that divinity to ourselves. Such are the holy sacraments.

68. Now, once again, I know of no one who would, for example, rush into the middle of a sacramental service, grab the linen from the tables, throw the bread the full length of the room, tip the water trays onto the floor, and laughingly retreat from the building to await an opportunity to do the same thing at another worship service the next Sunday. No one within the sound of my voice would do that during one of the truly sacred moments of our religious worship. Nor would anyone here violate any of the other sacramental moments in our lives, those times when we consciously claim God's power and by invitation stand with him in privilege and principality.

69. But I wish to stress with you this morning, as my third of three reasons to be clean, that sexual union is also, in its own profound way, a very real sacrament of the highest order, a union not only of a man and a woman but very much the union of that man and

woman with God. Indeed, if our definition of sacrament is that act of claiming and sharing and exercising God's own inestimable power, then I know of virtually no other divine privilege so routinely given to us all--women or men, ordained or unordained, Latter-day Saint or non-Latter-day Saint--than the miraculous and majestic power of transmitting life, the unspeakable, unfathomable, unbroken power of procreation. There are those special moments in your lives when the other, more formal ordinances of the gospel--the sacraments, if you will--allow you to feel the grace and grandeur of God's power. Many are one-time experiences (such as our own confirmation or our own marriage), and some are repeatable (such as administering to the sick or doing ordinance work for others in the temple). But I know of nothing so earth-shatteringly powerful and yet so universally and unstintingly given to us as the God-given power available in every one of us from our early teen years on to create a human body, that wonder of all wonders, a genetically and spiritually unique being never seen before in the history of the world and never to be duplicated again in all the ages of eternity--a child, your child--with eyes and ears and fingers and toes and a future of unspeakable grandeur.

70. Imagine that, if you will. Veritable teenagers--and all of us for many decades thereafter--carrying daily, hourly, minute-to-minute, virtually every waking and sleeping moment of our lives, the power and the chemistry and the eternally transmitted seeds of life to grant someone else her second estate, someone else his next level of development in the divine plan of salvation. I submit to you that no power, priesthood or otherwise, is given by God so universally to so many with virtually no control over its use except self-control. And I submit to you that you will never be more like God at any other time in this life than when you are expressing that particular power. Of all the titles he has chosen for himself, Father is the one he declares, and Creation is his watchword--especially human creation, creation in his image. His glory isn't a mountain, as stunning as mountains are. It isn't in sea or sky or snow or sunrise, as beautiful as they all are. It isn't in art or technology, be that a concerto or computer. No, his glory--and his grief--is in his children. You and I, we are his prized possessions, and we are the earthly evidence, however inadequate, of what he truly is. Human life--that is the greatest of God's powers, the most mysterious and magnificent chemistry of it all--and you and I have been given it, but under the most serious and sacred of restrictions. You and I who can make neither mountain nor moonlight, not one raindrop nor a single rose--yet we

have this greater gift in an absolutely unlimited way. And the only control placed on us is self-control--self-control born of respect for the divine sacramental power it is.

71. Surely God's trust in us to respect this future-forming gift is awesomely staggering. We who may not be able to repair a bicycle nor assemble an average jigsaw puzzle--yet with all our weaknesses and imperfections, we carry this procreative power that makes us very much like God in at least one grand and majestic way.

A SERIOUS MATTER

72. Souls. Symbols. Sacraments. Does any of this help you understand why human intimacy is such a serious matter? Why it is so right and rewarding and stunningly beautiful when it is within marriage and approved of God (not just "good" but "very good," he declared to Adam and Eve), and so blasphemously wrong--like unto murder--when it is outside such a covenant? It is my understanding that we park and pet and sleep over and sleep with at the peril of our very lives. Our penalty may not come on the precise day of our transgression, but it comes surely and certainly enough, and were it not for a merciful God and the treasured privilege of personal repentance, far too many would even now be feeling that hellish pain, which (like the passion we have been discussing) is also always described in the metaphor of fire. Someday, somewhere, sometime the morally unclean will, until they repent, pray like the rich man, wishing Lazarus to "dip . . . his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

73. Some say the world will end in fire,

74. Some say in ice.

75. From what I've tasted of desire

76. I hold with those who favor fire.

77. In closing, consider this from two students of civilization's long, instructive story:

78. No one man [or woman], however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life [or hers] before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be

banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group. [Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 35-36]

79. Or, in the more ecclesiastical words of James E. Talmage:

80. It has been declared in the solemn word of revelation, that the spirit and the body constitute the soul of man; and, therefore, we should look upon this body as something that shall endure in the resurrected state, beyond the grave, something to be kept pure and holy. Be not afraid of soiling its hands; be not afraid of scars that may come to it if won in earnest effort, or [won] in honest fight, but beware of scars that disfigure, that have come to you in places where you ought not have gone, that have befallen you in unworthy undertakings [pursued where you ought not have been]; beware of the wounds of battles in which you have been fighting on the wrong side. [Talmage, CR, October 1913, p. 117]

81. I love you for wanting to be on the right side of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I express my pride in and appreciation for your faithfulness. As I said earlier, you are an absolute inspiration to me. I consider it the greatest of all professional privileges to be associated with you at this university at a time in your lives when you are finalizing what you believe and forging what your future will be.

82. If some few of you are feeling the "scars . . . that have come to you in places where you ought not have gone," I wish to extend to you the special peace and promise available through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. I testify of his love and of the restored gospel principles and ordinances which make that love available to us with all their cleansing and healing power. I testify of the power of these principles and ordinances, including complete and redeeming repentance, which are only fully realized in this the true and living church of the true and living God. That we may "come unto Christ" for the fullness of soul and symbol and sacrament he offers us, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

9.4 - We Believe In Being Chaste

Elder David A. Bednar

Ensign, May 2013



1. My message addresses a fundamental question of great spiritual consequence: Why is the law of chastity so important? I pray the [Holy Ghost](#) will confirm the truthfulness of the principles I emphasize.

The Father's Plan of Happiness

2. The eternal importance of chastity can only be understood within the overarching context of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness for His children. "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and . . . has a divine nature and destiny" ("The [Family](#): A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129). All men and women lived with God as His spirit children before coming to the earth as mortal beings. The Father's plan enables His spirit sons and daughters to obtain physical bodies, to gain mortal experience, and to progress toward exaltation.

The Importance of a Physical Body

3. Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal existence. Thus, our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and act in accordance with truth, and our ability to obey the principles and ordinances of the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) are amplified through our physical bodies. In the school of mortality, we experience tenderness, love, kindness, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, and even the challenges of physical limitations in ways that prepare us for eternity. Simply stated, there are lessons we must learn and experiences we must have, as the scriptures describe, "according to the flesh" ([1 Nephi 19:6](#); [Alma 7:12–13](#)).

The Power of Procreation

4. After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said "it was not good that the man should be alone" ([Moses 3:18](#); see also [Genesis 2:18](#)), and Eve became Adam's wife and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females was needed to enact the plan of happiness. "Neither is the man without the woman,

neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” ([1 Corinthians 11:11](#)). The man and the woman are intended to learn from, strengthen, bless, and complete each other.

5. The means by which mortal life is created is divinely appointed. “The first commandment ... God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife” (Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2010, 129). The commandment to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

6. The power of procreation is spiritually significant. Misuse of this power subverts the purposes of the Father’s plan and of our mortal existence. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son are creators and have entrusted each of us with a portion of Their creative power. Specific guidelines for the proper use of the ability to create life are vital elements in the Father’s plan. How we feel about and use that supernal power will determine in large measure our happiness in mortality and our destiny in eternity.

7. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained:

8. “The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given his children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment, but another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse. The emphasis we place on the law of chastity is explained by our understanding of the purpose of our procreative powers in the accomplishment of God’s plan. ...

9. “Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of the procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute of men and women” (“The Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, Nov. 1993, 74).

The Standard of Sexual Morality

10. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a single, undeviating standard of sexual morality: intimate relations are proper only between a man and a woman in the marriage relationship prescribed in God’s plan. Such relations are not merely a curiosity to be explored, an appetite to be satisfied, or a type of recreation or entertainment to be pursued selfishly. They are not a conquest to be achieved or simply an act to be performed. Rather, they are in mortality one of the ultimate expressions of our divine nature and

potential and a way of strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between husband and wife. We are agents blessed with moral agency and are defined by our divine heritage as children of God—and not by sexual behaviors, contemporary attitudes, or secular philosophies.

The Natural Man

11. To some degree, the natural man described by King Benjamin is alive and well in each of us (see [Mosiah 3:19](#)). The natural man or woman is unrepentant, is carnal and sensual (see [Mosiah 16:5](#); [Alma 42:10](#); [Moses 5:13](#)), is indulgent and excessive, and is prideful and selfish. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “The ‘natural man’ is the ‘earthy man’ who has allowed rude animal passions to overshadow his spiritual inclinations” (“Ocean Currents and Family Influences,” Ensign, Nov. 1974, 112).

12. In contrast, the “man [or woman] of Christ” ([Helaman 3:29](#)) is spiritual and bridles all passions (see [Alma 38:12](#)), is temperate and restrained, and is benevolent and selfless. Men and women of Christ lay hold upon the word of God, deny themselves and take up His cross (see [Matthew 16:24](#); [Mark 8:34](#); [Luke 9:23](#); [D&C 56:2](#)), and press forward along a strait and narrow course of faithfulness, obedience, and devotion to the Savior and His gospel.

13. 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](#)).

14. 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.

The Intent of the Adversary

15. The Father's plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him with resurrected, exalted bodies. Heavenly Father desires us to be together in the light and filled with hope. In contrast, Lucifer labors to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to hinder their eternal progression. The overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become "miserable like unto himself" ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)). Lucifer wants us ultimately to be alone in the dark and without hope.

16. Satan relentlessly works to distort the most important elements of the Father's plan. He does not have a body, and his eternal progress has been halted. Just as water flowing in a riverbed is stopped by a dam, so the adversary's eternal progress is thwarted because he does not have a physical body. Because of his rebellion, Lucifer has denied himself all of the mortal blessings and experiences made possible through a body of flesh and bones. He cannot learn the lessons that only an embodied spirit can learn. He resents the reality of a literal and universal [resurrection](#) of all mankind. One of the potent scriptural meanings of the word damned is illustrated in his inability to continue developing and becoming like our Heavenly Father.

17. Because a physical body is so central to the Father's plan of happiness and our spiritual development, 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, entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to spiritual destruction.

18. Violating the law of chastity is a grievous sin and a misuse of our physical tabernacles. To those who know and understand the plan of salvation, defiling the body is an act of rebellion (see [Mosiah 2:36–37](#); [D&C 64:34–35](#)) and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit companionship advocated by the adversary is temporary and empty.

The Blessings of Being Chaste

19. Alma counseled his son Shiblon to "bridle all [of his] passions, that [he] may be filled with love" ([Alma 38:12](#)). Significantly, disciplining the natural man in each of us makes possible a richer, a deeper, and a more enduring love of God and of His children. Love

increases through righteous restraint and decreases through impulsive indulgence.

20. President Marion G. Romney declared:

21. "I can think of no blessings to be more fervently desired than those promised to the pure and the virtuous. Jesus spoke of specific rewards for different virtues but reserved the greatest, so it seems to me, for the pure in heart, 'for they,' said he, 'shall see God' ([Matt. 5:8](#)). And not only shall they see the Lord, but they shall feel at home in his presence.

22. "Here is ... the Savior's promise: 'Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God' ([D&C 121:45](#))" ("Trust in the Lord," Ensign, May 1979, 42).

23. We also are promised that, as we pursue the pathway of virtue, "the Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion" ([D&C 121:46](#)). Thus, living the law of chastity invites some of the greatest blessings men and women can receive in mortality: appropriate spiritual confidence in the presence of family, friends, Church associates, and, ultimately, the Savior. Our innate longing to belong is fulfilled in righteousness as we walk in the light with hope.

24. The Principle of Repentance

25. Some of you who receive this message need to repent of sexual or other sins. The Savior is often referred to as the Great Physician, and this title has both symbolic and literal significance. All of us have experienced the pain associated with a physical injury or wound. When we are in pain, we typically seek relief and are grateful for the medication and treatments that help to alleviate our suffering. Consider sin as a spiritual wound that causes guilt or, as described by Alma to his son Corianton, "remorse of conscience" ([Alma 42:18](#)). Guilt is to our spirit what pain is to our body—a warning of danger and a protection from additional damage. From the Atonement of the Savior flows the soothing salve that can heal our spiritual wounds and remove guilt. However, this salve can only be applied through the principles of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, and consistent obedience. The results of sincere repentance are peace of conscience, comfort, and spiritual healing and renewal.

26. Your bishop or branch president is the spiritual physician's assistant who is authorized to help you repent and heal. Please remember, however, that the extent and intensity of your repentance must match the nature and severity of your sins—especially for Latter-day Saints who are under sacred covenant. Serious

spiritual wounds require sustained treatment and time to heal completely and fully.

A Promise and a Testimony

27. The doctrine I have described will seem to be archaic and outdated to many people in a world that increasingly mocks the sanctity of procreation and minimizes the worth of human life. But the Lord’s

truth is not altered by fads, popularity, or public opinion polls. I promise that obedience to the law of chastity will increase our happiness in mortality and make possible our progress in eternity. Chastity and virtue are now, always have been, and always will be “most dear and precious above all things” ([Moroni 9:9](#)). I so testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

10.1 - Intimacy in Marriage

10.1 - Preparing for Intimacy

Chapter 12
Wendy Watson Nelson



1. The Lord’s counsel in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants is a wonderful guide for spouses: “Cease from all your light speeches . . . from all your lustful desires, from all your pride and light-mindedness, and from all your wicked doings. . . . See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another. . . . Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated. And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity.” (D&C 88:121, 123–25.) This advice could form the foundation of an entire marriage manual!

2. In fact, many problems that plague marriages would be eliminated if these words of the Lord were obeyed. The following table suggests a few ways they might be applied:

MARITAL PROBLEM	THE LORD’S SOLUTION
Criticism and emotional abuse	Cease to find fault; cease from all pride
Hygiene/housekeeping problems	Cease to be unclean
Pornography	Cease your lustful desires and wicked doings; cease to be unclean

Adultery	Cease to be covetous; cease your lustful desires and wicked doings; cease to be unclean
Trivializing marital intimacy itself	Cease from all your light speeches and lightmindedness
Selfishness	Learn to impart one to another
Pride	Cease from all your pride
Financial problems	Cease to be idle; cease to be covetous; cease from all your pride
Communication problems	Cease to find fault; cease from your pride; learn to impart one to another; cease from all your light speeches
Laziness; “underinvolvement” in caring for the home and family	Cease to be idle; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to bed early and arise early that your bodies and minds may be invigorated

3. Now, consider what would happen if the Lord’s instructions of *what to do* in the midst of all that “ceasing” were followed: “See that ye love one another. . . . And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity.” Imagine how well prepared for marital intimacy husbands and wives would be if just that one injunction were really followed!

Let the Holy Spirit Guide

4. As men and women of Christ and of covenant, we can never expect to find a fulness of joy by following the world's prescription for sexual intimacy. We can't participate in "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" and still do "the will of God." (1 John 2:16–17.) Paul's words provide a great guideline for spouses seeking to prepare for co-creating love. He counsels, "Refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7.) Looking beyond the world's "profane and old wives' fables" can help Latter-day Saint couples prepare for God-ordained sexual intimacy.

5. One bewildered husband said, "Okay, now I know what I'm *not* supposed to do. But I don't have a clue about what I *should* do. I want to be able to offer my wife the kind of marital intimacy we're talking about, but if I can't take my lead from what I see on TV and in movies, what do I do? I'm not good at thinking of these things myself."

6. Fortunately, this husband doesn't have to figure out by himself how to prepare for marital intimacy, and neither do you. Consider some of the spiritual truths we have discussed. We start with the foundational understanding that intimacy of any kind involves reciprocal feelings of trust and emotional closeness and an open communication of thoughts and feelings. Hence, the more a husband and wife experience open communication, trust, and emotional closeness with each other, the greater their prospects for enjoying true marital intimacy. The more unified spouses are in all areas of their lives, the more intimate their relationship will be. Physical intimacy then becomes a symbol of their overall unity. True marital intimacy becomes a time for them to draw closer to each other by uniting their whole souls—bodies and spirits. And it becomes a time when spouses can draw closer to the Lord. With these ideas in mind, it follows naturally then that any activity that (1) draws spouses' hearts out to one another and (2) invites the Spirit will help prepare a couple for marital intimacy.

7. The more you prepare yourself spiritually, bringing yourself more in tune with your spouse's spirit and with the Spirit, the more fulfilling your sexual experiences will become over time. In the words of one wife, "I never feel closer to my husband than when he is under the influence of the Spirit." Another wife said, "The greatest elixir of love for me is when my husband says, 'I want to spend time with you,' 'I want to know what's really on your mind,' 'How are you really

doing?'" As spouses seek the Lord's help about how to prepare for marital intimacy, the Holy Ghost will whisper truth-filled directives especially for them.

Thirty Activities That Can Increase Feelings of Intimacy

8. Following are thirty activities that various couples have found draw their hearts out to one another and invite the Spirit, setting the stage for greater intimacy in their relationship.

1) Think and ask about how your spouse is really doing and feeling.

2) Do things to lift your spouse's burdens and to let your spouse know that he or she is not alone. In other words, shore up your spouse's feeble knees and strengthen his or her hands that hang down.

3) Think about what would help strengthen your spouse's spirit and help him or her feel better about himself or herself.

4) Do things together—walk, work, play, dream, spend, and save *together*.

5) Talk and express your thoughts and feelings before, during, and after physically intimate moments.

6) Be involved in each other's lives and in the lives of your children. (As one woman said, "When I see my husband involved with our children, my heart is irresistibly drawn out to him.")

7) Draw a boundary around your marital intimacy. Keep the in-laws and your children and friends out. This is your sacred space and private experience. Keep it as yours alone.

8) Create a private sanctuary for the two of you—and include a lock on the door.

9) Take responsibility for what you do to contribute to the problems in your marriage. Apologize sincerely. Ask for forgiveness and willingly offer forgiveness.

10) Pray together and individually to hear the voice of the Lord.

11) Look for subtle—and not-so-subtle—ways that the adversary is holding your marriage hostage. Talk with each other about it.

12) Cast Satan out of your lives and your relationship.

13) Seek ideas for strengthening your marriage in the scriptures, together and individually.

14) Use "we," "us," and "our" language in public and in private.

- 15) Designate one time a week that is just for the two of you to talk and be together.
 - 16) Go to the temple together, remember your covenants, and talk about how you felt there, what came to your mind, what you learned.
 - 17) Fast together for your marriage.
 - 18) Look into your spouse's eyes—really look.
 - 19) Smile and laugh together.
 - 20) Comment on your spouse's strengths, both privately and publicly.
 - 21) Turn to each other first when there are challenges. Cry together when the occasion warrants it.
 - 22) Thank your spouse.
 - 23) Thank the Lord for your spouse.
 - 24) Express love for your spouse in word and deed—more than he or she would ever expect—in private and in public.
 - 25) Express love for the Lord privately and publicly—frequently.
 - 26) Remember that you are a child of God with divine characteristics and potential.
 - 27) Remember that you've made sacred covenants with your spouse and with the Lord.
 - 28) Remember that true marital intimacy involves the uniting of your souls—your body and spirit joining with the body and spirit of your spouse.
 - 29) Remember that co-creating love is to be symbolic of the total unity that can exist between you and your spouse.
 - 30) Remember that marital intimacy can be a kind of sacrament. It can be a time to draw closer to the Lord together and receive of His power.
9. This list is neither prescriptive nor all-inclusive. Not all of these activities that have helped other couples prepare for marital intimacy may fit for you. Co-creating love is unique for each couple. As you and your spouse seek and ask, you will find the appropriate activities that will help you lay claim to, or perhaps reclaim, the marital intimacy that is yours to enjoy.
10. With the understanding that each couple needs to be led by the Spirit to discover how to feel closer to each other, perhaps the following general guidelines can provide some initial assistance for your adventure.

Bury Your Weapons of War

11. In the days of Ammon in the Book of Mormon, the converted Lamanites were worried about staining their swords with the blood of their enemies. They wanted war to end. So, “they buried their weapons of war, for peace.” ([Alma 24:19](#).) What a dramatic gesture to signify just how determined they were to have peace!

12. Most husbands and wives can identify the weapons of war that fight against their marital intimacy. These weapons of war are thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that keep spouses feeling separate and single within their marriages. These weapons wound, maim, destroy, defile, or kill marital intimacy. As long as spouses continue to wield these weapons of war, the possibility of achieving true marital intimacy is out of the question.

13. One couple took the above scripture in Alma to heart. They made lists of words, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that killed their desire for marital intimacy. For example, the husband said, “I never want to say to you again: ‘You control me when you disapprove of what I’m watching on TV.’ I want to bury that weapon. The truth is that what you think about me really matters to me and helps me. Stubborn pride has prevented me from listening to your fears. From now on I won’t fight you anymore about TV viewing that makes you feel uncomfortable. I also want to bury the belief that ‘I will never be good enough for you.’ You’ve shown me and told me otherwise over and over again. I want to lay down that weapon of war and bury it.”

14. He kept adding to his list of things he used as “weapons of war” against his wife, himself, and their relationship. He also listed words, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that he felt were “weapons of war” used by his wife. His wife did the same. As they reviewed their lists, they found some weapons that they needed each other’s help to overcome. They talked about those things and what still needed to change before they would be able to bury those weapons. For example, one weapon could not be buried until an apology was offered and accepted.

15. The process took several weeks of intensively detecting old weapons, talking, and writing. Once the lists were made, they then wrote each “weapon of war” on a separate piece of paper. Ceremonially placing each piece of paper in a box, they vowed to each other to never again use that weapon. So committed were they to ridding their relationship of these destructive words, thoughts, and practices that they then selected a safe and private place to bury the box, declaring that if

they ever were tempted to use any of those weapons again, they would need to go to the burial site together, dig up the box, and exhume the remains to find the weapon they wanted to use. And thus they “buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their [spouse].” ([Alma 26:32](#).)

Bring Broken Hearts and Contrite Spirits

16. In D&C 59:8 we read about how to prepare ourselves to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper: We are each to bring a broken (or open) heart and a contrite spirit. What a great guideline for spouses as they prepare for sacred marital intimacy!

17. One couple’s preparation included a heart-to-heart conversation where they laid their pride aside, expressed sorrow for past offenses, and resolved to be more loving and more pure. They also determined to live by the “48-hour rule” to manage future disappointments. If one of them was upset about something the other did or didn’t do, he or she had 48 hours following the “offense” to talk with the offender about it. If they didn’t bring up what was troubling them within 48 hours, it was not fair to bring it up after that time period. This rule helped them stop their destructive former practice of reciting each other’s past sins, mistakes, and omissions whenever one of them did anything wrong. This couple’s pattern of flogging each other with the past decreased, and they started building a future together—one that began to include moments of true marital intimacy.

18. As the couple continued to uncover the effects of pride in their marriage the wife said, “I think I’ve missed many opportunities to help you learn to love. I was given lots of love growing up and saw a great example in my parents of a husband and wife who really enjoyed each other and supported each other in every way. I thought the other day that if you had a bandage over your heart with a sign on it that said, ‘In need of learning about love,’ I would be much more gentle and giving and forgiving of you. I’m sorry that I’ve punished you for not knowing how to love me.”

Focus on Love-Generating Images

19. One couple earnestly sought to put behind them the world’s approach to “making love.” They longed to gain access to the binding power that could come from worthily co-creating love. One day in prayer the wife was blessed with powerful, positive images of her husband. These images came into her mind and stayed in her heart. In her prayerful, seeking state, she was given to understand that these were sacred images of her husband’s premortal self. As she mentally

embraced these images, her heart was irresistibly drawn out to her husband in a manner unlike anything she had previously experienced. And each time the wife brought these images to her mind, she experienced a heightened appreciation for her husband and a desire to unite her life with his in every way.

Remember Your Covenants

20. Christian writer C. S. Lewis offers us an important truth in the form of advice from Screwtape, a senior devil, writing to his apprenticing nephew, Wormwood: “It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.” (*Screwtape Letters*, 25.)

21. What have you forgotten lately about the Savior, yourself, your spouse, your relationship, or about love and marriage that may be adversely affecting your marital intimacy?

22. How would remembering your temple wedding ceremony help you enjoy physical intimacy even more? Temple weddings involve symbols, not the least of which is the symbol of leaving the world in order to enter the temple. Through keeping the Lord’s commandments, you came out of the world, both literally and symbolically, to participate in your temple wedding. You shut the world out so that you and your beloved could be joined together in an endless contract—sealed together.

23. Elder John A. Widtsoe spoke of the elegant orchestration of a temple wedding and the benefits of really concentrating on the true meaning of the ceremony: “[Temple weddings] are performed in an attractive sealing room, especially dedicated for the purpose. The ceremony itself is simple, beautiful, and profound. Relatively few witnesses are present. Quiet and order prevail. There are no external trappings to confuse the mind. Full attention may be given to the sacred covenants to be made, and the blessings to follow cover the vast period of eternal existence.” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 232.)

24. Are you keeping the door to the world closed behind you as a couple, as you are in the process of building upon your temple wedding ceremony to fashion your temple marriage? If you consider the temple wedding ceremony to be a pattern for happiness within your marital intimacy:

- Do you give your full attention to your spouse from time to time?
- Do quiet and order prevail during moments of marital intimacy?

- Is your marriage free from excessive external trappings?
- Do you regularly review your sacred covenants and the associated blessings?

25. Pray for Gifts of the Spirit

26. Tad R. Callister has written, “President George Q. Cannon . . . eloquently and fervently pleaded with the saints to overcome each manifested weakness through the acquisition of a countermanding gift of strength, known as a gift of the Spirit.” (*The Infinite Atonement*, 273.) What gifts of the Spirit would strengthen you and your spouse? Talk about this with your spouse. Determine to seek and pray for those gifts of the Spirit that would increase the feelings of intimacy in your marriage. (See D&C 46 and [Moroni 10](#) for a beginning listing of possible gifts of the Spirit.)

27. For one couple, the seemingly simple act of reading about gifts of the Spirit was a major turning point in their marriage. Following a difficult time, the husband resolved not to approach his wife sexually until he felt “more worthy.” In the midst of this self-imposed restraint, he read to his wife one evening from section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Her heart was irresistibly drawn toward his. She later described that experience as the most wonderful time—in twenty-five years of marriage—of uniting their spirits, an important prerequisite to uniting their whole souls in marital intimacy.

Listen to Music that Brings Your Spirit to Life

28. Listening to music can lift us and rescue us from the darkness of the world. One couple loved music. Playing “their song” and listening to “mood music” was a favorite part of their preparation for physical intimacy. The melodies, words, rhythms, and volumes varied from selection to selection, but the outcome was always the same: Each piece of music brought their spirits to life.

Speak Words of Love and Commitment

29. As stated earlier, the “first four minutes of contact” between a couple are important in drawing their hearts together. Can you imagine how Paul’s greeting to the Philippians would warm your heart and pave the way for marvelous moments of sharing love? Imagine hearing your spouse say to you, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” ([Philippians 1:3](#)), or, “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers” ([Philemon 1:4](#)).

30. The greeting of the brethren at the School of the Prophets is similarly instructive and inspiring: “I salute

you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever.” (D&C 88:133.)

31. While such patterns of language may seem stilted or overdone, the pattern of commendation and expressing appreciation and love remains the same. Just image the power of such loving words.

Conclusion

32. What is appropriate preparation for marital intimacy? The Spirit has directed many couples as they have sought the answer to that question for themselves.

33. What an adventure lies ahead for you and your spouse as you seek to discover activities that bring your spirits to life and invite the Spirit! As you prepare in this way, your ability to experience true marital intimacy will increase.¹¹ 3-Sexual Stewardship.

10.2 - Strengthening Marriage Through Sexual Fulfillment,

Laura M. Brotherson

And They Were Not Ashamed, 2004



1. The Family: A Proclamation to the World states, “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other. . . .”² This solemn responsibility is defined as a stewardship, sacred trust, a charge or guardianship.

This stewardship is entrusted to us by God, not only for us to maintain, but also to improve. This requires our time and effort. Both husband and wife are stewards, caretakers, guardians and keepers of the marriage. Each is accountable to God for its well-being and success.

2. Designated by God and reserved specifically for marriage, sexual relations are an important part of the sacred stewardship of marriage. Couples are to improve intimacy and overcome barriers to sexual enjoyment. BYU professor Dr. Brent Barlow referred to sexual relations in marriage as a “sexual guardianship.” He indicated how couples share the responsibility for guarding, tending and improving, or strengthening, the sexual relationship within the marital stewardship:

3. When we see sexuality as a vital part of marital harmony and happiness, it becomes more than

something we simply give or receive. I like to think of it as something a husband and wife can share. It might be called a sexual guardianship.

4. In the parable of the talents, Jesus taught that we should improve on whatever has been entrusted to our care. (See Matthew 25:14-30.) And in marriage we are often given joint guardianships [or stewardships], such as children, fidelity, and the day-to-day maintenance of family members. 3

5. Both husband and wife will likely face some struggles as they seek to improve upon their sexual stewardship and find sexual fulfillment. New and unwelcome information and emotions may emerge as couples work through these challenges. It will require courage, faith, love, persistence and patience to find the marital treasure of sexual fulfillment.

6. Improving sexual relations in marriage is an individual, yet jointly shared, expedition full of discovery and adventure. Some marital treasures may be discovered within; other treasures will be discovered together from without—such as sexual knowledge and techniques. As couples grow in knowledge about themselves and their spouses, treasures of marital intimacy and oneness will emerge.

7. Often we know what is wrong or what needs to change in our marriage but don't know how to change. The following suggestions can help couples flourish in their sexual stewardship in marriage.

Pray for Sexual Help

8. Does the Lord care about the sexual relationship in your marriage? You bet He does! Not only does He care, but He is the only one who can and will lead you along your personal journey of discovery. Seeking God's divine guidance can lead you to the people, information and resources you specifically need to overcome your challenges. He stands at the door waiting for you to open it—wanting to bless you.4

9. No problem is beyond God's ability. "Many problems that arise in a family require wisdom and resources that are beyond our own abilities to provide. Few problems, however, are beyond solution if we seek divine help." 5 Praying for God's help, both individually and as a couple, should be your first priority.

10. I remember when my husband and I first began seriously praying for help with our sexual frustrations. We were a little uncomfortable at first as sex seemed an inappropriate topic for prayer, but we learned that God did care about our sexual happiness in marriage. Our convictions that sexual relations were truly ordained of

God-intended for the benefit and blessing of both husband and wife—helped us realize that our request for help was righteous. God guided us to find the solutions we needed.

11. The Lord knows what you need before you even ask so you won't be surprising or embarrassing Him by your requests.6 Your prayers for sexual fulfillment are not unreasonable or inappropriate. God will bless you with that which you righteously seek. Christian author and speaker Joe Beam gave wise counsel regarding prayer over sexual problems, "Pray for God to solve the problem. Ask Him to give each of you a clear understanding of the other. Ask Him to get each of you past whatever memories, misconceptions, misunderstandings, or hang-ups are causing problems. Ask Him to give you a wonderful, totally uninhibited sex life within the parameters of His boundaries. Ask Him, believing that He will answer."7

12. You may also need to pray for courage, faith, love, patience and persistence as you embark on your journey to fulfill your sexual stewardship. Christian author Tim LaHaye and his wife Beverly advocate the idea of sexual enjoyment as a rightful gift of God that couples can ask for. They stated, "I am convinced that God never intended any Christian couple to spend a lifetime in the sexual wilderness of orgasmic malfunction. He has placed within every woman the sexual capabilities He meant for her to enjoy. . . . If it isn't a pleasurable experience, He has something better in store for you, so pray about it and expect Him to direct you to an adequate solution."8

13. God stands waiting to grant your righteous desires and to show you the way to sexual fulfillment. It's as if He beckons to you to ask Him, so that he may pour out joy upon your marriage, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing [of sexual fulfillment in marriage] in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."9

14. Everyone is busy. "I just don't have time" is a common assertion. But, what is important to you, you make time for. Priority time and energy is needed to expand knowledge, learn about each other, and have fulfilling sexual encounters. One of the best ways to make time for something is to schedule it. If you schedule time for improving your sexual relationship, the concept of "time tithing" may come into play. Time tithing is putting first things first, then surprisingly having time enough left over for whatever else needs to be done.

15. Imagine a wide-mouthed jar. You have some large rocks (representing the most important things you have

to do), some smaller rocks, lots of gravel and lots of sand (representing the least important things to do). If you put the large rocks in first, then the smaller rocks, then the less-important gravel and finally the sand, you can fill up the spaces in between the rocks, allowing everything to fit (except maybe some of the least-important items). However, if you pour the gravel and sand in first, because it may be easier or take less time or effort, there will not be room enough for the more important rocks. Scheduling what matters most, and holding that time sacred, puts the big rocks first in your life.

16. Whatever time is scheduled for sexual learning and intimacy needs to be priority time-not leftover time. That means time must be given when energy and interest are still high. Dr. James Dobson agreed, "If sex is important in a marriage, and we all know that it is, then some time should be reserved for its expression. The day's working activities should end early in the evening, permitting a husband and wife to retire before exhausting themselves on endless chores and responsibilities. Remember this: whatever is put at the bottom of your priority list will probably be done inadequately. For too many [couples], sex languishes in last place." 10

17. Applying time tithing to your sexual relationship can be done in many ways. One example might be scheduling Sunday evenings, after the kids are in bed, for reading and discussing this and other helpful books and doing the "Home" work assignments. That same evening, or another night, might end with a "quickie" as a thank-you or offering of love. Another night, maybe a weekend night, might be reserved as a special date night, a night of romance, especially for the wife to receive all the warm-up, time and emotional connection needed for an unrushed, no-pressure, fulfilling sexual experience.

18. Regularly scheduling an hour or more for relaxed, no-rush lovemaking assures that sufficient time be available for female sexual fulfillment. With renewed determination and effort, sex need no longer languish in last place.

19. If you have been unfulfilled and sexually neglected for some time, you may be hesitant about having to spend more time building physical intimacy. You may only want nonsexual touching and talking while you build up some hope and trust that sexual fulfillment awaits you. Talking and nonsexual touching is a wonderful way for you to rebuild hope that sexual fulfillment awaits. With new hope that improved sexual relations are possible commit the necessary time to seek

solutions and the sexual fulfillment you both desire and deserve.

Education

20. With complete, correct and reverent sex education being rarely provided within families, many come into marriage with little or no understanding of how to create a satisfying sexual relationship. How well prepared were you for sexual fulfillment in marriage? Sexual knowledge is an important aspect of strengthening the sexual relationship. Sexual ignorance is not bliss.

21. Elder Hugh B. Brown attributed many divorces to a lack of sexual knowledge. He stated "Ignorance and blundering on the part of newlyweds account in large measure for the fact that [many] marriages end in divorce."" He identified not only ignorance but also incorrect information as culprits in destroying marriages, "Many marriages have been wrecked on the dangerous rocks of ignorant and debased sex behavior, both before and after marriage. Gross ignorance on the part of newlyweds on the subject of the proper place and functioning of sex results in much unhappiness and many broken homes." 12

22. People spend years studying to become proficient in their professions, but rarely do couples invest sufficient time to study the sanctifying aspects of sexual intimacy and fulfillment in marriage. Knowledge alone can be an energizing force, empowering you to improve your life. As you obtain and mentally process new information about intimacy in marriage, your soul can grasp the pieces it needs and begin to incorporate them into your knowledge bank and into your life. As couples, our stewardship is to have sufficient knowledge and wisdom to be able to govern ourselves sexually. This is a serious endeavor. Even though you may ask God for help, He will not wave a magic wand that will produce immediate sexual knowledge and satisfaction for you and your spouse.

23. What do you need to know to be sufficiently educated sexually? Important sexual knowledge includes: (1) the human sexual response, the mechanics and techniques;

24. (2) knowledge about your body and its sexual functioning; (3) knowledge about your spouse's body and its sexual functioning; and (4) knowledge of general sexual differences between men and women to promote understanding and empathy for each other's needs.

25. How might you get educated? Where can you turn for answers? The following are some possibilities:

26. The Lord is your best sex therapist. He created sex, He created your bodies, and He knows you personally. Through prayer and study of His words regarding marital intimacy, you can gain divine light and truth regarding your body and this important aspect of marriage. (Review Chapter 2 for God's word regarding the sanctity of sexual relations in marriage.) God will provide specific guidance and knowledge as you seek His counsel.

27. Read Books, Reading Chapters 3 and 4, and the books referenced therein, can help you learn about the body's sexual functioning and response. Other books referenced throughout this book can also be valuable resources for sexual learning. Schedule a few minutes before bed for pillow talk time to read and discuss such material.

Learn from each other. Once you understand some basics of the sexual response and of the human body, the most important learning must come from each other. You will learn best about the specific sexual functioning and preferences of your spouse from your spouse. And he will learn best from you. Study, openly discuss, and experiment with what you learn.

10.3 - The Gospel and Romantic Love

President Bruce C. Hafen
Ricks College, September 1982



1. Today I feel an unusually keen need for inspiration, because I have on my mind a subject so important and yet so sensitive that it is almost in a class by itself. I will call it, "The Gospel and Romantic Love."

2. Elder [Boyd K. Packer](#) of the Council of the Twelve once said to a group of college students: "The powers awakened earlier in your life have been growing. You have been responding to them, probably very clumsily, but they now form themselves into a restlessness that cannot be ignored. You are old enough now to fall in love—not the puppy love of elementary years, not the confused love of the teens, but the full-blown love of eligible men and women, newly matured, ready for life. I mean romantic love, with all the full intense meaning of the word, with all of the power and turbulence and frustration, the yearning, the restraining, and all of the peace and beauty and sublimity of love. No experience can be more beautiful, no power more compelling, more exquisite. Or, if misused, no suffering is more excruciating than

that connected with love." (Eternal Love, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973, p. 6.)

3. In approaching this topic, I feel I am walking on holy ground. This subject, delicate as it is, inspires my deepest reverence. The idea of romantic love, so commonplace that it is touched upon in virtually every popular book or movie or magazine, is also at the very center of the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#). It is one of the greatest of God's laws that "a man [shall] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." ([Gen. 2:24](#).) And, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." ([1 Cor. 11:11](#).)

4. As Elder Packer put it, "Romantic love ... is not only a part of life, but literally a dominating influence of it. It is deeply and significantly religious. There is no abundant life without it. Indeed, the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom is unobtainable in the absence of it." (Eternal Love, p. 4.)

5. The other side of this coin, of course, is represented by what Alma told his wayward son Corianton, who had gone after the Lamanite harlot Isabel: "Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the [Holy Ghost](#)?" ([Alma 39:5](#).)

6. Sometimes we give as reasons for the law of chastity the risk of pregnancy or [abortion](#), the possibility of an unwanted or embarrassing marriage, or the chance of a terrible venereal disease. With adultery, we talk about the damage of destroying an existing marriage or [family](#). As serious as these things are, I'm not sure they are the fundamental reason for the Lord's having placed this commandment ahead of armed robbery, fraud, and kidnapping in the seriousness of sins.

7. Think of it—unchastity is second only to murder. Perhaps there is a common element in those two things—chastity and murder. Both have to do with life, which touches upon the highest of divine powers. Murder involves the wrongful taking of life; sexual transgression may involve the wrongful giving of life, or the wrongful tampering with the sacred fountains of life-giving power.

8. Perhaps we should not expect the reasons for this commandment to be fully understandable to our finite minds. So often with our deepest feelings of joy, or testimony, or [gratitude](#), we may attempt to describe their meaning with words, but our words fail us when we try to plumb the depths of those precious things that are too sacred, too significant, and even too mysterious

to be susceptible of quickly understood explanations. Why is nature so exquisitely beautiful and full of harmony? Why do our hearts respond to the sight of little children laughing? Why, especially, do our hearts respond to unexplainable overflowing when those little children we see laughing before us are our very own children? All we know is that God himself has said, time after time, over all the generations of man, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.” ([D&C 42:22](#).) “Thou shalt not ... commit adultery ... nor do anything like unto it.” ([D&C 59:6](#).)

9. I have been around enough to know this is not the first time you have heard this subject mentioned from the pulpit. But I have also been around enough to know that, no matter what you have heard and no matter how often, today we live in a world so completely soaked through with tragically wrong and evil ideas about sex that you must be warned in love and kindness, but warned unmistakably—lest the moral sleeping sickness that has overcome this world claim you in deadly slumber.

10. There have always been violators of the moral code, but the last few years have witnessed a staggering revolution in sexual attitudes. In the United States, social norms began to unravel during the student revolts of the 1960s, but in the period from 1970 to 1975 the number of college students who accept the practice of premarital sex grew from about 50 percent to nearly 90 percent. (Katz and Cronin, “Sexuality and College Life,” *Change*, Feb/Mar 1980, p. 44.)

11. It would be of no help to you to seek counsel about sexual norms from a typical professional therapist. The American Psychiatric Association recently voted to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders, even though one study showed that 50 percent of the male homosexuals surveyed in one American city had had at least 500 sexual partners and 28 percent had had 1,000 partners. (Allen Bergin, “Bringing the Restoration to the Academic World: Clinical Psychology as a Test Case,” *BYU Studies*, 19, 1979, p. 464.) If that is normal behavior, we’ve got problems. A representative of today’s mainstream attitude among psycho-therapists recently wrote in a professional journal that most people in his field believe “that human disturbance is largely associated with and springs from absolutistic thinking—from dogmatism, inflexibility, and that [being extremely religious] is essentially emotional disturbance.” (Ellis, “Psycho-Therapy and Religious Values,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 48:635, 1980.) In

other words, the way to relieve your guilt about an immoral life is to begin believing there is no such thing as an immoral life. Whatever you want to do is moral, if you want to do it. This same psychologist expressed his concern about the mental stability of people who commit themselves to “unequivocal loyalty to any interpersonal commitments, especially marriage.” (Ibid.) You can imagine what this man and his professional associates would think of a commitment as long-term as eternal marriage.

12. The same attitudes are springing up everywhere in other fields, including law and the entertainment world. It is apparent that many of those who produce today’s movies, TV programs, and popular music, as well as those who set the editorial policies of many national magazines, believe that sex outside of marriage is harmless, if not healthy. When the Mormon filmmaker Kieth Merrill visited Ricks College, he said that today’s movie producers have no more hesitation about showing sexual acts than they do about showing people eating dinner.

13. Something deep within our collective soul has gone wrong, and it cannot help but influence our attitudes and dull our normal senses in frightening ways. Twenty years ago, there was much public support for the principles you and I believe in, despite some occasional straying from those principles. All that is different now. We are almost suffocated by a dense fog of sensuality. [Pornography](#) and moral permissiveness are so widespread that there is nothing to compare with it in the last several centuries in any civilized society; not since Rome, not since Sodom and Gomorrah.

14. The enormous scope of the drift is what makes it so treacherous. Even as we are surrounded by abnormality, everything somehow seems so normal. As written by Pascal, “When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving, as on board ship. When everyone is moving towards depravity, no one seems to be moving, but if someone stops, he shows up the others who are rushing on, by acting as a fixed point.” (Pensees, p. 247.) We—you and I—must be that fixed point.

15. It isn’t easy for me to paint such an extreme picture. I am generally a pretty calm and reasonable guy. But on this particular subject of sexual morality, I think our society is within the grip of the evil one, even in the very moment so many of us feel more “free” than ever before. There is a reason why the scriptures record the word “devilish” right after the words carnal and sensual. We read in the Pearl of Great Price that

“Satan came among them ... and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish.” ([Moses 5:13](#).) And so it was, until in that moment of darkest tragedy, Cain slew his brother Abel.

16. He then showed how totally he had accepted Satan’s promise of temporary “gain” in return for Cain’s eternal soul. We read, “Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him. And Cain gloried in that which he had done, saying, I am free.” ([Moses 5:32–33](#).) In truth, Cain was never more in bondage than in the very moment when he said, “I am free.” In exactly the same way, the American people have never been in greater moral bondage than in this time when they glory in being “free” to pursue pleasure in any form they fancy, as if there will never be any tomorrow. Can you see why it’s good advice to stay away from X- and R-rated movies, or their equivalent on television? Can you see why they plead with us to avoid drugs, alcohol, vulgar music, and the other products of the carnal environment that now surround us almost as water surrounds the fish of the sea? These are not trivial things. This is not simply a modern version of a fussy Victorian concern about bobby sox, social dancing, and driving over twenty miles an hour. This is not just cigarettes and makeup and nylons for twelve-year-olds. If the H-bomb symbolizes our age, we are playing now not just with fire, but with nuclear power. The Prince of Darkness has dragged out the heavy artillery. He is no longer limited to arrows and swords and BB guns. Now he is Darth Vader, with laser guns, light speeds, and the death star. We are near the end of a fight to the finish, and no holds are barred.

17. Let me say a word about the more positive aspects of the law of chastity, because that part of the law is very important. Elder Packer said, “Oh, youth ... the requirements of the Church are the highway to love, with guardrails securely in place ... with help along the way. How foolish is the youth who feels that the Church is a fence around love to keep him out. ... How fortunate is the young person who follows the standards of the Church, even if just from sheer obedience or habit, for he will find a rapture and a joy fulfilled.” (Eternal Love, pp. 5–6.)

18. Properly understood, the scriptures and the prophets counsel us to be virtuous not because romantic love is bad, but precisely because romantic love is so good. It is not only good, it is pure, precious, even sacred and holy. For that very reason, one of Satan’s cheapest and dirtiest tricks is to make profane that which is sacred. It is as though Satan holds up to the world a degraded image of sexual love suggested

by imagining the drunken, boisterous laughter of filthy men in a brothel, located on some crowded, dusty highway of life, where the flower of fair womanhood is jeered at, brutalized, and ultimately crushed by unclean hands. Meanwhile, high up in the cool, protected valleys of tall mountains, the priceless flower of virtue grows untarnished and pure. It waits as a noble prize for those valiant few who are willing to climb to its heights by paying the price of patience, obedience, and a lifetime of devotion—an endless, unselfish loyalty to spouse and children, in whose service we are only in the service of our God.

19. May I suggest now eight brief, practical steps for those who would one day be true sweethearts, based on a foundation of righteous living.

20. First, have reverence for life, and the life-giving powers of the human body. Your body is a temple. It is a sacred and holy edifice. Have the same spiritual reverence for it that you have for any temple that seeks to be a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. It is also the dwelling place of the seeds of human life, the nurturing of which, with your chosen companion, within the bounds set by God himself, is lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy.

21. Second, during the time of courtship, always be emotionally honest in the expression of affection. Sometimes you are not as careful as you might be about when, how, and to whom you express your feelings of affection. You must realize that the desire to express affection can be motivated by things other than true love. As one writer said:

22. “Desire can be stimulated by the anxiety of aloneness, by the wish to conquer or be conquered, by vanity, by the wish to hurt or even to destroy, as much as it can be stimulated by love. It seems that sexual desire can easily blend with and be stimulated by any strong emotion, of which love is only one. Because sexual desire is in the minds of most people coupled with the idea of love, they are easily misled to conclude that they love each other when they want each other physically. But if this desire is not stimulated by real love, it leaves strangers as far apart as they were before—sometimes it makes them ashamed of each other, or even makes them hate each other, because when the illusion has gone, they feel their estrangement even more markedly than before.” (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, New York: Harper and Rowe, 1956, pp. 54–55.)

23. In short, one might simply say: save your kisses—you might need them some day. And when any of you—men or women—are given entrance to the heart

of a trusting young friend, you stand on holy ground. In such a place you must be honest with yourself—and with your friend—about love and the expression of its symbols.

24. Third, be friends first and sweethearts second. Relationships between young men and young women should be built like a pyramid. The base of the pyramid is friendship. And the ascending layers are built of things like time, understanding, respect, and restraint. Right at the top of the pyramid is a glittering little mystery called romance. And when weary travelers in the desert see this pyramid far off in the distance, maybe the first thing they see is that glittering jewel on the top; but when they get closer, they see all that must underlie the jewel of romance to hold it up so high. Now you don't have to be very smart to know that a pyramid won't stand up very long if you stand it on its point and expect the point to hold up everything else. In other words, be friends first and sweethearts later, not the other way around. Otherwise, people who think they are sweethearts may discover they can't be very good friends, and by then it may be too late.

25. Fourth, develop the power of self-discipline and self-restraint. Be like Joseph, not like David. When Potiphar's wife tried with all her cunning to seduce young Joseph, who lived in her house as her husband's servant, the record simply says that Joseph "fled, and got him out." ([Gen. 39:12](#).) Joseph knew that it is wiser to avoid temptation than to resist it.

26. King David, by contrast, despite his years of faithful devotion to God, somehow developed too much confidence in his own ability to handle temptation. He was tragically willing to flirt with evil, and it ultimately destroyed him. We read that as David walked upon the roof of his house, he saw not far off a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. But David did not flee and get himself out. Rather, he sent and enquired after her, and she came in unto him. For this greatest of the kings of Israel, it was the beginning of the end. (See [2 Sam. 11](#).)

27. In your courtships, even when you feel there is a growing foundation of true love, show your profound respect for that love and the possibilities of your life together by restraining your passions. Do not be deceived by the false notion that anything short of the sex act itself is acceptable conduct. That is a lie, not only because one step overpoweringly leads to another, but also because the handling of another's body is in an important sense part of the sexual act that is kept holy by the sanctuary of chastity. If ever you are in doubt about where the line is between love and lust, draw the

line toward the side of love. Nobody ever fell off a cliff who never went near one.

28. Fifth, in your searching for the fulfillment of your romantic longings, always live for the presence of the Holy Spirit, that you may have it as your constant guide. Don't date someone you already know you would not ever want to marry. If you fall in love with someone you should not marry, you can't expect the Lord to guide you away from that person after you are already emotionally committed. It is difficult enough to tune your spiritual receiver to the whisperings of heaven without jamming up the channel with the loud thunder of romantic emotion. In general, remember that you need—as much as you will ever need it for any purpose—the guidance of the Holy Ghost in seeking an eternal companion and in building relationships toward that end. The key to spiritual guidance is not how long you pray, or what steps of prayer you follow, or what words you say. The key to spiritual guidance is found in one word: worthiness.

29. Some time soon when you have a chance to do a little scripture study, I recommend that you compare section 63:16 [[D&C 63:16](#)] with section 121:45–46 in the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) [[D&C 121:45–46](#)]. In the first of these two passages, you will find that "he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts," they will experience three very significant harmful consequences: One, they shall not have the Spirit; two, they shall deny the faith; and three, they shall fear.

30. On the other hand, in direct contrast to these three results of filling your minds with lust, note what three things happen as described in [D&C 121:45–46](#) when you "let virtue garnish [your] thoughts unceasingly." The Spirit will be your constant companion. As for keeping the faith, the doctrine of the priesthood will distil upon your soul as the dews from heaven. And in contrast to the fear felt by the lustful, those whose minds are filled with virtue will find that their confidence waxes strong in the presence of God.

31. For these and a multitude of other reasons, live for the presence in your life of the Holy Spirit.

32. Sixth, avoid the habit of feeling sorry for yourself, and don't worry excessively about those times when you feel socially unsuccessful. Everybody in the world doesn't have to fall in love with you and marry you—it only takes one. I remember the experience of a choice young woman who had been very popular and successful in many ways in her home town. She passed up two or three chances to get serious with young men because she planned to attend college at a Church

school, where she fully expected to find more promising opportunities. After she had been at that school for six months without a date, however, she honestly began to wonder if she had some loathsome disease. Seeing that experience through her eyes was very sobering for me about the risks we take in any large population center, because sheer size and numbers can so easily cause people to make incredibly superficial judgments about others, in ways that emphasize appearance above far more important but less obvious factors.

33. The opportunities for developing friendships (as sometimes distinguished from having “dates”) with members of the opposite sex are nonetheless plentiful at a college. Often these relationships lead to more promising possibilities than does the big social whirl. In approaching these opportunities, remember: “Worry not that you are not well known. Seek to be worth knowing.” The college-age years are a wonderful time in which to experience a variety of human relationships, to go places and do things, to read widely, to find yourself, to develop the roots of spiritual and emotional maturity. To gain this kind of ripeness and growth simply takes time, experience, and effort.

34. The discouragement you may feel as another empty Friday night rolls by is often a form of the insecurity we all encounter as we seek to find ourselves. Without the apparent approval of your self-worth that comes through social success, you may begin to doubt whether your life is really worthwhile. That kind of self-doubt is only part of a larger problem that accompanies most of us, married or single all the days of our lives. At times, we wonder if the Lord loves us; we wonder if other people love us. And so we mistakenly seek the symbols of success—whether that is being popular or being rich or being famous within our own sphere.

35. Sometimes you may let someone take improper liberties with you, or you may indulge yourself in some practice that seems to bring temporary relief but only makes you feel worse in the long run. Some even make poor marriage choices, just to show the world that somebody will have them. Ultimately, however, only the Lord’s approval of your life really matters. If you seek to be worth knowing and seek to do his will, all the rest will take care of itself. Never forget that all things work together for good to them who love God. (See [Rom. 8:28](#).)

36. Your time for marriage may not come until the autumn of your life and then “be twice more precious

for the waiting.” (Eternal Love, p. 17.) Even if your time should not come in this life, the promises of eternal love are still yours in the Lord’s view of time, if only you are faithful.

37. Seventh, in addition to avoiding fornication and adultery, you must avoid homosexual acts and abortion at all costs. These are extremely serious transgressions. Even persons who only assist others, much less pressure them, to have an abortion are in jeopardy of being denied the privilege of missionary service. They may also be called upon to face a church court, at the peril of their membership in the Church.

38. Eighth, if through some unfortunate experience in your past you have committed a moral transgression of the kind we have been talking about today, there is a way by which you may receive full [forgiveness](#). There is no more glorious promise in all scripture than the words of Isaiah, speaking as if it were by the voice of the Lord himself: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.” ([Isa. 1:18–19](#).)

39. The steps for the process of repentance are outlined in President Spencer W. Kimball’s masterful book *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969). If your transgressions are of the serious kind, you will need to see your bishop and voluntarily offer a full and complete confession. As frightening as that experience may seem to you, please know that by this means you will find purpose and a peace of mind more hopeful and uplifting than you can now imagine.

40. And in wondering how you might stand in the eyes of the Lord after such an experience, I commend to you the counsel of Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the First Quorum of the Seventy, who talked in the October 1980 general conference about the repentance process for serious transgressions. The most memorable part of that candid and loving sermon was Elder Featherstone’s expression of his attitude toward those who have had the courage and the faith to confess their sins and even face Church discipline, if necessary. Because I so much share Elder Featherstone’s feeling, I would like to quote a portion of his remarks:

41. “In Exodus 32 [[Ex. 32](#)], [Moses](#) had gone up to the mountain. The children of Israel had fashioned a golden calf with a graving tool. The people offered burnt offerings, and they sat down to eat, drink, and play; and there was great wickedness when Moses

came down out of the mountain. He cast the tablets out of his hands, and they were broken; he burned the golden calf and caused the idolaters to be slain.

42. “Then, when the people had repented [and that is the key], Moses went back before the Lord and prayed, ‘Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.’

43. “I have listened to possibly a thousand major transgressions; and each time after a truly repentant transgressor has left my office, I have either knelt behind the desk or bowed my head in prayer and said, ‘Lord, forgive him or her, I pray thee. If not, blot my name also out of thy book.’

44. “Though their sins be as scarlet, they may become white as the driven snow (see [Isa. 1:18](#)), and the Lord has promised he would remember their sins no more (see [D&C 58:42](#)).” (Ensign, Nov. 1980, pp. 29–31.)

45. One reason I appreciate Elder Featherstone’s feelings so much is that those are also my feelings toward you. I love the students of Ricks College. I don’t want to be where you aren’t.

46. For all that I have said by way of warning about the social conditions of our day or the limits you must place on yourselves as you seek the right channels for your natural feelings, I also want you always to remember that the teachings of the gospel about romantic love are filled with hope and peace and joy of the most uplifting and everlasting kind. I testify to you with all my heart that the commandments of God are designed for our ultimate happiness, and that being sweethearts in the way the Lord intended is worth waiting for.

10.4 - The Spiritual Dimension: Sexual Decision Making

Dean M. Busby, Jason S. Carroll, and Chelom Leavitt
Sexual Wholeness in Marriage, 2013

1. A significant aspect of healthy sexuality is proper decision making patterns for both spouses. Each of the couples introduced in Chapter One are asking important questions about sexuality in their marriages that are connected to decision making. Jenny and Steve need to find consensus and make decisions about the frequency of their sexual intimacy. Alex and his wife are exploring possible decisions about specific sexual practices, while Shannon and her husband are addressing boundaries and openness about sexual matters. Joshua and his wife are making decisions

about how to teach their children about sexuality in dating and marriage. While there is important information available that can help couples be better informed, how you make decisions as a couple is just as important as what you decide.

2. We want our decisions about how we express ourselves sexually to meet with God’s approval. That is why the spiritual dimension of our sexual nature is particularly relevant to couple decision making. Our Father in Heaven has provided a “divine design” (Proclamation on the Family, paragraph 7) or pattern for couple decision making. Specifically, this includes who should be involved in couple decisions about sex, how such decisions should be made, and what criteria should be considered.

Who Should Be Involved

3. At times, a couple may seek advice from someone outside their marriage for a decision they are making about their marriage. When we seek such counsel is a revealing indicator of whether or not we understand the nature of our marriage covenant. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said:

4. I like to tell a young couple who are being married that in the marriage relationship they ought to look first to each other, as they do across the altar during their marriage—not first to their parents, not first to their siblings, not first to their friends, but in solving all their problems they should look first to one another (Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, February 9, 2008, p.12).

5. When we do this first, we are striving to cleave to one another as spouses. If we eventually do seek counsel from a bishop, parent, or any other outside person, the best pattern is to go together to talk with that person. If both spouses are present, the couple can be unified in seeking and considering such outside advice. These patterns are particularly important in matters as personal as sex. Any solicited counsel should still be prayerfully and patiently considered by both spouses before making a decision.

How Decisions Should Be Made

6. The Proclamation on the Family reads:

7. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners (The Proclamation

on the Family, paragraph 7).

8. These prophetic instructions teach us that marriage consists of specific, sacred responsibilities that have been divinely given to husbands/fathers (to preside, provide, and protect), and to wives/mothers (to nurture); these are intertwined by the practice of equal partnership in marriage. It is in the proper integration of these responsibilities that the power and purposes of the Lord are manifested. Principles such as equal partnership, presiding, and nurturing, can be properly understood only in relation to one another. Each principle is interdependent of the other principles.

9. Equal partnership is the preeminent and overarching principle; presiding and nurturing are subservient to equal partnership. For example, presiding cannot eclipse equal partnership. So if a husband's pattern of presiding does not reinforce his wife's sense of equal partnership within the marriage, something is not right. Even though responsibilities may differ, the Lord intends for marriage to be one of true equality and partnership. The apostle Paul declared, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord (I Corinthians 11:11). And President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

10. In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey (Ensign, May 2002, p. 52).

11. Any notion of hierarchy—whether by vote or choice or priesthood or any other reason—where one spouse is put above or ahead of the other is contrary to God's will.

12. Again, the divine triangle of marriage reflects that the ordinance of marriage includes two interdependent covenants: a covenant with God, and a covenant with our spouse. This "triangle covenant" helps us envision how a truly equal partnership can be maintained. We see that the source of authority resides outside both the husband and the wife; it resides with God and within the principles of the gospel.

13. Husbands and wives stand on level ground, and so together they should prayerfully seek the will of the Lord in order to make unified decisions.

Equal Counsel and Equal Consent

14. President Howard W. Hunter taught a pattern of marital decision making that includes both equal counsel and equal consent:

15. A man who holds the priesthood accepts his wife as a partner in the leadership of the home and family with full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating thereto. Of necessity there must be in the Church and in the home a presiding officer. By divine appointment, the responsibility to preside in the home rests upon the priesthood holder. The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man ["meet" means "equal"]—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership. Presiding in righteousness necessitates a shared responsibility between husband and wife; together you act with knowledge and participation in all family matters (Ensign, November 1999, p. 49).

16. Notice President Hunter's emphasis on "full knowledge," "full participation," and "full partnership" between husbands and wives in "all decisions" relating to family matters. He also taught that a helpmeet is very different than a help mate. Meet means equal, and such equality is the essence of a true partnership. Other Church leaders have also stressed the need for both equal counsel and equal consent in the marriage partnership. Speaking to husbands, President Boyd K. Packer taught:

17. When there is a family decision to be made that affects everyone, you and your wife together will seek whatever counsel you might need, and together you will prayerfully come to a unified decision. If you ever pull priesthood rank on her you will have failed (Quoted by C. Broderick in *One Flesh, One Heart: Putting Celestial Love Into Your Temple Marriage*, 1986, p. 32).

18. The Lord's pattern of marital decision making involves husbands and wives prayerfully coming to a unified decision—unified with each other and unified with the Lord.

Proper Sources of Revelation

19. Most of the common questions we are asked by young adults and couples are inquiries about Church doctrine on specific aspects of marital sexuality. They want to know the "Church's official stance" on a certain sexual practice, or other specific aspect of marital sexuality. Examples include: "What is the Church's official stance on oral sex?;" "Does the Church approve of wearing lingerie?;" and "Do you have to put your temple garments back on right after sex, or is it all right to sleep together naked after sex?"

20. It is very common for couples to express that they have been searching for the official church position related to their question, but they haven't been able to

find one. We often respond that there are general principles that have been revealed by prophets that couples should seriously consider when making personal marital decisions, but rarely is there an official church position or doctrine that directs couples in the specifics of such intimate issues. As the Doctrine and Covenants teaches, “These things remain with you to do according to judgment and the directions of the Spirit” (D&C 62:8). It is important to note that this is the same pattern the Church wants us to use for questions regarding birth control and family planning, frequency of temple worship, specifics of Sabbath day observance, calculation of tithing, time spent in church callings, and other specific aspects of personal and family decision making. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves.”

21. Even though there may be some Church teachings or information from professionals that can inform a couple’s decision making around the specifics of their marital sexuality, hoping to find an official stance of the Church on these matters reveals that they believe that the answers lie outside of—rather than within—their relationship. Couples should have confidence that the best answers to such specific questions come from within their relationship rather than outside of it. By first “turning toward” each other, spouses are more responsive and attentive, and can make wiser choices that are based on their own personal needs, desires, and experiences rather than by using outside comparisons. Such introspection as a couple places the focus on motives and intents of their sexual desires and expressions—not just behaviors; they consider what they want to do, but they should also consider why they want to do it.

22. In a recent general conference address, Elder Dallin H. Oaks encouraged church members to use proper sources of revelation in their personal decision-making.

23. The personal line is of paramount importance in personal decisions and in the governance of the family. Unfortunately, some members of our church underestimate the need for this direct, personal line. Responding to the undoubted importance of prophetic leadership—the priesthood line, which operates principally to govern heavenly communications on Church matters—some seek to have their priesthood leaders make personal decisions for them, decisions they should make for themselves by inspiration through their personal line. Personal decisions and family governance are principally a matter for the personal line...

24. We must use both the personal line and the priesthood line in proper balance to achieve the growth that is the purpose of mortal life. If personal religious practice relies too much on the personal line, individualism erases the importance of divine authority. If personal religious practice relies too much on the priesthood line, individual growth suffers. The children of God need both lines to achieve their eternal destiny. The restored gospel teaches both, and the restored Church provides both (Ensign, Nov. 2010, pp. 83-86, emphasis added).

25. Marital sexuality is perhaps the ultimate example where decisions should be primarily guided by the inspired personal line. As sex educators and therapists, our experience indicates that too many young adults and married couples are seeking to have priesthood leaders—whether living or dead—make these personal decisions for them. Couples should foster a pattern of making personal decisions within the divine triangle of their marriage. They would be wise to focus on the reasons and motives of their proposed choices, and avoid seeking a one-size-fits-all prescribed model of marital sexuality that has purposely never been given by our prophetic leaders. These types of decisions are best left between the husband and the wife, as they counsel with the Lord.

26. This personal—even private—approach to decision making strongly infers that couples should also maintain proper boundaries around the specifics of their marital sexuality. Making comparisons with other couples is rarely helpful. We cannot think of any good that could come from learning about the specifics of sex in other people’s marriages—they are not you. In fact, learning about the details of other’s sexuality patterns may be detrimental to a couple’s sexual relationship as it may influence them to mimic those patterns, rather than be responsive to the needs and desires of one another. Almost nothing else is as personal and private as your sexual preferences and patterns. Therefore, your sexual relationship should be tailored to your spouse, and not influenced by outside expectations or comparisons.

Principles of Sexual Decision Making

27. We close this chapter by suggesting four principles of sexual decision making in marriage. Each is paired with a key question couples can discuss. Each principle and question can be used when considering a specific sexual decision or a specific encounter, when examining broader sexual patterns in the relationship.

Principle 1: Marital Unity

28. Does this strengthen our relationship with each other and with God?

29. As we discussed in Chapter Three, the two divine purposes of sex are procreation and the strengthening of unity between spouses. If spouses focus on this in their sexual expressions with each other, they can reinforce their alignment with God and His plan of happiness. The image of the divine triangle should inspire couples to make unity the primary focus of their sexual expressions. At times, marital unity can be strengthened by sexual exploration, creativity, fun, passion, and enjoyment in seeing the sexual responses in our own body as well as our spouse's body. At other times, however, unity can be strengthened by sexual restraint, where spouses share emotional or non-arousing forms of intimacy, rather than arousing sexuality.

Principle 2: Couple Consensus

30. Do we agree on this aspect of our marital sexuality?

31. The divinely prescribed principles of cleaving and equal partnership obligate couples to seek a mutually agreeable and mutually satisfying pattern of sexuality in their marriages. Spouses should never manipulate or try to force their partner to engage in anything sexual with which they are not comfortable, or to which they do not consent. Spouses should try to understand the differences in their sexual preferences, and make decisions that champion their spouse's happiness and preferences, and not just their own. This principle places a high premium on communication—both during and after sex—where couples can negotiate and find consensus on specific aspects of their intimacy.

Principle 3: Positive Attitudes

32. Does this reflect a positive and healthy attitude about sexuality?

33. When differences about sexuality arise in a marriage, one or both spouses may question why they are uncomfortable with, or do not desire, something that their partner desires. So when this happens, it is enlightening if spouses try to identify the origin of their discomfort or their lack of desire. Sometimes these different preferences are merely situational, such as not being in the mood, or feeling tired, sick, or preoccupied; and other differences may be more lasting.

34. Many spouses have acquired rather negative attitudes about sexual expression that may have started years earlier in family experiences, or from other

sources prior to or outside of their marriage. Such differences may also be tied to healthy inhibitions or unhealthy inhibitions. Healthy inhibitions are connected to a spouse's personal preferences for sexual experience, and also reflect his or her values about sexuality. Healthy inhibitions are balanced by otherwise positive attitudes about sexuality, and a general willingness to engage in desired forms of sexual encounters and arousal. Unhealthy inhibitions are usually expressions of negative sexual conditioning which originated from past experiences or from external influences—rather than genuine personal preferences. Spouses with unhealthy inhibitions tend to avoid creativity in sexual encounters, and are often uncomfortable with their own sexual response—regardless of the specific type of arousal or stimulation.

Principle 4: Sexual Potential

35. Does this foster the sexual needs of my spouse and myself?

36. In sexual decision-making, couples should accept that the truth that some sexual preferences originate from innate sexual needs—not just personal desires. As we have highlighted in our model of sexual wholeness, our innate sexual nature gives each of us the capacity and desire for meaningful sexual experiences. In a marriage, each spouse individually, as well as the couple itself, has a divinely created sexual potential; healthy sexuality is fostered when spouses seek to share such sexual potential together. This process requires openness, vulnerability, and creativity in learning to share the sexual part of themselves with one another. This becomes a significant contributor to a rich, whole, and satisfying marriage.

Questions to Ponder:

37. How do I maintain the “rites of marriage” within my relationship?

38. How is my partnership based on equality? Do we counsel with each other on family issues, and give our consent and support to the final decision?

39. Is our personal decision making done within the context of the divine triangle?

40. Do I tend to make sexual decisions based on true principles or on situational whims?

10.5 - They Twain Shall Be One: Thoughts on Intimacy in Marriage

Brent A. Barlow
Ensign, September, 1986



1. Several years ago when I was a young missionary and had just received a new companion, we met a Protestant minister who invited us in out of the cold. After exchanging points of view on various topics, he asked us, “And what is the Mormon attitude towards sexuality?”

2. I choked on my cup of hot chocolate, but my new companion seemed unmoved. “Well,” said the minister after a moment of silence, “could you please tell me the Mormon philosophy toward sexuality?” I was tongue-tied and believed my new companion knew next to nothing on the matter. However, when my companion realized that I didn’t have an answer, he finally said, “Sir, we believe in it.”

3. It has been more than twenty years since that time, and I have been asked the same question by numerous students, friends, professional people, and LDS members and nonmembers alike. And still, I haven’t yet been able to come up with a better answer than the one given by my supposedly naive companion: “We believe in it.”

4. We believe in it inasmuch as we know of the sorrow that comes from the inappropriate use of sexuality outside the realm of marriage. We are acutely aware of what the prophets, past and present, have warned in these matters. As Alma declared to his son Corianton, “Wickedness never was happiness.” ([Alma 41:10](#).)

5. But we also believe in the good that can be derived from the appropriate use of intimacy in marriage. We are well aware of the joy and unity that can come to a married couple when this particular dimension of the marital relationship is nurtured.

6. Yet, in spite of the potentially joyful aspects of sexuality in marriage, for many it is a source of frustration and even contention. Indeed, the inability of married couples to intimately relate to each other is one of the major causes of divorce. President Spencer W. Kimball noted that even in our own church, “if you study the divorces, as we have had to do in these past years, you will find there are one, two, three, four reasons. Generally sex is the first. They did not get along sexually. They may not say that in court. They may not even tell that to their attorneys, but that is the

reason.” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, p. 312.)

7. Why does something so beautiful sometimes become a source of so many problems? Part of the difficulty stems from mistaken ideas. Some people still believe that sexual intimacy is a necessary evil by which we have children. These people get an inaccurate view from parents who were too embarrassed to discuss such matters with their children or who were so concerned that their children live the law of chastity that they taught only the negative consequences of the improper use of intimacy.

8. Some develop inappropriate attitudes from mistaken interpretations of biblical verses. In Ephesians 5:22, [\[Eph. 5:22\]](#) for example, women are encouraged to “submit” to their husbands. Some have erroneously believed that this scripture means women are to submit or yield themselves to their husbands even if they do so unwillingly. Under these conditions, neither the thought nor the act does much to promote marital oneness.

9. In reality, however, sexuality is a beautiful power given to mankind from God. President Kimball has observed: “The [Bible](#) celebrates sex and its proper use, presenting it as God-created, God-ordained, God-blessed. It makes plain that God himself implanted the physical magnetism between the sexes for two reasons: for the propagation of the human race, and for the expression of that kind of love between man and wife that makes for true oneness. His commandment to the first man and woman to be ‘one flesh’ was as important as his command to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’” (Quoting Billy Graham, *Ensign*, May 1974, p. 7.)

10. It is also of interest to note that the word *sex* or *sexuality* does not appear in the scriptures. Rather, it is described in holy writ with the words *know* or *knew*. This idea of “knowing” or “becoming acquainted with” connotes a deeply satisfying aspect of married love.

11. To be able to know each other physically, couples need to talk together about the physical dimensions of their relationship. Partners who feel free to discuss finances, discipline, recreational activities, and so forth, often feel uncomfortable discussing this intimate subject. And they sometimes assume that their intimate relationship should just “naturally” work out and that to discuss it means something has gone wrong. This is simply not true. While these intimacies, because of their sacred nature, should not be discussed with

friends or other relatives, it is totally appropriate to discuss them with a marriage partner.

12. In this regard Elder Hugh B. Brown has noted: “Many marriages have been wrecked on the dangerous rocks of ignorant and debased sex behavior, both before and after marriage. Gross ignorance on the part of newlyweds on the subject of the proper place and functioning of sex results in much unhappiness and many broken homes.

13. “Thousands of young people come to the marriage altar almost illiterate insofar as this basic and fundamental function is concerned. ...

14. “If they who contemplate this most glorifying and intimate of all human relationships [marriage] would seek to qualify for its responsibilities. ... if they would frankly discuss the delicate and sanctifying aspects of harmonious sex life which are involved in marriage, ... much sorrow, heartbreak, and tragedy could be avoided.” (*You and Your Marriage*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960, pp. 22–23, 73.)

15. Talking about this intimate relationship—including the emotional feelings that attend it—can go a long way in strengthening a marriage.

16. Some problems in this aspect of marriage occur when one spouse or the other either unwisely limits its use or uses it inappropriately. Sexuality should be an integral part of loving and giving. Any use which doesn’t include these feelings is improper.

17. In my work as a marriage counselor, I have found that there are some couples who feel that sexuality should be restricted to one dimension—reproduction. Yet President Kimball has said: “We know of no directive from the Lord that proper sexual experiences between husbands and wives need be limited totally to the procreation of children.” (*Ensign*, Oct. 1975, p. 4.) While creating children is an integral and beautiful aspect of marital intimacy, to use it only for that purpose is to deny its great potential as an expression of love, commitment, and unity.

18. On the other hand, there are couples who seem to feel that the only reason for sexuality is physical gratification. These people become so obsessed with the achievement of sensation that the emotion of love is all but forgotten. Still others use sexuality as a weapon or a bargaining tool. This is not only a misuse of a God-given privilege, it shows great selfishness on the part of one or both partners and makes sexuality a destructive rather than a unifying element in marriage.

19. Lack of information about men’s and women’s sexual expressions and feelings can also cause problems in marriage.

20. Some people cling to old stereotypes, mistakenly perceiving women as being less sexual than men. Not long ago I was invited to speak to a group of LDS married couples on the topic of sexuality in marriage. At the conclusion of my remarks one young wife asked, “Why is the sex drive so much stronger in men than in women?” I told the group I seriously questioned whether or not it was. For years it has been widely believed that men have the greater interest and drive towards sexual fulfillment. In addition, many women have been culturally conditioned to believe that their sexual inclinations are less than those of men—and if they are not, they should be or something is supposedly wrong. But recent research indicates that the capacity for sexual response in women is just as great, and in some cases even greater, than that of males. Recognizing this can help both partners be more aware of and sensitive to the other’s desires and expectations.

21. Sometimes the image of men and women shown in the media subtly and incorrectly influences our perception of sexuality. Seldom does the media present a balanced, mature, loving marital relationship. Men are often presented as strong, dashing heroes with little commitment and only one desire—sex. Women are portrayed as hopelessly romantic, pragmatically businesslike, or silly, who in any case have one function—that of satisfying man’s one desire. Both of these narrow views deny the individuality of men and women. They ignore the fact that both are children of God, each with his or her own hopes, desires, talents, and emotions. When a husband and wife forget this truth and see the other as an object, sexuality can do little or nothing to promote intimacy.

22. Then there are, of course, physical or psychological problems which can damage this aspect of marriage. A husband or a wife who has been sexually abused, for example, may have deep-seated emotional problems. In these cases, it would be appropriate to consult a bishop or qualified counselor for help. And a medical doctor may be able to help with physical problems.

23. One great problem in this, as in all other aspects of marriage, is selfishness. I doubt that there is any human relationship better than marriage to teach us the need for Christlike love—that unqualified and unconditional love that persuades us to think more of another than we think of ourselves. Yet few of us, even

those of us in a seemingly good marriage, have learned to do this as well as we could or should. It's not always easy to put all other considerations aside and look to our companion to see what his or her needs are and then do our best to fulfill them. One young wife said that the problem isn't necessarily that husbands and wives don't know how to love each other, but that "people don't know how to love people." We tend to do for others what would make us happy if someone would do the same for us. And afterward we wonder why the other person isn't happy. One great key to success in marriage is to find out what would make our spouse happy and then to find joy in providing that happiness.

24. When we see sexuality as a vital part of marital harmony and happiness, it becomes more than something we simply give or receive. I like to think of it as something a husband and wife can share. It might be called a sexual guardianship.

25. In the parable of the talents, Jesus taught that we should improve on whatever has been entrusted to our care. (See [Matt. 25:14–30](#).) And in marriage we are often given joint guardianships, such as children, fidelity, and the day-to-day maintenance of family members.

26. Examples of joint guardianships in marriage are found in the scriptures. In Moses, chapter five, we are given insights into what Adam and Eve did and were accountable for *together*. In verse one we read, "Adam began to till the earth, and to have dominion over all the beasts of the field. ... And Eve, also, his wife, did labor with him." Thus, they shared the joint responsibility of work or labor. In sharing other dimensions of life, they also had sexual relationships and bore children *together* ([Moses 5:2](#)); prayed and received inspiration *together* ([Moses 5:4](#)); received commandments *together* ([Moses 5:5](#)); taught their children *together* ([Moses 5:12](#)); and mourned *together* ([Moses 5:27](#)).

27. Paul implies a sexual responsibility when he says: "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

28. "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." ([1 Cor. 7:3–4](#).)

29. To me, this means that neither the husband nor the wife alone control the physical relationship, that both are diligent in their commitment to each other, and that both have a nurturing attitude toward the other. With

that in mind, let's look at some of the ways husbands and wives can fulfill their part of this guardianship and better this dimension of their marriage.

To the Husband

30. A husband needs to spend time with his wife. The two need to have time together to share ideas, to grow and learn together, and to experience joy together. A wife is not going to be too excited about a husband who spends all his time at work, at church meetings, in hobbies that exclude her, or in front of the television or newspaper. A husband who always spends time in ways that exclude his wife communicates to her that she is not very important. Yet his wife should be the most important person in his life.

31. President Spencer W. Kimball, referring to Doctrine and Covenants 42:22 [[D&C 42:22](#)] ("Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else"), said that "the words *none else* eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes preeminent in the life of the husband or wife and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse." (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, p. 250.)

32. If her husband places other things first and is unable to find time to develop intimacy in other parts of his relationship with his wife, she will probably not be very interested in sexual intimacy.

33. Similarly, a wife may not be interested if she feels her husband is unaware of or doesn't care about the seemingly small struggles of her life. One wife once commented to me that she wished her husband would "come home from work, look into my eyes, and ask me how I feel, how was my busy day, and then give me a kiss and a long hug." Most wives deeply appreciate little helps that show their husband is sensitive to their needs. Many have told me of the appreciation they feel when their husbands help around the house or care for the children after a long and hectic day. Other wives appreciate their husband's help when they are ill, pregnant, or overwhelmed with housework. Little things—thank yous, compliments, and I love yous—are important. When these "little" elements are added to a marriage, sexuality becomes more meaningful and an expression of deep love. Without these "extras," sexual intimacy can become that which is ultimately satisfying to neither the husband nor the wife.

34. Wives also enjoy romance. The problem here is that sometimes husbands and wives have a different

definition of romance. Many wives include in their definition the time they spend together doing things they are both interested in. They include expressions of love both verbal and written, or small gifts that have meaning for just the two of them. If the romance in marriage is limited to sexuality, wives may feel more exploited than loved.

35. One complaint that I have heard many times from wives is that there is little affection in their marriage. In a survey I conducted some time ago, I found that most wives put sexual satisfaction fairly high on their list of what they desired in marriage. But most wives ranked non-sexual intimacy even higher. Many told of the satisfaction they feel when they hold hands with their husbands, or sit close together while reading or watching television. A wife also appreciates her husband's concern for her in the sexual relationship itself.

36. As a husband learns to find out and meet his wife's various needs, the love in their marriage and all the expressions of that love will likely improve.

To the Wife

37. Perhaps the most important thing a wife can do to improve the sexual relationship in her marriage is to realize her husband is also a human being with various needs, hopes, and aspirations. Unfortunately the media blatantly convey the idea that men want only one thing out of a relationship. To adopt this narrow view of men is to do them an injustice. Men, even those who may have mistaken ideas of marital relationships, are still children of God, and treating them as such can only help improve the relationship.

38. Many of the ideas that apply to husbands also apply to wives. Just as husbands need to find time for their wives, so wives need to find time for their husbands. Some wives spend most of their time at work, caring for the children, or cleaning house. When children are finally in bed at night and parents have a few moments away from them, wives often prefer doing "relaxing" things watching TV, doing needlework, reading a book, talking on the phone to spending time with their husbands. If their husbands want to be with them, they are often tired and emotionally unavailable. Men are not likely to appreciate or understand such actions. If the activities of the day really are so tiring that a woman has little time or energy left to develop her relationship with her husband, she or the couple together might examine her life carefully, to decide which things can be given up for the good of the most important relationship she will ever be involved in.

39. Men also appreciate affection. In some ways, when it comes to affection, men can be as romantic as women. A husband enjoys putting his arms around his wife or kissing her before leaving in the morning. These actions are not necessarily sexual; they are instead his romantic expression of the love he feels for her. If these expressions of affection are continually met with "not now," he may feel that his wife is indifferent to the love they share. These expressions are to the husband what words of appreciation and kind deeds are to the wife. A wife who rejects them tells her husband she doesn't really care about him. On the other hand, when she stops for a quick hug or even better, initiates the affectionate action herself, she deepens the love between her and her husband.

40. When it comes to sexuality, some wives become very concerned about their "rights," often speaking of their "right" to say no and yes. But marriage is also a relationship of responsibility and opportunity. In marriage, both partners have the opportunity to give. I believe few wives realize the power they have to help keep their husbands near them physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. On the other hand, I also believe few wives sense the degree of frustration and alienation husbands feel when a wife ignores his needs and interests. I believe a wise and loving Heavenly Father has given a wife the ability to achieve oneness with her husband. The key is unselfishness.

41. Elder Parley P. Pratt once noted that "our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose; and they are the very main-springs of life and happiness they are the cement of all virtuous and heavenly society.

42. "The fact is, God made man, male and female; he planted in their bosoms those affections which are calculated to promote their happiness and union." (Parker Pratt Robison, ed., *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952, pp. 52-53.) As husbands and wives learn to give of themselves and to understand each other's needs and desires, these affections will grow until they do indeed "promote their happiness and union."

11. Sanctity of Life

11.1 - Abortion: an Assault on the Defenseless

Elder Russell M. Nelson
Liahona, October 2008



1. As I begin, let me apologize to readers for the use of terms that are not pleasant. The nature of the war to which I'm referring requires such clarity of communication.

2. As sons and daughters of God, we cherish life as a gift from Him. His eternal plan provides opportunities for His children to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experiences, and to realize their divine destinies as heirs of eternal life. [1](#)

Death Rates from Wars

3. With that understanding and reverence for life, we deplore the loss of life associated with warfare. The data are appalling. In World War I, more than 8 million military fatalities occurred. In World War II, more than 22 million servicemen and women died. [2](#) Together, these two wars, covering portions of 14 years, cost the lives of at least 30 million soldiers worldwide. That figure does not include the millions of civilian casualties.

4. These data, however, are dwarfed by the toll of another war that claims more casualties annually than did World War I and World War II combined. Worldwide reports indicate that more than 40 million abortions are performed per year. [3](#)

5. This war called [abortion](#) is a war on the defenseless and the voiceless. It is a war on the unborn. This war is being waged globally. Ironically, civilized societies that have generally placed safeguards on human life have now passed laws that sanction this practice.

Divine Doctrine

6. This matters greatly to us because the Lord has repeatedly declared this divine imperative: "Thou shalt not kill." [4](#) Then He added, "Nor do anything like unto it." [5](#) Even before the fullness of the gospel was restored, enlightened individuals understood the sanctity of human life. John Calvin, a sixteenth-century reformer, wrote, "If it seems more horrible to kill a

man in his own house than in a field, ... it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a fetus in the womb before it has come to light." [6](#)

7. Man-made rules have now legalized that which has been forbidden by God from the dawn of time! Human reasoning has twisted and transformed absolute truth into sound-bite slogans that promote a practice that is consummately wrong.

Special Concerns

8. Concern for the health of the mother is a vital one. But circumstances in which the termination of pregnancy is necessary to save the life of the mother are very rare, particularly where modern medical care is available. Another concern applies to pregnancies resulting from rape or incest. This tragedy is compounded because an innocent woman's freedom of choice was denied. In these circumstances, abortion is sometimes considered advisable to preserve the physical and mental health of the mother. Abortions for these reasons are also rare.

9. Some argue for abortion because of fear that a child may have a congenital malformation. Surely the harmful effects of certain infectious or toxic agents in the first trimester of pregnancy are real, but caution is needed in considering the termination of a pregnancy. Life has great value for all, including those born with disabilities. Furthermore, the outcome may not be as serious as postulated.

10. I remember well a couple who endured such an experience. The woman was only 21 years old at the time—a beautiful and devoted wife. In her first trimester, she contracted German measles. Abortion was advised because the developing baby would almost surely be damaged. Some members of her [family](#), out of loving concern, applied additional pressure for an abortion. Devotedly, the couple consulted their bishop. He referred them to their stake president, who, after listening to their concern, counseled them not to terminate the life of this baby, even though the child would likely have a problem. He quoted this scripture:

11. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

12. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." [7](#)

13. They chose to follow that counsel and allowed their child to be born—a beautiful little girl, normal in every respect, except for total hearing loss. After their daughter’s evaluation at a school for the deaf, the parents were advised that this child had the intellect of a genius. She attended a major university on a scholarship. Now some 40 years later, she enjoys a wonderful life.

14. To deny life to an individual because of a possible handicap is a very serious matter. Policy consistent with that logic would dictate that those already living with such deficiencies should likewise be terminated. One more step in that tragic train of thought would lead to the conclusion that those who are either infirm or inconvenient should also be eliminated. Such irreverence for life would be totally unthinkable!

Abortion on Demand

15. Relatively few abortions are performed for the special circumstances to which I have referred. [8](#) Most abortions are performed on demand to deal with unwanted pregnancies. These abortions are simply a form of birth control.

16. Elective abortion has been legalized in many countries on the premise that a woman is free to choose what she does with her own body. To an extent this is true for each of us, male or female. We are free to think. We are free to plan. And we are free to do. But once an action has been taken, we are never free from its consequences.

17. To understand this concept more clearly, we can learn from the astronaut. Anytime during selection or preparation, he or she is free to withdraw from the program. But once the spacecraft has lifted off, the astronaut is bound to the consequences of the previous choice to make the journey.

18. So it is with people who choose to embark on a journey that leads to parenthood. They have freedom of choice—to begin or not to begin that course. When conception does occur, that choice has already been made.

19. Yes, a woman is free to choose what she will do with her body. Whether her choice leads to an astronaut’s mission or to a baby, her choice to begin the journey binds her to the consequences of that choice. She cannot “unchoose.”

20. When the controversies about abortion are debated, “individual right of choice” is invoked as though it were the one supreme virtue. That could only be true if but one person were involved. The rights of

any one individual do not allow the rights of another individual to be abused. In or out of marriage, abortion is not solely an individual matter. Terminating the life of a developing baby involves two individuals with separate bodies, brains, and hearts. A woman’s choice for her own body does not include the right to deprive her baby of life—and a lifetime of choices that her child would make.

21. As Latter-day Saints, we should stand up for choice—the right choice—not simply for choice as a method. [9](#)

22. Nearly all legislation pertaining to abortion considers the duration of gestation. The human mind has presumed to determine when “meaningful life” begins. In the course of my studies as a medical doctor, I learned that a new life begins when two special cells unite to become one cell, bringing together 23 chromosomes from the father and 23 from the mother. These chromosomes contain thousands of genes. In a marvelous process involving a combination of genetic coding by which all the basic human characteristics of the unborn person are established, a new DNA complex is formed. A continuum of growth results in a new human being. Approximately 22 days after the two cells have united, a little heart begins to beat. At 26 days the circulation of blood begins. [10](#) To legislate when a developing life is considered “meaningful” is presumptive and quite arbitrary, in my opinion.

23. Abortion has been legalized by governing entities without regard for God and His commandments. Scriptures state repeatedly that people will prosper only if they obey the commandments of God. [11](#) Individuals will prosper only when they walk in faith and obedience to God, who said:

24. “I, the Lord, ... built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

25. “And it is my purpose to provide. ...

26. “But it must needs be done in mine own way. ...

27. “For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare.” [12](#)

28. The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints has consistently opposed the practice of abortion. More than a century ago, the First Presidency wrote, “We again take this opportunity of warning the Latter-day Saints against those ... practices of feticide and infanticide.” [13](#)

29. Early in his presidency President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said: “We have repeatedly affirmed the position of the Church in unalterably

opposing all abortions, except in two rare instances: When conception is the result of forcible rape and when competent medical counsel indicates that a mother's health would otherwise be seriously jeopardized." [14](#) Current policy now includes two other exceptions—incest and if the baby cannot survive beyond birth, as determined by competent medical counsel. Even these exceptions do not justify abortion automatically. It "should be considered only after the persons responsible have consulted with their bishops and received divine confirmation through prayer." [15](#)

Adoption

30. Why destroy a life that could bring great joy to others? There are better ways of dealing with an unwanted pregnancy. When a life is created by sinful behavior, the best way to begin personal repentance is to preserve the life of that child. To add another serious sin to a serious sin already committed only compounds the grief. Adoption is a wonderful alternative to abortion. Both the baby and the [adoptive parents](#) can be greatly blessed by the adoption of that baby into a home where the child will be lovingly nurtured and where the blessings of the gospel will be available.

Repentance Is Possible

31. Is there any hope for the person who has participated in the act of abortion? Is there any hope for those who have so sinned and who now suffer heartbreak? The answer is yes! "As far as has been revealed, a person may repent and be forgiven for the sin of abortion." [16](#) We know the Lord will help all who are truly repentant. [17](#)

32. Life is precious! No one can cuddle an innocent infant, look into those beautiful eyes, feel the little fingers, and kiss that baby's cheek without a deepening reverence for life and for our Creator. Life comes from life. It is no accident. It is a gift from God. Innocent life is not sent by Him to be destroyed. It is given by Him and is naturally to be taken by Him alone. [18](#) I testify that life is eternal as He is eternal.

Adoption—A Loving Decision That Blesses the Child

33. "We ... express our support of unwed parents who place their children for adoption in stable homes with a mother and a father. We also express our support of the married mothers and fathers who adopt these children.

34. "Children are entitled to the blessing of being reared in a stable [family](#) environment where father and mother honor marital vows. Having a secure, nurturing, and consistent relationship with both a father

and a mother is essential to a child's well-being. When choosing adoption, unwed parents grant their children this most important blessing. Adoption is an unselfish, loving decision that blesses the child, birth parents, and [adoptive parents](#) in this life and throughout the eternities. We commend all those who strengthen children and families by promoting adoption."

Notes

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. See The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th ed. (1998), "World Wars, The."
3. See Maria Cheng, "Abortion Just as Common in Nations Where It's Illegal," Salt Lake Tribune, Oct. 12, 2007, p. A7. In the United States the number of live births per year is in the range of three to four million. The number of abortions during that same period of time exceeds one million. Thus, in that country, one of every three to four pregnancies ends in abortion.
4. See [Exodus 20:13](#); [Deuteronomy 5:17](#); [Matthew 5:21](#); [Romans 13:9](#); [Mosiah 13:21](#); [3 Nephi 12:21](#); [D&C 42:18–19](#).
5. [D&C 59:6](#).
6. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, trans. Charles William Bingham, 22 vols. (1979), 3:42.
7. [Proverbs 3:5–6](#).
8. See statement of Dr. Irvin M. Cushner, speaking to the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Constitutional Amendments Relating to Abortion, S.J. 17–19, 110, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981, 158.
9. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Weightier Matters," Liahona, Mar. 2000, 17–19; Ensign, Jan. 2001, 13–15.
10. See J. Willis Hurst and others, eds., The Heart, 4th ed. (1978), 7.
11. See [Leviticus 26:3–13](#); [Joshua 1:7–8](#); [1 Kings 2:3](#); [2 Kings 18:5–7](#); [2 Chronicles 24:20](#); [26:5](#); [31:21](#); [Job 36:11–12](#); [1 Nephi 2:20–21](#); [4:14](#); [2 Nephi 1:9](#), [20](#), [31](#); [4:4](#); [5:10–11](#); [Jarom 1:9](#); [Omni 1:6](#); [Mosiah 1:7](#); [2:22](#), [31](#); [Alma 9:13](#); [36:1](#), [30](#); [37:13](#); [38:1](#); [45:6–8](#); [48:15](#), [25](#); [50:20](#); [Helaman 3:20](#); [3 Nephi 5:22](#); [D&C 9:13](#).
12. [D&C 104:14–17](#).
13. John Taylor and George Q. Cannon, "Epistle of the First Presidency," Apr. 4, 1885; in James R. Clark, comp., Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. (1965–75), 3:11.
14. Spencer W. Kimball, "A Report and a Challenge," Ensign, Nov. 1976, 6; see also "The Time to Labor Is Now," Ensign, Nov. 1975, 6.
15. Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics (2006), 185.
16. Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1, 185.
17. See [Jeremiah 31:34](#); [Hebrews 8:12](#); [10:17](#); [D&C 58:42](#).
18. See [Deuteronomy 30:20](#); [Acts 17:28](#); [D&C 88:13](#); [Moses 6:32](#).

11.2 - Birth Control

The First Presidency
True to the Faith, 2004

1. When married couples are physically able, they have the privilege of providing mortal bodies for Heavenly Father's spirit children. They play a part in the great

plan of happiness, which permits God's children to receive physical bodies and experience mortality.

2. If you are married, you and your spouse should discuss your sacred responsibility to bring children into the world and nurture them in righteousness. As you do so, consider the sanctity and meaning of life. Ponder the joy that comes when children are in the home. Consider the eternal blessings that come from having a good posterity. With a testimony of these principles, you and your spouse will be prepared to prayerfully decide how many children to have and when to have them. Such decisions are between the two of you and the Lord.

3. As you discuss this sacred matter, remember that sexual relations within marriage are divinely approved. While one purpose of these relations is to provide physical bodies for God's children, another purpose is to express love for one another—to bind husband and wife together in loyalty, fidelity, consideration, and common purpose.

11.3 - Children

Neil L. Andersen
Ensign, November 2011



1. As we look into the eyes of a child, we see a fellow son or daughter of God who stood with us in the premortal life.

2. It is a crowning privilege of a husband and wife who are able to bear children to provide mortal bodies for these spirit children of God. We believe in families, and we believe in children.

3. When a child is born to a husband and wife, they are fulfilling part of our Heavenly Father's plan to bring children to earth. The Lord said, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the [immortality](#) and eternal life of man."¹ Before immortality, there must be mortality.

4. The [family](#) is ordained of God. Families are central to our Heavenly Father's plan here on earth and through the eternities. After Adam and Eve were joined in marriage, the scripture reads, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."² In our day prophets and apostles have declared, "The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force."³

5. This commandment has not been forgotten or set aside in The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints.⁴ We express deep [gratitude](#) for the enormous faith shown by husbands and wives (especially our wives) in their willingness to have children. When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. These are sacred decisions—decisions that should be made with sincere prayer and acted on with great faith.

6. Years ago, Elder James O. Mason of the Seventy shared this story with me: "The birth of our sixth child was an unforgettable experience. As I gazed on this beautiful, new daughter in the nursery just moments after her birth, I distinctly heard a voice declare, 'There will yet be another, and it will be a boy.' Unwisely, I rushed back to the bedside of my absolutely exhausted wife and told her the good news. It was very bad timing on my part."⁵ Year after year the Masons anticipated the arrival of their seventh child. Three, four, five, six, seven years passed. Finally, after eight years, their seventh child was born—a little boy.

7. Last April, President Thomas S. Monson declared:

8. "Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it's growing ever wider. ...

9. "The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world. We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded."⁶

10. Many voices in the world today marginalize the importance of having children or suggest delaying or limiting children in a family. My daughters recently referred me to a [blog](#) written by a [Christian](#) mother (not of our faith) with five children. She commented: "[Growing] up in this culture, it is very hard to get a biblical perspective on motherhood. ... Children rank way below college. Below world travel for sure. Below the ability to go out at night at your leisure. Below honing your body at the gym. Below any job you may have or hope to get." She then adds: "Motherhood is not a hobby, it is a calling. You do not collect children because you find them cuter than stamps. It is not something to do if you can squeeze the time in. It is what God gave you time for."⁷

11. Having young children is not easy. Many days are just difficult. A young mother got on a bus with seven

children. The bus driver asked, “Are these all yours, lady? Or is it a picnic?”

12. “They’re all mine,” she replied. “And it’s no picnic!”⁸

13. As the world increasingly asks, “Are these all yours?” we thank you for creating within the Church a sanctuary for families, where we honor and help mothers with children.

14. To a righteous father, there are no words sufficient to express the gratitude and love he feels for his wife’s incalculable gift of bearing and caring for their children.

15. Elder Mason had another experience just weeks after his marriage that helped him prioritize his family responsibilities. He said:

16. “Marie and I had rationalized that to get me through medical school it would be necessary for her to remain in the workplace. Although this was not what we [wanted] to do, children would have to come later. [While looking at a Church magazine at my parents’ home,] I saw an article by Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then of the Quorum of the Twelve, [highlighting] responsibilities associated with marriage. According to Elder Kimball, one sacred responsibility was to multiply and replenish the earth. My parents’ home was [close to] the Church Administration Building. I immediately walked to the offices, and 30 minutes after reading his article, I found myself sitting across the desk from Elder Spencer W. Kimball.” (This wouldn’t be so easy today.)

17. “I explained that I wanted to become a doctor. There was no alternative but to postpone having our family. Elder Kimball listened patiently and then responded in a soft voice, ‘Brother Mason, would the Lord want you to break one of his important commandments in order for you to become a doctor? With the help of the Lord, you can have your family and still become a doctor. Where is your faith?’”

18. Elder Mason continued: “Our first child was born less than a year later. Marie and I worked hard, and the Lord opened the windows of heaven.” The Masons were blessed with two more children before he graduated from medical school four years later.⁹

19. Across the world, this is a time of economic instability and financial uncertainty. In April general conference, President Thomas S. Monson said: “If you are concerned about providing financially for a wife and family, may I assure you that there is no shame in a couple having to scrimp and save. It is generally

during these challenging times that you will grow closer together as you learn to sacrifice and to make difficult decisions.”¹⁰

20. Elder Kimball’s piercing question, “Where is your faith?” turns us to the holy scriptures.

21. It was not in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve bore their first child. Leaving the garden, “Adam [and Eve] began to till the earth. ... Adam knew his wife, and she [bore] ... sons and daughters, and [acting in faith] they began to multiply and to replenish the earth.”¹¹

22. It was not in their Jerusalem home, with gold, silver, and precious things, that Lehi and Sariah, acting in faith, bore their sons Jacob and Joseph. It was in the wilderness. Lehi spoke of his son Jacob as “my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness.”¹² Lehi said of Joseph, “Thou wast born in the wilderness of [our] afflictions; yea, in the days of [our] greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee.”¹³

23. In the book of Exodus, a man and woman married and, acting in faith, had a baby boy. There was no welcoming sign on the front door to announce his birth. They hid him because Pharaoh had instructed that every newborn male Israelite should be “cast into the river.”¹⁴ You know the rest of the story: the baby lovingly laid in a little ark made of bulrushes, placed in the river, watched over by his sister, found by Pharaoh’s daughter, and cared for by his own mother as his nurse. The boy was returned to Pharaoh’s daughter, who took him as her son and called him Moses.

24. In the most beloved story of a baby’s birth, there was no decorated nursery or designer crib—only a manger for the Savior of the world.

25. In “the best of times [and] ... the worst of times,”¹⁵ the true Saints of God, acting in faith, have never forgotten, dismissed, or neglected “God’s commandment ... to multiply and replenish the earth.”¹⁶ We go forward in faith—realizing the decision of how many children to have and when to have them is between a husband and wife and the Lord. We should not judge one another on this matter.

26. The bearing of children is a sensitive subject that can be very painful for righteous women who do not have the opportunity to marry and have a family. To you noble women, our Heavenly Father knows your prayers and desires. How grateful we are for your remarkable influence, including reaching out with loving arms to children who need your faith and strength.

27. The bearing of children can also be a heartbreaking subject for righteous couples who marry and find that they are unable to have the children they so anxiously anticipated or for a husband and wife who plan on having a large family but are blessed with a smaller family.

28. We cannot always explain the difficulties of our mortality. Sometimes life seems very unfair—especially when our greatest desire is to do exactly what the Lord has commanded. As the Lord’s servant, I assure you that this promise is certain: “Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, [as] they keep the covenants they have made with God.”¹⁷

29. President J. Scott Dorius of the Peru Lima West Mission told me their story. He said:

30. “Becky and I were married for 25 years without being able to have [or adopt] children. We moved several times. Introducing ourselves in each new setting was awkward and sometimes painful. Ward members wondered why we [didn’t have] children. They weren’t the only ones wondering.

31. “When I was called as a bishop, ward members [expressed] concern that I did not have any experience with children and teenagers. I thanked them for their sustaining vote and asked them to allow me to practice my child-raising skills on their children. They lovingly obliged.

32. “We waited, gained perspective, and learned patience. After 25 years of marriage, a miracle baby came into our lives. We adopted two-year-old Nicole and then newborn Nikolai. Strangers now compliment us on our beautiful grandchildren. We laugh and say, ‘They are our children. We have lived our lives backwards.’”¹⁸

33. Brothers and sisters, we should not be judgmental with one another in this sacred and private responsibility.

34. “And [Jesus] took a child ... in his arms [and] said ...

35. “Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth ... him that sent me.”¹⁹

36. What a wonderful blessing we have to receive sons and daughters of God into our home.

37. Let us humbly and prayerfully seek to understand and accept God’s commandments, reverently listening for the voice of His Holy Spirit.

38. Families are central to God’s eternal plan. I testify of the great blessing of children and of the happiness they will bring us in this life and in the eternities, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sources

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3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2010, 129.
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6. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” Liahona and Ensign, May 2011, 66, 67.
7. Rachel Jankovic, “Motherhood Is a Calling (and Where Your Children Rank),” July 14, 2011, [desiringgod.org](#).
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11. [Moses 5:1, 2](#).
12. [2 Nephi 2:1](#).
13. [2 Nephi 3:1](#).
14. [Exodus 1:22](#).
15. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Signet Classic, 1997), 13.
16. Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2010, 129.
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19. [Mark 9:36–37](#).

11.4 - The Sanctity of Life

Elder James E. Faust

Ensign, May 1975



1. I most earnestly and humbly seek to be sustained and understood by the Spirit as I endeavor to discuss an important and sensitive subject. I approach it with all the humility and with the profound respect it commands.
2. I have chosen to speak on the sanctity of life. I desire also to speak with reverence about the hallowed hallmark of life, which is the ability to reproduce itself. I wish also to be an advocate for the unborn. For this reason I direct my remarks primarily to women, because only they can honor the holy calling of motherhood, which is the most exalted good that can be rendered to mankind.

3. In the Talmud we read that he who saves one life is as if he had saved an entire world. Since the beginning of man, God has taught of an absolute respect for human life. From the very first moment of his being until the last breath of his life, there is a veneration for life which includes those in being, but not yet born.

4. One wise teacher tells us, “One human life is as precious as a million lives, for each is infinite in value.” (Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, *Jewish Views on Abortion*, p. 4.)

5. The exercise of a man or woman’s sacred procreative powers makes each a partner with God in creation and brings to them in parenthood their greatest happiness. This divine partnership also brings their greatest privileges and most weighty responsibilities.

6. Since becoming a parent is such a transcending blessing, and since each child is so precious and brings so much happiness, a cardinal purpose of marriage and of life itself is to bring forth new life within this partnership with God. Obligations inherent in the creation of precious human life are a sacred trust, which if faithfully kept, will keep us from degenerating into moral bankrupts and from becoming mere addicts of lust.

7. The responsibilities involved in the divine life-giving process, and the functions of our body, are so sacrosanct that they are to be exercised only within the marriage relationship. Those who do not accept and meet those responsibilities, for any reason, as well as those who do, should never depart from the law of chastity if they wish to be truly happy. All members of this Church seeking eternal joy and peace are expected to and will wish to come to the marriage altar free from sexual transgressions—chaste and pure. Any who fail to do so may find that they have cheated themselves of their own self-respect, dignity, and much of the great joy they seek in marriage. Because of the special inner peace, strength, and happiness it brings, chastity, as the law of God, is and always has been really “in,” and unchastity is and always has been really “out.”

8. In times past we have looked upon a person who saves another human life as a great hero; yet now we have come to a time when the taking of an unborn human life for nonmedical reasons has become tolerated, made legal, and accepted in many countries of the world. But making it legal to destroy newly conceived life will never make it right. It is consummately wrong.

9. President Spencer W. Kimball has recently said, “This is one of the most despicable of all sins—to

destroy an unborn child to save one from embarrassment or to save one’s face or comfort.” (Ensign, Nov. 1974, p. 7.)

10. Some say, as did the Supreme Court of the United States, that it is only a theory that human life is present from conception. This is contrary to insurmountable medical evidence. Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson recently revealed that he was among those who were militantly outspoken in favor of legalized abortion and joined in using every device available in political action to promote it. He helped set up and became director of the first and largest abortion clinic in the western world. After the center had performed some sixty thousand abortions, Dr. Nathanson resigned as director. He said, “I am deeply troubled by my own increasing certainty that I had in fact presided over 60,000 deaths. There is no longer serious doubt in my mind that human life exists within the womb from the very onset of pregnancy.” (New England Journal of Medicine, vol. 291, no. 22, p. 1189.)

11. Way back in the sixteenth century, Arantius showed that maternal and fetal circulations were separate, thus clearly demonstrating that there are two separate lives involved. The unborn babe is certainly alive, because it possesses the token of life which is the ability to reproduce dying cells. (Dr. Eugene F. Diamond, *Illinois Medical Journal*, May 1967.)

12. For the unborn, only two possibilities are open: It can become a live human being or a dead unborn child.

13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, referring to the unborn babe in the mother’s womb, said, “The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being.”

14. Because she feels it, every mother knows there is sacred life in the body of her unborn babe. There is also life in the spirit, and some time before birth the body and the spirit are united. When they do come together, we have a human soul. For the Lord has said, “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.” ([D&C 88:15](#).)

15. Experts tell us that the necessity of terminating unborn life is rarely justified for purely medical or psychiatric reasons. (Dr. James H. Ford, M.D., *California Medical Journal*, Nov. 1972, pp. 80–84.) Some justify abortions because the unborn may have been exposed to drugs or disease and may have birth defects. Where in all the world is the physically or mentally perfect man or woman? Is life not worth living unless it is free of handicaps? Experience in working with handicapped children would suggest that human nature frequently rises above its impediments

and that in Shakespeare's words, "They say best men are molded out of faults, And, for the most, become much more the better for being a little bad" (Measure for Measure, 5, i, 445) in the physical sense.

16. Many parents who have known the heartache and concern of caring for a handicapped child would agree with Pearl Buck, Nobel prize-winning author who said, "A retarded child, a handicapped person, brings its own gift to life, even to the life of normal human beings." (Death Before Birth, the Constitutional Right to Life Committee, Providence, Rhode Island.) What a great gift to mankind the life of Helen Keller brought.

17. It is the belief of those who are members of this Church that human life is so hallowed and precious that there is an accountability to God on the part of those who invoke the sacred fountains of life.

18. The destruction of such a treasure is so abhorrent that the First Presidency of the Church has clearly and repeatedly counseled the world—as did President Kimball this morning—against the taking of unborn life. I quote, "Abortion must be considered one of the most revolting and sinful practices in this day. ... Members of the Church guilty of being parties to the sin of abortion must be subjected to the disciplinary action of the councils of the Church as circumstances warrant." Members are counseled neither "to submit to or perform an abortion except in the rare cases where" it is medically necessary, and, as the First Presidency has further counseled, "even then it should be done only after counseling with the local presiding priesthood authority and after receiving divine confirmation through prayer." The First Presidency has advised that it will be amenable to the laws of repentance and [forgiveness](#). (Ensign, March 1973, p. 64.)

19. It is my feeling that we grossly underestimate the sacred nature of motherhood. Psychiatric experts remind us that there are certain fundamental, biological facts which influence the psyche of those who bring new life into the world. One says, "The ability of mothers to accept infants after they are born is underrated and underestimated." (Dr. S. Bolter, American Journal of Psychiatry, Oct. 1962, pp. 312–16.) Childbearing is a basic biological and psychological, privileged function of womankind.

20. One of the most evil myths of our day is that a woman who has joined hands with God in creation can destroy that creation because she claims the right to control her own body. Since the life within her is not her own, how can she justify its termination and deflect that life from an earth which it may never inherit?

21. The great medical profession, for which I have such great respect, that for centuries has been committed to the preservation of life under the cardinal principles of treatment—"do no harm" and "protect life"—now finds itself destroying almost a million unborn children a year in the United States alone. Each of these, because of tiny chromosomal differences, would have been different from any other person born in the world. How many with special gifts like unto [Moses](#), Leonardo da Vinci, and Abraham Lincoln might have been among them?

22. These and all others are entitled to a defense in their unborn, natural state of existence. One great physician says, "We do that much for seagulls, flamingos and whooping cranes." This same physician, Dr. Henry G. Armitage, Jr., states, "Not without comment shall it come to pass that a state (so fretful for the preservation of the praying mantis but holding an unborn baby to be of no account) can send a spark of [immortality](#) swinging out into limbo and conspire with citizen and physician to turn a fragile, living object of simple innocence and complex wonder into a pathetic pulp and consign it by rude and peremptory passage to the furnace or sewer—unknown, unwanted [and] undefended." He further questions how a woman as "the fertile adornment of our race can be deluded into the notion that she is a mere portress of unwanted luggage or be by blandishment seduced into believing that she has dominion over life not her own." He says, "An abortion is never commonplace, for the world holds no heartbreak like the death of innocence. Whenever and wherever it occurs, we all suffer another loss from that little which sustains us and holds us together. It is the degradation of humanity. It is fulness emptied, innocence defiled, song unfinished, beauty discarded, hope unsprung. In our absence, housebreakers are robbing us of everything that we own: of virtue, honor, integrity, trust, innocence, truth, beauty, justice and liberty." (Dr. Henry G. Armitage, Jr., The Death of Innocence.)

23. I urge all who may have dipped into the fountains of life to respect the divinity inherent in that life and to protect this sacred treasure and its transcending blessings. For the Savior of the world said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ... ye have done it unto me." ([Matt. 25:40](#).)

24. I leave my testimony that the most precious of all of God's creations is eternal life itself, in the sacred name of [Jesus Christ](#). Amen.

11.5 - Weightier Matters

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, January 2001



1. From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University on 9 February 1999.

2. Diversity and choice are not the weightier matters of the law. The weightier matters that move us toward our goal of eternal life are love of God, obedience to His commandments, and unity in accomplishing the work of His Church.

3. The book of Matthew contains the Savior's denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" ([Matt. 23:23](#); emphasis added).

4. I wish to address some "weightier matters" we might overlook if we allow ourselves to focus exclusively on lesser matters. The weightier matters to which I refer are the qualities like faith and the love of God and His work that will move us strongly toward our eternal goals.

5. In speaking of weightier matters, I seek to contrast our ultimate goals in eternity with the mortal methods or short-term objectives we use to pursue them. The Apostle Paul described the difference between earthly perspectives and eternal ones in these words: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" ([2 Cor. 4:18](#)).

6. If we concentrate too intently on our obvious earthly methods or objectives, we can lose sight of our eternal goals, which the Apostle called "things ... not seen." If we do this, we can forget where we should be headed and in eternal terms go nowhere. We do not improve our position in eternity just by flying farther and faster in mortality, but only by moving knowledgeably in the right direction. As the Lord told us in modern revelation, "That which the Spirit testifies unto you ... ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation" ([D&C 46:7](#); emphasis added).

7. We must not confuse means and ends. The vehicle is not the destination. If we lose sight of our eternal goals, we might think that the most important thing is how fast we are moving and that any road will get us to

our destination. The Apostle Paul described this attitude as "having a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" ([Rom. 10:2](#)). Zeal is a method, not a goal. Zeal—even a zeal toward God—needs to be "according to knowledge" of God's commandments and His plan for His children. In other words, the weightier matter of the eternal goal must not be displaced by the mortal method, however excellent in itself.

8. Thus far I have spoken in generalities. Now I will give three examples.

Family

9. All Latter-day Saints understand that having an eternal family is an eternal goal. Exaltation is a family matter, not possible outside the everlasting covenant of marriage, which makes possible the perpetuation of glorious family relationships. But this does not mean that everything related to mortal families is an eternal goal. There are many short-term objectives associated with families—such as family togetherness or family solidarity or love—that are methods, not the eternal goals we pursue in priority above all others. For example, family solidarity to conduct an evil enterprise is obviously no virtue. Neither is family solidarity to conceal and perpetuate some evil practice like abuse.

10. The purpose of mortal families is to bring children into the world, to teach them what is right, and to prepare all family members for exaltation in eternal family relationships. The gospel plan contemplates the kind of family government, discipline, solidarity, and love that serve those ultimate goals. But even the love of family members is subject to the overriding first commandment, which is love of God (see [Matt. 22:37–38](#)), and the Savior's directive, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)). As Jesus taught, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" ([Matt. 10:37](#)).

Choice, or Agency

11. My next example in this message on weightier matters is the role of choice, or agency.

12. Few concepts have more potential to mislead us than the idea that choice, or agency, is an ultimate goal. For Latter-day Saints, this potential confusion is partly a product of the fact that moral agency—the right to choose—is a fundamental condition of mortal life. Without this precious gift of God, the purpose of mortal life could not be realized. To secure our agency in mortality we fought a mighty contest the book of Revelation calls a "war in heaven." This premortal

contest ended with the devil and his angels being cast out of heaven and being denied the opportunity of having a body in mortal life (see [Rev. 12:7–9](#)).

13. But our war to secure agency was won. The test in this postwar mortal estate is not to secure choice but to use it—to choose good instead of evil so that we can achieve our eternal goals. In mortality, choice is a method, not a goal.

14. Of course, mortals must still resolve many questions concerning what restrictions or consequences should be placed upon choices. But those questions come under the heading of freedom, not agency. Many do not understand that important fact. We are responsible to use our agency in a world of choices. It will not do to pretend that our agency has been taken away when we are not free to exercise it without unwelcome consequences.

15. Because choice is a method, choices can be exercised either way on any matter, and our choices can serve any goal. Therefore, those who consider freedom of choice as a goal can easily slip into the position of trying to justify any choice that is made. “Choice” can even become a slogan to justify one particular choice. For example, today one who says “I am pro-choice” is clearly understood as opposing any legal restrictions upon a woman’s choice to abort a fetus.

16. More than 30 years ago, as a young law professor, I published one of the earliest articles on the legal consequences of [abortion](#). Since that time I have been a knowledgeable observer of the national debate and the unfortunate United States Supreme Court decisions on the so-called “right to abortion.” I have been fascinated with how cleverly those who sought and now defend legalized abortion on demand have moved the issue away from a debate on the moral, ethical, and medical pros and cons of legal restrictions on abortion and focused the debate on the slogan or issue of choice. The slogan or sound bite “pro-choice” has had an almost magical effect in justifying abortion and in neutralizing opposition to it.

17. Pro-choice slogans have been particularly seductive to Latter-day Saints because we know that moral agency, which can be described as the power of choice, is a fundamental necessity in the gospel plan. All Latter-day Saints are pro-choice according to that theological definition. But being pro-choice on the need for moral agency does not end the matter for us. Choice is a method, not the ultimate goal. We are accountable for our choices, and only righteous choices will move us toward our eternal goals.

18. In this effort, Latter-day Saints follow the teachings of the prophets. On this subject our prophetic guidance is clear. The Lord commanded, “Thou shalt not ... kill, nor do anything like unto it” ([D&C 59:6](#)). The Church opposes elective abortion for personal or social convenience. Our members are taught that, subject only to some very rare exceptions, they must not submit to, perform, encourage, pay for, or arrange for an abortion. That direction tells us what we need to do on the weightier matters of the law, the choices that will move us toward eternal life.

19. In today’s world we are not true to our teachings if we are merely pro-choice. We must stand up for the right choice. Those who persist in refusing to think beyond slogans and sound bites like pro-choice wander from the goals they pretend to espouse and wind up giving their support to results they might not support if those results were presented without disguise.

20. For example, consider the uses some have made of the possible exceptions to our firm teachings against abortion. Our leaders have taught that the only possible exceptions are when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, or when a competent physician has determined that the life or health of the mother is in serious jeopardy or that the fetus has severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth. But even these exceptions do not justify abortion automatically. Because abortion is a most serious matter, we are counseled that it should be considered only after the persons responsible have consulted with their bishops and received divine confirmation through prayer.

21. Some Latter-day Saints say they deplore abortion, but they give these exceptional circumstances as a basis for their pro-choice position that the law should allow abortion on demand in all circumstances. Such persons should face the reality that the circumstances described in these three exceptions are extremely rare. For example, conception by incest or rape—the circumstance most commonly cited by those who use exceptions to argue for abortion on demand—is involved in only a tiny minority of abortions. More than 95 percent of the millions of abortions performed each year extinguish the life of a fetus conceived by consensual relations. Thus the effect in over 95 percent of abortions is not to vindicate choice but to avoid its consequences. ¹ Using arguments of “choice” to try to justify altering the consequences of choice is a classic case of omitting what the Savior called “the weightier matters of the law.”

22. A prominent basis for the secular or philosophical arguments for abortion on demand is the argument that a woman should have control over her own body. Not long ago I received a letter from a thoughtful Latter-day Saint outside the United States who analyzed that argument in secular terms. Since his analysis reaches the same conclusion I have urged on religious grounds, I quote it here for the benefit of those most subject to persuasion on this basis:

23. “Every woman has, within the limits of nature, the right to choose what will or will not happen to her body. Every woman has, at the same time, the responsibility for the way she uses her body. If by her choice she behaves in such a way that a human fetus is conceived, she has not only the right to but also the responsibility for that fetus. If it is an unwanted pregnancy, she is not justified in ending it with the claim that it interferes with her right to choose. She herself chose what would happen to her body by risking pregnancy. She had her choice. If she has no better reason, her conscience should tell her that abortion would be a highly irresponsible choice.

24. “What constitutes a good reason? Since a human fetus has intrinsic and infinite human value, the only good reason for an abortion would be the violation or deprivation of or the threat to the woman’s right to choose what will or will not happen to her body. Social, educational, financial, and personal considerations alone do not outweigh the value of the life that is in the fetus. These considerations by themselves may properly lead to the decision to [place the baby for adoption](#) after its birth, but not to end its existence in utero.

25. “The woman’s right to choose what will or will not happen to her body is obviously violated by rape or incest. When conception results in such a case, the woman has the moral as well as the legal right to an abortion because the condition of pregnancy is the result of someone else’s irresponsibility, not hers. She does not have to take responsibility for it. To force her by law to carry the fetus to term would be a further violation of her right. She also has the right to refuse an abortion. This would give her the right to the fetus and also the responsibility for it. She could later relinquish this right and this responsibility through the process of placing the baby for [adoption](#) after it is born. Whichever way is a responsible choice.”

26. The man who wrote those words also applied the same reasoning to the other exceptions allowed by our doctrine—life of the mother and a baby that will not survive birth.

27. I conclude this discussion of choice with two more short points.

28. If we say we are anti-abortion in our personal life but pro-choice in public policy, we are saying that we will not use our influence to establish public policies that encourage righteous choices on matters God’s servants have defined as serious sins. I urge Latter-day Saints who have taken that position to ask themselves which other grievous sins should be decriminalized or smiled on by the law due to this theory that persons should not be hampered in their choices. Should we decriminalize or lighten the legal consequences of child abuse? of cruelty to animals? of pollution? of fraud? of fathers who choose to abandon their families for greater freedom or convenience?

29. Similarly, some reach the pro-choice position by saying we should not legislate morality. Those who take this position should realize that the law of crimes legislates nothing but morality. Should we repeal all laws with a moral basis so that our government will not punish any choices some persons consider immoral? Such an action would wipe out virtually all of the laws against crimes.

Diversity

30. My last illustration of the bad effects of confusing means and ends, methods and goals, concerns the word diversity. Not many labels have been productive of more confused thinking in our time than this one. A respected federal judge recently commented on current changes in culture and values by observing that “a new credo in celebration of diversity seems to be emerging which proclaims, ‘Divided We Stand!’” ² Even in religious terms, we sometimes hear the words “celebrate diversity” as if diversity were an ultimate goal.

31. The word diversity has legitimate uses to describe a condition, such as when one discusses “racial and cultural diversity.” Similarly, what we now call “diversity” appears in the scriptures as a condition. This is evident wherever differences among the children of God are described, such as in the numerous scriptural references to nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples.

32. Yet in the scriptures, the objectives we are taught to pursue on the way to our eternal goals are ideals like love and obedience. These ideals do not accept us as we are but require each of us to make changes. Jesus did not pray that His followers would be “diverse.” He prayed that they would be “one” ([John 17:21–22](#)). Modern revelation does not say, “Be diverse; and if ye

are not diverse ye are not mine.” It says, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” ([D&C 38:27](#)).

33. Since diversity is a condition, a method, or a short-term objective—not an ultimate goal—whenever diversity is urged it is appropriate to ask, “What kind of diversity?” or “Diversity in what circumstance or condition?” or “Diversity in furtherance of what goal?” This is especially important in our policy debates, which should be conducted not in terms of slogans but in terms of the goals we seek and the methods or shorter-term objectives that will achieve them. Diversity for its own sake is meaningless and can clearly be shown to lead to unacceptable results. For example, if diversity is the underlying goal for a neighborhood, does this mean we should seek to assure that the neighborhood includes thieves and pedophiles, slaughterhouses and water hazards? Diversity can be a good method to achieve some long-term goal, but public policy discussions need to get beyond the slogan to identify the goal, to specify the proposed diversity, and to explain how this kind of diversity will help to achieve the agreed-upon goal.

34. Our Church has an approach to the obvious cultural and ethnic diversities among our members. We teach that what unites us is far more important than what differentiates us. Consequently, our members are asked to concentrate their efforts to strengthen our unity—not to glorify our diversity. For example, our objective is not to organize local wards and branches according to differences in culture or in ethnic or national origins, although that effect is sometimes produced on a temporary basis when required because of language barriers. Instead, we teach that members of majority groupings (whatever their nature) are responsible to accept Church members of other groupings, providing full fellowship and full opportunities in Church participation. We seek to establish a community of Saints—“one body,” the Apostle Paul called it ([1 Cor. 12:13](#))—where everyone feels needed and wanted and where all can pursue the eternal goals we share.

35. Consistent with the Savior’s command to “be one,” we seek unity. On this subject President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught: “I remember when President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., as a counselor in the First Presidency, would stand at this pulpit and plead for unity among the priesthood. I think he was not asking that we give up our individual personalities and become as robots cast from a single mold. I am confident he was not asking that we cease to think, to meditate, to ponder as individuals. I think he was telling us that if we are to assist in moving forward the

work of God, we must carry in our hearts a united conviction concerning the great basic foundation stones of our faith. ... If we are to assist in moving forward the work of God, we must carry in our hearts a united conviction that the ordinances and covenants of this work are eternal and everlasting in their consequences.” [3](#)

36. Anyone who preaches unity risks misunderstanding. The same is true of anyone who questions the goal of diversity. Such a one risks being thought intolerant. But tolerance is not jeopardized by promoting unity or by challenging diversity. Again, I quote President Hinckley: “Each of us is an individual. Each of us is different. There must be respect for those differences.” [4](#)

37. On another occasion he said: “We must work harder to build mutual respect, an attitude of forbearance, with tolerance one for another regardless of the doctrines and philosophies which we may espouse. Concerning these you and I may disagree. But we can do so with respect and civility.” [5](#)

38. President Hinckley continues: “An article of the faith to which I subscribe states: ‘We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may’ ([A of F 1:11](#)). I hope to find myself always on the side of those defending this position. Our strength lies in our freedom to choose. There is strength even in our very diversity. But there is greater strength in the God-given mandate to each of us to work for the uplift and blessing of all His sons and daughters, regardless of their ethnic or national origin or other differences.” [6](#)

39. In short, we preach unity among the community of Saints and tolerance toward the personal differences that are inevitable in the beliefs and conduct of a diverse population. Tolerance obviously requires a noncontentious manner of relating toward one another’s differences. But tolerance does not require abandoning one’s standards or one’s opinions on political or public policy choices. Tolerance is a way of reacting to diversity, not a command to insulate it from examination.

40. Strong calls for diversity in the public sector sometimes have the effect of pressuring those holding majority opinions to abandon fundamental values to accommodate the diverse positions of those in the minority. Usually this does not substitute a minority value for a majority one. Rather, it seeks to achieve “diversity” by abandoning the official value position

altogether, so that no one's value will be contradicted by an official or semiofficial position. The result of this abandonment is not a diversity of values but an official anarchy of values. I believe this is an example of former Brigham Young University visiting professor Louis Pojman's observation that diversity can be used as "a euphemism for moral relativism." ⁷

41. There are hundreds of examples of this, where achieving the goal of diversity results in the anarchy of values we call moral relativism. These examples include such varied proposals as forbidding the public schools to teach the wrongfulness of certain behavior or the rightness of patriotism. Another example is the attempt to banish a representation of the [Ten Commandments](#) from any public buildings.

42. In a day when prominent thinkers have decried the fact that universities have stopped teaching right and wrong, we are grateful for the countercultural position at Brigham Young University. Moral relativism, which is said to be the dominant force in American universities, has no legitimate place at BYU. The faculty teach values—the right and wrong taught in the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#).

43. In conclusion, diversity and choice are not the weightier matters of the law. The weightier matters that move us toward our goal of eternal life are love of God, obedience to His commandments, and unity in accomplishing the work of His Church. In this belief and practice we move against the powerful modern tides running toward individualism and tolerance rather than toward obedience and cooperative action. Though our belief and practice is unpopular, it is right, and it does not require the blind obedience or the stifling

uniformity its critics charge. If we are united on our eternal goal and united on the inspired principles that will get us there, we can be diverse on individual efforts in support of our goals and consistent with those principles.

44. We know that the work of God cannot be done without unity and cooperative action. We also know that the children of God cannot be exalted as single individuals. Neither a man nor a woman can be exalted in the celestial kingdom unless both unite in the unselfishness of the everlasting covenant of marriage and unless both choose to keep the commandments and honor the covenants of that united state.

45. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior. As the One whose Atonement paid the incomprehensible price for our sins, He is the One who can prescribe the conditions for our salvation. He has commanded us to keep His commandments (see [John 14:15](#)) and to "be one" ([D&C 38:27](#)). I pray that we will make the wise choices to keep the commandments and to seek the unity that will move us toward our ultimate goal, "eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" ([D&C 14:7](#)).

Notes

1. See Russell M. Nelson, "Reverence for Life," *Ensign*, May 1985, 11–14.
2. J. Thomas Greene, "Activist Judicial Philosophies on Trial," *Federal Rules Decisions* 178 (1997): 200.
3. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 672.
4. *Teachings*, 661.
5. *Teachings*, 665.
6. *Teachings*, 664.
7. "Viewpoint," *Daily Universe*, 13 October 1998, 4.

Principles and Practice for a Happy Home

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord” ([Psalm 127:3](#)). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

12. Principles of Happiness in Family Life

12.1 - For Peace at Home

Elder Richard G. Scott
Ensign, May 2015



1. Many voices from the world in which we live tell us we should live at a frantic pace. There is always more to do and more to accomplish. Yet deep inside each of us is a need to have a place of refuge where peace and serenity prevail, a place where we can reset, regroup, and reenergize to prepare for future pressures.

2. The ideal place for that peace is within the walls of our own homes, where we have done all we can to make the Lord [Jesus Christ](#) the centerpiece.

3. Some homes have a father who is a worthy priesthood holder joined by a faithful, devoted mother who together lead in righteousness. Many homes have a different configuration. Regardless of your circumstances, you can center your home and your life on the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the source of true peace in this life.

4. Be certain that every decision you make, whether temporal or spiritual, is conditioned on what the Savior would have you do. When He is the center of your home, there is peace and serenity. There is a spirit of assurance that pervades the home, and it is felt by all who dwell there.

5. The fulfillment of this counsel does not rest upon parents alone, although it is their role to lead. Children can be responsible for improving the Christ-centered efforts in the home. It is important for parents to teach children to recognize how their actions affect each individual who lives in the home. Children who are made to feel accountable for their actions, whether righteous or otherwise, grow to become trustworthy citizens in the kingdom of God.

6. I'm sure you can identify the fundamental principles that center your home on the Savior. The prophetic counsel to have daily personal and [family](#) prayer, daily personal and family scripture study, and weekly family home evening are the essential, weight-bearing beams in the construction of a Christ-centered home. Without these regular practices it will be difficult to find the desired and much-needed peace and refuge from the world.

7. Be obedient to the prophetic teachings Christ would have you follow. Don't rationalize away future happiness by taking shortcuts instead of applying sound gospel principles. Remember: little things lead to big things. Seemingly insignificant indiscretions or neglect can lead to big problems. More importantly, simple, consistent, good habits lead to a life full of bountiful blessings.

8. You children in the Primary, you young men and women in youth programs, and you stalwart missionaries now serving are doing many things more effectively than I was able to do at your age. In the premortal life you proved to be valiant, obedient, and pure. There you worked hard to develop talents and capacities to prepare yourselves to face mortality with courage, dignity, honor, and success.

9. Not long ago you came to mortality with all of those magnificent capacities and endless possibilities. Yet there is real danger in the environment surrounding you. Your great potential and ability could be limited or destroyed if you yield to the devil-inspired contamination around you. However, Satan is no match for the Savior. Satan's fate is decided. He knows he has lost, but he wants to take as many with him as he can. He will try to ruin your goodness and abilities by exploiting your weaknesses. Stay on the Lord's side, and you will win every time.

10. You live in a world where technological advances occur at an astounding pace. It is difficult for many of my generation to keep up with the possibilities. Depending on how technology is used, these advances can be a blessing or a deterrent. Technology, when understood and used for righteous purposes, need not be a threat but rather an enhancement to spiritual communication.

11. For example, many of us have a personal electronic device that fits into our pocket. We are seldom without its company; we may refer to it many times a day. Unfortunately, these devices can be a source of filth and wasted time. But, used with discipline, this technology can be a tool of protection from the worst of society.

12. Who could have imagined not very many years ago that the full standard works and years of general conference messages would fit into your pocket? Just having them in your pocket will not protect you, but studying, pondering, and listening to them during quiet

moments of each day will enhance communication through the Spirit.

13. Be wise in how you embrace technology. Mark important scriptures on your device and refer back to them frequently. If you young people would review a verse of scripture as often as some of you send text messages, you could soon have hundreds of passages of scripture memorized. Those passages would prove to be a powerful source of inspiration and guidance by the [Holy Ghost](#) in times of need.

14. Doing all we can to invite the gentle, guiding influence of the Holy Ghost into our lives is critical in our attempts to center our homes on the Savior. Acting obediently on those promptings strengthens us even more.

15. Greater peace will come as you couple your efforts to be obedient with serving those around you. So many individuals who have what they perceive to be meager talents humbly and generously use those talents to bless the lives of those around them. Selfishness is the root of great evil. The antidote for that evil is exemplified in the life of the Savior. He shows us how to focus our lives outward in unselfish service to others.

16. I have learned a truth that has been repeated so frequently in my life that I have come to know it as an absolute law. It defines the way obedience and service relate to the power of God. When we obey the commandments of the Lord and serve His children unselfishly, the natural consequence is power from God—power to do more than we can do by ourselves. Our insights, our talents, our abilities are expanded because we receive strength and power from the Lord. His power is a fundamental component to establishing a home filled with peace.

17. As you center your home on the Savior, it will naturally become a refuge not only to your own family but also to friends who live in more difficult circumstances. They will be drawn to the serenity they feel there. Welcome such friends into your home. They will blossom in that Christ-centered environment. Become friends with your children's friends. Be a worthy example to them.

18. One of the greatest blessings we can offer to the world is the power of a Christ-centered home where the gospel is taught, covenants are kept, and love abounds.

19. Years ago, following a mission tour, my wife, Jeanene, told me about an elder she had met. Jeanene had asked him about his family. She was surprised as

he responded that he had no family. He further explained that at his birth, his mother had given him to the government to raise. He spent his childhood going from one foster home to another. He was blessed as a teenager to find the gospel. A loving ward family had helped him to have the opportunity to serve a mission.

20. Later Jeanene asked the mission president's wife about this fine elder. She learned that a few months earlier this elder had been in the mission home for a few days due to an illness. During that time he had joined them for a family home evening. Before he left to go back into the field, he asked the mission president if he could spend two or three days at the end of his mission in the mission home again. He wanted to observe how a Christ-centered family functions. He wanted to be able to pattern his family after theirs.

21. Do all you can to have just such a home. Reach out to those living in adverse circumstances. Be a true friend. This kind of enduring friendship is like asphalt that fills the potholes of life and makes the journey smoother and more pleasant. It should not be a resource used to gain personal advantage but a treasure to be appreciated and shared. Welcome into your home others who need to be strengthened by such an experience.

22. I offer some final thoughts for those who love a family member who is not making good choices. That can challenge our patience and endurance. We need to trust in the Lord and in His timing that a positive response to our prayers and rescue efforts can occur. We do all that we can to serve, to bless, and to submissively acknowledge God's will in all things. We exercise faith and remember that there are some things that must be left to the Lord. He invites us to set our burdens down at His feet. With faith we can know that this straying loved one is not abandoned but is in the watchcare of a loving Savior.

23. Recognize the good in others, not their stains. At times a stain needs appropriate attention to be cleansed, but always build on his or her virtues.

24. When you feel that there is only a thin thread of hope, it is really not a thread but a massive connecting link, like a life preserver to strengthen and lift you. It will provide comfort so you can cease to fear. Strive to live worthily and place your trust in the Lord.

25. We need not worry if we can't simultaneously do all of the things that the Lord has counseled us to do. He has spoken of a time and a season for all things. In response to our sincere prayers for guidance, He will direct us in what should be emphasized at each phase

of our life. We can learn, grow, and become like Him one consistent step at a time.

26. I bear testimony that living an obedient life, firmly rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, provides the greatest assurance for peace and refuge in our homes. There will still be plenty of challenges or heartaches, but even in the midst of turmoil, we can enjoy inner peace and profound happiness. I testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is the source of that abundant peace, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

12.2 - More Diligent And Concerned At Home

Elder David A. Bednar

Ensign, November 2009



1. In 1833 the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) received a revelation that contained a strong rebuke to several leading brethren of the Church to set their families in order (see [D&C 93:40–50](#)). A specific phrase from this revelation provides the theme for my message—“more diligent and concerned at home” ([verse 50](#)). I want to suggest three ways each of us can become more diligent and concerned in our homes. I invite you to listen both with ears that hear and with hearts that feel, and I pray for the Spirit of the Lord to be with all of us.

Suggestion Number One: Express Love—and Show It

2. We can begin to become more diligent and concerned at home by telling the people we love that we love them. Such expressions do not need to be flowery or lengthy. We simply should sincerely and frequently express love.

3. Brethren and sisters, when was the last time you took your eternal companion in your arms and said, “I love you”? Parents, when was the last time you sincerely expressed love to your children? Children, when was the last time you told your parents that you love them?

4. Each of us already knows we should tell the people we love that we love them. But what we know is not always reflected in what we do. We may feel unsure, awkward, or even perhaps a bit embarrassed.

5. As disciples of the Savior, we are not merely striving to know more; rather, we need to consistently do more of what we know is right and become better.

6. We should remember that saying “I love you” is only a beginning. We need to say it, we need to mean it, and most importantly we need consistently to show it. We need to both express and demonstrate love.

7. President Thomas S. Monson recently counseled: “Often we assume that [the people around us] must know how much we love them. But we should never assume; we should let them know. ... We will never regret the kind words spoken or the affection shown. Rather, our regrets will come if such things are omitted from our relationships with those who mean the most to us” (“Finding Joy in the Journey,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 86).

8. Sometimes in a [sacrament](#) meeting talk or testimony, we hear a statement like this: “I know I do not tell my spouse often enough how much I love her. Today I want her, my children, and all of you to know that I love her.”

9. Such an expression of love may be appropriate. But when I hear a statement like this, I squirm and silently exclaim that the spouse and children should not be hearing this apparently rare and private communication in public at church! Hopefully the children hear love expressed and see love demonstrated between their parents in the regular routine of daily living. If, however, the public statement of love at church is a bit surprising to the spouse or the children, then indeed there is a need to be more diligent and concerned at home.

10. The relationship between love and appropriate action is demonstrated repeatedly in the scriptures and is highlighted by the Savior’s instruction to His Apostles: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)). Just as our love of and for the Lord is evidenced by walking ever in His ways (see [Deuteronomy 19:9](#)), so our love for spouse, parents, and children is reflected most powerfully in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds (see [Mosiah 4:30](#)).

11. Feeling the security and constancy of love from a spouse, a parent, or a child is a rich blessing. Such love nurtures and sustains faith in God. Such love is a source of strength and casts out fear (see [1 John 4:18](#)). Such love is the desire of every human soul.

12. We can become more diligent and concerned at home as we express love—and consistently show it.

Suggestion Number Two: Bear Testimony—and Live It

13. We also can become more diligent and concerned at home by bearing testimony to those whom we love

about the things we know to be true by the witness of the [Holy Ghost](#). The bearing of testimony need not be lengthy or eloquent. And we do not need to wait until the first Sunday of the month to declare our witness of things that are true. Within the walls of our own homes, we can and should bear pure testimony of the divinity and reality of the Father and the Son, of the great plan of happiness, and of the Restoration.

14. Brethren and sisters, when was the last time you bore testimony to your eternal companion? Parents, when was the last time you declared your witness to your children about the things you know to be true? And children, when was the last time you shared your testimony with your parents and [family](#)?

15. Each of us already knows we should bear testimony to the people we love the most. But what we know is not always reflected in what we do. We may feel unsure, awkward, or even perhaps a bit embarrassed.

16. As disciples of the Savior, we are not merely striving to know more; rather, we need to consistently do more of what we know is right and become better.

17. We should remember that bearing a heartfelt testimony is only a beginning. We need to bear testimony, we need to mean it, and most importantly we need consistently to live it. We need to both declare and live our testimonies.

18. The relationship between testimony and appropriate action is emphasized in the Savior's instruction to the Saints in Kirtland: "That which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do" ([D&C 46:7](#)). Our testimony of gospel truth should be reflected both in our words and in our deeds. And our testimonies are proclaimed and lived most powerfully in our own homes. Spouses, parents, and children should strive to overcome any hesitancy, reluctance, or embarrassment about bearing testimony. We should both create and look for opportunities to bear testimony of gospel truths—and live them.

19. A testimony is what we know to be true in our minds and in our hearts by the witness of the Holy Ghost (see [D&C 8:2](#)). As we profess truth rather than admonish, exhort, or simply share interesting experiences, we invite the Holy Ghost to confirm the verity of our words. The power of pure testimony (see [Alma 4:19](#)) does not come from sophisticated language or effective presentation; rather, it is the result of revelation conveyed by the third member of the Godhead, even the Holy Ghost.

20. Feeling the power, the edification, and the constancy of testimony from a spouse, a parent, or a child is a rich blessing. Such testimony fortifies faith and provides direction. Such testimony generates light in a world that grows increasingly dark. Such testimony is the source of an eternal perspective and of enduring peace.

21. We can become more diligent and concerned at home as we bear testimony—and consistently live it.

Suggestion Number Three: Be Consistent

22. As our sons were growing up, our family did what you have done and what you now do. We had regular family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening. Now, I am sure what I am about to describe has never occurred in your home, but it did in ours.

23. Sometimes Sister Bednar and I wondered if our efforts to do these spiritually essential things were worthwhile. Now and then verses of scripture were read amid outbursts such as "He's touching me!" "Make him stop looking at me!" "Mom, he's breathing my air!" Sincere prayers occasionally were interrupted with giggling and poking. And with active, rambunctious boys, family home evening lessons did not always produce high levels of edification. At times Sister Bednar and I were exasperated because the righteous habits we worked so hard to foster did not seem to yield immediately the spiritual results we wanted and expected.

24. Today if you could ask our adult sons what they remember about family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening, I believe I know how they would answer. They likely would not identify a particular prayer or a specific instance of scripture study or an especially meaningful family home evening lesson as the defining moment in their spiritual development. What they would say they remember is that as a family we were consistent.

25. Sister Bednar and I thought helping our sons understand the content of a particular lesson or a specific scripture was the ultimate outcome. But such a result does not occur each time we study or pray or learn together. The consistency of our intent and work was perhaps the greatest lesson—a lesson we did not fully appreciate at the time.

26. In my office is a beautiful painting of a wheat field. The painting is a vast collection of individual brushstrokes—none of which in isolation is very interesting or impressive. In fact, if you stand close to the canvas, all you can see is a mass of seemingly unrelated and unattractive streaks of yellow and gold

and brown paint. However, as you gradually move away from the canvas, all of the individual brushstrokes combine together and produce a magnificent landscape of a wheat field. Many ordinary, individual brushstrokes work together to create a captivating and beautiful painting.

27. Each family prayer, each episode of family scripture study, and each family home evening is a brushstroke on the canvas of our souls. No one event may appear to be very impressive or memorable. But just as the yellow and gold and brown strokes of paint complement each other and produce an impressive masterpiece, so our consistency in doing seemingly small things can lead to significant spiritual results. “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” ([D&C 64:33](#)). Consistency is a key principle as we lay the foundation of a great work in our individual lives and as we become more diligent and concerned in our own homes.

28. Being consistent in our homes is important for another reason. Many of the Savior’s harshest rebukes were directed to hypocrites. Jesus warned His disciples concerning the scribes and Pharisees: “Do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” ([Matthew 23:3](#)). This strong admonition is sobering given the counsel to “express love—and show it,” to “bear testimony—and live it,” and to “be consistent.”

29. The hypocrisy in our lives is most readily discerned and causes the greatest destruction within our own homes. And children often are the most alert and sensitive when it comes to recognizing hypocrisy.

30. A public statement of love when the private actions of love are absent at home is hypocrisy—and weakens the foundation of a great work. Publicly declaring testimony when faithfulness and obedience are missing within our own homes is hypocrisy—and undermines the foundation of a great work. The commandment “Thou shalt not bear false witness” ([Exodus 20:16](#)) applies most pointedly to the hypocrite in each of us. We need to be and become more consistent. “But be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” ([1 Timothy 4:12](#)).

31. As we seek the Lord’s help and in His strength, we can gradually reduce the disparity between what we say and what we do, between expressing love and consistently showing it, and between bearing testimony and steadfastly living it. We can become more diligent and concerned at home as we are more faithful in

learning, living, and loving the restored gospel of [Jesus Christ](#).

Testimony

32. “Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and ... the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). For these and other eternally important reasons, we should be more diligent and concerned at home.

33. May every spouse, every child, and every parent be blessed to communicate and receive love, to bear and be edified by strong testimony, and to become more consistent in the seemingly small things that matter so much.

34. In these important pursuits we will never be left alone. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son live. They love us and know our circumstances, and They will help us to become more diligent and concerned at home. Of these truths I testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

12.3 - Strengthening Families: Our Sacred Duty

Robert D. Hales

Ensign, May 1999



1. [Strengthening families](#) is our sacred duty as parents, children, extended [family](#) members, leaders, teachers, and individual members of the Church.

2. The importance of spiritually strengthening families is taught clearly in the scriptures. Father Adam and Mother Eve taught their sons and daughters the gospel. The sacrifices of Abel were accepted by the Lord, whom he loved. Cain, on the other hand, “loved Satan more than God” and committed serious sins. Adam and Eve “mourned before the Lord, because of Cain and his brethren,” but they never ceased to teach their children the gospel (see [Moses 5:12, 18, 20, 27](#); [Moses 6:1, 58](#)).

3. We must understand that each of our children comes with varying gifts and talents. Some, like Abel, seem to be given gifts of faith at birth. Others struggle with every decision they make. As parents, we should never let the searching and struggling of our children make us waver or lose our faith in the Lord.

4. Alma the Younger, when “racked with torment ... [and] harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins,” remembered hearing his father teach about the coming of “[Jesus Christ](#), a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” ([Alma 36:17](#)). His father’s words led to his conversion. In like manner, our teaching and testimony will be remembered by our children.

5. The 2,000 stripling warriors in the army of Helaman testified that their righteous mothers had powerfully taught gospel principles to them (see [Alma 56:47–48](#)).

6. At a time of great spiritual searching, Enos said, “The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life ... sunk deep into my heart” ([Enos 1:3](#)).

7. In the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) the Lord says that parents are to teach their children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of [baptism](#) and the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#) by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old. ...

8. “And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” ([D&C 68:25, 28](#)).

9. As we teach our children the gospel through word and example, our families are spiritually strengthened and fortified.

10. The words of living prophets are clear regarding our sacred duty to strengthen our families spiritually. In 1995 the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles issued a proclamation to the world, declaring that “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. ... Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. ... Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, [and] to observe the commandments of God” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102; *Liahona*, June 1996, 10–11).

11. In February of this year, the First Presidency issued a call to all parents “to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility.”

12. In the February letter, the First Presidency taught that by teaching and rearing children in gospel

principles, parents can protect their families from corrosive elements. They further counseled parents and children “to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform” (First Presidency letter, 11 Feb. 1999; cited in *Church News*, 27 Feb. 1999, 3).

13. With the help of the Lord and His doctrine, all the hurtful effects from challenges a family may meet can be understood and overcome. Whatever the needs of family members may be, we can strengthen our families as we follow the counsel given by prophets.

14. The key to strengthening our families is having the Spirit of the Lord come into our homes. The goal of our families is to be on the strait and narrow path.

15. Countless things can be done within the walls of our homes to strengthen the family. May I share a few ideas that may help identify the areas that need strengthening in our own families. I offer them in a spirit of encouragement, knowing that each family—and each family member—is unique.

16. Make our homes a safe place where each family member feels love and a sense of belonging. Realize that each child has varying gifts and abilities; each is an individual requiring special love and care.

17. Remember, “a soft answer turneth away wrath” ([Prov. 15:1](#)). When my sweetheart and I were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple, Elder Harold B. Lee gave us wise counsel: “When you raise your voice in anger, the Spirit departs from your home.” We must never, out of anger, lock the door of our home or our heart to our children. Like the prodigal son, our children need to know that when they come to themselves they can turn to us for love and counsel.

18. Spend individual time with our children, letting them choose the activity and the subject of conversation. Block out distractions.

19. Encourage our children’s private religious behavior, such as personal prayer, personal scripture study, and fasting for specific needs. Measure their spiritual growth by observing their demeanor, language, and conduct toward others.

20. Pray daily with our children.

21. Read the scriptures together. I remember my own mother and father reading the scriptures as we children sat on the floor and listened. Sometimes they would

ask, “What does that scripture mean to you?” or “How does it make you feel?” Then they would listen to us as we responded in our own words.

22. Read the words of the living prophets and other inspiring articles for children, youth, and adults in Church magazines.

23. We can fill our homes with the sound of worthy music as we sing together from the hymnbook and the Children’s Songbook.

24. Hold family home evening every week. As parents, we are sometimes too intimidated to teach or testify to our children. I have been guilty of that in my own life. Our children need to have us share spiritual feelings with them and to teach and bear testimony to them.

25. Hold family councils to discuss family plans and concerns. Some of the most effective family councils are one on one with each family member. Help our children know their ideas are important. Listen to them and learn from them.

26. Invite missionaries to teach less-active or nonmember friends in our homes.

27. Show that we sustain and support Church leaders.

28. Eat together when possible, and have meaningful mealtime discussions.

29. Work together as a family, even if it may be faster and easier to do the job ourselves. Talk with our sons and daughters as we work together. I had that opportunity every Saturday with my father.

30. Help our children learn how to build good friendships and make their friends feel welcome in our homes. Get to know the parents of the friends of our children.

31. Teach our children by example how to budget time and resources. Help them learn self-reliance and the importance of preparing for the future.

32. Teach our children the history of our ancestors and of our own family history.

33. Build family traditions. Plan and carry out meaningful vacations together, considering our children’s needs, talents, and abilities. Help them create happy memories, improve their talents, and build their feelings of self-worth.

34. By word and example, teach moral values and a commitment to obeying the commandments.

35. After my baptism and confirmation, my mother drew me aside and asked, “What do you feel?” I described as best I could the warm feeling of peace, comfort, and happiness I had. Mother explained that what I was feeling was the gift I had just received, the gift of the Holy Ghost. She told me that if I lived worthy of it, I would have that gift with me continually. That was a teaching moment that has lived with me all my life.

36. Teach our children the significance of baptism and confirmation, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, partaking of the [sacrament](#), honoring the priesthood, and making and keeping temple covenants. They need to know the importance of living worthy of a temple recommend and preparing for a temple marriage.

37. If you have not yet been sealed in the temple to your spouse or children, work as a family to receive temple blessings. Set temple goals as a family.

38. Be worthy of the priesthood which you hold, brethren, and use it to bless the lives of your family.

39. Through the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, dedicate our homes.

40. Resources are available outside the home. Wise use of them will strengthen our families.

41. Encourage our children to serve in the Church and community.

42. Talk to our children’s teachers, coaches, counselors, advisers, and Church leaders about our concerns and the needs of our children.

43. Know what our children are doing in their spare time. Influence their choice of movies, television programs, and videos. If they are on the Internet, know what they are doing. Help them see the importance of wholesome entertainment.

44. Encourage worthwhile school activities. Know what our children are studying. Help them with their homework. Help them realize the importance of education and of preparing for employment and self-sufficiency.

45. Young women: Attend Relief Society when you reach your 18th birthday. Some of you may be reluctant to make that transition. You may fear that you won’t fit in. My young sisters, this is not the case. There is much in Relief Society for you. It can be a blessing to you throughout your life.

46. Young men: Honor the Aaronic Priesthood. It is the preparatory priesthood, preparing you for the Melchizedek Priesthood. Become fully active in the

elders quorum when you are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The brotherhood, the quorum instruction, and the opportunities to serve others will bless you and your family throughout your life.

47. Every family can be strengthened in one way or another if the Spirit of the Lord is brought into our homes and we teach by His example.

48. Act with faith; don't react with fear. When our teenagers begin testing [family values](#), parents need to go to the Lord for guidance on the specific needs of each family member. This is the time for added love and support and to reinforce your teachings on how to make choices. It is frightening to allow our children to learn from the mistakes they may make, but their willingness to choose the Lord's way and family values is greater when the choice comes from within than when we attempt to force those values upon them. The Lord's way of love and acceptance is better than Satan's way of force and coercion, especially in rearing teenagers.

49. Remember the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#)'s words: "Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 240).

50. While we may despair when, after all we can do, some of our children stray from the path of righteousness, the words of Orson F. Whitney can comfort us: "Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving [mother's and] father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for [our] careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with [our] faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God" (Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110).

51. What if you are single or have not been blessed with children? Do you need to be concerned about the counsel regarding families? Yes. It is something we all need to learn in earth life. Unmarried adult members can often lend a special kind of strength to the family,

becoming a tremendous source of support, acceptance, and love to their families and the families of those around them.

52. Many adult members of the extended family do much parenting in their own right. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins, and other family members can have great impact on the family. I want to express my appreciation for those in my own extended family who have guided me by their example and testimony. Sometimes extended family members can say things parents cannot say without starting an argument. After a long heart-to-heart discussion with her mother, one young woman said: "It would be awful to tell you and Dad I had done something wrong. But it would be worse to tell Aunt Susan. I just couldn't let her down."

53. Knowing that we are in mortality to learn and to develop our faith, we should understand that there must be opposition in all things. During a family council in my own home, my wife said, "When you may think that someone has a perfect family, you just do not know them well enough."

54. Brothers and sisters, as parents let us heed the admonition, even the rebuke, given by the Lord to Joseph Smith and the leaders of the Church in 1833 to "set in order [our] own house" ([D&C 93:43](#)). "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" ([D&C 93:40](#)). "Set in order [our] family, and see that they are more diligent and concerned at home, and pray always, or they shall be removed out of their place" ([D&C 93:50](#)).

55. The prophets of our day have given a similar admonition and warning to parents to set in order our families. May we be blessed with the inspiration and love to meet opposition with faith within our families. We will then know that our trials are to draw us closer to the Lord and to one another. May we listen to a prophet's voice and set in order our own homes (see [D&C 93:41–49](#)). The family is strengthened as we draw near to the Lord, and each member of the family is strengthened as we lift and strengthen and love and care for one another. "Thee lift me and I'll lift thee, and we'll ascend together" (Quaker proverb).

56. May we be able to welcome and maintain the Spirit of the Lord in our homes to strengthen our families. That each of our family members can stay on the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" ([2 Ne. 31:18](#)), I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

12.4 - The Family

President Henry B. Eyring
Ensign, February 1998



1. Since the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has issued a proclamation only four times. 1 It had been more than 15 years since the previous one, which described the progress the Church had made in 150 years of its history. Thus, we can understand the importance our Heavenly Father places upon the family, the subject of the fifth and most recent proclamation, given on 23 September 1995. 2

2. Because our Father loves his children, he will not leave us to guess about what matters most in this life concerning where our attention could bring happiness or our indifference could bring sadness. Sometimes he will tell a person such things directly, by inspiration. But he will, in addition, tell us these important matters through his servants. In the words of the prophet Amos, recorded long ago, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). He does this so that even those who cannot feel inspiration can know, if they will only listen, that they have been told the truth and been warned.

3. The title of the proclamation on the family reads: “The Family: A Proclamation to the World—The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

4. Three things about the title are worth our careful reflection. First, the subject: the family. Second, the audience, which is the whole world. And third, those proclaiming it are those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. All this means that the family must be of tremendous importance to us, that whatever the proclamation says could help anyone in the world, and that the proclamation fits the Lord’s promise when he said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).

5. Before we examine the words of the proclamation, let us note that the proclamation’s title tells us something about how to prepare for the words that follow. We can expect that God won’t just tell us a few interesting things about the family; he will tell us what a family ought to be and why. Further, we know that our Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, want us to become like them so that we can dwell with them forever in families. We know that from this simple

statement of their intent: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Eternal Life: A Destination within Reach

6. Eternal life means to become like the Father and to live in families in happiness and joy forever, so of course we know that what he wants for us will require help beyond our powers. And if we have feelings of inadequacy, they can make it easier for us to repent and to be ready to rely on the Lord’s help. The fact that the proclamation is applicable to all the world—applicable to every person and government in it—gives us assurance that we need not be overwhelmed with our feelings of inadequacy. Whoever we are, however difficult our circumstances, we can know that what our Father requires of us if we are to qualify for the blessings of eternal life will not be beyond our ability. What a young boy said long ago when he faced a seemingly impossible assignment is true: “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Ne. 3:7).

7. We may have to pray with faith to know what we are to do, and after obtaining such knowledge we must pray with a determination to obey. But we can know what to do and be sure that the way has been prepared for us by the Lord. As we read what the proclamation tells us about the family, we can expect—in fact, we must expect—impressions to come to our minds as to what we are to do. And we can be confident it is possible for us to do according to those impressions.

8. The proclamation begins this way:

9. “We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”

10. Let us try to imagine ourselves as little children hearing those words for the first time and believing they are true. This can be a useful attitude whenever we read or hear the word of God, because he has told us, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:17).

11. A little child would feel safe hearing the words “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.” The child would know that the longing to have the love of both a father and a mother, distinct but

somehow perfectly complementary, exists because such longing is part of the eternal pattern, the pattern of happiness. The child would also feel safer knowing that God will help the mother and father resolve differences and love each other, if only they would ask for his help and try. Prayers of children across the earth would go up to God, pleading for his help for parents and for families.

12. Now read in that same way, as if we were little children, the next words of the proclamation:

13. “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

14. “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”

15. Understanding these truths ought to make it easier for us to feel like a little child, not just as we read the proclamation but throughout our lives, because we are children—but in what a family and of what parents! We can picture ourselves as we were, for longer than we can imagine, sons and daughters associating in our heavenly home with Parents who knew and loved us. Also, we know that in the premortal world we were men or women with unique gifts because of our gender and that the opportunity to be married and to become one was necessary for us to have eternal happiness. But now that we are here we can picture ourselves home again with our Heavenly Parents in that wonderful place, not only as sons and daughters but as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, grandsons and granddaughters, bound together forever in loving families.

16. With that picture before us we can never be tempted to think, “Maybe I wouldn’t like eternal life. Maybe I would be just as happy in some other place in the life after death, for haven’t I heard that even the lowest kingdoms are supposed to be more beautiful than anything we have here on earth?”

17. To counter such attitudes, we must have the goal of eternal life not just in our minds but in our hearts. What we want is eternal life in families. We don’t just want it if that is what happens to work out, nor do we want something that might seem to be only approaching eternal life. We want eternal life, whatever its cost in effort, pain, and sacrifice. Thus, whenever we are tempted to make eternal life our hope instead of our determination, we might think of a building I saw recently.

18. I was in Boston, Massachusetts. For a little nostalgia, I walked up to the front of the boardinghouse I was living in when I met Kathleen, who is now my wife. That was a long time ago, so I expected to find the house in a dilapidated condition. But to my surprise, it was freshly painted and much renovated. I recalled the wonderful deal the owners gave their student renters. I had my own large room and bath, furniture and sheets provided, maid service, six big breakfasts and five wonderful dinners a week, all for the price of \$21 a week. More than that, the meals were ample and prepared with such skill that, with some affection, we called our landlady “Ma Soper.” I now realize that I didn’t thank Mrs. Soper often enough, nor Mr. Soper and their daughter, since it must have been some burden to have 12 single men to dinner every weeknight.

19. Now, this old boardinghouse could have the most spacious rooms, the best service, and the finest boarders, but we wouldn’t want to live there for more than a short while. It could be beautiful beyond our power to imagine, but still we wouldn’t want to live there forever, single, if we have even the dimmest memory or the faintest vision of a family with beloved parents and children like the one from which we came to this earth and the one which is our destiny to form and to live in forever. There is only one place in heaven where there will be families—the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. That is where we will want to be.

20. A child hearing and believing the words of the proclamation regarding families united eternally would begin a lifetime of looking for a holy temple where ordinances and covenants perpetuate family relationships beyond the grave. The child also would begin striving to become worthy and preparing in other ways to attract a potential mate who also has become worthy of such ordinances. The words of the proclamation make it clear that to receive those blessings requires some sort of perfecting experiences. A child might not sense at first, but soon would learn, that making resolutions and trying harder can produce

only faltering progress toward perfection. Additional help is needed.

21. Further, with age will come temptations to do things that create feelings of guilt. Every child will someday feel those pangs of conscience, as we all have. And those who feel that priceless sense of guilt and cannot shake it may despair, sensing that eternal life requires a progress toward perfection that seems increasingly beyond them. So you and I must resolve to always speak to people who don't yet know what we know about how perfection is produced. We will do that because we know that someday they will want what we want and will then realize that we were their brother or sister and that we knew the way to eternal life. It isn't hard to be a member missionary if you think of that future moment when they and we will see things as they really are.

The Sanctity of Human Life

22. Some other words in the proclamation will have special meaning for us, knowing what we know about eternal life. They are in the next two paragraphs:

23. "The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

24. "We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan."

25. Believing those words, a child could spot easily the mistakes in reasoning made by some adults. For instance, apparently wise and powerful people blame poverty and famine on there being too many people in some parts of the earth or in all the earth. With great passion they argue for limiting births, as if that would produce human happiness. A child believing the proclamation will know that cannot be so, even before hearing these words from the Lord through his prophet Joseph Smith:

26. "For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves" (D&C 104:17).

27. A child could see that Heavenly Father would not command men and women to marry and to multiply

and replenish the earth if the children they invited into mortality would deplete the earth. Since there is enough and to spare, the enemy of human happiness as well as the cause of poverty and starvation is not the birth of children.

28. It is the failure of people to do with the earth what God could teach them to do if only they would ask and then obey, for they are agents unto themselves.

29. We would also see that the commandment to be chaste, to employ the powers of procreation only as husband and wife, is not limiting but, rather, expanding and exalting. Children are the inheritance of the Lord to us in this life and also in eternity. Eternal life is not only to have forever our descendants from this life. It is also to have eternal increase. This is the description of what awaits those of us married as husband and wife in the temple by a servant of God with authority to offer us the sacred sealing ordinances. Here are the words of the Lord:

30. "It shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

31. "Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting" (D&C 132:19–20).

32. Now you can see why our Father in Heaven puts such a high standard before us in using procreative powers, whose continuation is at the heart of eternal life. The Lord Jesus Christ has told us what eternal life is worth: "If you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7).

33. We can understand why our Heavenly Father commands us to reverence life and to cherish the powers that produce it as sacred. If we do not have those reverential feelings in this life, how could our Father give them to us in the eternities? Family life here is the schoolroom in which we prepare for family life there. And to give us the opportunity for family life there was and is the purpose of creation. That is why the coming of Elijah was described this way: "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming" (JS—H 1:39).

34. For some of us, the test in the schoolroom of mortality will be to want marriage and children in this life with all our hearts but to have them delayed or denied. Even such sorrow can be turned into a blessing by a just and loving Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. No one who strives with full faith and heart for the blessings of eternal life will be denied. And how great will be the joy and how much deeper the appreciation then after enduring in patience and faith now.

Achieving Happiness in Family Life

35. The proclamation describes our schooling here for family life:

36. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. ‘Children are an heritage of the Lord’ (Ps. 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God, and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

37. “The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.”

38. Those two paragraphs are filled with practical applications. There are things we can start to do now that have to do with providing for the spiritual and physical needs of a family. There are things we can do now to prepare, long before the need, so we can be at peace, knowing we have done all we can.

39. To begin with, we can decide to plan for success, not failure. Statistics are thrown at us every day in an effort to try to persuade us that a family composed of a loving father and mother with children loved, taught, and cared for in the way the proclamation enjoins is supposedly going the way of the dinosaurs, toward extinction. You have enough evidence in your own families to know that righteous people sometimes have their families ripped apart by circumstances beyond their control. It takes courage and faith to plan for what God holds before you as the ideal rather than what might be forced upon you by circumstances.

40. Conversely, there are important ways in which planning for failure can make failure more likely and the ideal less so. Consider these twin commandments as an example: “Fathers are to ... provide the necessities of life ... for their families” and “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.” Knowing how hard that might be, a young man might choose a career on the basis of how much money he could make, even if it meant he couldn’t be home enough to be an equal partner. By doing that, he has already decided he cannot hope to do what would be best. A young woman might prepare for a career incompatible with being primarily responsible for the nurture of her children because of the possibilities of not marrying, of not having children, or of being left alone to provide for them herself. Or she might fail to focus her education on the gospel and the useful knowledge of the world that nurturing a family would require, not realizing that the highest and best use she could make of her talents and her education would be in her home. Consequently, because a young man and woman had planned thus, they might make what is best for a family less likely to be obtained.

41. Surely they are both wise to worry about the physical needs of that future family. The costs of buying a home, compared to average salaries, seem to be rising and jobs harder to hold. But there are other ways the young man and the young woman could think about preparing to provide for that future family. Income is only one part of it. Have you noticed husbands and wives who feel pinched for lack of money choose for a solution ways to make their family income keep rising but soon find that the pinch is there whatever the income? There is an old formula which goes something like this: Income five dollars and expenses six dollars: misery. Income four dollars and expenses three dollars: happiness.

42. Whether the young man can provide and, after work, return home to his family at a reasonable hour, and whether the young woman can be there to nurture

children, can depend as much on how they learn to spend as on how they learn to earn. President Brigham Young said it this way, speaking to us as much as he did to the people in his day: “If you wish to get rich, save what you get. A fool can earn money; but it takes a wise man to save and dispose of it to his own advantage. Then go to work, and save everything, and make your own bonnets and clothing.” 3

43. In today’s world, instead of telling young couples to make bonnets, President Young might suggest they think carefully about what they really need in cars, clothes, recreation, houses, vacations, and whatever they will someday try to provide for their children. And he might point out that the difference in cost between what the world says is necessary and what children really need could allow the margin in time that a father and a mother might need with their children in order to bring them home to their Heavenly Father.

44. Even the most frugal spending habits and the most careful planning for employment may not be enough to ensure success, but those things could be enough to allow us the peace that comes from knowing we did the best we could to provide and to nurture.

45. There is another way we could plan to succeed, despite the difficulties that might lie before us. The proclamation sets a high standard for us when it describes our obligation to teach our children. We are somehow to teach them so that they love one another and serve one another, keep the commandments, and are law-abiding citizens. If we think of good families who have not met that test, and few meet it without some degree of failure over a generation or two, we could lose heart.

46. We cannot control what others choose to do, and so we cannot force our children to heaven, but we can determine what we will do. And we can decide that we will do all we can to bring down the powers of heaven into that family we want so much to have forever.

47. A key for us is in the proclamation: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

48. What could make it more likely that people in a family would love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and obey the law? It is not simply teaching them the gospel. It is in their hearing the word of God and then trying it in faith. If they do, their natures will be changed in a way that produces the happiness they seek. From Mormon, these words describe exactly how that change is the natural fruit of living the gospel of Jesus Christ:

49. “And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

50. “And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moro. 8:25–26).

51. When we prepare our children for baptism, if we do it well, we prepare them for the process that will bring the effects of the Atonement into their lives and the powers of heaven into our homes. Think of the change we all need. We need the Holy Ghost to fill us with hope and perfect love so that we can endure by diligence unto prayer. And then we can dwell forever with God in families. How can it come? By the simple promise Mormon described to his son, Moroni. Faith in Jesus Christ unto repentance and then baptism by those with authority lead to remission of sins. That produces meekness and lowliness of heart. And that in turn allows us to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, which fills us with hope and perfect love.

52. Concerning this desired love and happiness, the proclamation is careful in what it promises: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.” My heart aches a little to know that many who read those words will be surrounded by those who do not know or who deny the teachings of Jesus Christ. They can only do their best. But they can know this: their placement in a family, however challenging, is known by a loving Heavenly Father. They can know that a way is prepared for them to do all that will be required to qualify for eternal life. They may not see how God could give them that gift, nor with whom they will share it. Yet the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ is sure:

53. “But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.

54. “I, the Lord, have spoken it, and the Spirit beareth record. Amen” (D&C 59:23–24).

55. That peace will come from the assurance that the Atonement has worked in our lives and from the hope of eternal life that springs from that assurance.

56. The proclamation warns that for those who fail to respond to its truths the result will be more disastrous

than simply lack of peace in this life or absence of happiness. Here is the prophetic warning and the call to action, with which the proclamation ends:

57. “We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

58. “We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”

59. The family unit is fundamental not only to society and to the Church but also to our hope for eternal life. We begin to practice in the family, the smaller unit, what will spread to the Church and to the society in which we live in this world, which will then be what we practice in families bound together forever by covenants and by faithfulness. We can start now to “promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family.” I pray that we will. I pray that you will ask, “Father, how can I prepare?” Tell him how much you want what he desires to give you. You will receive impressions, and if you act on them, I promise you the help of the powers of heaven.

60. I testify that our Heavenly Father lives, that we lived with him as spirits, and that we would be lonely living anywhere but with him in the world to come. I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that by suffering for the sins of all of us he made possible the changes in you and me that can give us eternal life. I testify that the Holy Ghost can fill us with hope and with perfect love. And I testify that the sealing power restored to Joseph Smith and now held by President Gordon B. Hinckley can bind us in families and give us eternal life, if we do all that we can do in faith.

12.5 - The Tongue of Angels

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, May 2007



1. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) deepened our understanding of the power of speech when he taught, “It is by words ... [that] every being works when he works by faith. God said, ‘Let there be light: and there was light.’ Joshua spake, and the great lights which God had created stood still.

Elijah commanded, and the heavens were stayed for the space of three years and six months, so that it did not rain. ... All this was done by faith. ... Faith, then, works by words; and with [words] its mightiest works have been, and will be, performed.” [1](#) Like all gifts “which cometh from above,” words are “sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit.” [2](#)

2. It is with this realization of the power and sanctity of words that I wish to caution us, if caution is needed, regarding how we speak to each other and how we speak of ourselves.

3. There is a line from the Apocrypha which puts the seriousness of this issue better than I can. It reads, “The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh: but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones.” [3](#) With that stinging image in mind, I was particularly impressed to read in the book of James that there was a way I could be “a perfect man.”

4. Said James: “For in many things we offend all. [But] if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

5. Continuing the imagery of the bridle, he writes: “Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

6. “Behold also ... ships, which though they be ... great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm.”

7. Then James makes his point: “The tongue is [also] a little member. ... [But] behold, how great a [forest (Greek)] a little fire [can burn].

8. “... So is the tongue [a fire] among our members, ... it defileth the whole body, ... it is set on fire of hell.

9. “For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, ... hath been tamed of mankind:

10. “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

11. “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

12. “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” [4](#)

13. Well, that is pretty straightforward! Obviously James doesn’t mean our tongues are always iniquitous, nor that everything we say is “full of deadly poison.”

But he clearly means that at least some things we say can be destructive, even venomous—and that is a chilling indictment for a Latter-day Saint! The voice that bears profound testimony, utters fervent prayer, and sings the hymns of Zion can be the same voice that berates and criticizes, embarrasses and demeans, inflicts pain and destroys the spirit of oneself and of others in the process. “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing,” James grieves. “My brethren [and sisters], these things ought not so to be.”

14. Is this something we could all work on just a little? Is this an area in which we could each try to be a little more like a “perfect” man or woman?

15. Husbands, you have been entrusted with the most sacred gift God can give you—a wife, a daughter of God, the mother of your children who has voluntarily given herself to you for love and joyful companionship. Think of the kind things you said when you were courting, think of the blessings you have given with hands placed lovingly upon her head, think of yourself and of her as the god and goddess you both inherently are, and then reflect on other moments characterized by cold, caustic, unbridled words. Given the damage that can be done with our tongues, little wonder the Savior said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” [5](#) A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned in The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints. If it is possible to be more condemning than that, we speak even more vigorously against all forms of sexual abuse. Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be.

16. In that same spirit we speak to the sisters as well, for the sin of verbal abuse knows no gender. Wives, what of the unbridled tongue in your mouth, of the power for good or ill in your words? How is it that such a lovely voice which by divine nature is so angelic, so close to the veil, so instinctively gentle and inherently kind could ever in a turn be so shrill, so biting, so acrid and untamed? A woman’s words can be more piercing than any dagger ever forged, and they can drive the people they love to retreat beyond a barrier more distant than anyone in the beginning of that exchange could ever have imagined. Sisters, there is no place in that magnificent spirit of yours for acerbic or abrasive expression of any kind, including

gossip or backbiting or catty remarks. Let it never be said of our home or our ward or our neighborhood that “the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ... [burning] among our members.”

17. May I expand this counsel to make it a full [family](#) matter. We must be so careful in speaking to a child. What we say or don’t say, how we say it and when is so very, very important in shaping a child’s view of himself or herself. But it is even more important in shaping that child’s faith in us and their faith in God. Be constructive in your comments to a child—always. Never tell them, even in whimsy, that they are fat or dumb or lazy or homely. You would never do that maliciously, but they remember and may struggle for years trying to forget—and to forgive. And try not to compare your children, even if you think you are skillful at it. You may say most positively that “Susan is pretty and Sandra is bright,” but all Susan will remember is that she isn’t bright and Sandra that she isn’t pretty. Praise each child individually for what that child is, and help him or her escape our culture’s obsession with comparing, competing, and never feeling we are “enough.”

18. In all of this, I suppose it goes without saying that negative speaking so often flows from negative thinking, including negative thinking about ourselves. We see our own faults, we speak—or at least think—critically of ourselves, and before long that is how we see everyone and everything. No sunshine, no roses, no promise of hope or happiness. Before long we and everybody around us are miserable.

19. I love what Elder Orson F. Whitney once said: “The spirit of the gospel is optimistic; it trusts in God and looks on the bright side of things. The opposite or pessimistic spirit drags men down and away from God, looks on the dark side, murmurs, complains, and is slow to yield obedience.” [6](#) We should honor the Savior’s declaration to “be of good cheer.” [7](#) (Indeed, it seems to me we may be more guilty of breaking that commandment than almost any other!) Speak hopefully. Speak encouragingly, including about yourself. Try not to complain and moan incessantly. As someone once said, “Even in the golden age of civilization someone undoubtedly grumbled that everything looked too yellow.”

20. I have often thought that Nephi’s being bound with cords and beaten by rods must have been more tolerable to him than listening to Laman and Lemuel’s constant murmuring. [8](#) Surely he must have said at least once, “Hit me one more time. I can still hear you.” Yes, life has its problems, and yes, there are

negative things to face, but please accept one of Elder Holland's maxims for living—no misfortune is so bad that whining about it won't make it worse.

21. Paul put it candidly, but very hopefully. He said to all of us: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but [only] that which is good ... [and] edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

22. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God. ...

23. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you. ...

24. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." [9](#)

25. In his deeply moving final testimony, Nephi calls us to "follow the Son [of God], with full purpose of heart," promising that "after ye have ... received the [baptism](#) of fire and of the [Holy Ghost](#), [ye] can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels. ... And ... how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ." [10](#) Indeed, Christ was and is "the Word," according to John the Beloved, [11](#) full of grace and truth, full of mercy and compassion.

26. So, brothers and sisters, in this long eternal quest to be more like our Savior, may we try to be "perfect" men and women in at least this one way now—by offending not in word, or more positively put, by speaking with a new tongue, the tongue of angels. Our

words, like our deeds, should be filled with faith and hope and charity, the three great [Christian](#) imperatives so desperately needed in the world today. With such words, spoken under the influence of the Spirit, tears can be dried, hearts can be healed, lives can be elevated, hope can return, confidence can prevail. I pray that my words, even on this challenging subject, will be encouraging to you, not discouraging, that you can hear in my voice that I love you, because I do. More importantly, please know that your Father in Heaven loves you and so does His Only Begotten Son. When They speak to you—and They will—it will not be in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but it will be with a voice still and small, a voice tender and kind. [12](#) It will be with the tongue of angels. May we all rejoice in the thought that when we say edifying, encouraging things unto the least of these, our brethren and sisters and little ones, we say it unto God. [13](#) In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

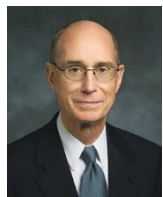
References

1. Lectures on Faith (1985), 72–73; emphasis added.
2. [D&C 63:64](#).
3. Ecclesiasticus 28:17.
4. [James 3:2–10](#); emphasis added.
5. [Matthew 15:11](#).
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1917, 43.
7. [Matthew 14:27](#); [Mark 6:50](#); [John 16:33](#).
8. See [1 Nephi 3:28–31](#); [18:11–15](#).
9. [Ephesians 4:29–32](#).
10. [2 Nephi 31:13–14](#); [32:2–3](#).
11. [John 1:1](#).
12. See [1 Kings 19:11–12](#).
13. See [Matthew 25:40](#).

13. By Divine Design – Partnership in Marriage

13.1 - Adversity

President Henry B. Eyring
Ensign, May 2009



1. My beloved brothers and sisters, this opportunity to speak to you is a great and sacred privilege. I pray that my words may be helpful and give you encouragement.

2. With all the differences in our lives, we have at least one challenge in common. We all must deal with adversity. There may be periods, sometimes long ones, when our lives seem to flow with little difficulty. But it is in the nature of our being human that comfort gives way to distress, periods of good health come to an end, and misfortunes arrive.

Particularly when the comfortable times have gone on for a while, the arrival of suffering or the loss of material security can bring fear and sometimes even anger.

3. The anger comes at least in part from a feeling that what is happening is unfair. The good health and the serene sense of being secure can become to seem deserved and natural. When they vanish, a feeling of injustice can come. Even a brave man I knew wept and cried out in his physical suffering to those who ministered to him: "I have always tried to be good. How could this happen?"

4. That aching for an answer to "How could this happen?" becomes even more painful when those struggling include those we love. And it is especially hard for us to accept when those afflicted seem to us to

be blameless. Then the distress can shake faith in the reality of a loving and all-powerful God. Some of us have seen such doubt come to infect a whole generation of people in times of war or famine. Such doubt can grow and spread until some may turn away from God, whom they charge with being indifferent or cruel. And if unchecked, those feelings can lead to loss of faith that there is a God at all.

5. My purpose today is to assure you that our Heavenly Father and the Savior live and that They love all humanity. The very opportunity for us to face adversity and affliction is part of the evidence of Their infinite love. God gave us the gift of living in mortality so that we could be prepared to receive the greatest of all the gifts of God, which is eternal life. Then our spirits will be changed. We will become able to want what God wants, to think as He thinks, and thus be prepared for the trust of an endless posterity to teach and to lead through tests to be raised up to qualify to live forever in eternal life.

6. It is clear that for us to have that gift and to be given that trust, we must be transformed through making righteous choices where that is hard to do. We are prepared for so great a trust by passing through trying and testing experiences in mortality. That education can come only as we are subject to trials while serving God and others for Him.

7. In this education we experience misery and happiness, sickness and health, the sadness from sin and the joy of [forgiveness](#). That [forgiveness](#) can come only through the infinite Atonement of the Savior, which He worked out through pain we could not bear and which we can only faintly comprehend.

8. It will comfort us when we must wait in distress for the Savior's promised relief that He knows, from experience, how to heal and help us. The [Book of Mormon](#) gives us the certain assurance of His power to comfort. And faith in that power will give us patience as we pray and work and wait for help. He could have known how to succor us simply by revelation, but He chose to learn by His own personal experience. Here is the account from Alma:

9. "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

10. "And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, 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.

11. "Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, [so] that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me." [1](#)

12. Even when you feel the truth of that capacity and kindness of the Lord to deliver you in your trials, it may still test your courage and strength to endure. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) cried out in agony in a dungeon:

13. "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

14. "How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?" [2](#)

15. The Lord's reply has helped me and can encourage us all in times of darkness. Here it is:

16. "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

17. "And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.

18. "Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.

19. "Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not contend against thee, neither charge thee with transgression, as they did Job." [3](#)

20. I have seen faith and courage come from a testimony that it is true that we are being prepared for eternal life. The Lord will rescue His faithful disciples. And the disciple who accepts a trial as an invitation to grow and therefore qualify for eternal life can find peace in the midst of the struggle.

21. I spoke recently to a young father who has lost his job in the recent economic crisis. He knows that hundreds of thousands of people with exactly his skills are looking desperately for work to feed their families. His quiet confidence led me to ask him what he had done to become so confident that he would find a way to support his [family](#). He said he had examined his life to be sure that he had done all he could to be worthy of the Lord's help. It was clear that his need and his faith in [Jesus Christ](#) were leading him to be obedient to God's commandments when it is hard to do. He said that he saw that opportunity as he and his wife were

reading in Alma where the Lord had prepared a people to find the gospel through adversity.

22. You remember the moment when Alma turned to the man who led the people in distress. The man told him that they had been persecuted and rejected for their poverty. And the record goes:

23. “And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.

24. “Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them:

25. “I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.” [4](#)

26. The scripture goes on to praise those of us who prepared for adversity in the more prosperous times. Many of you had the faith to try to qualify for the help you now need, before the crisis came.

27. Alma continued, “Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.” [5](#)

28. That young man with whom I spoke recently was one who had done more than put away food and a little savings for the misfortune which living prophets had warned would come. He had begun to prepare his heart to be worthy of the Lord’s help which he knew he would in the near future need. When I asked his wife on the day he lost his job if she was worried, she said with cheerfulness in her voice, “No, we’ve just come from the bishop’s office. We are full-tithe payers.” Now, it is still too early to tell, but I felt assured as they seemed to be assured: “Things will work out.” Tragedy did not erode their faith; it tested it and strengthened it. And the feeling of peace the Lord has promised has already been delivered in the midst of the storm. Other miracles are sure to follow.

29. The Lord always suits the relief to the person in need to best strengthen and purify him or her. Often it will come in the inspiration to do what might seem especially hard for the person who needs help himself. One of the great trials of life is losing to death a beloved husband or wife. President Hinckley described the hurt when Sister Hinckley was no longer at his side. The Lord knows the needs of those separated

from loved ones by death. He saw the pain of widows and knew of their needs from His earthly experience. He asked a beloved Apostle, from the agony of the cross, to care for His widowed mother, who would now lose a son. He now feels the needs of husbands who lose their wives and the needs of wives who are left alone by death.

30. Most of us know widows who need attention. What touches me is to hear, as I have, of an older widow whom I was intending to visit again having been inspired to visit a younger widow to comfort her. A widow needing comfort herself was sent to comfort another. The Lord helped and blessed two widows by inspiring them to encourage each other. So He gave succor to them both.

31. The Lord sent help in that same way to the humble poor in [Alma 34](#) who had responded to the teaching and testimony of His servants. Once they had repented and were converted, they were still poor. But He sent them to do for others what they might reasonably have thought was beyond them and which they still needed. They were to give others what they would have hoped He would give them. Through His servant, the Lord gave these poor converts this hard task: “After ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.” [6](#)

32. That may seem much to ask of people in such great need themselves. But I know one young man who was inspired to do that very thing early in his marriage. He and his wife were barely getting by on a tiny budget. But he saw another couple even poorer than they were. To the surprise of his wife, he gave help to them from their scanty finances. A promised blessing of peace came while they were still in their poverty. The blessing of prosperity beyond their fondest dreams came later. And the pattern of seeing someone in need, someone with less or in pain, has never ceased.

33. There is yet another trial which, when endured well, can bring blessings in this life and blessings forever. Age and illness can test the best of us. My friend served as our bishop when my daughters were still at home. They speak of what they felt when he bore his simple testimony around campfires in the mountains. He loved them, and they knew it. He was released as our bishop. He had served as a bishop before in another state. Those I have met who were

from his earlier ward remember him as my daughters do.

34. I visited him in his home from time to time to thank him and to give him [priesthood blessings](#). His health began a slow decline. I can't remember all the ailments he suffered. He needed surgery. He was in constant pain. Yet every time I visited him to give him comfort, he turned the tables; I always was the one comforted. His back and legs forced him to use a cane to walk. Yet there he was in church, always sitting near the door, where he could greet those arriving early, with a smile.

35. I will never forget the feeling of wonder and admiration which came over me when I opened the back door at home and saw him coming up our driveway. It was the day we put out our garbage cans to be picked up by city workers. I had put the can out in the morning. But there he was dragging my garbage can up the hill with one hand while he balanced himself with a cane in his other hand. He was giving me the help he thought I needed when he needed it far more than I did. And he was helping with a smile and without being asked.

36. I visited him when he finally had to be cared for by nurses and doctors. He was lying in a hospital bed, still in pain and still smiling. His wife had called me to say that he was getting weaker. My son and I gave him a priesthood blessing as he lay in the bed with tubes and bottles connected to him. I sealed the blessing with a promise that he would have time and the strength to do all that God had for him to do in this life, to pass every test. He stretched out his hand to grasp mine as I stepped away from his bed to leave. I was surprised at the strength of his grip and the firmness in his voice when he said, "I'm going to make it."

37. I left thinking that I would see him again soon. But the phone call came within a day. He was gone to the glorious place where he will see the Savior, who is his perfect judge and will be ours. As I spoke at his funeral, I thought of the words of Paul when he knew that he would go to that place where my neighbor and friend has gone:

38. "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

39. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

40. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

41. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." [7](#)

42. I have confidence that my neighbor made it through his trial and will face his judge with a joyous smile.

43. I bear you my testimony that [God the Father](#) lives. He set a course for each of us that can polish and perfect us to be with Him. I testify that the Savior lives. His Atonement makes possible our being purified as we keep His commandments and our sacred covenants. And I know from my own experience that He can and will give us strength to rise through every trial. President Monson is the Lord's prophet. He holds all the keys of the priesthood. This is the Lord's true Church in which we are, with Him, lifting each other and being blessed to succor the fellow sufferers He places in our way. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen

1. [Alma 7:11–13](#).

2. [D&C 121:1–2](#).

3. [D&C 121:7–10](#).

4. [Alma 32:6–8](#).

5. [Alma 32:15](#).

6. [Alma 34:28](#).

7. [2 Timothy 4:5–8](#).

13.2 - Crossing Thresholds and Becoming Equal Partners

Elder Bruce C. Hafen

Ensign, August 2007



1. His house key is in the lock. He's home from work and about to step inside. In the kitchen, real life is scattered all around. The baby is crying. The three-year-old just poured milk—not in a glass but all over the counter.

The seven-year-old needs some daddy attention. And dinner isn't ready.

2. With a deadline at work tomorrow, a head buzzing from rush-hour traffic, and a Church meeting tonight, he's hoping she will greet him with some relief.

3. Hearing him come in, she is glad a relief party has arrived! But when she sees his face fall as he looks around, she defends herself: "Look—I work all day too. I've been with these kids nonstop, and I really need a break. Will you please fix this macaroni and cheese and help with the kids?"

4. In the heat of her request, his hope evaporates into exasperation, and he is about to react.

5. At this crossroads of their busy day, these two have some choices. Will they use this moment to practice being the kind of companion each has covenanted to become? Or will each one default to past conditioning—familial and cultural? Certain attitudes and ideas have crept into the very air they breathe, challenging them as they try to work with each other rather than against each other.

6. Suppose he grew up with a father who was a dominant husband and a mother who was a subordinate wife. The cheery husband calls out, “Honey, I’m home!” as he strides through the polished front door. The calm wife—not a hair out of place and wearing fresh lipstick and a starched apron—greet him with, “Your dinner is ready, dear. Take off your tie and sit down.” Everything is in its place.

7. Suppose his parents believe that a wife’s first duty, as one U.S. church wrote recently in its creed, is to “submit graciously to her husband.” And suppose they believe that a husband’s duty is to give directions—leading out, assigning tasks, and expecting results.

8. Now suppose she grew up with parents who aligned themselves with women’s liberation. Her mother is grateful to live in a day when women no longer feel pressured to conform to a rigid, self-sacrificing role that seems to deny their sense of self.

9. Perhaps her mother, even her father, would say that a smart wife keeps boundaries around how much of her time and self she will give to support her husband and children because she first needs to look out for herself and her personal priorities in this new age of female freedom.

Becoming Interdependent

10. Correcting these two extremist attitudes, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” teaches a husband-wife concept that clearly differs from both households where this hypothetical couple grew up. It states that fathers “are to preside” and “to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families,” while mothers “are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.” Fathers and mothers are to “help one another” fulfill these duties as “equal partners.” 1

11. Our young husband’s parents believe the old idea that women are fully dependent on their husbands. Our young wife’s parents believe the new idea that women are independent of their husbands. But the restored

gospel teaches the eternal idea that husbands and wives are interdependent with each other. They are equal. They are partners.

12. The incorrect idea in Christian history that wives should be dependent began with the false premise that the Fall of Adam and Eve was a tragic mistake and that Eve was the primary culprit. Thus women’s traditional submission to men was considered a fair punishment for Eve’s sin. 2

13. Thankfully, the Restoration clarifies Eve’s—and Adam’s—choice as essential to the eternal progression of God’s children. We honor rather than condemn what they did, and we see Adam and Eve as equal partners.

14. The modern liberationist idea that married people are independent of each other is also incorrect. It typically claims that there are no innate differences between men and women or that, even if some differences do exist, no one has the right to define gender-based roles.

15. In some ways, the excessive selflessness of the dependent wife allowed and perhaps even encouraged male domination. In reaction to this, the radical wing of the women’s liberation movement swung to the other extreme of independence, moving past the possibilities of interdependence. This cultural motion, and emotion, pushed some women from being overly selfless to being overly selfish—causing them to miss the personal growth that can come only from self-chosen sacrifice, which makes possible a woman’s ability to thrive from nurturing all within her circle (see John 17:19).

16. The concept of interdependent, equal partners is well-grounded in the doctrine of the restored gospel. Eve was Adam’s “help meet” (Genesis 2:18). The original Hebrew for meet means that Eve was adequate for, or equal to, Adam. She wasn’t his servant or his subordinate. And the Hebrew for help in “help meet” is ezer, a term meaning that Eve drew on heavenly powers when she supplied their marriage with the spiritual instincts uniquely available to women as a gender gift. 3

17. As President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has said, men and women are by nature different, and while they share many basic human traits, the “virtues and attributes upon which perfection and exaltation depend come [more] naturally to a woman.” 4

18. Genesis 3:16 states that Adam is to “rule over” Eve, but this doesn’t make Adam a dictator. A ruler can be a measuring tool that sets standards. Then

Adam would live so that others may measure the rightness of their conduct by watching his. Being a ruler is not so much a privilege of power as an obligation to practice what a man preaches. Also, over in “rule over” uses the Hebrew *bet*, which means ruling with, not ruling over. If a man does exercise “dominion ... in any degree of unrighteousness” (D&C 121:37; emphasis added), God terminates that man’s authority.

19. Perhaps because false teachings had twisted original scriptural meanings, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) preferred “preside” rather than “rule.” He said: “No woman has ever been asked by the Church authorities to follow her husband into an evil pit. She is to follow him [only] as he follows and obeys the Savior of the world, but in deciding [whether he is obeying Christ], she should always be sure she is fair.”⁵ In this way, President Kimball saw marriage “as a full partnership,” stating, “We do not want our LDS women to be silent partners or limited partners” but rather “a contributing and full partner.”⁶

20. Spouses need not perform the same functions to be equal. The woman’s innate spiritual instincts are like a moral magnet, pointing toward spiritual north—except when that magnet’s particles are scrambled out of order. The man’s presiding gift is the priesthood—except when he is not living the principles of righteousness. If the husband and the wife are wise, their counseling will be reciprocal: he will listen to the promptings of her inner spiritual compass just as she will listen to his righteous counsel.

21. And in an equal-partner marriage both also bring a spiritual maturity to their partnership, without regard to gender. Both have a conscience and the Holy Ghost to guide them. Both see family life as their most important work. Each also strives to become a fully rounded disciple of Jesus Christ—a complete spiritual being.

Equal-Partner Marriage

22. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that for too long in the Church, the men have been the theologians while the women have been the Christians.⁷ To be equal partners, each should be both a theologian and a Christian.

23. When Elder Maxwell learned in 1996 that he had leukemia, the diagnosis was discouraging. He had worked for years on making himself “willing to submit” (Mosiah 3:19) to the Lord’s will. If it was time to face death, he didn’t want to shrink from drinking his bitter cup.

24. But his wife, Colleen, thought he was too willing to yield. With loving directness, she said that Christ Himself earnestly pleaded first, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Only then did He submit Himself, saying, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). Elder Maxwell saw his wife’s doctrinal insight and agreed. As a result, they pleaded together that his life might be spared. Motivated by their determination, Elder Maxwell’s doctor found a new medical treatment that prolonged his life for several years. Elder Maxwell was grateful that he was not the only theologian in their marriage.⁸

25. In an equal-partner marriage, “love is not possession but participation ... part of that co-creation which is our human calling.”⁹ With true participation, husband and wife merge into the synergistic oneness of an “everlasting dominion” that “without compulsory means” will flow with spiritual life to them and their posterity “forever and ever” (D&C 121:46).

26. In the little kingdom of a family, each spouse freely gives something the other does not have and without which neither can be complete and return to God’s presence. Spouses are not a soloist with an accompanist, nor are they two solos. They are the interdependent parts of a duet, singing together in harmony at a level where no solo can go.

27. Each gives abundance to the other’s want. As Paul wrote,

28. “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:

29. “But by an equality, that ... your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality” (2 Corinthians 8:13–14).

30. Temple marriage covenants do not magically bring equality to a partnership. Those covenants commit us to a developmental process of learning and growing together—by practice.

31. That couple we saw at the kitchen threshold share a commitment to the promise of eternal family unity. But equal partnerships are not made in heaven—they are made on earth, one choice at a time, one conversation at a time, one threshold crossing at a time. And getting there is hard work—like patiently working through differing assumptions about who was bringing relief to whom that night or any of thousands of nights like it.

32. As milk drips from the counter, she holds a box of macaroni and cheese in her hand, he faces a deadline

and a meeting, and both feel the pull of weariness on their faces. How would people in a covenant, balanced relationship handle such a moment, and how could the next few moments help create an equal partnership?

33. Young wife, do you see in him someone who has worked all day to bring sustenance to your table? Young husband, do you see in her someone who has worked all day to make nourishment of that sustenance? Can you both see beyond the doing of the day and remember the inestimable worth of the being to whom you are married?

Thresholds of Love

34. After a lifetime of practice and patience together, what will your last earthly threshold look like? Will it look and feel something like that of John and Therissa Clark? In 1921 John Haslem Clark of Manti, Utah, wrote what became his last journal entry:

35. “The folks have been here today, but have gone to their homes. The clatter of racing feet, the laughter and babble of tongues have ceased. We are alone, We two. We two whom destiny has made one. Long ago, it has been sixty years since we met under the June trees. I kissed you first. How shy and afraid was your girlhood. Not any woman on earth or in heaven could be to me what you are. I would rather you were here, woman, with your gray hair, than any fresh blossom of youth. Where you are is home. Where you are not is homesickness. As I look at you I realize that there is something greater than love, although love is the greatest thing in earth. It is loyalty. For were I driven away in shame you would follow. If I were burning in fever your cool hand would soothe me. With your hand in mine may I pass and take my place among the saved of Heaven. Being eight years the eldest—and as the years went by and I felt that the time of parting might be near—it was often the drift of our thought and speech: how could either of us be left alone. Alone, after living together for 56 years. I scarcely dared think of it and though a bit selfish comforted myself thinking [that] according to our age I would not be the one left alone.”

36. Another handwriting then appears later on the same page. It is Therissa’s voice, gently closing John’s journal:

37. “Almost two years and a half since the last writing, and its following events are so sad, so heartbreaking for this, his life’s companion that this pen has been laid down many times ere this record is made. Loss and loneliness [are] ever present and will be with me to the end. . . . Will time soften this sadness,

will I be able to leave the Old Home and not feel that he is waiting for me, calling me? I am only content at home where I feel that he is watching over me, his presence always with me.

38. “On March 11, 1923, John Haslem Clark passed away after an illness of only one week. He seemed so like himself, talking and active. We had no thought that the end was near until he passed into unconsciousness a few hours before his death. Oh, may we all be as clean and pure, ready to go before our Maker.” 10

39. We do not know the details of John and Therissa’s life as they crossed over the thresholds of their days. But we do know how 56 years of daily conversations finally shaped the kind of people they became, the kind of love they knew.

40. If our young couple could only know that this love is what they could feel and understand at the end of their lives, what wouldn’t they give! They’d listen more and choose better, over and over, day after day, crossing after crossing. They would learn, by patient experience, that “work is love made visible.” 11 They would realize as the years pass that their marriage is helping them become better disciples of Jesus Christ, even becoming a little more like Him. Then they would understand as they cross the final threshold of mortality that the extent to which they have become one with Him is the extent to which they are one with each other.

Notes

1. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102; emphasis added.
2. See Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (1988), 68.
3. Donald W. Parry, Brigham Young University professor, helped with the Hebrew translations.
4. “For Time and All Eternity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 22.
5. “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, 72.
6. “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 106.
7. See *Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* (1977), 127.
8. See Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (2002), 14–15, 555.
9. Madeleine L’Engle, *The Irrational Season* (1976), 98.
10. In Bruce C. Hafen, *Covenant Hearts: Marriage and the Joy of Human Love* (2005), 265–66.
11. Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (1973), 28.

13.3 - Good, Better, Best

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, November 2007



1. Most of us have more things expected of us than we can possibly do. As breadwinners, as parents, as Church workers and members, we face many choices on what we will do with our time and other resources.

I.

2. We should begin by recognizing the reality that just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives.

3. Jesus taught this principle in the home of Martha. While she was “cumbered about much serving” ([Luke 10:40](#)), her sister, Mary, “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” ([v. 39](#)). When Martha complained that her sister had left her to serve alone, Jesus commended Martha for what she was doing ([v. 41](#)) but taught her that “one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” ([v. 42](#)). It was praiseworthy for Martha to be “careful and troubled about many things” ([v. 41](#)), but learning the gospel from the Master Teacher was more “needful.” The scriptures contain other teachings that some things are more blessed than others (see [Acts 20:35](#); [Alma 32:14–15](#)).

4. A childhood experience introduced me to the idea that some choices are good but others are better. I lived for two years on a farm. We rarely went to town. Our Christmas shopping was done in the Sears, Roebuck catalog. I spent hours poring over its pages. For the rural families of that day, catalog pages were like the shopping mall or the Internet of our time.

5. Something about some displays of merchandise in the catalog fixed itself in my mind. There were three degrees of quality: good, better, and best. For example, some men’s shoes were labeled good (\$1.84), some better (\$2.98), and some best (\$3.45).¹

6. As we consider various choices, we should remember that it is not enough that something is good. Other choices are better, and still others are best. Even though a particular choice is more costly, its far greater value may make it the best choice of all.

7. Consider how we use our time in the choices we make in viewing television, playing video games, surfing the Internet, or reading books or magazines. Of course it is good to view wholesome entertainment or to obtain interesting information. But not everything of that sort is worth the portion of our life we give to obtain it. Some things are better, and others are best. When the Lord told us to seek learning, He said, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom” ([D&C 88:118](#); emphasis added).

II.

8. Some of our most important choices concern [family](#) activities. Many breadwinners worry that their occupations leave too little time for their families. There is no easy formula for that contest of priorities. However, I have never known of a man who looked back on his working life and said, “I just didn’t spend enough time with my job.”

9. In choosing how we spend time as a family, we should be careful not to exhaust our available time on things that are merely good and leave little time for that which is better or best. A friend took his young family on a series of summer vacation trips, including visits to memorable historic sites. At the end of the summer he asked his teenage son which of these good summer activities he enjoyed most. The father learned from the reply, and so did those he told of it. “The thing I liked best this summer,” the boy replied, “was the night you and I laid on the lawn and looked at the stars and talked.” Super family activities may be good for children, but they are not always better than one-on-one time with a loving parent.

10. The amount of children-and-parent time absorbed in the good activities of private lessons, team sports, and other school and club activities also needs to be carefully regulated. Otherwise, children will be overscheduled, and parents will be frazzled and frustrated. Parents should act to preserve time for family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, and the other precious togetherness and individual one-on-one time that binds a family together and fixes children’s values on things of eternal worth. Parents should teach gospel priorities through what they do with their children.

11. Family experts have warned against what they call “the overscheduling of children.” In the last generation children are far busier and families spend far less time together. Among many measures of this disturbing trend are the reports that structured sports time has doubled, but children’s free time has declined by 12

hours per week, and unstructured outdoor activities have fallen by 50 percent.²

12. The number of those who report that their “whole family usually eats dinner together” has declined 33 percent. This is most concerning because the time a family spends together “eating meals at home [is] the strongest predictor of children’s academic achievement and psychological adjustment.”³ Family mealtimes have also been shown to be a strong bulwark against children’s smoking, drinking, or using drugs.⁴ There is inspired wisdom in this advice to parents: what your children really want for dinner is you.

13. President Gordon B. Hinckley has pleaded that we “work at our responsibility as parents as if everything in life counted on it, because in fact everything in life does count on it.”

14. He continued: “I ask you men, particularly, to pause and take stock of yourselves as husbands and fathers and heads of households. Pray for guidance, for help, for direction, and then follow the whisperings of the Spirit to guide you in the most serious of all responsibilities, for the consequences of your leadership in your home will be eternal and everlasting.”⁵

15. The First Presidency has called on parents “to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles. ... The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place ... in ... this God-given responsibility.” The First Presidency has declared that “however worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform.”⁶

III.

16. Church leaders should be aware that Church meetings and activities can become too complex and burdensome if a ward or a stake tries to have the membership do everything that is good and possible in our numerous Church programs. Priorities are needed there also.

17. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve have stressed the importance of exercising inspired judgment in Church programs and activities. Elder L. Tom Perry taught this principle in our first worldwide leadership training meeting in 2003. Counseling the same leaders in 2004, Elder Richard G. Scott said: “Adjust your activities to be consistent with your local conditions and resources. ... Make sure that the essential needs are met, but do not go overboard in

creating so many good things to do that the essential ones are not accomplished. ... Remember, don’t magnify the work to be done—simplify it.”⁷

18. In general conference last year, Elder M. Russell Ballard warned against the deterioration of family relationships that can result when we spend excess time on ineffective activities that yield little spiritual sustenance. He cautioned against complicating our Church service “with needless frills and embellishments that occupy too much time, cost too much money, and sap too much energy. ... The instruction to magnify our callings is not a command to embellish and complicate them. To innovate does not necessarily mean to expand; very often it means to simplify. ... What is most important in our Church responsibilities,” he said, “is not the statistics that are reported or the meetings that are held but whether or not individual people—ministered to one at a time just as the Savior did—have been lifted and encouraged and ultimately changed.”⁸

19. Stake presidencies and bishoprics need to exercise their authority to weed out the excessive and ineffective busyness that is sometimes required of the members of their stakes or wards. Church programs should focus on what is best (most effective) in achieving their assigned purposes without unduly infringing on the time families need for their “divinely appointed duties.”

20. But here is a caution for families. Suppose Church leaders reduce the time required by Church meetings and activities in order to increase the time available for families to be together. This will not achieve its intended purpose unless individual family members—especially parents—vigorously act to increase family togetherness and one-on-one time. Team sports and technology toys like video games and the Internet are already winning away the time of our children and youth. Surfing the Internet is not better than serving the Lord or strengthening the family. Some young men and women are skipping Church youth activities or cutting family time in order to participate in soccer leagues or to pursue various entertainments. Some young people are amusing themselves to death—spiritual death.

21. Some uses of individual and family time are better, and others are best. We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord [Jesus Christ](#) and strengthen our families.

IV.

22. Here are some other illustrations of good, better, and best:

23. It is good to belong to our Father in Heaven's true Church and to keep all of His commandments and fulfill all of our duties. But if this is to qualify as "best," it should be done with love and without arrogance. We should, as we sing in a great hymn, "crown [our] good with brotherhood,"⁹ showing love and concern for all whom our lives affect.

24. To our hundreds of thousands of home teachers and visiting teachers, I suggest that it is good to visit our assigned families; it is better to have a brief visit in which we teach doctrine and principle; and it is best of all to make a difference in the lives of some of those we visit. That same challenge applies to the many meetings we hold—good to hold a meeting, better to teach a principle, but best to actually improve lives as a result of the meeting.

25. As we approach 2008 and a new course of study in our Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies, I renew our caution about how we use the Teachings of Presidents of the Church manuals. Many years of inspired work have produced our 2008 volume of the teachings of [Joseph Smith](#), the founding prophet of this dispensation. This is a landmark among Church books. In the past, some teachers have given a chapter of the Teachings manuals no more than a brief mention and then substituted a lesson of their own choice. It may have been a good lesson, but this is not an acceptable practice. A gospel teacher is called to teach the subject specified from the inspired materials provided. The best thing a teacher can do with Teachings: Joseph Smith is to select and quote from the words of the Prophet on principles specially suited to the needs of class members and then direct a class discussion on how to apply those principles in the circumstances of their lives.

26. I testify of our Heavenly Father, whose children we are and whose plan is designed to qualify us for "eternal life ... the greatest of all the gifts of God" ([D&C 14:7](#); see also [D&C 76:51–59](#)). I testify of Jesus Christ, whose Atonement makes it possible. And I testify that we are led by prophets, our President Gordon B. Hinckley and his counselors, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog, Fall and Winter 1944–45, 316E.
2. See Jared R. Anderson and William J. Doherty, "Democratic Community Initiatives: The Case of Overscheduled Children," [Family Relations](#), vol. 54 (Dec. 2005): 655.
3. Anderson and Doherty, [Family Relations](#), 54:655.

4. See Nancy Gibbs, "The Magic of the Family Meal," *Time*, June 12, 2006, 51–52; see also Sarah Jane Weaver, "Family Dinner," *Church News*, Sept. 8, 2007, 5.
5. "Each a Better Person," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 100.
6. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; printed in *Church News*, Feb. 27, 1999, 3.
7. "The Doctrinal Foundation of the Auxiliaries," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 5, 7–8; see also *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 62, 67.
8. "O Be Wise," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 18–20.
9. "America the Beautiful," *Hymns*, no. 338.

13.4 - Hallmarks of a Happy Home

President Thomas S. Monson

Ensign, November 1988



1. "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God." ([Joseph Smith](#), *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. by Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, pp. 255–56.)

2. This description of such a universal goal was provided by the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was relevant then. It is relevant now. With such a clear road map to follow, why then are there so many unhappy people? Frequently, frowns outnumber smiles and despair dampens joy. We live so far below the level of our divine possibilities. Some become confused by materialism, entangled by sin, and lost among the passing parade of humanity. Others cry out in the words of the convert of Philip of old: "How can I [find my way], except some man should guide me?" ([Acts 8:31](#).)

3. Happiness does not consist of a glut of luxury, the world's idea of a "good time." Nor must we search for it in faraway places with strange-sounding names. Happiness is found at home.

4. All of us remember the home of our childhood. Interestingly, our thoughts do not dwell on whether the house was large or small, the neighborhood fashionable or downtrodden. Rather, we delight in the experiences we shared as a [family](#). The home is the laboratory of our lives, and what we learn there largely determines what we do when we leave there.

5. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of Great Britain, expressed the profound philosophy: "The family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure centre, a place of refuge

and a place of rest. It encompasses the whole of the society. It fashions our beliefs; it is the preparation for the rest of our life.” (London Times, 26 May 1988.)

6. “Home is where the heart is.” It does take “a heap o’ livin’” to make a house a home (Edgar A. Guest, “Home,” in *The Family Book of Best-Loved Poems*, ed. David L. George, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952, p. 151–52.) “Home, home, sweet, sweet home, Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” (Hymns, 1948, no. 185.) We turn from the reverie of such pleasant recollections. We contemplate parents gone, family grown, childhood vanished. Slowly but surely we face the truth: We are responsible for the home we build. We must build wisely, for eternity is not a short voyage. There will be calm and wind, sunlight and shadows, joy and sorrow. But if we really try, our home can be a bit of heaven here on earth. The thoughts we think, the deeds we do, the lives we live influence not only the success of our earthly journey; they mark the way to our eternal goals.

7. Happy homes come in a variety of appearances. Some feature large families with father, mother, brothers, and sisters living together in a spirit of love. Others consist of a single parent with one or two children, while other homes have but one occupant. There are, however, identifying features which are to be found in a happy home, whatever the number or description of its family members. I refer to these as “Hallmarks of a Happy Home.” They consist of:

1. A pattern of prayer.
2. A library of learning.
3. A legacy of love.
4. A treasury of testimony.

8. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, Uttered or unexpressed.” (Hymns, 1985, no. 145.) So universal is its application, so beneficial its result, that prayer qualifies as the number-one hallmark of a happy home. As parents listen to the prayer of a child, they too draw close to God. These little ones, who so recently have been with their Heavenly Father, have no inhibitions in expressing to Him their feelings, their wishes, their thanks.

9. Family prayer is the greatest deterrent to sin, and hence the most beneficent provider of joy and happiness. The old saying is yet true: “The family that prays together stays together.”

10. “It is not possible for a married couple to reach happiness with eyes fixed on different stars; ... they must set up a single ideal and work toward [it]. ...

Cease cherishing impossible fancies of impossible futures. Take the best of [your] dreams and fit them to life as it comes every day.” (Temple Bailey, “The Bride Who Makes Her Dreams Come True,” in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 1912.)

11. On October 7, my wife, Frances, and I will have been married forty years. Our marriage took place just to the east of us in the holy temple. He who performed the ceremony, Benjamin Bowring, counseled us: “May I offer you newlyweds a formula which will ensure that any disagreement you may have will last no longer than one day? Every night kneel by the side of your bed. One night, Brother Monson, you offer the prayer, aloud, on bended knee. The next night you, Sister Monson, offer the prayer, aloud, on bended knee. I can then assure you that any misunderstanding that develops during the day will vanish as you pray. You simply can’t pray together and retain any but the best of feelings toward one another.”

12. When I was called to the Council of the Twelve just twenty-five years ago this weekend, President McKay asked me concerning my family. I related to him this guiding formula of prayer and bore witness to its validity. He sat back in his large leather chair and, with a smile, responded, “The same formula that has worked for you has blessed the lives of my family during all the years of our marriage.”

13. Prayer is the passport to spiritual power.

14. A second hallmark of a happy home is discovered when home is a library of learning. An essential part of our learning library will be good books.

15. Books are keys to wisdom’s treasure;

16. Books are gates to lands of pleasure;

17. Books are paths that upward lead;

18. Books are friends. Come, let us read.

19. Reading is one of the true pleasures of life. In our age of mass culture, when so much that we encounter is abridged, adapted, adulterated, shredded, and boiled down, it is mind-easing and mind-inspiring to sit down privately with a congenial book.

20. James A. Michener, prominent author, suggests, “A nation becomes what its young people read in their youth. Its ideals are fashioned then, its goals strongly determined.”

21. The Lord counseled, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” (D&C 88:118.)

22. The standard works offer the library of learning of which I speak. We must be careful not to underestimate the capacity of children to read and to understand the word of God.

23. A few months ago we took our grandchildren on an escorted tour of the Church printing facilities. There, all of us saw the missionary edition of the Book of Mormon coming off the delivery line—printed, bound, and trimmed, ready for reading. I said to a young grandson, “The operator says that you can remove one copy of the Book of Mormon to be your very own. You select the copy, and it will then be yours.”

24. Removing one finished copy of the book, he clutched it to his breast and said with sincerity, “I love the Book of Mormon. This is my book.”

25. I really don’t remember other events of that day, but none of us who was there will ever forget the honest expression from the heart of a child.

26. As parents, we should remember that our lives may be the book from the family library which the children most treasure. Are our examples worthy of emulation? Do we live in such a way that a son or a daughter may say, “I want to follow my dad,” or “I want to be like my mother”? Unlike the book on the library shelf, the covers of which shield the contents, our lives cannot be closed. Parents, we truly are an open book.

27. A third hallmark of a happy home is a legacy of love.

28. As a small boy, I enjoyed visiting the home of my grandmother on Bueno Avenue here in Salt Lake City. Grandmother was always so happy to see us and to draw us close to her. Seated on her lap, we listened as she read to us.

29. Her youngest son and his wife now occupy that same home. I visited there recently. The fireplug on the curb seemed so small compared to its size when I climbed its lofty heights those long years ago. The friendly porch was the same, the quiet, peaceful atmosphere not altered. Hanging on the kitchen wall was a framed expression which my aunt had embroidered. It carried a world of practical application: “Choose your love; love your choice.” She who prepared that message is now in frail health. Her husband, Ray, cares for her constantly and is the epitome of faithful and enduring love. She reciprocates in her own way. They live the lesson they framed.

30. Seemingly little lessons of love are observed by children as they silently absorb the examples of their parents. My own father, a printer, worked long and hard practically every day of his life. I’m certain that on the Sabbath he would have enjoyed just being at home. Rather, he visited elderly family members and brought cheer into their lives.

31. One was his uncle, who was crippled by arthritis so severe that he could not walk or care for himself. On a Sunday afternoon Dad would say to me, “Come along, Tommy; let’s take Uncle Elias for a short drive.” Boarding the old 1928 Oldsmobile, we would proceed to Eighth West, where, at the home of Uncle Elias, I would wait in the car while Dad went inside. Soon he would emerge from the house, carrying in his arms like a china doll his crippled uncle. I then would open the door and watch how tenderly and with such affection my father would place Uncle Elias in the front seat so he would have a fine view while I occupied the rear seat.

32. The drive was brief and the conversation limited, but oh, what a legacy of love! Father never read to me from the Bible about the good Samaritan. Rather, he took me with him and Uncle Elias in that old 1928 Oldsmobile along the road to Jericho.

33. When our homes carry the legacy of love, we will not receive Jacob’s chastisement as recorded in the Book of Mormon: “Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you.” (Jacob 2:35.)

34. Let us not be discouraged by the many newspaper and television accounts of discord—and sometimes cruelty—between companions and assume that virtue has vanished and love’s lamp no longer glows. Two of my dearest friends now lie in poor health and helpless. They are not alone. Their faithful companions minister to them in tender love. My friend Pres, who rarely leaves the side of his wife, said of her, “Christine is weaker but still beautiful. I love her so.” What a noble tribute to fidelity, to love, to marriage!

35. Another, a wife named Gertrude, makes comfortable her husband, Mark, in his room. Everything is just as he would want the room to be. She reads to him. She chats with him about the family. She once said to me during this long vigil, “I love him more than ever.”

36. For a beautiful example of “love at home,” we need not look beyond the family of President and Sister

Benson. My wife and I were privileged to attend the Bensons' sixty-second wedding anniversary party just three weeks ago. Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren rejoiced as the President and his companion held hands and led the group in singing "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "Love's Old Sweet Song," and "I Love You Truly." The entire Church can well emulate the Bensons' example of studying the scriptures, attending the temple, and enjoying life together.

37. These are pictures which portray a legacy of love as a hallmark of a happy home.

38. A fourth hallmark of a happy home is a treasury of testimony. "The first and foremost opportunity for teaching in the Church lies in the home," observed President David O. McKay. "A true Mormon home is one in which if Christ should chance to enter, he would be pleased to linger and to rest." (Gospel Ideals, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953, p. 169.)

39. What are we doing to ensure that our homes meet this description? It isn't enough for parents alone to have strong testimonies. Children can ride only so long on the coattails of a parent's conviction.

40. President Heber J. Grant declared: "It is our duty to teach our children in their youth. I may know that the gospel is true, and so may my wife; but I want to tell you that our children will not know that the gospel is true unless they study it and gain a testimony for themselves."

41. A love for the Savior, a reverence for His name, and genuine respect one for another will provide a fertile seedbed for a testimony to grow.

42. Learning the gospel, bearing a testimony, leading a family are rarely if ever simple processes. Life's journey is characterized by bumps in the road, swells in the sea—even the turbulence of our times.

43. Some years ago, while visiting the members and missionaries in Australia, I witnessed a sublime example depicting how a treasury of testimony can bless and sanctify a home. The mission president, Horace D. Ensign, and I were traveling the long distance from Sydney to Darwin, where I was to break ground for our first chapel in that city. En route we had a scheduled stop at a mining community named Mt. Isa. As we entered the small airport at Mt. Isa, a woman and her two children approached. She said, "I am Judith Loudon, a member of the Church, and these are my two children. We thought you might be on this flight, so we have come to visit with you during your brief stopover." She explained that her husband was

not a member of the Church and that she and the children were indeed the only members in the entire area. We shared lessons and bore testimony.

44. Time passed. As we prepared to reboard, Sister Loudon looked so forlorn, so alone. She pleaded, "You can't go yet; I have so missed the Church." Suddenly the loudspeaker announced a thirty-minute mechanical delay of our flight. Sister Loudon whispered, "My prayer has just been answered." She then asked how she might influence her husband to show an interest in the gospel. We counseled her to include him in their home Primary lesson each week and be to him a living testimony of the gospel. I mentioned we would send to her a subscription to *The Children's Friend* and additional helps for her family teaching. We urged that she never give up on her husband.

45. We departed Mt. Isa, a city to which I have never returned. I shall, however, always hold dear in memory that sweet mother and those precious children extending a tear-filled expression and a fond wave of gratitude and good-bye.

46. Several years later, while speaking at a priesthood leadership meeting in Brisbane, Australia, I emphasized the significance of gospel scholarship in the home and the importance of living the gospel and being examples of the truth. I shared with the men assembled the account of Sister Loudon and the impact her faith and determination had made on me. As I concluded, I said, "I suppose I'll never know if Sister Loudon's husband ever joined the Church, but he couldn't have found a better model to follow."

47. One of the leaders raised his hand, then stood and declared, "Brother Monson, I am Richard Loudon. The woman of whom you speak is my wife. The children [his voice quavered] are our children. We are a forever family now, thanks in part to the persistence and the patience of my dear wife. She did it all." Not a word was spoken. The silence was broken only by sniffles and muffled sobs and marked by the sight of tears streaming from every eye.

48. My brothers and sisters, let us determine, whatever our circumstance, to make of our houses happy homes. Let us open wide the windows of our hearts, that each family member may feel welcome and "at home." Let us open also the doors of our very souls, that the dear Christ may enter. Remember His promise: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." (Rev. 3:20.)

49. How welcome He will feel, how joyful will be our lives, when the “Hallmarks of a Happy Home” greet Him, even:

50. A pattern of prayer;

51. A library of learning;

52. A legacy of love;

53. A treasury of testimony.

54. That our loving Heavenly Father may bless all of us in our quest for such happy homes is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

13.5 - It Is Not Good For Man or Woman to Be Alone

Sheri L. Dew

Ensign, November 2001



1. For nearly five years, I have had the blessing of serving with Relief Society sisters and priesthood leaders from Africa to the Amazon. These experiences with you have reinforced for me the importance of a fundamental gospel

principle. I wish to direct my remarks about this principle especially to the young adult men and women of the Church, who are embarking upon a most demanding phase of their lives.

2. This summer I injured a shoulder and lost the use of an arm for weeks. I hadn't realized how much one arm depends upon the other for balance, or how much less I could lift with one arm than two, or that there were some things I couldn't do at all. This disability not only renewed my respect for those who deal so well with a physical limitation, but helped me realize how much more two arms working together can do.

3. Two are usually better than one, [1](#) as our Father confirmed when He declared that “it was not good that the man should be alone” [2](#) and made a help meet for Adam—someone with distinct gifts who would give him balance, help him shoulder the burdens of mortality, and enable him to do things he couldn't do alone. For “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.” [3](#)

4. Satan understands the power of men and women united in righteousness. He is still stinging from his banishment into eternal exile after Michael led the hosts of heaven, comprised of valiant men and women united in the cause of Christ, against him. In the

chilling words of Peter, “The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” [4](#) Lucifer is determined to devour marriages and families, because their demise threatens the salvation of all involved and the vitality of the Lord's kingdom itself. Thus, Satan seeks to confuse us about our stewardships and distinctive natures as men and women. He bombards us with bizarre messages about gender, marriage, [family](#), and all male-female relationships. He would have us believe men and women are so alike that our unique gifts are not necessary, or so different we can never hope to understand each other. Neither is true.

5. Our Father knew exactly what He was doing when He created us. He made us enough alike to love each other, but enough different that we would need to unite our strengths and stewardships to create a whole. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage or family, no ward or stake is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths.

6. These truths about the divinely appointed stewardships of men and women are largely lost on the world today. You will not find them on a TV sitcom or even, sadly, in some homes and wards. But they are not lost to the Lord, who has given us “a pattern in all things, that [we] may not be deceived.” [5](#) The Lord's pattern for couples and in large measure men and women serving together in His kingdom was established by our first parents. Together Adam and Eve labored, [6](#) mourned, [7](#) were obedient, had children, [8](#) taught their posterity the gospel, [9](#) called upon the name of the Lord, “heard the voice of the Lord,” [10](#) blessed the name of God, [11](#) and dedicated themselves to God. Repeatedly the scriptures about Adam and Eve refer to the pronoun they.

7. Neither Adam with his priesthood nor Eve with her motherhood could bring about the Fall alone. Their unique roles were interconnected. They counseled with one another, lifted burdens neither could have lifted alone, and then faced the wilderness, with all of its uncertainty, together. This is the Lord's pattern for righteous men and women.

8. Now, some of us encounter life circumstances that are less than ideal. I understand this. I personally deal with this. And yet, my dear young friends, in whose hands rests the future of the Church and its families, I must tell you that your understanding of this divine

pattern will affect your marriage, your family, your ability to help build the kingdom, and your eternal life.

9. My young sisters, some will try to persuade you that because you are not ordained to the priesthood you have been shortchanged. They are simply wrong, and they do not understand the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#). The blessings of the priesthood are available to every righteous man and woman. We may all receive the [Holy Ghost](#), obtain personal revelation, and be endowed in the temple, from which we emerge “armed” with power.¹² The power of the priesthood heals, protects, and inoculates all of the righteous against the powers of darkness. Most significantly, the fulness of the priesthood contained in the highest ordinances of the house of the Lord can only be received by a man and woman together.¹³ Said President Harold B. Lee: “Pure womanhood plus priesthood means exaltation. But womanhood without priesthood, or priesthood without pure womanhood doesn’t spell exaltation.”¹⁴

10. Sisters, we as women are not diminished by priesthood power, we are magnified by it. I know this is true, for I have experienced it again and again.

11. Your future husbands and the men with whom you serve will need the support only you can give. You have an inner spiritual strength that President James E. Faust said equals and even surpasses that of men.¹⁵ Do not abdicate your spiritual responsibility. Your faith will preach compelling sermons. No amount of time in front of the mirror will make you as attractive as having the Holy Ghost with you. Bless your family and the Church as only a woman of God can—with virtue, faith, integrity, and constant compassion.

12. Young men, your ordination to the priesthood is a grand privilege and responsibility, and not a license to dominate. Be unfailingly worthy to exercise this godly power, which is given you to be of service. A man is never more magnificent than when he is guided by the Spirit to honor the priesthood he holds.

13. If you will marry a virtuous woman who can hear the voice of the Lord, she will bless your life every day of your life. Consider Eve. She was the first to see that the fruit of the tree was good, and after partaking, she “gave unto her husband . . . , and he did eat.”¹⁶ Were it not for Eve, our progression would have ceased. Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated that her act was “a glorious necessity [that opened] the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same.”¹⁷

14. Young men, you will preside at home and in the Church. But be humble enough to listen to and learn

from the women in your life. They will provide insight, balance, and unique wisdom. And when challenges come, you will see how resilient a woman committed to [God the Father](#) and Jesus Christ is.

15. This divine pattern for men and women that strengthens marriages and families also fortifies the Church. For the Church cannot achieve the full measure of its creation unless both faithful men who bear the priesthood and righteous women who rejoice in serving under the direction of the priesthood work together. Time and again I have experienced this joy.

16. I think of a meeting in Brazil where I had a translator who was unsure of her ability to convert my English into Portuguese. But as it turned out, she and I communicated with ease. After the meeting I found out why. I learned that not only had the General Authority who presided been literally on the edge of his seat behind us the entire meeting, prompting the translator when necessary, but he had also assigned another priesthood leader to pray for both of us throughout the meeting.

17. That General Authority created a safety net of support so that I could fulfill the assignment he had given me. Such a circle of support has no end, because there is no end to the good works of righteous men and women who respect each other and who thrust in their sickles and reap, side by side, in the Lord’s vineyard. If we are going to build the kingdom of God, we as men and women of God must build each other. There is no challenge—with activation, retention, families, or anything—that we can’t solve when we counsel together in councils and help each other lift the load.

18. My dear young friends, learn the Lord’s pattern for men and women now. Ponder the scriptural accounts of Adam and Eve and see what the Lord will teach you that will strengthen your marriage, your family, and your Church service. Recent devastating events in the United States seem to indicate difficult days ahead. But they are days that will be filled with confidence and courage if the men and women of your generation unite in righteousness as never before. There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you will work together, equally yoked, under the guidance of the priesthood.

19. Our Father’s patterns help us avoid deception. Look to the Lord and not to the world for your ideas and ideals about men and women. For, my young friends, you are the mothers, fathers, and leaders who were reserved for this unprecedented time because our Father knows you, and He knows you have what it takes to face the world and to be fearless in building

the kingdom. Do it together, for it is not good for man or woman to be alone. Lift each other, and together you will be able to lift the beautiful burdens of mortality and have glory added upon your heads forever. ¹⁸ The Lord must have righteous men and righteous women to build His kingdom. I know that this is so. God is our Father. His Only Begotten Son is the Christ. This is Their work and Their glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See [Eccl. 4:9](#).
2. [Moses 3:18](#); see also [Abr. 5:14](#).
3. [1 Cor. 11:11](#).

4. [1 Pet. 5:8](#).
5. [D&C 52:14](#).
6. See [Moses 5:1](#).
7. See [Moses 5:27](#).
8. See [2 Ne. 2:20](#).
9. See [Moses 5:12](#).
10. [Moses 5:4](#).
11. See [Moses 5:12](#).
12. See [D&C 109:22](#).
13. See [D&C 131:1–4](#); [D&C 132:19–20](#).
14. The Teachings of Harold B. Lee (1996), 292.
15. See “What It Means to Be a Daughter of God,” Ensign, Nov. 1999, 101.
16. [Moses 4:12](#).
17. “The Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, Nov. 1993, 73.
18. See [Abr. 3:26](#).

14. Parenting Principles

14.1 - A “Mother Heart”

Julie B. Beck

Ensign, May 2004



1. I have often heard my father describe my mother as a woman with a “mother heart,” and that is true. Her mothering influence has been felt by many hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, and she has refined the role of nurturer to an art form. Her testimony of the restored gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) and strong sense of identity and purpose have guided her life.

2. She took longer than most women to find her husband, but during her single years she had devoted her life to progress. Though it was uncommon at the time, she was university educated and advancing in a career. Following her marriage, children arrived in quick succession; and in a short span of years, she was the mother of a large [family](#). All the knowledge she had acquired, all her natural abilities and gifts, all her skills were channeled into an organization that had no earthly bounds. As a covenant-keeping daughter of God, she had prepared all her life for motherhood.

3. What is a mother heart and how is one acquired? We learn about some of those qualities in the scriptures. To paraphrase Proverbs: “Who can find a ... woman [with a mother heart]? for her price is far above rubies. ... She ... worketh willingly with her hands. ... With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. ... She stretcheth out her hand to the poor. ... Strength and honour are her clothing. ... She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness” ([Prov. 31:10, 13, 16, 20, 25–27](#)). A woman with a mother heart has a testimony of the restored gospel, and she teaches the principles of the gospel without equivocation. She is keeping sacred covenants made in holy temples. Her talents and skills are shared unselfishly. She gains as much education as her circumstances will allow, improving her mind and spirit with the desire to teach what she learns to the generations who follow her.

4. If she has children, she is a “goodly parent” ([1 Ne. 1:1](#)) who lives and teaches standards of behavior exactly in line with the teachings of living prophets. She teaches her “children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” ([D&C 68:28](#)). Rather than

listening to the voices and partial truths of the world, she knows that gospel standards are based on eternal, unchangeable truths. She believes that to be “primarily responsible for the nurture of [her] children” is a vital, dignified, and “sacred responsibility” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 1998, 24; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). To nurture and feed them physically is as much an honor as to nurture and feed them spiritually. She is “not weary in well-doing” and delights to serve her family, because she knows that “out of small things proceedeth that which is great” ([D&C 64:33](#)).

5. Oh, that every girl and woman would have a testimony of her potential for eternal motherhood as she keeps her earthly covenants. “Each is a beloved ... daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine ... destiny” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). As spirit daughters of God, women “received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth” ([D&C 138:56](#)) on the earth. They were among the “noble and great ones” ([D&C 138:55](#)) who “shouted for joy” ([Job 38:7](#)) at the creation of the earth because they would be given a physical body with the opportunity to be proven in a mortal sphere (see [Abr. 3:25](#)). They wished to work side by side with righteous men to accomplish eternal goals that neither can attain independently.

6. Female roles did not begin on earth, and they do not end here. A woman who treasures motherhood on earth will treasure motherhood in the world to come, and “where [her] treasure is, there will [her] heart be also” ([Matt. 6:21](#)). By developing a mother heart, each girl and woman prepares for her divine, eternal mission of motherhood. “Whatever principle of intelligence [she] attain[s] unto in this life, it will rise with [her] in the [resurrection](#). And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through [her] diligence and obedience than another, [she] will have so much the advantage in the world to come” ([D&C 130:18–19](#)).

7. In my experience I have seen that some of the truest mother hearts beat in the breasts of women who will not rear their own children in this life, but they know that “all things must come to pass in their time” and that they “are laying the foundation of a great work” ([D&C 64:32–33](#)). As they keep their covenants, they are investing in a grand, prestigious future because they know that “they who keep their second estate shall

have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” ([Abr. 3:26](#)).

8. I was recently at a park where I met a group of women with mother hearts. They were young, covenant-keeping women. They were bright and had obtained advanced degrees from respected universities. Now they were devoting their considerable gifts to planning dinner that evening and sharing housekeeping ideas. They were teaching two-year-olds to be kind to one another. They were soothing babies, kissing bruised knees, and wiping tears. I asked one of those mothers how it came about that she could transfer her talents so cheerfully into the role of motherhood. She replied, “I know who I am, and I know what I am supposed to do. The rest just follows.” That young mother will build faith and character in the next generation one family prayer at a time, one scripture study session, one book read aloud, one song, one family meal after another. She is involved in a great work. She knows that “children are an heritage of the Lord” and “happy is the [woman] that hath [a] quiver full of them” ([Ps. 127:3, 5](#)). She knows that the influence of righteous, conscientious, persistent, daily mothering is far more lasting, far more powerful, far more influential than any earthly position or institution invented by man. She has the vision that, if worthy, she has the potential to be blessed as Rebekah of old to be “the mother of thousands of millions” ([Gen. 24:60](#)).

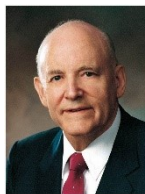
9. Covenant-keeping women with mother hearts know that whether motherhood comes early or late; whether they are blessed with a “quiver full” of children here in mortality or not; whether they are single, married, or left to carry the responsibility of parenthood alone—in holy temples they are “endowed with power from on high” ([D&C 38:32](#)), and with that endowment they received the promised blessings and are “persuaded of them, and embraced them” ([Heb. 11:13](#)).

10. Every girl and woman who makes and keeps sacred covenants can have a mother heart. There is no limit to what a woman with a mother heart can accomplish. Righteous women have changed the course of history and will continue to do so, and their influence will spread and grow exponentially throughout the eternities. How grateful I am to the Lord for trusting women with the divine mission of motherhood. Like Mother Eve I am “glad” (see [Moses 5:11](#)) to know these things. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14.2 - Being a Righteous Husband and Father

President Howard W. Hunter

Ensign, November 1994



1. My dear brethren of the priesthood, I consider it a privilege to meet with you this evening in this general priesthood meeting. The priesthood is the greatest brotherhood on the earth. I feel great strength in seeing your faithfulness and feeling your love and sustaining vote. We are particularly grateful to have so many of our Aaronic Priesthood brethren here with their fathers or advisers.

2. The subject of my address this evening will be more particularly directed to the husbands and fathers. All of you who hold the Aaronic Priesthood will soon arrive at the years of marriage and fatherhood. Therefore, what I say tonight has application to all present.

3. I wish to speak of the relationship that a man holding the priesthood should have with his wife and children. With a knowledge of the plan of salvation as a foundation, a man who holds the priesthood looks upon marriage as a sacred privilege and obligation. It is not good for man nor for woman to be alone. Man is not complete without woman. Neither can fill the measure of their creation without the other (see [1 Cor. 11:11](#); [Moses 3:18](#)). Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God (see [D&C 49:15–17](#)). Only through the new and everlasting covenant of marriage can they realize the fulness of eternal blessings (see [D&C 131:1–4](#); [D&C 132:15–19](#)). As a matter of priesthood responsibility, a man, under normal circumstances, should not unduly postpone marriage. Brethren, the Lord has spoken plainly on this matter. It is your sacred and solemn responsibility to follow his counsel and the words of his prophets.

4. The prophets of the past have spoken also of those who may not have opportunity to marry in this life. President Lorenzo Snow said:

5. “There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to do certain things when opportunities were not furnished him or her. In other words, if a young man or a young woman has no opportunity of getting married, and they live faithful lives up to the time of their death, they will have all the blessings, exaltation, and glory that any man or woman will have who had this opportunity and improved it. That is sure and positive” (The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, comp.

Clyde J. Williams, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984, p. 138).

6. I believe President Snow's statement to be true.

7. A man who holds the priesthood shows perfect moral fidelity to his wife and gives her no reason to doubt his faithfulness. A husband is to love his wife with all his heart and cleave unto her and none else (see [D&C 42:22–26](#)). President Spencer W. Kimball explained:

8. "The words none else eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes pre-eminent in the life of the husband or wife and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse" (The Miracle of [Forgiveness](#), Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, p. 250).

9. The Lord forbids and his church condemns any and every intimate relationship outside of marriage. Infidelity on the part of a man breaks the heart of his wife and loses her confidence and the confidence of his children (see [Jacob 2:35](#)).

10. Be faithful in your marriage covenants in thought, word, and deed. [Pornography](#), flirtations, and unwholesome fantasies erode one's character and strike at the foundation of a happy marriage. Unity and trust within a marriage are thereby destroyed. One who does not control his thoughts and thus commits adultery in his heart, if he does not repent, shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear (see [D&C 42:23](#); [D&C 63:16](#)).

11. A man who holds the priesthood has reverence for motherhood. Mothers are given a sacred privilege to "bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of [the] Father continued, that he may be glorified" ([D&C 132:63](#)).

12. The First Presidency has said: "Motherhood is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind" (in James R. Clark, comp., Messages of the First Presidency, 6 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75, 6:178). The priesthood cannot work out its destiny, nor can God's purposes be fulfilled, without our helpmates. Mothers perform a labor the priesthood cannot do. For this gift of life, the priesthood should have love unbounded for the mothers of their children.

13. Honor your wife's unique and divinely appointed role as a mother in Israel and her special capacity to bear and nurture children. We are under divine commandment to multiply and replenish the earth and

to bring up our children and grandchildren in light and truth (see [Moses 2:28](#); [D&C 93:40](#)). You share, as a loving partner, the care of the children. Help her to manage and keep up your home. Help teach, train, and discipline your children.

14. You should express regularly to your wife and children your reverence and respect for her. Indeed, one of the greatest things a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

15. A man who holds the priesthood regards the [family](#) as ordained of God. Your leadership of the family is your most important and sacred responsibility. The family is the most important unit in time and in eternity and, as such, transcends every other interest in life.

16. We reiterate what was stated by President David O. McKay: "No other success [in life] can compensate for failure in the home" (David O. McKay quoting J. E. McCulloch, "Home: the Savior of Civilization," in Conference Report, Apr. 1935, p. 116) and President Harold B. Lee: "The most important of the Lord's work you and I will ever do will be within the walls of our own homes" (Harold B. Lee, Stand Ye in Holy Places, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974, p. 255). Effective family leadership, brethren, requires both quantity and quality time. The teaching and governance of the family must not be left to your wife alone, to society, to school, or even the Church.

17. A man who holds the priesthood accepts his wife as a partner in the leadership of the home and family with full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating thereto. Of necessity there must be in the Church and in the home a presiding officer (see [D&C 107:21](#)). By divine appointment, the responsibility to preside in the home rests upon the priesthood holder (see [Moses 4:22](#)). The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (meet means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership. Presiding in righteousness necessitates a shared responsibility between husband and wife; together you act with knowledge and participation in all family matters. For a man to operate independent of or without regard to the feelings and counsel of his wife in governing the family is to exercise unrighteous dominion.

18. Keep yourselves above any domineering or unworthy behavior in the tender, intimate relationship between husband and wife. Because marriage is ordained of God, the intimate relationship between husbands and wives is good and honorable in the eyes of God. He has commanded that they be one flesh and

that they multiply and replenish the earth (see [Moses 2:28](#); [Moses 3:24](#)). You are to love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it (see [Eph. 5:25–31](#)).

19. Tenderness and respect—never selfishness—must be the guiding principles in the intimate relationship between husband and wife. Each partner must be considerate and sensitive to the other’s needs and desires. Any domineering, indecent, or uncontrolled behavior in the intimate relationship between husband and wife is condemned by the Lord.

20. Any man who abuses or demeans his wife physically or spiritually is guilty of grievous sin and in need of sincere and serious repentance. Differences should be worked out in love and kindness and with a spirit of mutual reconciliation. A man should always speak to his wife lovingly and kindly, treating her with the utmost respect. Marriage is like a tender flower, brethren, and must be nourished constantly with expressions of love and affection.

21. You who hold the priesthood must not be abusive in your relationship with children. Seek always to employ the principles of priesthood government set forth in the revelations (see [D&C 93:40](#); [D&C 121:34–36, 41–45](#)).

22. President George Albert Smith wisely counseled: “We should not lose our tempers and abuse one another. . . . Nobody ever abused anybody else when he had the spirit of the Lord. It is always when we have some other spirit” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1950, p. 8).

23. No man who has been ordained to the priesthood of God can with impunity abuse his wife or child. Sexual abuse of children has long been a cause for excommunication from the Church.

24. We encourage you, brethren, to remember that priesthood is a righteous authority only. Earn the respect and confidence of your children through your loving relationship with them. A righteous father protects his children with his time and presence in their social, educational, and spiritual activities and responsibilities. Tender expressions of love and affection toward children are as much the responsibility of the father as the mother. Tell your children you love them.

25. You who hold the priesthood have the responsibility, unless disabled, to provide temporal support for your wife and children. No man can shift the burden of responsibility to another, not even to his wife. The Lord has commanded that women and

children have claim on their husbands and fathers for their maintenance (see [D&C 83](#); [1 Tim. 5:8](#)). President Ezra Taft Benson has stated that when a husband encourages or insists that his wife work out of the home for their convenience, “not only will the family suffer in such instances, . . . but [his] own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered” (Ensign, Nov. 1987, p. 49).

26. We urge you to do all in your power to allow your wife to remain in the home, caring for the children while you provide for the family the best you can. We further emphasize that men who abandon their family and fail to meet their responsibility to care for those they have fathered may find their eligibility for a temple recommend and their standing in the Church in jeopardy. In cases of divorce or separation, men must demonstrate that they are meeting family support payments mandated by law and obligated by the principles of the Church in order to qualify for the blessings of the Lord.

27. A man who holds the priesthood leads his family in Church participation so they will know the gospel and be under the protection of the covenants and ordinances. If you are to enjoy the blessings of the Lord, you must set your own homes in order. Together with your wife, you determine the spiritual climate of your home. Your first obligation is to get your own spiritual life in order through regular scriptural study and daily prayer. Secure and honor your priesthood and temple covenants; encourage your family to do the same.

28. Take seriously your responsibility to teach the gospel to your family through regular family home evening, family prayer, devotional and scripture-reading time, and other teaching moments. Give special emphasis to preparation for missionary service and temple marriage. As patriarch in the home, exercise your priesthood through performing the appropriate ordinances for your family and by giving blessings to your wife and children. Next to your own salvation, brethren, there is nothing so important to you as the salvation of your wife and children.

29. Brethren, I have spoken plainly to you regarding your responsibility as holders of the holy priesthood. If there are areas in your life where improvement may be needed, I encourage you to make this a matter of prayerful consideration.

30. I testify that this is what the Lord would have the brethren of the priesthood receive at this time. May you be blessed in your efforts to be righteous husbands and fathers, I pray as I bear solemn witness of the

truthfulness of that which has been spoken this evening and do so in the name of the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

14.3 - Bring Up a Child in the Way He Should Go

Gordon B. Hinckley
Ensign, November 1993



1. My brethren and sisters, near and far: I extend to each of you my love and [gratitude](#). I am deeply grateful for your sustaining faith and prayers. We need your prayers. We desire always to be worthy of them. Many of you write letters of encouragement and confidence. These are deeply appreciated. We likewise pray for you.
2. A few days ago there came to my office a man from Las Vegas, Nevada. His wife and married daughter were with him. When we had accomplished the purpose of his visit, the younger woman asked if I would accept something from her thirteen-year-old daughter. She unwrapped a painting of two butterflies around a flowering shrub.
3. The mother explained that her daughter had been struck by a car in a terrible accident when she was four years of age. Her body was badly broken. She was left paralyzed from the shoulders down, a quadriplegic without the use of arms or legs. She had painted this picture holding a brush between her teeth and moving her head.
4. As I listened to that story, the painting grew in beauty and value before my eyes. It became more than a portrayal of butterflies. It represented remarkable courage in the face of blinding adversity; tenacious practice in holding and moving the brush; pleading prayers for help; faith—the faith of a child, nurtured by loving parents, that she could create beauty notwithstanding her handicap.
5. Some might say that this is not a masterpiece. Without knowledge of its origin, that could be the judgment. But what is the test of art? Is it not the inspiration which comes from looking at it?
6. I will hang this small painting in my study so that during occasional hours of struggle there will come into my mind the picture of a beautiful little girl, robbed of the use of her feet and hands, gripping the handle of a paintbrush in her teeth to create a thing of beauty. Thank you, Krystal, for what you have done for me. I hope the telling of your story will bring a new

measure of strength to others who, facing discouragement, have felt they could not go on. I hope that your example will be as a polar star to lead them in the darkness through which they stumble.

7. When I think of those who carry heavy burdens, my mind goes to our beloved prophet. President Benson is now in his ninety-fifth year. He still wears the mantle of his sacred office. But his activities are seriously limited. He is unable to be with us this morning or to speak to us. We love him. We honor him. We pray for him. We sustain him. And we go forward.
8. This church is established on principles that are divine. From the day of its organization, it has been led by prophets, and I solemnly testify that the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), whose church it is and whose name it bears, will never let any man or group of men lead it astray. His is the power to remove them if they should ever be found taking the wrong turn.
9. We have critics both within and without. Although they are vocal and have access to the media, they are relatively few in number. If we were entirely without criticism, we would be concerned. Our responsibility is not to please the world but, rather, to do the will of the Lord, and from the beginning the divine will so often has been contrary to the ways of the world.
10. These worldly ways appear to be on a course that should be of concern to every thoughtful man and woman.
11. We in America are saddled with a huge financial deficit in our national budget. This has led to astronomical debt.
12. But there is another deficit which, in its long-term implications, is more serious. It is a moral deficit, a decline in values in the lives of the people, which is sapping the very foundation of our society. It is serious in this land. And it is serious in every other nation of which I know.
13. Some few months ago there appeared in the Wall Street Journal what was spoken of as an index of what is happening to our culture. I read from this statement:
14. “Since 1960, the U.S. population has increased 41%; the gross domestic product has nearly tripled; and total social spending by all levels of government [has experienced] more than a fivefold increase. ...
15. “But during the same ... period there has been a 560% increase in violent crime; a 419% increase in illegitimate births; a quadrupling in divorce rates; a tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent homes; more than a 200% increase in the

teenage suicide rate” (William J. Bennett, “Quantifying America’s Decline,” Wall Street Journal, 15 Mar. 1993).

16. The article concludes with a statement from Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

17. “The West ... has been undergoing an erosion and [an] obscuring of high moral and ethical ideals. The spiritual axis of life has grown dim.”

18. One need not, of course, read statistics to recognize a moral decay that seems to be going on all about us. It is evident in the easy breakup of marriages, in widespread infidelity, in the growth of youth gangs, in the increased use of drugs and the epidemic spread of AIDS, and in a growing disregard for the lives and property of others. It is seen in the defacement of private and public property with graffiti, which destroys beauty and is an insult to art. It is expressed in the language of the gutter, which is brought into our homes.

19. The endless sex and violence on network TV, the trash of so many motion pictures, the magnified sensuality found in much of modern literature, the emphasis on sex education, a widespread breakdown of law and order—all are manifestations of this decay.

20. What is the answer? Is there any way to change the course of the ethical and moral slide we are experiencing? I believe there is.

21. What is happening is simply an ugly expression of the declining values of our society. Those who are concerned with the problem advocate more legal regulation, large appropriations for increased police forces, tax increases to build additional jails and prisons. These may be needed to deal with the present problems. They may help in the near term. But they will be only as a bandage too small for the sore. They may help in taking care of the fruits, but they will not get at the roots. In searching for remedies, we speak of a greater work that must be done in our schools. But educators have largely abdicated their responsibility for teaching values. The Church is looked to—this and all other churches. I am grateful for what the Pope recently said in Denver in warning against moral pitfalls. I am pleased to note that the Baptists have begun a campaign for chastity. We as a church are doing much, very much, and I think we are accomplishing much. But it is not enough.

22. When all is said and done, the primary place in building a value system is in the homes of the people.

23. I read the other day of a father who pleaded with a judge to lock up his son because he could not control him. I do not doubt that he has tried. But it is now too late. Attitudes have been fixed. Habits have become rigid. If we are to turn this tide, the effort must begin with children when they are young and pliable, when they will listen and learn.

24. Not long after we were married, we built our first home. We had very little money. I did much of the work myself. It would be called “sweat equity” today. The landscaping was entirely my responsibility. The first of many trees that I planted was a thornless honey locust. Envisioning the day when its filtered shade would assist in cooling the house in the summertime, I put it in a place at the corner where the wind from the canyon to the east blew the hardest. I dug a hole, put in the bare root, put soil around it, poured on water, and largely forgot it. It was only a wisp of a tree, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It was so supple that I could bend it with ease in any direction. I paid little attention to it as the years passed.

25. Then one winter day, when the tree was barren of leaves, I chanced to look out the window at it. I noticed that it was leaning to the west, misshapen and out of balance. I could scarcely believe it. I went out and braced myself against it as if to push it upright. But the trunk was now nearly a foot in diameter. My strength was as nothing against it. I took from my toolshed a block and tackle. Attaching one end to the tree and another to a well-set post, I pulled the rope. The pulleys moved a little, and the trunk of the tree trembled slightly. But that was all. It seemed to say, “You can’t straighten me. It’s too late. I’ve grown this way because of your neglect, and I will not bend.”

26. Finally in desperation I took my saw and cut off the great heavy branch on the west side. The saw left an ugly scar, more than eight inches across. I stepped back and surveyed what I had done. I had cut off the major part of the tree, leaving only one branch growing skyward.

27. More than half a century has passed since I planted that tree. My daughter and her [family](#) live there now. The other day I looked again at the tree. It is large. Its shape is better. It is a great asset to the home. But how serious was the trauma of its youth and how brutal the treatment I used to straighten it.

28. When it was first planted, a piece of string would have held it in place against the forces of the wind. I could have and should have supplied that string with ever so little effort. But I did not, and it bent to the forces that came against it.

29. I have seen a similar thing, many times, in children whose lives I have observed. The parents who brought them into the world seem almost to have abdicated their responsibility. The results have been tragic. A few simple anchors would have given them the strength to withstand the forces that have shaped their lives. Now it appears it is too late.

30. Every individual in the world is a child of a mother and a father. Neither can ever escape the consequences of their parenthood. Inherent in the very act of creation is responsibility for the child who is created. None can with impunity run from that responsibility.

31. It is not enough simply to provide food and shelter for the physical being. There is an equal responsibility to provide nourishment and direction to the spirit and the mind and the heart. Wrote Paul to Timothy, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” ([1 Tim. 5:8](#)).

32. I am satisfied that Paul was speaking of more than physical nourishment.

33. Many years ago President Stephen L. Richards, then a Counselor in the First Presidency, speaking from this pulpit made an eloquent plea to put father back at the head of the family (see Conference Report, Apr. 1958, p. 94). I repeat that plea to all fathers. Yours is the basic and inescapable responsibility to stand as the head of the family. That does not carry with it any implication of dictatorship or unrighteous dominion. It carries with it a mandate that fathers provide for the needs of their families. Those needs are more than food, clothing, and shelter. Those needs include righteous direction and the teaching, by example as well as precept, of basic principles of honesty, integrity, service, respect for the rights of others, and an understanding that we are accountable for that which we do in this life, not only to one another but also to the God of heaven, who is our Eternal Father.

34. Let every mother realize that she has no greater blessing than the children which have come to her as a gift from the Almighty; that she has no greater mission than to rear them in light and truth, in understanding and love; that she will have no greater happiness than to see them grow into young men and women who respect principles of virtue, who walk free from the stain of immorality and from the shame of delinquency.

35. Said the writer of Proverbs, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” ([Prov. 22:6](#)).

36. The health of any society, the happiness of its people, their prosperity, and their peace all find their roots in the teaching of children by fathers and mothers.

37. The very structure of our society is now threatened by broken homes and the tragic consequences of those homes.

38. I believe that with effort we can change this course. We must begin with parents. We must provide understanding on the part of every man and woman of the eternal purposes of life, of the obligations of marriage, and of the responsibilities of parenthood. To men who beget children and then abandon them, I say that God will hold you accountable, for these are also His children, whose cries over what you have done reach up to Him. With the obligation to beget goes the responsibility to nurture, to protect, to teach, to guide in righteousness and truth. Yours is the power and the responsibility to preside in a home where there is peace and security, love and harmony.

39. I remind mothers everywhere of the sanctity of your calling. No other can adequately take your place. No responsibility is greater, no obligation more binding than that you rear in love and peace and integrity those whom you have brought into the world.

40. To both of you, let no bickering cloud the spirit of your home. Set aside your selfishness in the interest of a far greater and eternal cause. Bring up your children in light and truth as the Lord has commanded.

41. Could you wish for anything more than peace for your children? Could you benefit society in any better way? I make you a solemn and sacred promise that if you will do this, the time will come when, looking upon those you have created, nurtured, and loved, you will see the fruits of your nurturing and get on your knees and thank the Lord for His blessing to you.

42. Now, with all of this, I know there are very many of you who are wonderful parents and whose children are growing in righteousness. Happy and productive will be their lives, and the world will be the better for them. I thank you and most warmly congratulate you. Surely you are fortunate.

43. But there are others—too many among our own—whose children, to quote the revelation, are “growing up in wickedness” and who “seek not ... the riches of

eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness” ([D&C 68:31](#)). To these I make my appeal.

44. It may not be easy. It may be fraught with disappointment and challenge. It will require courage and patience. I remind you of the faith and determination of the thirteen-year-old girl who, holding a paintbrush in her teeth, created the painting I showed you earlier. Love can make the difference—love generously given in childhood and reaching through the awkward years of youth. It will do what money lavished on children will never do.

45. —And patience, with a bridling of the tongue and self-mastery over anger. The writer of Proverbs declared, “A soft answer turneth away wrath” ([Prov. 15:1](#)).

46. —And encouragement that is quick to compliment and slow to criticize.

47. These, with prayers, will accomplish wonders. You cannot expect to do it alone. You need heaven’s help in rearing heaven’s child—your child, who is also the child of his or her Heavenly Father.

48. God, our Eternal Father, bless the parents to teach with love and patience and encouragement those who are most precious, the children who have come from Thee, that together they might be safeguarded and directed for good and, in the process of growth, bring blessings to the world of which they will be a part, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14.4 - The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting

James E. Faust

Ensign, November 1990



1. My beloved brothers and sisters and friends, I ask for your faith and prayers this afternoon as I feel moved upon to discuss a subject which I have chosen to call the greatest challenge in the world. It has to do with the privilege and

responsibility of being [good parents](#). On this subject there are about as many opinions as there are parents, yet there are few who claim to have all of the answers. I am certainly not one of them.

2. I feel that there are more outstanding young men and women among our people at present than at any other moment in my lifetime. This presupposes that most of these fine young people have come from good homes and have committed, caring parents. Even so, the most

conscientious parents feel that they may have made some mistakes. One time, when I did a thoughtless thing, I remember my own mother exclaiming, “Where did I fail?”

3. The Lord has directed, “Bring up your children in light and truth.” ([D&C 93:40](#).) To me, there is no more important human effort.

4. Being a father or a mother is not only a great challenge, it is a divine calling. It is an effort requiring consecration. President David O. McKay stated that being parents is “the greatest trust that has been given to human beings.” (The Responsibility of Parents to Their Children, pamphlet, Salt Lake City: The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints, n.d., p. 1.)

5. While few human challenges are greater than that of being good parents, few opportunities offer greater potential for joy. Surely no more important work is to be done in this world than preparing our children to be God-fearing, happy, honorable, and productive. Parents will find no more fulfilling happiness than to have their children honor them and their teachings. It is the glory of parenthood. John testified, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” ([3 Jn. 1:4](#).) In my opinion, the teaching, rearing, and training of children requires more intelligence, intuitive understanding, humility, strength, wisdom, spirituality, perseverance, and hard work than any other challenge we might have in life. This is especially so when moral foundations of honor and decency are eroding around us. To have successful homes, values must be taught, and there must be rules, there must be standards, and there must be absolutes. Many societies give parents very little support in teaching and honoring moral values. A number of cultures are becoming essentially valueless, and many of the younger people in those societies are becoming moral cynics.

6. As societies as a whole have decayed and lost their moral identity and so many homes are broken, the best hope is to turn greater attention and effort to the teaching of the next generation—our children. In order to do this, we must first reinforce the primary teachers of children. Chief among these are the parents and other [family](#) members, and the best environment should be in the home. Somehow, some way, we must try harder to make our homes stronger so that they will stand as sanctuaries against the unwholesome, pervasive moral dry rot around us. Harmony, happiness, peace, and love in the home can help give children the required inner strength to cope with life’s challenges. Barbara Bush, wife of President George

Bush, a few months ago said to the graduates of Wellesley College:

7. “But whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: Fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first. You must read to your children and you must hug your children and you must love your children. Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House but on what happens inside your house.” (Washington Post, 2 June 1990, p. 2.)

8. To be a good father and mother requires that the parents defer many of their own needs and desires in favor of the needs of their children. As a consequence of this sacrifice, conscientious parents develop a nobility of character and learn to put into practice the selfless truths taught by the Savior Himself.

9. I have the greatest respect for single parents who struggle and sacrifice, trying against almost superhuman odds to hold the family together. They should be honored and helped in their heroic efforts. But any mother’s or father’s task is much easier where there are two functioning parents in the home. Children often challenge and tax the strength and wisdom of both parents.

10. A few years ago, Bishop Stanley Smoot was interviewed by President Spencer W. Kimball. President Kimball asked, “How often do you have family prayer?”

11. Bishop Smoot answered, “We try to have family prayer twice a day, but we average about once.”

12. President Kimball answered, “In the past, having family prayer once a day may have been all right. But in the future it will not be enough if we are going to save our families.”

13. I wonder if having casual and infrequent family home evening will be enough in the future to fortify our children with sufficient moral strength. In the future, infrequent family scripture study may be inadequate to arm our children with the virtue necessary to withstand the moral decay of the environment in which they will live. Where in the world will the children learn chastity, integrity, honesty, and basic human decency if not at home? These values will, of course, be reinforced at church, but parental teaching is more constant.

14. When parents try to teach their children to avoid danger, it is no answer for parents to say to their children, “We are experienced and wise in the ways of the world, and we can get closer to the edge of the cliff

than you.” Parental hypocrisy can make children cynical and unbelieving of what they are taught in the home. For instance, when parents attend movies they forbid their children to see, parental credibility is diminished. If children are expected to be honest, parents must be honest. If children are expected to be virtuous, parents must be virtuous. If you expect your children to be honorable, you must be honorable.

15. Among the other values children should be taught are respect for others, beginning with the child’s own parents and family; respect for the symbols of faith and patriotic beliefs of others; respect for law and order; respect for the property of others; respect for authority. Paul reminds us that children should “learn first to shew piety at home.” ([1 Tim. 5:4.](#))

16. One of the most difficult parental challenges is to appropriately discipline children. Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh or what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment. Brigham Young counseled, “If you are ever called upon to chasten a person, never chasten beyond the balm you have within you to bind up.” (In Journal of Discourses, 9:124–25.) Direction and discipline are, however, certainly an indispensable part of child rearing. If parents do not discipline their children, then the public will discipline them in a way the parents do not like. Without discipline, children will not respect either the rules of the home or of society.

17. A principal purpose for discipline is to teach obedience. President David O. McKay stated, “Parents who fail to teach obedience to their children, if [their] homes do not develop obedience society will demand it and get it. It is therefore better for the home, with its kindness, sympathy and understanding to train the child in obedience rather than callously to leave him to the brutal and unsympathetic discipline that society will impose if the home has not already fulfilled its obligation.” (The Responsibility of Parents to Their Children, p. 3.)

18. An essential part of teaching children to be disciplined and responsible is to have them learn to work. As we grow up, many of us are like the man who said, “I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours.” (Jerome Klapka Jerome, in The

International Dictionary of Thoughts, comp. John P. Bradley, Leo F. Daniels, and Thomas C. Jones (Chicago: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Co., 1969, p. 782.) Again, the best teachers of the principle of work are the parents themselves. For me, work became a joy when I first worked alongside my father, grandfather, uncles, and brothers. I am sure that I was often more of an aggravation than a help, but the memories are sweet and the lessons learned are valuable. Children need to learn responsibility and independence. Are the parents personally taking the time to show and demonstrate and explain so that children can, as Lehi taught, “act for themselves and not ... be acted upon”? ([2 Ne. 2:26](#).)

19. Luther Burbank, one of the world’s greatest horticulturists, said, “If we had paid no more attention to our plants than we have to our children, we would now be living in a jungle of weeds.” (In Elbert Hubbard’s *Scrap Book*, New York: Wm. H. Wise and Co., 1923, p. 227.)

20. Children are also beneficiaries of moral agency by which we are all afforded the opportunity to progress, grow, and develop. That agency also permits children to pursue the alternate choice of selfishness, wastefulness, self-indulgence, and self-destruction. Children often express this agency when very young.

21. Let parents who have been conscientious, loving, and concerned and who have lived the principles of righteousness as best they could be comforted in knowing that they are good parents despite the actions of some of their children. The children themselves have a responsibility to listen, obey, and, having been taught, to learn. Parents cannot always answer for all their children’s misconduct because they cannot ensure the children’s good behavior. Some few children could tax even Solomon’s wisdom and Job’s patience.

22. There is often a special challenge for those parents who are affluent or overly indulgent. In a sense, some children in those circumstances hold their parents hostage by withholding their support of parental rules unless the parents acquiesce to the children’s demands. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said, “Those who do too much for their children will soon find they can do nothing with their children. So many children have been so much done for they are almost done in.” (Ensign, May 1975, p. 101.) It seems to be human nature that we do not fully appreciate material things we have not ourselves earned.

23. There is a certain irony in the fact that some parents are so anxious for their children to be accepted by and be popular with their peers; yet these same

parents fear that their children may be doing the things their peers are doing.

24. Generally, those children who make the decision and have the resolve to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and illicit sex are those who have adopted and internalized the strong values of their homes as lived by their parents. In times of difficult decisions they are most likely to follow the teachings of their parents rather than the example of their peers or the sophistries of the media which glamorize alcohol consumption, illicit sex, infidelity, dishonesty, and other vices. They are like Helaman’s two thousand young men who “had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” from death. “And they rehearsed ... the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.” ([Alma 56:47–48](#).)

25. What seems to help cement parental teachings and values in place in children’s lives is a firm belief in Deity. When this belief becomes part of their very souls, they have inner strength. So, of all that is important to be taught, what should parents teach? The scriptures tell us that parents are to teach their children “faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of [baptism](#) and the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#),” and “the doctrine of repentance.” ([D&C 68:25](#).) These truths must be taught in the home. They cannot be taught in the public schools, nor will they be fostered by the government or by society. Of course, Church programs can help, but the most effective teaching takes place in the home.

26. Parental teaching moments need not be big or dramatic or powerful. We learn this from the Master Teacher. Charles Henry Parkhurst said:

27. “The completed beauty of Christ’s life is only the added beauty of little inconspicuous acts of beauty—talking with the woman at the well; showing the young ruler the stealthy ambition laid away in his heart that kept him out of the Kingdom of Heaven; ... teaching a little knot of followers how to pray; kindling a fire and broiling fish that his disciples might have a breakfast waiting for them when they came ashore from a night of fishing, cold, tired, and discouraged. All of these things, you see, let us in so easily into the real quality and tone of [Christ’s] interests, so specific, so narrowed down, so enlisted in what is small, so engrossed with what is minute.” (“Kindness and Love,” in *Leaves of Gold*, Honesdale, Pa.: Coslet Publishing Co., 1938, p. 177.)

28. And so it is with being parents. The little things are the big things sewn into the family tapestry by a

thousand threads of love, faith, discipline, sacrifice, patience, and work.

29. There are some great spiritual promises which may help faithful parents in this church. Children of eternal sealings may have visited upon them the divine promises made to their valiant forebears who nobly kept their covenants. Covenants remembered by parents will be remembered by God. The children may thus become the beneficiaries and inheritors of these great covenants and promises. This is because they are the children of the covenant. (See Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, pp. 110–11.)

30. God bless the struggling, sacrificing, honorable parents of this world. May He especially honor the covenants kept by faithful parents among our people and watch over these children of the covenant. I pray that this may be so in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14.5 - The Moral Force of Women

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Ensign, November 2013



1. From age immemorial, societies have relied on the moral force of women. While certainly not the only positive influence at work in society, the moral foundation provided by women has proved uniquely beneficial to the

common good. Perhaps, because it is pervasive, this contribution of women is often underappreciated. I wish to express [gratitude](#) for the influence of good women, identify some of the philosophies and trends that threaten women’s strength and standing, and voice a plea to women to cultivate the innate moral power within them.

2. Women bring with them into the world a certain virtue, a divine gift that makes them adept at instilling such qualities as faith, courage, empathy, and refinement in relationships and in cultures. When praising the “unfeigned faith” he found in Timothy, Paul noted that this faith “dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice.”¹

3. Years ago, while living in Mexico, I observed firsthand what Paul meant. I recall a particular young mother, one of many among the women of the Church in Mexico whose faith in God graces their lives so naturally that they seem scarcely aware of it. This lovely woman radiated a moral authority, born of goodness, that influenced all around her for good. With her husband, she sacrificed a number of pleasures and

possessions for their higher priorities, seemingly without a second thought. Her ability to perform feats of lifting, bending, and balancing with her children was near superhuman. The demands on her were many and her tasks often repetitive and mundane, yet underneath it all was a beautiful serenity, a sense of being about God’s work. As with the Savior, she was ennobled by blessing others through service and sacrifice. She was love personified.

4. I have been remarkably blessed by the moral influence of women, in particular my mother and my wife. Among other women that I look to in gratitude is Anna Daines. Anna and her husband, Henry, and their four children were among the pioneers of the Church in New Jersey, in the United States. Beginning in the 1930s, when Henry was a doctoral student at Rutgers University, he and Anna worked tirelessly with school and civic organizations in Metuchen, where they lived, to overcome deeply rooted prejudice against Mormons and to make the community a better place for all parents to raise their children.

5. Anna, for example, volunteered at the Metuchen YMCA and made herself indispensable. Within a year she was appointed president of the Mothers’ Auxiliary and then “was asked to run for one of the three women’s positions on the YMCA board of directors. She won without opposition, and so joined the very council that only a few years before had refused to let the Saints meet in their building!”²

6. My [family](#) moved into the New Brunswick Ward when I was a teenager. Sister Daines took notice of me and often expressed her confidence in my abilities and potential, which inspired me to reach high—higher than I would have without her encouragement. Once, because of a thoughtful and timely warning from her, I avoided a situation that would surely have led to regret. Although she is no longer here, Anna Daines’s influence continues to be felt and reflected in the lives of her descendants and countless others, myself included.

7. My grandmother Adena Warnick Swenson taught me to be conscientious in priesthood service. She encouraged me to memorize the sacramental blessings on the bread and water, explaining that in this way I could express them with greater understanding and feeling. Observing how she sustained my grandfather, a stake patriarch, engendered in me a reverence for sacred things. Grandma Swenson never learned how to drive a car, but she knew how to help boys become priesthood men.

8. A woman's moral influence is nowhere more powerfully felt or more beneficially employed than in the home. There is no better setting for rearing the rising generation than the traditional family, where a father and a mother work in harmony to provide for, teach, and nurture their children. Where this ideal does not exist, people strive to duplicate its benefits as best they can in their particular circumstances.

9. In all events, a mother can exert an influence unequaled by any other person in any other relationship. By the power of her example and teaching, her sons learn to respect womanhood and to incorporate discipline and high moral standards in their own lives. Her daughters learn to cultivate their own virtue and to stand up for what is right, again and again, however unpopular. A mother's love and high expectations lead her children to act responsibly without excuses, to be serious about education and personal development, and to make ongoing contributions to the well-being of all around them. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once asked: "When the real history of mankind is fully disclosed, will it feature the echoes of gunfire or the shaping sound of lullabies? The great armistices made by military men or the peacemaking of women in homes and in neighborhoods? Will what happened in cradles and kitchens prove to be more controlling than what happened in congresses?"³

10. Most sacred is a woman's role in the creation of life. We know that our physical bodies have a divine origin⁴ and that we must experience both a physical birth and a spiritual rebirth to reach the highest realms in God's celestial kingdom.⁵ Thus, women play an integral part (sometimes at the risk of their own lives) in God's work and glory "to bring to pass the [immortality](#) and eternal life of man."⁶ As grandmothers, mothers, and role models, women have been the guardians of the wellspring of life, teaching each generation the importance of sexual purity—of chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage. In this way, they have been a civilizing influence in society; they have brought out the best in men; they have perpetuated wholesome environments in which to raise secure and healthy children.

11. Sisters, I don't want to overpraise you as we sometimes do in Mother's Day talks that make you cringe. You don't have to be perfect;⁷ I don't claim that you are (with one possible exception who is sitting nearby at the moment). What I mean to say is that whether you are single or married, whether you have borne children or not, whether you are old, young, or in between, your moral authority is vital, and perhaps we

have begun to take it and you for granted. Certainly there are trends and forces at work that would weaken and even eliminate your influence, to the great detriment of individuals, families, and society at large. Let me mention three as a caution and a warning.

12. A pernicious philosophy that undermines women's moral influence is the devaluation of marriage and of motherhood and homemaking as a career. Some view homemaking with outright contempt, arguing it demeans women and that the relentless demands of raising children are a form of exploitation.⁸ They ridicule what they call "the mommy track" as a career. This is not fair or right. We do not diminish the value of what women or men achieve in any worthy endeavor or career—we all benefit from those achievements—but we still recognize there is not a higher good than motherhood and fatherhood in marriage. There is no superior career, and no amount of money, authority, or public acclaim can exceed the ultimate rewards of family. Whatever else a woman may accomplish, her moral influence is no more optimally employed than here.

13. Attitudes toward human sexuality threaten the moral authority of women on several fronts. [Abortion](#) for personal or social convenience strikes at the heart of a woman's most sacred powers and destroys her moral authority. The same is true of sexual immorality and of revealing dress that not only debases women but reinforces the lie that a woman's sexuality is what defines her worth.

14. There has long been a cultural double standard that expected women to be sexually circumspect while excusing male immorality. The unfairness of such a double standard is obvious, and it has been justifiably criticized and rejected. In that rejection, one would have hoped that men would rise to the higher, single standard, but just the opposite has occurred—women and girls are now encouraged to be as promiscuous as the double standard expected men to be. Where once women's higher standards demanded commitment and responsibility from men, we now have sexual relations without conscience, fatherless families, and growing poverty. Equal-opportunity promiscuity simply robs women of their moral influence and degrades all of society.⁹ In this hollow bargain, it is men who are "liberated" and women and children who suffer most.

15. A third area of concern comes from those who, in the name of equality, want to erase all differences between the masculine and the feminine. Often this takes the form of pushing women to adopt more masculine traits—be more aggressive, tough, and

confrontational. It is now common in movies and video games to see women in terribly violent roles, leaving dead bodies and mayhem in their wake. It is soul-numbing to see men in such roles and certainly no less so when women are the ones perpetrating and suffering the violence.

16. Former Young Women general president Margaret D. Nadauld taught: “The world has enough women who are tough; we need women who are tender. There are enough women who are coarse; we need women who are kind. There are enough women who are rude; we need women who are refined. We have enough women of fame and fortune; we need more women of faith. We have enough greed; we need more goodness. We have enough vanity; we need more virtue. We have enough popularity; we need more purity.”¹⁰ In blurring feminine and masculine differences, we lose the distinct, complementary gifts of women and men that together produce a greater whole.

17. My plea to women and girls today is to protect and cultivate the moral force that is within you. Preserve that innate virtue and the unique gifts you bring with you into the world. Your intuition is to do good and to be good, and as you follow the Holy Spirit, your moral authority and influence will grow. To the young women I say, don’t lose that moral force even before you have it in full measure. Take particular care that your language is clean, not coarse; that your dress reflects modesty, not vanity; and that your conduct manifests purity, not promiscuity. You cannot lift others to virtue on the one hand if you are entertaining vice on the other.

18. Sisters, of all your associations, it is your [relationship with God](#), your Heavenly Father, who is the source of your moral power, that you must always put first in your life. Remember that Jesus’s power came through His single-minded devotion to the will of the Father. He never varied from that which pleased His Father.¹¹ Strive to be that kind of disciple of the Father and the Son, and your influence will never fade.

19. And do not be afraid to apply that influence without fear or apology. “Be ready always to give an answer to every [man, woman, and child] that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”¹² “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”¹³ “Bring up your children in light and truth.”¹⁴ “Teach [them] to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.”¹⁵

20. In these exhortations to women, let no one willfully misunderstand. By praising and encouraging the moral force in women, I am not saying that men and boys are somehow excused from their own duty to stand for truth and righteousness, that their responsibility to serve, sacrifice, and minister is somehow less than that of women or can be left to women. Brethren, let us stand with women, share their burdens, and cultivate our own companion moral authority.

21. Dear sisters, we rely on the moral force you bring to the world, to marriage, to family, to the Church. We rely on blessings you bring down from heaven by your prayers and faith. We pray for your security, welfare, and happiness and for your influence to be sustained. In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

Sources

1. [2 Timothy 1:5](#).
2. Orson Scott Card, “Neighborliness: Daines Style,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1977, 19.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Women of God,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 10–11.
4. See [Moses 2:27](#).
5. See [Moses 6:57–60](#).
6. [Moses 1:39](#).
7. “A century ago, attachment scholar John Bowlby found that the bond created through the innumerable caring interactions between a mother and child is the critical foundation for social-emotional development. ... And feminist scholar Sara Ruddick identified a mother’s ‘attentive love’ as the core of effective parenting. Through the ‘patient eye of love,’ mothers develop a special knowledge of their children—a knowledge that gives them unique insight into what the truly ‘best practices’ for each child should be” (Jenet Jacob Erickson, “Love, Not Perfection, Root of Good Mothering,” *Deseret News*, May 12, 2013, G3).
8. It is true that many women over many generations have been exploited or saddled with unfair burdens both in family and employment, but selflessness and sacrifice need not and should not become abusive or exploitative. Elder Bruce C. Hafen observed: “If being ‘selfless’ means a woman must give up her own inner identity and personal growth, that understanding of selflessness is wrong. ... But today’s liberationist model goes too far the other way, stereotyping women as excessively independent of their families. A more sensible view is that husbands and wives are interdependent with each other. ... The critics who moved mothers from dependence to independence skipped the fertile middle ground of interdependence. Those who moved mothers from selflessness to selfishness skipped the fertile middle ground of self-chosen service that contributes toward a woman’s personal growth. Because of these excesses, debates about the value of motherhood have, ironically, caused the general society to discount not only mothers but women in general” (“Motherhood and the Moral Influence of Women” [remarks to the World Congress of Families II, Geneva, Plenary Session IV, Nov. 16, 1999], http://worldcongress.org/wcf2_spkrs/wcf2_hafen.htm).
9. One mother in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial observed: “With the exception of some Mormons, evangelicals and Orthodox Jews, scads of us don’t know how to teach our own sons and daughters not to give away their bodies so readily. ... Still, in my own circle of girlfriends, the desire to push back is strong. I don’t know one of

them who doesn't have feelings of lingering discomfort regarding her own sexual past. And not one woman I've ever asked about the subject has said that she wishes she'd 'experimented' more" (Jennifer Moses, "Why Do We Let Them Dress Like That?" Wall Street Journal, Mar. 19, 2011, C3).

10. Margaret D. Nadauld, "The Joy of Womanhood," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 15; or *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 18.

11. See [John 8:29](#).

12. [1 Peter 3:15](#).

13. [2 Timothy 4:2](#).

14. [Doctrine and Covenants 93:40](#).

15. [Doctrine and Covenants 68:28](#).

14.6 - We'll Ascend Together

President Linda K. Burton

Ensign, May 2015



1. As covenant-keeping women and men, we need to lift each other and help each other become the people the Lord would have us become.

2. Next to the inspiring talks, music, and prayers that always touch our hearts

during general conference, I have been told by many sisters that what they love most is watching the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve as they exit this podium with their eternal companions. And don't we all enjoy hearing the Brethren tenderly express their love for them?

3. Speaking about his wife, Donna, President Boyd K. Packer said, "Because of the office I hold, I have a solemn obligation to tell the truth: She's perfect."¹

4. "She is the sunshine of my life,"² said President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of his wife, Harriet.

5. President Henry B. Eyring, referring to his wife, Kathleen, said, "She [is] a person who has always made me want to be the very best that I can be."³

6. And President Thomas S. Monson, speaking of his beloved Frances, said, "She was the love of my life, my trusted confidant, and my closest friend. To say that I miss her does not begin to convey the depth of my feelings."⁴

7. I too would like to express my love for my beloved companion, Craig. He is a precious gift to me! Referring to my husband, a cherished and sacred phrase in my patriarchal blessing promises that my life and the lives of my children will "be well in his keeping." It is clear to me that Craig is the fulfillment of that promise. Borrowing from the words of Mark Twain, I say that "life without [Craig] would not be life."⁵ I love him, heart and soul!

Divine Roles and Responsibilities

8. Today I wish to honor husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and uncles who know who they are and who are doing their best to fulfill their God-given roles as described in the [family](#) proclamation, including righteously presiding and providing for and protecting their families. Please know that I am painfully aware that the topics of fatherhood, motherhood, and marriage can be troubling for many. I know that some Church members feel that their homes will never reach what they perceive to be the ideal. Many are hurting because of neglect, abuse, addictions, and incorrect traditions and culture. I do not condone the actions of men or women who have willfully or even ignorantly caused pain, anguish, and despair in their homes. But today I am speaking of something else.

9. I am convinced that a husband is never more attractive to his wife than when he is serving in his God-given roles as a worthy priesthood holder—most important in the home. I love and believe these words from President Packer to worthy husbands and fathers: "You have the power of the priesthood directly from the Lord to protect your home. There will be times when all that stands as a shield between your family and the adversary's mischief will be that power."⁶

Spiritual Leaders and Teachers in the Home

10. Earlier this year I attended the funeral of an extraordinary ordinary man—my husband's uncle Don. One of Uncle Don's sons shared an experience he had as a small child, shortly after his parents had purchased their first home. Because there were five small children to feed and clothe, there was not enough money to fence the yard. Taking seriously one of his divine roles as the protector of his family, Uncle Don drove a few small wooden stakes into the ground, took some string, and tied the string from stake to stake all around the yard. He then called his children to him. He showed them the stakes and string and explained to them that if they would stay on the inside of that makeshift fence, they would be safe.

11. One day the visiting teachers watched in disbelief as they approached the house and saw five little children standing obediently at the edge of the string, looking longingly at a ball that had bounced beyond their boundaries and out into the street. One little child ran to get their daddy, who, in response, ran and retrieved the ball.

12. Later in the funeral, the oldest son tearfully expressed that all he had ever hoped in this life was to be like his beloved father.

13. President Ezra Taft Benson said:

14. “Oh, husbands and fathers in Israel, you can do so much for the salvation and exaltation of your families! ...

15. “Remember your sacred calling as a father in Israel—your most important calling in time and eternity—a calling from which you will never be released.”

16. “You must help create a home where the Spirit of the Lord can abide.”⁷

17. How applicable those prophetic words are today.

18. It must be difficult, at best, for covenant men to live in a world that not only demeans their divine roles and responsibilities but also sends false messages about what it means to be a “real man.” One false message is “It’s all about me.” On the other end of the scale is the degrading and mocking message that husbands and fathers are no longer needed. I plead with you not to listen to Satan’s lies! He has forfeited that sacred privilege of ever becoming a husband or father. Because he is jealous of those who have the sacred roles he will never fill, he is intent on making “all men ... miserable like unto himself”!⁸

Lifting and Helping in Our Complementary Roles

19. Brothers and sisters, we need each other! As covenant-keeping women and men, we need to lift each other and help each other become the people the Lord would have us become. And we need to work together to lift the rising generation and help them reach their divine potential as heirs of eternal life. We could do as Elder Robert D. Hales and his wife, Mary, have done and follow the proverb “Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee, and we’ll ascend together.”⁹

20. We know from the scriptures that “it is not good that ... man should be alone.” That is why our Heavenly Father made “an help meet for him.”¹⁰ The phrase help meet means “a helper suited to, worthy of, or corresponding to him.”¹¹ For example, our two hands are similar to each other but not exactly the same. In fact, they are exact opposites, but they complement each other and are suited to each other. Working together, they are stronger.¹²

21. In a chapter about families, the Church handbook contains this statement: “The nature of male and female spirits is such that they complete each other.”¹³ Please note that it does not say “compete with each other” but “complete each other”! We are here to help, lift, and rejoice with each other as we try to become our very best selves. Sister Barbara B. Smith wisely taught, “There is so much more of happiness to be had

when we can rejoice in another’s successes and not just in our own.”¹⁴ When we seek to “complete” rather than “compete,” it is so much easier to cheer each other on!

22. When I was a young mother of several small children, at the end of days filled with diapering, dish washing, and disciplining, no one sang more emphatically the Primary song “I’m so glad when daddy comes home.”¹⁵ I’m sad to admit, however, I was not always cheerful when Craig seemed to bounce through the door after a hard day of work. He always greeted each of us with a hug and kiss and turned many difficult and sometimes disastrous days into delightful daddy times. I wish I had been a little less preoccupied with the endless list of to-dos still to be done and had more wisely focused, like he did, on things that mattered most. I would have stopped more often and enjoyed sacred family time and would have thanked him more often for blessing our lives!

Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words to Each Other

23. Not long ago, a faithful sister in the Church shared with me a deep concern she had been praying about for some time. Her concern was for some of the sisters in her ward. She told me how it hurt her heart to observe that they sometimes spoke disrespectfully to their husbands and about their husbands, even in front of their children. She then told me how as a young woman she had earnestly desired and prayed to find and marry a worthy priesthood holder and build a happy home with him. She had grown up in a home where her mother had “ruled the roost” and her father had cowered to her mother’s demands in order to keep peace at home. She felt that there was a better way. She had not seen it modeled in the home she grew up in, but as she prayed fervently for guidance, the Lord blessed her to know how to create a home with her husband where the Spirit would be warmly welcomed. I have been in that home and can testify it is a holy place!

24. Sisters and brothers, how often do we intentionally “speak kind words to each other”?¹⁶

25. We might test ourselves by asking a few questions. With a little adaptation, these questions can apply to most of us, whether we are married or single, whatever our home situation might be.

1. When was the last time I sincerely praised my companion, either alone or in the presence of our children?

2. When was the last time I thanked, expressed love for, or earnestly pleaded in faith for him or her in prayer?
3. When was the last time I stopped myself from saying something I knew could be hurtful?
4. When was the last time I apologized and humbly asked for [forgiveness](#)—without adding the words “but if only you had” or “but if only you hadn’t”?
5. When was the last time I chose to be happy rather than demanding to be “right”?
26. Now, if any of these questions lead you to squirm or feel a tinge of guilt, remember that Elder David A. Bednar has taught that “guilt is to our spirit what pain is to our body—a warning of danger and a protection from additional damage.”[17](#)
27. I invite each of us to heed Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s heartfelt plea: “Brothers and sisters, in this long eternal quest to be more like our Savior, may we try to be ‘perfect’ men and women in at least this one way now—by offending not in word, or more positively put, by speaking with a new tongue, the tongue of angels.”[18](#)
28. As I have prepared for this opportunity today, the Spirit has taught me, and I have committed to speak words of kindness more often to my cherished companion and about him, to lift the men in my family and express [gratitude](#) for the ways they fulfill their divine and complementary roles. And I have committed to follow the proverb “Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee, and we’ll ascend together.”
29. Will you join me in seeking the help of the [Holy Ghost](#) to teach us how we can better lift each other in our complementary roles as covenant sons and daughters of our loving heavenly parents?

30. I know that through the enabling power of the Atonement of [Jesus Christ](#) and our faith in Him, we can do it. I pray we will put our trust in Him to help us help each other live happily and eternally as we ascend together, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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8. [2 Nephi 2:27](#).
9. See Robert D. Hales, “Strengthening Families: Our Sacred Duty,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 34; *Liahona*, July 1999, 40; see also LaRene Gaunt, “Elder Robert D. Hales: ‘Return with Honor,’” *Ensign*, July 1994, 51; *Liahona*, Apr. 1995, 31.
10. [Genesis 2:18](#).
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15. Providing for Temporal Needs

15.1 - All Is Safely Gathered In: Family Finances

Message from the First Presidency

1. Dear Brothers and Sisters:
2. Latter-day Saints have been counseled for many years to prepare for adversity by having a little money set aside. Doing so adds immeasurably to security and well-being. Every family has a responsibility to provide for its own needs to the extent possible.

3. We encourage you wherever you may live in the world to prepare for adversity by looking to the condition of your finances. We urge you to be modest in your expenditures; discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid debt. Pay off debt as quickly as you can, and free yourselves from this bondage. Save a little money regularly to gradually build a financial reserve.
4. If you have paid your debts and have a financial reserve, even though it be small, you and your family

will feel more secure and enjoy greater peace in your hearts.

5. May the Lord bless you in your family financial efforts.

6. The First Presidency

The Basics of Family Finances

Pay Tithes and Offerings

7. Successful family finances begin with the payment of an honest tithe and the giving of a generous fast offering. The Lord has promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out great blessings upon those who pay tithes and offerings faithfully (see [Malachi 3:10](#)).

Avoid Debt

8. Spending less money than you make is essential to your financial security. Avoid debt, with the exception of buying a modest home or paying for education or other vital needs. Save money to purchase what you need. If you are in debt, pay it off as quickly as possible.

Use a Budget

9. Keep a record of your expenditures. Record and review monthly income and expenses. Determine how to reduce what you spend for nonessentials.

10. Use this information to establish a family budget. Plan what you will give as Church donations, how much you will save, and what you will spend for food, housing, utilities, transportation, clothing, insurance, and so on. Discipline yourself to live within your budget plan. (See the Budget Worksheet on the back page.)

Build a Reserve

11. Gradually build a financial reserve, and use it for emergencies only. If you save a little money regularly, you will be surprised how much accumulates over time.

Teach Family Members

12. Teach family members the principles of financial management. Involve them in creating a budget and setting family financial goals. Teach the principles of hard work, frugality, and saving. Stress the importance of obtaining as much education as possible.

15.2 - Becoming Provident Providers Temporally and Spiritually

Elder Robert D. Hales

Ensign, May 2009



1. When we live providently, we can provide for ourselves and our families and also follow the Savior's example to serve and bless others.

2. How blessed we are to be led by a living prophet! Growing up during the

Great Depression, President Thomas S. Monson learned how to serve others. Often his mother asked him to deliver food to needy neighbors, and she would give homeless men odd jobs in exchange for home-cooked meals. Later as a young bishop, he was taught by President J. Reuben Clark, "Be kind to the widow and look after the poor" (in Thomas S. Monson, "A Provident Plan—A Precious Promise," *Ensign*, May 1986, 62). President Monson looked after 84 widows and cared for them until they passed away. Through the years, his service to members and neighbors throughout the world has become the hallmark of his ministry. We are grateful to have his example. Thank you, President Monson.

3. Brothers and sisters, as did President Monson, our children are growing up in times of economic uncertainty. Just as our grandparents and great-grandparents learned vital lessons through economic adversity, what we learn now, in our present circumstances, can bless us and our posterity for generations to come.

4. Today I speak to all whose freedom to choose has been diminished by the effects of ill-advised choices of the past. I speak specifically of choices that have led to excessive debt and addictions to food, drugs, [pornography](#), and other patterns of thought and action that diminish one's sense of self-worth. All of these excesses affect us individually and undermine our [family](#) relationships. Of course some debt incurred for education, a modest home, or a basic automobile may be necessary to provide for a family. Unfortunately however, additional debt is incurred when we cannot control our wants and addictive impulses. And for both debt and addiction, the hopeful solution is the same—we must turn to the Lord and follow His commandments. We must want more than anything else to change our lives so that we can break the cycle of debt and our uncontrolled wants. I pray that in the

next few minutes, and throughout this conference, you will be filled with hope in our Savior, [Jesus Christ](#), and find hope in the doctrines of His restored gospel.

5. Our challenges, including those we create by our own decisions, are part of our test in mortality. Let me assure you that your situation is not beyond the reach of our Savior. Through Him, every struggle can be for our experience and our good (see [D&C 122:7](#)). Each temptation we overcome is to strengthen us, not destroy us. The Lord will never allow us to suffer beyond what we can endure (see [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)).

6. We must remember that the adversary knows us extremely well. He knows where, when, and how to tempt us. If we are obedient to the promptings of the [Holy Ghost](#), we can learn to recognize the adversary's enticements. Before we yield to temptation, we must learn to say with unflinching resolve, "Get thee behind me, Satan" ([Matthew 16:23](#)).

7. Our success is never measured by how strongly we are tempted but by how faithfully we respond. We must ask for help from our Heavenly Father and seek strength through the Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. In both temporal and spiritual things, obtaining this divine assistance enables us to become provident providers for ourselves and others.

What is a provident provider?

8. All of us are responsible to provide for ourselves and our families in both temporal and spiritual ways. To provide providently, we must practice the principles of provident living: joyfully living within our means, being content with what we have, avoiding excessive debt, and diligently saving and preparing for rainy-day emergencies. When we live providently, we can provide for ourselves and our families and also follow the Savior's example to serve and bless others.

9. Being provident providers, we must keep that most basic commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" ([Exodus 20:17](#)). Our world is fraught with feelings of entitlement. Some of us feel embarrassed, ashamed, less worthwhile if our family does not have everything the neighbors have. As a result, we go into debt to buy things we can't afford—and things we do not really need. Whenever we do this, we become poor temporally and spiritually. We give away some of our precious, priceless agency and put ourselves in self-imposed servitude. Money we could have used to care for ourselves and others must now be used to pay our debts. What remains is often only enough to meet our most basic physical needs. Living at the subsistence level, we become depressed, our self-worth is affected,

and our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and the Lord are weakened. We do not have the time, energy, or interest to seek spiritual things.

10. How then do we avoid and overcome the patterns of debt and addiction to temporal, worldly things? May I share with you two lessons in provident living that can help each of us. These lessons, along with many other important lessons of my life, were taught to me by my wife and eternal companion. These lessons were learned at two different times in our marriage—both on occasions when I wanted to buy her a special gift.

11. The first lesson was learned when we were newly married and had very little money. I was in the air force, and we had missed Christmas together. I was on assignment overseas. When I got home, I saw a beautiful dress in a store window and suggested to my wife that if she liked it, we would buy it. Mary went into the dressing room of the store. After a moment the salesclerk came out, brushed by me, and returned the dress to its place in the store window. As we left the store, I asked, "What happened?" She replied, "It was a beautiful dress, but we can't afford it!" Those words went straight to my heart. I have learned that the three most loving words are "I love you," and the four most caring words for those we love are "We can't afford it."

12. The second lesson was learned several years later when we were more financially secure. Our wedding anniversary was approaching, and I wanted to buy Mary a fancy coat to show my love and appreciation for our many happy years together. When I asked what she thought of the coat I had in mind, she replied with words that again penetrated my heart and mind. "Where would I wear it?" she asked. (At the time she was a ward Relief Society president helping to minister to needy families.)

13. Then she taught me an unforgettable lesson. She looked me in the eyes and sweetly asked, "Are you buying this for me or for you?" In other words, she was asking, "Is the purpose of this gift to show your love for me or to show me that you are a good provider or to prove something to the world?" I pondered her question and realized I was thinking less about her and our family and more about me.

14. After that we had a serious, life-changing discussion about provident living, and both of us agreed that our money would be better spent in paying down our home mortgage and adding to our children's education fund.

15. These two lessons are the essence of provident living. When faced with the choice to buy, consume, or engage in worldly things and activities, we all need to learn to say to one another, “We can’t afford it, even though we want it!” or “We can afford it, but we don’t need it—and we really don’t even want it!”

16. There is an equally important principle underlying these lessons: we can learn much from communicating with our husbands and wives. As we counsel and work together in family councils, we can help each other become provident providers and teach our children to live providently as well.

17. The foundation of provident living is the law of the tithe. The primary purpose of this law is to help us develop faith in our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. [Tithing](#) helps us overcome our desires for the things of this world and willingly make sacrifices for others. Tithing is the great equitable law, for no matter how rich or poor we are, all of us pay the same one-tenth of our increase annually (see [D&C 119:4](#)), and all of us receive blessings so great “that there shall not be room enough to receive [them]” ([Malachi 3:10](#)).

18. In addition to our tithes, we should also be an example with the payment of fast offerings. A fast offering is at least the cost of the two consecutive meals from which we fast each month. By not eating these two meals, we draw close to the Lord in humility and prayer and also participate in anonymous giving to bless our brothers and sisters all over the world.

19. Another important way we help our children learn to be provident providers is by establishing a family budget. We should regularly review our family income, savings, and spending plan in family council meetings. This will teach our children to recognize the difference between wants and needs and to plan ahead for meaningful use of family resources.

20. When our boys were young, we had a family council and set a goal to take a “dream vacation” down the Colorado River. When any of us wanted to buy something during the next year, we would ask each other, “Do we really want to buy that thing now, or do we want to take our dream trip later?” This was a wonderful teaching experience in choosing provident living. By not satisfying our every immediate want, we obtained the more desirable reward of family togetherness and fond memories for years to come.

21. Whenever we want to experience or possess something that will impact us and our resources, we may want to ask ourselves, “Is the benefit temporary, or will it have eternal value and significance?”

Truthfully answering these questions may help us avoid excessive debt and other addictive behavior.

22. In seeking to overcome debt and addictive behaviors, we should remember that addiction is the craving of the natural man, and it can never be satisfied. It is an insatiable appetite. When we are addicted, we seek those worldly possessions or physical pleasures that seem to entice us. But as children of God, our deepest hunger and what we should be seeking is what the Lord alone can provide—His love, His sense of worth, His security, His confidence, His hope in the future, and assurance of His love, which brings us eternal joy.

23. We must want, more than anything else, to do our Heavenly Father’s will and providently provide for ourselves and others. We must say, as did King Lamoni’s father, “I will give away all my sins to know thee” ([Alma 22:18](#)). Then we can go to Him with steadfast determination and promise Him, “I will do whatever it takes.” Through prayer, fasting, obedience to the commandments, [priesthood blessings](#), and His atoning sacrifice, we will feel His love and power in our lives. We will receive His spiritual guidance and strength through the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Only through our Lord’s Atonement can we obtain a mighty change of heart (see [Mosiah 5:2](#); [Alma 5:14](#)) and experience a mighty change in our addictive behavior.

24. With all the love I have in me and with the Savior’s love through me, I invite you to come unto Him and hear His words: “Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted” ([2 Nephi 9:51](#)).

25. I testify that the appetite to possess worldly things can only be overcome by turning to the Lord. The hunger of addiction can only be replaced by our love for Him. He stands ready to help each one of us. “Fear not,” He said, “for you are mine, and I have overcome the world” ([D&C 50:41](#)).

26. I bear my special witness that through the Atonement He has overcome all things. May each of us also overcome worldly temptation by coming unto Him and by becoming provident providers both temporally and spiritually for ourselves and others is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

15.3 - Becoming Self-Reliant— Spiritually and Physically

Elder M. Russell Ballard
Ensign, March 2009



1. My travels have taken me almost everywhere in the world—most of the continent of Africa, the islands of the sea, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the heart of the inner cities of America. Everywhere I go, the cries of the poor ring out—often with the plea, “Please help us.” In Africa alone those cries do not come from a few; they come from tens of thousands, even millions.

2. The Church has been especially concerned with teaching self-reliance since 1936, when Elder Melvin J. Ballard was named general chairman of the newly formed Welfare Committee. Elder Harold B. Lee was the first managing director, followed by Elder Marion G. Romney. Since that beginning, the Church has learned a great deal about the principles of self-reliance.

3. From the Church Handbook of Instructions, we learn: “The Savior has commanded the Church and its members to be self-reliant and independent. ...

4. “To become self-reliant, a person must work. Work is physical, mental, or spiritual effort. It is a basic source of happiness, self-worth, and prosperity. Through work, people accomplish many good things in their lives. ...

5. “As people become self-reliant, they are better prepared to endure adversities” and are “better able to care for others in need.” [1](#)

6. President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) taught: “Without self-reliance one cannot exercise these innate desires to serve. How can we give if there is nothing there? Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves. Money to assist the needy cannot come from an empty purse. Support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved. Teaching cannot come from the unlearned. And most important of all, spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak.” [2](#) (See also p. 65 of this magazine.)

7. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said: “The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape

human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.” [3](#)

8. William George Jordan put it this way: “The world is busy with its own cares, sorrows and joys, and pays little heed to you. There is but one great pass-word to success,—self-reliance.” [4](#)

9. From my experience, I believe that a few simple but very important principles can help prepare us to become more self-reliant.

Find Answers through the Spirit

10. First, every person must know that he or she is a child of God and is loved by Him. People need to realize that regardless of their circumstances, as desperate as those may be, they are entitled to the Light of Christ in their lives. From Moroni we learn, “The Spirit of Christ is given to every man” ([Moroni 7:16](#)). The promise is that every son and daughter of God can find, through the Spirit, answers to the challenges in their lives, including how to become more self-reliant. We must, therefore, ever keep in our minds how precious each child of God is and how important our service is to each one of them.

11. We become more self-reliant in some ways as we recognize our dependence on Him from whom all good things come. This is the spirit noted in [Alma 34:27](#), in which we are counseled to cry unto the Lord over our homes, our families, and our work. “Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be ... drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.”

12. At the root of self-reliance are the dignity and importance of seeing ourselves as children of God regardless of circumstance, culture, or location.

Appraise Our Lives and the Needs of Others

13. Second, we need to appraise our own lives. How well are we listening to the Spirit? Are we living according to the eternal truths and doctrines of the restored Church of [Jesus Christ](#)? Can we effectively appraise the needs of others by the prompting of the Spirit? It impressed me that Muhammad Yunus must have been prompted by the Spirit when he organized a very unusual bank in Bangladesh, which some have said was the beginning of microfinance. When Yunus, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his efforts to help the poor, was asked what his initial strategy would be, he responded:

14. “I didn’t really have one at the time. I simply began trying to help with my own funds, then went to

the banks and asked them to get involved. They refused for several stated reasons, and thus my strategy began to evolve into: ‘Whatever the bankers did, I simply did the opposite.’ The bankers would only lend to the rich. I would only lend to the poor. The bankers would only make large loans. I would only make very small loans. The bankers would only lend to men. I would only lend to women. The bankers would only lend if there was collateral. I would only lend without collateral. The bankers required extensive paperwork. I only made loans that even an illiterate could understand. The bankers required their clients to come to the bank. I took my bank to the village.” [5](#)

15. It should be noted that the banks expected a high rate of loan defaults. Yunus expected and experienced almost none. I understand that Mr. Yunus’s bank has provided more than \$4 billion in loans and is entirely self-sustaining. Surely the Spirit of the Lord guided this noble effort.

Choose between Good and Evil

16. Third, we need to remember that every man and every woman has the God-given right to choose what he or she will believe and do. Lehi said it this way: “Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh. ... They are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)). I realize there are some places in the world where freedom is greatly restricted; however, the individual freedom of every soul to choose good or evil is an eternal truth essential to God’s plan of happiness. No one can take that away from His children. Benjamin Franklin had this to say about choice:

17. “We stand at the crossroads, each minute, each hour, each day, making choices. We choose the thoughts we allow ourselves to think, the passions we allow ourselves to feel, and the actions we allow ourselves to perform. Each choice is made in the context of whatever value system we’ve selected to govern our lives. In selecting that value system, we are, in a very real way, making the most important choice we will ever make.

18. Those who believe there is one God who made all things and who governs the world by his Providence will make many choices different from those who do not. Those who hold in reverence that being who gave them life and worship Him through adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving will make many choices different from those who do not. Those who believe that mankind are all of a [family](#) and that the most

acceptable service of God is doing good to man will make many choices different from those who do not. Those who believe in a future state in which all that is wrong here will be made right will make many choices different from those who do not. Those who subscribe to the morals of Jesus will make many choices different from those who do not.”

19. Franklin concludes:

20. “Since the foundation of all happiness is thinking rightly, and since correct action is dependent on correct opinion, we cannot be too careful in choosing the value system we allow to govern our thoughts and actions.

21. “And to know that God governs in the affairs of men, that he hears and answers prayers, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, is indeed, a powerful regulator of human conduct.” [6](#)

Think Straight

22. Fourth, master the ability to think straight. As Franklin said, “The foundation of all happiness is thinking rightly.” This may be more important in the future as the world continues to spiral downward and crumble into moral decay.

23. In my office hangs a printed statement that includes the last words spoken by my grandfather Elder Melvin J. Ballard before his passing. He was in the hospital phasing in and out of a coma. My father said that Grandfather suddenly opened his eyes and looked into the room and said, “Above all else, brethren, let us think straight.” A few minutes later he passed away.

24. That was more than 65 years ago. How much more does the world need people today who can think straight? Part of thinking straight is using common sense in solving life’s problems. Lord Chesterfield said, “Common sense (which, in truth, is very uncommon) is the best sense I know of: abide by it; it will counsel you best.” [7](#)

25. Often in my ministry have I heard the sad tale of those who are struggling to become self-reliant but in fact are becoming more dependent upon others because of their inability to think straight and apply common sense in the decisions they make. Much of life’s misery centers in the lack of using common sense. As an example, consider the pharmacist who was compounding a prescription that called for as much strychnine as you could put on the face of a dime. He didn’t have a dime, so he used two nickels.

26. Helping people to think straight and use common sense will, in my judgment, always be a very important

step in helping them to reach economic self-reliance. It is part of teaching our children and others to walk in the ways of truth and soberness and to love and serve one another (see [Mosiah 4:15](#)). Part of thinking straight is listening—being able to listen to the promptings of the Spirit.

Seek the Lord's Guidance

27. Fifth, seek guidance from the Lord and trust in Him. In the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) we read:

28. “I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

29. “Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

30. “And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom.

31. “Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations.

32. “And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught.

33. “For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man” ([D&C 76:5–10](#)).

34. May we remember our responsibility to carry the light of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God's children. And may we, through our provident living, teach others to emulate the examples of our pioneer forefathers in lifting themselves up by their own bootstraps, to trust in the light of hope, and to seek the light of knowledge that will ultimately lead them to spiritual and economic self-reliance.

Helps for Home Evening

1. Read the first paragraph of the section titled “Find Answers through the Spirit.” Discuss how seeing ourselves as children of God can help us become spiritually self-reliant. Have each [family](#) member identify someone in need and serve him or her during the next week.

2. Write the following on separate pieces of paper: food storage, education, and getting out of debt. Have three family members each select one and lead a discussion on how that principle will help your family become more physically self-reliant. Choose one principle to work on as a family.

At the root of self-reliance are the dignity and importance of seeing ourselves as children of God regardless of circumstance, culture, or location.

“As people become self-reliant, they are better prepared to endure adversities” and are “better able to care for others in need.”

“To become self-reliant, a person must work. Work is physical, mental, or spiritual effort. It is a basic source of happiness, self-worth, and prosperity. Through work, people accomplish many good things in their lives.”

Franklin said, “The foundation of all happiness is thinking rightly.” This may be more important in the future as the world continues to spiral downward and crumble into moral decay.

Notes

1. Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders (1998), 257.
2. Marion G. Romney, “The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 93.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “Born of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 6.
4. William George Jordan, “Self-Control,” *Improvement Era*, June 1909, 642.
5. Notes by Chris Eyre taken from the introduction of Mr. Yunus by Sam Daley-Harris, director of Microcredit Summit Campaign, at a conference in Palo Alto, California, on June 4, 2003.
6. Benjamin Franklin's *The Art of Virtue*, ed. George L. Rogers (1996), 88–90.
7. In *A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles*, sel. and ed. H. L. Mencken (1976), 1084.

15.4 - Constancy amid Change

President N. Eldon Tanner
Ensign, November 1979



1. During World War II, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Albert E. Bowen, wrote a book compiled from a series of radio addresses, which he entitled *Constancy amid Change* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1944).

The messages of these talks were very timely. We were a world in conflict, and people the world over needed a message of certainty, assurance, and stability.

2. This present era seems very similar in many ways to those turbulent war years. Today we face many perplexing issues. In addition to significant international political problems, we are experiencing one of the most difficult economic periods we have faced in many decades—the problem of inflation and personal financial management.

3. I would like to borrow the title of Elder Bowen's book and share with you some of my own experiences and convictions drawn from the sixty years of my working life. I have lived during each phase of the economic cycle. As a young man getting started in life, I experienced personal depression. I have experienced a national and international depression, as well as periods of recession and inflation. I have watched so-called solutions come and go with each change in the economic cycle. These experiences have led me to the same conviction as Robert Frost, who once said:

4. Most of the change we think we see in life is due to truths being in and out of favor.

5. ("The Black Cottage," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Latham, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. p. 58).

6. What I would like to share with you today are my observations about the constant and fundamental principles which, if followed, will bring financial security and peace of mind under any economic circumstances.

7. First, I would like to build a foundation and establish a perspective within which these economic principles must be applied.

8. One day a grandson of mine said to me: "I have observed you and other successful men, and I have made up my mind that I want to be a success in my life. I want to interview as many successful people as I can to determine what made them successful. So looking back over your experience, grandpa, what do you believe is the most important element of success?"

9. I told him that the Lord gave the greatest success formula that I know of: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" ([Matt. 6:33](#)).

10. Some argue that some men prosper financially who do not seek the kingdom first. This is true. But the Lord is not promising us just material wealth if we seek first the kingdom. From my own experience I know this is not the case. In the words of Henrik Ibsen: "Money may be the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings you food, but not appetite; medicine,

but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants, but not faithfulness; days of joy, but not peace or happiness" (In *The Forbes Scrapbook of Thoughts on the Business of Life*, New York: Forbes, Inc., 1968, p. 88).

11. Material blessings are a part of the gospel if they are achieved in the proper way and for the right purpose I am reminded of an experience of President Hugh B. Brown. As a young soldier in World War I, he was visiting an elderly friend in the hospital. This friend was a millionaire several times over who, at the age of eighty, was lying at death's door. Neither his divorced wife nor any of his five children cared enough to come to the hospital to see him. As President Brown thought of the things his friend "had lost which money could not buy and noted his tragic situation and the depth of his misery," he asked his friend how he would change the course of his life if he had it to live over again.

12. The old gentleman, who died a few days later, said: "As I think back over life the most important and valuable asset which I might have had but which I lost in the process of accumulating my millions was the simple faith my mother had in God and in the [immortality](#) of the soul.

13. "... You asked me what is the most valuable thing in life I cannot answer you in better words than those used by the poet." He asked President Brown to get a little book out of his briefcase from which he read a poem entitled "I'm an Alien."

I'm an alien, to the faith my mother taught me.

I'm a stranger to the God that heard my mother when she cried.

I'm an alien to the comfort that, "Now I lay me," brought me.

To the everlasting arms that held my father when he died.

When the great world came and called me, I deserted all to follow.

Never noting in my blindness I had slipped my hand from His.

Never dreaming in my dazedness that the bubble fame is hollow.

That the wealth of gold is tinsel, as I since have learned it is.

I have spent a lifetime seeking things I spurned when I found them,

I have fought and been rewarded in many a winning cause,

But I'd give it all, fame and fortune and the pleasures that surround them,

If I only had the faith that made my mother what she was.

14. "That was the dying testimony of a man who was born in the Church but had drifted far from it. That was the brokenhearted cry of a lonely man who could have anything money could buy, but who had lost the most important things of life in order to accumulate this world's goods" (Continuing the Quest, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1961, pp. 32–35; italics added).

15. In the [Book of Mormon](#), the prophet Jacob gives us some important counsel on this matter:

16. "But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

17. "And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted" ([Jacob 2:18–19](#); italics added).

18. The foundation and perspective then are these: We must first seek the kingdom, work and plan and spend wisely, plan for the future, and use what wealth we are blessed with to help build up that kingdom. When guided by this eternal perspective and by building on this firm foundation, we can pursue with confidence our daily tasks and our life's work, which must be carefully planned and diligently pursued.

19. It is within this framework that I would like to explain five principles of economic constancy.

20. Constancy No. 1: Pay an honest [tithing](#). I often wonder if we realize that paying our tithing does not represent giving gifts to the Lord and the Church. Paying tithing is discharging a debt to the Lord. The Lord is the source of all our blessings, including life itself.

21. The payment of tithing is a commandment, a commandment with a promise. If we obey this commandment, we are promised that we will "prosper in the land." This prosperity consists of more than material goods—it may include enjoying good health and vigor of mind. It includes [family](#) solidarity and spiritual increase. I hope those of you presently paying your full tithe will seek the faith and strength to do so. As you discharge this obligation to your Maker, you

will find great, great happiness, the like of which is known only by those who are faithful to this commandment.

22. Constancy No. 2: Live on less than you earn. I have discovered that there is no way that you can ever earn more than you can spend. I am convinced that it is not the amount of money an individual earns that brings peace of mind as much as it is having control of his money. Money can be an obedient servant but a harsh taskmaster. Those who structured their standard of living to allow a little surplus, control their circumstances. Those who spend a little more than they earn are controlled by their circumstances. They are in bondage. President Grant once said: "If there is any one thing that will bring peace and contentment into the human heart, and into the family, it is to live within our means. And if there is any one thing that is grinding and discouraging and disheartening, it is to have debts and obligations that one cannot meet" (Gospel Standards, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1941, p. 111).

23. The key to spending less than we earn is simple—it is called discipline. Whether early in life or late, we must all eventually learn to discipline ourselves, our appetites, and our economic desires. How blessed is he who learns to spend less than he earns and puts something away for a rainy day.

24. Constancy No. 3: Learn to distinguish between needs and wants. Consumer appetites are man-made. Our competitive free enterprise system produces unlimited goods and services to stimulate our desire to want more convenience and luxuries. I do not criticize the system or the availability of these goods or services. I am only concerned about our people using sound judgment in their purchases. We must learn that sacrifice is a vital part of our eternal discipline.

25. In this and many other countries, many parents and children born since World War II have known only prosperous conditions. Many have been conditioned to instant gratification. There have been ample job opportunities for all who are capable of working. Yesterday's luxuries for most are considered today's necessities.

26. This is typified by young couples who expect to furnish their homes and provide themselves with luxuries as they begin their marriages, which their parents have managed to acquire only after many years of struggle and sacrifice. By wanting too much too soon, young couples may succumb to easy credit plans, thereby plunging themselves into debt. This would keep them from having the financial means necessary

to do as the Church suggests in the matter of food storage and other security programs.

27. Overindulgence and poor money management place a heavy strain on marriage relationships. Most marital problems, it seems, originate from economic roots—either insufficient income to sustain the family or mismanagement of the income as earned.

28. One young father came to his bishop for financial counseling and told an all-too-frequent story: “Bishop, I have been well trained as an engineer, and I earn a good salary. It seems that all through school I was taught how to make money, but no one taught me how to manage money.”

29. While we believe it is desirable for every student to take classes in consumer education, the primary training rests with the parents. Parents cannot leave this vital training to chance or transfer the responsibility entirely to our public schools and universities.

30. An important part of this training should be to explain debt. For most of us there are two kinds of financial debt—consumer debt and investment or business debt. Consumer debt refers to buying on credit those things we use or consume in daily living. Examples would include installment buying of clothes, appliances, furniture, etc. Consumer debt is secured by mortgaging our future earnings. This can be very dangerous. If we are laid off work, disabled, or encounter serious emergencies, we have difficulties meeting our obligations. Installment buying is the most expensive way to purchase. To the cost of the goods we buy must be added heavy interest and handling charges.

31. I realize that young families find it necessary at times to purchase on credit. But we caution you not to buy more than is truly necessary and to pay off your debts as quickly as possible. When money is tight, avoid the extra burden of additional interest charges.

32. Investment debt should be fully secured so as not to encumber a family’s security. Don’t invest in speculative ventures. The spirit of speculation can become intoxicating. Many fortunes have been wiped out by the uncontrolled appetite to accumulate more and more. Let us learn from the sorrows of the past and avoid enslaving our time, energy, and general health to a gluttonous appetite to acquire increased material goods.

33. President Kimball has given this thought-provoking counsel:

34. “The Lord has blessed us as a people with a prosperity unequalled in times past. The resources that have been placed in our power are good, and necessary to our work here on the earth. But I am afraid that many of us have been surfeited with flocks and herds and acres and barns and wealth and have begun to worship them as false gods, and they have power over us. Do we have more of these good things than our faith can stand? Many people spend most of their time working in the service of a self-image that includes sufficient money, stocks, bonds, investment portfolios, property, credit cards, furnishings, automobiles, and the like to guarantee carnal security throughout, it is hoped, a long and happy life. Forgotten is the fact that our assignment is to use these many resources in our families and quorums to build up the kingdom of God” (Ensign, June 1976, p. 4).

35. By way of testimony, may I add this to President Kimball’s statement. I know of no situation where happiness and peace of mind have increased with the amassing of property beyond the reasonable wants and needs of the family.

36. Constancy No. 4: Develop and live within a budget. A friend of mine has a daughter who went overseas with a BYU study-abroad program for a semester. She was constantly writing home for more money. His concern was such that he called her long-distance and questioned her about the need for the additional funds. At one point in the conversation the daughter explained, “But dad, I can tell you where every penny you have sent me has been spent.”

37. He replied, “You don’t seem to get the point. I’m interested in a budget—a plan for spending—not in a diary of where the money has gone.”

38. Perhaps parents should be more like the father of the college boy who wired home, “No mon, no fun, your son.” His father wired back, “How sad, too bad, your dad.”

39. It has been my observation in interviewing many people through the years that far too many people do not have a workable budget and have not disciplined themselves to abide by its provisions. Many people think a budget robs them of their freedom. On the contrary, successful people have learned that a budget makes real economic freedom possible.

40. Budgeting and financial management need not be overly complicated or time-consuming. The story is told of an immigrant father who kept his accounts payable in a shoe box, his accounts receivable on a spindle, and his cash in the cash register.

41. "I don't see how you can run your business this way," said his son. "How do you know what your profit is?"

42. "Son," replied the businessman, "when I got off the boat, I had only the pants I was wearing. Today your sister is an art teacher, your brother is a doctor, and you're an accountant. I have a car, a home, and a good business. Everything is paid for. So you add it all up, subtract the pants, and there's my profit."

43. Wise financial counselors teach that there are four different elements to any good budget. Provision should be made first for basic operating needs such as food, clothing, etc.; second, for home equity; third, for emergency needs such as savings, health insurance, and life insurance; and, fourth, for wise investment and a storage program for the future.

44. May I comment on two of these elements. Nothing seems so certain as the unexpected in our lives. With rising medical costs, health insurance is the only way most families can meet serious accident, illness, or maternity costs, particularly those for premature births. Life insurance provides income continuation when the provider prematurely dies. Every family should make provision for proper health and life insurance.

45. After these basics are met, we should by frugal management regularly save to create funds for investment. It has been my observation that few people have been successful with investments who have not first developed the habit of saving regularly. This requires discipline and discriminating judgment. There are many ways to invest. My only advice is to choose wisely your investment counselors. Be sure they merit your confidence by maintaining a successful investment record.

46. Constancy No. 5: Be honest in all your financial affairs. The ideal of integrity will never go out of style. It applies to all we do. As leaders and members of the Church, we should be the epitome of integrity.

47. Brothers and sisters, through these five principles, I have tried to sketch what might be characterized as the true pattern of financial and resource management.

48. I hope that each of us may benefit from their application. I bear my witness that they are true and that this Church and the work we are engaged in are true. In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

15.5 - One for the Money

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

Ensign, September 2007



1. Recently I had the opportunity to visit with a choice young couple. They were to be married within the week. Their eyes sparkled in anticipation of the important event and their continuing love for one another. Both had the advantages of a college education, good homes, and cultural experiences. It was delightful to share their personalities, plans, and potentials. Their courtship already seemed appropriately launched on an eternal basis.

2. During our interview, their response to only one question gave me concern. I hope my anxieties and suggestions caused them to reassess their pending partnership's future.

3. To the question "Who is going to manage the money in your marriage?" she said, "He is, I guess," while he responded, "We haven't talked about that yet." These comments surprised and shocked me.

4. How important are money management and finances in marriage and [family](#) affairs? Tremendously. The American Bar Association recently indicated that 89 percent of all divorces could be traced to quarrels and accusations over money. ¹ Others have estimated that 75 percent of all divorces result from clashes over finances. Some professional counselors indicated that four out of five families are strapped with serious money problems.

5. May I at this time hasten to emphasize the fact that these marriage tragedies are not caused simply by lack of money but rather by the mismanagement of personal finances. A prospective wife could well concern herself not with the amount her husband-to-be can earn in a month but rather how will he manage the money that comes into his hands. Money management should take precedence over money productivity. A prospective husband who is engaged to a sweetheart who has everything would do well to take yet another look and see if she has money-management sense.

6. In the home, money management between husband and wife should be on a partnership basis, with both parties having a voice in decision and policy making. When children come along and reach the age of accountability, they, too, should be involved in money concerns on a limited-partnership basis. Peace, contentment, love, and security in the home are not

possible when financial anxieties and bickerings prevail. Whether we are anticipating marriage or are well into it, today is the time for all of us to review and repent as necessary to improve our money-management skills and live within our means.

7. May I make some recommendations for improved personal and family financial management, since proper money management and living within one's means are essential in today's world if we are to live abundantly and happily. I believe the following 12 points will help each of us achieve this goal.

1. Teach family members early the importance of working and earning. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" ([Genesis 3:19](#)) is not outdated counsel. It is basic to personal welfare. One of the greatest favors parents can do for their children is to teach them to work. Much has been said over the years about children and monthly allowances, and opinions and recommendations vary greatly. I'm from the "old school." I believe that children should earn their money needs through service and appropriate chores. I think it is unfortunate for a child to grow up in a home where the seed is planted in the child's mind that there is a family money tree that automatically drops "green stuff" once a week or once a month.

2. Teach children to make money decisions in keeping with their capacities to comprehend. "Save your money" is a hollow pronouncement from a parent to a child. "Save your money for a mission, a bicycle, a doll house, a trousseau, or a car" makes understandable sense. Family unity comes from saving together for a common, jointly approved purpose. In our home we found it unifying to have a child save for a major project and then, when the amount was achieved, we matched it with a predetermined percentage. ...

3. Teach each family member to contribute to the total family welfare. Encourage fun projects, understandable to the children, that contribute to a family goal or joy. Some families miss a tremendous financial and spiritual experience when they fail to sit together, preferably during family home evening, and each put in his share of the monthly amount going to the son or daughter, brother or sister who is serving in the mission field. When this monthly activity is engaged in all at once, he or she becomes "our" missionary and pride becomes a two-way street.

4. Teach family members that paying financial obligations promptly is part of integrity and

honesty development. Paying [tithing](#) promptly to Him who does not come to check up each month will teach us to be more honest with those physically closer at hand.

5. Learn to manage money before it manages you. A bride-to-be would do well to ask herself, "Can my sweetheart manage money? Does he know how to live within his means?" These are more important questions than "Can he earn a lot of money?" New attitudes and relationships toward money should be developed constantly by all couples. After all, the partnership should be full and eternal.

6. Learn self-discipline and self-restraint in money matters. Such conduct can be more important than courses in accounting. Married couples show genuine maturity when they think of their partners and their families ahead of their own spending impulses. Money-management skills should be learned together in a spirit of cooperation and love on a continuing basis. A disgusted husband once said, "I know that in life money talks, but when my wife gets hold of it, all it ever says is 'good-bye.'" To the husband who says his wife is the poorest money manager in the world, I would say, "Look in the mirror and meet the world's poorest teacher-trainer."

7. Use a budget. Avoid finance charges except for homes, education, and other vital investments. Buy consumer durables with cash. Avoid installment credit and be careful with your use of credit cards. They are principally for convenience and should not be used carelessly or recklessly. Buy used items until you have saved sufficient money to purchase quality new items. Save and invest a specific percent of your income. Learn the principle of obedience as you make your Church contributions, and meet your financial obligations promptly. Please listen carefully to this—and if it makes some of you feel uncomfortable, it is on purpose: Latter-day Saints who ignore or avoid their creditors are entitled to feel the inner frustrations that such conduct merits, and they are not living as Latter-day Saints should!

8. Make education a continuing process. Complete as much formal, full-time education as possible. This includes the trade schools. This is money well invested. Use night school and correspondence classes to further prepare. Acquire some special skill or ability that could be used to avoid prolonged unemployment. In these days of

worldwide heavy unemployment, we should not allow ourselves, when we are out of work, to sit back and wait for “our type of job” if other honorable interim employment becomes available.

9. Work toward home ownership. This qualifies as an investment, not consumption. Buy the type of home your income will support. Improve the home and beautify the landscape all the time you occupy the premises so that if you do sell it, you can use the capital gain to get a better home.

10. Appropriately involve yourself in an insurance program. It is most important to have sufficient medical and adequate life insurance.

11. Strive to understand and cope with existing inflation. Learn to see through the money illusion and recognize the real value of money. Most wage earners today have less purchasing power than they did [a few years ago]. To some degree inflation is probably going to be with us for a long time. Realize that you are living in a new era of higher prices and less abundant energy.

12. Appropriately involve yourself in a food storage program. Accumulate your basic supplies in a systematic and an orderly way. Avoid going into debt for these purposes. Beware of unwise promotional schemes.

8. These few points and suggestions are not intended to be all-inclusive nor exhaustive. Rather, it is hoped that a need has been brought to the surface for our serious consideration. We need to recognize and be aware of these basic guidelines for wise money management.

9. God help us to realize that money management is an important ingredient in proper personal welfare. Learning to live within our means should be a continuing process. We need to work constantly toward keeping ourselves free of financial difficulties. It is a happy day financially when time and interest are working for you and not against you.

10. Money in the lives of Latter-day Saints should be used as a means of achieving eternal happiness. Careless and selfish uses cause us to live in financial bondage. We can't afford to neglect personal and family involvement in our money management. God will open the windows of heaven to us in these matters if we will but live close to Him and keep His commandments.

Note

1. Subsequent American Bar Association surveys have shown similar results.

15.6 - Seek Learning - You Have A Work To Do

Mary N. Cook
Ensign, May 2012



1. My dear young women, how we love each one of you. We see you courageously arising and shining forth with light in a world where great challenges accompany great opportunities. This may cause you to

wonder, what does the future hold for me? I assure you that as you are a virtuous daughter of God, your future is bright! You live at a time when the truths of the gospel have been restored, and these truths can be found in your scriptures. You received the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#) at the time of your [baptism](#), and the Holy Ghost will teach you truth and prepare you for life's challenges.

2. God gave you moral agency and the opportunity to learn while on earth, and He has a work for you to do. To accomplish this work, you have an individual responsibility to seek learning. The key to your future, your “bright ray of hope,” [1](#) can be found in the new For the Strength of Youth booklet under the standard of education and in the Young Women value of knowledge.

3. “Education ... will open the doors of opportunity.” [2](#) As you follow the Lord's admonition to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith,” [3](#) you gain not only knowledge from your study but added light as you learn by faith.

4. Seek learning by studying diligently. Rarely will you be able to spend as much time dedicated to learning as you can now. President Gordon B. Hinckley wisely counseled the youth of the Church: “The pattern of study you establish during your formal schooling will in large measure affect your lifelong thirst for knowledge.” [4](#) “You must get all of the education that you possibly can. ... Sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of [this] world. ... Train your minds and hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your lives.” [5](#)

5. In speaking specifically to women, President Thomas S. Monson said: “Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties. ... I urge you to pursue your education and learn

marketable skills so that, should such a situation arise, you are prepared to provide.” [6](#)

6. Young women, follow the advice of these wise and inspired prophets. Be a good student. Arise and shine forth in your schools with hard work, honesty, and integrity. If you are struggling or discouraged with your performance in school, seek help from your parents, teachers, and helpful Church members. Never give up!

7. Make a list of the things you want to learn; then “share your educational goals with your [family](#), friends, and leaders so they can support and encourage you.” [7](#) This is the pattern of Personal Progress.

8. With technology you are witnessing an explosion of knowledge. You are constantly bombarded by sound, video, and networking. Be selective and don’t allow this surge of information to distract you or slow your progress. Arise, young women! You determine your goals. You decide what enters your mind and heart.

9. Some of your most important learning will be outside of the classroom. Surround yourself with exemplary women who can teach you skills in homemaking, art, music, family history, sports, writing, or speaking. Get to know them and ask them to mentor you. When you have learned something new, teach it at Mutual or become a mentor to other young women as part of the requirements for your Honor Bee.

10. In addition to my wonderful mother, I’ve had many mentors in my life. I first became acquainted with the process of mentoring when I was just nine years old. My Primary teacher taught me to cross-stitch “I Will Bring the Light of the Gospel into My Home,” a picture that hung in my room during my teenage years. My teacher guided me, corrected me, and always encouraged me along the way. Other mentors followed. Two excellent seamstresses in my ward taught me sewing. With their guidance, patience, and encouragement, I entered a dress in a sewing contest when I was 14, and I actually won a prize! The process increased my thirst for knowledge and excellence in other areas as well.

11. Gaining knowledge now will pay huge dividends when you become a mother. “A mother’s education level has a profound influence on the educational choices of her [children].” [8](#) A mother’s education can hold the “key to halt [the] poverty cycle.” [9](#) Educated women “tend to: Give birth to healthier babies, have children who are healthier, be more confident, resilient and have improved reasoning and judgment.” [10](#)

12. We learn in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” that “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.” [11](#) Providing an education for your children is part of that nurturing and is your sacred responsibility. Like the stripling warriors, who “had been taught by their mothers,” [12](#) you will be the most important teacher your children will ever have, so choose your learning carefully. Bless your children and your future home by learning as much as you can now.

13. Seek learning by faith. We learn by faith as we diligently gain spiritual knowledge through prayer, scripture study, and obedience and as we seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who testifies of all truth. If you do your part to gain knowledge, the Holy Ghost can enlighten your mind. As you strive to keep yourself worthy, the Holy Ghost will give direction and added light to your learning.

14. When I was a young woman, I borrowed skis that were way too long and boots that were way too big, and a friend taught me to ski! We went on a beautiful spring day filled with bright sun, perfect snow, and cloudless, blue skies. Anxiety about the steep slopes gave way to delight as I learned. And though I tumbled quite a few times on those long skis, I got up and I kept trying. I came to love the sport!

15. I soon found out, however, that not all ski days and weather conditions were that ideal. On days with overcast skies, we skied in a condition called “flat light.” Flat light occurs when the light from the sun is diffused by the clouds. Looking ahead at the white snow, you find that your depth perception vanishes, and it is difficult to judge the steepness of the slope or see the moguls and bumps on the hill.

16. Young women, you may be looking forward to your future as I looked at that steep ski slope. You may feel at times that you are living in flat light, unable to see what lies ahead of you. Learning by faith will give you confidence and will help you navigate your way through times of uncertainty.

17. In the 25th chapter of Matthew, the parable of the ten virgins teaches us that spiritual preparation is vital and must be achieved individually. You will recall that all ten virgins were invited to escort the bridegroom into the wedding feast, but only the five wise virgins were prepared with oil in their lamps.

18. “And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

19. “But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

20. “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” [13](#)

21. You may think it selfish that the five wise virgins did not share their oil, but it was impossible. Spiritual preparation must be acquired individually, drop by drop, and cannot be shared.

22. The time is now for you to diligently apply yourselves to increasing your spiritual knowledge—drop by drop—through prayer, scripture study, and obedience. The time is now to pursue your education—drop by drop. Each virtuous thought and action also adds oil to your lamps, qualifying you for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, our divine teacher.

23. The Holy Ghost will guide you on your journey here in mortality, even when you feel you are in flat light, uncertain of what lies ahead. You need not fear. As you stay on the path that leads to eternal life, the Holy Ghost will guide you in your decisions and in your learning.

24. I testify from personal experience that if you will seek learning not only by study but also by faith, you will be guided in what “the Lord ... will need you to do and what you will need to know.” [14](#)

25. I received my patriarchal blessing as a young woman and was counseled to prepare myself with a good education and to learn early in life those virtues that go into homemaking and rearing a family. I so wanted the blessing of a family; however, that blessing wasn’t fulfilled until I was 37, when I eventually married. My husband had been widowed, so the day we were sealed in the temple, I was suddenly blessed with not only a husband but a family of four children.

26. Long before that, there were many days when I felt like I was skiing in flat light, asking the question, “What does the future hold for me?” I tried to follow the admonitions in my patriarchal blessing. I studied diligently to become a schoolteacher and continued my education to become an elementary school principal. I prayed to my Heavenly Father and sought the guidance of the Holy Ghost. I held fervently to the promise of prophets who assured me that if I “remain true and

faithful, keep [my] covenants, serve God, and love [my] Father in Heaven and the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), [I] will not be denied any of the eternal blessings our Heavenly Father has for His faithful children.” [15](#)

27. I know that my education prepared me for a life that has been nothing like I had envisioned as a young woman. I thought I was studying education to teach school and my future children, but I did not know the Lord was also preparing me to teach English in Mongolia on a mission with my husband and to teach the young women of the Church throughout the world and to teach my grandchildren the value of knowledge—all wonderful blessings I could never have imagined.

28. I testify that our Father in Heaven does know and love you. He has placed great trust in you and has work that only you can do. I want to assure you that you will be prepared for that great work if you seek learning by study and also by faith. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Promoting and Defending the Family

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

16. Promoting and Defending the Family

16.1 - Christian Courage: The Price of Discipleship

Elder Robert D. Hales
Ensign, November 2008



1. We have gathered together as one, we have taken upon us the name of [Jesus Christ](#), and we are Christians. One of the questions we would ask: why then, if we have that love of the Savior, would someone want to be an antagonist or to attack us?

2. Recently a group of bright, faithful young Latter-day Saints wrote down some of the most pressing questions on their minds. One sister asked, “Why doesn’t the Church defend itself more actively when accusations are made against it?”

3. To her inquiry I would say that one of mortality’s great tests comes when our beliefs are questioned or criticized. In such moments, we may want to respond aggressively—to “put up our dukes.” But these are important opportunities to step back, pray, and follow the Savior’s example. Remember that Jesus Himself was despised and rejected by the world. And in Lehi’s dream, those coming to the Savior also endured “mocking and pointing ... fingers” ([1 Nephi 8:27](#)). “The world hath hated [my disciples],” Jesus said, “because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” ([John 17:14](#)). But when we respond to our accusers as the Savior did, we not only become more Christlike, we invite others to feel His love and follow Him as well.

4. To respond in a Christlike way cannot be scripted or based on a formula. The Savior responded differently in every situation. When He was confronted by wicked King Herod, He remained silent. When He stood before Pilate, He bore a simple and powerful testimony of His divinity and purpose. Facing the moneychangers who were defiling the temple, He exercised His divine responsibility to preserve and protect that which was sacred. Lifted up upon a cross, He uttered the incomparable [Christian](#) response: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)).

5. Some people mistakenly think responses such as silence, meekness, [forgiveness](#), and bearing humble testimony are passive or weak. But to “love [our]

enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” ([Matthew 5:44](#)) takes faith, strength, and, most of all, Christian courage.

6. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) demonstrated this courage throughout his life. Though he “suffer[ed] severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious” ([Joseph Smith—History 1:27](#)), he did not retaliate or give in to hatred. Like all true disciples of Christ, he stood with the Savior by loving others in a tolerant and compassionate way. That is Christian courage.

7. When we do not retaliate—when we turn the other cheek and resist feelings of anger—we too stand with the Savior. We show forth His love, which is the only power that can subdue the adversary and answer our accusers without accusing them in return. That is not weakness. That is Christian courage.

8. Through the years we learn that challenges to our faith are not new, and they aren’t likely to disappear soon. But true disciples of Christ see opportunity in the midst of opposition.

9. In the [Book of Mormon](#), the prophet Abinadi was bound and brought before the evil King Noah. Although the king vigorously opposed Abinadi and eventually sentenced him to death, Abinadi boldly taught the gospel and bore his testimony anyway. Because Abinadi took advantage of that opportunity, a priest named Alma was converted to the gospel and brought many souls unto Christ. The courage of Abinadi and Alma was Christian courage.

10. Experience shows that seasons of negative publicity about the Church can help accomplish the Lord’s purposes. In 1983 the First Presidency wrote to Church leaders, “Opposition may be in itself an opportunity. Among the continuing challenges faced by our missionaries is a lack of interest in religious matters and in our message. These criticisms create ... interest in the Church. ... This provides an opportunity [for members] to present the truth to those whose attention is thus directed toward us.” [1](#)

11. We can take advantage of such opportunities in many ways: a kind letter to the editor, a conversation with a friend, a comment on a [blog](#), or a reassuring word to one who has made a disparaging comment. We can answer with love those who have been influenced by misinformation and prejudice—who are “kept from

the truth because they know not where to find it” ([D&C 123:12](#)). I assure you that to answer our accusers in this way is never weakness. It is Christian courage in action.

12. As we respond to others, each circumstance will be different. Fortunately, the Lord knows the hearts of our accusers and how we can most effectively respond to them. As true disciples seek guidance from the Spirit, they receive inspiration tailored to each encounter. And in every encounter, true disciples respond in ways that invite the Spirit of the Lord.

13. Paul reminded the Corinthians that his preaching was “not with the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” ([1 Corinthians 2:4](#)). Because that power resides in the Spirit of the Lord, we must never become contentious when we are discussing our faith. As almost every missionary learns, [Bible](#) bashing always drives the Spirit away. The Savior has said, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” ([3 Nephi 11:29](#)). More regrettable than the Church being accused of not being Christian is when Church members react to such accusations in an un-Christlike way! May our conversations with others always be marked by the fruits of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)). To be meek, as defined in Webster’s dictionary, is “manifesting patience and longsuffering: enduring injury without resentment.”² Meekness is not weakness. It is a badge of Christian courage.

14. This is especially important in our interactions with members of other Christian denominations. Surely our Heavenly Father is saddened—and the devil laughs—when we contentiously debate doctrinal differences with our Christian neighbors.

15. This is not to suggest that we compromise our principles or dilute our beliefs. We cannot change the doctrines of the restored gospel, even if teaching and obeying them makes us unpopular in the eyes of the world. Yet even as we feel to speak the word of God with boldness, we must pray to be filled with the [Holy Ghost](#) (see [Acts 4:29, 31](#)). We should never confuse boldness with Satan’s counterfeit: overbearance (see [Alma 38:12](#)). True disciples speak with quiet confidence, not boastful pride.

16. As true disciples, our primary concern must be others’ welfare, not personal vindication. Questions and criticisms give us an opportunity to reach out to others and demonstrate that they matter to our Heavenly Father and to us. Our aim should be to help

them understand the truth, not defend our egos or score points in a theological debate. Our heartfelt testimonies are the most powerful answer we can give our accusers. And such testimonies can only be borne in love and meekness. We should be like Edward Partridge, of whom the Lord said, “His heart is pure before me, for he is like unto Nathanael of old, in whom there is no guile” ([D&C 41:11](#)). To be guileless is to have a childlike innocence, to be slow to take offense and quick to forgive.

17. These qualities are first learned in the home and [family](#) and can be practiced in all our relationships. To be guileless is to look for our own fault first. When accused, we should ask as the Savior’s Apostles did, “Lord, is it I?” ([Matthew 26:22](#)). If we listen to the answer given by the Spirit, we can, if needed, make corrections, apologize, seek [forgiveness](#), and do better.

18. Without guile, true disciples avoid being unduly judgmental of others’ views. Many of us have cultivated strong friendships with those who are not members of our Church—schoolmates, colleagues at work, and friends and neighbors throughout the world. We need them, and they need us. As President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “Let us learn respect for others. ... None of us lives alone—in our city, our nation, or our world.” ³

19. As the Savior demonstrated with Herod, sometimes true disciples must show Christian courage by saying nothing at all. Once when I was golfing, I barely brushed up against a large cholla cactus, which seems to shoot needles like a porcupine. Thorns from that plant stuck all over my clothing, even though I had barely touched the cactus plant. Some situations are like that plant: they can only injure us. In such instances, we are better off to keep our distance and simply walk away. As we do, some may try to provoke us and engage us in argument. In the Book of Mormon, we read about Lehonti and his men camped upon a mount. The traitorous Amalickiah urged Lehonti to “come down” and meet him in the valley. But when Lehonti left the high ground, he was poisoned “by degrees” until he died, and his army fell into Amalickiah’s hands (see [Alma 47](#)). By arguments and accusations, some people bait us to leave the high ground. The high ground is where the light is. It’s where we see the first light of morning and the last light in the evening. It is the safe ground. It is true and where knowledge is. Sometimes others want us to come down off the high ground and join them in a theological scrum in the mud. These few contentious individuals are set on picking religious fights, online or

in person. We are always better staying on the higher ground of mutual respect and love.

20. In doing so, we follow the example of the prophet Nehemiah, who built a wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah's enemies entreated him to meet them on the plain, where "they thought to do [him] mischief." Unlike Lehonti, however, Nehemiah wisely refused their offer with this message: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" ([Nehemiah 6:2-3](#)). We too have a great work to do, which will not be accomplished if we allow ourselves to stop and argue and be distracted. Instead we should muster Christian courage and move on. As we read in Psalms, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers" ([Psalm 37:1](#)).

21. Evil will always be with us in this world. Part of mortality's great test is to be in the world without becoming like the world. In His Intercessory Prayer, the Savior asked His Heavenly Father, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" ([John 17:15](#)). But even as the Savior warned of persecution, He promised peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" ([John 14:27](#)). I testify that with the mantle of His peace upon us, the First Presidency's promise will be fulfilled: "The opposition which may seem hard to bear will be a blessing to the kingdom of God upon the earth." [4](#)

22. To my inquiring sister and all who seek to know how we should respond to our accusers, I reply, we love them. Whatever their race, creed, religion, or political persuasion, if we follow Christ and show forth His courage, we must love them. We do not feel we are better than they are. Rather, we desire with our love to show them a better way—the way of Jesus Christ. His way leads to the gate of [baptism](#), the strait and narrow path of righteous living, and the temple of God. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)). Only through Him can we and all our brothers and sisters inherit the greatest gift we can receive—eternal life and eternal happiness. To help them, to be an example for them, is not for the weak. It is for the strong. It is for you and me, Latter-day Saints who pay the price of discipleship by answering our accusers with Christian courage.

23. I conclude by making the testimony of Mormon my own: "Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have

everlasting life" ([3 Nephi 5:13](#)). I bear my special witness of Him—that our lives can be everlasting because His love is everlasting. That we may share His eternal, unconditional love with our brothers and sisters everywhere, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. First Presidency letter, Dec. 1, 1983.
2. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1976), "meek," 1403.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "In Quest of the Abundant Life," Ensign, Mar. 1988, 3.
4. First Presidency letter, Dec. 1, 1983

16.2 - Defenders of The Family Proclamation

Bonnie L. Oscarson
Ensign, May 2015



1. What a privilege and joy to be a part of this marvelous assembly of girls and women. How blessed we are as women to be joined together this evening in unity and in love.

2. I recently read the story of Marie Madeline Cardon, who, with her [family](#), received the message of the restored gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) from the first missionaries called to serve in Italy in 1850. She was a young woman of 17 or 18 years of age when they were baptized. One Sunday, while the family was holding a worship service in their home high in the Alps of northern Italy, an angry mob of men, including some of the local ministers, gathered around the house and began shouting, yelling, and calling for the missionaries to be brought outside. I don't think they were anxious to be taught the gospel—they intended bodily harm. It was young Marie who marched out of the house to confront the mob.

3. They continued their vicious yells and demands for the missionaries to be brought out. Marie raised her [Bible](#) up in her hand and commanded them to depart. She told them that the elders were under her protection and that they could not harm one hair of their heads. Listen to her own words: "All stood aghast. ... God was with me. He placed those words in my mouth, or I could not have spoken them. All was calm, instantly. That strong ferocious body of men stood helpless before a weak, trembling, yet fearless girl." The ministers asked the mob to leave, which they did quietly in shame, fear, and remorse. The small flock completed their meeting in peace. [1](#)

4. Can't you just picture that brave young woman, the same age as many of you, standing up to a mob and defending her newly found beliefs with courage and conviction?

5. Sisters, few of us will ever have to face an angry mob, but there is a war going on in this world in which our most cherished and basic doctrines are under attack. I am speaking specifically of the doctrine of the family. The sanctity of the home and the essential purposes of the family are being questioned, criticized, and assaulted on every front.

6. When President Gordon B. Hinckley first read "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" 20 years ago this year, we were grateful for and valued the clarity, simplicity, and truth of this revelatory document. Little did we realize then how very desperately we would need these basic declarations in today's world as the criteria by which we could judge each new wind of worldly dogma coming at us from the media, the Internet, scholars, TV and films, and even legislators. The proclamation on the family has become our benchmark for judging the philosophies of the world, and I testify that the principles set forth within this statement are as true today as they were when they were given to us by a prophet of God nearly 20 years ago.

7. May I point out something obvious? Life rarely goes exactly according to plan for anyone, and we are very aware that not all women are experiencing what the proclamation describes. It is still important to understand and teach the Lord's pattern and strive for the realization of that pattern the best we can.

8. Each of us has a part to play in the plan, and each of us is equally valued in the eyes of the Lord. We should remember that a loving Heavenly Father is aware of our righteous desires and will honor His promises that nothing will be withheld from those who faithfully keep their covenants. Heavenly Father has a mission and plan for each of us, but He also has His own timetable. One of the hardest challenges in this life is to have faith in the Lord's timing. It's a good idea to have an alternative plan in mind, which helps us to be covenant-keeping, charitable, and righteous women who build the kingdom of God no matter which way our lives go. We need to teach our daughters to aim for the ideal but plan for contingencies.

9. During this 20th anniversary year of the family proclamation, I would like to issue a challenge for all of us as women of the Church to be defenders of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Just as Marie Madeline Cardon courageously defended the

missionaries and her newly found beliefs, we need to boldly defend the Lord's revealed doctrines describing marriage, families, the divine roles of men and women, and the importance of homes as sacred places—even when the world is shouting in our ears that these principles are outdated, limiting, or no longer relevant. Everyone, no matter what their marital circumstance or number of children, can be defenders of the Lord's plan described in the family proclamation. If it is the Lord's plan, it should also be our plan!

10. There are three principles taught in the proclamation which I think are especially in need of steadfast defenders. The first is marriage between a man and a woman. We are taught in the scriptures, "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord."² For anyone to attain the fulness of [priesthood blessings](#), there must be a husband and a wife sealed in the house of the Lord, working together in righteousness and remaining faithful to their covenants. This is the Lord's plan for His children, and no amount of public discourse or criticism will change what the Lord has declared. We need to continue to model righteous marriages, seek for that blessing in our lives, and have faith if it is slow in coming. Let us be defenders of marriage as the Lord has ordained it while continuing to show love and compassion for those with differing views.

11. The next principle which calls for our defending voices is elevating the divine roles of mothers and fathers. We eagerly teach our children to aim high in this life. We want to make sure that our daughters know that they have the potential to achieve and be whatever they can imagine. We hope they will love learning, be educated, talented, and maybe even become the next Marie Curie or Eliza R. Snow.

12. Do we also teach our sons and daughters there is no greater honor, no more elevated title, and no more important role in this life than that of mother or father? I would hope that as we encourage our children to reach for the very best in this life that we also teach them to honor and exalt the roles that mothers and fathers play in Heavenly Father's plan.

13. Our youngest daughter, Abby, saw a unique opportunity to stand as a defender of the role of mother. One day she got a notice from her children's school that they were having Career Day presentations at the school. Parents were invited to send in an application if they wanted to come to school to teach the children about their jobs, and Abby felt impressed to apply to come and speak about motherhood. She

didn't hear back from the school, and when Career Day was getting close, she finally called the school, thinking they may have lost her application. The organizers scrambled around and found two teachers who agreed to have Abby come talk to their classes at the end of Career Day.

14. In her very fun presentation to the children, Abby taught them, among other things, that as a mother she needed to be somewhat of an expert in medicine, psychology, religion, teaching, music, literature, art, finance, decorating, hair styling, chauffeuring, sports, culinary arts, and so much more. The children were impressed. She finished by having the children remember their mothers by writing thank-you notes expressing [gratitude](#) for the many loving acts of service they received daily. Abby felt that the children saw their mothers in a whole new light and that being a mother or father was something of great worth. She applied to share again this year at Career Day and was invited to present to six classes.

15. Abby has said of her experience: "I feel like it could be easy in this world for a child to get the sense that being a parent is a secondary job or even sometimes a necessary inconvenience. I want every child to feel like they are the most important priority to their parent, and maybe telling them how important being a parent is to me will help them realize all that their parents do for them and why."

16. Our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, is a wonderful example of honoring women and motherhood, especially his own mother. In reference to our earthly mothers, he has said: "May each of us treasure this truth; one cannot forget mother and remember God. One cannot remember mother and forget God. Why? Because these two sacred persons, God and [our earthly] mother, partners in creation, in love, in sacrifice, in service, are as one."³

17. The last principle we need to stand and defend is the sanctity of the home. We need to take a term which is sometimes spoken of with derision and elevate it. It is the term homemaker. All of us—women, men, youth, and children, single or married—can work at being homemakers. We should "make our homes" places of order, refuge, holiness, and safety. Our homes should be places where the Spirit of the Lord is felt in rich abundance and where the scriptures and the gospel are studied, taught, and lived. What a difference it would make in the world if all people would see themselves as makers of righteous homes. Let us defend the home as a place which is second only to the temple in holiness.

18. Sisters, I am grateful to be a woman in these latter days. We have opportunities and possibilities which no other generation of women has had in the world. Let us help build the kingdom of God by standing up boldly and being defenders of marriage, parenthood, and the home. The Lord needs us to be brave, steadfast, and immovable warriors who will defend His plan and teach the upcoming generations His truths.

19. I bear witness that Heavenly Father lives and loves each of us. His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. I leave this testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sources

1. See Marie Madeline Cardon Guild, "Marie Madeline Cardon Guild: An Autobiography," cardonfamilies.org/Histories/MarieMadelineCardonGuild.html; see also Marie C. Guild autobiography, circa 1909, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. [1 Corinthians 11:11](#).
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Behold Thy Mother," Ensign, Jan. 1974, 32.

16.3 - Disciples Of Jesus Christ—Defenders Of Marriage

Russell M. Nelson

BYU Speeches, Russell M. Nelson



1. Thank you, President Worthen, for your gracious introduction. Wendy and I are grateful for the privilege of being here on this significant occasion. I bring love and greetings from President Thomas S. Monson, President Henry B. Eyring, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, my beloved Brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and members of the board of trustees.

2. We are grateful for President Kevin J Worthen and President Cecil O. Samuelson, who have presided over the studies of this graduating class. We thank the faculty and staff for their service and tireless striving for excellence. And today we congratulate every graduate, along with their families and friends who have provided encouragement along the way. We are very proud of each of you!

3. Some of you will continue your education and achieve graduate degrees. Some of you will enter the workforce on a full-time basis. Many of you have married or will marry and begin your families. Family life will provide your most enduring rewards. As partners, you and your spouse will work together to achieve mutual goals and enjoy the fruits of your

labors. By the way, brethren, you might bear this in mind: Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law. I know mine was!

4. There is great power in a strong partnership. True partners can achieve more than the sum of each acting alone. With true partners, one plus one is much more than two. For example, Dr. Will Mayo and his brother, Dr. Charles Mayo, formed the Mayo Clinic. Lawyers and others form important partnerships. And in marriage, a husband and wife can form the most significant partnership of all—an eternal family.

5. Sustainable improvements in any endeavor depend on collaboration and agreement. Great leaders and partners develop the skill of sharing insights and efforts and the pattern of building consensus. Great partners are completely loyal. They suppress personal ego in exchange for being part of creating something larger than themselves. Great partnerships are dependent upon each individual developing his or her own personal attributes of character.

6. Each of us was born as an individual and is educated as an individual. You have passed tests to meet standards imposed upon you by someone else. You have been jumping over educational high hurdles, all erected by other people. For years you have been primarily task-oriented, preparing for what you want to do in life.

7. That is essential. But now it is time for a significant shift. Now it is time for you to define your own goals and meet your own expectations. From now on, you decide! Instead of concentrating on what you are to do, now is the time to zero in on who you are to be—on that person you are yet to become, as President Worthen explained so well. Now is the time for you to focus on developing great attributes of character.

8. Now seems to be my time for attending funerals. I have witnessed many families saying good-bye, for a season, to those they love and to whom they are sealed. I often leave funerals wondering, “What would I like to have said about me at my funeral?”

9. It is not too early in your life to ask the same question. What would you like to have said about you at your funeral? Hopefully that you were a good husband and father or a good wife and mother.

10. That you were a person of integrity.

11. That you were kind and patient.

12. Or humble and hardworking.

13. Or a person of virtue.

14. The greatest guardians of any and all virtues are marriage and family. This is particularly the case with the virtues of chastity and fidelity in marriage, both of which are required to create enduring and fully rewarding marriage partnerships and family relationships.

15. Male and female are created for what they can do and become, together. It takes a man and a woman to bring a child into the world. Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable. Men and women are distinct and complementary. Children deserve a chance to grow up with both a mom and a dad.

16. As you go forth from BYU, you will likely encounter increasing debate about the definition of marriage. Many of your neighbors, colleagues, and friends will have never heard logical and inspired truths about the importance of marriage as God Himself defined it. You will have many opportunities to strengthen understanding of the Lord’s side of that argument by the eloquence of your examples, both as individuals and as families.

17. The Apostle Paul foresaw our circumstances when he said:

18. In the last days perilous times shall come.

19. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

20. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, . . . despisers of those that are good,

21. . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

22. Then he concluded, “From such turn away.”¹

23. After his remarkable prophecy of our time, Paul added this word of warning:

24. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.²

25. Ponder that! It means that during these perilous times, life will not be comfortable for true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we will have His approval. He gave us this assurance:

26. And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ³

27. In short, as disciples, each of us will be put to the test. At any hour of any day we have the privilege of choosing between right and wrong. This is an age-old battle that started in a premortal realm. And that battle is becoming more intense every day. Your individual

strength of character is needed now more than ever before.

28. The day is gone when you can be a quiet and comfortable Christian. Your religion is not just about showing up for church on Sunday. It is about showing up as a true disciple from Sunday morning through Saturday night—24/7! There is no such thing as a “part-time” disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus invited anyone who wants to be His disciple to take up His cross and follow Him.⁴ Are you ready to join the ranks?

29. Or will you be ashamed of the gospel? Will you be ashamed of your Lord and His plan?⁵ Will you yield to voices of those who would have you join them on the popular side of contemporary history?

30. No! The youth of Zion will not falter! I believe you will be courageous and proclaim God’s truth with clarity and kindness, even when His truth is politically unpopular! Paul set that pattern when he declared:

31. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.⁶

32. Disciples of the Lord are defenders of marriage. We cannot yield. History is not our judge. A secular society is not our judge. God is our judge! For each of us, Judgment Day will be held in God’s own way and time.⁷

33. The future of marriage and of countless human lives will be determined by your willingness to bear solemn witness of the Lord and live according to His gospel. Great protection is available to us as we enter the waters of baptism and take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. King Benjamin so explained:

34. And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.⁸

35. I appreciate a statement made by Sister Sheri L. Dew at the recent BYU Women’s Conference. She said:

36. At the heart of becoming disciples is doing what we promise to do every time we partake of the sacrament—which is to “always remember” the Lord (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2). This means remembering Him when we choose what media we’re willing to expose our spirits to. It means remembering Him in how we

spend our time and when choosing between a steady diet of pop culture or the Word of God. It means remembering Him in the middle of conflict or when temptation looms. It means remembering Him when critics attack His Church and mock truth. It means remembering that we have taken His name upon us (Mosiah 5:7).⁹

37. Sister Dew’s message is consonant with a message from President Howard W. Hunter (1907–1995), who said:

38. If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. . . . If our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right. ¹⁰

39. Wherever we go, you and I as disciples of the Lord bear a solemn responsibility to proclaim the will of God to all people. And one of the more demanding opportunities of our time is to stand up for the truth regarding the sacred nature of marriage.

40. Our message is shaped by divine doctrine, canonized in the Bible:

41. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.¹¹

42. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. ¹²

43. And God blessed them, and . . . said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.¹³

44. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. ¹⁴

45. And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. ¹⁵

46. God is the Father of all men and women. They are His children. It was He who ordained marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Marriage was not created by human judges or legislators. It was not created by think tanks or by popular vote or by oft-quoted bloggers or by pundits. It was not created by lobbyists. Marriage was created by God!

47. The Ten Commandments forbade adultery and covetousness.¹⁶ Those ancient commandments were given later to people of New Testament¹⁷ and Book of Mormon¹⁸ times. In modern revelation the Lord has reaffirmed:

48. Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.¹⁹

49. True intimacy, as planned by our Creator, is experienced only within the sacred union of a husband and wife because it is enriched by truth and ennobled by the honoring of covenants a husband and wife make with each other and with God. It is crucial to note that full fidelity to those covenants forbids pornography, lust, or abuse in any form.

50. Social and political pressures to change marriage laws are resulting in practices contrary to God's will regarding the eternal nature and purposes of marriage. Man simply cannot make moral what God has declared to be immoral. Sin, even if legalized by man, is still sin in the eyes of God.

51. Brothers and sisters, undergirded by incontrovertible truth, proclaim your love for God! Proclaim your love for all human beings "with malice toward none, with charity for all."²⁰ They as children of God are our brothers and sisters. We value their rights and feelings. But we cannot condone efforts to change divine doctrine. It is not for man to change.

52. God loves His children. And if they love Him, they will show that love by keeping His commandments,²¹ including chastity before marriage and total fidelity within marriage. Scriptures warn that behavior contrary to the commandments of the Lord will not only deprive couples of divinely approved intimacy but will bring about the stern judgments of God.²²

53. The noblest yearning of the human heart is for a marriage that will endure beyond death. Complete fidelity to covenants made in holy temples will allow husband and wife to be sealed together throughout all eternity.²³

54. Dear graduates, families, and friends, the burden of discipleship is heavy. As disciples of the Lord you will stand as defenders of marriage. And as you are true and faithful, not only will He help you and protect you,²⁴ He will bless your families.²⁵

55. You are beneficiaries of the infinite Atonement of the Lord. Because of Him all of you will eventually be rewarded with immortality. And because of Him you may enjoy the blessing of eternal life with Him and your families.

56. Now, invoking the keys of the holy apostleship in me vested, I bless you with a fervent desire to feast on the words of Jesus Christ and to apply His teachings in your daily lives. I bless you with success in your

continuing educational and occupational pursuits. I bless you with joy as you keep the commandments of Almighty God. And I bless you with protection, peace, and continual growth as you stand as disciples and defenders of the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.

57. God lives! Jesus is the Christ! He stands as the Head of His Church, restored in these latter days to accomplish its divine destiny. I so testify, with my expression of love and gratitude for each of you, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Timothy 3:1–5.
2. 2 Timothy 3:12.
3. 3 Nephi 12:10; see also JST Matthew 5:12.
4. See Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; D&C 56:2; 112:14.
5. See Mormon 8:38.
6. Romans 1:16, see also 2 Timothy 1:8.
7. See Romans 2:5; Alma 33:22; Ether 11:20; D&C 88:104; 133:38.
8. Mosiah 5:7; see also verse 8.
9. Sheri L. Dew, "Sweet Above All That Is Sweet," BYU Women's Conference address, 1 May 2014; emphasis in original; ce.byu.edu/cw/womensconference/pdf/archive/2014/sheri_dew.pdf.
10. Howard W. Hunter, "Fear Not, Little Flock," BYU devotional address, 14 March 1989.
11. Genesis 1:1.
12. Genesis 1:27.
13. Genesis 1:28.
14. Genesis 2:24.
15. Genesis 3:20; see also Moses 4:26.
16. See Exodus 20:14, 17; Deuteronomy 5:18, 21.
17. See Matthew 5:27; 19:18; Romans 13:9.
18. See Mosiah 13:22, 24; 3 Nephi 12:27.
19. D&C 42:22.
20. Abraham Lincoln, second inaugural address, 4 March 1865.
21. See John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:2; D&C 46:9; 124:87.
22. See Leviticus 26:15–20; Psalm 89:31–32; Matthew 5:19.
23. See D&C 132:7, 19.
24. See D&C 84:88.
25. See Isaiah 49:25; D&C 98:37; 105:14.

16.4 - To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse

Richard G. Scott
Ensign, May 2008



1. I bear solemn witness of how deeply I love our new prophet, seer, and revelator, President Thomas S. Monson—how deeply I trust him, and how I am willing to do whatever he asks me to do.

2. Some matters are so sensitive and intensely personal and can awaken such disturbing feelings that they are seldom mentioned publicly. Yet, if tenderly and compassionately treated in the light of truth, discussion

of these matters can bring greater understanding, with the easing of pain, the blessing of healing, and even the avoidance of further tragedy.

3. It is with a deep desire to define a path to relief that I speak to you who suffer the shattering consequences of mental, verbal, physical, and especially sexual abuse. I speak also to those of you who cause it. I will focus on sexual abuse, although the counsel given should help the victims of other mistreatment. My intent is to act as a mirror so that divine, healing light can illuminate the dark clouds of distress caused by others' unrighteous acts. May I be aided to communicate understandably, to provide help, and not further complicate a damaged life. It is also likely that greater understanding, awareness, and sensitivity may permit some of the rest of us to help resolve or prevent the tragedy of abuse in additional victims.

4. The rising tide of this vicious, abominable sin may not have touched your life personally. Yet it is pervasive enough in the world that it may have touched someone you love. It frequently causes such profound suffering—that can be overcome—that I want to speak of how healing can be attained. It will be done reverently, for my objective is to help heal and not aggravate painful memories.

Agency

5. Moral agency is a vital element in our Father in Heaven's plan of happiness. He understood that some of His spirit children would use that agency improperly, causing serious problems to others. Some would even violate sacred trust, such as a father or [family](#) member abusing an innocent child. Since our Heavenly Father is completely just, there has to be a way of overcoming the tragic consequences of such damaging use of agency for both the victim and the perpetrator. That secure healing comes through the power of the Atonement of His Beloved Son, [Jesus Christ](#), to rectify that which is unjust. Faith in Jesus Christ and in His power to heal provides the abused with the means to overcome the terrible consequences of another's unrighteous acts. When combined with complete repentance, the Atonement also affords the perpetrator a way to avoid the severe punishment the Lord has decreed for such acts.

To the Victim

6. I testify that I know victims of serious abuse who have successfully made the difficult journey to full healing through the power of the Atonement. After her own concerns were resolved by her faith in the healing power of the Atonement, one young woman who had

been severely abused by her father requested another interview with me. She returned with an older couple. I could sense that she loved the two very deeply. Her face radiated happiness. She began, "Elder Scott, this is my father. I love him. He's concerned about some things that happened in my early childhood. They are no longer a problem for me. Could you help him?" What a powerful confirmation of the Savior's capacity to heal! She no longer suffered from the consequences of abuse, because she had adequate understanding of His Atonement, sufficient faith, and was obedient to His law. As you conscientiously study the Atonement and exercise your faith that Jesus Christ has the power to heal, you can receive the same blessed relief. During your journey of recovery, accept His invitation to let Him share your burden until you have sufficient time and strength to be healed.

7. To find relief from the consequences of abuse, it is helpful to understand their source. Satan is the author of all of the destructive outcomes of abuse. He has extraordinary capacity to lead an individual into blind alleys where the solution to extremely challenging problems cannot be found. His strategy is to separate the suffering soul from the healing attainable from a compassionate Heavenly Father and a loving Redeemer.

8. If you have been abused, Satan will strive to convince you that there is no solution. Yet he knows perfectly well that there is. Satan recognizes that healing comes through the unwavering love of Heavenly Father for each of His children. He also understands that the power of healing is inherent in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Therefore, his strategy is to do all possible to separate you from your Father and His Son. Do not let Satan convince you that you are beyond help.

9. Satan uses your abuse to undermine your self-confidence, destroy trust in authority, create fear, and generate feelings of despair. Abuse can damage your ability to form healthy human relationships. You must have faith that all of these negative consequences can be resolved; otherwise they will keep you from full recovery. While these outcomes have powerful influence in your life, they do not define the real you.

10. Satan will strive to alienate you from your Father in Heaven with the thought that if He loved you He would have prevented the tragedy. Do not be kept from the very source of true healing by the craftiness of the prince of evil and his wicked lies. Recognize that if you have feelings that you are not loved by your Father in Heaven, you are being manipulated by Satan. Even

when it may seem very difficult to pray, kneel and ask Father in Heaven to give you the capacity to trust Him and to feel His love for you. Ask to come to know that His Son can heal you through His merciful Atonement.

11. It was Satan's proposal that Father's children be forced to obey, that there be no moral agency and therefore no personal growth. To preserve moral agency, the Lord does not restrain individuals from improper use of that agency. However, He will punish them for such acts unless there is full repentance. Through the [Holy Ghost](#), He sends warning promptings to the abuser, but often that individual's degrading appetite is so powerful that it blocks out that spiritual guidance. That is why our Father provided a way to heal the consequences of acts that, through force, misuse of authority, or fear of another, temporarily take away the agency of the abused.

12. The beginning of healing requires childlike faith in the unalterable fact that Father in Heaven loves you and has supplied a way to heal. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, laid down His life to provide that healing. But there is no magic solution, no simple balm to provide healing, nor is there an easy path to the complete remedy. The cure requires profound faith in Jesus Christ and in His infinite capacity to heal. It is rooted in an understanding of doctrine and a resolute determination to follow it.

13. Healing may begin with a thoughtful bishop or stake president or a wise professional counselor. If you had a broken leg, you wouldn't decide to fix it yourself. Serious abuse can also benefit from professional help. There are many ways to begin healing, but remember that a full cure comes through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Redeemer. Have faith that with effort His perfect, eternal, infinite Atonement can heal your suffering from the consequences of abuse.

14. As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser and even have feelings of sorrow for him or her. When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heartache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser. As a result, you will enjoy greater peace. While an important part of healing, if the thought of [forgiveness](#) causes you yet more pain, set that step aside until you have more experience with the Savior's healing power in your own life. [1](#)

15. If you are currently being abused or have been in the past, find the courage to seek help. You may have been severely threatened or caused to fear so that you

would not reveal the abuse. Have the courage to act now. Seek the support of someone you can trust. Your bishop or stake president can give you valuable counsel and help you with the civil authorities. Explain how you have been abused and identify who has done it. Ask for protection. Your action may help others avoid becoming innocent victims, with the consequent suffering. Get help now. Do not fear—for fear is a tool Satan will use to keep you suffering. The Lord will help you, but you must reach out for that help.

16. Do not be discouraged if initially a bishop hesitates when you identify an abuser. Remember that predators are skillful at cultivating a public appearance of piety to mask their despicable acts. Pray to be guided in your efforts to receive help. That support will come. Rest assured that the Perfect Judge, Jesus the Christ, with a perfect knowledge of the details, will hold all abusers accountable for every unrighteous act. In time He will fully apply the required demands of justice unless there is complete repentance. Your preoccupation with a need for justice only slows your healing and allows the perpetrator to continue his abusive control. Therefore you should leave punishment for the diabolic acts of abuse to civil and Church authorities.

To the Perpetrator

17. Now, to the perpetrator who has shattered the life of another by abuse: Recognize that you need help with your addiction or it will destroy you. You will not overcome it by yourself. You likely need specialized professional help. I plead with you to seek to be rescued now. You likely have deceived yourself in the false, temporary security that you have successfully hidden your transgression from the civil or Church authorities. But know that the Lord Jesus Christ is completely aware of your sins. He has warned: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . , it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." [2](#) Know that even without action by a victim, your act of abuse will be publicly known, for Satan will expose you, then abandon you.

18. Simplify your life by taking steps now to cleanse your soul from such sin and resolve the penalties they evoke. Show your desire to heal the anguish that you have caused others. Talk to your bishop or stake president. The seriousness of your acts may require you to face civil and Church discipline. But full repentance will bring the sweet relief of [forgiveness](#), peace of conscience, and a renewed life. It will also bring relief to the abused and their families. You will

be free of the weight of remorse and the accusing thoughts of what you have caused in grief and anguish in another's life. Recognize that it is much easier to repent in this life than it will be in the next, so repent now. You will be helped when you decide to be freed from your addiction through repentance and the support of others. Be grateful that you didn't live anciently when abusers were stoned to death without the opportunity for repentance. [3](#)

To Parents

19. Parents, in appropriate, sensitive ways, teach your children of the potential danger of abuse and how to avoid it. Be aware of warning signs, such as an abrupt change in a child's behavior, that may signal a problem. Be alert to a child's unsettled feelings and identify their origin.

To Judges in Israel

20. To you who hold the keys of a judge in Israel, painstakingly assure that every individual that is suffering from abuse receives appropriate help. The Church handbook and the help line listed there are valuable resources to guide your ecclesiastical action and coordination with civil authorities. [4](#) Carefully supervise the participation of any individual who may have had past offenses. Recognize that it is very unlikely that a perpetrator will confess his depraved acts. Seek the guidance of the Spirit when you feel that something may be amiss. Enlist the help of ward and stake leaders to avoid potential dangers.

21. I pray that you, as one abused or one who has caused it, will act now to avail yourself of the healing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I testify that your faith and obedience will assure that He will help you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

22. Sources

1. These materials may help in recovering from the tragedy of abuse: Gordon B. Hinckley, "Save the Children," Ensign, Nov. 1994, 52–54; James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," Liahona, Jan. 2002, 19–22; Ensign, Nov. 2001, 18–20; Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2006, 6–9; Richard G. Scott, "Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse," Ensign, May 1992, 31–33; Richard G. Scott, "Trust in the Lord," Ensign, Nov. 1995, 16–18; Richard G. Scott, "Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind," Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2004, 15–18; Richard G. Scott, "The Atonement Can Secure Your Peace and Happiness," Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2006, 40–42; Jeffrey R. Holland, "Broken Things to Mend," Liahona and Ensign, May 2006, 69–71; "A Conversation on Spouse Abuse," Ensign, Oct. 1999, 22–27; "The Wrongful Road of Abuse," chapter 28 in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 1998), 249–55; [D&C 121:34–46](#).

2. [Matthew 18:6](#).

3. See [Deuteronomy 22:25–27](#).

4. See Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics (2006), 107–8, 110, 120, 122, 147, 186.

16.5 - Truth and Tolerance

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

CES Devotional, September 2011



1. My dear young brothers and sisters, Kristen and I feel privileged to be with you on this significant occasion. We meet on 9/11, the 10th anniversary of an event that has profoundly influenced our lives and thinking and will do so for many years to come. It is forever associated with the Twin Towers.

2. I have felt impressed to speak this evening about another set of twins, the twin ideas of Truth and Tolerance. These subjects were not chosen because they are uniquely your concern as young adults, like the dating, hanging out, and marriage I described to this audience some years ago. My treatment of truth and tolerance will invite you to consider and to teach these twin subjects because they are vital to the rising generation, in which you are the senior members.

We Believe in Absolute Truth

3. First: Truth. We believe in absolute truth, including the existence of God and the right and wrong established by His commandments. We sing:

4. Tho the heavens depart and the earth's fountains burst,

5. Truth, the sum of existence, will weather the worst,

6. Eternal, unchanged, evermore.[1](#)

7. In the words of President Joseph F. Smith: "We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure."[2](#)

8. The existence and nature of truth is one of the fundamental questions of mortal life. Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate that He came into the world to "bear witness unto the truth." "What is truth?" that unbeliever responded (see [John 18:37–38](#)). In earlier times the Savior had declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)). In modern revelation He declared: "Truth is knowledge of things as they are,

and as they were, and as they are to come” ([D&C 93:24](#)).

9. My young brothers and sisters, we know that the existence of God and the existence of absolute truth are fundamental to life on this earth, whether they are believed or not. We also know that evil exists and that some things are simply, seriously, and everlastingly wrong. You whom I address shun evil and seek truth. I salute you for your righteous actions and your righteous desires. As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I seek to help you make right choices in a world that is increasingly polarized between belief and disbelief, between good and evil.

10. Shocking reports of large-scale thievery and lying in civilized societies in the last two months suggest a moral vacuum in which many have little sense of right and wrong. Last month’s widespread rioting and pillaging in Britain and the scandalous, widespread cheating by teachers on state-mandated tests in elementary and middle schools in Atlanta, Georgia, have caused many to wonder whether we are losing the moral foundation Western countries have received from their Judeo-Christian heritage.³

Beware of Moral Relativism

11. It is well to worry about our moral foundation. We live in a world where more and more persons of influence are teaching and acting out a belief that there is no absolute right and wrong, that all authority and all rules of behavior are man-made choices that can prevail over the commandments of God. Many even question whether there is a God.

12. The philosophy of moral relativism, which holds that each person is free to choose for himself what is right and wrong, is becoming the unofficial creed for many in America and other Western nations. At the extreme level, evil acts that used to be localized and covered up like a boil are now legalized and paraded like a banner. Persuaded by this philosophy, many of the rising generation—youth and young adults—are caught up in self-serving pleasures, pagan painting and piercing of body parts, foul language, revealing attire, pornography, dishonesty, and degrading sexual indulgence.

13. On the foundation belief in right and wrong, there is an alarming contrast between the older and the younger generations. According to survey data of two decades ago, “79 percent of American adults [believed] that ‘there are clear guidelines about what’s good and evil that apply to everyone regardless of the situation.’”⁴ In contrast, a more recent poll of college

seniors suggests that “three-quarters of [them] believe that the difference between right and wrong is relative.”⁵

14. Many religious leaders teach the existence of God as the Ultimate Lawgiver, by whose action certain behavior is absolutely right and true and certain other behavior is absolutely wrong and untrue.⁶ Bible and Book of Mormon prophets foresaw this time, when men would be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” ([2 Timothy 3:4](#)) and, indeed, when men would deny God (see [Jude 1:4](#); [2 Nephi 28:5](#); [Moroni 7:17](#); [D&C 29:22](#)).

15. In this troubled circumstance, we who believe in God and the corollary truth of absolute right and wrong have the challenge of living in a godless and increasingly amoral world. In this circumstance, all of us—and especially you of the rising generation—have a duty to stand up and speak up to affirm that God exists and that there are absolute truths His commandments establish. In doing so, we Latter-day Saints rely on the truth we sing in the hymn I quoted earlier:

16. The pillar of truth will endure to the last,

17. And its firm-rooted bulwarks outstand the rude blast

18. And the wreck of the fell tyrant’s hopes.⁷

19. As I face this audience of committed young people, I know that some of you may be wondering why I am speaking about what is obvious to you and what, you might assume, is obvious to others. Recall the survey data I mentioned earlier, suggesting that about three-quarters of all college seniors believe the difference between right and wrong is relative.

20. I have chosen to speak about truth because teachers in schools, colleges, and universities are teaching and practicing relative morality. This is shaping the attitudes of many young Americans who are taking their places as the teachers of our children and the shapers of public attitudes through the media and popular entertainment. This philosophy of moral relativism denies what millions of believing Christians, Jews, and Muslims consider fundamental, and this denial creates serious problems for all of us. What believers should do about this introduces the second of my twin subjects: Tolerance.

Tolerance

21. Tolerance is defined as a friendly and fair attitude toward unfamiliar opinions and practices or toward the persons who hold or practice them. As modern

transportation and communication have brought all of us into closer proximity to different peoples and different ideas, we have greater need for tolerance. When I was a young adult, about 60 years ago, it was only in books and magazines that most Americans were exposed to great differences in cultures, values, and peoples. Now we experience such differences in television and the Internet, through travel, and often in personal interactions in our neighborhoods and the marketplace.

22. This greater exposure to diversity both enriches our lives and complicates them. We are enriched by associations with different peoples, which remind us of the wonderful diversity of the children of God. But diversities in cultures and values also challenge us to identify what can be embraced as consistent with our gospel culture and values and what cannot. In this way diversity increases the potential for conflict and requires us to be more thoughtful about the nature of tolerance. What is tolerance, when does it apply, and when does it not apply?

23. This is a harder question for those who affirm the existence of God and absolute truth than for those who believe in moral relativism. The weaker one's belief in God and the fewer one's moral absolutes, the fewer the occasions when the ideas or practices of others will confront one with the challenge to be tolerant. For example, an atheist has no need to decide what kinds and occasions of profanity or blasphemy can be tolerated and what kinds should be confronted. Persons who don't believe in God or in absolute truth in moral matters can see themselves as the most tolerant of persons. For them, almost anything goes. "You do your thing, and I'll do my thing" is the popular description. This belief system can tolerate almost any behavior and almost any persons. Unfortunately, some who believe in moral relativism seem to have difficulty tolerating those who insist that there is a God who should be respected and certain moral absolutes that should be observed.

Three Absolute Truths for Tolerance

24. I will say no more about the tolerance or intolerance of nonbelievers. I am speaking to an audience of Latter-day Saints who believe in God and in absolute truth. What does tolerance mean to us and to other believers, and what are our special challenges in applying it?

25. I begin with three absolute truths. I express them as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I believe that most of these ideas are shared by believers generally.

26. First, all persons are brothers and sisters under God, taught within their various religions to love and do good to one another. President Gordon B. Hinckley expressed this idea for Latter-day Saints: "Each of us [from various religious denominations] believes in the fatherhood of God, although we may differ in our interpretations of Him. Each of us is part of a great family, the human family, sons and daughters of God, and therefore brothers and sisters. We must work harder to build mutual respect, an attitude of forbearance, with tolerance one for another regardless of the doctrines and philosophies which we may espouse."⁸

27. Note that President Hinckley spoke of "mutual respect" as well as tolerance. Speaking at BYU a decade later, a Muslim scholar, Dr. Alwi Shihab, an Indonesian, elaborated that idea in these words: "To tolerate something is to learn to live with it, even when you think it is wrong and downright evil. ... We must go, I believe, beyond tolerance if we are to achieve harmony in our world."

28. Relying on the teachings of the Quran, Dr. Shihab continued: "We must respect this God-given dignity in every human being, even in our enemies. For the goal of all human relations—whether they are religious, social, political, or economic—ought to be cooperation and mutual respect."⁹

29. Living together with mutual respect for one another's differences is a challenge in today's world. However—and here I express a second absolute truth—this living with differences is what the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us we must do.

30. The kingdom of God is like a leaven, Jesus taught (see [Matthew 13:33](#)). A leaven—yeast—is hidden away in the larger mass until the whole is leavened, which means raised by its influence. Our Savior also taught that His followers will have tribulation in the world, that their numbers and dominions will be small (see [1 Nephi 14:12](#)), and that they will be hated because they are not of the world (see [John 17:14](#)). But that is our role. We are called to live with other children of God who do not share our faith or our values and who do not have the covenant obligations we have assumed. So it was that, at the conclusion of His ministry, Jesus prayed to the Father, "Not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" ([John 17:15](#)). We are to be in the world, but not of the world.

31. Since followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to be a leaven—not to be taken out of the world, but to remain in it—we must seek tolerance from those who

hate us for not being of the world. As part of this, we will sometimes need to challenge laws that would impair our freedom to practice our faiths, doing so in reliance on our constitutional rights to the free exercise of religion. As described by an attorney supporting a Lutheran school in a case now before the United States Supreme Court, the big concern is “the ability of people of all faiths to work out their relationship with God and one another without the government looking over their shoulder.”¹⁰ That is why we need understanding and support—including your understanding and support—when we must contend for religious freedom.

32. We must also practice tolerance and respect toward others. As the Apostle Paul taught, Christians should “follow after the things which make for peace” ([Romans 14:19](#)) and, as much as possible, “live peaceably with all men” ([Romans 12:18](#)). Consequently, we should be alert to honor the good we should see in all people and in many opinions and practices that differ from our own. As the Book of Mormon teaches:

33. “All things which are good cometh of God. ...

34. “... Wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

35. “Wherefore, take heed ... that ye do not judge ... that which is good and of God to be of the devil” ([Moroni 7:12–14](#)).

36. That approach to differences will yield tolerance and also respect.

37. Our tolerance and respect for others and their beliefs does not cause us to abandon our commitment to the truths we understand and the covenants we have made. That is a third absolute truth: We do not abandon the truth and our covenants. We are cast as combatants in the war between truth and error. There is no middle ground. We must stand up for truth, even while we practice tolerance and respect for beliefs and ideas different from our own and for the people who hold them.

38. While we must practice tolerance and respect for others and their beliefs, including their constitutional freedom to explain and advocate their positions, we are not required to respect and tolerate wrong behavior. Our duty to truth requires us to seek relief from some behavior that is wrong. This is easy to see when it involves extreme behaviors that most believers and nonbelievers recognize as wrong or unacceptable. For example, we must all deplore murder or other terrorist

behavior, even when done by extremists in the name of religion. And we must all oppose violence and thievery.

The Two-Sided Coin of Tolerance and Truth

39. As to less extreme behaviors, where even believers disagree on whether or not they are wrong, the nature and extent of what we should tolerate is much more difficult to define. Thus, a thoughtful LDS woman wrote me about her concern that “the world’s definition of ‘tolerance’ seems to be increasingly used in relation to tolerating wicked lifestyles.” She asked how the Lord would define “tolerance.”¹¹

40. President Boyd K. Packer gave an inspired introduction to this subject. Speaking to an audience of institute students three years ago, he said: “The word tolerance does not stand alone. It requires an object and a response to qualify it as a virtue. ... Tolerance is often demanded but seldom returned. Beware of the word tolerance. It is a very unstable virtue.”¹²

41. This inspired caution reminds us that for persons who believe in absolute truth, tolerance for behavior is like a two-sided coin. Tolerance, or respect, is on one side of the coin, but truth is always on the other. You cannot possess or use the coin of tolerance without being conscious of both sides.

42. Our Savior applied this principle. When He faced the woman taken in adultery, Jesus spoke the comforting words of tolerance: “Neither do I condemn thee.” Then, as He sent her away, He spoke the commanding words of truth: “Go, and sin no more” ([John 8:11](#)). We should all be edified and strengthened by this example of speaking both tolerance and truth: kindness in the communication, but firmness in the truth.

Facing Profanity, Cohabitation, and Sabbath Breaking with Truth and Tolerance

43. Let us consider how to apply that example to some other behaviors. Another thoughtful LDS member wrote:

44. “In [Mosiah 18:9](#) Alma tells us that when we are baptized we covenant ‘to stand as “witnesses” of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in.’ ... What does this scripture mean for our day and how can it be applied by Latter-day Saints?

45. “Living in the mission field, I often hear the name of the Lord taken in vain, and I also have acquaintances who tell me that they are living with their boyfriends. I have found that observance of the Sabbath is almost obsolete. How can I keep my

covenant to stand as a witness and not offend these people?”[13](#)

46. Profanity, cohabitation, and Sabbath breaking—excellent examples to illustrate how Latter-day Saints might balance their competing duties to truth and tolerance in their own lives in these difficult circumstances.

47. I begin with our personal conduct, including the teaching of our children. In applying the sometimes competing demands of truth and tolerance in these three behaviors and many others, we should not be tolerant with ourselves. We should be ruled by the demands of truth. We should be strong in keeping the commandments and our covenants, and we should repent and improve when we fall short.

48. As President Thomas S. Monson taught us in the conference where he was sustained as our prophet: “My young friends, be strong. . . . The face of sin today often wears the mask of tolerance. Do not be deceived; behind that façade is heartache, unhappiness, and pain. You know what is right and what is wrong, and no disguise, however appealing, can change that. The character of transgression remains the same. If your so-called friends urge you to do anything you know to be wrong, you be the one to make a stand for right, even if you stand alone.”[14](#)

49. Similarly, with our children and others we have a duty to teach—such as in our Church callings—our duty to truth is paramount. Of course, teaching efforts only bear fruit through the agency of others, so they must always be done with love, patience, and persuasion.

50. I turn now to the obligations of truth and tolerance in our personal relations with associates who use profanity in our presence, who live with a partner out of wedlock, or who do not observe the Sabbath day appropriately. How should we react toward and communicate with them?

51. Our obligation to tolerance means that none of these behaviors—or others we consider deviations from the truth—should ever cause us to react with hateful communications or unkind actions. But our obligation to truth has its own set of requirements and its own set of blessings. When we “speak every man truth with his neighbour” ([Ephesians 4:25](#)), and when we “[speak] the truth in love” ([Ephesians 4:15](#)) as the Apostle Paul taught, we are acting as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, doing His work. Angels will stand with us, and He will send His Holy Spirit to guide us.

52. In this sensitive matter we should first consider whether or the extent to which we should communicate to our associates what we know to be true about their behavior. In most cases this decision can depend on how directly we are personally affected by it.

53. Profanity consistently used in our presence is an appropriate cause for us to communicate the fact that this is offensive to us. Profanity used out of our presence by nonbelievers probably would not be an occasion for us to confront the offenders.

54. Cohabitation we know to be a serious sin in which Latter-day Saints must not engage, whatever the circumstances. When practiced by those around us, it can be private behavior or something we are asked to condone, sponsor, or facilitate. In the balance between truth and tolerance, tolerance can be dominant where the behavior does not involve us personally. If the cohabitation does involve us personally, we should be governed by our duty to truth. For example, it is one thing to ignore serious sins when they are private; it is quite another thing to be asked to sponsor or impliedly endorse them, such as by housing them in our own homes.

55. On Sabbath observance, Latter-day Saints know that we are taught to observe the Sabbath day in a different way than many other Christians. Most of us are troubled by packed shopping centers and other commercial activities on the Sabbath. Perhaps we should explain our belief that our observance of the Sabbath, including our partaking of the sacrament, restores us spiritually and makes us better people for the rest of the week. Then, to other believers, we might express appreciation for the fact that we share common ground on what is most vital because each of us believes in God and in the existence of absolute truth, even though we differ in our definitions of these fundamentals. Beyond that, we should remember the Savior’s teaching that we should avoid contention (see [3 Nephi 11:29–30](#)) and that our example and our preaching should “be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness” ([D&C 38:41](#)).

56. In all of this we should not presume to judge our neighbors or associates on the ultimate effect of their behaviors. That judgment is the Lord’s, not ours. Even He refrained from a final mortal judgment of the woman taken in adultery. Tolerance requires a similar refraining in our judgment of others.

Four Principles of Truth and Tolerance When Seeking Government Action

57. Having discussed the balancing of truth and tolerance in our personal behavior and in our relations with associates, I come to a different and more difficult circumstance. When believers enter the public square to try to influence the making or the administration of laws motivated by their beliefs, they should apply some different principles.

58. As young adults, you may wonder why I am speaking to you about the principles we should follow when we seek government action, such as by the legislature. You might say, “That is a matter for senior Church authorities to handle.” I describe these principles to you young adults because you are current members and future leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ, and you will need to decide these kinds of questions sooner than you think. You will need to understand how our efforts in the public square are informed by the balance between truth and tolerance.

59. Whether or how we might seek to obtain laws that would compel or influence behavior that we deem desirable because of our belief in God and His commandments is too large a subject for adequate treatment in the concluding few minutes of my talk. I will, therefore, limit myself to describing four paramount principles that should govern such an effort.

60. First, when believers in Jesus Christ take their views of truth into the public square, they must seek the inspiration of the Lord to be selective and wise in choosing which true principles they seek to promote by law or executive action. Generally, they should refrain from seeking laws or administrative action to facilitate beliefs that are distinctive to believers, such as the enforcement of acts of worship, even by implication. Believers can be less cautious in seeking government action that would serve principles broader than merely facilitating the practice of their beliefs, such as laws concerning public health, safety, and morals.

61. In any event, as defenders of the faith, believers can and must seek laws that will preserve religious freedom. Along with the ascendancy of moral relativism, the United States is experiencing a disturbing reduction in overall public esteem for religion. Once an accepted part of American life, religion is now suspect in the minds of many. To them it has become something that must prove its legitimacy as a part of our public life. Some influential voices even question the extent to which our constitution should protect the free exercise of religion, including the right to practice and preach religious principles.

62. This is a vital matter on which we who believe in a Supreme Being who has established absolute right

and wrong in human behavior must unite to insist on our time-honored constitutional rights to exercise our religion, to vote our consciences on public issues, and to participate in elections and debates in the public square and in the halls of justice. In doing so we stand with angels. We must also stand shoulder to shoulder with other believers to preserve and strengthen the freedom to advocate and practice our religious beliefs, whatever they are. For this purpose we must walk together on the same path in order to secure our freedom to pursue our separate ways when that is necessary according to our separate beliefs. Guided by heaven in this righteous cause, our words will be sweet and find place in the hearts of many.

63. Second, when believers seek to promote their positions in the public square, their methods and their advocacy should always be tolerant of the opinions and positions of others who do not share their beliefs. We should not add to the extremism that divides our society. As believers, we must always speak with love and show patience, understanding, and compassion toward our adversaries. Christian believers are under command to love their neighbors (see [Luke 10:27](#)), to forgive (see [Matthew 18:21–35](#)), and to do good to those who spitefully use them (see [Matthew 5:44](#)). They should always remember the Savior’s teaching that we “bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which spitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” ([Matthew 5:44](#)).

64. As believers, we should also frame our arguments and positions in ways that contribute to the reasoned discussion and accommodation that are essential to democratic government in a pluralistic society. By this means we will contribute to the civility that is essential to preserve our civilization.

65. Third, believers should not be deterred by the familiar charge that they are trying to legislate morality. Many areas of the law are based on Judeo-Christian morality and have been for centuries. Our civilization is based on morality and cannot exist without it. As John Adams declared: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”¹⁵

66. Fourth, believers should not shrink from seeking laws to maintain public conditions or policies that assist them in practicing the requirements of their faith where those conditions or policies are also favorable to the public health, safety, or morals. For example, even though religious beliefs are behind many criminal laws, and some family laws, such laws have a long-standing history of appropriateness in democratic

societies. But where believers are in the majority, they should always be sensitive to the views of the minority.

67. We Latter-day Saints are sometimes accused of being self-righteous and intolerant of others, especially where we are in the majority or where others are in the majority and our beliefs cause us to oppose them. Surely Latter-day Saints do need to be more wise and skillful in explaining and pursuing our views and in exercising our influence when we have it.

68. That is the spirit of the two-sided coin of truth and tolerance. President Thomas S. Monson has provided an excellent example of the practice of these twin virtues. Throughout his life he has been exemplary in reaching out and working with the members and leaders of other faiths in cooperative efforts on matters of common interest and in the Christian fellowship and concern that have no denominational boundaries.¹⁶

69. Finally, the spirit of our balance of truth and tolerance is applied in these words of President Gordon B. Hinckley: “Let us reach out to those in our community who are not of our faith. Let us be good neighbors, kind and generous and gracious. Let us be involved in good community causes. There may be situations, there will be situations, where, with serious moral issues involved, we cannot bend on matters of principle. But in such instances we can politely disagree without being disagreeable. We can acknowledge the sincerity of those whose positions we cannot accept. We can speak of principles rather than personalities.”¹⁷

The Gift to Know and the Gift to Believe

70. I close with this assurance and this testimony:

71. The Bible teaches that one of the functions of a prophet is to be a “watchman” to warn Israel (see [Ezekiel 3:17](#); [33:7](#)). In revelation the Lord added this parable for modern Zion: “Set ... a watchman upon the tower,” who will “[see] the enemy while he [is] yet afar off” and give warning to save the “vineyard from the hands of the destroyer” ([D&C 101:45, 54](#)).

72. I have spoken to you as one of those watchmen on the subject the Spirit has assigned me. I assure you that my message is true. If you have doubts about this, or if you have questions about how to apply these principles in your own life, I urge you to seek guidance from the same source.

73. On the broader question being widely agitated by the atheists of our day, I proclaim my knowledge that God lives! His creations witness His existence, and His

servants hear and proclaim His voice. Modern revelation teaches that some have the gift “to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, ... crucified for the sins of the world,” and that it is given to others “to believe on their words” ([D&C 46:13–14](#)). As one who knows, I invite you to believe on my words.

74. I testify of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the vineyard. He is our Savior, and He reaches out to each of us with the timeless invitation to receive His peace by learning of Him and by walking in His way (see [D&C 19:23](#)):

75. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

76. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

77. “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” ([Matthew 11:28–30](#)).

78. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” Hymns, no. 272.
2. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 1.
3. See “Anarchy in the UK,” *The Economist*, Aug. 13, 2011, 14; Patrick Jonsson, “Is the US a Nation of Liars?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 25, 2011, 20.
4. Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (1993), 225.
5. “Campus Confidential,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 5, 2002, W11.
6. See, for example, John Paul II: *The Encyclicals in Everyday Language*, 3rd ed., ed. Joseph G. Donders (2005), 210–13; Harold Kushner, *Who Needs God* (1989), 83–84.
7. “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” Hymns, no. 272.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 665.
9. Alwi Shihab, *Building Bridges to Harmony Through Understanding* (forum address at Brigham Young University, Oct. 10, 2006), <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=11324>.
10. Eric Rassbach, quoted in William McGurn, “Religion and the Cult of Tolerance,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 16, 2011, A11.
11. Letter to Dallin H. Oaks, May 14, 1998.
12. Boyd K. Packer, “Be Not Afraid” (address at the Ogden Institute of Religion, Nov. 16, 2008), 5; see also Bruce D. Porter, “Defending the Family in a Troubled World,” *Ensign*, June 2011, 12–18.
13. Letter to Dallin H. Oaks, Dec. 22, 1987.
14. Thomas S. Monson, in *Conference Report*, Apr. 2008, 66; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 65.
15. John Adams, from an address to officers of the militia of Massachusetts, Oct. 11, 1798, in *The Works of John Adams*, Second President of the United States, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (1856), 9:229.
16. See Heidi S. Swinton, *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (2010), especially chapters 25 and 28 and pages 462–63.
17. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 662.