

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

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.

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 also further declare that God's commandment that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between a man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

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

HUSBAND AND WIFE HAVE A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE one another as for each other and for their children. "Children are born as a result of marriage. Therefore, the parent has 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 their 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 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 read by President Gordon B. Hinckley at the General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1994.

The Eternal Family

Religion C 200 – Supplemental Readings

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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.

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" (Psalms 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.

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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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1. The Eternal Family and The Nature of God

Families And The Church In God's Plan

The First Presidency

Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 2010

God the Father's Plan for His Eternal Family

The Premortal Family of God

1. The family is ordained of God. It is the most important unit in time and in eternity. Even before we were born on the earth, we were part of a family. Each of us "is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents" with "a divine nature and destiny" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). God is our Heavenly Father, and we lived in His presence as part of His family in the premortal life. There we learned our first lessons and were prepared for mortality (see D&C 138:56).

The Purpose of Mortality

2. Because of God's love for us, He prepared a plan that included our coming to the earth, where we would receive bodies and be tested so that we could progress and become more like Him. This plan is called "the plan of salvation" (Alma 24:14), "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8), and "the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:25; see also verses 26–33).

3. The purpose of God's plan is to lead us to eternal life. God declared, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Eternal life is God's greatest gift to His children (see D&C 14:7). It is exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Through the plan of salvation, we can receive this blessing of returning to God's presence and receiving a fulness of joy.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

4. In order to gain exaltation in the kingdom of God, we must overcome two obstacles of mortality: death and sin. Because we cannot overcome either obstacle by ourselves, Heavenly Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior and Redeemer. The Savior's atoning sacrifice made it possible for all of God's children to overcome physical death, be resurrected, and gain immortality. The Atonement also made it possible for those who repent and follow Him to overcome spiritual death, return to God's presence to dwell with Him, and obtain eternal life (see D&C

45:3–5).

The Role of Families in God's Plan

5. As part of our Heavenly Father's plan, we were born into families. He established families to bring us happiness, to help us learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare us for eternal life.

6. Parents have the vital responsibility to help their children prepare to return to Heavenly Father. Parents fulfill this responsibility by teaching their children to follow Jesus Christ and live His gospel.

The Role of the Church

7. The Church provides the organization and means for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God's children. It provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them.

Returning to the Father

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

8. The plan of salvation is the fulness of the gospel. It includes the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and all the laws, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel. It provides the way for us to experience joy in mortality (see 2 Nephi 2:25) as well as the blessing of eternal life.

9. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be cleansed and sanctified from sin and prepare to enter again into the presence of our Eternal Father. To receive this blessing, we must follow the principles and ordinances of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:3). We must:

10. Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.

11. Turn to God through sincere repentance, having a change of heart and confessing and forsaking sins.

12. Receive the saving ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins.

13. Be confirmed a member of the Church and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

14. Endure to the end by keeping sacred covenants.

15. These principles have been taught since the days of Adam. As we come to understand and believe these truths and gain a firm testimony of Jesus Christ, we

strive to obey His commandments and want to share our blessings with our family and others (see 1 Nephi 8:9–37). With this secure foundation of testimony, other elements of Church activity follow naturally.

16. Personal spiritual growth takes place as we draw close to God through prayer, scripture study, pondering, and obedience. Nephi taught:

17. “After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

18. “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

19. Each of us is accountable before God to learn and keep His commandments and to live the gospel. We will be judged according to our actions, the desires of our hearts, and the kind of people we have become. As we become true followers of Jesus Christ, we experience a mighty change of heart and “have no more disposition to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2; see also Alma 5:12–15; Moroni 10:32–33). As we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, we grow line upon line, becoming more like the Savior in loving and serving others.

The Role of Church Leaders and Teachers

20. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers strive to help others become true followers of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 18:18–30). To assist individuals and families in this effort, they:

21. Teach and testify of the pure doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

22. Strengthen individuals and families in their efforts to keep their sacred covenants.

23. Provide counsel, support, and opportunities for service.

24. In addition, certain priesthood leaders have the authority to oversee the performance of the saving priesthood ordinances.

Establishing Eternal Families

25. Families are central to God’s plan, which provides a way for family relationships to extend

beyond the grave. Sacred temple ordinances and covenants, faithfully kept, help us return to the presence of God, united eternally with our families.

Husband and Wife

26. Exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom can be attained only by those who have faithfully lived the gospel of Jesus Christ and are sealed as eternal companions.

27. The sealing of husband and wife for time and eternity by the authority of the priesthood—also known as temple marriage—is a sacred privilege and obligation that all should strive to receive. It is the foundation of an eternal family.

28. The nature of male and female spirits is such that they complete each other. Men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

29. The Lord has commanded husbands and wives to cleave to each other (see Genesis 2:24; D&C 42:22). In this commandment, the word cleave means to be completely devoted and faithful to someone. Married couples cleave to God and one another by serving and loving each other and by keeping covenants in complete fidelity to one another and to God (see D&C 25:13).

30. A couple is to become one in establishing their family as the basis of a righteous life. Latter-day Saint husbands and wives leave behind their single life and establish their marriage as the first priority in their lives. They allow no other person or interest to have greater priority in their lives than keeping the covenants they have made with God and each other. Nonetheless, married couples continue to love and support their parents and siblings while focusing on their own families. Similarly, wise parents realize that their family responsibilities continue throughout life in a spirit of love and encouragement.

31. Being one in marriage requires a full partnership. For example, Adam and Eve worked together, prayed and worshipped together, sacrificed together, taught their children the gospel together, and mourned over wayward children together (see Moses 5:1, 4, 12, 27). They were united with each other and with God.

Parents and Children

32. “The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. . . . God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). By divine design, both a man and a woman are

essential for bringing children into mortality and providing the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

33. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred responsibility. Parents and priesthood and auxiliary leaders should do all they can to reinforce this teaching.

34. Concerning the roles of fathers and mothers, Church leaders have taught: “Fathers are to pre- side 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”). When there is no father in the home, the mother presides over the family.

35. Parents have a divinely appointed responsibility “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”; see also Mosiah 4:14–15).

36. Wise parents teach their children to apply the healing, reconciling, and strengthening power of the Atonement within their family. Just as sin, mortal weaknesses, emotional hurt, and an- ger are conditions that separate God’s children from Him, these same conditions can separate family members from each other. Each family member has a responsibility to strive for family unity. Children who learn to strive for unity at home will find it easier to do so outside the home.

Unmarried Members of the Church

37. All members, even if they have never married or are without family in the Church, should strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. This means preparing to become worthy spouses and loving fathers or mothers. In some cases these blessings will not be fulfilled until the next life, but the ultimate goal is the same for all.

38. 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, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God.

The Home and the Church

39. In the teachings and practices of the restored gospel, the family and the Church help and strengthen each other. To qualify for the blessings of eternal life, families need to learn the doctrines and receive the priesthood ordinances that are available only through the Church. To be a strong and vital organization, the Church needs righteous families.

40. God has revealed a pattern of spiritual progress for individuals and families through ordinances, teaching, programs, and activities that are home centered and Church supported. Church organizations and programs exist to bless individuals and families and are not ends in themselves. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers seek to assist parents, not to supersede or replace them.

41. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders must endeavor to strengthen the sacredness of the home by ensuring that all Church activities support the lives of individuals and families. Church leaders need to be careful not to overwhelm families with too many Church responsibilities. Parents and Church leaders work together to help individuals and families return to our Father in Heaven by following Jesus Christ.

Strengthening the Home

42. Followers of Christ are invited to “gather,” “stand in holy places,” and “be not moved” (D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22; see also 2 Chronicles 35:5; Mat- thew 24:15). These holy places include temples, homes, and chapels. The presence of the Spirit and the behavior of those within these physical structures are what make them “holy places.”

43. Wherever Church members live, they should establish a home where the Spirit is present. All members of the Church can make efforts to en- sure that their place of residence provides a place of sanctuary from the world. Every home in the Church, large or small, can be a “house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119). Church members can invite the Spirit into their homes through simple means such as wholesome entertainment, good music, and inspiring artwork (for example, a painting of the Savior or a temple).

44. A home with loving and loyal parents is the setting in which the spiritual and physical needs of children are most effectively met. A Christ- centered home offers adults and children a place of defense against sin, refuge from the world, healing from emotional and other pain, and com- mitted, genuine love.

45. Parents have always been commanded to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; Enos 1:1) and “in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). The First Presidency proclaimed:

46. “We call upon 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.

47. “We counsel 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, Feb. 11, 1999).

48. Parents have the primary responsibility for helping their children know Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (see John 17:3). Latter-day Saint fathers and mothers have been commanded to teach gospel doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and ways of righteous living to their children (see D&C 68:25–28). Children who are so reared and taught are more likely to be prepared at the appropriate age to receive priesthood ordinances and to make and keep covenants with God.

49. Strengthening families is the focus of inspired Church programs such as home teaching (see D&C 20:47, 51), visiting teaching, and family home evening. As in all things, Jesus set the example of entering homes to minister, teach, and bless (see Matthew 8:14–15; 9:10–13; 26:6; Mark 5:35–43; Luke 10:38–42; 19:1–9).

Family Home Evening

50. Latter-day prophets have counseled parents to hold a weekly family home evening to teach their children the gospel, bear testimony of its truthfulness, and strengthen family unity. Stake and ward leaders are to keep Monday evenings free from all Church meetings and activities so family home evenings may be held.

51. Family home evening may include family prayer, gospel instruction, testimony sharing, hymns and Primary songs, and wholesome recreational activities. (For information on using music in the home, see 14.8.) As part of family home evening, or separately, parents may also call a periodic family council to set goals, resolve problems, coordinate schedules, and give support and strength to family members.

52. Family home evening is sacred, private family time under the direction of the parents. Priesthood leaders should not give directions as to what families should do during this time.

Strengthening Individuals

53. Church leaders should give special attention to individuals who do not presently enjoy the support of a family of strong Church members. These members may include children and youth whose parents are not members of the Church, other individuals in part-member families, and single adults of all ages. They are covenant members of God’s eternal family, deeply loved by Him. These individuals should be given opportunities for service in the Church. The Church can provide wholesome sociality and fellowship that these members can find nowhere else.

54. Every member of the Church is as precious as every other. God’s eternal plan provides for all of His faithful children to receive every blessing of eternal life, exalted in families forever.

2. The Plan of Salvation and the Eternal Family

The Great Plan of the Eternal God

Elder Neal A. Maxwell
Ensign, May 1984



1. My public and warm welcome to Elder Nelson and Elder Oaks, choice friends of many years, as they now enter into an even deeper friendship.

2. One of the great blessings flowing from amplifying, latter-day revelations is the crucial, doctrinal framework known as the marvelous plan of salvation, the plan of happiness, or the plan of mercy. (See Alma 42:5, 8, 15.) However designated, it represents what Amulek called the

“great plan of the Eternal God” without which mankind would unavoidably perish. (Alma 34:9.)

3. The plan is a most stunning example of the precious perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, full faith in the Lord Jesus Christ includes and requires full faith in His Father’s plan of salvation.

4. President Brigham Young declared: “The Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God.” (Journal of Discourses, 9:279.)

5. So vital is this framework that if one stays or strays outside it, he risks provinciality and misery. In fact, most human misery represents ignorance of or noncompliance with the plan. A cessation of such mortal suffering will not come without compliance to it. Hence, the Lord, who has freely shared this vital knowledge with us, has urged us to teach the fundamentals of this plan “freely.” (Moses 6:58.)

6. At the center of the Father’s plan is Jesus Christ, mankind’s Redeemer. Yet, as foreseen, many judge Jesus “to be a thing of naught” (1 Ne. 19:9), or “consider him” merely “a man.” (Mosiah 3:9.) Whether others deny or delimit Jesus, for us He is our Lord and Savior! Comparatively, brothers and sisters, it matters very little what people think of us, but it matters very much what we think of Him. It matters very little, too, who others say we are; what matters is who we say Jesus is. (See Matt. 16:13–17.)

7. For instance, we appreciate not only the towering divinity of Jesus Christ, but His breathtaking mobility and the scope of His shepherding. The resurrected Jesus revisited the Middle East scene of His mortal messiahship. Then some souls in the Americas. (See 3 Ne 11.) And then His other lost sheep. (See 3 Ne. 17:4.)

8. In His selfless plan, the Lord doeth nothing save it be for the benefit of the children of men. (See 2 Ne. 26:24.) He labors, lovingly and constantly, as Moses and Jeremiah declared, “for our good always.” (Deut. 6:24; see also Jer. 32: 38–40.) In His grand design, His “work” and “glory” are “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39.) Thus, even when we truly learn to love God, we must humbly acknowledge that He loved us first. (See 1 Jn. 4:19.)

9. Meanwhile, Shakespeare was not very wide of the mark in writing, “All the world’s a stage.” (As You Like It, act 2, scene 7.) But not for playacting!

10. The very word plan confirms God’s paternal purpose, a realization so desperately needed by the confused and despairing on the world’s stage.

11. The “plan of happiness” not only ensures the immortalization of our individual identities, but can yield bettered and reborn individuals. Fittingly, one appreciative prophet declared, “O how great the plan of our God!” (2 Ne. 9:13.) Enoch wept when he saw the sweep of history and the unnecessary human misery. (See Moses 7:41.) But he also saw the triumph of God’s plan. Another prophet exclaimed: “God ... made these things known unto us that we might not perish ... because he loveth our souls ... ; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us.” (Alma 24:14.)

12. It took visits by angels in our day, too, in order to instruct us anew regarding God’s plan of salvation and to reassure us that mortality is not a conclusive and massive mausoleum, and that death is not extinction.

13. Alma faced an awful and anguished moment when he felt that he might actually “become extinct both soul and body.” (Alma 36:15.) Then he remembered his father’s prophecies “concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.” (Alma 36:17.) In a moment of deep intellectual humility, his “mind caught hold upon this thought.” Out came Alma’s great soul cry: “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me”! (Alma 36:18.)

14. Purpose replaced pain. Joy swallowed up despair as Alma apparently viewed God upon His throne, and he longed to join God! (See Alma 36:22.)

15. Such longing for a heavenly home is real, especially in view of how this life is designed. After all, brothers and sisters, when we rejoice in beautiful scenery, great art, and great music, it is but the flexing of instincts acquired in another place and another time.

16. Life turns out, however, to be just what one would expect of a deliberately constructed proving and tutoring experience which features opportunities, choices, and deprivations. Furthermore, there is no way around—the only way to go is through!

17. And what a “through” it is!

18. Even so, for us mistake-prone mortals, this plan of mercy provides for recognition and redress of error and for the resumption of interrupted individual development.

19. Redemptive and refining provisions are made: For a brave Peter faltering and sinking on the churning waves—and yet knowing to whom to look to live, and crying out, “Lord, save me.” (Matt. 14:30.) For a meek Moses struggling with people, fatigued and with all the burdens of leadership. (See Num. 11:11, 14, 29.) For a Jonah seeking to substitute Tarshish, but still reaching Nineveh and, thereby, receiving a great lesson in compassion. For erring Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Thomas B. Marsh to recover their spiritual poise and vote with their feet by traveling westward to rejoin, in reconciliation, and to sustain the plan and its enunciating latter-day prophets.

20. Hence, brothers and sisters, for the faithful, our finest hours are sometimes during or just following our darkest hours.

21. It is an incredible irony, therefore, that some complainingly attempt to use the very tutoring process of the Lord against Him. Or resent the reality that we are to walk by faith during this mortal experience. Yet, as practical and spiritual President Brigham Young said, “There is no saving faith merely upon ... acknowledging a fact.” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941, p. 154.)

22. Furthermore, since this life is such a brief experience, there must be regular exit routes. Some easy. Some hard. Some sudden. Others lingering. Therefore, we cannot presume, even by faith, to block all these exits, all the time, and for all people. Nor, if possessed of full, eternal perspective, would we desire so to do.

23. Since certain recollections are withheld, we do not now see the end from the beginning. But God does. Meanwhile, we are in what might be called “the murky middle.” Therein, however, we can still truly know that God loves us, individually and perfectly, even though we cannot always explain the meaning of all things happening to us or around us. (See 1 Ne. 11:17.)

24. Enclosed in this mortal cocoon, or classroom, we would be totally provincial in outlook except for faith in, and knowledge of, the “great plan of the Eternal God.”

25. Hence, Christ’s doctrines pertaining to the plan of salvation stand like sentinel scriptures to mark and light the way. His gospel guardrails line the strait and narrow path to steady us, nudge us, and even jar us for the sake of our spiritual safety!

26. So much more than a matter of abstract theology, this great plan can focus daily life. Its truths are crucial to how we see ourselves, others, life, the Lord, and even the universe. Or how we view a baby. Or death. Or the praise and honors of the world. This plan constitutes the mother lode of meaning and can cradle us, conceptually, amid any concern.

27. Its truths and perspectives permit us to distinguish between a great book and mere want ads, between vengeance and justice, rage and righteous indignation, and pleasure and happiness.

28. With an understanding of God’s plan of salvation, we know that the rejoicing, the striving, the suffering, the tutoring, and the enduring experiences of life all play their part in an intelligible process of helping us, if we will, to become, as the Savior beckoningly invited, “even as I am.” (3 Ne. 27:27.)

29. This individual development sometimes requires the march of a Zion’s Camp, or an arduous Hole in the Rock trek, or special classrooms like the settlements in northern Mexico, wherein special individuals were fashioned. Those episodes, however, had nothing to do with real estate but everything to do with our second estate!

30. Hence, in submitting knowingly and meekly to this plan, we cannot say to the Lord that we are willing to surrender but only on our terms. There are no conditions in unconditional surrender!

31. Even with all of its interior consistency, however, the plan cannot bring true happiness to anyone whose life is grossly inconsistent with its standards. It cannot fully enfold him who is too worried about being taken in. It has no place of honor for one too concerned with losing his place in the secular synagogue. (See John 12:42–43.)

32. Though the plan reflects a caring Father and a Savior, believers in the plan are not automatically immune to the consuming cares of the world.

33. The plan places a striking emphasis on present human freedom to choose. (See 2 Ne. 2:27.) Yet some of our present circumstances may reflect previous agreements, now forgotten, but once freely made.

34. The plan always points the way, but does not always smooth the way, since individual development requires an “opposition in all things.” (2 Ne. 2:11.)

35. The Lord will give us the needed intellectual and spiritual confirmation concerning His plan, but on His terms and in His own way.

36. “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17.)

37. Truly, of all the errors mortals could make, God’s plan of salvation is the wrong thing to be wrong about!

38. No error could be more enormous or more everlasting in its consequences!

39. No wonder this Church and its people go to such great lengths and expense to share the fulness of the gospel concerning this plan.

40. No wonder the Lord wants the plan taught plainly and repetitively.

41. And why not? It is God’s plan—not ours! And, given the unimpressive outcomes of man’s plans to solve the world’s problems, aren’t we glad! Furthermore, of all the things about which we might converse, as Jacob wrote, “Why not speak of the atonement of Christ?” (Jacob 4:12.) Why not, brothers and sisters? This event arches over all of human history, as a Redeeming God and Savior Son pressed onward with the great plan of happiness. Yes, in the plan, God would have us be happy, but first we had to be free to choose.

42. God’s gift to us of this moral agency tells us wonderful things about His beneficial and developmental purposes. Our abuse of that agency tells us awful things about ourselves!

43. Yet, on this mortal stage, we see great moments of mercy, stirring celebrations of compassion, striking selflessness, and quiet and constant heroism among people of all creeds and colors and cultures.

44. This should not surprise us. After all, whose spirit children are we? (See Heb. 12:9.)

45. Unsurprisingly, therefore, this mortal school produces some soaring triumphs but also a history filled with individual mistakes. But we should not blame the school, nor the curriculum! Least of all, the Schoolmaster! Furthermore, we dare not lecture Him on the plight of His students!

46. Meanwhile, brothers and sisters, no one ever promised us that discipleship in the last days would be a picnic in the park.

47. Former periods of stress can guide us. When the earlier coming of Jesus was imminent, signs abounded. Still, for some, there were “doubtings.” (3 Ne. 8:4.) But the faithful prevailed and were vindicated.

48. There were determined detractors then, mocking the faith of believers, briefly creating “a great uproar,” even rejoicing over the seeming prospect that the faith of Christ’s followers would be in vain. (See 3 Ne. 1:5–7.) It was not. Members kept the faith, and the faith kept them!

49. For today’s spiritually attuned, the reassurances will be there, as with Elisha’s young servant. Encircled by an outnumbering enemy, the young man rightly sought reassurance from the prophet and seer, who told him, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” (2 Kgs. 6:16.) But the young man could count, and, clearly, it did not look that way to him—until after the prophet’s prayer in his behalf. Then, the young man’s eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain filled with horses and chariots of fire. (See 2 Kgs. 6:17.)

50. All will be well now, as anciently, because the Lord’s covenant keepers have His echoing assurance:

51. “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:

52. “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

53. “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good.” (Jer. 32:38–40.)

54. I so testify and assure in Apostolic authority and in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness

Elder Richard G. Scott
Ensign, November 1996



1. The scriptures record, “And I, God, created man ... ; male and female created I them.” 1 This was done spiritually in your premortal existence when you lived in the presence of your Father in Heaven. Your gender existed before you came to earth. You elected to have this earth experience as part of His plan for you. The prophets call it “the plan of mercy,” 2 the “eternal plan of deliverance,” 3 “the plan of salvation,” 4 and, yes, “the great plan of happiness.” 5 You were taught this plan before you came to earth and there rejoiced in the privilege of participating in it.

2. Obedience to the plan is a requisite for full happiness in this life and a continuation of eternal joy

beyond the veil. Essential to His plan of happiness is agency—the right of personal choice. Also fundamental is the holy privilege of procreation to be exercised within the commitment of legal marriage. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. The family is ordained of God. 6 As husband and wife, you have the responsibility to bear children and to nurture and train them spiritually, emotionally, and physically.⁷

3. Satan also has a plan. It is a cunning, evil, subtle plan of destruction. 8 It is his objective to take captive the children of Father in Heaven and with every possible means frustrate the great plan of happiness.

4. Our Heavenly Father endowed His sons and daughters with unique traits especially fitted for their individual responsibilities as they fulfill His plan. To follow His plan requires that you do those things He expects of you as a son or daughter, husband or wife. Those roles are different but entirely compatible. In the Lord's plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics.

5. Marriage allows these different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren. For the greatest happiness and productivity in life, both husband and wife are needed. Their efforts interlock and are complementary. Each has individual traits that best fit the role the Lord has defined for happiness as a man or woman. When used as the Lord intends, those capacities allow a married couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and overcome them as one, to grow in love and understanding, and through temple ordinances to be bound together as one whole, eternally. That is the plan.

6. You can learn how to be more effective parents by studying the lives of Adam and Eve. Adam was Michael who helped create the earth—a glorious, superb individual. Eve was his equal—a full, powerfully contributing partner. After they had partaken of the fruit, the Lord spoke with them. Their comments reveal some different characteristics of a man and woman. To Adam He said, “Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?” 9 Now, Adam's response was characteristic of a man who wants to be perceived as being as close to right as possible. Adam responded,

“The woman thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree and I did eat.” 10 And the Lord said unto Eve, “What is this thing which thou hast done?” 11 Eve's response was characteristic of a woman. Her answer was very simple and straightforward: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” 12

7. Later, “Adam blessed God ... and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: 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.” 13 Adam was thinking about his responsibilities. He was trying to align his performance with the desires of the Lord. Eve said, “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.” 14 Eve's response was characteristic of a woman. She embraced all, wanted to make sure that everyone was considered. One response was not more correct than the other. The two perspectives resulted from the traits inherent in men and women. The Lord intends that we use those differences to fulfill His plan for happiness, personal growth, and development. By counseling together they arrived at a broader, more correct understanding of truth.

8. They worked together. 15 They obeyed the commandment to have children. 16 They knew the plan of happiness and followed it, even though at times it resulted in hardship and difficulty for them.

9. They were commanded, “Thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.” 17 And they did. Further, they taught their children the plan of happiness. 18 They worked together to overcome challenges, 19 and they “ceased not to call upon God.” 20

10. Because Adam and Eve were obedient, the Holy Ghost led them. As husband and wife, you can receive direction in your lives by qualifying for the gift of the Holy Ghost through obedience to the teachings of the Savior.

11. Beware of the subtle ways Satan employs to take you from the plan of God 21 and true happiness. One of Satan's most effective approaches is to demean the role of wife and mother in the home. This is an attack at the very heart of God's plan to foster love between husband and wife and to nurture children in an atmosphere of understanding, peace, appreciation, and support. Much of the violence that is rampant in the

world today is the harvest of weakened homes. Government and social plans will not effectively correct that, nor can the best efforts of schools and churches fully compensate for the absence of the tender care of a compassionate mother and wife in the home.

12. This morning President Hinckley spoke of the importance of a mother in the home. Study his message. As a mother guided by the Lord, you weave a fabric of character in your children from threads of truth through careful instruction and worthy example. You imbue the traits of honesty, faith in God, duty, respect for others, kindness, self-confidence, and the desire to contribute, to learn, and to give in your trusting children's minds and hearts. No day-care center can do that. It is your sacred right and privilege.

13. Of course, as a woman you can do exceptionally well in the workplace, but is that the best use of your divinely appointed talents and feminine traits? As a husband, don't encourage your wife to go to work to help in your divinely appointed responsibility of providing resources for the family, if you can possibly avoid it. As the prophets have counseled, to the extent possible with the help of the Lord, as parents, work together to keep Mother in the home. 22 Your presence there will strengthen the self-confidence of your children and decrease the chance of emotional challenges. Moreover, as you teach truth by word and example, those children will come to understand who they are and what they can obtain as divine children of Father in Heaven.

14. I know I have been speaking of the ideal, and you may be disturbed because your life may not now fit that mold. I promise you that through your obedience and continuing faith in Jesus Christ and your understanding of the whole plan of happiness, even if important parts of it aren't fulfilled in your life now, they will be yours in the Lord's due time. I also promise you that you can have significant growth and happiness now in your present circumstances. As a daughter or son of God, live whatever portion of the plan you can to the best of your ability.

15. Your desire to be a wife and mother may not have its total fulfillment here, but it will in His time as you live in faith and obedience to merit it. 23 Don't be lured away from the plan of our God 24 to the ways of the world, where motherhood is belittled, femininity is decried, and the divinely established role of wife and mother is mocked. Let the world go its way. You follow the plan of the Lord for the greatest

measure of true, eternal achievement and the fullest happiness. The lack of promised blessings for which you qualify will be fully rectified in this life or in the next. 25

16. I often interview strong priesthood leaders. When these men speak of their wives, it is with deep tenderness and obvious appreciation. Often, tears flow. Their comments include "She is more spiritual, purer, and more committed than I," "She motivates me to be a better person," "She is the strength of my life," and "I couldn't do it without her." As a woman, please don't judge how worthwhile, needed, and loved you are by our inept ability to express our true feelings. Your divinely conferred trait of giving of self without counting the cost leads you to underestimate your own worth.

17. I humbly thank our Father in Heaven for His daughters, you who were willing to come to earth to live under such uncertain circumstances. Most men could not handle the uncertainties you are asked to live with. Social customs require that you wait to be asked for marriage. You are expected to go with your husband wherever his employment or call takes him. Your environment and neighborhood are determined by his ability to provide, meager or not. You place your life in the Lord's hands each time you bear a child. He makes no such sacrifice. The blessing of nurturing children and caring for a husband often is intermingled with many routine tasks. But you do all of these things willingly because you are a woman. Generally you have no idea of how truly wonderful and capable you are, how very much appreciated and loved, or how desperately needed, for most men don't tell you as completely and as often as needed.

18. How can you receive the greatest happiness and blessings from this earth experience?

- Learn the doctrinal foundation of the great plan of happiness by studying the scriptures, pondering their content, and praying to understand them. Carefully study and use the proclamation of the First Presidency and the Twelve on the family. 26 It was inspired of the Lord.
- Listen to the voice of current and past prophets. Their declarations are inspired. You may verify that counsel in your own mind and heart by praying about it as it applies to your special circumstances. Ask the Lord to confirm your choices and accept accountability for them.
- Obey the inner feelings that come as promptings from the Holy Ghost. Those feelings are engendered

by your righteous thoughts and acts and your determination to seek the will of the Lord and to live it.

- When needed, seek counsel and guidance from parents and your priesthood leaders.

19. A choice mother wrote: “How did the pioneer women ... respond to the challenges of their day? They listened to their prophet’s voice and followed him because they knew he spoke the will of the Lord. They met the challenges and reaped great blessings because of their faith and obedience. Their first priorities were not security, nice homes, or an easy life. ... No sacrifice was too great for them to make for their precious husbands and children.” 27

20. I obviously don’t know what it feels like to be a woman, but I do know what it is to love one with all of my heart and soul. I constantly express to the Lord overflowing gratitude for the unending blessings that flow to our children and so abundantly to me from the life of one of His precious daughters. I want the happiness we have found together to be yours. The more closely you personally adhere to His plan for you on earth, the greater will be your happiness, fulfillment, and progress; the more qualified you will be to receive the rewards He has promised for obedience. I so testify, for the Savior lives and He loves you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Moses 2:27. See also Moses 2:28; Moses 3:5; James R. Clark,

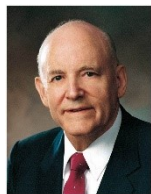
comp., Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. (1965–75), 4:303; James E. Talmage, Millennial Star, Aug. 1922, 539.

2. Alma 42:15.
3. 2 Ne. 11:5.
4. Moses 6:62.
5. Alma 42:8.
6. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. See “Proclamation,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. See 2 Ne. 9:8–9; Alma 12:4–5; Hel. 2:8; 3 Ne. 1:16; D&C 10:12, 23.
9. Moses 4:17.
10. Moses 4:18.
11. Moses 4:19.
12. Moses 4:19.
13. Moses 5:10; emphasis added.
14. Moses 5:11; emphasis added.
15. See Moses 5:1.
16. See Moses 5:2.
17. Moses 5:8.
18. See Moses 5:12.
19. See Moses 5:13.
20. Moses 5:16.
21. 2 Ne. 9:13.
22. See Spencer W. Kimball, San Antonio fireside, 3 Dec. 1977, 32.
23. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 94; or Ensign, May 1991, 71.
24. 2 Ne. 9:13.
25. See Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:76.
26. See “Proclamation,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
27. Jeanene W. Scott, BYU Women’s Conference, 6 Apr. 1989, 1.

3. Jesus Christ: The Sure Foundation of Eternal Marriage

A More Excellent Way

Howard W. Hunter
Ensign, May 1992



1. In an important message to the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo just one year before his tragic and untimely martyrdom, the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) said:

2. “If we would secure and cultivate the love of others, we must love others, even our enemies as well as friends. ... Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst.” (History of the Church, 5:498–99.)

3. That is magnificent counsel today, even as it was 150 years ago. The world in which we live, whether close to home or far away, needs the gospel of [Jesus](#)

[Christ](#). It provides the only way the world will ever know peace. We need to be kinder with one another, more gentle and forgiving. We need to be slower to anger and more prompt to help. We need to extend the hand of friendship and resist the hand of retribution. In short, we need to love one another with the pure love of Christ, with genuine charity and compassion and, if necessary, shared suffering, for that is the way God loves us.

4. In our worship services, we often sing a lovely hymn with text written by Susan Evans McCloud. May I recall a few lines of that hymn for you?

5. Savior, may I learn to love thee,

6. Walk the path that thou hast shown,

7. Pause to help and lift another,

8. Finding strength beyond my own. ...

9. Who am I to judge another

10. When I walk imperfectly?
11. In the quiet heart is hidden
12. Sorrow that the eye can't see. ...
13. I would be my brother's keeper;
14. I would learn the healer's art.
15. To the wounded and the weary
16. I would show a gentle heart.
17. I would be my brother's keeper—
18. Lord, I would follow thee.
19. We need to walk more resolutely and more charitably the path that Jesus has shown. We need to “pause to help and lift another” and surely we will find “strength beyond [our] own.” If we would do more to learn “the healer's art,” there would be untold chances to use it, to touch the “wounded and the weary” and show to all “a gentle[r] heart.” Yes, Lord, we should follow thee.
20. “A new commandment I give unto you,” he said, “That ye love one another; ... By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” ([John 13:34–35](#).) This love that we should have for our brothers and sisters in the human [family](#), and that Christ has for every one of us, is called charity or “the pure love of Christ.” ([Moro. 7:47](#).) It is the love that prompted the suffering and sacrifice of Christ's atonement. It is the highest pinnacle the human soul can reach and the deepest expression of the human heart.
21. We have a feeling of appreciation that our women's Relief Society organization, celebrating this year its sesquicentennial anniversary, has always had as its theme “Charity Never Faileth.” Charity encompasses all other godly virtues. It distinguishes both the beginning and the end of the plan of salvation. When all else fails, charity—Christ's love—will not fail. It is the greatest of all divine attributes.
22. Out of the abundance of his heart, Jesus spoke to the poor, the downtrodden, the widows, the little children; to farmers and fishermen, and those who tended goats and sheep; to strangers and foreigners, the rich, the politically powerful, as well as the unfriendly Pharisees and scribes. He ministered to the poor, the hungry, the deprived, the sick. He blessed the lame, the blind, the deaf, and other people with physical disabilities. He drove out the demons and evil spirits that had caused mental or emotional illness. He purified those who were burdened with sin.

He taught lessons of love and repeatedly demonstrated unselfish service to others. All were recipients of his love. All were “privileged the one like unto the other, and none [were] forbidden.” ([2 Ne. 26:28](#).) These are all expressions and examples of his unbounded charity.

23. The world in which we live would benefit greatly if men and women everywhere would exercise the pure love of Christ, which is kind, meek, and lowly. It is without envy or pride. It is selfless because it seeks nothing in return. It does not countenance evil or ill will, nor rejoice in iniquity; it has no place for bigotry, hatred, or violence. It refuses to condone ridicule, vulgarity, abuse, or ostracism. It encourages diverse people to live together in [Christian](#) love regardless of religious belief, race, nationality, financial standing, education, or culture.

24. The Savior has commanded us to love one another as he has loved us; to clothe ourselves “with the bond of charity” ([D&C 88:125](#)), as he so clothed himself. We are called upon to purify our inner feelings, to change our hearts, to make our outward actions and appearance conform to what we say we believe and feel inside. We are to be true disciples of Christ.

25. As a young man, Brother Vern Crowley said he learned something of the crucial lesson the Prophet Joseph had taught the early Saints in Nauvoo when he told them to “love others, even our enemies as well as friends.” This is a good lesson for each of us.

26. After his father became ill, Vern Crowley took responsibility for running the family wrecking yard although he was only fifteen years of age. Some customers occasionally took unfair advantage of the young man, and parts were disappearing from the lot overnight. Vern was angry and vowed to catch someone and make an example of him. Vengeance would be his.

27. Just after his father had started to recover from his illness, Vern was making his rounds of the yard one night at closing time. It was nearly dark. In a distant corner of the property, he caught sight of someone carrying a large piece of machinery toward the back fence. He ran like a champion athlete and caught the young thief. His first thought was to take out his frustrations with his fists and then drag the boy to the front office and call the police. His heart was full of anger and vengeance. He had caught his thief, and he intended to get his just dues.

28. Out of nowhere, Vern's father came along, put his weak and infirm hand on his son's shoulder, and said, "I see you're a bit upset, Vern. Can I handle this?" He then walked over to the young would-be thief and put his arm around his shoulder, looked him in the eye for a moment, and said, "Son, tell me, why are you doing this? Why were you trying to steal that transmission?" Then Mr. Crowley started walking toward the office with his arm around the boy, asking questions about the young man's car problems as they walked. By the time they had arrived at the office, the father said, "Well, I think your clutch is gone and that's causing your problem."

29. In the meantime, Vern was fuming. "Who cares about his clutch?" he thought. "Let's call the police and get this over with." But his father just kept talking. "Vern, get him a clutch. Get him a throwout bearing, too. And get him a pressure plate. That should take care of it." The father handed all of the parts to the young man who had attempted robbery and said, "Take these. And here's the transmission, too. You don't have to steal, young man. Just ask for it. There's a way out of every problem. People are willing to help."

30. Brother Vern Crowley said he learned an everlasting lesson in love that day. The young man came back to the lot often. Voluntarily, month by month, he paid for all of the parts Vic Crowley had given him, including the transmission. During those visits he asked Vern why his dad was the way he was and why he did what he did. Vern told him something of their Latter-day Saint beliefs and how much his father loved the Lord and loved people. Eventually the would-be thief was baptized. Vern later said, "It's hard now to describe the feelings I had and what I went through in that experience. I, too, was young. I had caught my crook. I was going to extract the utmost penalty. But my father taught me a different way."

31. A different way? A better way? A higher way? A more excellent way? Oh, how the world could benefit from such a magnificent lesson. As Moroni declares:

32. "Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, ...

33. "In the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way." ([Ether 12:4, 11.](#))

34. President David O. McKay once said:

35. "The peace of Christ does not come by seeking the superficial things of life, neither does it come except as it springs from the individual's heart. Jesus

said to his disciples: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.'" (Gospel Ideals, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953, pp. 39–40.)

36. In all the realms of daily living and in a world of so much need, we should so live that one day we will hear the King of Kings say to us:

37. "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

38. "Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." ([Matt. 25:35–36.](#))

39. And if we should have occasion to say:

40. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

41. "When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

42. "Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" ([Matt. 22:37–39.](#))

43. Then I am certain we will hear this reply: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." ([Matt. 25:40.](#))

44. We need a more peaceful world, growing out of more peaceful families and neighborhoods and communities. To secure and cultivate such peace, "we must love others, even our enemies as well as our friends." The world needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who are filled with the love of Christ do not seek to force others to do better; they inspire others to do better, indeed inspire them to the pursuit of God. We need to extend the hand of friendship. We need to be kinder, more gentle, more forgiving, and slower to anger. We need to love one another with the pure love of Christ. May this be our course and our desire.

45. I add my witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that this is his church, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Personal Strength Through The Atonement Of Jesus Christ

Elder Richard G. Scott
Ensign, November 2013



1. Recently I was blessed to meet with a most impressive group of youth from the state of Idaho. One virtuous young woman asked me what I feel is the most important thing they should be doing in their lives right now. I

suggested they learn to recognize the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in their lives. Today I expound on one aspect of that power, which is the personal strength we can receive through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

2. In the Book of Mormon we read of Ammon and his brethren teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to a people who were “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people.”¹ Many of the people were converted and chose to leave behind their sinful behavior. So complete was their conversion that they buried their weapons and covenanted with the Lord that they would never use them again.²

3. Later, many of their unconverted brethren came upon them and began to slay them. The now-faithful people chose to succumb to the sword rather than risk their spiritual lives by taking up arms. Their righteous example helped even more people to be converted and to lay down their weapons of rebellion.³

4. Through Ammon, the Lord guided them to refuge among the Nephites, and they became known as the people of Ammon.⁴ The Nephites protected them for many years, but eventually the Nephite army began to wear down, and reinforcements were gravely needed.⁵

5. The people of Ammon were at a critical moment of their spiritual lives. They had been true to their covenant never to take up arms. But they understood that fathers are responsible to provide protection to their families.⁶ That need seemed great enough to merit consideration of breaking their covenant.⁷

6. Their wise priesthood leader, Helaman, knew that breaking a covenant with the Lord is never justified. He offered an inspired alternative. He reminded them that their sons had never been guilty of the same sins and therefore had not needed to make the same covenant.⁸ Though the sons were very young, they were physically strong and, more important, they were virtuous and pure. The sons were fortified by the faith of their mothers.⁹ Under the direction of their prophet-leader, these young men took their fathers’ place in defense of their families and homes.¹⁰

7. The events surrounding this critical decision demonstrate how the Atonement of Jesus Christ

brings personal strength to the lives of the children of God. Consider the tender feelings of those fathers. How must they have felt to know that the rebellious actions of their past prevented them from protecting their wives and children at that moment of need? Knowing personally of the atrocities their sons would now face, they must have privately wept. Fathers, not children, are supposed to protect their families!¹¹ Their sorrows must have been intense.

8. Why would their inspired priesthood leader fear their consideration to retrieve their weapons, “lest ... they should lose their souls”?¹² The Lord has declared, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”¹³ These faithful fathers had long since repented of their sins and become clean through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, so why were they counseled not to defend their families?

9. It is a fundamental truth that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can be cleansed. We can become virtuous and pure. However, sometimes our poor choices leave us with long-term consequences. One of the vital steps to complete repentance is to bear the short- and long-term consequences of our past sins. Their past choices had exposed these Ammonite fathers to a carnal appetite that could again become a point of vulnerability that Satan would attempt to exploit.

10. Satan will try to use our memory of any previous guilt to lure us back into his influence. We must be ever vigilant to avoid his enticements. Such was the case of the faithful Ammonite fathers. Even after their years of faithful living, it was imperative for them to protect themselves spiritually from any attraction to the memory of past sins.

11. In between the many battles, Captain Moroni directed fortification of the weakest cities. “He caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers ... until they had encircled the city ... with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height.”¹⁴ Captain Moroni understood the importance of fortifying the weak areas to create strength.¹⁵

12. These Ammonite fathers were much the same. They needed taller and wider fortifications between their faithful lives and the unrighteous behavior of their past. Their sons, who were blessed with righteous traditions, were not as vulnerable to the same temptations. They were able to defend their

families faithfully without compromising their spiritual well-being.

13. The joyful news for anyone who desires to be rid of the consequences of past poor choices is that the Lord sees weaknesses differently than He does rebellion. Whereas the Lord warns that unrepented rebellion will bring punishment,¹⁶ when the Lord speaks of weaknesses, it is always with mercy.¹⁷

14. Undoubtedly, there is some allowance that the Ammonite fathers were taught the false traditions of their parents, but all of Father in Heaven's children come to mortality with the Light of Christ. Regardless of the cause of their sinful deeds, the effect was the development of a spiritual vulnerability that Satan would attempt to exploit.

15. Mercifully, they were taught the gospel, repented, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ became spiritually much stronger than Satan's enticements. It is likely they had not felt the temptation to return to their brutal past, yet by following their prophet-leader, they didn't give Satan the chance to "[cheat] their souls, and [to lead] them away carefully down to hell."¹⁸ The Savior's Atonement not only cleansed them from sin, but because of their obedience to the counsel of their priesthood leader, the Savior was able to protect them from their weaknesses and strengthen them. Their humble, lifelong commitment to forsaking their sins did more to protect their families than anything they could have done on the battlefield. Their submission did not deprive them of blessings. It strengthened them and blessed them and blessed future generations.

16. The end of the story illuminates how the mercy of the Lord made "weak things become strong."¹⁹ These faithful fathers sent their sons off under the care of Helaman. Though the sons fought in fierce battles where all received at least some injury, not one life was lost.²⁰ The young men proved to be a vital boost to the weary Nephite army. They were faithful and spiritually stronger when they returned home. Their families were blessed, protected, and strengthened.²¹ In our day, countless students of the Book of Mormon have been edified by the example of these pure and righteous sons.

17. Each of us has had times in our lives when we have made poor choices. We are all in desperate need of the redemptive power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Each of us must repent of any rebellion. "For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."²² He cannot because He knows what it takes to become like Him.

18. Many of us have allowed weakness to develop in our character. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we, like the Ammonites, can build spiritual fortifications between ourselves and any past mistakes that Satan attempts to exploit. The spiritual protections built around the Ammonite fathers blessed and strengthened themselves, their families, their country, and future generations. The same can be true with us.

19. So how do we build these eternal fortifications? The first step must be sincere, thorough, and complete repentance. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, each of us can become clean and the burden of our rebellion will be lifted. Remember, repentance is not punishment. It is the hope-filled path to a more glorious future.

20. Father in Heaven has provided us tools that help to build the fortifications between our vulnerabilities and our faithfulness. Consider the following suggestions:

- Make covenants and receive ordinances for yourself. Then steadily and consistently work to provide ordinances in the temple for your own ancestors.
- Share the gospel with nonmember or less-active family members or friends. Sharing these truths can bring a renewed enthusiasm into your life.
- Serve faithfully in all Church callings, especially home teaching and visiting teaching assignments. Don't be just a 15-minutes-a-month home or visiting teacher. Rather, reach out to each individual member of the family. Get to know them personally. Be a real friend. Through acts of kindness, show them how very much you care for each of them.
- Most important, serve the members of your own family. Make the spiritual development of your spouse and children a very high priority. Be attentive to the things you can do to help each one. Give freely of your time and attention.

21. In each of these suggestions, there is a common theme: fill your life with service to others. As you lose your life in the service of Father in Heaven's children,²³ Satan's temptations lose power in your life.

22. Because your Father in Heaven loves you profoundly, the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes that strength possible. Isn't it wonderful? Many of you have felt the burden of poor choices, and each of you can feel the elevating power of the Lord's forgiveness, mercy, and strength. I have felt it, and I

testify that it is available to each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Alma 17:14; see also Alma 17–27.
2. See Alma 23:4–7; 24:5–19.
3. See Alma 24:20–27.
4. See Alma 27.
5. See Alma 53:8–9; 56:10–17.
6. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2010, 129.
7. See Alma 53:10–13.
8. See Alma 53:14–16.
9. See Alma 56:48.
10. See Alma 53:17–22; 56:3–10, 30–57.
11. See Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2010, 129.
12. Alma 53:15.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
14. Alma 53:4.
15. See Ether 12:27.
16. See 1 Samuel 12:15; Isaiah 1:20; 1 Nephi 2:23; Mosiah 15:26; Alma 9:24; Doctrine and Covenants 76:25; Moses 4:3.
17. See Proverbs 28:13; 1 Corinthians 2:3; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 13:4; James 3:17; 2 Nephi 3:13; Jacob 4:7; Alma 34:17; 3 Nephi 22:8; Ether 12:26–28; Doctrine and Covenants 24:11; 35:17; 38:14; 62:1.
18. 2 Nephi 28:21.
19. Ether 12:27.
20. See Alma 57:25; 58:39.
21. See Alma 58:40.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 1:31.
23. See Matthew 16:25; Doctrine and Covenants 88:125.

The Atonement Is Not Just for Sinners

Bruce C. Hafen

The Broken Heart, 1989



1. After his return from the wilderness of temptation, Jesus read to a Sabbath congregation in Nazareth a passage from Isaiah 61 that stated a central theme of his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” (Luke 4: 18; emphasis added.) In the Old Testament’s continuation of this prophecy, Isaiah adds, “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness . . .” (Isaiah 61:3; emphasis added.) After he had read to them, Jesus said to his audience, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” (Luke 4:21.)

2. By thus referring so broadly to the bruised and brokenhearted, the Savior pointed toward his eventual

Atonement as the healing power not only for sin but also for carelessness, inadequacy, and the entire range of mortal bitterness. The Atonement is not just for sinners.

3. I believe there is in the Church today a compelling need for us to teach and understand the Atonement more fully than we do. Our need arises both from the erroneous perceptions of outsiders about our teachings and from our own sometimes narrow view about the reach of the Atonement in our lives.

4. For example, in its September 1, 1980, issue, Newsweek magazine carried a story entitled “What Mormons Believe.” This article began by noting that “of all the religious sects to emerge out of nineteenth-century America” only the LDS Church “has developed into a major world-wide faith-and it is now gaining members at a rapid rate.” The article then summarized some fundamental doctrines of the Church, noting in general that “their family values are mainstream America, but their theology is a radical conception of God-and Mrs. God.”

5. Newsweek summarized our understanding of the Atonement in these words: “According to Mormon tradition, not only did Adam’s fall make procreation possible, it also established the conditions for human freedom and moral choice. Unlike orthodox Christians, Mormons believe that men are born free of sin and earn their way to godhood by the proper exercise of free will, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus’ suffering and death in the Mormon view were brotherly acts of compassion, but they do not atone for the sins of others. For this reason, Mormons do not include the cross in their iconography nor do they place much emphasis on Easter.”

6. When I read this statement, I was appalled that a writer as sophisticated as Newsweek’s religion editor would miss the point of our core doctrine. I applauded when someone later wrote a published letter expressing dismay that this writer would have “spent as much time as he did among the Mormons” in preparation for that story, only to “come away with the conclusion that Mormons don’t believe that the Atonement of Christ is efficacious for personal sins.”

7. But then came the Newsweek writer’s provocative reply to this letter: “It seems that [the letter’s author] doesn’t understand the distinction between a book review and a magazine article. I did read several books of Mormon scripture and theology before writing the article. My intent, however, was not to review books but rather to report how representative

members of the LDS Church describe and interpret their own traditions The point is to determine what doctrines of a church are genuinely infused into the lifeblood of its adherents.”

8. I remain deeply troubled that Newsweek's readers across the country were left with a serious misimpression about the central teachings of the restored gospel. At the same time, the magazine writer's observation about Church members' actual understanding of the Atonement rings just true enough to leave me equally troubled about the level of our own doctrinal literacy. It is disturbing that some Latter-day Saints might convey incorrect ideas to members of other faiths; but in some ways it concerns me even more that this limited understanding might deny those same Latter-day Saints the reassurance and guidance they may desperately need at pivotal moments in their personal lives.

9. We should note, by the way, the irony of the accusation that the restored gospel doesn't take the Atonement seriously, given the enormous depth of the Book of Mormon's teachings on the Atonement compared with those of the New Testament. For example, as Elder Boyd K. Packer noted in his April 1988 conference talk on the Atonement, “Did you know that the word atonement appears only once in the English New Testament?” (That reference is in Romans 5:11.) “Atonement, of all words! It was not an unknown word, for it had been used much in the Old Testament in connection with the Law of Moses.” In the Book of Mormon, by contrast, “the word atone in form and tense appears fifty-five times.”⁴ And beyond word usage, the Book of Mormon contains without question the most profound theological treatment of the Atonement found in any book now available on any shelf anywhere in the world.

10. Despite this remarkable truth about the Book of Mormon, we Latter-day Saints are, for the most part, only superficially acquainted with our own doctrines of grace, mercy, justice, and the Atonement. As an indication of our reluctance to consider the principle of grace, one researcher found only one serious article on grace in the periodicals published by the Church in the twenty-three years from 1961 through 1983.

11. Perhaps some reasons exist for our reluctance to stress the doctrine of grace. The prophet Nephi wrote, “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added.) Our natural inclination to think in categorical “either/or” terms makes us worry that a constant public emphasis on grace will lead some Church

members to ignore the crucial “all we can do” in that two-part process. They might then accept-or appear to accept-what Elder Bruce R. McConkie once called the “second great heresy” of modern Christianity: “the doctrine that we are saved by grace alone, without works; . . . that we may be born again simply by confessing the Lord Jesus with our lips while we continue to live in our sins.”

12. Many Christians do take the idea of repentance seriously, but an overemphasis on grace can encourage the prevailing Christian view that we will be saved by grace no matter what we may do. Perhaps Nephi had this attitude in mind in describing those living in our time who would say, “If it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.” (2 Nephi 28:8.) At the extreme, this doctrine denies free will altogether, accepting the Calvinistic notion that God will “elect” those to be saved without regard to their conduct or even their preference.

13. In addition to the risk of this doctrinal error, there is a more practical logic to our fear that emphasizing God's side of the equation may justify our tendency not to do all we should. I was surprised on one occasion to hear a senior General Authority tell me something in a private conversation that allowed for greater flexibility on a particular issue than I had expected to hear. I told him how valuable I thought it would be if more members of the Church could hear his counsel, because what is said across the desk can so nicely clarify what is said over the pulpit. He replied that private counsel can be adapted to the attitudes and understanding of the person being counseled. If that same counsel were given publicly to an audience that included individuals of insufficient background or commitment, it might appear to give license to those whose needs require not more flexibility, but less.

14. For example, the person most in need of understanding the Savior's mercy is probably one who has worked himself to exhaustion in a sincere effort to repent, but who still believes his estrangement from God is permanent and hopeless. By contrast, some people come before a bishop feeling that the repentance process requires them to do little more than casually acknowledge the truth of an accusation. An increasing number of younger Church members even seem to believe they are entitled to “a few free ones” as they sow their wild oats and walk constantly along the edge of transgression. Constant emphasis on the availability of forgiveness can be counterproductive for those in these latter categories,

suggesting wrongly to them that they can “live it up” now and repent easily later without harmful consequences.

15. Moreover, emphasizing God's mercy may lead some to believe they are entitled to divine protection against all of life's natural adversities. There is already enough theological difficulty for those who believe that their activity in the Church should somehow protect them from tragedy and sorrow. Our understanding of the Atonement is hardly a shield against sorrow; rather, it is a rich source of strength to deal productively with the disappointments and heartbreaks that form the deliberate fabric of mortal life. The gospel was given us to heal our pain, not to prevent it.

16. Having noted these reasons for caution, however, I sense that an increasing number of deeply committed Church members are weighed down beyond the breaking point with discouragement about their personal lives. When we habitually understate the meaning of the Atonement, we take more serious risks than simply leaving one another without comforting reassurances—for some may simply drop out of the race, worn out and beaten down with the harsh and untrue belief that they are just not celestial material.

17. The Savior himself was not concerned that he would give aid and comfort to backsliders or that he would seem to be soft on sin. Said he, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30.) He spoke these words of comfort in the overall context of his demanding teachings about the strait and narrow way and the need to develop a love so pure that it would extinguish not only hatred, but lust and anger. He said his yoke is easy, but he asked for all our hearts.

18. His words do not describe an event or even simply an attitude, but a process; not the answer to a yes or no question, but an essay, written in the winding trail of our experience. Along that trail, he is not only aware of our limitations, he will also in due course compensate for them, “after all we can do.” That, in addition to forgiveness for sin, is a crucial part of the Good News of the gospel, part of the Victory, part of the Atonement. For such a purpose each of us needs to take the Atonement more fully into the deep parts of our consciousness, even if there are some good reasons not to stress the role of grace excessively.

19. I wish now to summarize the elements of

doctrine that apply the holy Atonement and its enabling grace to our lives. In this way I hope to illustrate how fully each of us needs the Lord's power and how earnestly he seeks to turn our mourning to joy, our blindness to sight, and our ashes to beauty.

20. When I think of the Savior all alone that night in Gethsemane, a solitary light shining in the vast darkness of cosmic evil, I think of the millions of people for whom he alone paid the full ransom. Then I recall Elder Neal A. Maxwell's phrase about “the awful arithmetic of the Atonement.” The wonder of that event is clearly beyond our comprehension. As Elder Packer said, “How the Atonement was wrought, we do not know. No mortal watched as evil turned away and hid in shame before the light of that pure being.”

21. The first and most familiar elements of the Atonement relate to the transgression of Adam and Eve and to our personal sins. Because of the Fall, Adam and his children became subject to death, sin, and other characteristics of mortality that separated them from God. To allow mankind again to be “at one” with God, the eternal law of justice required compensation for these consequences of the Fall. The eternal law of mercy allowed the Savior to make that compensation fully through the great “at-one-ment,”⁸ relieving Adam and his children of their unbearable burdens.

22. Somehow, through his sinless life, his genetic nature as the Only Begotten of the Father, and his willingness to drink the bitter cup of justice, the Lord Jesus Christ was able to atone unconditionally for the original sin of Adam and Eve and for the physical death, and to atone conditionally for the personal sins of all mankind.

23. The unconditional parts of the Atonement, those that assure our resurrection from physical death and that pay for Adam's transgression, require no further action on our part. They are the free gifts of unmerited divine grace. The conditional part, however, requires our repentance—part of “all we can do” — as the condition of applying mercy to our personal sins. We have been told that if we do not repent, we must suffer even as the Savior did to satisfy the demands of justice. (See D&C 19:15-17.)

24. I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice. For that reason,

paying for our sins will not bear the same fruit as repenting of our sins. Justice is a law of balance and order and it must be satisfied, either through our payment or his. But if we decline the Savior's invitation to let him carry our sins, and then satisfy justice by ourselves, we will not yet have experienced the complete rehabilitation that can occur through a combination of divine assistance and genuine repentance. Working together, those forces have the power permanently to change our hearts and our lives, preparing us for celestial life.

25. By analogy, the criminals who fill our prisons are not necessarily "rehabilitated" when they pay their debt to society by serving a fixed number of years. The payment of that debt may satisfy our sense of retribution, but only a positive process of character change can rehabilitate a lawbreaker.

26. The doctrines of mercy and repentance are rehabilitative, not retributive, in nature. The Savior asks for our repentance not merely to compensate him for paying our debt to justice, but also as a way of inducing us to undergo the process of development that will make our nature divine, giving us the capacity to live the celestial law. The "natural man" will remain an enemy to God forever—even after paying for his own sins—unless he also "becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child." (Mosiah 3:19.)

27. As King Benjamin here suggests, the Atonement does more than pay for our sins. It is also the agent through which we develop a saintly nature. When the Savior accepts our repentance and blesses us with his mercy, he restores our spiritual balance from a negative position to a neutral position. This complete process requires active faith, changes in our lives, and baptism or the meaningful renewal of baptismal covenants.

28. But when we have taken these sometimes arduous steps, we are then only ready to enter the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life." (2 Nephi 31:17-18.)

29. Now we must consider an additional realm in becoming a saint through the Atonement—the process by which we move from the messy slate of sin through the clean slate of forgiveness to the beautifully full slate of a divine nature. There are many blessings of the Atonement in addition to the more familiar blessings of resurrection, the removal of original sin, and the forgiveness of our personal sins.

30. Let us consider first the general question of whether divine grace does more than compensate for sin as we normally think of it. As we consider this question, we will find that the blessings available to us are both closer and richer than we might have imagined.

31. The dictionary in the 1979 LDS edition of the King James Bible, under the heading "Grace," suggests that grace is needed not only because of our sins, but also because of our weaknesses and shortcomings: "It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, made possible by his atoning sacrifice, that . . . individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works. . . . This grace is an enabling power . . . [that is needed] in consequence of the fall of Adam and also because of man's weaknesses and shortcomings. However, grace cannot suffice without total effort on the part of the recipient."

32. Three of the most central figures in all of scripture—Adam, Eve, and Christ himself—illustrate the point that grace is needed to overcome limitations other than sin. These illustrations also suggest two significant ways in which divine grace can bless and help us, in addition to its compensation for our sins. Let us call these two categories *tasting the bitter* and *attaining divine perfection*.

33. Consider first the experience of Adam and Eve and the concept of tasting the bitter in order to prize the good. As best I can tell, the transgression in the Garden of Eden was not really a wrongful act of "sin," according to the meaning we usually give the term sin. For one thing, despite their obvious agency to choose, Adam and Eve were in a state of "innocence" in the Garden, not knowing good and evil as they did after the Fall. (See 2 Nephi 2:23.) Moreover, while their choice violated the command against partaking of the fruit, that choice was necessary to enable their obedience to the command to have children. Thus, what we call their "transgression" was a painful but correct, even eternally glorious, choice. For, as Eve later discovered, "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.)

34. Elder John A. Widtsoe once wrote that such statements by Adam and Eve "were not the words of sinners or of repentant sinners." Rather, the

commandment not to eat the forbidden fruit was “a warning, . . . as if to say, if you do this thing, you will bring upon yourself a certain punishment; but do it if you choose.” For this reason, “the choice they made raises Adam and Eve to preeminence among all who have come on earth.” And “The 'Fall' and the consequent redeeming act of Jesus became the most glorious events in the history of mankind.”

35. Thus, the first time the Atonement applied to any human act, it applied to compensate for the harmful consequences of a choice that was more like a close judgment call than it was a true sin. Like Adam and Eve, though obviously on a smaller scale, we make many judgment-call choices that lead to pain or trouble either for ourselves or for other people. Some of our judgments are wise, and some are not so wise. Think of accidents caused by carelessness, such as dozing at the wheel. They can have devastating effects, as tragic as deliberate violence. Think of unkind words and forgotten promises between spouses or among family members. Such incidents are never admirable, but not all of them are the result of conscious sin. Still, some of life's uglier consequences may flow from them. Think also of the tragedy of what we might call a pure accident. I know of a man who ended the life of a college student at an intersection when the brakes on the man's pickup truck failed through no fault of his own. He returned to the scene of the accident alone, night after night, weeping and pleading with God to help him know what he could possibly do to make up for this terrible loss of life. “I can never forgive myself,” he lamented. He felt heartrending guilt, but in what he had done he found neither true sin nor real relief.

36. We might think of the degree of our personal fault for the bad things that happen in our lives as a continuum ranging from sin to adversity, with the degree of our fault dropping from high at one end of the spectrum to zero at the other. At the “sin” end of the continuum, we bear grave responsibility for our deliberately wrongful actions and the suffering they cause. We bring the bitter fruits of sin fully upon ourselves. But at the other end of the spectrum, marked by “adversity,” we may bear no responsibility at all. The bitterness of adversity may come to us, as it did to the man who owned the pickup and as it did to Job, regardless of our actual, conscious fault. Job's friends simply assumed that all bitterness is the result of fault or sin, so they insisted that Job's obedience would restore his prosperity. Job's wife believed his afflictions must be the result of God's weakness. But Job's own true perspective introduced a new thought

to the Hebrew mind: We can experience trouble not only because of transgression but because it is a natural, even essential, part of life.¹⁰

37. Between the poles of sin and adversity along this fault-level continuum are such intermediate points as unwise choices and hasty judgments, in which it is often unclear just how much personal fault we bear for the bitter fruits we may taste or cause others to taste. Bitterness may taste the same, whatever its source, and it can destroy our peace, break our hearts, and separate us from God. We often-indeed usually-lack the power to compensate for all of the harmful effects of such bitter events. Could it be that the great “at-one-ment” of Christ could put back together the broken parts and give beauty to the ashes of experience such as this?

38. I am led to believe that it could, because tasting the bitter, in all its forms and with all the variety of its motivation, is so central to the mortal experience as to be a deliberate part of the great plan of life. The Lord taught Adam that his children would grow up in this lone and dreary world with sin conceiving in their hearts. But this consequence of the Fall was not a terrible mistake at all-on the contrary, it is the dimension that gives mortality its profound meaning. As the Lord said to Adam, “They taste the bitter that they may know to prize the good.” (Moses 6:55; emphasis added.) Similarly, in modern revelation the Lord said, “And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet.” (D&C 29:39.) Or, as he said to Joseph Smith when he was overcome with bitter darkness that was also not the result of his wrongdoing, “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 122:7.)

39. The Lord taught Adam that the Atonement was given to him and to his children to heal the effects of tasting this bitterness-perhaps all of it. (See Moses 6:55-62.) The Savior extends this infinite power not just to bless any person who happens to have a need, or even just to answer prayers, but to fulfill the holy covenant arising from his deeply personal bond with those “few humble followers of Christ” (2 Nephi 28:14) whom he has ransomed with his blood. It is not just the Creation, and not just our being part of the Father's spirit family, that creates this sacred relationship between the Lord and his followers; it is the Atonement. Indeed, “mercy cometh because of the atonement.” (Alma 42:23.) And it is “by virtue of the blood which I have spilt” that he pleads “before the Father” the cause of those who follow him. (D&C

38:4.) This healing power cleanses our spirits, upon condition of our repentance, when our souls are soiled with sin. It can also compensate for the effects of our sins upon others, when we are unable to make further restitution. The Atonement overcame the physical death and other effects of the Fall. It just might be that it also has power to sweeten the bitterness arising elsewhere in our lives-again, after all we can do ourselves to make compensation to the extent of our ability and our responsibility.

40. As Jacob taught the Nephites, “For behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.” (2 Nephi 9:21.) Of this statement Elder Maxwell wrote, “Since not all human sorrow and pain is connected to sin, the intensiveness of the Atonement involved bearing our pains, infirmities, and sicknesses, as well as our sins.”¹¹

41. I have not attempted here to be definitive in marking the outer boundaries of the idea that the Atonement can heal us from the harmful consequences of our choices and experiences that do not result from deliberate wrongdoing. Surely at some point there are limits to that healing role; otherwise, the concept of Atonement could become trivialized and lose its essentially religious meaning. For instance, I would not suggest that this grand concept applies to every minor irritation or inconvenience of daily life, ranging from disappointments in the weather to unhappiness over a grade in school.

42. A sensible test for determining whether the Atonement applies might be the simple question of whether the experience in fact separates or estranges us from God. To make us “at-one” with God is, after all, the doctrine’s purpose. Using that test, even the weather could be a source of serious religious estrangement for a farmer who loses everything to a flood or a drought; and a grade in school could be similarly critical if the grade flunks a student from an educational program he believes he was directed to enter in answer to his serious personal prayer.

43. Whatever may be the outer limits of the Atonement’s reach, the essential point is that it reaches beyond conscious sin. We see the classic application of Atonement doctrine in the case of one who understands the difference between good and evil, yet consciously chooses evil in an act of rebellion against God. Such a person must return to God in earnest repentance to claim the blessing of atoning mercy. But many people sin in utter ignorance

of how wrong their conduct is: “For there are many yet on the earth . . . who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men . . . and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it.” (D&C 123:12.)

44. King Benjamin taught that the Atonement applies fully to ignorant transgression as well as to deliberate transgression, even though the degree of wrongful motive varies so widely between these two categories that they hardly seem sinful in the same sense: “His blood atoneth for the sins of those . . . who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned. But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Mosiah 3:11-12. See also 3 Nephi 6:18.)

45. This comparison suggests that the scriptures may use the term sin with different meanings in different contexts. For a further example of sin’s various meanings, we have already seen that Adam and Eve’s original sin was not a classic sin in the sense of an evil, knowing rebellion against God. Moreover, the ancient languages from which the Bible was translated used many terms with a variety of meanings that were all translated as sin in English language translations.

46. For instance, Bible scholars have established that our Old Testament uses the English word sin to translate Hebrew phrases that should more precisely have been interpreted as “missing the right point,” or as describing “those who had lost their way” or those who “even with the best intentions were in difficulty.”¹² Similarly, our Old Testament at times uses sin to describe what in Hebrew could be either wilful “rebellion” or unintentional “error” that is “misguided but not unconditionally negligent or culpable.”¹³ Indeed, using terms we might call “sin” in English, some original Old Testament writers actually ascribe man’s shortcomings to “the terrifying and tormenting” thought that “man cannot attain to God by his own striving because God withholds from him the ability to do so.”¹⁴

47. Seeing Job taste mortality’s bitterness, then, is only the beginning of his story. Whether one believes this bitterness came from Job’s transgression, from God’s withholding adequate ability from Job, from Satan’s overpowering influence, or from God’s love for Job, the bitterness estranged him from God. Whatever the causes or his personal motives, Job

needed and found the healing blessing of “at-one-ment.”

48. In addition, “the Christian view of sin” cannot be found in the classical Greek language. In the Greek conception, “guilt” and “sin” cover “everything from crime to harmless faults,” not only “moral actions but also intellectual and artistic failings.”¹⁵ In Greek literature, guilt and suffering frequently flowed from man's ignorance, some of which was believed to be inherent in the mortal condition and some of which could be overcome with education. Yet, “for the Greeks . . . to become guilty and to suffer in consequence is simply to come to a deeper understanding of the world.”¹⁶

49. It is by no means clear that the Atonement would apply to all these usages of the word sin, but it applies to many of them, especially when the effects of the choice or conduct are the same as the effects of evil-based sin-harm to ourselves or others and estrangement from God. In any case, the Atonement clearly applies to more acts than intentional rebellion. If it were concerned only with deliberately evil motives and intentions, it would not apply to those who “died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.” That “his blood atoneth” for these “sins” suggests that the Atonement's reach includes unintentional but harmful acts and consequences of many kinds. (See Mosiah 3:11.)

50. A higher degree of personal repentance is evidently required of “him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God” than would be required of one who violates divine law without such conscious fault, even though the Atonement applies in both cases. (See Mosiah 3:12.) It appears that the degree of repentance required may vary with the degree of conscious wrongdoing involved, because the repentance portion of Atonement doctrine is primarily concerned with changing a sinful heart. But the healing and compensating portions of the doctrine reach to include the effects of actions that were not necessarily motivated by knowing rebellion.

51. Having considered the application of grace to “tasting the bitter” in this broad sense, let us now consider the role of grace in our quest to attain divine perfection. Here we will see that the Lord's grace, unlocked by the Atonement, can perfect our imperfections: “By his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.” (Moroni 10:32.) While much of the perfection process involves a cleansing from the contamination of sin and bitterness, there is an

additional, affirmative dimension through which we acquire a Christlike nature, becoming perfect even as the Father and Son are perfect.

52. As an introductory illustration, consider the life and experience of the Savior himself, because his own development was marked by his receipt of the Father's grace. His experience shows us also that being free from sin is not quite the same as attaining divine perfection. Jesus lived without sin or blemish, which qualified him in that aspect to perform the Atonement for all mankind. Yet he also tasted of the bitterness of mortality in order to grow and develop: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Hebrews 5:8-9; emphasis added.)

53. The Savior's personal experience is clarified by the witness of John, as contained in modern revelation. Note the role of the Father's grace in his development, which he in turn extends to his followers: “And I, John, saw that [Christ] received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace . . . until he received a fulness.” (D&C 93:12-13.) Now Christ himself speaks to us: “I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace.” (D&C 93:19-20; emphasis added.)

54. When the laws of justice and mercy are satisfied by the Atonement and by our repentance, we are, in effect, free from sin. But just as the sinless Christ was “made perfect” through interaction with his Father's grace, so we must then move beyond the remission of sins to the perfection of a divine nature by a process involving grace.

55. Not long before he passed away, Elder Bruce R. McConkie visited Ricks College to deliver a devotional talk. As we drove together toward the campus from the airport, I asked Elder McConkie if he thought the concepts of grace and the Lord's Atonement had anything to do with the affirmative process of perfecting our nature—apart from the connection of those concepts with forgiveness of sin.

56. He said that is what the scriptures teach. Turning to the Doctrine and Covenants, he read aloud from Joseph Smith's description of those in the celestial kingdom: “These are they who are just men made

perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.” (D&C 76:69; emphasis added.) In the same section we read this echo of the ninety-third section: “They are they . . . who have received of [the Father’s] *fulness*.” (D&C 76:56; emphasis added.) I thought about these ideas when Elder McConkie told the Ricks students later that day that the Atonement compensates for all the effects of the Fall and makes possible our inheritance of God’s quality of life-eternal life.

57. At the very end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni describes this perfecting grace in a final, stirring invitation to his readers: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ . . . 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.” (Moroni 10:32-33.)

58. We know very little about this process of sanctification, but it is clear that we do not achieve perfection solely through our own efforts. Knowing just that much is enough to give us a new perspective. Because so many of us feel overwhelmed with the scriptural injunction to be perfect, the idea that divine grace is the final source of our perfection may seem too good to be true. That is how Christ’s grace appears to those carrying the burden of truly serious sins. Honest people who carry the burden of being called “saints” may feel the same way, as they stumble daily through the discouraging debris of their obvious imperfections. But the gospel has good news not only for the serious transgressor, but for all who long to be better than they are. We truly become saints “through the atonement of Christ, the Lord,” which, after all we can do, has power to help us become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love.” (Mosiah 3:19; emphasis added.)

59. The Atonement in some way, apparently through the Holy Ghost, makes possible the infusion of spiritual endowments that actually change and purify our nature, moving us toward that state of holiness or completeness we call eternal life or Godlike life. At that ultimate stage we will exhibit divine characteristics not just because we think we should but because that is the way we are.

60. The bestowal of the gift of charity is the clearest illustration of this process, as King Benjamin’s phrase, “full of love,” suggests. This love, the very “love which [the Lord] hath had for the children of men” (Ether 12:34), is not developed entirely by one’s own power, even though our faithfulness is a necessary qualification to receive it. Rather, as Mormon so eloquently tells us in Moroni 7, charity is “bestowed upon” the “true followers” of Christ. Its source, like all other blessings of the Atonement, is the grace of God. Said Moroni, who was much preoccupied with this theme, “I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.” (Ether 12:36.)

61. The purpose of the endowment of charity is not only to cause an unselfish motivation for charitable acts toward other people, although that is a most valuable result. The ultimate additional purpose is to make Christ’s followers like him: “He hath bestowed [this love] upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him.” (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added.)

62. In his dream, Lehi felt the stirrings of true charity when he partook of the tree of life, which filled his soul with great joy and made him “desirous that [his] family should partake of it.” (1 Nephi 8:12.) By eating the fruit of the tree of eternal life, Lehi tasted not only forgiveness, but also the nature of Christ. Charity is just one of the Savior’s attributes, though it is central to his holy nature. And charity is only part of the total blessing. In its fulness, this “gift” of grace is eternal life-being fully like God-“the greatest of all the gifts of God.” (D&C 14:7.) The term “at-one-ment” thus seems to mean not only being with God, but being like God.

63. Another divine endowment in this process is hope, which blesses us with the state of mind we need to deal with the gap between where we are and where we seek to be. It is the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, who fills us with this hope as the remission of our sins makes us lowly of heart and meek enough to receive him. (See Moroni 8:25-26.) I believe this endowment can literally fill our minds in a pure and permanent form with the kind of encouragement and confidence we might find in talking with a close friend who gives us perspective about a difficult problem. We go away from such a conversation with confidence that there is light at the end of our dark tunnels and somehow everything will be all right. That kind of hope can be literally life-sustaining when it is given us by the Savior, for the light at the end of life’s darkest tunnels

is the Light and the Life of the world.

64. Such a promise throws a wonderful lifeline to the increasing number of religious people who feel discouragement, stress, low self-esteem, and even depression. The Savior desires to save us from our inadequacies as well as our sins. Inadequacy is not the same as being sinful—we have far more control over the choice to sin than we may have over our innate capacity. We sometimes say that the Lord will not save us in our sins, but from them. However, it is quite possible that he will save us in our inadequacies as well as from them. A sense of falling short or falling down is not only natural but essential to the mortal experience. Still, after all we can do, the Atonement can fill that which is empty, straighten our bent parts, and make strong that which is weak.

65. The Savior's victory can compensate not only for our sins but also for our inadequacies; not only for our deliberate mistakes but also for our sins committed in ignorance, our errors of judgment, and our unavoidable imperfections. Our ultimate aspiration is more than being forgiven of sin—we seek to become holy, endowed affirmatively with Christlike attributes, at one with him, like him. Divine grace is the only source that can finally fulfill that aspiration, after all we can do.

66. I grieve for those who, in their admirable and sometimes blindly dogged sense of personal responsibility, believe that, in the quest for eternal life, the Atonement is there only to help big-time sinners, and that they, as everyday Mormons who just have to try harder, must “make it” on their own. The truth is not that we must make it on our own, but that he will make us his own.

67. Despite how little we know or can explain about these perfecting blessings of the Atonement, one other observation seems to hold true here as it does in applying the Atonement to the concept of sin. The scriptures suggest that the heresy of salvation by grace alone also applies to the personal developmental process. Thus, we will not be blessed with hope and charity and eternal life only for the asking. Rather, we must do the very best we can—even if that may not seem terribly impressive compared to a standard of flawless perfection. The important thing is that we can qualify, despite failures, bad judgments, wrong turns, and limited strength.

68. A few scriptural phrases can be pieced together that suggest the characteristics of those who are worthy of the sanctifying gifts. These phrases tell us more about attitude and commitment than they do

about scoring points or never making mistakes.

Consider just a brief sampling: “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart.” (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added.) Be “true followers of . . . Jesus Christ.” (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added.) “Because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which . . . filleth with hope and perfect love.” (Moroni 8:26; emphasis added.) See that ye “bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love.” (Alma 38:12; emphasis added.) “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you.” (Moroni 10:32; emphasis added.)

69. Rather than setting another discouragingly high standard, these invitations sound more like doing the best we can in the circumstances of our own lives. We need not apologize for the typical untidiness of those circumstances. It is their very lone and dreary nature that allows them to shape us as they do. It was never intended that we should partake of the tree of life and thereby gain full access to perfecting grace before we have stumbled and groped and learned all we can from the disappointments and surprises of this vale of tears. I suppose that is why the Lord guarded the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve had partaken of the first tree: They needed the time and space and shaping purpose of mortality. (See Alma 42:3-5.) They needed to taste the bitter in order to “prize”—to appreciate, to understand, to grasp the meaning of —“the good.” (See Moses 6:55.) Perhaps the essence of that good is the gift of eternal life, which we can only comprehend after we do all we can do. Until we are prepared in what may look like very imperfect ways to receive them, we are not ready for the gifts that perfect our nature.

70. In his dream of the tree of life, Lehi found himself in a dark and dreary wasteland and saw others surrounded by a great mist of darkness. The pathway home from this darkness was the way to the tree of life—the same tree, I suppose, as the one from which Adam and Eve were barred until they too had walked the trail where Lehi wandered. The path was marked by the iron rod, the word of God. Holding fast to this rod in the mists of darkness, we, as did Lehi, grope and move our way homeward. As we do, we are likely to find that the cold rod of iron will begin to feel in our hands as the warm, firm, loving hand of one who is literally pulling us along the way. He gives us strength enough to rescue us, warmth enough to tell us that home is not far away; and we summon our deepest resources to reciprocate with our own



renewed energy until we are again “at one” in the arms of the Lord through the power of his great “at-one-ment.”

71. Sometimes we talk about how important it is to be on the Lord's side.

Perhaps we should talk more about how important it is that the Lord is on our side.

72. Sometimes we say that no other success can compensate for our failures in the home. And while it is true that no other success of ours can fully compensate, there is a success that compensates for all our failures, after all we can do in good faith. That success is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. By its power, we may arise from the ashes of life filled with incomprehensible beauty and joy.

73. According to an ancient legend, the Phoenix was a large and beautiful bird that lived hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, then burned itself on a funeral pyre of its own making. A new Phoenix would rise from these very ashes with renewed youth and beauty, carry the remains of its father to the altar of the sun god, then return to soar for the rest of its life about the earth, the only bird of its kind. The long life of the Phoenix and its dramatic rebirth from its father's ashes made it a symbol in the ancient world of both immortality and spiritual rebirth. Each of us will taste the bitter ashes of life, from sin and neglect to sorrow and disappointment. But the Atonement of Christ can lift us up in beauty, not only from our own ashes but also from the ashes of him who fathers the rebirth of our spirits. We then soar toward the sun on the wings of a sure promise of immortality and eternal life. Thus may we be lifted up, not only at the end of life but in each day of our lives.

74. “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth . . . giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:28-29, 31; emphasis added.)

The Atonement of Christ: Infinite In Scope, Intimate In Nature

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Brigham Young University–Hawaii, November 2005

1. Brothers and sisters, Aloha!

I think I'd like to thank Brother Martins for that introduction. I'd only ask two things of him. One is

that he commit it to writing and send it to my wife as soon as possible so that she could believe that, and, number two, I would only ask that he be around at the time of my funeral.

2. What a delightful thing for me to be with you. I love Brigham Young University Hawaii, and I love the students at BYU-Hawaii and it's just an honor for me to be asked to be here this week and particularly this morning to address you at this devotional. We have spent this year celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of the prophet Joseph Smith.

3. Magnificent prophet, leader, dispensation head, and it's been an honor for me to be involved in many varied activities throughout the world in celebrating the prophet and holding his name and work and ministry high. As part of that I thought that today in our devotional, we might consider what I believe to be and I know to be the central feature of Joseph Smith's testimony. On many occasions, he was asked the question, “Are you or do you claim to be a prophet of God?”

4. And he would answer, “Yes, as is every other man who has the testimony of Jesus. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

5. If Joseph Smith had anything, he had the testimony of Jesus. He had the spirit of prophecy. Joseph Smith was steeped in and thoroughly trained in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it was the focus and the center of all that he did. And I feel today that perhaps the greatest tribute I might pay on this occasion is to bear testimony myself of the person who was the center of Joseph Smith's life, namely, the Savior.

6. Perhaps there's some of you, and I think all of us at one time or another feel this, that find yourselves wondering on occasion, if perhaps you've slipped and gone a little too far. Perhaps you worry that perhaps your actions or your attitudes have been such that they place you beyond spiritual help. I want to bear testimony, brothers and sisters, as the prophet Joseph Smith said, “That all are within reach of pardoning mercy who has not committed the unpardonable sin.” And I don't think there are too many of us today that are even capable of committing the unpardonable sin so I think we're safe.

7. I want to bear testimony today of the reality and the beauty and the majesty; the magnificence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Atonement. And I want to, at the same time, bear testimony of the intimate and personal nature of that atonement, because I think both of those attitudes both of those

perspectives are necessary in order for us to appreciate how powerful He is, and how much we need Him. And for us at the same time to appreciate the fact that He's there, He's available, He's open to us.

8. I want to draw largely upon the Book of Mormon this morning and talk about the nature of the atonement. I'll quote once in a while from another source, but I'd like to use mostly the Book of Mormon. I'd like to suggest, first of all, some ways in which the scripture teach us that the atonement of Christ is indeed infinite and eternal.

9. Let me begin with a passage from a book that most of us don't quote too often. From the book of Jarom, in the Book of Mormon; Jarom 1:11 "Wherefore the prophets and the priests and the teachers did labor diligently, exhorting with all long suffering the people to diligence, teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given, persuading them to look forward to the Messiah," now note this line, "and to believe in Him to come as though He already was."

10. Now this is some 500 to 600 BC. One of the magnificent messages of the Book of Mormon is the message of Christ's eternal gospel. It is a message, frankly, that the Latter-day Saints hold as a singular message to the world. That is that Christian prophets have declared Christian doctrine and administered Christian ordinances since the days of Adam. That Adam was told, with Eve, to call upon the Father in the name of the Son, who would not come to the earth for another 4,000 years. In other words, that the atonement was in effect from the beginning of time. Indeed as the scriptures say, "Christ is the lamb, slain from the foundation of the world." [Rev 13:8, D&C 76:39, Moses 7:47]

11. The atonement is infinite in that it is timeless. It is timeless. Notice what Alma says to his son, Corianton, a boy who has been guilty of moral transgression but who more than anything needs direction and needs doctrine in his life. You see, this is what President Packer taught us so beautifully when he taught us, "that true doctrine understood changes attitudes and behavior."

12. Notice what Alma says to Corianton, "Behold you, {Corianton}, marvel why these things {the Atonement} should be known so long beforehand. Behold I say unto you is not a soul unto this time, {meaning at our time} as precious unto God as the will be soul at the time of His coming? Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children?

Is it not as easy at this time, for the Lord to send His angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children? Or as after the time of His coming?" [Alma 39:17-19]

13. For the Nephites and for those who lived before Christ who knew who Jesus would be and knew who the Messiah and the Redeemer would be, for them, prophecy was as history. It was as though He had already come.

14. Second, the atonement of Jesus Christ is said to be infinite and eternal in the sense that it overcomes that universal phenomenon that we know as death. The one thing that every mortal shares with every other mortal: we are all born; we will all die. Now I wish that weren't true, but it's true. I get up in the morning, and I roll over onto my knees and say my prayers and then get up and then go into the bathroom. I flip on the light, and I look in the mirror, and I want you to know that I have a spiritual experience as I look into that mirror, because there is born to my soul the witness that the fall is a true doctrine, because there I stand looking at myself and I notice that I'm losing what little hair I ever had. I notice that my broad chest and my narrow waist have changed places. I notice that I have no feeling in my feet yet. It takes a while for the blood to get all that way down there, and I realize that I'm actually much closer to death than I am to birth.

15. The fall is a reality. Every one of us will face, one day, what the world calls a Grim Reaper, but which the Book of Mormon teaches is part of the merciful plan we will face death. But the atonement is infinite and eternal in that it, through the Savior's resurrection, gets around, overcomes that universal thing we call death. Lehi said to Jacob (actually it's Jacob himself), "Wherefore it needs be an infinite atonement, save it should be an infinite atonement, this corruption could not put on incorruption. This corrupt body could not put on incorruption {in the resurrection}. Wherefore the first judgment which came upon man, must needs have remained to an endless duration, and if so, this flesh must lay down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more." [2 Ne.9:7] And so the Atonement is timeless, the Atonement overcomes death.

16. Third, let me read to you a passage from Alma chapter 34 where Amulek is preaching to the Zoramites concerning the atonement and see if you can understand how he says the Atonement is infinite and eternal. "It is expedient," Amulek says, "that there should be a great and last sacrifice. Yea not a

sacrifice of man, neither of beast neither of any manner of fowl, for it shall not be a human sacrifice, but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. Now there's not any man that can sacrifice his own blood {meaning an immortal man} which can atone for the sins of another. Now if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, nay. But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered. Therefore, there can be nothing which can be short of an infinite Atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world." [Alma 34:10-12]

17. Now think about what Amulek is saying. It is: the atonement of Christ is infinite and eternal in the sense that it, it seems almost to defy human law and human logic. The great Christian thinker, C.S. Lewis, put it this way. He said, "Among the Jews, there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if he were God. I mean, he claims to forgive sins. He says he has always existed. He says he's coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you. You steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden upon, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other man's toes and stealing other men's money. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if he were the party chiefly concerned. The person chiefly offended in all offenses. "This makes sense only," Lewis said, "if he really was the God whose laws were broken, and whose love is wounded in every sin."

18. The atonement is timeless. The atonement defies human law and logic. The atonement overcomes the universal thing we know as death.

19. Fourth, in speaking to the Jews, Jesus said, "Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down. I have power to take it again. {And then he said,} This commandment have I received of my Father." [John 10:17-18] Now in that statement the Savior points out why it was that He was able to perform the Atoning sacrifice and no one else was.

20. To use again, our friend, Amulek. Notice these words, "Therefore it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be a stop

to the shedding of blood. Then shall the Law of Moses be fulfilled. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice, and that great and last sacrifice would be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal." [Alma 34:13-14]

21. The fourth way I suggest that the Book of Mormon teaches that the atonement of Christ is infinite and eternal is in that the one who performed it is, Himself, infinite and eternal. Jesus inherited from His mother, Mary, a mortal woman, mortality: the capacity to die. From His Father, the almighty Elohim, the capacity to live forever, what we call immortality. It was then within His power therefore, truly, to lay down His own life, to determine when He would die. In reality, no one took His life from Him, He gave it freely. His was a free offering. And so the atonement is infinite and eternal because Jesus is infinite and eternal.

22. Finally number five, the atonement of Christ is infinite in that our Lord and Savior saves and redeems all that He creates. You'll recall that in what we know as the vision of the glories, the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, that after having shown the magnificent vision, or spoken of the magnificent vision that they had seen, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon bore their testimony of the Savior when they said, "And now after the many testimonies which have been given of Him. This is the testimony last of all which we give of Him: that He lives! For we saw Him, even on the right hand of God, and we heard the voice bearing record that He is the only begotten of the Father. That by Him, and through Him and of Him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God." [D&C 76:22-24]

23. That revelation, that vision was given in February of 1832. Some eleven years later, Joseph Smith committed to writing that vision in poetry. Those verses I've just quoted to you, the prophet rendered poetically as follows, "And I heard a great voice bearing record from heaven, 'He's the Savior and only begotten of God. That by Him and through Him the worlds were all made—even all the careen and the heavens so broad. Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last, are saved by the very same Savior of ours and of course, are begotten God's daughters and sons by the very same truths and the very same powers.'"

24. How much more magnificently could we rejoice in who and what the Savior is and what He has done,

than to acknowledge that He redeems all that He creates. He is the Creator of worlds without number. He is the Redeemer of worlds without number. To sort of summarize this, let me quote from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve. He said this, "His atonement is infinite, without an end. It was also infinite in that all humankind would be saved from never-ending death. It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope. It was done, once and for all, and the mercy of the atonement extends not only to the infinite number of people but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him."

25. Now at the same time, having understood as I hope we can appreciate that this atonement is magnificent and it is grand. It is at the same time, brothers and sisters, and I bear testimony of this, or it should be, very personal. The "Cosmic" Christ is in fact our personal Savior.

26. Consider these magnificent words that you know from, from Enoch. Enoch, who lived from 3,000 B.C., who saw this majestic creation of our Father's; who saw the magnificent love of God for His children. He saw God weep over the waywardness of His children, particularly in the days of Noah. Listen to what Enoch said, "How is it that thou canst weep seeing thou art holy and from all eternity to all eternity? And were it possible that man could number the particles of the Earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be the beginning of thy creations." And listen to this, "And yet, thou art there, and thy bosom is there, and also thou art just, thou art merciful and kind forever." [Moses 7:29-30]

27. The atonement of Christ, brothers and sisters, is intimate in that God's (can I say it this way?); God's infinity does not preclude either His immediacy or his intimacy. In ways that we cannot comprehend, even though our Savior is the Savior of an innumerable host of people, He is first and foremost my Savior and your Savior.

28. Recently, at our General Conference, Elder Merrill J. Bateman of the Seventy made this observation. "For many years," he said, "I have thought of the Savior's experience in the garden and on the cross as places where a large mass of sin of was heaped upon Him. Through the words of Alma, Abinadi, Isaiah, and other prophets, however, my view has been changed. Instead of an impersonal mass of sin, there was a long line of people. As Jesus

felt our infirmities, bore our griefs, carried our sorrows and was bruised for our iniquities."

29. Elder Bateman continues, "The atonement was an intimate, personal experience in which Jesus came to know how to help each of us. The Pearl of Great Price teaches that Moses was shown all the inhabitants of the earth, which were numberless as the sand upon the seashore. If Moses beheld every soul," Elder Bateman says, "then it seems reasonable that the Creator of the universe has the power to become intimately acquainted with each of us. He learned about your weaknesses and mine. He experienced your pains and sufferings. He experienced mine. I testify that He knows us. He understands the way in which we deal with temptation. He knows our weaknesses, but more than that. More than just knowing us, He knows how to help us if we come to Him in faith." That's the end of the quote from Elder Bateman.

30. Second, as many of you know, the Arabic or the Aramaic word translated as "atone" is the word *khafat* which means "to embrace." Notice this beautiful language of Lehi to his children. "The Lord hath redeemed my soul," Lehi exalts. "Redeemed my soul from Hell. I have beheld His glory and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of His love." [2 Nephi 20:20] Notice this language in the Doctrine and Covenants, 6th section. "Be faithful, {the Lord said,} and diligent in keeping the commandments of God. And I will encircle thee in the arms of my love." [D&C 6:20]

31. Notice this language from the 62nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, "Behold and hearken, O ye elders of the Church, saith the Lord, your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted." [D&C 62:1] How to help, or literally, how to run to and help.

32. And then in what I believe to be one of the most profound and expansive passages in all of scripture concerning the depth and breadth and magnificence of our Savior's atoning sacrifice, Alma said to the people of Gideon, "And He shall go forth suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind. And this that the word might be fulfilled which sayeth He will take upon Him the pains and the sicknesses of His people. 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 {weaknesses} that His bowels might be filled with mercy according to the flesh. That He may know

according to the flesh, how to succor His people according to their infirmities.”[Alma 7:11-12]

33. Alma continues, “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, and that He might blot out their transgressions according to the power of His deliverance.” Alma chapter seven. [Alma 7:13]

34. See what a beautiful statement. We had to go quite a ways in that magnificent testimony before the word sin or transgression was ever mentioned. Our Lord and Savior's atonement is so broad. As Elder Bruce Hafen said some years ago, “Jesus doesn't just suffer for big, bad sinners, but He knows the feelings associated with disappointment, the feelings of apprehension, the feelings of fear. He knows how to help us with our feelings of inadequacy. He knows how to help us face and fight our way through abuse. He knows how to help us learn to forgive. And yes, He knows how to forgive our sins.”

35. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said this in speaking of the Savior's atonement. “Can we,” he asked, “even in the depths of disease, tell Christ anything at all about suffering? In ways we cannot comprehend, our sicknesses and infirmities were born by Him even before they were born by us. The very weight of our combined sins caused Him to descend below all. We have never been nor will we be in depths such as He has known. Thus His atonement made perfect His empathy, and His mercy, and His capacity to succor us for which we can be everlastingly grateful as He tutors us in our trials. There was no ram in the thicket at Calvary to spare Him, this friend of Abraham and Isaac.”

36. I'd like to suggest finally, brothers and sisters, that the atonement of Christ is intimate in nature because, more than anything else, Jesus loves us.

37. One of the great religious thinkers of the twentieth century, a man by the name of Carl Bart, a great Protestant theologian, after a lifetime of writing, I suppose tens of thousands of pages on Christ and the atonement, he was asked, “What, what do you think is the most significant thing you have discovered in your studies?”

38. Without much hesitation he said, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

39. Elder Jeffrey Holland, some years ago, quoted the passage from the Savior in the New Testament, John 14:27 in which the Savior said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And then

Elder Holland said this, “I submit to you that, {that is to let not our hearts be troubled neither let it be afraid} that may be one of the Savior's commandments that is, even in the hearts of otherwise faithful Latter-day Saints, almost universally disobeyed. Even in the hearts of otherwise faithful people, and yet I wonder,” he said, “whether our resistance to this invitation [to not be afraid] could be any more grievous to the Lord's merciful heart. I can tell you that as a parent that as concerned as I would be if somewhere in their lives one of my children were seriously troubled or unhappy or disobedient. Nevertheless I would be infinitely more devastated if I felt that at such a time, that child could not trust me to help or thought his or her interest was unimportant to me or unsafe in my care. In that same spirit I'm convinced that none of us can appreciate how deeply it wounds the loving heart of the Savior of the world when He finds that His people do not feel confident in His care, or secure in His hands, or trust in His commandments.”

40. Elder Holland continues, “Just because God is God. Just because Christ is Christ, they cannot do other than care for us and bless us and help us. If we would but come unto them, approaching their throne of grace in meekness and lowliness of heart, they can't help but bless us. They have to. It is their nature to help us. When the Savior says, 'Come follow me,' it means that He knows where the quicksand is, and where the thorns are and the best way to handle the slippery slope near the summit of our personal mountains. He knows it all, and He knows the way. He is the way.” That's the end of the quote.

41. Let me close, brothers and sisters, with this sweet testimony of President Gordon B. Hinckley. “I sense in a measure,” President Hinckley said, “the meaning of His atonement. I cannot comprehend it all. It is so vast in its reach, and yet so intimate in its affect that it defies comprehension. When all is said and done,” President Hinckley said, “When all of history is examined. When the deepest depths of the human mind have been explored, there is nothing so wonderful, so majestic, so tremendous as this act of grace when the Son of the Almighty, the Prince of His Father's royal household gave His life in ignominy and pain, so that all of the sons and daughters of God, of all the generations of time, of whom, every one of whom must die, might walk again and live eternally.”

42. I have come to know more about the Savior, more about His infinite sacrifice, more about His intimate sacrifice because of the grand call and great ministry and magnificent teaching of the Prophet,

Joseph Smith. I bear testimony of Joseph Smith, and I bear testimony of the One of which he bore witness. Joseph Smith stands as God's preeminent, prophetic witness of Christ and of the plan of salvation in these last days. I bear testimony that God is our Father. He loves us and there is no truth more central to improvement, no truth more fundamental to progress than to know that God loves us and there is nothing you and I can do to change that. And that the greatest manifestation of that is that He sent a man to die for us who didn't need to die. A man who didn't deserve

to die, but a man who volunteered to die because He loved us.

43. May we not take lightly that atonement which is infinite in scope but intimate in nature, but may we herald the Lord's living sacrifice and make of ourselves a living sacrifice as we put our natural men and women upon the altar and become new men, new women, new creatures in Christ is my prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

4. The Role of Prophets, Seers, and Revelators

“Lord, I Believe”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, May 2013



1. On one occasion Jesus came upon a group arguing vehemently with His disciples. When the Savior inquired as to the cause of this contention, the father of an afflicted child stepped forward, saying he had approached Jesus’s disciples for a blessing for his son, but they were not able to provide it. With the boy still gnashing his teeth, foaming from the mouth, and thrashing on the ground in front of them, the father appealed to Jesus with what must have been last-resort desperation in his voice:

2. “If thou canst do any thing,” he said, “have compassion on us, and help us.

3. “Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

4. “And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”¹

5. This man’s initial conviction, by his own admission, is limited. But he has an urgent, emphatic desire in behalf of his only child. We are told that is good enough for a beginning. “Even if ye can no more than desire to believe,” Alma declares, “let this desire work in you, even until ye believe.”² With no other hope remaining, this father asserts what faith he has and pleads with the Savior of the world, “If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.”³ I can hardly read those words without weeping. The plural pronoun *us* is obviously used intentionally. This man is saying, in effect, “Our whole [family](#) is pleading. Our struggle never ceases. We are exhausted. Our son falls into the water. He falls into the fire. He is continually in danger, and we are continually afraid. We don’t know where else to turn. Can you help us? We will be grateful for anything—a partial blessing, a glimmer of hope, some small lifting of the burden carried by this boy’s mother every day of her life.”

6. “If thou canst do anything,” spoken by the father, comes back to him “If thou canst believe,” spoken by the Master.⁴

7. “Straightway,” the scripture says—not slowly nor skeptically nor cynically but “straightway”—the father cries out in his unvarnished parental pain, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” In response to new and still partial faith, Jesus heals the boy, almost literally raising him from the dead, as Mark describes the incident.⁵

8. With this tender scriptural record as a backdrop, I wish to speak directly to the young people of the Church—young in years of age or young in years of membership or young in years of faith. One way or another, that should include just about all of us.

9. Observation number one regarding this account is that when facing the challenge of faith, the father asserts his strength first and only then acknowledges his limitation. His initial declaration is affirmative and without hesitation: “Lord, I believe.” I would say to all who wish for more faith, remember this man! In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited. In the growth we all have to experience in mortality, the spiritual equivalent of this boy’s affliction or this parent’s desperation is going to come to all of us. When those moments come and issues surface, the resolution of which is not immediately forthcoming, hold fast to what you already know and stand strong until additional knowledge comes. It was of this very incident, this specific miracle, that Jesus said, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”⁶ The size of your faith or the degree of your knowledge is not the issue—it is the integrity you demonstrate toward the faith you do have and the truth you already know.

10. The second observation is a variation of the first. When problems come and questions arise, do not start your quest for faith by saying how much you do not have, leading as it were with your “unbelief.” That is like trying to stuff a turkey through the beak! Let me be clear on this point: I am not asking you to pretend to faith you do not have. I am asking you to be true to the faith you do have. Sometimes we act as if an honest declaration of doubt is a higher manifestation of moral courage than is an honest declaration of faith. It is not! So let us all remember the clear message of this scriptural account: Be as candid about your questions as you need to be; life is full of them on one subject or another. But if you and

your family want to be healed, don't let those questions stand in the way of faith working its miracle.

11. Furthermore, you have more faith than you think you do because of what the [Book of Mormon](#) calls "the greatness of the evidences."⁷ "Ye shall know them by their fruits," Jesus said, ⁸ and the fruit of living the gospel is evident in the lives of Latter-day Saints everywhere. As Peter and John said once to an ancient audience, I say today, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," and what we have seen and heard is that "a notable miracle hath been done" in the lives of millions of members of this Church. That cannot be denied.⁹

12. Brothers and sisters, this is a divine work in process, with the manifestations and blessings of it abounding in every direction, so please don't hyperventilate if from time to time issues arise that need to be examined, understood, and resolved. They do and they will. In this Church, what we know will always trump what we do not know. And remember, in this world, everyone is to walk by faith.

13. So be kind regarding human frailty—your own as well as that of those who serve with you in a Church led by volunteer, mortal men and women. Except in the case of His only perfect Begotten Son, imperfect people are all God has ever had to work with. That must be terribly frustrating to Him, but He deals with it. So should we. And when you see imperfection, remember that the limitation is not in the divinity of the work. As one gifted writer has suggested, when the infinite fulness is poured forth, it is not the oil's fault if there is some loss because finite vessels can't quite contain it all.¹⁰ Those finite vessels include you and me, so be patient and kind and forgiving.

14. Last observation: When doubt or difficulty come, do not be afraid to ask for help. If we want it as humbly and honestly as this father did, we can get it. The scriptures phrase such earnest desire as being of "real intent," pursued "with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God."¹¹ I testify that in response to that kind of importuning, God will send help from both sides of the veil to strengthen our belief.

15. I said I was speaking to the young. I still am. A 14-year-old boy recently said to me a little hesitantly, "Brother Holland, I can't say yet that I know the Church is true, but I believe it is." I hugged that boy until his eyes bulged out. I told him with all the fervor of my soul that belief is a precious word, an even

more precious act, and he need never apologize for "only believing." I told him that Christ Himself said, "Be not afraid, only believe,"¹² a phrase which, by the way, carried young Gordon B. Hinckley into the mission field.¹³ I told this boy that belief was always the first step toward conviction and that the definitive articles of our collective faith forcefully reiterate the phrase "We believe."¹⁴ And I told him how very proud I was of him for the honesty of his quest.

16. Now, with the advantage that nearly 60 years give me since I was a newly believing 14-year-old, I declare some things I now know. I know that God is at all times and in all ways and in all circumstances our loving, forgiving Father in Heaven. I know Jesus was His only perfect child, whose life was given lovingly by the will of both the Father and the Son for the redemption of all the rest of us who are not perfect. I know He rose from that death to live again, and because He did, you and I will also. I know that [Joseph Smith](#), who acknowledged that he wasn't perfect,¹⁵ was nevertheless the chosen instrument in God's hand to restore the everlasting gospel to the earth. I also know that in doing so—particularly through translating the Book of Mormon—he has taught me more of God's love, of Christ's divinity, and of priesthood power than any other prophet of whom I have ever read, known, or heard in a lifetime of seeking. I know that President Thomas S. Monson, who moves devotedly and buoyantly toward the 50th anniversary of his ordination as an Apostle, is the rightful successor to that prophetic mantle today. We have seen that mantle upon him again in this conference. I know that 14 other men whom you sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators sustain him with their hands, their hearts, and their own apostolic keys.

17. These things I declare to you with the conviction Peter called the "more sure word of prophecy."¹⁶ What was once a tiny seed of belief for me has grown into the tree of life, so if your faith is a little tested in this or any season, I invite you to lean on mine. I know this work is God's very truth, and I know that only at our peril would we allow doubt or devils to sway us from its path. Hope on. Journey on. Honestly acknowledge your questions and your concerns, but first and forever fan the flame of your faith, because all things are possible to them that believe. In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

1. [Mark 9:22–24](#); see also [verses 14–21](#).

2. [Alma 32:27](#); emphasis added.

3. [Mark 9:22](#); emphasis added.

4. [Mark 9:22, 23](#); emphasis added.

5. See [Mark 9:24–27](#).

6. [Matthew 17:20](#).
7. [Helaman 5:50](#).
8. [Matthew 7:16](#).
9. See [Acts 4:16, 20](#).
10. Adapted from Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (1883), 2:108.
11. [2 Nephi 31:13](#).
12. [Mark 5:36](#).
13. See Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 114.
14. See [Articles of Faith 1:1–13](#).
15. See Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 522.
16. [2 Peter 1:19](#).

Stay in the Boat and Hold On!

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Ensign, November 2014



1. Recently, a friend of mine took his son on a trip down the Colorado River through Cataract Canyon, located in southeastern Utah. The canyon is famous for its 14 miles (23 km) of white-water rapids that can be particularly hazardous.
2. In preparation for their adventure, they had carefully reviewed the National Park Service website, which contains important information about personal preparedness and common, hidden hazards.
3. At the beginning of the trip, one of the experienced river guides reviewed important safety instructions, emphasizing three rules that would ensure the group's safe travel through the rapids. "Rule number one: stay in the boat! Rule number two: always wear a life jacket! Rule number three: always hold on with both hands!" He then said again, with even more emphasis, "Above all, remember rule number one: stay in the boat!"
4. This adventure reminds me of our mortal journey. Most of us experience periods in our lives where the tranquil waters of life are appreciated. At other times, we encounter white-water rapids that are metaphorically comparable to those found in the 14-mile stretch through Cataract Canyon—challenges that may include physical and mental health issues, the death of a loved one, dashed dreams and hopes, and—for some—even a crisis of faith when faced with life's problems, questions, and doubts.
5. The Lord in His goodness has provided help, including a boat, essential supplies such as life jackets, and experienced river guides who give guidance and safety instructions to help us make our way down the river of life to our final destination.

6. Let's think about rule number one: stay in the boat!
7. President Brigham Young commonly employed "the Old Ship Zion" as a metaphor for The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints.
8. He said on one occasion: "We are in the midst of the ocean. A storm comes on, and, as sailors say, she labors very hard. 'I am not going to stay here,' says one; 'I don't believe this is the "Ship Zion."' 'But we are in the midst of the ocean.' 'I don't care, I am not going to stay here.' Off goes the coat, and he jumps overboard. Will he not be drowned? Yes. So with those who leave this Church. It is the 'Old Ship Zion,' let us stay in it."¹
9. On another occasion, President Young said that he also worried about people losing their way when they were being blessed—when life was good: "It is in calm weather, when the old ship of Zion is sailing with a gentle breeze, [and] when all is quiet on deck, that some of the brethren want to go out in the whaling boats to have ... a swim, and some get drowned, others drifted away, and others again get back to the ship. Let us stick to the old ship and she will carry us [safely] into the harbor; you need not be concerned."²
10. And finally, President Young reminded the Saints: "We are on the old ship Zion. ... [God] is at the helm and will stay there. ... All is right, sing Hallelujah, for the Lord is here. He dictates, guides and directs. If the people will have implicit confidence in their God, never forsake their covenants nor their God, He will guide us right."³
11. Given the challenges we all face today, how do we stay on the Old Ship Zion?
12. Here is how. We need to experience a continuing conversion by increasing our faith in Jesus Christ and our faithfulness to His gospel throughout our lives—not just once but regularly. Alma asked, "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren [and sisters], if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?"⁴
13. The experienced river guides today can be likened to the Church's apostles and prophets and inspired local priesthood and auxiliary leaders. They help us arrive safely to our final destination.
14. Recently, I spoke at the new mission presidents' seminar and counseled these leaders:

15. “Keep the eyes of the mission on the leaders of the Church. ... We will not and ... cannot lead [you] astray.

16. “And as you teach your missionaries to focus their eyes on us, teach them to never follow those who think they know more about how to administer the affairs of the Church than ... Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ do” through the priesthood leaders who have the keys to preside.

17. “I have discovered in my ministry that those who have become lost [and] confused are typically those who have most often ... forgotten that when the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve speak with a united voice, it is the voice of the Lord for that time. The Lord reminds us, ‘Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same’ [[D&C 1:38](#)].”⁵

18. In other words, they leave the Old Ship Zion—they fall away; they apostatize. Tragically, they often experience short-term and eventually long-term unintended consequences, not only for themselves but also for their families.

19. Our local Church leaders, like seasoned river guides, have been tutored by life’s experiences; have been trained and mentored by apostles and prophets and other officers of the Church; and, most important, have been tutored by the Lord Himself.

20. On another occasion this year, I spoke to the young adults of the Church in the May CES devotional broadcast. I said:

21. “I have heard that some people think the Church leaders live in a ‘bubble.’ What they forget is that we are men and women of experience, and we have lived our lives in so many places and worked with many people from different backgrounds. Our current assignments literally take us around the globe, where we meet the political, religious, business, and humanitarian leaders of the world. Although we have visited [leaders in] the White House in Washington, D.C., and leaders of nations [and religions] throughout the world, we have also visited the most humble [families and people] on earth. ...

22. “When you thoughtfully consider our lives and ministry, you will most likely agree that we see and experience the world in ways few others do. You will realize that we live less in a ‘bubble’ than most people. ...

23. “... There is something about the individual and combined wisdom of the [Church leaders] that should provide some comfort. We have experienced it all,

including the consequences of different public laws and policies, disappointments, tragedies, and deaths in our own families. We are not out of touch with your lives.”⁶

24. Along with rule number one as I’ve applied it, remember rules two and three: always wear a life jacket, and hold on with both hands. The words of the Lord are found in the scriptures and the teachings of the apostles and prophets. They provide us counsel and direction that, when followed, will act like a spiritual life jacket and will help us know how to hold on with both hands.

25. We need to become like the sons of Mosiah, who “waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth.” We can become men and women “of a sound understanding.” This can be accomplished only by our “search[ing] the scriptures diligently, that [we] might know the word of God.”⁷

26. In searching the scriptures and the words of past and current apostles and prophets, we should focus on studying, living, and loving the doctrine of Christ.

27. In addition to developing the habit of personal scripture reading, we need to be like the sons of Mosiah and give ourselves “to much prayer, and fasting.”⁸

28. It seems that these things which are not easily measured are of great importance. Stay focused on these simple things, and avoid becoming distracted.

29. As I have known people who have not stayed in the boat and have not held on with both hands during times of trials and troubles or who have not stayed in the boat during times of relative calm, I have observed that many of them have lost their focus on the central truths of the gospel—the reasons why they joined the Church in the first place; the reasons they remained fully committed and active in living gospel standards and blessing others through dedicated, consecrated service; and the ways in which the Church has been in their lives “a place of spiritual nourishment and growth.”⁹

30. [Joseph Smith](#) taught this central truth: “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 up into heaven;’ and all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion.”¹⁰

31. If we keep our focus on the Lord, we are promised a blessing beyond comparison: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ,

having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”¹¹

32. Sometimes faithful Latter-day Saints and sincere investigators begin to focus on the “appendages” instead of on the fundamental principles. That is, Satan tempts us to become distracted from the simple and clear message of the restored gospel. Those so distracted often give up partaking of the [sacrament](#) because they have become focused, even preoccupied, with less important practices or teachings.

33. Others may focus on the questions and doubts they experience. Of course, having questions and experiencing doubts are not incongruent with dedicated discipleship. Recently, the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: “We understand that from time to time Church members will have questions about Church doctrine, history, or practice. Members are always free to ask such questions and earnestly seek greater understanding.”¹²

34. Remember, Joseph Smith himself had questions that began the Restoration. He was a seeker and, like Abraham, found the answers to life’s most important questions.

35. The important questions focus on what matters most—Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement. Our search should lead us to become kind, gentle, loving, forgiving, patient, and dedicated disciples. We must be willing, as Paul taught, to “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”¹³

36. To bear another’s burdens includes helping, supporting, and understanding everyone, including the sick, the infirm, the poor in spirit and body, the seeker and the troubled, and also other member-disciples—including Church leaders who have been called by the Lord to serve for a season.

37. Brothers and sisters, stay in the boat, use your life jackets, and hold on with both hands. Avoid distractions! And if any one of you have fallen out of the boat, we will seek you, find you, minister to you, and pull you safely back onto the Old Ship Zion, where God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are at the helm and will guide us right, to which I humbly testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young(1997), 82–83.

2. Brigham Young, “Discourse,” Deseret News, Jan. 27, 1858,

373.

3. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” Deseret News, Nov. 18, 1857, 291.

4. [Alma 5:26](#).

5. M. Russell Ballard, “Mission Leadership” (address given at the seminar for new mission presidents, June 25, 2014), 8.

6. M. Russell Ballard, “Be Still, and Know That I Am God” (Church Educational System devotional, May 4, 2014); [lds.org/broadcasts](#).

7. [Alma 17:2](#).

8. [Alma 17:3](#).

9. First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles letter, June 28, 2014.

10. Joseph Smith, Elders’ Journal, July 1838, 44.

11. [2 Nephi 31:20](#).

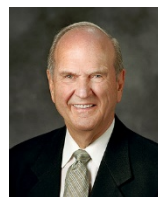
12. First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles letter, June 28, 2014.

13. [Galatians 6:2](#).

Sustaining the Prophets

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Ensign, November 2014



1. President Eyring, we thank you for your instructive and inspiring message. My dear brothers and sisters, we thank you for your faith and devotion. Yesterday, we were each invited to sustain Thomas S. Monson as the prophet of the Lord and President of the Lord’s Church. And often we sing, “We thank thee, O God, for a prophet.”¹ Do you and I really understand what that means? Imagine the privilege the Lord has given us of sustaining His prophet, whose counsel will be untainted, unvarnished, unmotivated by any personal aspiration, and utterly true!

2. How do we really sustain a prophet? Long before he became President of the Church, President Joseph F. Smith explained, “It is an important duty resting upon the Saints who ... sustain the authorities of the Church, to do so not only by the lifting of the hand, the mere form, but in deed and in truth.”²

3. Well do I remember my most unique “deed” to sustain a prophet. As a medical doctor and cardiac surgeon, I had the responsibility of performing open-heart surgery on President Spencer W. Kimball in 1972, when he was Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He needed a very complex operation. But I had no experience doing such a procedure on a 77-year-old patient in heart failure. I did not recommend the operation and so informed President Kimball and the First Presidency. But, in faith, President Kimball chose to have the operation, only because it was advised by the First Presidency. That shows how he sustained his leaders! And his decision made me tremble!

4. Thanks to the Lord, the operation was a success. When President Kimball's heart resumed beating, it did so with great power! At that very moment, I had a clear witness of the Spirit that this man would one day become President of the Church!³

5. You know the outcome. Only 20 months later, President Kimball became President of the Church. And he provided bold and courageous leadership for many years.

6. Since then we have sustained Presidents Ezra Taft Benson, Howard W. Hunter, Gordon B. Hinckley, and now Thomas S. Monson as Presidents of the Church—prophets in every sense of the word!

7. My dear brothers and sisters, if the Restoration did anything, it shattered the age-old myth that God had stopped talking to His children. Nothing could be further from the truth. A prophet has stood at the head of God's Church in all dispensations, from Adam to the present day.⁴ Prophets testify of [Jesus Christ](#)—of His divinity and of His earthly mission and ministry.⁵ We honor the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) as the prophet of this last dispensation. And we honor each man who has succeeded him as President of the Church.

8. When we sustain prophets and other leaders,⁶ we invoke the law of common consent, for the Lord said, "It shall not be given to anyone to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by someone who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church."⁷

9. This gives us, as members of the Lord's Church, confidence and faith as we strive to keep the scriptural injunction to heed the Lord's voice⁸ as it comes through the voice of His servants the prophets.⁹ All leaders in the Lord's Church are called by proper authority. No prophet or any other leader in this Church, for that matter, has ever called himself or herself. No prophet has ever been elected. The Lord made that clear when He said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you."¹⁰ You and I do not "vote" on Church leaders at any level. We do, though, have the privilege of sustaining them.

10. The ways of the Lord are different from the ways of man. Man's ways remove people from office or business when they grow old or become disabled. But man's ways are not and never will be the Lord's ways. Our sustaining of prophets is a personal commitment that we will do our utmost to uphold their prophetic priorities. Our sustaining is an oath-

like indication that we recognize their calling as a prophet to be legitimate and binding upon us.

11. Twenty-six years before he became President of the Church, then-Elder George Albert Smith said: "The obligation that we make when we raise our hands ... is a most sacred one. It does not mean that we will go quietly on our way and be willing that the prophet of the Lord shall direct this work, but it means ... that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; we will defend his good name, and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct."¹¹

12. The living Lord leads His living Church!¹² The Lord reveals His will for the Church to His prophet. Yesterday, after we were invited to sustain Thomas S. Monson as President of the Church, we also had the privilege to sustain him, the counselors in the First Presidency, and members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. Think of that! We sustain 15 men as prophets of God! They hold all the priesthood keys that have ever been conferred upon man in this dispensation.

13. The calling of 15 men to the holy apostleship provides great protection for us as members of the Church. Why? Because decisions of these leaders must be unanimous.¹³ Can you imagine how the Spirit needs to move upon 15 men to bring about unanimity? These 15 men have varied educational and professional backgrounds, with differing opinions about many things. Trust me! These 15 men—prophets, seers, and revelators—know what the will of the Lord is when unanimity is reached! They are committed to see that the Lord's will truly will be done. The Lord's Prayer provides the pattern for each of these 15 men when they pray: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."¹⁴

14. The Apostle with the longest seniority in the office of Apostle presides.¹⁵ That system of seniority will usually bring older men to the office of President of the Church.¹⁶ It provides continuity, seasoned maturity, experience, and extensive preparation, as guided by the Lord.

15. The Church today has been organized by the Lord Himself. He has put in place a remarkable system of governance that provides redundancy and backup. That system provides for prophetic leadership even when the inevitable illnesses and incapacities may come with advancing age.¹⁷ Counterbalances and safeguards abound so that no one can ever lead the Church astray. Senior leaders are constantly being tutored such that one day they are ready to sit in the

highest councils. They learn how to hear the voice of the Lord through the whisperings of the Spirit.

16. While serving as First Counselor to President Ezra Taft Benson, who was then nearing the end of his mortal life, President Gordon B. Hinckley explained:

17. “The principles and procedures which the Lord has put in place for the governance of His church make provision for any ... circumstance. It is important ... that there be no doubts or concerns about the governance of the Church and the exercise of the prophetic gifts, including the right to inspiration and revelation in administering the affairs and programs of the Church, when the President may be ill or is not able to function fully.

18. “The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, called and ordained to hold the keys of the priesthood, have the authority and responsibility to govern the Church, to administer its ordinances, to expound its doctrine, and to establish and maintain its practices.”

19. President Hinckley continued:

20. “When the President is ill or not able to function fully in all of the duties of his office, his two Counselors together comprise a Quorum of the First Presidency. They carry on with the day-to-day work of the Presidency. ...

21. “... But any major questions of policy, procedures, programs, or doctrine are considered deliberately and prayerfully by the First Presidency and the Twelve together.”¹⁸

22. Last year, when President Monson reached the milestone of 5 years of service as President of the Church, he reflected on his 50 years of apostolic service and made this statement: “Age eventually takes its toll on all of us. However, we join our voices with King Benjamin, who said, ... ‘I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen ... and consecrated by my father, ... and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me’ (Mosiah 2:11).”

23. President Monson continued: “Despite any health challenges that may come to us, despite any weakness in body or mind, we serve to the best of our ability. I assure you that the Church is in good hands. The system set up for the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve [Apostles] assures [us] that it will always be in good hands and that, come

what may, there is no need to worry or to fear. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, whom we follow, whom we worship, and whom we serve, is ever at the helm.”¹⁹

24. President Monson, we thank you for those truths! And we thank you for your lifetime of exemplary and dedicated service. May I presume to speak for the members of the Church throughout the world in our united and sincere expression of [gratitude](#) for you. We honor you! We love you! We sustain you, not only with uplifted hands but with all our hearts and consecrated efforts. Humbly and fervently, “we ever pray for thee, our prophet dear”!²⁰ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” Hymns, no. 19.
2. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith (1998), 211; emphasis added. This statement was made in 1898, when President Smith was Second Counselor in the First Presidency.
3. For further details, see Spencer J. Condie, Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle (2003), 153–56.
4. See Bible Dictionary, “[Dispensations](#).”
5. A number of prophets foretold the coming of the Lord, including Lehi (see [1 Nephi 1:19](#)), Nephi (see [1 Nephi 11:31–33](#); [19:7–8](#)), Jacob (see [Jacob 4:4–6](#)), Benjamin (see [Mosiah 3:5–11, 15](#)), Abinadi (see [Mosiah 15:1–9](#)), Alma (see [Alma 40:2](#)), and Samuel the Lamanite (see [Helaman 14:12](#)). Before the Savior was born in Bethlehem, they foresaw His atoning sacrifice and His subsequent Resurrection.
6. The principle of sustaining leaders is fundamental throughout the Lord’s Church. A person is sustained before being set apart to a calling or being ordained to an office in the priesthood.
7. [Doctrine and Covenants 42:11](#). The practice of sustaining our leaders was implemented on April 6, 1830, when the Church was organized, and in March 1836, when members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators (see History of the Church, 1:74–77; 2:417).
8. The Book of Mormon warns of danger if we disregard prophetic teachings. From it we read that “the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake... , saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” ([1 Nephi 11:36](#)).
9. See [Daniel 9:10](#); [Amos 3:7](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 21:1, 4–5](#); [124:45–46](#).
10. [John 15:16](#). The [fifth article of faith](#) clarifies: “We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”
11. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith (2011), 64; emphasis added. This quotation came from a conference address by Elder George Albert Smith in 1919. He became President of the Church in 1945.
12. See [Doctrine and Covenants 1:30, 38](#).
13. See [Doctrine and Covenants 107:27](#).
14. [3 Nephi 13:10](#); see also [Matthew 6:10](#); [Luke 11:2](#).
15. When a President of the Church dies, the First Presidency is dissolved and the counselors take their places in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The Quorum of the Twelve then presides over the Church until the First Presidency is reorganized. That period of time is known as an apostolic interregnum. Historically,

that interval has varied in length from four days to three and a half years.

16. Of course, that pattern of succession did not apply to the calling of Joseph Smith, who was foreordained to be the prophet of the Restoration and the first President of the Church (see [2 Nephi 3:6–22](#); see also [Abraham 3:22–23](#)).

17. We know that the Lord Himself can call any of us home anytime He chooses.

18. Gordon B. Hinckley, “God Is at the Helm,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 54; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, [“He Slumbers Not, nor Sleeps.”](#) *Ensign*, May 1983, 6.

19. “Message from President Thomas S. Monson,” *Church News*, Feb. 3, 2013, 9.

20. “We Ever Pray for Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 23.

What Is Our Doctrine?

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1. We have been charged to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently,” the Lord implores, “and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” (D&C 88:77–78). But what exactly are we to teach? What is doctrine? Before beginning this discussion, let me affirm that I understand implicitly that the authority to declare, interpret, and clarify doctrine rests with living apostles and prophets. This article will thus speak only about doctrine and in no way attempt to reach beyond my own stewardship.

Doctrine: Its Purpose, Power, and Purity

2. Doctrine is “the basic body of Christian teaching or understanding (2 Timothy 3:16). Christian doctrine is composed of teachings which are to be handed on through instruction and proclamation. . . . Religious doctrine deals with the ultimate and most comprehensive questions.”¹ Further, “gospel doctrine is synonymous with the truths of salvation. It comprises the tenets, teachings, and true theories found in the scriptures; it includes the principles, precepts, and revealed philosophies of pure religion; prophetic dogmas, maxims, and views are embraced within its folds; the Articles of Faith are part and portion of it, as is every inspired utterance of the Lord’s agents.”²

3. The central, saving doctrine is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of humankind; that He lived, taught, healed, suffered, and died for our sins; and that He rose from the dead the third day with a glorious, immortal, resurrected

body (see 1 Corinthians 15:1–3; D&C 76:40–42). It was the Prophet Joseph Smith who spoke of these central truths as the “fundamental principles” of our religion to which all other doctrines are but appendages.³ President Boyd K. Packer observed: “Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator. . . . Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.”⁴

4. Such counsel really does point us toward that which is of most worth in sermons and in the classroom, that which should receive our greatest emphasis. There is power in doctrine, power in the word (see Alma 31:5), power to heal the wounded soul (see Jacob 2:8), power to transform human behavior. “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior,” President Packer taught. “The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.”⁵ Elder Neal A. Maxwell also pointed out that “doctrines believed and practiced do change and improve us, while ensuring our vital access to the Spirit. Both outcomes are crucial.”⁶

5. Those of us who are teachers associated with the Church of Jesus Christ are under obligation to learn the doctrines, teach them properly, and bind ourselves to speak and act in harmony with them. Only in this way can we perpetuate truth in a world filled with error, avoid deception, focus on what matters most, and find joy and happiness in the process. “I have spoken before,” President Gordon B. Hinckley stated, “about the importance of keeping the doctrine of the Church pure, and seeing that it is taught in all of our meetings. I worry about this. Small aberrations in doctrinal teaching can lead to large and evil falsehoods.”⁷

How Do We “Keep the Doctrine Pure”? What Might We Do?

6. We can teach directly from the scriptures, the standard works. The scriptures contain the mind and will and voice and word of the Lord (see D&C 68:3–4) to men and women in earlier days and thus contain doctrine and applications that are both timely and timeless. “And all scripture given by inspiration of

God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man [or woman] of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (Joseph Smith Translation, 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

7. We can present the doctrine the same way the prophets in our own day present it (see D&C 52:9, 36)—in terms of both content and emphasis. Mormon wrote: “And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; . . . and he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught” (Mosiah 18:18-19; emphasis added). “Therefore they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches; every church having their priests and their teachers, and every priest preaching the word according as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma. And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church, yea, even the church of God” (Mosiah 25:21–22; emphasis added).

8. We can pay special attention to the scriptural commentary offered by living apostles and prophets in general conference addresses, cross-reference the same in our scriptures, and teach this commentary in conjunction with the scriptures. For example, we can study what

9. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught concerning the parable of the prodigal son in the April 2002 general conference; Elder Robert D. Hales taught concerning the covenant of baptism in October 2000; Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught concerning the principles of fasting as found in Isaiah 58 in April 2001; Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught concerning conversion and “becoming” as well as his thoughtful commentary on the parable of the workers in the vineyard in October 2000; Elder M. Russell Ballard taught concerning “Who is my neighbor?” And what may be called the doctrine of inclusion in October 2001.

10. We can teach the gospel with plainness and simplicity, focus on fundamentals, and emphasize what matters most. We do not tell all we know, nor do we teach on the edge of our knowledge. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that “it is not always wise to relate all the truth. Even Jesus, the Son of God, had to refrain from doing so, and had to restrain His feelings many times for the safety of Himself and His followers, and had to conceal the righteous purposes of His heart in relation to many things pertaining to His Father’s kingdom.”⁸

11. We can acknowledge that there are some things

we simply do not know. President Joseph F. Smith declared: “It is no discredit to our intelligence or to our integrity to say frankly in the face of a hundred speculative questions, ‘I do not know.’ One thing is certain, and that is, God has revealed enough to our understanding for our exaltation and for our happiness. Let the Saints, then, utilize what they already have; be simple and unaffected in their religion, both in thought and word, and they will not easily lose their bearings and be subjected to the vain philosophies of man.”⁹

Doctrinal Parameters

12. In recent years, I have tried to look beneath the surface and discern the nature of the objections that so many in the religious world have toward the Latter-day Saints. To be sure, the growth of the Church poses a real threat to many—more specifically, the Christian groups resent the way we “steal their sheep.” We are not in the line of historic Christianity and thus are neither Catholic nor Protestant. We believe in scripture beyond the Bible and in continuing revelation through apostles and prophets. We do not accept the concepts concerning God, Christ, and the Godhead that grew out of the post-New Testament church councils. All these things constitute reasons why many Protestants and Catholics label us as non-Christian. We have tried, with some success I think, to speak of ourselves as “Christian but different.” But there is another reason we are suspect, one that underlies and buttresses large amounts of anti-Mormon propaganda—namely, what they perceive to be some of our “unusual doctrines,” much of which was presented by a few Church leaders of the past.

13. Let me illustrate with an experience I had just a few months ago. A Baptist minister was in my office one day. We were chatting about a number of things, including doctrine. He said to me, “Bob, you people believe in such strange things!” “Like what?” I asked. “Oh, for example,” he said, “you believe in blood atonement. And that affects Utah’s insistence on retaining death by a firing squad.” I responded, “No, we don’t.” “Yes, you do,” he came right back. “I know of several statements by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Jedediah Grant that teach such things.” “I’m aware of those statements,” I said. I then found myself saying something that I had never voiced before: “Yes, they were taught, but they do not represent the doctrine of our Church. We believe in the blood atonement of Jesus Christ, and that alone.” My friend didn’t skip a beat: “What do you mean they don’t represent the doctrine of your Church? They

were spoken by major Church leaders.”

14. I explained that such statements were made, for the most part, during the time of the Mormon Reformation and that they were examples of a kind of “revival rhetoric” in which the leaders of the Church were striving to “raise the bar” in terms of obedience and faithfulness. I assured him that the Church, by its own canonical standards, does not have the right or the power to take a person’s life because of disobedience or even apostasy (see D&C 134:10). I read to him a passage from the Book of Mormon in which the Nephite prophets had resorted to “exceeding harshness, . . . continually reminding [the people] of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, . . . and exceedingly great plainness of speech” in order to “keep them from going down speedily to destruction” (Enos 1:23).

15. This seemed to satisfy him to some extent, but then he said: “Bob, many of my fellow Christians have noted how hard it is to figure out what Mormons believe. They say it’s like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall! What do you people believe? How do you decide what is your doctrine and what is not?” I sensed that we were in the midst of a very important conversation, one that was pushing me to the limits and requiring that I do some of the deepest thinking I had done for a long time. His questions were valid and in no way mean-spirited. They were not intended to entrap or embarrass me or the Church. He simply was seeking information. I said, “You’ve asked some excellent questions. Let me see what I can do to answer them.” I suggested that he consider the following three ideas:

16. The teachings of the Church today have a rather narrow focus, range, and direction; central and saving doctrine is what we are called upon to teach and emphasize, not tangential and peripheral teachings.

17. Very often what is drawn from Church leaders of the past is, like the matter of blood atonement mentioned above, either misquoted, misrepresented, or taken out of context. Further, not everything that was ever spoken or written by a past Church leader is a part of what we teach today. Ours is a living constitution, a living tree of life, a dynamic Church (see D&C 1:30). We are commanded to pay heed to the words of living oracles (see D&C 90:3–5).

18. In determining whether something is a part of the doctrine of the Church, we might ask, is it found within the four standard works? Within official declarations or proclamations? Is it discussed in

general conference or other official gatherings by general Church leaders today? Is it found in the general handbooks or approved curriculum of the Church today? If it meets at least one of these criteria, we can feel secure and appropriate about teaching it.

19. A significant percentage of anti-Mormonism focuses on Church leaders’ statements of the past that deal with peripheral or noncentral issues. No one criticizes us for a belief in God, in the divinity of Jesus Christ or His atoning work, in the literal bodily resurrection of the Savior and the eventual resurrection of mankind, in baptism by immersion, in the gift of the Holy Ghost, in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and so forth. But we are challenged regularly for statements in our literature on such matters as the following:

- God’s life before He was God
- How Jesus was conceived
- The specific fate of sons of perdition
- Teachings about Adam as God
- Details concerning what it means to become like God hereafter
- That plural marriage is essential to one’s exaltation
- Why blacks were denied the priesthood prior to 1978
- Loyalty to Men Called as Prophets

20. While we love the scriptures and thank God regularly for them, we believe that anyone can have sufficient confidence and even reverence for holy writ without believing that every word between Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 22:21 is the word-for-word dictation of the Almighty or that the Bible now reads as it has always read. Indeed, the Book of Mormon and other scriptures attest that plain and precious truths and many covenants of the Lord were taken away or kept back from the Bible before it was compiled (see 1 Nephi 13:20–29; Moses 1:40–41; Articles of Faith 1:8).¹⁰ But we still cherish the sacred volume, recognize and teach the doctrines of salvation within it, and seek to pattern our lives according to its timeless teachings.

21. In like manner, we can sustain with all our hearts the prophets and apostles without believing that they are perfect or that everything they say or do is exactly what God wants said and done. In short, we do not believe in apostolic or prophetic infallibility. Moses made mistakes, but we love and sustain him and accept his writings nonetheless. Peter

made mistakes, but we still honor him and study his words. Paul made mistakes, but we admire his boldness and dedication and treasure his epistles. James pointed out that Elijah “was a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17), and the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.”¹¹ On another occasion, the Prophet declared: “I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities.”¹² “I can fellowship the President of the Church,” said Lorenzo Snow, “if he does not know everything I know.”

22. . . . I saw the . . . imperfections in [Joseph Smith]. . . . I thanked God that He would put upon a man who had those imperfections the power and authority He placed upon him. . . . for I knew that I myself had weakness, and I thought there was a chance for me.”¹³

23. As we have been reminded again and again, whom God calls, God qualifies. That is, God calls His prophets. He empowers and strengthens the individual, provides an eternal perspective, loosens his tongue, and enables him to make divine truth known. But being called as an Apostle or even as President of the Church does not remove the man from mortality or make him perfect. President David O. McKay explained that “when God makes the prophet He does not unmake the man.”¹⁴ “I was this morning introduced to a man from the east,” Joseph Smith stated. “After hearing my name, he remarked that I was nothing but a man, indicating by this expression, that he had supposed that a person to whom the Lord should see fit to reveal His will, must be something more than a man. He seemed to have forgotten the saying that fell from the lips of St. James, that [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, yet he had such power with God, that he, in answer to his prayers, shut the heavens that they gave no rain for the space of three years and six months.”¹⁵

24. “With all their inspiration and greatness,” Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared, “prophets are yet mortal men with imperfections common to mankind in general. They have their opinions and prejudices and are left to work out their problems without inspiration in many instances.”¹⁶ “Thus the opinions and views, even of a prophet, may contain error, unless those opinions and views were inspired by the

Spirit.”¹⁷

25. “There have been times,” President Harold B. Lee pointed out, “when even the President of the Church has not been moved upon by the Holy Ghost. There is, I suppose you’d say, a classic story of Brigham Young in the time when Johnston’s army was on the move. The Saints were all inflamed, and President Young had his feelings whetted to fighting pitch. He stood up in the morning session of general conference and preached a sermon vibrant with defiance at the approaching army, declaring an intention to oppose them and drive them back. In the afternoon, he rose and said that Brigham Young had been talking in the morning but the Lord was going to talk now. He then delivered an address in which the tempo was the exact opposite of the morning sermon. Whether that happened or not, it illustrates a principle: that the Lord can move upon His people but they may speak on occasions their own opinions.”¹⁸

26. In 1865, the First Presidency counseled the Latter-day Saints as follows: We do not wish incorrect and unsound doctrines to be handed down to posterity under the sanction of great names to be received and valued by future generations as authentic and reliable, creating labor and difficulties for our successors to perform and contend with, which we ought not to transmit to them. The interests of posterity are, to a certain extent, in our hands. Errors in history and in doctrine, if left uncorrected by us who are conversant with the events, and who are in a position to judge of the truth or falsity of the doctrines, would go to our children as though we had sanctioned and endorsed them. . . . We know what sanctity there is always attached to the writings of men who have passed away, especially to the writings of Apostles, when none of their contemporaries are left, and we, therefore, feel the necessity of being watchful upon these points.¹⁹

27. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated: “I have worked with seven Presidents of this Church. I have recognized that all have been human. But I have never been concerned over this. They may have had some weaknesses. But this has never troubled me. I know that the God of heaven has used mortal men throughout history to accomplish His divine purposes.”²⁰ On another occasion, President Hinckley pleaded with the Saints that “as we continue our search for truth . . . we look for strength and goodness rather than weakness and foibles in those who did so great a work in their time. We recognize that our forebears were human. They doubtless made mistakes. . . . There was only one perfect man who

ever walked the earth. The Lord has used imperfect people in the process of building his perfect society. If some of them occasionally stumbled, or if their characters may have been slightly flawed in one way or another, the wonder is the greater that they accomplished so much.”²¹

28. Prophets are men called of God to serve as covenant spokesmen for His children on earth, and thus we should never take lightly what they say. The early Brethren of this dispensation were the living prophets for their contemporaries, and much of what we believe and practice today rests upon the doctrinal foundation they laid. But the work of the Restoration entails a gradual unfolding of divine truth in a line-upon-line fashion. Some years ago, my colleague Joseph McConkie remarked to a group of religious educators: “We have the scholarship of the early brethren to build upon; we have the advantage of additional history; we have inched our way up the mountain of our destiny and now stand in a position to see some things with greater clarity than did they. . . . We live in finer houses than did our pioneer forefathers, but this does not argue that we are better or that our rewards will be greater. In like manner our understanding of gospel principles should be better housed, and we should constantly be seeking to make it so. There is no honor in our reading by oil lamps when we have been granted better light.”²² Thus, it is important to note that ultimately the Lord will hold us responsible for the teachings, direction, and focus provided by the living oracles of our own day, both in terms of their commentary upon canonized scripture as well as the living scripture that is delivered through them by the power of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 68:3–4).

Facing Hard Issues

29. My experience suggests that anti-Mormonism will probably continue to increase in volume, at least until the Savior returns and shuts down the presses. Because we believe in the Apostasy and the need for a restoration of the fulness of the gospel, we will never be fully accepted by those who claim to have all the truth they need in the Bible. But I want to note two things about anti-Mormonism: First, anti-Mormon material definitely affects more than those who are not Latter-day Saints. Not only does it in some cases deter or frighten curious or interested investigators but it also troubles far more members of the Church than I had previously realized. I must receive ten phone calls, letters, or e-mails per week from members throughout the Church asking hard questions that have been raised by their neighbors or some literature

they read. A short time ago a young man (married, with a family) phoned me in late afternoon, excused himself for the interruption, and then proceeded to tell me that he was teetering on the edge of leaving the Church because of his doubts. He posed several questions, and I responded to each one and bore my testimony. After about a half-hour chat, he offered profound thanks and indicated that he felt he would be okay now. Such an experience is not uncommon. I guess what I am saying is that antagonistic materials are here to stay and are affecting adversely both Latter-day Saints and the attitudes of those of other faiths.

30. Second, very often the critics of the Church simply use our own “stuff” against us. They do not need to create new material; they simply dig up and repackage what some of our own Church leaders have said in the past that would not be considered a part of the doctrine of the Church today. Latter-day Saints are eager to sustain and uphold their leaders. Consequently, we are especially hesitant to suggest that something taught by President Brigham Young or Elders Orson Pratt or Orson Hyde might not be in harmony with the truth as God has made it known to us “line upon line, precept upon precept” (Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30).

31. Some time ago a colleague and I were in southern California speaking to a group of about five hundred people, both Latter-day Saints and Protestants. During the question-and-answer phase of the program, someone asked the inevitable: “Are you really Christian? Do you, as many claim, worship a different Jesus?” I explained that we worship the Christ of the New Testament, that we believe wholeheartedly in His virgin birth, His divine sonship, His miracles, His transforming teachings, His atoning sacrifice, and His bodily resurrection from the dead. I added that we also believe in the teachings of and about Christ found in the Book of Mormon and modern revelation. After the meeting, a Latter-day Saint woman came up to me and said, “You didn’t tell the truth about what we believe!”

32. Startled, I asked, “What do you mean?”

33. She responded, “You said we believe in the virgin birth of Christ, and you know very well that we don’t believe that.”

34. “Yes, we do,” I retorted.

35. She then said with a great deal of emotion, “I want to believe you, but people have told me for years that we believe that God the Father had sexual

relations with Mary and thereby Jesus was conceived.”

36. I looked her in the eyes and said, “I’m aware of that teaching, but that is not the doctrine of the Church; that is not what we teach in the Church today. Have you ever heard the Brethren teach it in conference? Is it in the standard works, the curricular materials, or the handbooks of the Church? Is it a part of an official declaration or proclamation?” I watched as a five-hundred-pound weight seemed to come off her shoulders, as tears came into her eyes, and she simply said, “Thank you, Brother Millet.”

37. Not long ago, Pastor Greg Johnson and I met with an Evangelical Christian church in the Salt Lake area. The minister there asked us to come and make a presentation (“An Evangelical and a Latter-day Saint in Dialogue”) that Greg and I have made several times before in different parts of the country. The whole purpose of our presentation is to model the kind of relationships people with differing religious views can have. This kind of presentation has proven, in my estimation, to be one of the most effective bridge-building exercises in which I have been involved.

38. On this particular night, the first question asked by someone in the audience was on DNA and the Book of Mormon. I made a brief comment and indicated that a more detailed (and informed) response would be forthcoming in a journal article from a BYU biologist. There were many hands in the air at this point. I called on a woman close to the front of the church. Her question was, “How do you deal with the Adam-God doctrine?”

39. I responded, “Thank you for that question. It gives me an opportunity to explain a principle early in our exchange that will lay the foundation for other things to be said.” I took a few moments to address the questions, “What is our doctrine? What do we teach today?” I indicated that if some teaching or idea was not in the standard works, not among official declarations or proclamations, was not taught currently by living apostles or prophets in general conference or other official gatherings, or was not in the general handbooks or official curriculum of the Church, it is probably not a part of the doctrine or teachings of the Church.

40. I was surprised when my pastor friend then said to the group: “Are you listening to Bob? Do you hear what he is saying? This is important! It’s time for us to stop criticizing Latter-day Saints on matters they don’t even teach today.” At this point in the meeting, two things happened: first, the number of hands went

down, and second, the tone of the meeting changed quite dramatically. The questions were not baiting or challenging ones but rather were efforts to clarify. For example, the last question asked was by a middle-aged man: “I for one would like to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for what you have done here tonight. This thrills my soul. I think this is what Jesus would do. I have lived in Utah for many years, and I have many LDS friends. We get along okay; we don’t fight and quarrel over religious matters. But we really don’t talk with one another about the things that matter most to us—that is, our faith. I don’t plan to become a Latter-day Saint, and I’m certain my Mormon friends don’t plan to become Evangelical, but I would like to find more effective ways to talk heart to heart. Could you two make a few suggestions on how we can deepen and sweeten our relationships with our LDS neighbors?”

41. At that point, I sensed that we had somehow gotten through to some of the audience. Richard Mouw, one of my Evangelical friends, has suggested the need for “convicted civility,” the challenge to be true to our own faith and not compromise one whit of our doctrine and way of life, and at the same time strive to better understand and respect our neighbors who are of another religious persuasion.²³ These experiences highlight for me the challenge we face. I have no hesitation telling an individual or a group “I don’t know” when I am asked why men are ordained to the priesthood and women are not; why blacks were denied the blessings of the priesthood for almost a century and a half; and several other matters that have neither been revealed nor clarified by those holding the proper keys. The difficulty comes when someone in the past has spoken on these matters, has put forward ideas that are out of harmony with what we know and teach today, and when those teachings are still available, either in print or among the everyday conversations of the members, and have never been corrected or clarified. The underlying questions are simply, “What is our doctrine? What are the teachings of the Church today?” If we could somehow help the Saints (and the larger religious world) know the answers to those questions, it would no doubt enhance our missionary effort, our convert retention, our activation, and the image and overall strength of the Church. If presented properly, it need not weaken faith or create doubts. It could do much to focus the Saints more and more on the central, saving verities of the gospel.

Further Illustrations

42. We discussed earlier that one of the ways to keep

our doctrine pure is to present the gospel message the way the prophets and apostles today present it. Similarly, our explanations of certain “hard doctrines” or deeper doctrines should not go beyond what the prophets believe and teach today. Let us take two illustrations. The first is an extremely sensitive matter, one that currently affects and will continue to affect the quantity and quality of convert baptisms in the Church. I speak of the matter of the blacks and the priesthood. I was raised in the Church, just as many readers were, and was well aware of the priesthood restriction. For as long as I can remember, the explanation for why our black brethren and sisters were denied the full blessings of the priesthood (including the temple) was some variation of the theme that they had been less valiant in the premortal life and thus had come to earth under a curse, an explanation that has been perpetuated as doctrine for most of our Church’s history. I had committed to memory the article of our faith that states that men and women will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression (see Articles of Faith 1:2) and later read that “the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children” (Moses 6:54), but I had assumed that somehow these principles did not apply to the blacks.

43. In June of 1978 everything changed—not just the matter of who could or could not be ordained to the priesthood but also the nature of the explanation for why the restriction had been in place from the beginning. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, in a 1988 interview, was asked: “As much as any doctrine the Church has espoused, or controversy the Church has been embroiled in, this one [the priesthood restriction] seems to stand out. Church members seemed to have less to go on to get a grasp of the issue. Can you address why this was the case, and what can be learned from it?” In response, Elder Oaks stated that “if you read the scriptures with this question in mind, ‘Why did the Lord command this or why did he command that,’ you find that in less than one in a hundred commands was any reason given. It’s not the pattern of the Lord to give reasons. We can put reason to revelation. We can put reasons to commandments. When we do we’re on our own. Some people put reasons to the one we’re talking about here, and they turned out to be spectacularly wrong. There is a lesson in that. The lesson I’ve drawn from that [is that] I decided a long time ago that I had faith in the command and I had no faith in the reasons that had been suggested for it.”

44. Then came a follow-up question: “Are you

referring to reasons given even by general authorities?” Elder Oaks answered: “Sure. I’m referring to reasons given by general authorities and reasons elaborated upon that reason by others. The whole set of reasons seemed to me to be unnecessary risk taking. . . . Let’s don’t make the mistake that’s been made in the past, here and in other areas, trying to put reasons to revelation. The reasons turn out to be man-made to a great extent. The revelations are what we sustain as the will of the Lord and that’s where safety lies.”²⁴

45. In other words, we really do not know why the restriction on the priesthood existed. “I don’t know” is the correct answer when we are asked “Why?” The priesthood was restricted “for reasons which we believe are known to God, but which he has not made fully known to man.”²⁵ I have come to realize that this is what Elder McConkie meant in his August 1978 address to the Church Educational System when he counseled us to: forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whosoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.

46. We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don’t matter anymore. . . . It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject. As to any slivers of light or any particles of darkness of the past, we forget about them.²⁶

47. It seems to me, therefore, that we as Latter-day Saints have two problems to solve in making the restored gospel available more extensively to people of color. First, we need to have our hearts and minds purified of all pride and prejudice. Second, we need to dismiss all previous explanations for the restriction and indicate that while we simply do not know why the restriction existed before, the fulness of the blessings of the restored gospel are now available to all who prepare themselves to receive them. Elder M. Russell Ballard observed that “we don’t know all of the reasons why the Lord does what he does. We need to be content that someday we’ll fully understand it.”²⁷

48. Now to the second illustration. When I open the discussion to questions before a group of persons not

of our faith, I am always asked about our doctrine of God and the Godhead, particularly concerning the teachings of Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow. I generally do not have too much difficulty explaining our view of how through the Atonement man can eventually become like God, become more and more Christlike. For that matter, Orthodox Christianity, a huge segment of the Christian world, still holds to a view of human deification. The Bible itself teaches that men and women may become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), gain “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), and become perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect (see Matthew 5:48). The Apostle John declared, “Beloved, now are we the [children] of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Perhaps more important, this doctrine is taught powerfully in modern revelation (see D&C 76:58; 132:19–20).

49. The tougher issue for other Christians to deal with is the accompanying doctrine set forth in the King Follett sermon²⁸ and the Lorenzo Snow couplet²⁹—namely, that God was once a man. Latter-day scriptures state unequivocally that God is a man, a Man of Holiness (see Moses 6:57) who possesses a body of flesh and bones (see D&C 130:22). These concepts are clearly a part of the doctrinal restoration. We teach that man is not of a lower order or different species than God. This, of course, makes many of our Christian friends extremely nervous (if not angry), for it appears to them that we are lowering God in the scheme of things and thus attempting to bridge the Creator/creature chasm.

50. I suppose all we can say in response is that we know what we know as a result of modern revelation and that from our perspective the distance between God and man is still tremendous, almost infinite. Our Father in Heaven is indeed omnipotent, omniscient, and, by the power of His Holy Spirit, omnipresent. He is a gloried, exalted, resurrected being, “the only supreme governor and independent being in whom all fullness and perfection dwell; . . . in him every good gift and every good principle dwell; . . . he is the Father of lights; in him the principle of faith dwells independently, and he is the object in whom the faith of all other rational and accountable beings center for life and salvation.”³⁰ Modern revelation attests that the Almighty sits enthroned “with glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice,

judgment, mercy, and an infinity of fulness” (D&C 109:77).

51. And what do we know beyond the fact that God is an exalted man? What do we know of His mortal existence? What do we know of the time before He became God? Nothing. We really do not know more than what was stated by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and that is precious little. Insights concerning God’s life before Godhood are not found in the standard works, in official declarations or proclamations, in current handbooks, or in curricular materials, nor are doctrinal expositions on the subject delivered in general conference today. This topic is not what we would call a central and saving doctrine, one that must be believed (or understood) to hold a temple recommend or be in good standing in the Church.

52. This latter illustration highlights an important point: a teaching may be true and yet not a part of what is taught and emphasized in the Church today. Whether it is true or not may, in fact, be irrelevant, if indeed the Brethren do not teach it today or it is not taught directly in the standard works or found in our approved curriculum. Let’s take another question: Was Jesus married? The scriptures do not provide an answer. “We do not know anything about Jesus Christ being married,” President Charles W. Penrose stated. “The Church has no authoritative declaration on the subject.”³¹ So whether He was or was not is not part of the doctrine of the Church. It would be well for us to apply the following lesson from President Harold B. Lee: “With respect to doctrines and meanings of scriptures, let me give you a safe counsel. It is usually not well to use a single passage of scripture [or, I would add, a single sermon] in proof of a point of doctrine unless it is confirmed by modern revelation or by the Book of Mormon. . . . To single out a passage of scripture to prove a point, unless it is [so] confirmed . . . is always a hazardous thing.”³²

Conclusion

53. There is a very real sense in which we as Latter-day Saints are spoiled. We have been given so much, have had so much knowledge dispensed from on high relative to the nature of God, Christ, man, the plan of salvation, and the overall purpose of life here and the glory to be had hereafter, that we are prone to expect to have all the answers to all the questions of life. Elder Neal A. Maxwell pointed out that “the exhilarations of discipleship exceed its burdens. Hence, while journeying through our Sinai, we are nourished in the Bountiful-like oases of the Restoration. Of these oases some of our first

impressions may prove to be more childish than definitive. . . . In our appreciation, little wonder some of us mistake a particular tree for the whole of an oasis, or a particularly refreshing pool for the entirety of the Restoration's gushing and living waters. Hence, in our early exclamations there may even be some unintended exaggerations. We have seen and partaken of far too much; hence, we 'cannot [speak] the smallest part which [we] feel' (Alma 26:16)."³³

54. We have much, to be sure, but there are indeed "many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" yet to come forth (Articles of Faith 1:9). The Lord stated to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo: "I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times" (D&C 124:41; compare 121:26; 128:18). As Elder Oaks observed, we have been given many of the commands but not all of the reasons why, many of the directives but not all of the explanations. I regularly state to my classes that it is as important for us to know what we do not know as it is for us to know what we know. Far too many things are taught or discussed or even argued about that fit into the realm of the unrevealed and thus the unresolved. Such matters, particularly if they do not fall within the range of revealed truth we teach today, do not edify or inspire. Often, very often, they lead to confusion and sow discord.

55. This does not in any way mean that we should not seek to study and grow and expand in our gospel understanding. Peter explained that there needs to be a reason for the hope within us (see 1 Peter 3:15). Our knowledge should be as settling to the mind as it is soothing to the heart. Elder Maxwell taught that some "Church members know just enough about the doctrines to converse superficially on them, but their scant knowledge about the deep doctrines is inadequate for deep discipleship (see 1 Corinthians 2:10). Thus uninformed about the deep doctrines, they make no deep change in their lives."³⁴ President Hugh Brown once observed: "I am impressed with the testimony of a man who can stand and say he knows the gospel is true. What I would like to ask is 'But, sir, do you know the gospel?' . . . Mere testimony can be gained with but perfunctory knowledge of the Church and its teachings. . . . But to retain a testimony, to be of service in building the Lord's kingdom, requires a serious study of the gospel and knowing what it is."³⁵ On another occasion, President Brown taught that we are required only to

"defend those doctrines of the Church contained in the four standard works. . . . Anything beyond that by anyone is his or her own opinion and not scripture. . . . The only way I know of by which the teachings of any person or group may become binding upon the church is if the teachings have been reviewed by all the brethren, submitted to the highest councils of the church, and then approved by the whole body of the church."³⁶ Again, the issue is one of focus, one of emphasis—where we choose to spend our time when we teach the gospel to both Latter-day Saints and to those of other faiths.

56. There is a valid reason why it is difficult to "tie down" Latter-day Saint Doctrine, one that derives from the very nature of the Restoration. The fact that God continues to speak through His anointed servants; the fact that He, through those servants, continues to reveal, elucidate, and clarify what has already been given; and the fact that our canon of scripture is open, flexible, and expanding—all of these things militate against what many in the Christian world would call a systematic theology.

57. It is the declaration of sound and solid doctrine, the doctrine found in scripture and taught regularly by Church leaders, that builds faith and strengthens testimony and commitment to the Lord and His kingdom. Elder Maxwell explained that "deeds do matter as well as doctrines, but the doctrines can move us to do the deeds, and the Spirit can help us to understand the doctrines as well as prompt us to do the deeds."³⁷ He also noted that "when weary legs falter and detours and roadside allurements entice, the fundamental doctrines will summon from deep within us fresh determination. Extraordinary truths can move us to extraordinary accomplishments."³⁸

58. The teaching and the application of sound doctrine are great safeguards to us in these last days, shields against the fiery darts of the adversary. Understanding true doctrine and being true to that doctrine can keep us from ignorance, from error, and from sin. The Apostle Paul counseled Timothy: "If thou put the brethren [and sisters] in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. . . . Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6, 13).

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Which Way Do You Face?

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1. “Which way do you face?”

President Boyd K. Packer surprised me with this puzzling question while we were traveling together on my very first assignment as a new Seventy. Without an explanation to put the question in context, I was baffled. “A Seventy,” he continued, “does not represent the people to the prophet but the prophet to the people. Never forget which way you face!” It was a powerful lesson.

2. Trying to please others before pleasing God is inverting the first and second great commandments (see [Matthew 22:37–39](#)). It is forgetting which way we face. And yet, we have all made that mistake because of the fear of men. In Isaiah the Lord warns us, “Fear ye not the reproach of men” ([Isaiah 51:7](#); see also [2 Nephi 8:7](#)). In Lehi’s dream, this fear was triggered by the finger of scorn pointed from the great and spacious building, causing many to forget which way they faced and to leave the tree “ashamed” (see [1 Nephi 8:25–28](#)).

3. This peer pressure tries to change a person’s attitudes, if not behavior, by making one feel guilty for giving offense. We seek respectful coexistence with those who point fingers, but when this fear of men tempts us to condone sin, it becomes a “snare” according to the book of Proverbs (see [Proverbs 29:25](#)). The snare may be cleverly baited to appeal to our compassionate side to tolerate or even approve of something that has been condemned by God. For the weak of faith, it can be a major stumbling block. For example, some young missionaries carry this fear of men into the mission field and fail to report the flagrant disobedience of a companion to their mission president because they don’t want to offend their wayward companion. Decisions of character are made by remembering the right order of the first and second great commandments (see [Matthew 22:37–39](#)). When these confused missionaries realize they are accountable to God and not to their companion, it should give them courage to do an about-face.

4. At the youthful age of 22, even [Joseph Smith](#) forgot which way he faced when he repeatedly importuned the Lord to allow Martin Harris to borrow the 116 manuscript pages. Perhaps Joseph wanted to show [gratitude](#) to Martin for his support. We know that Joseph was extremely anxious for other eyewitnesses

to stand with him against the distressing falsehoods and lies being spread about him.

5. Whatever Joseph’s reasons were, or as justified as they may appear, the Lord did not excuse them and sharply rebuked him: “How oft you have transgressed ... and have gone on in the persuasions of men. For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God” ([D&C 3:6–7](#); emphasis added). This poignant experience helped Joseph remember, forever after, which way he faced.

6. When people try to save face with men, they can unwittingly lose face with God. Thinking one can please God and at the same time condone the disobedience of men isn’t neutrality but duplicity, or being two-faced or trying to “serve two masters” ([Matthew 6:24](#); [3 Nephi 13:24](#)).

7. While it certainly takes courage to face perils, the true badge of courage is overcoming the fear of men. For example, Daniel’s prayers helped him face lions, but what made him lionhearted was defying King Darius (see [Daniel 6](#)). That kind of courage is a gift of the Spirit to the God-fearing who have said their prayers. Queen Esther’s prayers also gave her that same courage to confront her husband, King Ahasuerus, knowing that she risked her life in doing so (see [Esther 4:8–16](#)).

8. Courage is not just one of the cardinal virtues, but as C.S. Lewis observed: “Courage is ... the form of every virtue at the testing point. ... Pilate was merciful till it became risky.” [1](#) King Herod was sorrowful at the request to behead John the Baptist but wanted to please “them which sat with him at meat” ([Matthew 14:9](#)). King Noah was ready to free Abinadi until peer pressure from his wicked priests caused him to waver (see [Mosiah 17:11–12](#)). King Saul disobeyed the word of the Lord by keeping the spoils of war because he “feared the people, and obeyed their voice” ([1 Samuel 15:24](#)). To appease rebellious Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai, Aaron crafted a golden calf, forgetting which way he faced (see [Exodus 32](#)). Many of the New Testament chief rulers “believed on [the Lord]; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” ([John 12:42–43](#)). The scriptures are full of such examples.

9. Now listen to some inspiring examples:

- First, Mormon: “Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man

can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear” ([Moroni 8:16](#); emphasis added).

- Nephi: “Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world” ([1 Nephi 6:5](#)).

- Captain Moroni: “Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country” ([Alma 60:36](#)).

10. Moroni had such great courage in remembering which way he faced that it was said of him, “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” ([Alma 48:17](#)).

11. Prophets through the ages have always come under attack by the finger of scorn. Why? According to the scriptures, it is because “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” ([1 Nephi 16:2](#)), or as President Harold B. Lee observed, “The hit bird flutters!”² Their scornful reaction is, in reality, guilt trying to reassure itself, just as with Korihor, who finally admitted, “I always knew that there was a God” ([Alma 30:52](#)). Korihor was so convincing in his deception that he came to believe his own lie (see [Alma 30:53](#)).

12. The scornful often accuse prophets of not living in the 21st century or of being bigoted. They attempt to persuade or even pressure the Church into lowering God’s standards to the level of their own inappropriate behavior, which in the words of Elder Neal A. Maxwell, will “develop self-contentment instead of seeking self-improvement”³ and repentance. Lowering the Lord’s standards to the level of a society’s inappropriate behavior is—apostasy. Many of the churches among the Nephites two centuries after the Savior’s visit to them began to “dumb down” the doctrine, borrowing a phrase from Elder Holland.⁴

13. As you listen to this passage from 4 Nephi, look for parallels in our day: “And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred

unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness” ([4 Nephi 1:27](#)).

14. Déjà vu in the latter days! Some members don’t realize they are falling into the same snare when they lobby for acceptance of local or ethnic “tradition[s] of their fathers” ([D&C 93:39](#)) that are not in harmony with the gospel culture. Still others, self-deceived and in self-denial, plead or demand that bishops lower the standard on temple recommends, school endorsements, or missionary applications. It isn’t easy being a bishop under that kind of pressure. However, like the Savior who cleansed the temple to defend its sanctity (see [John 2:15–16](#)), bishops today are called upon to boldly defend the temple standard. It was the Savior who said, “I will manifest myself to my people in mercy ... if my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house” ([D&C 110:7–8](#)).

15. The Savior, our great Exemplar, always faced His Father. He loved and served His fellowmen but said, “I receive not honour from men” ([John 5:41](#)). He wanted those He taught to follow Him, but He did not court their favor. When He performed an act of charity, such as healing the sick, the gift often came with the request to “tell no man” ([Matthew 8:4](#); [Mark 7:36](#); [Luke 5:14](#); [8:56](#)). In part, this was to avoid the very fame which followed Him in spite of His efforts to eschew it (see [Matthew 4:24](#)). He condemned the Pharisees for doing good works only to be seen of men (see [Matthew 6:5](#)).

16. The Savior, the only perfect being who ever lived, was the most fearless. In His life, He was confronted by scores of accusers but never yielded to their finger of scorn. He is the only person who never once forgot which way He faced: “I do always those things that please [the Father]” ([John 8:29](#); emphasis added), and “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” ([John 5:30](#)).

17. Between [3 Nephi chapter 11](#) and [3 Nephi chapter 28](#), the Savior used the title Father at least 150 times, making it very clear to the Nephites that He was there representing His Father. And from John chapters 14 through 17, the Savior refers to the Father at least 50 times. In every way possible, He was His Father’s perfect disciple. He was so perfect in representing His Father that to know the Savior was also to know the Father. To see the Son was to see the Father (see [John 14:9](#)). To hear the Son was to hear the Father (see [John 5:36](#)). He had, in essence, become indistinguishable from His Father. His Father

and He were one (see [John 17:21–22](#)). He flawlessly knew which way He faced.

18. May His inspiring example strengthen us against the pitfalls of flattery from without or of conceit from within. May it give us courage to never cower or fawn at the feet of intimidation. May it inspire us to go about doing good as anonymously as possible and not “aspire to the honors of men” ([D&C 121:35](#)). And may His incomparable example help us always remember which is “the first and [great commandment](#)” ([Matthew 22:38](#)). When others

demand approval in defiance of God’s commandments, may we always remember whose disciples we are, and which way we face, is my prayer in the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, rev. ed. (1982), 137–38.
2. Harold B. Lee, in *Mine Errand from the Lord: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Boyd K. Packer* (2008), 356.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 32.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Call to Be Christlike,” *Ensign*, June 2014, 33; *Liahona*, June 2014, 35.

5. Gender is an Essential Characteristic

Blessings of the Priesthood for All: An Inseparable Connection with the Priesthood

Daughters in our Kingdom, 2011

1. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the priesthood of God has been restored to the earth in its fulness. The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God by which He blesses, redeems, and exalts His children, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man.”¹

2. Heavenly Father’s worthy sons are ordained to priesthood offices and are assigned specific duties and responsibilities. They are authorized to act in His name to look after His children and to help them receive ordinances and make and honor covenants. All Heavenly Father’s sons and daughters are equally blessed as they draw upon the power of the priesthood.

3. In a general conference address, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “While we sometimes refer to priesthood holders as ‘the priesthood,’ we must never forget that the priesthood is not owned by or embodied in those who hold it. It is held in a sacred trust to be used for the benefit of men, women, and children alike.”² Elder Oaks then quoted Elder John A. Widtsoe, who also served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve: “Men have no greater claim than women upon the blessings that issue from the Priesthood and accompany its possession.”³

“Full Partakers of the Spiritual Blessings of the Priesthood”

4. Many Latter-day Saint women have borne witness of the blessings of the priesthood in their lives. Sister

Elaine L. Jack, the twelfth Relief Society general president, expressed the feelings of other sisters in Relief Society. “I have a firm testimony of the power of the priesthood in the lives of all Church members,” she said. “In the Doctrine and Covenants we are ... told that the Melchizedek Priesthood holds ‘the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church’ ([D&C 107:18](#)). I know it is God’s power and authority on earth to bless our lives and help us bridge our earthly experiences to the eternities. When we receive the blessings of the priesthood, we are drawing on the power and grace of God.” Sister Jack continued:

5. “It is significant to me that the women were organized under the authority of the priesthood. We sustain the priesthood and are sustained by its power. The sisters of the Church ... treasure our opportunity to be full partakers of the spiritual blessings of the priesthood.

6. “Each of us can be directed and blessed in our eternal progression by receiving these blessings. The ordinances, covenants, sealings, and the gift of the Holy Ghost are essential for exaltation. There are a host of individual priesthood blessings as well. Priesthood blessings give us direction; they lift our sights; they encourage and inspire us; they prompt our commitment. We can all be partakers of these spiritual blessings.”⁴

7. Sister Sheri L. Dew, who served as a counselor in the general Relief Society presidency, echoed these teachings: “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. 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 be received only by a man and woman together.”⁵

Ordinances, Covenants, and Blessings

8. “When you attend the temple and perform the ordinances that pertain to the House of the Lord, certain blessings will come to you. ... You will receive the key of the knowledge of God. (See [D&C 84:19](#).) You will learn how you can be like Him. Even the power of godliness will be manifest to you. (See [D&C 84:20](#).)” Ezra Taft Benson Ensign, Aug. 1985, 10

9. When Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society in Nauvoo, Illinois, in the spring of 1842, its members were women who had already been blessed by some priesthood ordinances and covenants. They had been baptized for the remission of sins. They had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, giving them the right to the constant companionship of the Spirit and the ability to be guided by personal revelation. They had partaken of the sacrament in remembrance of Jesus Christ and their covenants. They had received gifts of the Spirit. Some had received patriarchal blessings, learning of their individual gifts and potential and of their membership in the house of Israel. The Lord had healed them, comforted them, and instructed them according to their needs, their faith, and His will.

10. Sister Elizabeth Ann Whitney, who attended the first Relief Society meeting, had learned about the restored gospel 12 years earlier, in 1830. “As soon as I heard the Gospel as the Elders preached it,” she later said, “I knew it to be the voice of the Good Shepherd.” She “was baptized immediately,” and her husband, Newel K. Whitney, was baptized a few days later.⁶ Recalling this experience, she told of the blessings she received through the priesthood ordinances of baptism and confirmation:

11. “If there are any principles which have given me strength, and by which I have learned to live more truly a life of usefulness, it seems to me I could wish to impart this joy and strength to others; to tell them what the Gospel has been and is to me, ever since I embraced it and learned to live by its laws. A fresh revelation of the Spirit day by day, an unveiling of mysteries which before were dark, deep, unexplained and incomprehensible; a most implicit faith in a divine power, in infinite truth emanating from God the Father.”⁷

12. As Latter-day Saint women make and keep covenants, the Lord strengthens them to serve in His kingdom.

Gifts of the Spirit

13. On April 28, 1842, Joseph Smith spoke at a meeting of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Part of his discourse was based on the Apostle Paul’s teachings in [1 Corinthians 12–13](#) about the gifts of the Spirit. Joseph Smith emphasized that “these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils etc. should follow all that believe.”⁸

14. Because Latter-day Saint women have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, they can seek and be blessed by spiritual gifts such as “the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.”⁹ Throughout the history of the Church, Latter-day Saint women have received gifts of the Spirit and used them to bless their families and others.

15. Amanda Barnes Smith was present on April 28, 1842, when Joseph Smith taught Relief Society sisters about gifts of the Spirit. She knew the truth of his teachings, for she had been blessed with the gift of revelation about four years earlier at a time when she needed the Lord’s help to save her son.

16. In late October 1838, Amanda and her husband, Warren, with their children and other members of the Church, were on the way to Far West, Missouri. They stopped at a mill to make some repairs on their wagon. While they were there, a mob attacked Latter-day Saints who were working at the mill, killing 17 men and boys and wounding 15. Amanda, who had hidden during the attack, returned to find Warren and their son Sardius among the dead. Another son, Alma, was severely wounded. His hip had been blown off by a gun blast. Amanda later told of the personal revelation she received so her son could be healed:

17. “I [was] there, all that long, dreadful night, with my dead and my wounded, and none but God as our physician and help.

18. “Oh my Heavenly Father, I cried, what shall I do? Thou seest my poor wounded boy and knowest my inexperience. Oh Heavenly Father direct me what to do!

19. “And then I was directed as by a voice speaking to me.”

20. Amanda was directed to make a lye, or washing solution, from the ashes of their fire to clean the wound. Then she was directed to make a poultice out

of cloth and slippery elm to fill the wound. The next day she found some balsam and poured it into the wound to soothe Alma's pain.

21. "'Alma, my child,' I said, 'you believe that the Lord made your hip?'"

22. "'Yes, mother.'

23. "'Well, the Lord can make something there in the place of your hip, don't you believe he can, Alma?'"

24. "'Do you think that the Lord can, mother?'" inquired the child, in his simplicity.

25. "'Yes, my son,' I replied, 'he has shown it all to me in a vision.'

26. "Then I laid him comfortably on his face, and said: 'Now you lay like that, and don't move, and the Lord will make you another hip.'

27. "So Alma laid on his face for five weeks, until he was entirely recovered—a flexible gristle having grown in place of the missing joint and socket, ... a marvel to physicians.

28. "On the day that he walked again I was out of the house fetching a bucket of water, when I heard screams from the children. Running back, in affright, I entered, and there was Alma on the floor, dancing around, and the children screaming in astonishment and joy."¹⁰

29. Through the spiritual gift of revelation, the Lord taught Sister Smith how to care for her son. She, like Elizabeth Ann Whitney and countless others, received "joy and strength" and "fresh revelation of the Spirit"¹¹ because of her faithfulness.

Temple Blessings

30. "The only place on earth where we can receive the fulness of the blessings of the priesthood is in the holy temple. That is the only place where, through holy ordinances, we can receive that which will qualify us for exaltation in the celestial kingdom." Harold B. Lee *Stand Ye in Holy Places*(1974), 117

31. One of the Lord's purposes in organizing the Relief Society was to prepare His daughters for the greater blessings of the priesthood found in the ordinances and covenants of the temple. The early sisters in Nauvoo anticipated the completion of the temple with great excitement, for they knew, as the Prophet Joseph Smith promised Mercy Fielding Thompson, that the endowment would bring them "out of darkness into marvelous light."¹²

32. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed the following to Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio: "I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high."¹³ He promised to give faithful Saints a "multiplicity of blessings,"¹⁴ and He declared that the temple would be "a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and ... a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry in all their several callings and offices; that they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth."¹⁵

33. In Nauvoo, the Lord again commanded the Saints to build a temple, saying that He would restore the "fulness of the priesthood" and "reveal [His] ordinances" there.¹⁶

34. Relief Society sisters helped each other prepare for these ordinances and their attendant covenants. They contributed to the building of the temple, learned from the Prophet and from each other in Relief Society meetings, charitably served one another, and sought to live with greater sanctity.

35. As the temple neared completion, 36 women were called to serve as temple ordinance workers. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, one of those first ordinance workers, recalled: "I gave myself, my time and attention to that mission. I worked in the Temple every day without cessation until it was closed."¹⁷

36. In the ordinances of the higher priesthood that the Saints received in the Nauvoo Temple, "the power of godliness [was] manifest."¹⁸ As the Saints kept their covenants, this power strengthened and sustained them through their trials in the days and years ahead (see chapter 3).

37. In the Church today, faithful women and men all over the world continue to serve in the temple and find strength in the blessings that can be received only through temple ordinances. As President Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth President of the Church, stated, "It is within the privilege of the sisters of this Church to receive exaltation in the kingdom of God and receive authority and power as queens and priestesses."¹⁹

Sacred Clothing

38. Joseph Smith asked faithful women in Nauvoo to make sacred clothing to be used in temple ordinances. Sewing temple clothing remained a Relief Society responsibility for many years. Today, sisters continue

to have a primary role related to temple clothing and the temple garment. They teach about the honor and care this clothing should receive. They also teach the modesty that is to be maintained in the wearing of the temple garment. The Relief Society president in each ward or branch can answer questions about the use and care of sacred clothing, referring to the current Church handbook. Treating sacred clothing with respect is a sign of reverence for temple blessings.

Priesthood in the Home

39. Relief Society helps sisters strengthen homes and families, thus helping to accomplish one of the fundamental purposes of the priesthood. “Priesthood authority has been restored,” said Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “so that families can be sealed eternally.”²⁰ Elder Richard G. Scott, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, taught: “The family and the home are the foundation of the righteous life. The priesthood is the power and the priesthood line is the means provided by the Lord to support the family.”²¹ Relief Society assists in this work by helping women and their families live the gospel in such a way that they can receive promised blessings of the priesthood.

Husband and Wife

40. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “The ultimate and highest expression of womanhood and manhood is in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. Only this relationship culminates in exaltation. As the Apostle Paul taught, ‘Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.’”²² Ancient scripture confirms this in the accounts of covenant marriages between Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel. The sealing ordinance binds husband and wife to each other, to their children, and to their Father in Heaven. “Thus,” continued Elder Oaks, “the common objective ... in our priesthood quorums and ... in our Relief Societies is to bring men and women together in the sacred marriage and family relationships that lead toward eternal life, ‘the greatest of all the gifts of God.’”²³

41. When a husband and wife are blessed with the opportunity to be parents, they share a solemn responsibility to help their children understand and receive priesthood ordinances and covenants.²⁴ Our first parents, Adam and Eve, set an example of an interdependent and unified relationship when they taught their children. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught:

42. “It was not Adam alone, who was involved in these things. ...

43. “Eve was an active participant. She heard all that Adam said. She spoke of ‘our transgression,’ of ‘the joy of our redemption,’ of the ‘seed’ they should have together, and of the ‘eternal life’ which could not come to either of them alone, but which is always reserved for a man and a woman together.

44. “She and Adam both prayed; they both blessed the name of the Lord; they both taught their children; they both received revelation; and the Lord commanded both of them to worship and serve him in the name of Jesus Christ forever.”²⁵

45. Latter-day prophets and apostles have encouraged husbands and wives to follow this pattern in their homes: “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.”²⁶

46. Latter-day Saints all over the world follow this counsel in simple but powerful ways. Husbands and wives gather their children to pray and read the scriptures. In many homes, parents establish a special place—perhaps a simple shelf—where they keep scriptures and other Church resources. They teach the gospel through their words and their examples. They help their children prepare to receive the blessings of the temple, serve full-time missions, establish homes of their own, and continue serving in the Church. Like Adam and Eve, they share the responsibilities to teach, to pray, to serve, and to worship the Lord.

47. In some cases, a husband or wife may feel alone in these responsibilities because their spouse has not made covenants or has strayed from covenants that have been made. Even in these situations, faithful family members need not feel alone. They are blessed and strengthened through the priesthood ordinances they have received and the covenants they keep. They can also call upon the support of extended family members and other Latter-day Saints.

Single Sisters and the Priesthood

48. Many Latter-day Saints have never been married. Others are single because of the death of a spouse, abandonment, or divorce. Like all members of the

Church, these members will be blessed as they remain faithful to their covenants and do all they can to strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. They can enjoy the blessings, strength, and influence of the priesthood in their lives and homes through the ordinances they have received and the covenants they keep.

49. Elder Dallin H. Oaks told of the faithfulness of his mother, who was widowed at a young age. Having been sealed to her husband in the temple, she did not consider herself single; nevertheless, she had to rear her three children alone. Elder Oaks recalled:

50. “My father died when I was seven. I was the oldest of three small children our widowed mother struggled to raise. When I was ordained a deacon, she said how pleased she was to have a priesthood holder in the home. But Mother continued to direct the family, including calling on which one of us would pray when we knelt together each morning. ...

51. “When my father died, my mother presided over our family. She had no priesthood office, but as the surviving parent in her marriage she had become the governing officer in her family. At the same time, she was always totally respectful of the priesthood authority of our bishop and other Church leaders. She presided over her family, but they presided over the Church. ...

52. “The faithful widowed mother who raised us had no confusion about the eternal nature of the family. She always honored the position of our deceased father. She made him a presence in our home. She spoke of the eternal duration of their temple marriage. She often reminded us of what our father would like us to do so we could realize the Savior’s promise that we could be a family forever.”[27](#)

53. Another man told of his mother presiding in the home: “Just as I was preparing to serve a full-time mission, my father left our family and the Church. Under these circumstances, it was difficult for me to leave home for two years, but I went. And while I served the Lord in a faraway land, I learned of my mother’s strength at home. She needed and appreciated the special attention she received from men who held the priesthood—her father and brothers, her home teachers, other men in the ward. However, her greatest strength came from the Lord Himself. She did not have to wait for a visit in order to have the blessings of the priesthood in her home, and when visitors left, those blessings did not leave with them. Because she was faithful to the covenants she had made in the waters of baptism and in the

temple, she always had the blessings of the priesthood in her life. The Lord gave her inspiration and strength beyond her own capacity, and she raised children who now keep the same covenants that have sustained her.”[28](#)

54. These women understood that they received added strength and help through the covenants they had made and kept. Barbara B. Smith Tenth Relief Society General President

55. “With continuing priesthood counsel and with Relief Society leaders who are called of the Lord by inspiration, the women of the Church have a divine source of direction for the work that is theirs to do, and the Society provides a means to accomplish that work.”

Serving in the Church

56. All those who serve in an official capacity in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do so under the direction and authority of those who hold priesthood keys, such as bishops and stake presidents. In Relief Society, this pattern was established in the first Relief Society meeting. As instructed by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Elder John Taylor of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles laid his hands on the heads of Sister Emma Smith and her counselors, Sisters Sarah M. Cleveland and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, one by one. He blessed them to be guided in their service. Ever since, sisters who have served in Relief Society callings, in all other Church callings, and as visiting teachers have served under the authority of those who hold priesthood keys.

57. President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

58. “The Relief Society works under the direction of the Melchizedek Priesthood, for ‘all other authorities or offices in the church are appendages to this priesthood.’ It was organized ‘after the pattern of the priesthood.’ ...

59. “The Brethren know they belong to a quorum of the priesthood. Too many sisters, however, think that Relief Society is merely a class to attend. The same sense of belonging to the Relief Society rather than just attending a class must be fostered in the heart of every woman.”[29](#)

60. Priesthood quorums organize men in a brotherhood to give service, to learn and carry out their duties, and to study the doctrines of the gospel. Relief Society accomplishes these same purposes for the women of the Church. All women in the Church belong to Relief Society, even if they have other

responsibilities that make it difficult for them to attend all Relief Society meetings. They continue to be watched over and taught through the sisterhood of Relief Society.

Unity: “All Must Act in Concert”

61. “I pray that [a] spirit of oneness may spread throughout all the Church, that it may be characteristic of Presidencies of Stakes and High Councils, Bishoprics, [Home Teachers], and particularly of the quorums and auxiliaries of the Church, that they may all be one, to quote the Savior, as he and his Father are one.” David O. McKay In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 121–22; referring to [John 17:21](#)

62. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, men and women are to strengthen and fortify one another and work together in unity. The Lord said, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”[30](#)

63. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “All must act in concert or nothing can be done.”[31](#) And he set an example by working in concert with others. Sister Eliza R. Snow remembered and cherished this example all her life. She shared it with local Church leaders when the Relief Society was reestablished in Utah. She taught that bishops were to “have the same relation” with ward Relief Societies as Joseph Smith did with the Relief Society in Nauvoo. She also taught that “each society ... could not exist without [the bishop’s] counsel.”[32](#)

64. When Sister Bathsheba W. Smith served as the fourth Relief Society general president, she remembered Joseph Smith’s teachings and example. She instructed Relief Society sisters to work in harmony with priesthood leaders. She said: “We humbly desire to magnify the callings given to us of the Lord, and in order to do so acceptably, we shall need the faith and support of the First Presidency of the Church, the Apostles, presidents of Stakes and Bishops, whom we ever feel to uphold, and with whom we desire to work in harmony.”[33](#)

65. This pattern has endured through the decades. President Henry B. Eyring, a counselor in the First Presidency, said, “A wonderful part of the heritage of Relief Society is evident in the way the priesthood has always shown respect to and received it from the Relief Society in turn.”[34](#)

66. When Sister Barbara W. Winder began her service as the eleventh Relief Society general president, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who was

then serving as a counselor in the First Presidency, asked her to unite the sisters who served in Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary under the priesthood. Sister Winder realized that unity is “not simply a matter of the sisters working together, but that we are partners with the priesthood brethren. We are companions in the work.”[35](#)

67. Sister Winder said that shortly after she was called to serve as Relief Society general president, Elder Dallin H. Oaks asked to meet with her. He had been asked to prepare a statement for the Church on an important issue, and he felt that he must have input from the female leaders of the Church. He showed respect and gratitude for Sister Winder’s knowledge, opinions, and inspiration by asking for and using her help.

68. Sister Winder later taught that men and women in the Church need each other’s help in the work. “I learned that when you are invited to a meeting,” she explained, “you are not invited to come and complain about all your problems, but you are invited to come with solutions. Then together you can talk about ideas to see what will work. The priesthood brethren expect and need the perspective of the women of the Church. We need to be prepared and assist them.”[36](#)

69. In the Church, men and women work together in unity.

70. This unity of purpose is evident in the council meetings of the Church. As the men and women on these councils listen to one another, seek the guidance of the Spirit, and work in unity, they receive inspiration to know how to meet the needs of individuals and families. The Lord has said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, as touching one thing, behold, there will I be in the midst of them.”[37](#)

71. President Thomas S. Monson, the sixteenth President of the Church, shared an example of what can happen when Relief Society sisters and priesthood brethren work together in the Lord’s service:

72. “On August 24, [1992,] Hurricane Andrew slammed into the Florida coast south of Miami. Wind gusts exceeded two hundred miles per hour. ... Eighty-seven thousand homes were destroyed, leaving 150,000 homeless. ...

73. “Local priesthood and Relief Society leaders organized rapidly to assess injuries and damage and to assist in the cleanup effort. Three large waves of member volunteers, numbering over five thousand, labored shoulder to shoulder with disaster-stricken

residents, helping to repair three thousand homes, a Jewish synagogue, a Pentecostal church, and two schools.”³⁸ Barbara W. Winder Eleventh Relief Society General President

74. “I want so, and desire so, that we be unified, one together with the priesthood, serving and building the kingdom of God here today and spreading the joy of the gospel to those who are so in need of it. This is His kingdom. We have a great responsibility to share it.”

“Hand in Hand with the Priesthood”: Inspired Counsel from Latter-day Prophets

75. Latter-day prophets have spoken of the blessings that come to the Church and to families when faithful priesthood brethren and faithful Relief Society sisters work together.

76. President Spencer W. Kimball, the twelfth President of the Church, said, “There is a power in this organization [of Relief Society] that has not yet been fully exercised to strengthen the homes of Zion and build the Kingdom of God—nor will it until both the sisters and the priesthood catch the vision of Relief Society.”³⁹

77. President Joseph Fielding Smith summarized the relationship between the Relief Society and priesthood quorums:

78. “They [the sisters] have their own meetings, such as the Relief Society, in which they have been given power and authority to do a great many things. ...

79. “The Lord through his wisdom has called upon our sisters to be aids to the Priesthood. Because of their sympathy, tenderness of heart, and kindness, the Lord looks upon them and gives unto them the duties and responsibilities of being ministers to the needy and to the afflicted. He has pointed out the path which they should follow, and he has given to them this great organization where they have authority to serve under the directions of the bishops of the wards and in harmony with the bishops of the wards, looking after the interest of our people both spiritually and temporally.”⁴⁰

80. “There is strength and great capacity in the women of this Church” (Gordon B. Hinckley).

81. When President Gordon B. Hinckley was serving as the fifteenth President of the Church, he shared the following with Relief Society sisters:

82. “Let me say to you sisters that you do not hold a second place in our Father’s plan for the eternal

happiness and well-being of His children. You are an absolutely essential part of that plan.

83. “Without you the plan could not function. Without you the entire program would be frustrated. ...

84. “Each of you is a daughter of God, endowed with a divine birthright. You need no defense of that position. ...

85. “... There is strength and great capacity in the women of this Church. There is leadership and direction, a certain spirit of independence, and yet great satisfaction in being a part of this, the Lord’s kingdom, and of working hand in hand with the priesthood to move it forward.”⁴¹

Chapter 8

1. [Moses 1:39](#).
2. Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 51; or Ensign, May 1992, 36.
3. John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government* (1939), 83.
4. Elaine L. Jack, in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 105; or Ensign, Nov. 1996, 76–77.
5. Sheri L. Dew, in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 13; or Ensign, Nov. 2001, 13; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
6. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, “A Leaf from an Autobiography,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1878, 51.
7. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, “A Leaf from an Autobiography,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Aug. 1, 1878, 33.
8. Joseph Smith, in Relief Society Minute Book, Nauvoo, Illinois, Apr. 28, 1842, Church History Library, 36.
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Both Women And Men Have Access To God's Highest Spiritual Blessings

Sheri Dew

Women And The Priesthood, 2013



1. President David O. McKay once posed the question to the members of the Church, "If at this moment each one of you were asked to state in one sentence or phrase the most distinguishing feature of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what would be your answer?" He then answered his own question, stating simply, the "divine authority of the priesthood."
2. In the hierarchy of what is important in the Church, the priesthood—including priesthood keys, priesthood authority, and priesthood power is at the top. "Not only is the priesthood the power by which the heavens and earth were created," said Elder M. Russell Ballard, "but it is also the power the Savior used in His mortal ministry to perform miracles, to bless and heal the sick, to bring the dead to life, and, as our

Father's Only Begotten Son, to endure the unbearable pain of Gethsemane and Calvary. . . . During the glorious days of the Restoration and the reestablishment of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world today, John the Baptist; Peter, James, and John; Moses; Elias; and Elijah came to the earth and restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith all of the keys and authority of the priesthood for the work of God in these latter days."2 Nephi saw in vision how crucial God's power would be to us living now, in the latter days: "I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory."

3. In the world's vernacular and frame of reference, the word power typically evokes—or at least results in—domination and control, both of which are often used and abused for personal gain. And the thirst for power rarely has a righteous end. "Some sincerely wish for more power to do good," said Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "but only a few individuals are good enough to be powerful. But craving power and the spotlight sucks out the spiritual oxygen, leaving some past feeling. . . . Those who bestow the transitory things of the world are, themselves, transients. They cannot confer that which is lasting because they do not possess it."4

4. In illuminating contrast, God's power is about unity rather than control and domination. God makes His power available to His covenant-making children so that they can become one with Him and one with each other. When we enter the waters of baptism, we not only covenant to serve God and keep His commandments, we promise to bear one another's burdens, to mourn with those who mourn, and to comfort those who need comfort. When we receive the Holy Ghost, we have the capacity to know all things the Lord would have us do and to gradually, increasingly become one with Him. When we are endowed, we bind ourselves more fully to the Lord, and He binds Himself to us. When we enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, we take an essential step to ultimately becoming like our Father and His Son—to having no end, living from everlasting to everlasting, and having all power.⁵

5. There are countless evidences that God actually wants a powerful people. An eight-year-old may receive the gift and power of the Holy Ghost and thus the privilege of constant access to the third member of the Godhood. A twelve-year-old boy may be ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood, which holds the "key of the

ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel.”⁷ Every adult who qualifies may enter the house of the Lord, where he or she has the opportunity to “grow up” in the Lord, “receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost,” and emerge armed with power and knowledge. In a multitude of ways, the Lord has made it clear that He desires to have a righteous, pure people who both qualify for and seek to have access to His power, which by definition is priesthood power.

6. With the indisputable significance of priesthood established, the statement that LDS women are eligible for the Lord's highest spiritual blessings, and yet ineligible for priesthood ordination, may strike some as confusing if not misleading. Some who feel concern over what they see as a blatant inequity have asked the question, “If Mormon men are the only ones eligible for the high privilege of priesthood ordination, what do Mormon women get?” That is a fair question.

7. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that “where spiritual things are concerned, as pertaining to all of the gifts of the Spirit, with reference to the receipt of revelation, the gaining of testimonies, and the seeing of visions, in all matters that pertain to godliness and holiness and which are brought to pass as a result of personal righteousness in all these things men and women stand in a position of absolute equality before the Lord.”⁹ This is reassuring doctrine, but what does it actually mean for LDS women?

THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERSTANDING AND DISCUSSING PRIESTHOOD

8. Understanding priesthood is not a simple matter for anyone, for several reasons. First, we tend to use the word priesthood in a variety of ways. Often it is used to refer to men, meaning to those who are ordained to the priesthood. How many times have you heard a conducting officer in sacrament meeting say, “We thank the Aaronic Priesthood for administering the sacrament”? It would be more fitting to say, “We thank those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood for administering the sacrament.” The “Aaronic Priesthood” is not ordained teenage boys. It is the power and authority of the “lesser” priesthood. ¹⁰ Likewise, the Melchizedek Priesthood is not ordained men and is not synonymous with men or male administration. It is the power and authority of the “higher” priesthood. ¹¹

9. We actually diminish priesthood power when we equate it with holders of the priesthood. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained that “some of our abbreviated

expressions, like the women and the priesthood; convey an erroneous idea. Men are not ‘the priesthood.’”¹²

10. Elder M. Russell Ballard spoke similarly:

11. “In our Heavenly Father's great priesthood-endowed plan, men have the unique responsibility to administer the priesthood, but they are not the priesthood.”¹³

12. Statements such as, “We would like to thank the priesthood for setting up chairs,” or “I’m so grateful to have the priesthood in my home,” are actually misleading and to some degree undermining of God's power. Priesthood holders are men. “The priesthood” refers to keys, authority, and power God's power.

13. Second, we use the word priesthood interchangeably and often without clarification meaning we use it to mean different things in different applications. Even prophets, seers, and revelators have used the word priesthood to mean different things at different times. Sometimes the word refers to keys without explicitly saying so; sometimes to authority; sometimes to power; sometimes to blessings; and sometimes to priesthood holders or leaders. In fact, different important statements from Church leaders cited in this very chapter use the term priesthood in varying applications.

14. Simply stated, priesthood is the power of God. It is the all-encompassing power by which He works. It is the power by which He creates, changes, and ultimately redeems us. It is beyond the beginning of days or end of years. It is the “power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, . . . to stand in the presence of God; to do all things according to his will.”¹⁴ In many respects, priesthood is beyond our comprehension, which leads to the next point of potential confusion.

15. Third, understanding the doctrine of the priesthood is not a simple matter for anyone, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “This doctrine of the priesthood unknown in the world and but little known even in the Church cannot be learned out of the scriptures alone. It is not set forth in the sermons and teachings of the prophets and Apostles, except in small measure. The doctrine of the priesthood is known only by personal revelation. It comes, line upon line and precept upon precept, by the power of the Holy Ghost to those who love and serve God with all their heart, might, mind, and strength... .

Priesthood is power like none other on earth or in heaven.”¹⁵

16. When we speak of the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, we are referring to the greatest power in heaven or on earth. Just as the doctrine of this priesthood can only be fully understood through revelation, understanding the relationship of women and priesthood requires the same.

17. There are four key truths related to women and priesthood that are crucial for both men and women to understand. The Father's plan and the Savior's Church are designed to qualify all of us-both men and women-for exaltation.

18. Priesthood keys are the manner through which the Lord authorizes and disperses His power and authority throughout the Church for both men and women. In the temple, both men and women are “endowed with the same power, which by definition is priesthood power.”¹⁶

19. Neither a man nor a woman may receive the highest ordinances of the priesthood or be exalted alone.

The Father's Plan and the Savior's Church Are Designed to Qualify All of Us for Exaltation

20. It bears repeating from chapter 4 that the work and glory of the Father and the Son-and Their sole motivation-is to help us grow and progress so that we ultimately live where They live, as They live, and become as They are.

21. Our Father and His Son are not experimenting with us, hoping against hope that somehow things work out well for the human family. Their understanding and motives are perfect. Their understanding of each of us individually and of everything we will encounter in mortality is perfect. As Elder Tad R. Callister asked, “Could you ever imagine the Lord having a problem He could not solve?”¹⁷

22. Surely, then, our omniscient Father gave both His sons and His daughters the exact gifts, talents, privileges, responsibilities, opportunities, challenges, and divine errands we would need to help us stretch, struggle, serve, and eventually qualify for the gift of exaltation. To presume that we know better than our Father how to best prepare the human family for exaltation is absurd.

23. Every man and every woman who is serious about sanctification and who desires exaltation needs to come to understand and respect priesthood keys,

authority, and power.

24. President Boyd K. Packer taught that “a man who holds the priesthood does not have an advantage over a woman in qualifying for exaltation. The woman, by her very nature, is also co-creator with God. . . .

25. Virtues and attributes upon which perfection and exaltation depend come naturally to a woman.”¹⁸

26. Every man and every woman who is serious about sanctification and who desires exaltation needs to come to understand and respect priesthood keys, authority, and power.

27. This is all fine and good, say some who are concerned about what they perceive as second-class status for women in the Church. But does ordination for males, and lack of ordination for females, create a fundamentally unequal relationship between men and women? Does this place women at the ultimate mercy of men? Does it say something about how God sees His children? And why aren't women eligible for priesthood ordination anyway?

28. From my point of view, the answers to these questions are: No. No. No. And we don't know. Elder M. Russell Ballard said it well when he declared, “Does the Lord respect women? Do women matter to the Lord? The answer is yes-a resounding yes! . . . There are those who suggest that males are favored of the Lord because they are ordained to hold the priesthood. Anyone who believes this does not understand the great plan of happiness. The premortal and mortal natures of men and women were specified by the Lord Jehovah Himself and it is simply not within His character to diminish the roles and responsibilities of any of [Heavenly Father's] children.”¹⁹

29. On another occasion, Elder Ballard added: “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 a husband and wife.”²⁰

30. 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.”²¹

31. Elder Neal A. Maxwell admitted that “we know so little . . . about the reasons for the division of duties between womanhood and manhood as well as between motherhood and priesthood. These were divinely determined in another time and another place. We are accustomed to focusing on the men of God because theirs is the priesthood and leadership line. But paralleling that authority line is a stream of righteous influence reflecting the remarkable women of God who have existed in all ages and dispensations, including our own. . . Just as certain men were foreordained from before the foundations of the world, so were certain women appointed to certain tasks. Divine design-not chance-brought Mary forward to be the mother of Jesus. The boy prophet, Joseph Smith, was blessed ...with a superb mother, Lucy Mack, who influenced a whole dispensation. . . .When the real history of mankind is fully disclosed, will. . .what happened in cradles and kitchens prove to be more controlling than what happened in congresses?”²²

32. There are two reasons I am not troubled about the fact that we don't have clear answers for some issues involving women. First, because God is perfect, and His love for us is perfect, I have faith that His distribution of divine errands is perfectly constructed for the benefit of both His daughters and His sons as well as for the benefit and well-being of the Church. Second, as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared, “In this Church, what we know will always trump what we do not know. And remember, in this world, everyone is to walk by faith.”²³

33. When all is said and done, we don't know the definitive reason the Lord divided assignments, divine gifts, privileges, and responsibilities between men and women the way He did. He has not seen fit to reveal or explain everything to us. But men and women of faith are required to have faith.

34. With the witness of the Spirit that God is our Father, that Jesus is the Christ, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's Church comes a confidence and sense of peace about the manner in which the Lord has organized His Church and the plan. Because God is perfect, and His love for us is perfect, I have faith that His distribution of divine errands is perfectly constructed for the benefit of both His daughters and His sons as well as for the benefit and wellbeing of the Church. Our Father has for us.

35. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” clarifies vital truths about the fundamental division of

roles between men and women: “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.”

36. Following this basic pattern in the primary responsibilities of men and women, the Lord has declared His will regarding the assignments men and women assume in Church governance. While women direct the affairs of the Primary, Young Women, and Relief Society, they are not assigned to assume ultimate direction of the ecclesiastical affairs of the Church, whereas men are. And as previously stated, although women are not ordained to the priesthood, they do have authority to officiate in priesthood ordinances in the temple. On the other hand, women, unlike men, are not required to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood in order to enter the house of the Lord, though the ordinances performed there are all priesthood ordinances. Neither are women required to be ordained to the priesthood to serve as leaders in the Lord's Church. Why is this the case? We don't know the answer to these questions, either. These are questions that at present may be answered only through personal revelation.

37. On the other hand, women, unlike men, are not required to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood in order to enter the house of the Lord, though the ordinances performed there are all priesthood ordinances. Neither are women required to be ordained to the priesthood to serve as leaders in the Lord's Church. Why is this the case? We don't know the answer to these questions, either. These are questions that at present may be answered only through personal revelation.

38. Some who believe women should be ordained to the priesthood point to statements by the Prophet Joseph Smith in which he implied that women could participate in priesthood blessings. As just one example, he stated in a sermon to Relief Society sisters in Nauvoo that there was no more sin in a “female laying hands on the sick than in wetting the face with water-that it is no sin for anybody to do it that has faith.” He also “offered instruction respecting the propriety of females administering to the sick by the laying on of hands-said it was according to revelation.”²⁴

39. What are we to make of the fact that these

statements don't square with Church doctrine and practice today? I don't know why the Prophet Joseph appears to have sanctioned females blessing the sick, though I've pondered different possibilities: Were these statements recorded accurately? Was the Prophet's reference to "administering to the sick" referring to prayers of faith and comfort rather than a priesthood ordinance? Had issues regarding women and priesthood not yet been fully revealed? Was he anticipating women officiating in priest- hood ordinances in the temple? Were there reasons the Lord allowed women to give blessings of healing-as distinct from performing actual ordinances during those turbulent days in Nauvoo when illness threatened the Saints constantly, priesthood bearers were frequently away from home, and women often found themselves caring for their families alone? I don't know if any of these explanations are correct, though all would seem to be possibilities.

40. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has cautioned us to "remember that in those earliest days in Church history more revelation was to come. Thus, when he spoke to the sisters about the appropriateness of their laying on hands to bless one another, the Prophet cautioned, 'that the time had not been before that these things could be in their proper order-that the Church is not now organized in its proper order, and cannot be until the Temple is completed' (Minutes, 28 Apr. 1842, p. 36.) During the century that followed, as temples became accessible to most members, 'proper order' required that these and other sacred practices be confined within those temples."²⁵

LDS WOMEN LEAD, TEACH, TESTIFY, PRAY, AND EXPOUND DOCTRINE

41. As mentioned earlier, Latter-day Saint women participate in the Church in ways that require ordination in most other churches, and they do so from the most visible pulpits in the Church-including general conference.

42. This sweeping truth notwithstanding, there are those who feel that the participation and visibility of women need to increase. Others have had unfortunate experiences with priesthood leaders or priesthood bearers. Still others are troubled because within the Church's hierarchical structure, men ultimately control everything. "Men make the rules and they enforce the rules," is how some express it.²⁶

43. It is true that examples of sexism can be found in the Church. As of this writing there are nearly fifteen million Church members who represent most of the world's cultures. Among that group, unfortunately, are

some men who abuse power and therefore some women who have been oppressed.

44. But is sexism-or, heaven forbid, abuse of women-condoned by or inherent within the Church? Absolutely not. Does The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints undermine or restrict the progression of women? The answer is a resounding "No!" In fact, Church doctrine declares exactly the opposite.

45. President Spencer W. Kimball admonished priesthood leaders that "our sisters do not wish to be indulged or to be treated condescendingly; they desire to be respected and revered as our sisters and our equals. I mention [this], my brethren, not because the doctrines or the teachings of the Church regarding women are in any doubt, but because in some situations our behavior is of doubtful quality."²⁷

46. On a personal note, I have had splendid experiences with priesthood bearers and priesthood leaders far too many to count. I have also occasionally had bewildering experiences with priesthood leaders. But does a difficult experience with a priesthood leader mean that priesthood authority isn't real or that there is something inherently wrong with the way the Lord has organized His Church? Of course not! (It is important to note that I have also had unpleasant experiences with female auxiliary leaders, and I shudder to think about those who have had difficult moments with me.) We are mortals serving in a lay Church, and even the finest leaders have days when they don't handle authority particularly well. Human weakness is a reality in a lay ministry.

47. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland put it this way: "Be kind regarding human frailty-your own as well as those who serve with you in a Church led by volunteer, mortal men and women. Except in the case of His only perfect Begotten Son, imperfect people are all God has ever had to work with. That must be terribly frustrating to Him, but He deals with it. So should we. And when you see imperfection, remember that the limitation is not in the divinity of the work."²⁸ Or as Moroni said when finishing his father Mormon's work, "If there be faults they be the faults of a man."²⁹

48. Years ago, Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve said to me in a moment of private mentoring, "Sheri, don't ever allow yourself to be offended by someone who is learning his job." It took a while for me to realize how comprehensive his counsel was, because as lay servant-leaders whose jobs rotate regularly, most of us are often in the

process of “learning our jobs.” Elder Ashton's wisdom has helped me look past difficult episodes and learn from rather than agonize over them.

49. When all is said and done, it is the Lord-not man-who ultimately controls everything. We are all dependent-women and men alike-upon priesthood leaders who hold priesthood keys exercising those keys and their authority righteously and as the Lord dictates.

50. Within this pattern of governance, LDS women have extraordinary opportunities for influence as leaders in the Church and teachers of the gospel. We truly do expound the gospel and exhort the Saints from pulpits across the Church.

A DEFINING TEST

51. Despite the fact that we do not yet know all things, we do know that our Father is the author of His plan for us and that His plan is perfect. We know that the Savior's Church, filled with His power and authority, has been restored to the earth to help us grow and progress. And we know that the overarching aim of our Father's plan and the Savior's Church is to help us understand who we are, why we are here, and who we may ultimately become.

52. It may well be that some of the most defining tests of mortality involve issues that swirl around gender, including how men feel about and treat women; how women feel about and treat men; how men feel about manhood and women about womanhood; and how all regard and honor priesthood keys, priesthood authority and priesthood power. Having a witness that Heavenly Father's plan and the Lord's Church are perfectly constructed to give us the maximum potential for achieving our eternal destiny is foundational to passing these tests.

53. Priesthood Keys Are the Manner through which the Lord Authorizes and Disperses His Power and Authority throughout the Church for Both Men and Women

54. It is crucial for men and women alike to understand the distinctions between priesthood keys, priesthood authority, and priesthood power. To set the stage, let's look at how keys, authority, and power work together to bless and change lives.

55. First example: In order for a worthy, Melchizedek Priesthood-bearing father to baptize and confirm his daughter, he must receive authorization to do so from his bishop, who holds the keys for his ward. The father, who by virtue of his ordination to the priesthood has the authority to perform ordinances

when authorized by one who has keys, may then baptize his daughter, confirm her a member of the Church, and bestow upon her the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once the girl has been baptized, confirmed, and has received the Holy Ghost, she has direct access to the third member of the Godhead and may learn to receive personal revelation-which means she may benefit directly and individually from the blessings of priesthood power.

56. Second example: A worthy, Melchizedek Priesthood-bearing father cannot confer the Melchizedek Priesthood upon his son and ordain him an elder until a bishop, who has keys, and a stake president, who has keys, proclaim the son worthy to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and until the stake president authorizes the father to perform the ordination. When that authorization occurs, the father, who has the authority to perform ordinances by virtue of his ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood, may ordain his son. At that point, the son, now having received the priesthood, has authority to officiate in the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood when authorized to do so by one who has keys. He also has direct access to the privileges and blessings and power of the priesthood.

57. Third example: In order for a woman to go to the temple, she must be authorized to do so by her bishop and stake president, both of whom have keys. Once they authorize her to enter the temple, she receives priesthood ordinances from those who have the authority to administer them-which in the temple includes both men and women. Having received those ordinances, she then has the privilege of having direct access to priesthood power for her own life and responsibilities. The challenge for her at that point is to learn how to access that power. (More will be said about the later in my chapter.)

58. To summarize the above three examples:

59. Worthy priesthood bearers are not able to perform saving ordinances without the authorization of those who hold priesthood keys.

PRIESTHOOD KEYS

60. Priesthood keys are the “right of presidency,”³⁰ the right to “preside over and direct the work.”³¹ They 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).

61. Those who hold priesthood keys have the right to

preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction.” 32

62. By definition, keys open things. "All priesthood authority in the Church functions under the direction of the one who holds the appropriate priesthood keys,"³³ explained Elder Dallin H. Oaks.

63. Just because a man has been ordained to the priesthood does not mean he holds priesthood keys. In fact, most priesthood bearers do not have priesthood keys. At any given time, a relative few hold keys. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles hold all keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Handbook 2: Administering the Church explains others who receive keys: "Seventies act by assignment and by the delegation of authority from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Area Presidents are assigned to administer areas under the authorization of the First Presidency and the Twelve. The Presidency of the Seventy are set apart and are given the keys to preside over the Quorums of Seventy.

64. "The President of the Church delegates priesthood keys to other priesthood leaders so they can preside in their areas of responsibility. Priesthood keys are bestowed on presidents of temples, missions, stakes, and districts; bishops; branch presiding authority is valid only for the designated responsibilities and within the geographic jurisdiction of each leader's calling."³⁴

65. Though women do not hold priesthood keys, they do have opportunities to preside, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks clarified: "Under the priesthood authority of the bishop, the president of a ward Relief Society presides over and directs the activities of the Relief Society in the ward. A stake Relief Society president presides and exercises authority over the function to which she has been called. The same is true for the other auxiliaries. Similarly, women called as missionaries are set apart to go forth with authority to teach the everlasting gospel, and women called to work in a temple are given authority for the sacred functions to which they have been called. All men and women alike receive authority to serve under the direction of a priesthood leader who holds keys. Those who hold priesthood keys authorize and open the flow of priesthood power in behalf of all who serve under their direction function under the direction of the priesthood leader who has been given the priesthood keys to direct those who labor in his area of responsibility."

66. Men and women alike receive authority to serve

under the direction of a priesthood leader who holds keys. Those who hold priesthood keys authorize and open the flow of priesthood power in behalf of all who serve under their direction.

67. In an epistle to the Church that is now canonized, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught how all-encompassing priesthood keys are: "It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of-a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven. Nevertheless, in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation, or any set of men, this power has always been given. . . . And again, for the precedent, Matthew 16:18, 19: And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 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. Now the great and grand secret of the whole matter, and the summum bonum of the whole subject that is lying before us, consists in obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men."³⁶

PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

68. Priesthood authority is conferred through ordination by the laying on of hands and is required to perform all sacred and saving ordinances.³⁷ "Through the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood," states Handbook 2: Administering the Church, "Church leaders guide the Church, direct the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, and administer all the spiritual work of the Church."³⁸

69. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the distinction between priesthood keys and priesthood authority. "Every elder . . . has the power to baptize, but no elder can use this power unless he is authorized to do so by someone holding the keys."³⁹

70. Men and women alike receive and are blessed by the ordinances of salvation. President Boyd K. Packer taught that "the mariner gets his bearing from light coming from celestial bodies the sun by day, the stars by night. . . . The spiritual sextant, which each of us has, also functions on the principle of light from celestial sources. Set that sextant in your mind to the word covenant or the word ordinance. The light will come through. Then you can fix your position and set a true course in life. No matter what citizenship or

race, whether male or female, no matter what occupation, no matter your education, regardless of the generation in which one lives, life is a homeward journey for all of us, back to the presence of God in His celestial kingdom. Ordinances and covenants become our credentials for admission into His presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of immortality.”⁴⁰

71. Ordinances provide all who partake worthily with access to the power of God. With the exception of women who serve as ordinance workers in the temple, however, only men have the authority to officiate in the ordinances of the priesthood.

72. Though women do not hold priesthood keys and are not ordained with priesthood authority, this is not to say that they don't have opportunities to exercise authority, because they do.

73. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that when Joseph Smith “turn[ed] the key” in behalf of women, he opened to them the privilege of exercising “some measure of divine authority, particularly in the direction of government and instruction in behalf of the women of the Church.”⁴¹ On another occasion, President Smith added, “While the sisters have not been given the Priesthood, . . . that does not mean that the Lord has not given unto them authority. Authority and Priesthood are two different things. 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.”⁴²

74. It is worth repeating that priesthood authority is required to perform all sacred and saving ordinances.

PRIESTHOOD POWER

75. Priesthood power is the power of God that emanates from the priesthood. Priesthood power and blessings are as available to worthy women (particularly endowed women) as to men. (More will be said under point 3 in this chapter about the ways in which women have direct access to priesthood power.)

76. As early as 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith sought to teach women about the priesthood, and particularly about the priesthood power that would be available to them in the temple. In a Relief Society meeting held on April 28, 1842, he explained that the purpose of “his being present . . . was, to make observations respecting the Priesthood.”⁴³ He then delivered a message that has at times been

misinterpreted or misunderstood because he used the word keys in two ways: first, by referring to priesthood keys, which he exercised in behalf of the sisters; and second, by referring to the keys of knowledge and power that provide those who are endowed in the temple with direct access to God.

77. When Joseph organized the Relief Society and declared, “I now turn the key to you in the name of God and this Society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time,”⁴⁴ he was exercising priesthood keys in behalf of women and formally opening for them the privilege of serving, leading, and teaching in the Church.⁴⁵

78. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that “when he 'turn[ed] the key; the Prophet Joseph Smith made the Relief Society an official part of the Church and kingdom of God. This opened to women new opportunities for receiving knowledge and intelligence from on high, such as through the temple ordinances that were soon to be instituted. . . . No priesthood keys were delivered to the Relief Society. Keys are conferred on individuals, not organizations.”⁴⁶

79. It is important to note, however, that because Relief Society leaders serve under the direction of those who hold priesthood keys, they have the authority to preside over an organization that has the power to bless and strengthen lives that no other organization for women can claim.

80. The second way in which the Prophet used the word keys in his April 28 sermon to the Relief Society referred to keys of knowledge and power obtained by those endowed in the temple.⁴⁷ In this usage, the Prophet was not referring to priesthood keys held by priesthood leaders, and he was not suggesting that Relief Society leaders would receive priesthood keys. He was indicating that the “keys” that enable us to “detect everything false”—that is, the keys of knowledge and power given to the endowed—would be given to women as well as men. These keys provide access to heaven to godly power, to personal revelation, and to heavenly help.

81. Sarah Rich, who labored with her husband in the Nauvoo Temple from seven a.m. until midnight each day for many weeks prior to their journey across the plains, recorded: “Many were the blessings we had received in the house of the Lord which has caused us joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows and enabled us to have faith in God, knowing he would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us. For if it had not been for the faith and

knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the influence and help of the Spirit of the Lord, our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark.”⁴⁸

82. The Prophet Joseph taught the women the doctrine of the priesthood, organized them after the pattern of the priesthood, and taught them that this pattern would soon be evident in the highest priesthood ordinances conferred in the temple. In other words, he organized women in a manner that would allow them to work officially and cooperatively with priesthood leaders in helping administer the Church and build up the Kingdom of God, a pattern mirroring the divine pattern of the celestial union of man and woman required for exaltation.

UNDERSTANDING PRIESTHOOD AND WOMEN

83. For as long as I can remember, the exercise of the priesthood has moved me. Even as a girl, I knew that priesthood power was real—that it really was the power and authority of God, and that it really would bless, heal, protect, and strengthen me.

84. Perhaps for that reason, I've never been troubled about women not being ordained. But along the way, I have found myself serving women who were troubled and burdened with the misconception that a lack of ordination for women is proof positive that women are not as valued as men by the Lord or at least by His Church. Because of this, there came a time when I realized that a testimony of the divinity of priesthood was not enough. I needed to understand the doctrine of the priesthood so that I could better understand the connection between priesthood and women.

85. Women need to understand priesthood power just as much as men do. The desire to understand more about the priesthood sent me to the scriptures. I studied passages on priesthood over and over again. Sections 20, 76, 84, 107, 121, and 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants; JST, Genesis 14:25-40; JST, Hebrews 7; and Alma 13 became dog-eared in my scriptures. I wanted to understand what priesthood keys are, and what the distinction is between priesthood keys, priesthood authority, and priesthood power. And I wanted to understand how a woman, who is not ordained, draws upon that power.

86. Because of what I have learned, I wince when I hear a priesthood leader say, usually in a Relief Society meeting or women's conference of some kind, “I want to leave a blessing with each of you,

particularly for those who don't have the priesthood in their home.” As an unmarried but endowed woman, I do not have a priesthood bearer living in my home, but I do have access to priesthood power in my home. While being unmarried is a source of personal sadness and loneliness with which I grapple daily, it does not leave me (or any other endowed woman who lives alone but who understands what she has been endowed with) as defenseless and powerless as some apparently believe.

87. Further, I have learned for myself how tangible the power of priesthood keys is and how literally those keys authorize the flow of priesthood power to each of us. While serving in the Relief Society general presidency, another general officer and I traveled in a distant land with the Area President and his wife to a large city where the Church has many stakes—enough that one stake center could not accommodate all of the priesthood and auxiliary leaders assigned to attend the meetings in which we were participating. The Area President accompanied the other general officer to her meetings and asked me to go to a different chapel to teach the Relief Society and priesthood leaders assigned to that session. “Who will preside at the Relief Society training?” I asked. He indicated that one of the stake presidents there had been assigned to preside, and off I went. When I arrived at my building, I found a stake center filled to capacity and many stake presidents waiting to greet and help me; but due to a miscommunication, no one had received the assignment to preside from the Area President. Because no stake president could appoint himself to preside, no one did.

88. The meeting that unfolded was a disaster.

89. As an unmarried but endowed woman, I do not have a priesthood bearer living in my home, but I do have access to priesthood power in my home. From the moment I stood to teach a three-hour session, it was clear to me (and I'm sure to everyone else) that I was on my own. I experienced the utter futility of attempting to serve without the power of a presiding authority. Priesthood keys are real. They unlock the power of God to all who serve under their direction. Priesthood authority is real. It enables men who are ordained and worthy to officiate in saving ordinances and to bless and heal those who have faith. Priesthood power is real. It is not some theological theory. It is the power of God Himself available to men and women alike who serve under the direction of those who have keys as well as to those who have been endowed in the house of the Lord.

90. I had an entirely different experience in Recife, Brazil. For meetings there, I had a translator who was highly skilled but anxious about doing side-by-side translation before a large audience of priesthood and auxiliary leaders. We were serving under the direction of Elder Claudio R. M. Costa, the Area President.

91. The meeting went well, and the translator did a beautiful job, with the interchange between the two of us at times feeling seamless. There were moments when it almost felt as though I was speaking Portuguese. After the meeting a stake president told me the rest of the story: "I wish you could have seen Elder Costa and the Area Seventy with him. They were on the edge of their seats, listening to every word you said and occasionally prompting the translator to make sure everything received a precise translation. I said to Elder Costa, 'I noticed that you listened carefully to what Sister Dew taught, even though you were the presiding authority.' 'Of course; he said. 'She was assigned by the Brethren to bring us a message, and it was my responsibility to make sure we heard it exactly as she meant it.'" "The Area Seventy then said to me, "Elder Costa told me my assignment was to pray for you and the translator throughout the meeting, so I did." Though I was serving under Elder Costa's direction, he in turn used his priesthood keys and authority to support and sustain me in my assignment. It was one of many experiences that have allowed me to see for myself the heavenly power that comes when righteous men and women support each other in their respective roles in the work of salvation.

92. That evening, I experienced firsthand what President Spencer W. Kimball was talking about when he said, "May the brotherhood of the priesthood and the sisterhood of the Relief Society be a blessing in the lives of all the members of this great Church, as we help each other along the path to perfection."⁴⁹

93. For those concerned about the fact that LDS women are not ordained to the priesthood, the issue is in many respects one of priesthood keys. Those who hold keys ultimately govern the Church, and those individuals are men.

94. Why has the Lord organized His Church in this manner? I don't know. But followers of Christ have always been required to accept some things on faith. Unanswered questions are not unique in the annals of the Lord's Church. Only the Lord "knoweth all things."⁵⁰

95. When all is said and done, as stated earlier, people of faith must have faith that the Lord has

organized His Church according to His will, that He knows best what will lead all of us toward exaltation, that He is the one who determines those who will hold priesthood keys, and that He is the one who inspires them to use those keys according to His will.

96. While it is true that the mortals who hold keys are not perfect and do not always handle things flawlessly, our Father and His Son oversee all. In Their infinite wisdom and perfect knowledge and understanding, They have devised a plan and organized a Church designed to help us achieve our highest potential.

In the Temple, Both Men and Women Are "Endowed with the Same Power, Which by Definition Is Priesthood Power"

97. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that "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."⁵¹

98. All of us, covenant men and women alike, receive the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. We may all speak and lead as directed by the Spirit, receive and understand the mysteries of the kingdom, and learn to open the heavens. We may all enjoy the ministering of and communion with angels (whom Joseph said could not be restrained from associating with women who were pure and innocent).⁵² We may all take upon us the Lord's name, partake of the ordinances of the temple, receive the fulness of the gospel, become sons and daughters of Christ, and achieve exaltation in the celestial kingdom.⁵³ These spiritual blessings emanate from the Melchizedek Priesthood, which holds the "keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church."⁵⁴

99. Priesthood power heals, blesses, protects, and inoculates all of the Father's righteous sons and daughters against the powers of darkness. It has the power to separate and safeguard us from the world, to subdue the adversary and help us surmount obstacles, to enlarge our physical and spiritual capacity and enable us to hear the voice of the Lord, to strengthen marriages and families and bind us to each other and to the Lord, and to allow us to triumph over mortality and come unto Him. These blessings may be received by every righteous son and daughter.⁵⁵

100. Further, women who have received their endowment in the house of the Lord have additional privileges.

101. Endowed, covenant-keeping women have direct access to priesthood power for their own lives.

102. What does it mean to have access to priesthood power for our own lives? It means that we can receive revelation, be blessed and aided by the ministering of angels, learn to part the veil that separates us from our Heavenly Father, be strengthened to resist temptation, be protected, and be enlightened and made smarter than we are—all without any mortal intermediary.

103. Eliza R. Snow said that Latter-day Saint women “have greater and higher privileges than any other females upon the face of the earth.”⁵⁶ This is because the temple gives LDS women spiritual privileges no other women on earth may claim.

104. The temple is the only place on earth where we may receive the highest ordinances and greatest spiritual privileges and powers of mortality. It is the ultimate institution of higher learning. As important as traditional education is, the finest instruction in the world’s finest universities pales when compared with what the Grand Schoolmaster teaches those who submit to the curriculum taught in His house.

105. Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught that the source of moral and spiritual power is God and that “our access to that power is through our covenants with Him. . . . all the ordinances, especially those of the temple, we are endowed with power from on high.”⁵⁷

106. Men and women who are endowed in the house of the Lord have been given a gift of power, and they have been given a gift of knowledge to know how to access and use that power. In the temple, we are promised that we may “grow up” in the Lord, receive a “fulness of the Holy Ghost,” be armed with the power of the Lord, and have His name upon us, His glory round about us, and His angels given charge over us.⁵⁸

107. Brigham Young explained that the endowment is “to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels . . . and gain your eternal exaltation.”⁵⁹

108. President Young also said that “the priesthood is given to the people. . . and, when properly understood, they may actually unlock the treasury of the Lord, and receive to their fullest satisfaction.”⁶⁰ Surely the “treasury of the Lord” includes the “wonders of eternity” and the “riches of eternity” that the Lord wishes to give His sons and daughters. Surely it

includes the “mysteries of God” that are granted unto those who give Him heed and diligence.⁶¹

109. The temple is a step-by-step ascent toward God. Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote that “the endowment is so richly symbolic that only a fool would attempt to describe it; it is so packed full of revelations to those who exercise their strength to seek and see, that no human words can explain or make clear the possibilities that reside in the temple service. The endowment which was given by revelation can best be understood by revelation.”⁶²

110. For each of us, men and women alike, our quest is not just to make and keep sacred covenants but to claim the promises and privileges that accompany the highest ordinances on earth.

111. For each of us, men and women alike, our quest is not just to make and keep sacred covenants but to claim the promises and privileges that accompany the highest ordinances on earth.

112. Do I fully understand the doctrine of the priesthood? Of course not. I am simply an earnest student with average intellect. I know, however, that if we sincerely want to learn about the Lord and His ways, He will lead us along just as He did the Prophet Joseph—here a little, there a little. The Prophet himself taught us this when he gave us insight into how much the Lord is willing to teach us: “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, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know Him (who remain) from the least to the greatest.”⁶³

113. In that spirit, I share an example of being led along while pondering the issue of priesthood and its relationship to me as a woman. One day, I became curious about a passage in Doctrine and Covenants 84, which contains the oath and covenant of the priesthood. There we learn that those who are faithful and who “obtain” the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood and then magnify their callings become “the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham . . . and the elect of God.”⁶⁴ These verses seem to apply solely to men.

114. Subsequent verses, however, say this: “And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord; For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth my Father; and he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be

given unto him. And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood. Therefore, all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and covenant of my Father.”⁶⁵ The words also all they and the word receive, used no fewer than ten times in these verses, aroused my curiosity. The phrase also all they seems to refer to more than those who are ordained. And though we typically use receive to mean “to acquire something,” receive can also mean “to believe” or “to accept as true.”

115. Interestingly, this secondary definition of receive is used frequently in the scriptures by the Lord Himself. He began a revelation to Emma Smith by declaring that “all those who receive [accept] my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom.”⁶⁶ On another occasion, the Savior lamented, “I came unto my own, and my own received [accepted] me not. ... And as many as have received [accepted, believed in] me, to them have I given to become the sons of God.”⁶⁷

116. As I read verses such as these and pondered the secondary definition of receive, I found myself wondering if the transcendent promises of Doctrine and Covenants 84:35-40 might be available not only to those who receive the priesthood through ordination but also to those who receive its blessings by believing that the priesthood is the power of God; accepting the manner in which the Lord has organized His kingdom; sustaining those who hold priesthood keys; and honoring priesthood power as the power of God.

117. In other words, could it be that the blessings of the oath and covenant of the priesthood are just as efficacious in the lives of endowed, covenant-keeping, believing women as they are for ordained men?

118. I do not share or declare these ponderings as doctrine but as reflections of someone engaged in the step-by-step, line-upon-line process of seeking to receive what the Lord has made available to us. At the very least, it seems clear from the scriptures that women have claim upon all blessings that emanate from priesthood keys, priesthood authority, and priesthood power.

119. We as women are not diminished by priesthood power, we are magnified by it. The challenge and opportunity for each woman is to learn what that means and how to access that power.

Neither a Man nor a Woman May Receive the Highest Ordinances of the Priesthood or Be

Exalted Alone

120. The ultimate aim of the Church and the Melchizedek Priesthood is to enable men and women to be exalted. Paul taught the Corinthians how this was to be done: “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”⁶⁸

121. A fulness of the priesthood, and therefore the highest priesthood ordinances and the greatest priesthood power, are available only to a righteous man and woman together, just as exaltation is available only to a man and woman together a couple who are “sealed in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage,” who are true and faithful, and who qualify for a “fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end.”⁶⁹ No one will be exalted alone.⁷⁰ Happily, there will be neither singles nor singles wards in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom!⁷¹

122. Thus, in the sealing ordinance of the temple—an ordinance that elevates men and women and propels them along the path to exaltation—our Father has made clear His feelings about women, men, and marriage.

123. 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. Woman does not hold the Priesthood, but she is a partaker of the blessings of the Priesthood.

124. . . . This is made clear . . . in the Temple. . . . The ordinances of the Temple are distinctly of Priesthood character, yet women have access to all of them, and the highest blessings of the Temple are conferred only upon a man and his wife jointly.”⁷²

125. Elder Charles W. Penrose taught something similar: “When a woman is sealed to a man holding the Priesthood, she becomes one with him. . . . The glory and power and dominion that he will exercise when he has the fulness of the Priesthood and becomes ‘a king and a priest unto God; she will share with him.’”

126. Our Father created men to need women and women to need men. In the Lord’s kingdom, priesthood and parenthood are necessarily intertwined. The sealing ordinance makes this abundantly clear.

127. Elder Richard G. Scott declared that “in the Lord’s plan, it takes two—a man and a woman to form a

whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics.” 74 Elder David A. Bednar added that “the unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females was needed to enact the plan of happiness The man and the woman are intended to learn from, strengthen, bless, and complete each other.”75

128. There is an interdependency between men and women that is essential not only for posterity and for lasting happiness but also for eternal life. Elder James E. Talmage addressed this issue when he taught that “women of the Church share the authority of the Priesthood with their husbands, actual or prospective; and therefore women ... are not ordained to specific rank in the Priesthood. Nevertheless, there is no grade, rank, or phase of the temple endowment to which women are not eligible on an equality with men. . . . Within the House of the Lord the woman is the equal and the help-meet of the man. In the privileges and blessings of that holy place, the utterance of Paul is regarded as a scriptural decree in full force and effect. 'Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.'”76 Indeed, Peter spoke of husband and wife being “heirs together of the grace of life.”77

129. On another occasion Elder Talmage added further clarification: “It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless, in the sacred endowments associated with the ordinances of the House of the Lord, 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.”78

130. Simply put, as President Harold B. Lee explained: “Pure womanhood plus priesthood means exaltation. But womanhood without priesthood, or priesthood without womanhood, doesn't spell exaltation.”79

131. I know this is true. There isn't a day that I'm not

acutely aware that as an unmarried woman, I am not yet complete.

132. Singleness does not equal exaltation.

133. A man and a woman, as designed by God, create a whole. President Gordon B. Hinckley went to the heart of the matter when he said, “There is no other arrangement that meets the divine purposes of the Almighty. Man and woman are His creations. Their duality is His design. Their complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to His purposes. One is incomplete without the other.”80

134. Elder Bruce C. Hafen taught that when a man and woman come together in righteousness, “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.”81

135. Elder Hafen recounted an episode in the biography of Elder Neal A. Maxwell illustrating this principle: “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. 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.”82

136. Elder John A. Widtsoe offered this insight: “Modern revelation sets forth the high destiny of those who are sealed for everlasting companionship. They will be given opportunity for a greater use of their powers. That means progress. They will attain more readily to their place in the presence of the Lord; they will increase more readily in every divine power; they will approach more nearly to the likeness of God; they will more completely realize their divine destinies.”83

137. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that there is much to learn in this regard from our first parents: “As [Adam and Eve] have gone on to exaltation and sit upon their thrones in glorious immortality, so may all, both male and female, who walk as they walked. As there are no words to extol the greatness of the Ancient of Days . . . , so there is no language that can do credit to our glorious mother Eve.”⁸⁴

138. Neither men nor women have an edge over the other when it comes to qualifying for exaltation. Very simply, the highest ordinances of the house of the Lord, and ultimately eternal life, are available only to a man and woman together.

139. There are many things about the priesthood and the division of responsibilities between men and women that I don't yet understand. This does not concern me, however, because wrestling with spiritual questions is a fundamental element of a religious life. It is an exercise that not only increases knowledge but strengthens faith.

140. Furthermore, the things I don't yet understand do not negate what I do know. I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet, foreordained by the Lord to be the Prophet of this dispensation, the one through whom the Lord restored His gospel and His priesthood. Wrestling with spiritual questions is a fundamental element of a religious life. It is an exercise that not only increases knowledge but strengthens faith.

141. I know that we have a living prophet and living Apostles today who hold all priesthood keys and who receive revelation for the Church. I know that the priesthood has been restored to the earth for the benefit and blessing of men and women alike, and that priesthood keys literally unlock God's authority and power in behalf of all of us. And I know that endowed, covenant-keeping men and women have access to priesthood power for their own lives.

142. In a sobering passage of scripture, the Lord taught Joseph Smith that there will be many who are consigned to the telestial or terrestrial kingdoms, to enjoy what they were “willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. 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.”⁸⁵

143. How ironic it is that some are annoyed by our mortal perspectives of the priesthood and how the Lord has chosen to disperse it throughout the

Church when actually priesthood power and all of its blessings are here to help, strengthen, enlighten, protect, and redeem everyone who believes and seeks. How tragic it will be if that sense of annoyance leads some to overlook the tremendous gifts that can be ours if we will but receive and learn how to access them. What we understand and how we feel about the priesthood is central to our testimony of the restored gospel.⁸⁶ So, back to an earlier question: What do Latter-day Saint women get? As baptized, endowed daughters of God, we have the privilege of: receiving the gift and power of the Holy Ghost; receiving personal revelation; being endowed in the temple with godly power and with the knowledge to access that power; leading and teaching by the Spirit; receiving spiritual gifts-including charity, spiritual intuition, and moral courage, which are found in women in abundance; receiving all of the blessings of the Atonement; entering the new and everlasting covenant of marriage; bearing and rearing children and becoming partners with the Almighty in the progression of His children; and most important, we have the opportunity to receive eternal life. As Paul taught the Romans: We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, what we may be also glorified together.”⁸⁷

144. What do Mormon women get? Potentially, we get everything.

Notes

1. “The Mission of the Church and Its Members,” Improvement Era, November 1956, 781.
2. M. Russell Ballard, “This Is My Work and Glory,” Ensign, May 2013, 18-19.
3. 1 Nephi 14:14; emphasis added.
4. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Tugs and Pulls of the World,” Ensign, November 2000, 35.
5. See Mosiah 18:8-10; 2 Nephi 32:2-5; D&C 109:9, 13, 15, 22; 132:19-20.
6. See 1 Nephi 13:37.
7. D&C 84:26.
8. D&C 109:15, 22.
9. Bruce R. McConkie, “Our Sisters from the Beginning,” Ensign, January 1979, 61.
10. See D&C 107:20.
11. See D&C 107:18.
12. Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” Ensign, November 2005, 26.
13. Ballard, “This is My Work,” 19.
14. JST, Genesis 14:30-31; see also vv. 25-40.
15. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrine of the Priesthood,” Ensign, May 1982, 32; emphasis added. Elder McConkie added: “Priesthood is . . . the very power of God himself, the power by which the worlds were made, the power by which all things are regulated, upheld, and preserved It is that we have power, by faith, to govern and control all things, both temporal and spiritual; to work miracles and perfect lives; to stand in the presence of God and be like him because we have gained his faith, his perfections, and his power, or in other words the fulness of his priesthood”

(“Doctrine of the Priesthood,” 32, 34).

16. M. Russell Ballard, “Let Us Think Straight,” BYU Campus Education Week devotional address, 20 August 2013; see also D&C 109:15, 22.

17. Tad R. Callister, “The Power of the Priesthood in the Boy,” Ensign, May 2013, 53.

18. Boyd K. Packer, *Mine Errand from the Lord* (2009), 253.

19. M. Russell Ballard, “Here Am I, Send Me,” BYU devotional address, 13 March 2001.

20. Ballard, “This Is My Work,” 19.

21. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Women of the Church,” Ensign, November 1996, 70.

22. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Women of God,” Ensign, May 1978, 10-11.

23. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” Ensign, May 2013, 94; emphasis added.

24. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 28 April 1842. The account of the latter statement in the History of the Church was amplified: “President Smith then gave instruction respecting the propriety of females administering to the sick by the prayer of faith, the laying on hands, or the anointing of oil; and said it was according to revelation that the sick should be nursed with herbs and mild food. . . . Who are better qualified to administer than our faithful and zealous sisters, whose hearts are full of faith, tenderness, sympathy and compassion. No one” (History of the Church, 4:607).

A second example of potential confusion about women and priesthood centers around Eliza’s recording that Joseph proposed to “ordain” the new Relief Society presidency to preside over the Society. Elder John Taylor later clarified that Emma did not receive priesthood keys or authority: “On the occasion of the organization of the Relief Society, by the Prophet Joseph Smith at Nauvoo, I was present Sister Emma Smith was elected president and Sisters Elizabeth Ann Whitney and Sarah M. Cleveland her Counselors. The Prophet Joseph then said that Sister Emma was named in the revelation recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants concerning the Elect Lady, and furthermore that she had been ordained to expound the Scriptures. . . . The ordination then given did not mean the conferring of the Priesthood upon those sisters yet the sisters hold a portion of the Priesthood in connection with their husbands. (Sisters Eliza R. Snow and Bathsheba W. Smith, stated that they so understood it in Nauvoo and have looked upon it always in that light.) As I stated, at that meeting, I was called upon by the Prophet Joseph and I did ordain Sisters Whitney and Cleveland, and blessed Sister Emma and set her apart. I could not ordain these sisters to anything more or to greater powers than had been conferred upon Sister Emma who had previously been ordained to expound the Scriptures, and that Joseph said at that time, that being an elect lady had its significance, and that the revelation was then fulfilled in Sister Emma being thus elected to preside over the Relief Society” (Tillotson’s Exponent, 1 September 1880, 53).

25. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Relief Society and the Church,” Ensign, May 1992, 36.

26. Ordination to the priesthood is a divinely appointed, foreordained privilege and responsibility and not a license to dominate. Those ordained are given power that enables them to bless and serve in unique ways that transcend anything earthly. But the Lord has made clear the rules for exercising priesthood power. The rights to use the priesthood are “inseparably connected with the powers of heaven;” and they cannot be “controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36). Leaving little to interpretation the Lord spelled out what that means. When men attempt to cover their sins, gratify

their pride or vain ambitions, 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” (D&C 121:37; emphasis added).

27. Spencer W. Kimball, “Our Sisters in the Church,” Ensign, November 1979

49. Elder M. Russell Ballard said something similar: “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” (“Let Us Think Straight,” BYU Campus Education Week devotional address, 20 August 2013).

28. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” 94.

29. Mormon 8:17.

30. D&C 107:8.

31. Callister, “Power of the Priesthood in the Boy,” 52.

32. Handbook 2: Administering the Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2010), 8.

33. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” 26.

34. Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 8.

35. Oaks, “The Relief Society and the Church,” 36. 36. D&C 128:9-11.

37. Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 9.

38. Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 8.

39. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 309.

40. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” Ensign, May 1987, 24.

41. Relief Society Magazine, January 1965, 5.

42. Relief Society Magazine, January 1959, 4. Elder Dallin H. Oaks clarified that President Joseph Fielding Smith’s teaching on authority “explains what the Prophet Joseph Smith meant when he said that he organized the Relief Society ‘under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood.’ The authority to be exercised by the officers and teachers of the Relief Society . . . was the authority that would flow to them through their organizational connection with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and through their individual setting apart under the hands of the priesthood leaders by whom they were called” (“The Relief Society and the Church,” 36.)

43. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 28 April 1842. Joseph Smith later described this address in these terms: “At two o’clock I met the members of the Female Relief Society; and . . . gave a lecture on the Priesthood, showing how the sisters would come in possession of the privileges, blessings and gifts of the Priesthood, and that the signs should follow them, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, &c. and that they might attain unto these blessings by a virtuous life, and conversation, and diligence in keeping all the commandments” (History of the Church, 4:602).

44. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 28 April 1842.

45. See Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (1992), 47-48 for further discussion on this point.

46. Oaks, “The Relief Society and the Church,” 35-36. Elder Oaks further explained that “the same is true of priesthood

authority and of the related authority exercised under priesthood direction. Organizations may channel the exercise of such authority, but they do not embody it. Thus, the priesthood keys were delivered to the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve apostles, not to any organizations” (“The Relief Society and the Church,” 36).

47. About this meeting, Elder George A. Smith recorded: “[Joseph] spoke of delivering the keys of the Priesthood to the Church, and said that the faithful members of the Relief Society should receive them in connection with their husbands, that the Saints whose integrity has been tried and proved faithful, might know how to ask the Lord and receive an answer” (History of the Church, 4:604).

48. “Autobiography of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich;” Church History Library; as quoted in Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (1989), 168-69 n. 12.

49. Spencer W. Kimball, “Relief Society-Its Promise and Potential;” *Ensign*, March 1976, 2.

50. 2 Nephi 9:20.

51. Improvement Era, June 1970, 66.

52. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 28 April 1842.

53. Verses in the Doctrine and Covenants, including D&C 84:19-22, 33-40; 107:18-20; 121:26-29, 33 are excellent places to begin a study of the fruits and blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood. In general, Sections 20, 76, 84, 107, 121, and 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants, along with Alma 13, provide an excellent curriculum.

54. D&C 107:18.

55. Said Brigham Young, “Every man and woman may be a revelator, and have the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy, and foresee the mind and will of God concerning them, eschew evil, and choose that which is good” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. and arr. John A. Widtsoe, [1954], 131).

56. Evening News, 14 January 1870.

57. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of Covenants;” *Ensign*, May 2009, 20, 22.

58. D&C 109:15, 22.

59. Discourses of Brigham Young, 416.

60. Discourses of Brigham Young, 131.

61. D&C 76:8; 38:39; Alma 12:9.

62. John A. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, April 1921, 63.

63. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. (1976), 149; emphasis added.

64. D&C 84:33-34.

65. D&C 84:35-40; emphasis added.

66. D&C 25:1; emphasis added.

67. 3 Nephi 9:16-17; emphasis added.

68. 1 Corinthians 11:11.

69. D&C 131:2; 132:16, 19-20.

70. See D&C 132:15-17.

71. See D&C 131:1-2.

72. John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government* (1962), 83; emphasis added.

73. Charles W. Penrose, in Conference Report, April 1921, 24.

74. Richard G. Scott, “The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 73-74.

75. David A. Bednar, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 41-42.

76. James E. Talmage, *House of the Lord* (1976), 79; emphasis added.

77. 1 Peter 3:7.

78. Young Woman's journal October 1914, 602.

79. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* (1996), 292.

80. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Women in Our Lives;” *Ensign*, May 2004, 84.

81. Bruce C. Hafen, “Crossing Thresholds and Becoming Equal Partners,” *Ensign*, August 2007, 27.

82. Hafen, “Crossing Thresholds,” 27.

83. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (1960), 300. About the issue of men, women, and priesthood, Elder Widtsoe also said: “Priesthood is to be used for the benefit of the entire human family, for the upbuilding of men, women and children alike. There is indeed no privileged class or sex within the true Church of Christ; and in reality there can be no discrimination between the sexes only as human beings make it or permit it” (*Priesthood and Church Government*, 92).

84. Bruce R. McConkie, “Eve and the Fall,” *Woman* (1979), 68.

85. D&C 88:32-33.

86. Joseph Smith taught that “the Melchizedek Priesthood . . . is the grand head, and . . . is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 166-67).

87. Romans 8:17.

God Loveth His Children

2007

1. This message is intended for Latter-day Saints who are troubled with same-gender attraction and sometimes feel discouraged but sincerely desire to live a life pleasing to our Father in Heaven.

2. You are a son or daughter of God, and our hearts reach out to you in warmth and affection. Notwithstanding your present same-gender attractions, you can be happy during this life, lead a morally clean life, perform meaningful service in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with your fellow Saints, and ultimately receive all the blessings of eternal life.

3. The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi voiced feelings we all have when he acknowledged that he did not “know the meaning of all things.” But he testified, “I know that [God] loveth his children” (1 Nephi 11:17). God does indeed love all His children. Many questions, however, including some related to same-gender attractions, must await a future answer, even in the next life. But God has revealed simple, unchanging truths to guide us. He loves all His children, and because He loves you, you can trust Him.

4. Your Identity and Potential

5. You are a precious son or daughter of God. He not only knows your name; He knows you. His love for you is individual. You lived in His presence before you

were born on this earth. You cannot remember your premortal relationship with Him, but He does. Although His children may sometimes do things that disappoint Him, He will always love them.

6. When you know who you are and are comfortable in the assurance that God loves you, you can more easily understand what He wants for you. He wants you to have all of the blessings of eternal life. Eternal life means much more than long or unending life. To obtain eternal life means to become like Heavenly Father, to live like Him, and to receive a fulness of joy. You can receive eternal life if you abide by the same laws as God and do the things He does.

7. The Plan of Happiness

8. God has provided the plan of salvation, or plan of happiness, to help you receive the blessings of eternal life. This plan is set forth in the scriptures; men and women cannot rewrite it to accommodate their desires. God alone gives the reward of eternal life. Some of the greatest blessings promised by the plan, including eternal life, are not intended for immediate enjoyment. Eternity is long, and mortality is short. As you base your decisions on eternal principles rather than on earthly challenges or desires, you can have “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23).

9. These blessings are based on obedience to eternal principles. The importance of families is one of these principles. Heaven is organized by families, which require a man and a woman who together exercise their creative powers within the bounds the Lord has set. Same-gender relationships are inconsistent with this plan. Without both a husband and a wife there would be no eternal family and no opportunity to become like Heavenly Father.

10. In some circumstances a person defers marriage because he or she is not presently attracted to a member of the opposite gender. 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.

11. Same-gender attractions include deep emotional, social, and physical feelings. 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.

12. Self-Mastery

13. In order to qualify for the blessings of our Heavenly Father’s plan, each of us was sent to this earth for a period of probation, during which we face a variety of temptations and challenges. Some of these challenges are associated with our physical bodies. Because we did not possess physical bodies before this life, we must learn to live with their inadequacies and interpret their signals, urges, and needs. And we must often learn to say “no.” This self-mastery of the physical body is very important because we will possess these bodies, in perfected form, in the next life.

14. Our bodies are sacred; they are sometimes referred to in the scriptures as “temples of God.” Many people with same-gender attraction respect the sacredness of their bodies and the standards God has set—that sexuality be expressed “only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). The lives of these individuals are pleasing to our Father in Heaven. Some, however, cross this boundary and indulge in immoral conduct. The desire for physical gratification does not authorize immorality by anyone.

15. True happiness depends on more than the expression of physical urges. These urges diminish as more fundamental emotional needs are met—such as the need to interact with and serve others. True happiness comes from self-control, self-respect, and positive direction in life. It comes from a testimony of true doctrine—including who you are and who you may become—and from living according to God’s plan of happiness.

16. Many people with same-gender attractions have strong testimonies of the gospel and, therefore, do not act on those attractions. Attractions alone do not make you unworthy. If you avoid immoral thoughts and actions, you have not transgressed even if you feel such an attraction. The First Presidency stated, "There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior" (letter, Nov. 14, 1991).

17. This principle applies to all of God's children, for He has declared that all sexual relations outside of marriage are unacceptable. Everyone has temptations, but one of the purposes of mortality is to learn to overcome them. President David O. McKay beautifully defined spirituality as "the consciousness of victory over self" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 8). These temptations, which are generally uninvited, may be powerful, but they are never so strong as to deprive us of our freedom of choice. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, "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" ("Same-Gender Attraction," Ensign, Oct. 1995, 9). Improper thoughts diminish if you replace them immediately with uplifting, constructive thoughts.

18. In your quest for self-mastery, remember the importance of living righteously in private as well as in public. President Gordon B. Hinckley urged: "Our behavior in public must be above reproach. Our behavior in private is even more important. It must clear the standard set by the Lord. We cannot indulge in sin, let alone try to cover our sins" ("Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood," Ensign, May 2002, 52).

19. If you have violated God's commandments or your covenants, you can repent. Through the Atonement, Jesus Christ has paid the price for your sins, and God will forgive you. After you have thoroughly and sincerely repented, you need not dwell on past transgressions. The Lord's command to "forgive all men" includes the requirement to forgive yourself (see D&C 64:10).

20. An understanding of eternal truths is a powerful motivation for righteous behavior. You are best served by concentrating on the things you can presently understand and control, not wasting energy or enlarging frustration by worrying about that which God has not yet fully revealed. Focus on living the simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Same-gender inclinations may be very powerful, but through faith in the Atonement you can receive the power to resist all improper conduct, keeping your life free from sin.

21. Filling Your Life with Goodness

22. Someone wisely said that if we plant a garden with good seed, there will not be so much need of the hoe. Likewise, if we fill our lives with the spiritual nourishment God has provided, we can more easily gain control over inclinations and become the masters of ourselves. This means creating a daily positive environment in which the Spirit can flourish and avoiding environments of temptation, where the Spirit is offended. A positive environment includes consistent private and public worship, church attendance, fasting, temple attendance, service, scripture reading, prayer, association with good friends, and exposure to uplifting literature and music. As you surround yourself with these things, your garden will bear good fruit and be a joy to you and to your Father in Heaven. Happiness is harvested from the cultivation of worthwhile things, not just the suppression of that which offends God.

23. One very important way to fill your spiritual garden with good seed is to participate actively in the Church. Even though same-gender attractions may continue and may foster unresolved tensions, you will be strengthened by service in the Church and by interaction with other Church members who share beliefs and have made the same covenants you have made. Partaking of the sacrament, singing the hymns of Zion, and listening to uplifting talks all contribute to your spiritual growth. Neglecting these positive influences and withdrawing from the Church because of discouragement, perceived rejection, or a sense that you do not belong can only hurt your spirituality and your desire to control your actions.

24. Some people with same-gender attraction have felt rejected because members of the Church did not always show love. No member of the Church should ever be intolerant. As you show love and kindness to

others, you give them an opportunity to change their attitudes and follow Christ more fully.

25. In addition to filling your garden with positive influences, you must also avoid any influence that can harm your spirituality. One of these adverse influences is obsession with or concentration on same-gender thoughts and feelings. It is not helpful to flaunt homosexual tendencies or make them the subject of unnecessary observation or discussion. It is better to choose as friends those who do not publicly display their homosexual feelings. The careful selection of friends and mentors who lead constructive, righteous lives is one of the most important steps to being productive and virtuous. Association with those of the same gender is natural and desirable, so long as you set wise boundaries to avoid improper and unhealthy emotional dependency, which may eventually result in physical and sexual intimacy. There is moral risk in having so close a relationship with one friend of the same gender that it may lead to vices the Lord has condemned. Our most important relationships are with our own families because our ties to them can be eternal.

26. Despair is another adverse influence. It often results from a lack of understanding and trust in God's continuing love as made available through the power of the Atonement. You can find hope in the fact that every blessing contemplated by Heavenly Father's plan of happiness remains available for each of His children. Despair and doubt may lead to withdrawal, fault-finding, and impatience that all answers and resolutions for life's problems are not immediately forthcoming. The Spirit of God brings good cheer and happiness. Trust the Lord. Do not blame anyone—not yourself, not your parents, not God—for problems not fully understood in this life.

27. Pornography, in all its subtle and damaging forms, is an especially adverse, dangerous, and addictive influence. The images to which your mind is exposed, even for a brief moment, are recorded and will present themselves in a moment of weakness to break down your resolve. Righteous action results from purity of thought, which is encouraged by uplifting literature, conversation, music, and other media.

28. Some people have been abused during the early years of life or have engaged in sexual

experimentation at a young age. If this has happened to you, please understand that abuse by others or youthful experiences should not create a present sense of guilt, unworthiness, or rejection by God or His Church. Innocent mischief early in life does not predispose a youth toward same-gender attraction as an adult.

29. You will be most successful in controlling your life as you constantly nourish your spirit. Avoiding food for prolonged periods, followed by excessively large meals, will not maintain physical health. Likewise, feeding your spirit sporadically, even in large proportions, will not yield the same result as constantly, daily nourishing your spirit.

30. "Go Forward"

31. President Gordon B. Hinckley has promised that those with same-gender attraction who do not express these inclinations may "go forward as do all other members of the Church" ("What Are People Asking about Us?" Ensign, Nov. 1998, 71).

32. If you live by the standards God has set and fill your days with worthwhile things, your life will be full of hope and you may expect opportunities for meaningful service, social inclusion, and spiritual growth in this life.

33. It is helpful to visit with your bishop and other priesthood leaders who hold the keys of inspired counsel for the members of your local Church unit. If you approach them humbly and honestly, they will extend themselves in compassion and love as they counsel with you. The First Presidency stated: "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" (letter, Nov. 14, 1991). It is also often helpful to seek guidance from professional counselors who are experienced in working with same-gender attraction issues and whose counsel is consistent with gospel teachings.

34. As you seek the help of others, be careful not to become dependent on them alone for your spiritual strength. Your bishop and other leaders can counsel you and teach the true principles of God's plan for His children, but ultimately the sustained strength you need must come from the Lord as you submit to the influence of the Holy Ghost and exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Only then will there be a lasting resolve

and sufficient strength to abstain from conduct and thoughts displeasing to God.

35. A number of Latter-day Saints with same-gender attraction are moving forward with their lives by carefully adhering to gospel standards, staying close to the Lord, and obtaining ecclesiastical and professional help when needed. Their lives are rich and satisfying, and they can be assured that all the blessings of eternal life will ultimately be theirs.

36. The teachings of the gospel differ greatly from the ways and teachings of the world on many subjects, including moral behavior. These differences result from our understanding of the gift of eternal life that Heavenly Father has prepared for us and the conditions necessary to receive it. No one is, or ever could be, excluded from the circle of God's love or the extended arms of His Church, for we are all His beloved sons and daughters. As President Hinckley said: "Our hearts reach out to those who struggle with feelings of affinity for the same gender. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and sisters" ("Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 99).

Plato's Son, Augustine's Heir: "A Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology"

V.H. Cassler

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1. Lately we have seen the emergence of a "gentle dissent" among some of the membership of the LDS Church concerning Church doctrine on marriage, complete with a peaceful march on Temple Square in June. [\[1\]](#)

Sometimes likened to the same types of gentle dissent that preceded the 1978 revelation offering priesthood ordination to worthy black males, some members believe that a similar revelation on the nature of marriage is in the offing.

2. Of course, marriage is a harder row to hoe than the issue of race, as Church members are sealed in the temple only by heterosexual parentage. No sealing means no exaltation, and so what has been missing from the gentle dissent movement is some idea of how one would re-work LDS doctrine to permit sealings in other family forms. That task has been finally taken up in [a recent Dialogue article by Taylor](#)

[Petrey](#), an assistant professor of religion at Kalamazoo College and director of that institution's Women, Gender, and Sexuality program. A thoughtful and thought-provoking article, it deserves wide reading and commentary.

3. Interestingly, the commentary on Petrey's article has overwhelmingly been penned by men. Searching for response on Dialogue's website for the Petrey article, I can find no letters to the editor written by women. [\[2\]](#) Similarly, at By Common Consent, the commentators are almost all male, though there are a few blogs where the issue has been enjoined by women. I find this noteworthy, because I believe that Petrey's vision is a veiled attempt at the erasure of women in LDS theology, reminiscent of what French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski (2001:11) calls the "nostalgia for the one" in philosophy.

4. No doubt Petrey would argue that what he is advocating is the construction of or, alternatively, the realization of, a plethora of genders, not one gender. No doubt he would also argue that his vision is meant to be emancipatory for women, constrained as they truly are by unjustifiably narrow cultural gender roles across the world. However, as a woman, I believe Petrey deceives himself and his readers. When I read Petrey's essay, I see a different bottom line: Women are no longer necessary for the Plan of Happiness to obtain. Women are no longer necessary for temple sealings to take place. Women are no longer necessary for the work of the gods in the eternities, or for there to be brought forth spirit children: indeed, there need not be a Heavenly Mother, or, for that matter, earthly mothers. Women are dispensable in Petrey's rethinking of LDS doctrine.

5. Of course, Petrey would retort that the same could be said of men in his worldview. But, alas, the fact of the matter is that Petrey is a man. We women are rightfully suspicious of men's "nostalgia for the one," a paternity unsullied by maternity, a love unsullied by the need to interact with female anatomy or psychology. After all, it is women, not men, who are being erased on a global scale by the tens of millions, as if the presence of two XX chromosomes constituted the worst possible genetic defect (Hudson and Den Boer, 2004). A 2005 UNFPA estimate suggests that over 163 million women are missing due to such causes as sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and passive neglect of female children. That women are not only dispensable globally in the fallen world, but also in an "LDS" theology reimagined by a purportedly LDS man is deeply ironic, for this viewpoint is a marker of the most

radical form of patriarchy. Petrey is indeed the son of Plato and the heir of Augustine, wrapping misogyny in a beautiful cloak, this time of post-genderism. He makes our General Authorities look like raving feminists next to him (and I am prepared to argue that our General Authorities are indeed feminists, though they don't do much raving)—because to our General Authorities, women are indispensable to all that is or aspires to be divine.

6. Let us see the workings of this occult misogyny in the details of Petrey's theological thought experiment.

I. The Absurdity of Women's Bodies and Women's Ordinances

7. Does reproduction in the afterlife require male and female parents? Petrey's take on this is that the organization of intelligences does not necessarily require "reproductive organs" (109). He asks, "must we imagine that male gods deposit sperm in the bodies of female gods (who menstruate monthly when they are not pregnant), that the pregnant female god gestates spirit embryos for nine months and then gives birth to spirit bodies?" (109) Maternity, you see, is absurd. Menstruation is absurd; pregnancy is absurd; birth is absurd. Why, we are asked to consider, would gods choose to do any of these things? Petrey's unspoken assumption here is that there is no value in these things; indeed, these bodily activities are in some way contemptible and "beneath" what it means to be a god. This, of course, is the classic fallen masculinist view of women's bodies: they are dirty, they are polluting; they are inconvenient; they are messy; they are constraining. Why would anyone in their right mind want the physical experience of female anatomy? Certainly no man would want that experience, and by male extrapolation, that means no one would—not even females themselves if given a choice, in Petrey's perspective. An artificial womb would be a far better path, it seems. [3] In this regard, Agacinski notes,

8. Philosophy has always been uneasy with birth. With few exceptions . . . the philosopher sees himself as pure thought—he seems never to have been born . . . Masculine humanity always affirms its own power—to know or to be able, to think or to act—and rejects feminine fecundity as the impotence and passivity of materiality and flesh with the same gesture . . . the heirs of Platonism can continue to see in sexual difference and generation only the irrational, animal part of the human, as if this part ought to remain foreign to the higher preoccupations of a philosophic or political order. " (2001:58/9, xxi)

9. Furthermore, riffs Petrey, this vision of body-less procreation in the afterlife is emancipatory for females because the "reason for divine female figures" in the Plan of Happiness is that men do not have wombs and would need access to such if there were embodied procreation in the afterlife (109). (Of course, men wouldn't want wombs, because in Petrey's view the whole embodied procreation business is absurd, and women's anatomy is messy and polluting.) If one buys into embodied procreation in the afterlife, Petrey says, then women are merely necessary instruments, not full and equal partners, in the Plan of Happiness. If one gets rid of the assumed need for a womb through rejection of embodied procreation in the afterlife, asserts Petrey, one then bypasses the instrumental need for women in the Plan of Happiness. It is important for the reader to understand that Petrey feels that this view is liberating for women because now women are no longer merely instruments. No, now they are merely . . . dispensable. (The idea that women could be simultaneously indispensable but not dehumanized as instruments does not appear as an alternative in Petrey's essay.)

10. This convolution is really a backhanded endorsement of the instrumentalist view of women, when one looks into the matter more closely. This view of the female body, so powerful and yet so disgusting, so necessary and yet so contemptible, is the foundation of thousands of years of misogynist thought right up to this very day. The classic alchemist's solution to the whole problem was to simply dream up a mode of reproduction in which women did not participate at all. (One method included doing something with semen and earth in moonlight, as I recall. See Allen and Hubbs, 1987 [4].) Voila, men are then liberated from their humiliating need for women, who, in the end, remain in men's view only good as instruments. And because men now no longer need them, women can just . . . go away. To see this "dream" recycled by a highly educated LDS man in the early twenty-first century is nothing less than stunning.

11. Equally stunning is that Petrey appears absolutely convinced that women will view his vision as a giant step forward for their sex. Petrey seems—for a director of a Women, Gender, and Sexuality Program—strangely ignorant of the fact that an overwhelming majority of women see the embodied production of children as something full of meaning, something to be freely chosen, even freely preferred. As Agacinski puts it,

12. If women are free human beings, why would they not be able to give meaning to their fecundity and answer for being mothers in their own way? . . . You'd have to have no experience of maternity, and no imagination, to reduce childbearing to [its] biological aspects." (2001:48-49)

13. Just so. Pace Petrey, women are capable of seeing meaning in all of their bodily rhythms, and have celebrated these female life cycle events and those of their daughters for millennia. Female children of God in the premortal existence strove to be found worthy in the sight of God to have the right to menstruate, to lactate, to be pregnant, to give birth. Indeed, these are not just physical events—they are spiritual ordinances of the highest order and the greatest power, presided over by women apprenticed to their Heavenly Mother. The most beautiful evocation of this is a recent essay in SquareTwo by Analiesa Leonhardt, which I recommend to all our readers. [5] That Petrey sees the workings of the female body as utterly devoid of meaning and thus completely dispensable is an age-old masculinist perspective of profound contempt for all things female. But LDS theology teaches that the female body is no curse, but rather the greatest blessing that could be bestowed upon the daughters of God. To carry a spirit, or a spirit and body, under one's heart, to nourish it from one's own breast, to have one's baby's cells coursing through one's veins as well as one's own, is no simple physical activity, but the representation and incarnation of the most exquisite understanding of divine love. And that love bears a distinctly female cast as a result.

14. Indeed, we could go further and assert that the body-less procreation of which Petrey dreams is an obviously androcentric project, even if some women have chosen to be involved:

15. [T]here would not be anything very new, from the male perspective, in the technological externalization of procreation, since, in fact, the man (as father) had always procreated out side of his own body, and since paternity has always basically been of a legal order for him. Thus, in some way, he has always had the 'right to do without his body to procreate.' Thus arises the question of knowing if, by claiming to free humanity from bodily constraints, biotechnologies are not obeying a new androcentric programming, even if remedies for female sterility are sometimes found there. Because, by allowing the two sexes to be technologically emancipated from their interdependence and physical constraints, they also make more widespread a masculine model of

procreation, that is, one of reproduction outside the body. The old male/female controversy over control of descendancy may take the new form of a rivalry between embodied procreation and technical procreation. (Agacinski, 2001:xxii, xxiii)

16. To remain logically consistent with his desired vision of body-less reproduction in the afterlife, Petrey must also regard sexual union between man and woman in the same way. To Petrey, such union is a mere physical event, bounded by mortality, of no real meaning, and thus dispensable. "Possible yet not necessary" (111) is his conclusion concerning sexual union between men and women in the afterlife. But sexual union is also an ordinance rife with meaning, if we have the eyes to see it. It is the sacrament of peace between men and women, who are the fathers and mothers of all who live and all who will yet live. Sexual union between a man and a woman, conducted in righteousness, is far, far more than a physical event. An examination of but one aspect of its meaning is instructive.

17. Among its many other profound meanings, sexual union between a man and a woman in marriage is an admission that self-love, or love of what one is, is sterile. Thus Agacinski (2001) calls sexual difference the foundation of ethics: to realize that one cannot produce offspring without the Other, to realize that one is not infinite of oneself, to realize one is limited by oneself but unlimited with the Other. She goes on to say,

18. [I]f humanity is mixed, and not single, all individuals are confronted with their own insufficiency and cannot fully claim to be full human beings . . . There is indeed a lack essential to every human being, which is neither the lack of a penis nor some other attribute of men, or women, but stems from being only male or only female." (2001:39)

19. Sexual finitude in reproduction, of which sexual union of a man and a woman in a loving, committed marriage testifies, thus serves an important ethical function in human society, and in so doing "generally wards off individual egocentric fantasies of omnipotence." (xxiii) Indeed, sexual union between men and women is the template for the treatment of all Others; if sex between a man and a woman is contaminated by dominance or contempt, it will produce very different societies than if sex is a mutual giving in peace between a man and a woman who stand before each other as faithful, loving equals. [6]

20. As a coda to his discussion of reproduction and sexual union, we are also asked by Petrey to

contemplate that, “There is no requirement or expectation of natural fertility to qualify for marriages, even sealings, in Latter-day Saint practice” (114). If there is no need for embodied procreation or sexual union, fertility likewise must be superfluous for Petrey. But this fertility discussion misses the point: marriage’s deeper meaning is as the sacrament of peace between the mothers and the fathers of all who live and all who will yet live. In the eternal perspective, infertility is but a small moment, but fertility in the afterlife for those who gain that right will last forever. In temple marriage, we are pledging not only ourselves and our capabilities in the here and now, but who we shall be and what our capabilities will be in the eternities. Contra Petrey, there has, in fact, always been a requirement and an expectation in LDS temple marriages of post-mortal “natural fertility.”

II. The Superfluous Woman

21. Petrey moves on to tell us that “In both the canonical and ritual accounts of creation, women are entirely absent” (111). Dispensable again. Drink it in, sisters:

22. Creation of the earth, organization of the elements, and even the creation of the living bodies of Adam and Eve all occur without the presence of female figures. The creation as we know it is capable of being performed with an all-male cast. This has the effect of not only making women superfluous to creation and salvation, but also of putting a male-male relationship as the source of creativity, productivity, and the giving of life itself. (111)

23. Superfluous. Absurd and superfluous. Of course, to assume that absence of mention is the same as absence is a logical fallacy. We have tantalizing glimpses that the presumption of women’s absence is an error, for example: “Eve, Adam, Abraham, and others were among the noble and great ones involved in the creation of the earth.” [7] Really, how is it possible to assume that women were not involved without a prior assumption as to the importance (or, rather, lack of importance) of women to creation? This assumption is quite revealing of Petrey’s own view of women. Furthermore, it is possible to assert that whenever Elohim is mentioned, as it is in the creation story of Genesis (and by extension, the Pearl of Great Price), we are speaking of God, and “God” means an exalted woman and an exalted man married in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (D&C 132; see further, Sorensen and Hudson Cassler, 2004 [8]). To speak of God in the sense of Elohim is

to speak of Man and Woman. Eve was not created in the image of a male god; she was created in the image of her Heavenly Mother. What we have taken as absence was presence all along, but we did not have the eyes to see it.

24. Petrey also wants to ensure we realize that, “Even Eve is “reproduced” from a male body with the help of other males. The Lord penetrates the body of Adam and creates Eve.” Petrey does not mention that President Spencer W. Kimball taught that the “rib story” was entirely figurative; in that context, Petrey’s assertion that Adam “birthed” Eve is very revealing. [9] To be more precise, Petrey’s view fits the classical masculinist perspective which passionately desires a paternity unsullied by maternity, a masculinity without a corresponding femininity. Agacinski asserts,

25. [A]ndrocentrism obeys a metaphysical fear of division. Thought in general, and especially Western thought, experiences a nostalgia for the one . . . The one closes in on itself . . . The division of the species disturbs this demand for simplicity, and there is always the temptation to reduce the two to one. Thus, Eve has been made to derive from Adam, man alone has been thought to transmit the germ of life, or it has been assumed that there was only one sex, the phallus. (11)

26. This dream of a paternity unsullied by maternity motivated the ancient Greek philosophers (all male, needless to say) to opine that women were not even related to their own children, being but the “ground” in which men “sowed their seed.” How odd to see that ancient misogyny embraced by a 21st century Mormon man.

III. Kinship

27. Petrey tells us that “kinship is a way of making the biological results of sexual reproduction meaningful” (115). I cannot but say it: only a man—a being that reproduces outside of his own body—could have written that statement. From this female’s perspective, kinship is men’s way of “making the biological results of sexual reproduction meaningful.” We women call those “biological results” our children. We women carry within us for the rest of our lives the cells of each human being we have borne in our wombs. We do not need men’s ordinances to be kin to our children: such ordinances are for the sake of men, whose blood is not mingled with that of their children, whose heart did not beat with their child’s within the same body, whose cries did not join with their child’s at birth. We have our own women’s

ordinances, or pregnancy, birth, and lactation, which establish our kinship with our children. Mothers who must adopt out their children know they will always be kin to them, no matter where their children are. Their bodies carry those children within them forever. The mother cannot be erased, despite all efforts to do so. The navel mark is etched into the very flesh of each human being as a symbol that kinship to one's mother is real and permanent and un-erasable and holy. (Our vesture contains but an echo of this real, embodied mark and its holy significance.)

28. We can pretend we have produced children who have no mother by buying eggs and renting wombs, but that is a lie. The egg came from a woman; the womb was in a woman. There are no human children without mothers, and this stubborn fact testifies to the stubborn placement of women as indispensable in the Plan of Happiness. And that motherhood is, as we have seen, no simple physical act, no mere instrumentality, but rather the deepest incarnation of all that is meant by love, an embodied ordinance of the greatest meaning and the greatest power.

29. We do children a great disservice when we lie to them in obscuring their dual male and female heritage. As Agacinski puts it, it is an "inhuman organization" that prevents children "from knowing through their fathers and mothers, their double, masculine and feminine, origin" (2001:116), and continues,

30. The small child, offspring of a human world, must know that she or he descends from a lineage made up of men and women . . . the biological origin of the child is always double, as the unavoidable recourse to cell donors proves . . . It is in the parental couple, as much real as symbolic, that the child discovers the division of man, and thus a form of his finitude and human destiny. It is in the necessary parental complementarity that humans recognize both their difference and their mutual dependence. It is in the impossibility of being both father and mother that individuals encounter their own limits, come up against their desire for self-sufficiency, and must assume their sexual identities. Mixity is a value that is as much fundamental, universal, and ethical as it is biological. . . . The desire to neutralize the very principle of man's double origin will have serious ethical and cultural consequences." (2001:109)

31. Though Petrey claims, "Mormon models of kinship, both past and present, displace and replace the biological and the sexual relationship as markers of kinship" (119), this is a narrow, masculinist view.

The temple sealings are meant, in the first place, to include men rightfully into kinship with those they have not borne in their body. These sealings are meant, in a sense, to ratify what was done by women in the sacrament of sexual union in marriage and in the female-presided ordinances of pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. Only in cases of great sorrow will the mother's reproductive line, her female ordinance line, not be subsequently paralleled by the male priesthood-sealed line. The mother's choices in sexual union and in childbearing precede and are foundation for temple sealings except in sorrowful exceptional cases.

IV. Gender

32. In the final section of his essay, Petrey appears to define "gender" as "enactment of gender roles" in order to problematize the idea of "eternal gender" in LDS theology. With such a definition, he can appeal to women who are justifiably aghast at the limited and clearly subordinate roles assigned them by society, even within LDS culture. Using that definition, Petrey is now able to highlight what he perceives to be a tension in LDS doctrine concerning gender: as Petrey puts it, "gender "identity" cannot be both inherent and taught." (124). But there are very important things that are just so: "faith" is both inherent and taught, for example. We do not say, "Well, if you were born, then you kept your first estate and had faith in Christ's plan, and so you have no need to go to Church or read your scriptures." There are many "inherent" things that must be nurtured in order that they do not die—such as our understanding of the meaning and power of the ordinances over which women preside, such as pregnancy, birth, and lactation. Our female spirits knew these things before mortality, but this understanding has largely died out in the mortal world, even within the LDS community—a perfect example being Petrey's own essay. No, we can cultivate sexual difference in a non-misogynist and non-coercive fashion, without such cultivation somehow undermining the concept that sexual difference is eternal. [\[10\]](#)

V. Marriage

33. Petrey further informs us of "the necessity of hierarchical views of males and females in marriage as a necessary aspect of marking same-sex relationships as illegitimate" (127). He believes this is so because of language in the Family Proclamation referring to the husband's role in "presiding," noting that in male homosexual marriage there are two "presiders" and in lesbian marriage there are no

“presiders,” both of which circumstances are problematic to the LDS mindset which, in Petrey’s view, craves a neat male-female hierarchy in marriage.

34. But Petrey has simply misunderstood what “preside” means, which is not uncommon in our faith community. A recent Ensign article sheds some further light on the subject:

35. “The husband’s patriarchal duty as one who presides in the home is not to rule over others but to ensure that the marriage and the family prosper. . . . The husband is accountable for growth and happiness in his marriage, but this accountability does not give him authority over his wife. Both are in charge of the marriage.” [11]

36. The LDS Church unabashedly preaches the sincerely [equal partnership](#) of men and women in marriage, and thus it is disingenuous to tie the Church’s repudiation of same-sex marriage as somehow emanating from what Petrey presumes (wrongly) is LDS doctrinal subordination of women to men in marriage. The argument is a non sequitur for the latter proposition is demonstrably false.

37. Indeed, it is the Church’s incessant drumbeat of equal partnership between men and women in marriage that undercuts the “post-heterosexist doctrine” viewpoint so decisively. Men and women, the mothers and fathers of all who live or will yet live, must enter into the sacrament of peace we call marriage—intimate, faithful, day-to-day physical, emotional, and physical experience and love of one another—to become as their Heavenly Parents. There is no other way: this is central, not peripheral, doctrine. This is the great bridge that must be crossed, here or in the hereafter if one has not had the chance here. Thus when Petrey tell us that,

38. “If learning to interact with members of the opposite sex (or gender) really does hold a privileged position as a means to salvation over learning to master other kinds of relationships—such as those of different social, economic, racial, linguistic, national, or even religious backgrounds—there is no reason to suppose that same-sex companions cannot or would not develop those relationships” (128),

39. we can say that he is purposefully comparing apples to oranges, which denotes a state of stubborn denial, a real “kicking against the pricks.” (NB: contra Petrey, in LDS doctrine marriage is not essential to salvation—it is essential to exaltation). As Agacinski notes,

40. [S]ex is neither a social nor a cultural trait, nor an ethnic one, [i]t is not the common characteristic of some ‘community’—like a language, a religion, or a territory—but rather, [i]t is a universal, differential trait. That is, humankind does not exist outside this double form, masculine and feminine.” (2001:xxiii)

41. Marriage, especially when sealed in the temple, is simply a far, far different experience of the other sex than any friendship or acquaintanceship. It is an exclusive giving and receiving of all one is on all levels, lasting for the rest of one’s existence and throughout all eternity, between the mothers and the fathers of all who have lived or ever will live. It is, as we have said, “the” sacrament of human peace, and as such, is as indispensable to our divine destiny as women themselves are.

Conclusion

42. When Petrey states, “there is nothing preventing Latter-day Saints from moving past these assumptions” (129) about the heterosexual nature of marriage sealing in LDS theology, we say, But there is something—or, rather, someone: our Heavenly Mother, who will not countenance Her own erasure by one of Her sons.

43. No, the female is not dispensable, no matter how pretty the cloak of enlightened thought obscuring that agenda from our view. As Agacinski puts it, “We cannot merely be neutral observers of any and all interpretations. We have a vested interest in theories of difference as well as the respective places of men and women in a culture” (xxxiv). It matters that there is a Female God/Mother in Heaven. It matters that there are females/mothers here on Earth. We women are no mere by-passable instruments in the Plan; we are the heart of the Plan. The men who “get” this—the men who pledge their love, their loyalty, and their commitment to our equality and to the sacrament of human peace—are our brothers and our partners. Those men who see us as dispensable cannot be viewed as our friends, for they do not recognize that male and female “are woven into the fabric of the universe, a vital, foundational element of eternal life and divine nature.” [12]

NOTES:

NB: All Agacinski quotes are from Sylviane Agacinski, *The Parity of the Sexes*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001 (English translation edition). Also cited is Hudson and Den Boer 2004, which is Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. Den Boer, *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia’s Surplus Male Population*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004.

[1] Jack Healy, “Gentle Dissent in Mormon Church on Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, 11 June 2012,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/12/us/dissent-on-gay-marriage->

[among-mormons.html?pagewanted=all](#). [Back to manuscript].

[2] <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/2011/a-letter-to-the-editor-joe-spencer-responds-to-taylor-petrey/>.

[3] Note: Even a handful of short-sighted females have signed on to this agenda: Kira Cochrane, “Sex Could Be History,” *The Guardian* 17 August 2012,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/aug/17/sex-reproduction-aarathi-prasad>.

[4] Sally G. Allen and Joanna Hubbs, “Outrunning Atalanta: Feminine Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation,” in *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*, edited by Sandra Harding and Jean F. O’Barr, 1987, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 79-98.

[5] Analiesa Leonhardt, “The Sacrament of Birth,” *SquareTwo*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Spring 2010),

<http://squatwo.org/Sq2ArticleLeonhardtBirth.html>.

[6] V. H. Cassler, “Some Things Which Should Not Have Been Forgotten Were Lost,” *SquareTwo*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring 2009),

<http://squatwo.org/Sq2ArticleCasslerMarriage.html>.

[7] Daniel H. Ludlow, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992, “Eve.”).

[8] Alma Don Sorensen and Valerie Hudson Cassler, *Women in Eternity, Women of Zion*, Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2004.

[9] Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” October 1975 General Conference address,

<http://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/03/the-blessings-and-responsibilities-of-womanhood>.

[10] Of course, the Abbot and Byrd book on encouraging heterosexuality that Petrey mentions in this regard was critiqued thoroughly in the pages of *SquareTwo* for its mildly misogynist and somewhat coercive approach to gender roles:

<http://squatwo.org/Sq2ArticleSteamersBookReview.html>.

[11] Randy Keyes, “Counseling Together in Marriage,” *Ensign*, June 2012, p. 1.

[12] Bruce D. Porter, “Defending the Family in a Troubled World,” *Ensign*, June 2011,

<http://www.lds.org/ensign/2011/06/defending-the-family-in-a-troubled-world>.

Same-Sex Marriage

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Letter to Church Leaders, March 2014

1. Legal proceedings and legislative action in a number of countries have given civil recognition to same-sex marriage relationships, and the question of same-sex marriage continues to be widely debated. As we confront this and other issues, we encourage all to bear in mind our Heavenly Father’s purposes in creating the earth and providing for our mortal birth and experience here as His children. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” ([Genesis 1:27–28](#)). “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](#)). Marriage between a man and a woman was instituted by God and is central to His plan for His children and for the well-being of

society. Strong families, guided by a loving mother and father, serve as the fundamental institution for nurturing children, instilling faith, and transmitting to future generations the moral strengths and values that are important to civilization and crucial to eternal salvation.

2. Changes in the civil law do not, indeed cannot, change the moral law that God has established. God expects us to uphold and keep His commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society. His law of chastity is clear: sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We urge you to review and teach Church members the doctrine contained in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

3. Just as those who promote same-sex marriage are entitled to civility, the same is true for those who oppose it. The Church insists on its leaders’ and members’ right to express and advocate religious convictions on marriage, family, and morality free from retaliation or retribution. The Church is also entitled to maintain its standards of moral conduct and good standing for members.

4. Consistent with our fundamental beliefs, Church officers will not employ their ecclesiastical authority to perform marriages between two people of the same sex, and the Church does not permit its meetinghouses or other properties to be used for ceremonies, receptions, or other activities associated with same-sex marriages. Nevertheless, all visitors are welcome to our chapels and premises so long as they respect our standards of conduct while there.

5. We affirm that those who avail themselves of laws or court rulings authorizing same-sex marriage should not be treated disrespectfully. The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to love and treat all people with kindness and civility—even when we disagree.

6. As members of the Church, we are responsible to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to illuminate the great blessings that flow from heeding God’s commandments as well as the inevitable consequences of ignoring them. We invite you to pray that people everywhere will have their hearts softened to the truths of the gospel, and that wisdom will be granted to those who are called upon to decide issues critical to society’s future.

Helping Those Who Struggle With Same-Gender Attraction

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, October 2007



1. A pleasant young man in his early 20s sat across from me. He had an engaging smile, although he didn't smile often during our talk. What drew me in was the pain in his eyes.
2. "I don't know if I should remain a member of the Church," he said. "I don't think I'm worthy."
3. "Why wouldn't you be worthy?" I asked.
4. "I'm gay."
5. I suppose he thought I would be startled. I wasn't. "And ... ?" I inquired.
6. A flicker of relief crossed his face as he sensed my continued interest. "I'm not attracted to women. I'm attracted to men. I've tried to ignore these feelings or change them, but ..."
7. He sighed. "Why am I this way? The feelings are very real."
8. I paused, then said, "I need a little more information before advising you. You see, same-gender attraction is not a sin, but acting on those feelings is—just as it would be with heterosexual feelings. Do you violate the law of chastity?"
9. He shook his head. "No, I don't."
10. This time I was relieved. "Thank you for wanting to deal with this," I said. "It takes courage to talk about it, and I honor you for keeping yourself clean."
11. "As for why you feel as you do, I can't answer that question. A number of factors may be involved, and they can be as different as people are different. Some things, including the cause of your feelings, we may never know in this life. But knowing why you feel as you do isn't as important as knowing you have not transgressed. If your life is in harmony with the commandments, then you are worthy to serve in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with the members, attend the temple, and receive all the blessings of the Savior's Atonement."
12. He sat up a little straighter. I continued, "You serve yourself poorly when you identify yourself primarily by your sexual feelings. That isn't your only characteristic, so don't give it disproportionate

attention. You are first and foremost a son of God, and He loves you.

13. "What's more, I love you. My Brethren among the General Authorities love you. I'm reminded of a comment President Boyd K. Packer made in speaking to those with same-gender attraction. 'We do not reject you,' he said. '... We cannot reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We will not reject you, because we love you.' "[1](#)
14. We talked for another 30 minutes or so. Knowing I could not be a personal counselor to him, I directed him to his local priesthood leaders. Then we parted. I thought I detected a look of hope in his eyes that had not been there before. Although he yet faced challenges to work through—or simply endure—I had a feeling he would handle them well.
15. God Loveth His Children
16. When an angel asked Nephi a question about God, Nephi answered, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" ([1 Nephi 11:17](#)). I too affirm that God loves all His children and acknowledge that many questions, including some related to same-gender attraction, must await a future answer, perhaps in the next life.
17. Unfortunately, some people believe they have all the answers now and declare their opinions far and wide. Fortunately, such people do not speak for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
18. Although I believe members are eager to extend compassion to those different from themselves, it is human nature that when confronted with a situation we don't understand, we tend to withdraw. This is particularly true of same-gender attraction. We have so little reliable information about it that those wanting to help are left feeling a bit unsteady. Admitting my own inadequacy in this regard but wanting to assist, let me offer some suggestions to help those who have loved ones or friends who are attracted to the same gender.
19. Our Father's Plan of Happiness
20. First, let's be absolutely clear on what God wants for each of us. He wants us to have all of the blessings of eternal life. He wants us to become like Him. To help us do that, He has given us a plan. This plan is based on eternal truths and is not altered according to the social trends of the day.
21. At the heart of this plan is the begetting of children, one of the crucial reasons Adam and Eve left

the Garden of Eden (see [2 Nephi 2:19–25](#); [Moses 5:10–12](#)). They were commanded to “be fruitful, and multiply” ([Moses 2:28](#)), and they chose to keep that commandment. We are to follow them in marrying and providing physical bodies for Heavenly Father’s spirit children. Obviously, a same-gender relationship is inconsistent with this plan.

22. For various reasons, marriage and children are not immediately available to all. Perhaps no offer of marriage is forthcoming. Perhaps even after marriage there is an inability to have children. Or perhaps there is no present attraction to the opposite gender. Whatever the reason, God’s richest blessings will eventually be available to all of His children if they are clean and faithful.

23. Through the exercise of faith, individual effort, and reliance upon the power of the Atonement, some may overcome same-gender attraction in mortality and marry. Others, however, may never be free of same-gender attraction in this life.

24. As fellow Church members, families, and friends, we need to recognize that those attracted to the same gender face some unique restrictions regarding expression of their feelings. While same-gender attraction is real, there must be no physical expression of this attraction. The desire for physical gratification does not authorize immorality by anyone. Such feelings can be powerful, but they are never so strong as to deprive anyone of the freedom to choose worthy conduct.

25. In saying this, let me make it clear that attractions alone, troublesome as they may be, do not make one unworthy. The First Presidency has stated, “There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior.”² If you do not act on temptations, you have not transgressed.

26. The failure to see that distinction sometimes leads to despair. I ache for those who do not understand that every blessing offered by God is available to anyone who obeys the laws upon which those blessings are predicated (see [D&C 130:20–21](#)). No one who lives the gospel should despair. Hope and peace come from the Comforter, and the answer to despair is to invite the Holy Ghost into our lives.

27. Ways to Help

28. Let’s assume you are the family member or friend of someone with same-gender attraction who comes to you for help. What do you say? What do you do?

29. I’d begin by recognizing the courage that brought your son, daughter, sibling, or friend to you. I’d recognize the trust that person has extended. Discussing the issue with someone of trust is a healthy first step to dealing with confusing feelings, and it is imperative that these first steps be met with compassion.

30. Next, if you are a parent of one with same-gender attraction, don’t assume you are the reason for those feelings. No one, including the one struggling, should try to shoulder blame. Nor should anyone place blame on another—including God. Walk by faith, and help your loved one deal the best he or she can with this challenge.

31. In doing so, recognize that 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. We are all thrilled when some who struggle with these feelings are able to marry, raise children, and achieve family happiness. But other attempts have resulted in broken hearts and broken homes.

32. Above all, keep your lines of communication open. Open communication between parents and children is a clear expression of love, and pure love, generously expressed, can transform family ties. But love for a family member does not extend to condoning unrighteous behavior. Your children are welcome to stay in your home, of course, but you have every right to exclude from your dwelling any behavior that offends the Spirit of the Lord.

33. The Garden Principle

34. Next, consider a principle learned in gardening. Someone said that if we plant a garden with good seed, there will not be so much need of the hoe. Likewise, if we fill our lives with spiritual nourishment, we can more easily gain control over inclinations. This means creating a positive environment in our homes in which the Spirit is abundantly evident. A positive environment includes consistent private and public worship, prayer, fasting, scripture reading, service, and exposure to uplifting conversation, music, literature, and other media.

35. This same environment extends to experiences at church. Some with same-gender attractions have unresolved fears and are offended at church when no offense is intended. On the other hand, some members exclude from their circle of fellowship those who are different. When our actions or words discourage someone from taking full advantage of Church

membership, we fail them—and the Lord. The Church is made stronger as we include every member and strengthen one another in service and love (see [D&C 84:110](#)).

36. You may feel prompted to encourage the one you are trying to help to visit with a priesthood leader who holds the keys of inspired counsel. Please do so, knowing that the First Presidency has asked Church leaders to discuss these matters confidentially and in a spirit of Christlike love.³

37. In the Lord's Hands

38. Not long ago I received a letter from a man in his early 30s who struggles with same-gender attraction. His struggle has not been easy, and he has not yet married. But, he wrote, "the Lord has helped me face my current circumstances, and I am content to do my best and leave my life in His hands."

39. I weep with admiration and respect at the faith and courage of such a man who is living with a challenge I have never faced. I love him and the thousands like him, male or female, who "fight the good fight" ([1 Timothy 6:12](#)). I commend his attitude to all who struggle with—or who are helping others who struggle with—same-gender attraction.

Notes

1. "Ye Are the Temple of God," Liahona, Jan. 2001, 87; Ensign, Nov. 2000, 74.
2. First Presidency letter, Nov. 14, 1991.
3. See First Presidency letter, Nov. 14, 1991.

Interview With Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: "Same-Gender Attraction"

Mormon Newsroom, 2006

1. The continuing public debate over same-gender marriage has prompted many questions from the news media, the general public and Church members in relation to the position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the marriage issue specifically and on homosexuality in general.

2. The following interview was conducted in 2006 with Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church, and Elder Lance B. Wickman, a member of the Seventy. These senior Church leaders responded to questions from two members of the Church's Public Affairs staff. The transcript of the interview appears below in order

to help clarify the Church's stand on these important, complex and sensitive issues.

3. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: At the outset, can you explain why this whole issue of homosexuality and same-gender marriage is important to the Church?

4. ELDER OAKS: This is much bigger than just a question of whether or not society should be more tolerant of the homosexual lifestyle. Over past years we have seen unrelenting pressure from advocates of that lifestyle to accept as normal what is not normal, and to characterize those who disagree as narrow-minded, bigoted and unreasonable. Such advocates are quick to demand freedom of speech and thought for themselves, but equally quick to criticize those with a different view and, if possible, to silence them by applying labels like "homophobic." In at least one country where homosexual activists have won major concessions, we have even seen a church pastor threatened with prison for preaching from the pulpit that homosexual behavior is sinful. Given these trends, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must take a stand on doctrine and principle. This is more than a social issue — ultimately it may be a test of our most basic religious freedoms to teach what we know our Father in Heaven wants us to teach.

5. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Let's say my 17-year-old son comes to talk to me and, after a great deal of difficulty trying to get it out, tells me that he believes that he's attracted to men — that he has no interest and never has had any interest in girls. He believes he's probably gay. He says that he's tried to suppress these feelings. He's remained celibate, but he realizes that his feelings are going to be devastating to the family because we've always talked about his Church mission, about his temple marriage and all those kinds of things. He just feels he can't live what he thinks is a lie any longer, and so he comes in this very upset and depressed manner. What do I tell him as a parent?

6. ELDER OAKS: You're my son. You will always be my son, and I'll always be there to help you.

7. The distinction between feelings or inclinations on the one hand, and behavior on the other hand, is very clear. It's no sin to have inclinations that if yielded to would produce behavior that would be a transgression. The sin is in yielding to temptation. Temptation is not unique. Even the Savior was tempted.

8. The New Testament affirms that God has given us commandments that are difficult to keep. It is in 1

Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13: “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.”

9. I think it’s important for you to understand that homosexuality, which you’ve spoken of, is not a noun that describes a condition. It’s an adjective that describes feelings or behavior. I encourage you, as you struggle with these challenges, not to think of yourself as a ‘something’ or ‘another,’ except that you’re a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and you’re my son, and that you’re struggling with challenges.

10. Everyone has some challenges they have to struggle with. You’ve described a particular kind of challenge that is very vexing. It is common in our society and it has also become politicized. But it’s only one of a host of challenges men and women have to struggle with, and I just encourage you to seek the help of the Savior to resist temptation and to refrain from behavior that would cause you to have to repent or to have your Church membership called into question.

11. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: If somebody has a very powerful heterosexual drive, there is the opportunity for marriage. If a young man thinks he’s gay, what we’re really saying to him is that there is simply no other way to go but to be celibate for the rest of his life if he doesn’t feel any attraction to women?

12. ELDER OAKS: That is exactly the same thing we say to the many members who don’t have the opportunity to marry. We expect celibacy of any person that is not married.

13. ELDER WICKMAN: We live in a society which is so saturated with sexuality that it perhaps is more troublesome now, because of that fact, for a person to look beyond their gender orientation to other aspects of who they are. I think I would say to your son or anyone that was so afflicted to strive to expand your horizons beyond simply gender orientation. Find fulfillment in the many other facets of your character and your personality and your nature that extend beyond that. There’s no denial that one’s gender orientation is certainly a core characteristic of any person, but it’s not the only one.

14. What’s more, merely having inclinations does not disqualify one for any aspect of Church participation or membership, except possibly marriage

as has already been talked about. But even that, in the fullness of life as we understand it through the doctrines of the restored gospel, eventually can become possible.

15. In this life, such things as service in the Church, including missionary service, all of this is available to anyone who is true to covenants and commandments.

16. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: So you are saying that homosexual feelings are controllable?

17. ELDER OAKS: Yes, homosexual feelings are controllable. Perhaps there is an inclination or susceptibility to such feelings that is a reality for some and not a reality for others. But out of such susceptibilities come feelings, and feelings are controllable. If we cater to the feelings, they increase the power of the temptation. If we yield to the temptation, we have committed sinful behavior. That pattern is the same for a person that covets someone else’s property and has a strong temptation to steal. It’s the same for a person that develops a taste for alcohol. It’s the same for a person that is born with a ‘short fuse,’ as we would say of a susceptibility to anger. If they let that susceptibility remain uncontrolled, it becomes a feeling of anger, and a feeling of anger can yield to behavior that is sinful and illegal.

18. We’re not talking about a unique challenge here. We’re talking about a common condition of mortality. We don’t understand exactly the ‘why,’ or the extent to which there are inclinations or susceptibilities and so on. But what we do know is that feelings can be controlled and behavior can be controlled. The line of sin is between the feelings and the behavior. The line of prudence is between the susceptibility and the feelings. We need to lay hold on the feelings and try to control them to keep us from getting into a circumstance that leads to sinful behavior.

19. ELDER WICKMAN: One of the great sophistries of our age, I think, is that merely because one has an inclination to do something, that therefore acting in accordance with that inclination is inevitable. That’s contrary to our very nature as the Lord has revealed to us. We do have the power to control our behavior.

20. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: If we were to look back at someone who had a ‘short fuse,’ and we were to look at their parents who might have had a short fuse, some might identify a genetic influence in that.

21. ELDER OAKS: No, we do not accept the fact that conditions that prevent people from attaining

their eternal destiny were born into them without any ability to control. That is contrary to the Plan of Salvation, and it is contrary to the justice and mercy of God. It's contrary to the whole teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which expresses the truth that by or through the power and mercy of Jesus Christ we will have the strength to do all things. That includes resisting temptation. That includes dealing with things that we're born with, including disfigurements, or mental or physical incapacities. None of these stand in the way of our attaining our eternal destiny. The same may be said of a susceptibility or inclination to one behavior or another which if yielded to would prevent us from achieving our eternal destiny.

22. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: You're saying the Church doesn't necessarily have a position on 'nurture or nature'

23. ELDER OAKS: That's where our doctrine comes into play. The Church does not have a position on the causes of any of these susceptibilities or inclinations, including those related to same-gender attraction. Those are scientific questions — whether nature or nurture — those are things the Church doesn't have a position on.

24. ELDER WICKMAN: Whether it is nature or nurture really begs the important question, and a preoccupation with nature or nurture can, it seems to me, lead someone astray from the principles that Elder Oaks has been describing here. Why somebody has a same-gender attraction... who can say? But what matters is the fact that we know we can control how we behave, and it is behavior which is important.

25. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Is therapy of any kind a legitimate course of action if we're talking about controlling behavior? If a young man says, "Look, I really want these feelings to go away... I would do anything for these feelings to go away," is it legitimate to look at clinical therapy of some sort that would address those issues?

26. ELDER WICKMAN: Well, it may be appropriate for that person to seek therapy. Certainly the Church doesn't counsel against that kind of therapy. But from the standpoint of a parent counseling a person, or a Church leader counseling a person, or a person looking at his or her same-gender attraction from the standpoint of 'What can I do about it here that's in keeping with gospel teachings?' the clinical side of it is not what matters most. What matters most is recognition that 'I have my own will. I have my own agency. I have the power within myself to control what I do.'

27. Now, that's not to say it's not appropriate for somebody with that affliction to seek appropriate clinical help to examine whether in his or her case there's something that can be done about it. This is an issue that those in psychiatry, in the psychology professions have debated. Case studies I believe have shown that in some cases there has been progress made in helping someone to change that orientation; in other cases not. From the Church's standpoint, from our standpoint of concern for people, that's not where we place our principal focus. It's on these other matters.

28. ELDER OAKS: Amen to that. Let me just add one more thought. The Church rarely takes a position on which treatment techniques are appropriate, for medical doctors or for psychiatrists or psychologists and so on.

29. The second point is that there are abusive practices that have been used in connection with various mental attitudes or feelings. Over-medication in respect to depression is an example that comes to mind. The aversive therapies that have been used in connection with same-sex attraction have contained some serious abuses that have been recognized over time within the professions. While we have no position about what the medical doctors do (except in very, very rare cases — abortion would be such an example), we are conscious that there are abuses and we don't accept responsibility for those abuses. Even though they are addressed at helping people we would like to see helped, we can't endorse every kind of technique that's been used.

30. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Is heterosexual marriage ever an option for those with homosexual feelings?

31. ELDER OAKS: We are sometimes asked about whether marriage is a remedy for these feelings that we have been talking about. President Hinckley, faced with the fact that apparently some had believed it to be a remedy, and perhaps that some Church leaders had even counseled marriage as the remedy for these feelings, made this statement: "Marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices." To me that means that we are not going to stand still to put at risk daughters of God who would enter into such marriages under false pretenses or under a cloud unknown to them. Persons who have this kind of challenge that they cannot control could not enter marriage in good faith.

32. On the other hand, persons who have cleansed themselves of any transgression and who have shown

their ability to deal with these feelings or inclinations and put them in the background, and feel a great attraction for a daughter of God and therefore desire to enter marriage and have children and enjoy the blessings of eternity — that's a situation when marriage would be appropriate.

33. President Hinckley said that marriage is not a therapeutic step to solve problems.

34. ELDER WICKMAN: One question that might be asked by somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is, "Is this something I'm stuck with forever? What bearing does this have on eternal life? If I can somehow make it through this life, when I appear on the other side, what will I be like?"

35. Gratefully, the answer is that same-gender attraction did not exist in the pre-earth life and neither will it exist in the next life. It is a circumstance that for whatever reason or reasons seems to apply right now in mortality, in this nano-second of our eternal existence.

36. 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.

37. ELDER OAKS: Let me just add a thought to that. There is no fullness of joy in the next life without a family unit, including a husband, a wife, and posterity. Further, men are that they might have joy. In the eternal perspective, same-gender activity will only bring sorrow and grief and the loss of eternal opportunities.

38. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: A little earlier, Elder Oaks, you talked about the same standard of morality for heterosexuals and homosexuals. How would you address someone who said to you, 'I understand it's the same standard, but aren't we asking a little more of someone who has same-gender attraction?' Obviously there are heterosexual people who won't get married, but would you accept that they at least have hope that 'tomorrow I could meet the person of my dreams.' There's always the hope that that could happen at any point in their life. Someone with same-

gender attraction wouldn't necessarily have that same hope.

39. ELDER OAKS: There are differences, of course, but the contrast is not unique. There are people with physical disabilities that prevent them from having any hope — in some cases any actual hope and in other cases any practical hope — of marriage. The circumstance of being currently unable to marry, while tragic, is not unique.

40. It is sometimes said that God could not discriminate against individuals in this circumstance. But life is full of physical infirmities that some might see as discriminations — total paralysis or serious mental impairment being two that are relevant to marriage. If we believe in God and believe in His mercy and His justice, it won't do to say that these are discriminations because God wouldn't discriminate. We are in no condition to judge what discrimination is. We rest on our faith in God and our utmost assurance of His mercy and His love for all of His children.

41. ELDER WICKMAN: There's really no question that there is an anguish associated with the inability to marry in this life. We feel for someone that has that anguish. I feel for somebody that has that anguish. But it's not limited to someone who has same-gender attraction.

42. We live in a very self-absorbed age. I guess it's naturally human to think about my own problems as somehow greater than someone else's. I think when any one of us begins to think that way, it might be well to look beyond ourselves. Who am I to say that I am more handicapped, or suffering more, than someone else?

43. I happen to have a handicapped daughter. She's a beautiful girl. She'll be 27 next week. Her name is Courtney. Courtney will never marry in this life, yet she looks wistfully upon those who do. She will stand at the window of my office which overlooks the Salt Lake Temple and look at the brides and their new husbands as they're having their pictures taken. She's at once captivated by it and saddened because Courtney understands that will not be her experience here. Courtney didn't ask for the circumstances into which she was born in this life, any more than somebody with same-gender attraction did. So there are lots of kinds of anguish people can have, even associated with just this matter of marriage. 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 fullness 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.

44. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Elder Wickman, when you referred earlier to missionary service, you held that out as a possibility for someone who felt same-gender attraction but didn't act on it. President Hinckley has said that if people are faithful, they can essentially go forward as anyone else in the Church and have full fellowship. What does that really mean? Does it mean missionary service? Does it mean that someone can go to the temple, at least for those sacraments that don't involve marriage? Does it really mean that someone with same-gender attraction so long as they're faithful, has every opportunity to participate, to be called to service, to do all those kinds of things that anyone else can?

45. ELDER WICKMAN: I think the short answer to that is yes! I'd look to Elder Oaks to elaborate on that.

46. ELDER OAKS: President Hinckley has helped us on that subject with a clear statement that answers all questions of that nature. He said, "We love them (referring to people who have same-sex attractions) as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church."

47. To me that means that a person with these inclinations, where they're kept under control, or, if yielded to are appropriately repented of, is eligible to do anything in the Church that can be done by any member of the Church who is single. Occasionally, there's an office, like the office of bishop, where a person must be married. But that's rather the exception in the Church. Every teaching position, every missionary position can be held by single people. We welcome to that kind of service people who are struggling with any kind of temptation when the struggle is a good struggle and they are living so as to be appropriate teachers, or missionaries, or whatever the calling may be.

48. ELDER WICKMAN: Isn't it really the significance of the Atonement in a person's life? Doesn't the Atonement really begin to mean something to a person when he or she is trying to face down the challenges of living, whether they be temptations or limitations? The willingness to turn to the Savior, the opportunity of going to sacrament service on a Sunday, and really participating in the

ordinance of the sacrament... listening to the prayers, partaking of those sacred emblems. Those are opportunities that really help us to come within the ambit of the Savior's Atonement. Viewed that way, then any opportunity to serve in the Church is a blessing. As has been mentioned, there is a relatively tiny handful of callings within the Church that require marriage.

49. ELDER OAKS: There is another point to add here, and this comes from a recent statement of the First Presidency, which is a wonderful description of our attitude in this matter: "We of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender. We realize there may be great loneliness in their lives, but there must also be recognition of what is right before the Lord."

50. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: What would you say to those members in society, members of the Church, who may look at same-gender attraction as different than other temptations, than any other struggle that people face? First of all, do you think it's a fair assessment that some people have that feeling? What would you say to them?

51. ELDER OAKS: I think it is an accurate statement to say that some people consider feelings of same-gender attraction to be the defining fact of their existence. There are also people who consider the defining fact of their existence that they are from Texas or that they were in the United States Marines. Or they are red-headed, or they are the best basketball player that ever played for such-and-such a high school. People can adopt a characteristic as the defining example of their existence and often those characteristics are physical.

52. We have the agency to choose which characteristics will define us; those choices are not thrust upon us.

53. The ultimate defining fact for all of us is that we are children of Heavenly Parents, born on this earth for a purpose, and born with a divine destiny. Whenever any of those other notions, whatever they may be, gets in the way of that ultimate defining fact, then it is destructive and it leads us down the wrong path.

54. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Both of you have mentioned the issue of compassion and this feeling about needing to be compassionate. Let's fast-forward the scenario that we used earlier, and assume it's a couple of years later. My conversations with my son, all our efforts to

love our son and keep him in the Church have failed to address what he sees as the central issue — that he can't help his feelings. He's now told us that he's moving out of the home. He plans to live with a gay friend. He's adamant about it. What should be the proper response of a Latter-day Saint parent in that situation?

55. ELDER OAKS: It seems to me that a Latter-day Saint parent has a responsibility in love and gentleness to affirm the teaching of the Lord through His prophets that the course of action he is about to embark upon is sinful. While affirming our continued love for him, and affirming that the family continues to have its arms open to him, I think it would be well to review with him something like the following, which is a statement of the First Presidency in 1991: "The Lord's law of moral conduct is abstinence outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife, appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual conduct, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior is sinful. Those who persist in such practices or influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline."

56. My first responsibility as a father is to make sure that he understands that, and then to say to him, "My son, if you choose to deliberately engage in this kind of behavior, you're still my son. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to reach out and cleanse you if you are repentant and give up your sinful behavior, but I urge you not to embark on that path because repentance is not easy. You're embarking on a course of action that will weaken you in your ability to repent. It will cloud your perceptions of what is important in life. Finally, it may drag you down so far that you can't come back. Don't go that way. But if you choose to go that way, we will always try to help you and get you back on the path of growth."

57. ELDER WICKMAN: One way to read the Book of Mormon is as a book of encounters between fathers and sons. Some of those encounters were very positive and reinforcing on the part of the father of a son. Some were occasions where a father had to tell his son or his sons that the path that they were following was incorrect before the Lord. With all, it needs to be done in the spirit of love and welcoming that, as Elder Oaks mentioned, 'You're always my son.' There's an old maxim which is really true for every parent and that is, 'You haven't failed until you quit trying.' I think that means both in terms of taking

appropriate opportunities to teach one's children the right way, but at all times making sure they know that over all things you'll love them.

58. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: At what point does showing that love cross the line into inadvertently endorsing behavior? If the son says, 'Well, if you love me, can I bring my partner to our home to visit? Can we come for holidays?' How do you balance that against, for example, concern for other children in the home?'

59. ELDER OAKS: That's a decision that needs to be made individually by the person responsible, calling upon the Lord for inspiration. I can imagine that in most circumstances the parents would say, 'Please don't do that. Don't put us into that position.' Surely if there are children in the home who would be influenced by this example, the answer would likely be that. There would also be other factors that would make that the likely answer.

60. I can also imagine some circumstances in which it might be possible to say, 'Yes, come, but don't expect to stay overnight. Don't expect to be a lengthy house guest. Don't expect us to take you out and introduce you to our friends, or to deal with you in a public situation that would imply our approval of your "partnership."

61. There are so many different circumstances, it's impossible to give one answer that fits all.

62. ELDER WICKMAN: It's hard to imagine a more difficult circumstance for a parent to face than that one. It is a case by case determination. The only thing that I would add to what Elder Oaks has just said is that I think it's important as a parent to avoid a potential trap arising out of one's anguish over this situation.

63. I refer to a shift from defending the Lord's way to defending the errant child's lifestyle, both with him and with others. It really is true the Lord's way is to love the sinner while condemning the sin. That is to say we continue to open our homes and our hearts and our arms to our children, but that need not be with approval of their lifestyle. Neither does it mean we need to be constantly telling them that their lifestyle is inappropriate. An even bigger error is now to become defensive of the child, because that neither helps the child nor helps the parent. That course of action, which experience teaches, is almost certainly to lead both away from the Lord's way.

64. ELDER OAKS: The First Presidency made a wonderful statement on this subject in a letter in 1991. Speaking of individuals and families that were

struggling with this kind of problem, they said, “We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues.” Surely if we are counseled as a body of Church membership to reach out with love and understanding to those ‘struggling with these issues,’ that obligation rests with particular intensity on parents who have children struggling with these issues... even children who are engaged in sinful behavior associated with these issues.

65. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Is rejection of a child to some degree the natural reaction of some parents whenever their children fall short of expectations? Is it sometimes easier to ‘close the window’ on an issue than deal with it?

66. ELDER OAKS: We surely encourage parents not to blame themselves and we encourage Church members not to blame parents in this circumstance. We should remember that none of us is perfect and none of us has children whose behavior is entirely in accord with exactly what we would have them do in all circumstances.

67. We feel great compassion for parents whose love and protective instincts for their challenged children have moved them to some positions that are adversary to the Church. I hope the Lord will be merciful to parents whose love for their children has caused them to get into such traps.

68. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Let’s fast-forward again. My son has now stopped coming to church altogether. There seems no prospect of him returning. Now he tells me he’s planning on going to Canada where same-gender marriage is allowed. He insists that he agrees that loving marriage relationships are important. He’s not promiscuous; he has one relationship. He and his partner intend to have that relationship for the rest of their lives. He cannot understand that a lifetime commitment can’t be accepted by the Church when society seems to be moving in that way. Again, if I am a Latter-day Saint father, what would I be expected to tell him?

69. ELDER WICKMAN: For openers, marriage is neither a matter of politics, nor is it a matter of social policy. Marriage is defined by the Lord Himself. It’s the one institution that is ceremoniously performed by priesthood authority in the temple [and] transcends this world. It is of such profound importance... such a core doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of the very purpose of the creation of this earth. One hardly can get past the first page of Genesis without seeing that very clearly. It is not an institution to be tampered

with by mankind, and certainly not to be tampered with by those who are doing so simply for their own purposes. There is no such thing in the Lord’s eyes as something called same-gender marriage. Homosexual behavior is and will always remain before the Lord an abominable sin. Calling it something else by virtue of some political definition does not change that reality.

70. ELDER OAKS: Another way to say that same thing is that the Parliament in Canada and the Congress in Washington do not have the authority to revoke the commandments of God, or to modify or amend them in any way.

71. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: On some gay web sites there are those who argue that homosexual behavior is not specifically prohibited in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. Some argue that Jesus Christ’s compassion and love for humanity embraces this kind of relationship. What is the Church’s teaching about that?

72. ELDER WICKMAN: For one thing, those who assert that need to read their Bible more carefully. But beyond that, it is comparing apples and oranges to refer to the love that the Savior expressed for all mankind, for every person, for every man and woman and child, with the doctrine related to marriage.

73. In fact, the Savior did make a declaration about marriage, albeit in a somewhat different context. Jesus said that “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh. What God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

74. We usually think of that expression in the context of two people, a man and a woman, being married and the inappropriateness of someone trying to separate them. I think it may have a broader meaning in a doctrinal sense. Marriage of a man and a woman is clear in Biblical teaching in the Old Testament as well as in the New [Testament] teaching. Anyone who seeks to put that notion asunder is likewise running counter to what Jesus Himself said. It’s important to keep in mind the difference between Jesus’ love and His definition of doctrine, and the definition of doctrine that has come from apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus Christ, both anciently and in modern times.

75. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: What of those who might say, “Okay. Latter-day Saints are entitled to believe whatever they like. If you don’t believe in same-gender marriages, then it’s fine for you. But why try to regulate the behavior of other people who have

nothing to do with your faith, especially when some nations in Europe have legally sanctioned that kind of marriage? Why not just say, 'We don't agree with it doctrinally for our own people' and leave it at that. Why fight to get a Constitutional amendment [in the United States], for example?

76. ELDER WICKMAN: We're not trying to regulate people, but this notion that 'what happens in your house doesn't affect what happens in my house' on the subject of the institution of marriage may be the ultimate sophistry of those advocating same-gender marriage.

77. Some people promote the idea that there can be two marriages, co-existing side by side, one heterosexual and one homosexual, without any adverse consequences. The hard reality is that, as an institution, marriage like all other institutions can only have one definition without changing the very character of the institution. Hence there can be no coexistence of two marriages. Either there is marriage as it is now defined and as defined by the Lord, or there is what could thus be described as genderless marriage. The latter is abhorrent to God, who, as we've been discussing, Himself described what marriage is — between a man and a woman.

78. A redefinition of that institution, therefore, redefines it for everyone — not just those who are seeking to have a so-called same gender marriage. It also ignores the definition that the Lord Himself has given.

79. ELDER OAKS: There's another point that can be made on this. Let's not forget that for thousands of years the institution of marriage has been between a man and a woman. Until quite recently, in a limited number of countries, there has been no such thing as a marriage between persons of the same gender. Suddenly we are faced with the claim that thousands of years of human experience should be set aside because we should not discriminate in relation to the institution of marriage. When that claim is made, the burden of proving that this step will not undo the wisdom and stability of millennia of experience lies on those who would make the change. Yet the question is asked and the matter is put forward as if those who believe in marriage between a man and a woman have the burden of proving that it should not be extended to some other set of conditions.

80. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: There are those who would say that that might have applied better in the 1950s or earlier than in the 21st century. If you look at several nations in Europe, for example, traditional marriage is

so rapidly on the decline that it is no longer the norm. If marriage is evolving, ought we to resist those kind of social changes?

81. ELDER OAKS: That argument impresses me as something akin to the fact that if we agree that the patient is sick and getting sicker, we should therefore approve a coup de grace. The coup de grace which ends the patient's life altogether is quite equivalent to the drastic modification in the institution of marriage that would be brought on by same-gender marriage.

82. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: You talked about the harm that could come on society by redefining marriage. What would you say to those people who declare: "I know gay people who are in long-term committed relationships. They're great people. They love each other. What harm is it going to do my marriage as a heterosexual to allow them that same 'rite'?"

83. ELDER WICKMAN: Let me say again what I said a moment ago. I believe that that argument is true sophistry, because marriage is a unified institution. Marriage means a committed, legally sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman. That's what it means. That's what it means in the revelations. That's what it means in the secular law. You cannot have that marriage coexisting institutionally with something else called same-gender marriage. It simply is a definitional impossibility. At such point as you now, as an institution, begin to recognize a legally-sanctioned relationship, a committed relationship between two people of the same gender, you have now redefined the institution to being one of genderless marriage.

84. As we've mentioned in answer to other questions, [genderless marriage] is contrary to God's law, to revealed Word. Scripture, ancient and modern, could not be clearer on the definition that the Lord and His agents have given to marriage down through the dispensations.

85. But it has a profound effect in a very secular way on everybody else. What happens in somebody's house down the street does in very deed have an effect on what happens in my house and how it's treated. To suggest that in the face of these millennia of history and the revelations of God and the whole human pattern they have the right to redefine the whole institution for everyone is presumptuous in the extreme and terribly wrong-headed.

86. ELDER OAKS: Another point to be made about this is made in a question. If a couple who are cohabiting, happy, and committed to one another want

to have their relationship called a marriage, why do they want that? Considering what they say they have, why do they want to add to it the legal status of marriage that has been honored and experienced for thousands of years? What is it that is desired by those who advocate same-gender marriage? If that could be articulated on some basis other than discrimination, which is not a very good argument, it would be easier to answer the question that you have asked, and I think it would reveal the soundness of what we've already heard.

87. There are certain indicia of marriage — certain legal and social consequences and certain legitimacy — which if given to some relationship other than marriage between a man and a woman tend to degrade if not destroy the institution that's been honored over so many thousands of years.

88. In addition, if people want to legalize a particular relationship, we need to be careful if that kind of relationship has been disapproved for millennia. Suddenly there's a call to legalize it so they can feel better about themselves. That argument proves a little too much. Suppose a person is making a living in some illegal behavior, but feels uneasy about it. (He may be a professional thief or he may be selling a service that is illegal, or whatever it may be.) Do we go out and legalize his behavior because he's being discriminated against in his occupational choices or because he doesn't feel well about what he's doing and he wants a 'feel good' example, or he wants his behavior legitimized in the eyes of society or his family? I think the answer is that we do not legalize behavior for those reasons unless they are very persuasive reasons brought forward to make a change in the current situation.

89. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Would you extend the same argument against same-gender marriage to civil unions or some kind of benefits short of marriage?

90. ELDER WICKMAN: One way to think of marriage is as a bundle of rights associated with what it means for two people to be married. What the First Presidency has done is express its support of marriage and for that bundle of rights belonging to a man and a woman. The First Presidency hasn't expressed itself concerning any specific right. It really doesn't matter what you call it. If you have some legally sanctioned relationship with the bundle of legal rights traditionally belonging to marriage and governing authority has slapped a label on it, whether it is civil union or domestic partnership or whatever label it's given, it is nonetheless tantamount to marriage. That

is something to which our doctrine simply requires us to speak out and say, "That is not right. That's not appropriate."

91. As far as something less than that — as far as relationships that give to some pairs in our society some right but not all of those associated with marriage — as to that, as far as I know, the First Presidency hasn't expressed itself. There are numbers of different types of partnerships or pairings that may exist in society that aren't same-gender sexual relationships that provide for some right that we have no objection to. All that said... there may be on occasion some specific rights that we would be concerned about being granted to those in a same-gender relationship. Adoption is one that comes to mind, simply because that is a right which has been historically, doctrinally associated so closely with marriage and family. I cite the example of adoption simply because it has to do with the bearing and the rearing of children. Our teachings, even as expressed most recently in a very complete doctrinal sense in the Family Proclamation by living apostles and prophets, is that children deserve to be reared in a home with a father and a mother.

92. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: On the issue of a Constitutional amendment prohibiting same-gender marriage, there are some Latter-day Saints who are opposed to same-gender marriage, but who are not in favor of addressing this through a Constitutional amendment. Why did the Church feel that it had to step in that direction?

93. ELDER OAKS: Law has at least two roles: one is to define and regulate the limits of acceptable behavior. The other is to teach principles for individuals to make individual choices. The law declares unacceptable some things that are simply not enforceable, and there's no prosecutor who tries to enforce them. We refer to that as the teaching function of the law. The time has come in our society when I see great wisdom and purpose in a United States Constitutional amendment declaring that marriage is between a man and a woman. There is nothing in that proposed amendment that requires a criminal prosecution or that directs the attorneys general to go out and round people up, but it declares a principle and it also creates a defensive barrier against those who would alter that traditional definition of marriage.

94. There are people who oppose a federal Constitutional amendment because they think that the law of family should be made by the states. I can see a

legitimate argument there. I think it's mistaken, however, because the federal government, through the decisions of life-tenured federal judges, has already taken over that area. This Constitutional amendment is a defensive measure against those who would ignore the will of the states appropriately expressed and require, as a matter of federal law, the recognition of same-gender marriages — or the invalidation of state laws that require that marriage be between a man and a woman. In summary, the First Presidency has come out for an amendment (which may or may not be adopted) in support of the teaching function of the law. Such an amendment would be a very important expression of public policy, which would feed into or should feed into the decisions of judges across the length and breadth of the land.

95. ELDER WICKMAN: Let me just add to that, if I may. It's not the Church that has made the issue of marriage a matter of federal law. Those who are vigorously advocating for something called same-gender marriage have essentially put that potato on the fork. They're the ones who have created a situation whereby the law of the land, one way or the other, is going to address this issue of marriage. This is not a situation where the Church has elected to take the matter into the legal arena or into the political arena. It's already there.

96. The fact of the matter is that the best way to assure that a definition of marriage as it now stands continues is to put it into the foundational legal document of the United States. That is in the Constitution. That's where the battle has taken it. Ultimately that's where the battle is going to be decided. It's going to be decided as a matter of federal law one way or the other. Consequently it is not a battleground on such an issue that we Latter-day Saints have chosen, but it has been established and we have little choice but to express our views concerning it, which is really all that the Church has done.

97. Decisions even for members of the Church as to what they do with respect to this issue must of course rest with each one in their capacity as citizens.

98. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: The emphasis that has been placed in this conversation on traditional marriage between a man and a woman has been consistent throughout. Do you see any irony in the fact that the Church is so publicly outspoken on this issue, when in the minds of so many people in the United States and around the world the Church is known for once supporting a very untraditional marriage arrangement — that is, polygamy?

99. ELDER OAKS: I see irony in that if one views it without the belief that we affirm in [divine revelation](#). The 19th century Mormons, including some of my ancestors, were not eager to practice plural marriage. They followed the example of Brigham Young, who expressed his profound negative feelings when he first had this principle revealed to him. The Mormons of the 19th century who practiced plural marriage, male and female, did so because they felt it was a duty put upon them by God.

100. When that duty was lifted, they were directed to conform to the law of the land, which forbade polygamy and which had been held constitutional. When they were told to refrain from plural marriage, there were probably some who were unhappy, but I think the majority were greatly relieved and glad to get back into the mainstream of western civilization, which had been marriage between a man and a woman. In short, if you start with the assumption of continuing revelation, on which this Church is founded, then you can understand that there is no irony in this. But if you don't start with that assumption, you see a profound irony.

101. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: What about various types of support groups for those with same-gender affliction?

102. ELDER WICKMAN: I think we neither encourage nor discourage them, but much would depend on the nature of those groups. We certainly discourage people getting involved with any group or organization that foster living a homosexual lifestyle.

103. Ultimately, the wisest course for anybody who's afflicted with same-gender attraction is to strive to extend one's horizon beyond just one's sexual orientation, one's gender orientation, and to try to see the whole person. If I'm one that's afflicted with same-gender attraction, I should strive to see myself in a much broader context... seeing myself as a child of God with whatever my talents may be, whether intellect, or music, or athletics, or somebody that has a compassion to help people, to see myself in a larger setting and thus to see my life in that setting.

104. The more a person can look beyond gender orientation, the happier and more fulfilling life is likely to be. The worst possible thing for any of us — no matter what our temptations, no matter what our mortal inclinations may be — is to become fixated with them, to dwell on them. When we do that, not only do we deny the other things that comprise us, but experience teaches that there will be an increased likelihood that eventually we will simply succumb to the inclination.

105. ELDER OAKS: The principle that Elder Wickman has talked about, in a nutshell, is that if you are trying to live with and maintain ascendancy over same-gender attractions, the best way to do that is to have groups that define their members in terms other than same-gender attractions.

106. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: If you had to describe this enormously complex question in a couple of basic principles, what would that be?

107. ELDER OAKS: God loves all of His children. He has provided a plan for His children to enjoy the choicest blessings that He has to offer in eternity. Those choicest blessings are associated with marriage between a man and a woman by appropriate priesthood authority to bring together a family unit for creation and happiness in this life and in the life to come.

108. We urge persons with same-gender attractions to control those and to refrain from acting upon them, which is a sin, just as we urge persons with heterosexual attractions to refrain from acting upon them until they have the opportunity for a marriage recognized by God as well as by the law of the land. That is the way to happiness and eternal life. God has given us no commandment that He will not give us the strength and power to observe. That is the Plan of Salvation for His children, and it is our duty to proclaim that plan, to teach its truth, and to praise God for the mission of His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ's atonement that makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins and His resurrection that gives us the assurance of immortality and the life to come. It is that life to come that orients our views in mortality and reinforces our determination to live the laws of God so that we can qualify for His blessings in immortality.

109. PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Thank you.

Same-Sex Attraction

LDS.org

1. Addressing same-sex attraction

2. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints acknowledges that same-sex attraction is a sensitive issue which requires kindness, compassion, and understanding. The website [“Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction”](#) strives to address, through interviews and videos from Church leaders and members, the issue of same-sex attraction as it relates to individuals and affected family members. The statements and stories emphasize the

importance of Christ's commandment to love one another and reaffirm the Church's position.

3. The Church's doctrinal position is clear: Sexual activity should only occur between a man and a woman who are married. However, that should never be used as justification for unkindness. Jesus Christ, whom we follow, was clear in His condemnation of sexual immorality, but never cruel. His interest was always to lift the individual, never to tear down.¹

4. In short, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints affirms the centrality of doctrines relating to human sexuality and gender as well as the sanctity and significance of marriage as the union of a man and a woman.² However, the Church firmly believes that all people are equally beloved children of God and deserve to be treated with love and respect. Church apostle Elder Quentin L. Cook stated, “As a church, nobody should be more loving and compassionate. Let us be at the forefront in terms of expressing love, compassion and outreach. Let's not have families exclude or be disrespectful of those who choose a different lifestyle as a result of their feelings about their own gender.”³

5. The divine institution of marriage

6. The Church distinguishes between same-sex attraction and behavior. While maintaining that feelings and inclinations toward the same sex are not inherently sinful, engaging in homosexual behavior is in conflict with the “doctrinal principle, based on sacred scripture ... that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”⁴

7. Because the Church believes that the sacred powers of procreation are “to be exercised only between a man and a woman lawfully wedded as husband and wife ... any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, undermine the divinely created institution of the family.”

Accordingly, the Church favors measures that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

However, “protecting marriage between a man and a woman does not remove Church members' Christian obligations of love, kindness and humanity toward all people.”⁵

8. Individual rights

9. 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.”⁶ On the contrary, many Church leaders have spoken clearly about the love and respect with

which all people are to be treated. Former Church president Gordon B. Hinckley (1910-2008) told members who are attracted to the same sex: “Our hearts reach out to [you]. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and sisters.” President Boyd K. Packer affirmed, “We do not reject you. ... We cannot reject you. ... We will not reject you, because we love you.”

10. The Church has advocated for rights 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.”⁷ In Salt Lake City, for example, the Church supported ordinances aimed at protecting gay residents from discrimination in housing and employment. ⁸

11. Gospel of love

12. The gospel of Jesus Christ is based on love, respect and agency. Mormons believe that all humans have inherited strengths, weaknesses, challenges and blessings and are invited to live, through the help and grace of God, the principles revealed by Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

maintains that “God’s universal fatherhood and love charges each of us with an innate and reverent acknowledgment of our shared human dignity. We are to love one another. We are to treat each other with respect as brothers and sisters and fellow children of God, no matter how much we may differ from one another.”⁹

Notes

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-mormon-responds-to-human-rights-campaign-petition-same-sex-attraction>

Elder Christofferson, quoted on “Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction,” mormonsandgays.org

Elder Cook, quoted on “Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction,” mormonsandgays.org

“First Presidency Statement on Same-Gender Marriage.”

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/first-presidency-statement-on-same-gender-marriage>

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage>

Mormon Newsroom: “Church Responds to Same-Sex Marriage Votes,” <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-responds-to-same-sex-marriage-votes>

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-responds-to-same-sex-marriage-votes>

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage>

<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-mormon-responds-to-human-rights-campaign-petition-same-sex-attraction>

6. Eternal Covenants and Ordinances

Celestial Marriage

Elder Bruce R. McConkie

New Era, June 1978



1. So that we may all be united in our thinking and be in a position to build on the same foundation, having in mind the same eternal truths, I shall initially quote three or four brief passages from the revelations. I pray that we will be one in feeling and in attitude, where these great doctrinal principles are concerned, and will have riveted in our souls the determination to do all the things that must be done in this mortal probation to inherit the fulness of the glory of our Father’s kingdom.

2. I take for one text these words from section 42, the revelation entitled “The Law of the Church”: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.” (D&C 42:22.) And in the spirit of those words, I take from the Old Testament book of Ruth these expressions which, though not originally uttered with reference to marriage, contain a principle that is wholly applicable.

3. And Ruth said: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

4. “Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also [and now I will change it slightly] if [even] death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:16–17.)

5. Now a passage from section 49 in the Doctrine and Covenants summarizing the basic administrative announcement relative to marriage for our dispensation:

6. “Verily I say unto you, [saith the Lord,] that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

7. “Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation;

8. “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.)

9. When we as Latter-day Saints talk about marriage, we are talking about a holy, celestial order. We are talking about a system out of which can grow the greatest love, joy, peace, happiness, and serenity known to humankind. We are talking about creating a family unit that has the potential of being everlasting and eternal, a family unit where a man and a wife can go on in that relationship to all eternity, and where mother and daughter and father and son are bound by eternal ties that will never be severed. We are talking about creating a unit more important than the Church, more important than any organization that exists on earth or in heaven, a unit out of which exaltation and eternal life grow; and when we talk about eternal life, we are talking about the kind of life that God our Heavenly Father lives.

10. In this final, glorious, gospel dispensation we have received the most basic truth of all eternity, and that truth concerns the nature and kind of being that God is. It is eternal life to know the Father and the Son. (See John 17:3.) There is no possible way to go degree by degree, step by step to the high exaltation we seek unless and until we come to a knowledge of the nature and kind of being that God is. Thus, when we talk about eternal life, we are talking about the kind of life that God our Father lives; and when we speak of him, we are speaking of a holy, perfected, exalted, ennobled man—an individual, a personage, a being with “a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.” (D&C 130:22.) We are talking about someone who is a literal parent, who is the Father of the spirits of all men. You and I were born as members of his family. We have seen his face; we have heard his voice; we have received his counsel, personally, as well as through representatives and agents; we knew him in the pre-existence. Now a curtain has been dropped and we do not have the remembrance that we had then, but we are seeking to do the things that will enable us to be like him.

11. After he had begotten us as his spirit children, he gave us our agency, which is the power and ability to choose; he also gave us laws and allowed us to obey or disobey, in consequence of which we can and did develop talents, abilities, aptitudes, and characteristics of diverse sorts. He ordained and established a plan of salvation. It was named the gospel of God, meaning God our Heavenly Father, and it consisted of all of the laws, powers, and rights, all of the experiences, all of the gifts and graces needed to take us, his spirit sons and daughters, from our then-spirit state of low intelligence to the high, exalted state where we would be like him.

12. The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us that God himself, finding that he was in the midst of spirits and glory, ordained laws whereby they might advance and progress and become like him. Those laws included the creation of this earth; they included the receipt of a mortal body where we could be tried and tested in a probationary state and receive experiences impossible to gain in any other way; they included the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, to do good or to do evil, the opportunity to grow and advance in the things of the spirit; and they included the opportunity to enter into a marriage relationship that has the potential of being eternal. We started out on this course in the premortal life. Now we are down here taking the final examination for all the life that we lived back then, which also is the entrance examination for the realms and kingdoms that are ahead.

13. The name of the kind of life that God our Father lives is eternal life, and eternal life consists of two things: the continuation of the family unit in eternity, and an inheritance of what the scriptures denominate the fulness of the Father or the fulness of the glory of the Father (see D&C 76:56), meaning the might, power, dominion, and exaltation that he himself possesses. In our finite circumstances we have no ability or power to comprehend the might and omnipotence of the Father. We can look at the stars in the heavens, we can view the Milky Way, we can see all the worlds and orbs that have been created in their spheres, we can examine all the life on this planet with which we are familiar, and by doing this we can begin to get a concept of the glorious, infinite, unlimited intelligence by which all these things are—and all these things taken together and more dramatize the fulness of the glory of the Father.

14. We are seeking eternal life—that is to say, we have been offered the privilege to go forward in advancement, as the children of God, until we become like our eternal Parent; and if we so attain, it is required, it is requisite, it is mandatory for us to build on the foundation of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It is required of us that we keep the commandments and sow the seeds of righteousness in order to reap the harvest of glory and honor. If we do all the things that the gospel requires of us, we can make that kind of advancement. The gospel, which is the plan of salvation, is now named the gospel of Jesus Christ to honor him who worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice and put into operation all the terms and conditions of the Father’s plan.

15. God our Father is the Creator of all things, and we glorify his holy name and sing praises to him because he created us and, in the ultimate sense, the universe, the earth, and all things on all the orbs in all the sidereal heavens. God our Father is the ultimate and perfect Creator. Jesus Christ, his Son, is the Redeemer. He came to ransom us from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the fall of Adam. The ransom from temporal death gives each of us immortality: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Cor. 15:22.) And every living soul will rise in the resurrection with immortality and, having so arisen, will be judged according to his works and will be assigned a place in the kingdoms that are prepared. Some will be raised in immortality and then unto eternal life, and eternal life is the name of the kind of life that God lives.

16. We cannot shout praises to the name of the Lord Jehovah, who is the Lord Jesus, to the extent that we should in order to honor him properly for all that he has done for us and for the possibilities that lie ahead because he took upon himself our sins on conditions of repentance. The work of God the Father was creation, and the work of Christ the Son was redemption. We are men, and our work—building on the foundation that God our Father laid and that Christ his Son has established—is to do the part assigned to us in order to inherit the glory and honor and dignity of which I speak. In general terms, that means that we are to accept and believe the law. We are to believe in Christ and live his law, be upright and clean, have our sins washed away in the waters of baptism, become new creatures by the power of the Holy Ghost, and walk in paths of truth and righteousness.

17. As long as we speak in this vein, all that we say is said in generalities; it is a foundation for a specific and particular thing toward which we point: eternal marriage. Everything that we do in the Church is connected and associated with and tied into the eternal order of matrimony that God has ordained. Everything that we do from the time that we become accountable, through all our experiences, and all the counsel and direction we receive, up to the time of marriage, is designed and intended to prepare us to enter into a probationary marriage arrangement, one that does in fact become eternal if we abide in the covenant made in connection with that order of matrimony. Then everything that we do for the remainder of our lives, whatsoever it may be, ties back into the celestial order of matrimony into which we have entered and is designed and intended to encourage us to keep the

covenant made in holy places. That is the general concept, briefly stated, under which we are operating.

18. Let me now read from the revelation on marriage the general concept governing marriage and everything else. I read from the Doctrine and Covenants.

19. “All who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.” (D&C 132:5.)

20. That is the basic, governing, overriding principle that rules all of the acts of men in all ages. No one ever gets anything for nothing. We have received as a free gift the fact of resurrection, but in a sense, even that is not free in that we lived meritoriously and uprightly in the pre-existence and earned the right to undergo this mortal probation and the resurrection that follows it. In the broadest and most eternal perspective that there is, no one ever gets anything for nothing; and so we live the law and we get the blessing. And having said that, then the Lord says:

21. “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.” (D&C 132:6.)

22. “The new and everlasting covenant” is the fulness of the gospel, and the gospel is the covenant of salvation that the Lord makes with men. It is new because it has been revealed anew in our day; it is everlasting because it has always been had by faithful people, not only on this earth but on all the earths inhabited by the children of our Father. This next verse, number 7, is a one-sentence summary of the whole law of the whole gospel. Of necessity it is written in legal language because it outlines the terms and conditions that are involved; and of course it is the Lord speaking:

23. “And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these [this recites the conditions of the law that govern in the whole field of revealed religion, but we will make specific application of it to our central responsibility, which is marriage]: 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, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have

appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.” (D&C 132:7.)

24. Now what is involved? We have power, as mortals, to make between ourselves any arrangements that we choose to make and that are legal in the society where we live, and they will bind us as long as we agree to be bound, even until death takes us. But we do not have power, as mortals, to bind ourselves after death. Neither you nor I can enter a contract to buy or sell or go or come or paint or perform or do any act in the sphere that is ahead. God has given us our agency here and now as pertaining to mortality.

25. We are mortal; this is a temporal sphere, a time-bound sphere. And if we are going to do anything here and now that bridges the gulf of death, anything that endures in the spirit world, anything that remains with us in the resurrection, we have to do it by a power that is beyond the power of man—it has to be the power of God. Man is mortal and his acts are limited to mortality; God is eternal, and his acts have no end.

26. The Lord conferred upon Peter the keys of the kingdom of God so that he had power to bind on earth and seal everlastingly in the heavens, and then he spread that out to James and John and then to all of the Twelve anciently so that they all had the same power, and then in our day he has restored again what was had anciently. He has called apostles and prophets and given them the keys of the kingdom of God, and they have power once again to bind on earth and have it sealed everlastingly in the heavens. He sent Elijah to bring the sealing power; he sent Elias to confer upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the gospel of Abraham and to give the promise that in them and in their seed all generations after should be blessed.

27. Elijah came and Elias came, acting in the power and authority of the Almighty, and gave once again their keys, powers, prerogatives, and rights to mortal men on earth—praise God for this glorious thing! Once again on earth there are people who can bind on earth and have it sealed everlastingly in the heavens. We have the power to perform a marriage, and we can do it so that the man and the woman become husband and wife here and now and—if they keep the

covenant there and then made—they will remain husband and wife in the spirit world and will come up in glory and dominion, with kingdoms and exaltation in the resurrection, being husband and wife and having eternal life. And it operates thus because in this church, and in this church only, the Lord Almighty has given the sealing power. That is our potential; that is within our possible realm of achievement.

28. In this one-sentence summary, as I express it, of the whole law of the whole gospel, we read three requisites. If, for instance, a person is going to have a baptism that lasts eternally, he must first find the right baptism; second, find a legal administrator to perform the ordinance for him; and third, have that ordinance sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit, in which event the baptism will admit the repentant person to a celestial heaven in the realms ahead. This matter of being sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise applies to every ordinance and every covenant and all things that there are in the Church. Do not talk about marriage and the Holy Spirit of promise unless and until you understand first the concept and the principle and its universal application.

29. One of our revelations speaks of “the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true” (D&C 76:53), meaning that every person who walks uprightly, does the best that he can, overcomes the world, rises above carnality, and walks in paths of righteousness will have his acts and his deeds sealed and approved by the Holy Spirit. He will be, as Paul would have expressed it, “justified ... by the Spirit.” (See 1 Cor. 6:11.) Therefore, if a man is going to be married and wants a marriage that lasts for a week, or three weeks, or three months, or as long as Hollywood prescribes, or even “until death us do part,” he can be married by the power of man within the parameters and the limits that are set; he has that prerogative by the agency that the Lord has given him. But if he wants a wife to be his in the realms ahead, he had better find someone who has power to bind on earth and seal in heaven.

30. In order to get a proper marriage one must do this: first, search for and seek out celestial marriage—find the right ordinance; second, look for a legal administrator, someone who holds the sealing power—and that power is exercised only in the temples that the Lord has had built by the tithing and sacrifice of his people in our day; and third, so live in righteousness, uprightness, integrity, virtue, and morality that he is entitled to have the Holy Spirit of God ratify and seal and justify and approve, and in

that event his marriage is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise and is binding in time and in eternity.

31. So we Latter-day Saints struggle and labor and work to be worthy to get a recommend to go to the temple, for the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. We struggle and labor to get our tabernacles clean, to be pure and refined and cultured, to have the Spirit as our companion; and when we get in that state, our bishop and our stake president give us a “recommend” to go to the temple. We go there and make solemn and sober covenants, and having so done we then labor and struggle and work with all our power to continue in the light of the Spirit so that the agreement we have made will not be broken. If we do that, we have the assurance of eternal life. We do not need to tremble and fear; we do not need to have anxiety or worry if we are laboring and working and struggling to the best of our abilities. Though we do not become perfect, though we do not overcome all things, if our hearts are right and we are charting a course to eternal life in the manner I indicate, our marriages will continue in the realms that are ahead. We shall get into the paradise of God, and we shall be husband and wife. We shall come up in the resurrection, and we shall be husband and wife.

32. Anyone who comes up in the resurrection in the marriage state has the absolute guarantee of eternal life, but he will not then be a possessor and inheritor of all things—there is a great deal of progress and advancement to be made after the grave and after the resurrection. But he will be in the course where he will go on in the schooling and preparing processes until eventually he knows all things and becomes like God our Heavenly Father, meaning that he becomes an inheritor of eternal life.

33. In a manner of speaking we have, here and now, probationary families, even though we have been married in the temple, because our marriage in the temple is conditional. It is conditioned upon our subsequent compliance with the laws, the terms, the conditions of the covenant that we then make. And so when I get married in the temple, I am put in a position where I can strive and labor and learn to love my wife with the perfection that must exist if I am going to have a fulness of the glory that attends this covenant in eternity, and it puts her in a position to learn to love me in the same way. It puts both of us in a position to bring up our children in light and truth and to school and prepare them to be members of an eternal family unit, and it puts us as children of our parents in a position where we honor our parents and do what is necessary to have these eternal ties go from

one generation to the next and the next. Eventually there will be a great patriarchal chain of exalted beings from Adam to the last man, with any links left out being individuals who are not qualified and worthy to inherit, possess, and receive along the indicated line.

34. I am talking now to people who have opportunity to live the law. Anyone who has the opportunity is required to do so; it is mandatory. I am perfectly well aware that there are people who did not have the opportunity but who would have lived the law had the opportunity been afforded, and those individuals will be judged in the providences and mercy of a gracious God according to the intents and desires of their hearts. That is the principle of salvation and exaltation for the dead.

35. I have talked only in general terms; I have deliberately not been specific. I have designed to set forth true principles, as the Prophet indicated in his statement, “I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves.” I have desired and designed to set forth the general concept that is involved with the hope that, having the concept before us, each of us will then determine for ourselves the courses that we have to pursue as individuals to obtain the indicated rewards.

36. I think that the noblest concept that can enter the heart of man is the fact that the family unit continues in eternity. I do not think that one can conceive of a more glorious concept than that—building, of course, on the foundation of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Celestial marriage is the thing that opens the door to eternal life in our Father’s kingdom. If we can pass the probationary experiences that prevail and exist in the family unit, then the Lord will say to us at some future day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” (Matt. 25:21.)

37. The things we are talking about here are true. That is the glory and the wonder and the beauty of everything connected with this system of revealed religion that we have—it is true. There is no more glorious fact connected with our whole system of revealed religion than the simple fact that it is true, and because it is true, the doctrines that we teach are true; and because these doctrines are true, they will give us peace and joy and happiness in this life. They will enable us to cast off the drudgery, sludge, evil, and iniquities of the world; they will empower us to put on Christ and the glory and beauty of pure religion and to become new creatures of the Holy Ghost. It is a

wondrous thing beyond belief to belong to a system that is true, that is founded on the rock foundation of eternal truth.

38. I hope, as I bear testimony to you of the truth and divinity of this work, that my words simply echo the thoughts that are in your hearts. I know just as well as I know anything in this world that God has spoken in our day, that Jesus is the Lord, that he has worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice, that the Lord has set up his kingdom for the last time among men, that Spencer W. Kimball at this moment is the prophet and revelator and mouthpiece of the Almighty on earth, and that this Church, weak and struggling and humble as it is now, is going to advance and grow and progress until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Our destiny is to fill the earth because we are founded on the rock foundation of eternal truth.

Covenant Marriage

Bruce C. Hafen

Ensign, November 1996



1. Three summers ago, I watched a new bride and groom, Tracy and Tom, emerge from a sacred temple. They laughed and held hands as [family](#) and friends gathered to take pictures. I saw happiness and promise in their faces as

they greeted their reception guests, who celebrated publicly the creation of a new family. I wondered that night how long it would be until these two faced the opposition that tests every marriage. Only then would they discover whether their marriage was based on a contract or a covenant.

2. Another bride sighed blissfully on her wedding day, “Mom, I’m at the end of all my troubles!” “Yes,” replied her mother, “but at which end?” When troubles come, the parties to a contractual marriage seek happiness by walking away. They marry to obtain benefits and will stay only as long as they’re receiving what they bargained for. But when troubles come to a covenant marriage, the husband and wife work them through. They marry to give and to grow, bound by covenants to each other, to the community, and to God. Contract companions each give 50 percent; covenant companions each give 100 percent. [1](#)

3. Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will. Jesus taught about contractual attitudes when he described the “hireling,” who performs his conditional promise of care only

when he receives something in return. When the hireling “seeth the wolf coming,” he “leaveth the sheep, and fleeth ... because he ... careth not for the sheep.” By contrast, the Savior said, “I am the good shepherd, ... and I lay down my life for the sheep.” [2](#) Many people today marry as hirelings. And when the wolf comes, they flee. This idea is wrong. It curses the earth, turning parents’ hearts away from their children and from each other. [3](#)

4. Before their marriage, Tom and Tracy received an eternal perspective on covenants and wolves. They learned through the story of Adam and Eve about life’s purpose and how to return to God’s presence through obedience and the Atonement. Christ’s life is the story of giving the Atonement. The life of Adam and Eve is the story of receiving the Atonement, which empowered them to overcome their separation from God and all opposition until they were eternally “at one,” with the Lord, and with each other.

5. Without the Fall, Lehi taught, Adam and Eve would never have known opposition. 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.” [4](#) Astute parents will see a little connection here—no children, no misery! But left in the garden, they could never know joy. So the Lord taught them they would live and bear children in sorrow, sweat, and thorns.

6. Still, the ground was cursed for their sake: [5](#) their path of affliction also led to the joy of both redemption and comprehension. [6](#) That is why the husband and wife in a covenant marriage sustain and lift each other when the wolf comes. If Tom and Tracy had understood all this, perhaps they would have walked more slowly from the gardenlike temple grounds, like Adam and Eve, arm in arm, into a harsh and lonely world.

7. And yet—marrying and raising children can yield the most valuable religious experiences of their lives. Covenant marriage requires a total leap of faith: they must keep their covenants without knowing what risks that may require of them. They must surrender unconditionally, obeying God and sacrificing for each other. Then they will discover what Alma called “incomprehensible joy.” [7](#)

8. Of course, some have no opportunity to marry. And some divorces are unavoidable. But the Lord will ultimately compensate those faithful ones who are denied mortal fulfillment.

9. Every marriage is tested repeatedly by three kinds of wolves. The first wolf is natural adversity. After asking God for years to give them a first child, David and Fran had a baby with a serious heart defect. Following a three-week struggle, they buried their newborn son. Like Adam and Eve before them, they mourned together, brokenhearted, in faith before the Lord. [8](#)

10. Second, the wolf of their own imperfections will test them. One woman told me through her tears how her husband's constant criticism finally destroyed not only their marriage but her entire sense of self-worth. He first complained about her cooking and housecleaning, and then about how she used her time, how she talked, looked, and reasoned. Eventually she felt utterly inept and dysfunctional. My heart ached for her, and for him.

11. Contrast her with a young woman who had little self-confidence when she first married. Then her husband found so much to praise in her that she gradually began to believe she was a good person and that her opinions mattered. His belief in her rekindled her innate self-worth.

12. The third wolf is the excessive individualism that has spawned today's contractual attitudes. A seven-year-old girl came home from school crying, "Mom, don't I belong to you? Our teacher said today that nobody belongs to anybody—children don't belong to parents, husbands don't belong to wives. I am yours, aren't I, Mom?" Her mother held her close and whispered, "Of course you're mine—and I'm yours, too." Surely marriage partners must respect one another's individual identity, and family members are neither slaves nor inanimate objects. But this teacher's fear, shared today by many, is that the bonds of kinship and marriage are not valuable ties that bind, but are, instead, sheer bondage. Ours is the age of the waning of belonging.

13. The adversary has long cultivated this overemphasis on personal autonomy, and now he feverishly exploits it. Our deepest God-given instinct is to run to the arms of those who need us and sustain us. But he drives us away from each other today with wedges of distrust and suspicion. He exaggerates the need for having space, getting out, and being left alone. Some people believe him—and then they wonder why they feel left alone. And despite admirable exceptions, children in America's growing number of single-parent families are clearly more at risk than children in two-parent families.[9](#) Further, the rates of divorce and births outside marriage are now

so high that we may be witnessing "the collapse of marriage." [10](#)

14. Many people even wonder these days what marriage is. Should we prohibit same-sex marriage? Should we make divorce more difficult to obtain? Some say these questions are not society's business, because marriage is a private contract. But as the modern prophets recently proclaimed, "marriage ... is ordained of God."[11](#) Even secular marriage was historically a three-party covenant among a man, a woman, and the state. Society has a huge interest in the outcome and the offspring of every marriage. So the public nature of marriage distinguishes it from all other relationships. Guests come to weddings because, as Wendell Berry said, sweethearts "say their vows to the community as much as to one another," giving themselves not only to each other, but also to the common good "as no contract could ever join them." [12](#)

15. When we observe the covenants we make at the altar of sacrifice, we discover hidden reservoirs of strength. I once said in exasperation to my wife, Marie, "The Lord placed Adam and Eve on the earth as full-grown people. Why couldn't he have done that with this boy of ours, the one with the freckles and the unruly hair?" She replied, "The Lord gave us that child to make Christians out of us."

16. One night Marie exhausted herself for hours encouraging that child to finish a school assignment to build his own diorama of a Native American village on a cookie sheet. It was a test no hireling would have endured. At first he fought her efforts, but by bedtime, I saw him lay "his" diorama proudly on a counter. He started for his bed, then turned around, raced back across the room, and hugged his mother, grinning with his fourth-grade teeth. Later I asked Marie in complete awe, "How did you do it?" She said, "I just made up my mind that I couldn't leave him, no matter what." Then she added, "I didn't know I had it in me." She discovered deep, internal wellsprings of compassion because the bonds of her covenants gave her strength to lay down her life for her sheep, even an hour at a time.

17. Now I return to Tom and Tracy, who this year discovered wellsprings of their own. Their second baby threatened to come too early to live. They might have made a hireling's convenient choice and gone on with their lives, letting a miscarriage occur. But because they tried to observe their covenants by sacrifice, [13](#) active, energetic Tracy lay almost motionless at home for five weeks, then in a hospital

bed for another five. Tom was with her virtually every hour when he was not working or sleeping. They prayed their child to earth. Then the baby required 11 more weeks in the hospital. But she is here, and she is theirs.

18. One night as Tracy waited patiently upon the Lord in the hospital, she sensed that perhaps her willingness to sacrifice herself for her baby was in some small way like the Good Shepherd's sacrifice for her. She said, "I had expected that trying to give so much would be really difficult, but somehow this felt more like a privilege." As many other parents in Zion have done, she and Tom gave their hearts to God by giving them to their child. In the process, they learned that theirs is a covenant marriage, one that binds them to each other and to the Lord.

19. May we restore the concept of marriage as a covenant, even the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.¹⁴ And when the wolf comes, may we be as shepherds, not hirelings, willing to lay down our lives, a day at a time, for the sheep of our covenant. Then, like Adam and Eve, we will have joy. ¹⁵ In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

1. See Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen, *The Belonging Heart* (1994), 255–65; Pitirim Sorokin, *Society, Culture and Personality*, 2nd ed. (1962), 99–107.
2. [John 10:12–15](#).
3. See [D&C 2](#).
4. [2 Ne. 2:23](#).
5. See [Moses 4:23](#).
6. See [Moses 5:11](#).
7. [Alma 28:8](#).
8. See [Moses 5:27](#).
9. See Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly*, Apr. 1993, 47.
10. Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage* (1996), 4–5.
11. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
12. See Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (1993), 137–39; emphasis added.
13. See [D&C 97:8](#).
14. See [D&C 131:2](#).
15. See [2 Ne. 2:25](#).

Enriching Your Marriage

President James E. Faust

Ensign, April 2007



1. Many years ago when I was practicing law, I was consulted by a woman who wanted a divorce from her husband on grounds that, in my opinion, seemed justified. After the divorce was concluded, I did not see her again for many years. In a chance meeting with

her on the street, I noticed that the years of loneliness and discouragement were evident in her once-beautiful face.

2. After we passed a few pleasantries, she was quick to say that life had not been rich and rewarding for her and that she was tired of facing the struggle alone. Then she startled me by disclosing, "Bad as it was, if I had to do it over again and had known then what I do now, I would not have sought the divorce. This is worse."

3. Statistically, it is difficult to avoid divorce. Experts project that about half of the women in the United States will have a marriage dissolve sometime in their lives. Divorce is also increasing in many other countries. Unless the present rate of ever-increasing divorces diminishes, even more marriages will come to a tragic end.

4. Divorce can be justified only in the rarest of circumstances. In my opinion, "just cause" for divorce should be nothing less serious than a prolonged and apparently irredeemable relationship that destroys a person's dignity as a human being. Divorce often tears people's lives apart and shears [family](#) happiness. Frequently in a divorce the parties lose much more than they gain.

5. The traumatic experience one goes through in divorce seems little understood and is perhaps not well enough appreciated. Certainly, much more sympathy and understanding need to be extended to those who have experienced this great tragedy and whose lives cannot be reversed. Yet for those who are divorced, there is still much to be hoped for and expected in terms of fulfillment and happiness in life, particularly in the forgetting of self and in the rendering of service to others.

6. Difficult Questions

7. Why is happiness in marriage so fragile and fleeting for so many yet so abundant for others? Why does the resulting train of heartache and suffering have to be so long and have so many innocent people on board?

8. What are the missing enriching ingredients in so many marriages that began with such happiness and so many high hopes?

9. I have long pondered these difficult questions. Having spent almost a lifetime dealing with human experiences, I am somewhat familiar with the problems of unhappy marriages, of divorce, and of heartbroken families. I can also speak of great happiness because, thanks to my beloved Ruth, I have

found in marriage the richest fulfillment of human existence.

10. Reasons for Divorce

11. There are no simple, easy answers to the challenging and complex questions of happiness in marriage. Among the many supposed reasons for divorce are the serious problems of selfishness, immaturity, lack of commitment, inadequate communication, and unfaithfulness.

12. In my experience there is another reason for failure of marriage that seems not so obvious but that precedes and laces through all of the others. It is the lack of a constant enrichment in marriage, an absence of that something extra which makes it precious, special, and wonderful, and without which it becomes drudgery or difficult or even dull.

13. Enriching a Marriage

14. You might wonder, "How can a marriage be constantly enriched?" We build our marriages with endless friendship, confidence, and integrity and also by ministering to and sustaining each other in our difficulties. Adam, speaking of Eve, said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" ([Genesis 2:23](#)). There are a few simple, relevant questions that each person, whether married or contemplating marriage, should honestly ask in an effort to become "one flesh." They are:

15. First, am I able to think of the interest of my marriage and spouse first before I think of my own desires?

16. Second, how deep is my commitment to my companion, aside from any other interests?

17. Third, is he or she my best friend?

18. Fourth, do I have respect for the dignity of my spouse as a person of worth and value?

19. Fifth, do we quarrel over money? Money itself seems neither to make a couple happy, nor the lack of it, necessarily, to make them unhappy. A quarrel over money is often a symbol of selfishness.

20. Sixth, is there a spiritually sanctifying bond between us?

21. Building Bridges of Enrichment

22. Several key practices can contribute to enriching a marriage.

23. Prayer. Marriage relationships can be enriched by better communication. One important way is to pray together. This will resolve many of the

differences, if there are any, between the couple before going to sleep. I do not mean to overemphasize differences, but they are real and do make things interesting. I believe our differences are the little pinches of salt that can make the marriage seem more flavorful.

24. We communicate in a thousand ways, such as a smile, a brush of the hair, a gentle touch. We should remember each day to say, "I love you." The husband should say to his wife, "You're beautiful." Some other important words for both husband and wife to say, when appropriate, are, "I'm sorry." Listening is also an excellent form of communication.

25. Trust. Complete trust in each other is one of the greatest enriching factors in marriage. Nothing devastates the core of mutual trust necessary to maintain a fulfilling relationship like infidelity. There is never any justification for adultery. Despite this destructive experience, occasionally marriages are saved and families preserved. To do so requires the aggrieved party to be capable of giving unreserved love great enough to forgive and forget. It requires the errant party to want desperately to repent and actually forsake evil.

26. Our loyalty to our eternal companion should not be merely physical, but mental and spiritual as well. Since there are no harmless flirtations and there is no place for jealousy after marriage, it is best to avoid the very appearance of evil by shunning any questionable contact with another to whom we are not married.

27. Virtue. Virtue is the strong glue that holds it all together. Said the Lord, "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else" ([D&C 42:22](#)).

28. Divine presence. Of all that can bless marriages, there is one special enriching ingredient that above all else will help join a man and a woman together in a very real, sacred, spiritual sense. It is the presence of the divine in marriage. Shakespeare, speaking through Queen Isabel in King Henry the Fifth, said, "God, the best maker of all marriages, / Combine your hearts in one" (act 5, scene 2, lines 67–68). God is also the best keeper of marriages.

29. There are many things that go into enriching a marriage, but some of them seem to be of the husk of the relationship. Having the companionship and enjoying the fruits of a holy and divine presence become the kernel of great happiness in marriage. Spiritual oneness is the anchor. Slow leaks in the

sanctifying dimension of marriage often cause marriages to become flat tires.

30. I believe that divorces are increasing because in many cases the union lacks that sanctifying



benediction that flows from keeping the commandments of God. Marriages can die from a lack of spiritual nourishment.

31. [Tithing](#). I learned in serving almost 20 years as bishop and as stake president that an excellent insurance against divorce is the payment of tithing. Payment of tithing seems to facilitate keeping the spiritual battery charged in order to make it through the times when the spiritual generator has been idle or is not working.

32. There is no great or majestic music that constantly produces the harmony of a great love. The most perfect music is a welding of two voices into one spiritual song. Marriage is the way provided by God for the fulfillment of the greatest of human needs, based upon mutual respect, maturity, selflessness, decency, commitment, and honesty. Happiness in marriage and parenthood can exceed a thousand times any other happiness.

33. Parenthood. The soul of the marriage is greatly enriched and the spiritual growing process is greatly strengthened when a couple become parents. For couples who can have children, parenthood should bring the greatest of all happiness. Men grow because as fathers they must take care of their families. Women blossom because as mothers they must forget themselves. We understand best the full meaning of love when we become parents. However, if children do not come, couples who are nevertheless prepared to receive them with love will be honored and blessed by the Lord for their faithfulness. Our homes should be among the most hallowed of all earthly sanctuaries.

34. In the enriching of marriage, the big things are the little things. There must be constant appreciation for each other and thoughtful demonstration of [gratitude](#). A couple must encourage and help each other grow. Marriage is a joint quest for the good, the beautiful, and the divine.

35. The Savior has said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” ([Revelation 3:20](#)).

36. May the presence of God be found enriching and blessing all marriages and homes, especially those of His Saints, as part of His eternal plan.

The Power of Covenants

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Ensign, May 2009

1. May I extend a warm and sincere welcome to Elder Neil L. Andersen to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He is a worthy and welcome addition.

2. On August 15, 2007, Peru suffered a massive earthquake that all but destroyed the coastal cities of Pisco and Chincha. Like many other Church leaders and members, Wenceslao Conde, the president of the Balconcito Branch of the Church in Chincha, immediately set about helping others whose homes were damaged.

3. Four days after the earthquake, Elder Marcus B. Nash of the Seventy was in Chincha helping to coordinate the Church’s relief efforts there and met President Conde. As they talked about the destruction that had occurred and what was being done to help the victims, President Conde’s wife, Pamela, approached carrying one of her small children. Elder Nash asked Sister Conde how her children were. With a smile, she replied that through the goodness of God they were all safe and well. He asked about the Condes’ home.

4. “It’s gone,” she said simply.

5. “What about your belongings?” he inquired.

6. “Everything was buried in the rubble of our home,” Sister Conde replied.

7. “And yet,” Elder Nash noted, “you are smiling as we talk.”

8. “Yes,” she said, “I have prayed and I am at peace. We have all we need. We have each other, we have our children, we are sealed in the temple, we have this marvelous Church, and we have the Lord. We can build again with the Lord’s help.”

9. This tender demonstration of faith and spiritual strength is repeated in the lives of Saints across the world in many different settings. It is a simple illustration of a profound power that is much needed in our day and that will become increasingly crucial in days ahead. We need strong Christians who can persevere against hardship, who can sustain hope through tragedy, who can lift others by their example and their compassion, and who can consistently overcome temptations. We need strong Christians who can make important things happen by their faith and who can defend the truth of [Jesus Christ](#) against moral relativism and militant atheism.

10. What is the source of such moral and spiritual power, and how do we obtain it? The source is God. Our access to that power is through our covenants with Him. A covenant is an agreement between God and man, an accord whose terms are set by God (see [Bible Dictionary](#), “Covenant,” 651). In these divine agreements, God binds Himself to sustain, sanctify, and exalt us in return for our commitment to serve Him and keep His commandments.

11. We enter into covenants by priesthood ordinances, sacred rituals that God has ordained for us to manifest our commitment. Our foundational covenant, for example, the one in which we first pledge our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ, is confirmed by the ordinance of [baptism](#). It is done individually, by name. By this ordinance, we become part of the covenant people of the Lord and heirs of the celestial kingdom of God.

12. Other sacred ordinances are performed in temples built for that very purpose. If we are faithful to the covenants made there, we become inheritors not only of the celestial kingdom but of exaltation, the highest glory within the heavenly kingdom, and we obtain all the divine possibilities God can give (see [D&C 132:20](#)).

13. The scriptures speak of the new and everlasting covenant. The new and everlasting covenant is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, the doctrines and commandments of the gospel constitute the substance of an everlasting covenant between God and man that is newly restored in each dispensation. If we were to state the new and everlasting covenant in one sentence it would be this: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” ([John 3:16](#)).

14. Jesus explained what it means to believe in Him: “Now this is the commandment [or in other words, this is the covenant]: 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 Nephi 27:20](#)).

15. What is it about making and keeping covenants with God that gives us the power to smile through hardships, to convert tribulation into triumph, to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, ... and bring to pass much righteousness” ([D&C 58:27](#))?

16. Strengthened by Gifts and Blessings

17. First, as we walk in obedience to the principles and commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we enjoy a continual flow of blessings promised by God in His covenant with us. Those blessings provide the resources we need to act rather than simply be acted upon as we go through life. [1](#) For example, the Lord’s commandments in the [Word of Wisdom](#) regarding the care of our physical bodies bless us first and foremost with “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” ([D&C 89:19](#)). Furthermore, they lead to a generally more healthy life and freedom from destructive addictions. Obedience gives us greater control over our lives, greater capacity to come and go, to work and create. Of course, age, accident, and illnesses inevitably take their toll, but even so, our obedience to this gospel law enhances our capacity to deal with these challenges.

18. In the covenant path we find a steady supply of gifts and help. “Charity never faileth” ([1 Corinthians 13:8](#); [Moroni 7:46](#)), love begets love, compassion begets compassion, virtue begets virtue, commitment begets loyalty, and service begets joy. We are part of a covenant people, a community of Saints who encourage, sustain, and minister to one another. As Nephi explained, “And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them” ([1 Nephi 17:3](#)). [2](#)

19. Strengthened with Increased Faith

20. All this is not to say that life in the covenant is free of challenge or that the obedient soul should be surprised if disappointments or even disasters interrupt his peace. If you feel that personal righteousness should preclude all loss and suffering, you might want to have a chat with Job.

21. This brings us to a second way in which our covenants supply strength—they produce the faith necessary to persevere and to do all things that are expedient in the Lord. Our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ and keep His commandments requires a degree of faith, but as we honor our covenants, that faith expands. In the first place, the promised fruits of obedience become evident, which confirms our faith. Secondly, the Spirit communicates God’s pleasure, and we feel secure in His continued blessing and help. Thirdly, come what may, we can face life with hope and equanimity, knowing that we will succeed in the end because we have God’s promise to us individually, by name, and we know He cannot lie (see [Enos 1:6](#); [Ether 3:12](#)).

22. Early Church leaders in this dispensation confirmed that adhering to the covenant path provides the reassurance we need in times of trial:

23. “It was [the knowledge that their course in life conformed to the will of God] that enabled the ancient saints to endure all their afflictions and persecutions, and to take ... not only the spoiling of their goods, and the wasting of their substance, joyfully, but also to suffer death in its most horrid forms; knowing (not merely believing) that when this earthly house of their tabernacle was dissolved, they had a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ([2 Cor. 5:1](#).)” (Lectures on Faith [1985], 67).

24. They further pointed out that in offering whatever sacrifice God may require of us, we obtain the witness of the Spirit that our course is right and pleasing to God (see Lectures on Faith, 69–71). With that knowledge, our faith becomes unbounded, having the assurance that God will in due time turn every affliction to our gain. Some of you have been sustained by that faith as you have endured those who point fingers of scorn from the “great and spacious building” and cry, “Shame!” (see [1 Nephi 8:26–27](#)), and you have stood firm with Peter and the Apostles of old, “rejoicing that [you] were counted worthy to suffer shame for [Christ’s] name” ([Acts 5:41](#)).

25. The Lord said of the Church:

26. “Verily I say unto you, all among them who ... are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.

27. “For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit” ([D&C 97:8–9](#)).

28. The Apostle Paul understood that one who has entered into a covenant with God is both given the faith to face trials and gains even greater faith through those trials. Of his personal “thorn in the flesh” ([2 Corinthians 12:7](#)), he observed:

29. “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

30. “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

31. “Therefore I take pleasure in [my] infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in

distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” ([2 Corinthians 12:8–10](#)). [3](#)

32. Strengthened through the “Power of Godliness”

33. We have considered, first, the empowering blessings and, second, the endowment of faith that God grants to those who keep their covenants with Him. A final aspect of strength through covenants that I will mention is the bestowal of divine power. Our covenant commitment to Him permits our Heavenly Father to let His divine influence, “the power of godliness” ([D&C 84:20](#)), flow into our lives. He can do that because by our participation in priesthood ordinances we exercise our agency and elect to receive it. Our participation in those ordinances also demonstrates that we are prepared to accept the additional responsibility that comes with added light and spiritual power.

34. In all the ordinances, especially those of the temple, we are endowed with power from on high. [4](#) This “power of godliness” comes in the person and by the influence of the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Holy Ghost is part of the new and everlasting covenant. It is an essential part of our baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. It is the messenger of grace by which the blood of Christ is applied to take away our sins and sanctify us (see [2 Nephi 31:17](#)). It is the gift by which Adam was “quickened in the inner man” ([Moses 6:65](#)). It was by the Holy Ghost that the ancient Apostles endured all that they endured and by their priesthood keys carried the gospel to the known world of their day.

35. When we have entered into divine covenants, the Holy Ghost is our comforter, our guide, and our companion. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are “the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment” ([Moses 6:61](#)). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are testimony, faith, knowledge, wisdom, revelations, miracles, healing, and charity, to name but a few (see [D&C 46:13–26](#)).

36. It is the Holy Ghost that bears witness of your words when you teach and testify. It is the Holy Ghost that, as you speak in hostile venues, puts into your heart what you should say and fulfills the Lord’s promise that “you shall not be confounded before men” ([D&C 100:5](#)). It is the Holy Ghost that reveals how you may clear the next seemingly insurmountable hurdle. It is by the Holy Ghost in you that others may feel the pure love of Christ and

receive strength to press forward. It is also the Holy Ghost, in His character as the Holy Spirit of Promise, that confirms the validity and efficacy of your covenants and seals God's promises upon you. [5](#)

37. Divine covenants make strong Christians. I urge each one to qualify for and receive all the priesthood ordinances you can and then faithfully keep the promises you have made by covenant. In times of distress, let your covenants be paramount and let your obedience be exact. Then you can ask in faith, nothing wavering, according to your need, and God will answer. He will sustain you as you work and watch. In His own time and way He will stretch forth his hand to you, saying, "Here am I."

38. I testify that in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is found the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances by which we can enter into binding covenants with our Heavenly Father in the name of His Holy Son. I testify that God will keep His promises to you as you honor your covenants with Him. He will bless you in "good measure, pressed down, ... shaken together, and running over" ([Luke 6:38](#)). He will strengthen and finish your faith. He will, by His Holy Spirit, fill you with godly power. I pray that you will always have His Spirit to be with you to guide you and deliver you from want, anxiety, and distress. I pray that through your covenants, you may become a powerful instrument for good in the hands of Him who is our Lord and Redeemer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

7. Dating and Courtship

Celebrating Womanhood

Marie K. Hafen
Ensign, June 1992



1. Consider three familiar symbols—a diaper, a frying pan, and a boy's worn-out tennis shoe. How do you react to these objects? Are they symbols of joy and fulfillment? Or are they symbols of drudgery and submission?

2. Many people in today's world would be confused by these questions. When I was growing up, society placed great value on marriage and home and family. Since then, economic conditions and social attitudes have changed. The traditional view of family life is being challenged from every side.

3. Yet these three symbols of home life introduce the place that is for me the surest place to stand in this bewildering cultural climate: the place called home. So I want to say what being a wife and a mother means to me. Then I want to put those feelings into a larger context of women's life choices, because the choice between family life and education is not an either-or choice. For the sake of our own happiness and stability, for our families, for the Church, and for a better society, we need both domestic and educational skills; but we must shape and balance them on the foundation of the gospel.

4. My voice of celebration is thus a voice of hope, yet also a voice of warning, because the confusion in modern society can confuse all of us about the

aspirations of women. Remember the Savior's words: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" ([Matthew 10:16](#)). Wisdom and meekness help us keep our balance in these unstable times.

5. Soon after my husband, Bruce, and I were blessed with children, we discovered that, as someone said, "to believe in God is to know that the eternal rules are fair, and that there will be some wonderful surprises." One of those wonderful surprises was to learn what Lehi meant when he said that if Adam and Eve had remained in the Garden of Eden, "they would have had no children; . . . they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery" ([2 Nephi 2:23](#)). Astute parents will note here that if Adam and Eve had had no children, they would have had no misery! But note also that without children and misery, they would have had no joy. And two verses further, Lehi tells us that "men are, that they might have joy" ([2 Nephi 2:25](#)).

6. Now that I've had a house full of children and their not-always-wonderful surprises for over twenty years, all of Lehi's words have meaning for me. Of course there are days of drudgery. Dishes get dirty, children cry, and family members get sick. There are bills to pay and cars to fix, too little time and not enough money. There is frustration and fatigue and disappointment. Yet somehow, amid this drab reality, there are moments of genuine joy and meaning so tender that all you can do is kneel to thank God through your tears for the gift of children and the bonds of married love.

7. One recent moment of that kind for me was the birth of our first grandchild, whose reddish hair is the color of my mother's hair. This new granddaughter slept in the same little white crib where we placed each of our seven babies. The crib, lovingly refurbished by great-grandparents and trimmed with fresh lace, is no ordinary crib: The baby's father, grandfather, and great-grandmother each occupied it in the first months of their lives. Is the white crib just a piece of antique furniture? Or does it, like the frying pan and the tennis shoe, represent the grandest cycle of life and love and hope?

8. Looking back a quarter century, I feel the same way about raising children as Ammon felt about missionary work when he and his brethren testified of "their journeyings in the land of Nephi, their sufferings in the land, their sorrows, and their afflictions, and their incomprehensible joy" ([Alma 28:8](#); emphasis added). Their joy was mixed with sorrow and affliction, for that is the very nature of joy.

9. As a core part of life's joy, I celebrate the womanhood that is at the heart of life in a family home. I hope that young men as well as young women will honor this womanhood and cherish it in their own families and in their own lives.

10. Knowing, then, that marriage and family come first, what should we think about education and careers? Remember—the issue is not marriage or education; the issue is marriage and education. But why? And how?

11. It has been said that before becoming somebody's wife, before becoming somebody's mother, become somebody. Let us consider seven variations on that theme.

12. First, become somebody who can support herself. Young women should prepare for a career, but not because a career is more important than family life. A career isn't as important as family life. Although Church leaders have counseled mothers of young children to avoid working outside the home whenever possible, they have also urged young women to seek education and prepare for careers and meaningful involvement in society.

13. Career-oriented education matters for several reasons. For example, at any given time, from 35 to 40 percent of the adult women in the Church are single, whether widowed, divorced, or not having married. Only 3 percent of Latter-day Saint women never marry (see Twila Van Leer, "Singleness

Becoming More Common," Church News, 6 November 1983, 4). In addition, more than 90 percent of both married and single women must work sometime during their adult lives. An LDS woman is now likely to work more than twenty-five years in her life, and six out of ten working LDS women are supporting not only themselves but others in their families.

14. What these statistics boil down to is that young women who believe they will always have a husband who will fully support them, thereby making it unnecessary for them to work outside the home, are living in a dream world. Husbands may die, or they may be disabled by accidents or illness. Children grow up, missionaries need financial support, and most mothers live healthy, vigorous lives for many years after their children leave home. Single-adult women cannot expect the Lord to rescue them from life's natural adversity. The gospel has been given us to heal our pain, not to prevent it. The Lord does give us strength to deal with a world that can sometimes be dreary, but often that help comes only as we do all we can do.

15. Second, before becoming somebody's wife, be careful about who that somebody is. Young people must obviously strike a sound balance between being too fussy and not fussy enough. Elder Boyd K. Packer once reminded us to look for potential, not for perfection (address given at BYU Tri-Stake Fireside, 3 November 1963). And even those who have potential need proving by the test of time.

16. It is also important to be friends first and sweethearts later. If a young man and a young woman are sweethearts before they are friends, they might discover too late that their philosophies of life are miles apart. I know a young couple who fell in love with the idea of love rather than with each other. Only after they were married did they start to discover real differences in their views on many basic issues. He was in school and thought she should work to support his education. She felt that she should stay home and be a full-time homemaker. Their relationship suffered from their many unresolved differences. They should have become friends first.

17. Third, before becoming somebody's mother, become somebody capable of being a good mother. Once, one of my teenage daughters was frustrated about not having finished her assigned housework. She said to me, "Look, Mom—I'm not majoring in homemaking!" Maybe not, but she aspires to motherhood, and part of being a good

mother is knowing how to make not just a bed, but a home. There is no career more meaningful, no calling more divine, than being a person who truly makes a home in the sense of creating and maintaining an environment of human warmth, intellectual stimulation, and spiritual strength—someone who sees the wellsprings of personal meaning that lie beyond a first glance at a diaper, a frying pan, and a worn tennis shoe.

18. Motherhood is above all a teaching task. A mother is the first and most important teacher in her children's lives. British essayist G. K. Chesterton once compared a full-time specialist in a single discipline with a full-time mother, who is a generalist in all the disciplines of life. He observed that the specialist is something to everyone, but the mother is everything to someone. Many women play both of these roles at one time or another. Mothers, then, are teachers who contribute to the world and thus need educational preparation to fulfill their noble teaching task. For me, that fact is reason enough for all women to take education seriously, even if there were no other reasons.

19. I am grateful to see young Latter-day Saint fathers increasingly involved in the daily educational nurturing of their children. What a loss it is, both to fathers and to society, if the bonds of child nurturing belong only to mothers. I agree with the observation that one of the hallmarks of civilization is when men learn from women to become interested in the education of their children.

20. A prospective mother should take her education seriously enough to become an inspiring teacher, not only because she profoundly influences her children's lives, but also because she improves the quality of her own life. For example, I have enjoyed a lifelong love affair with literature, particularly the works of Shakespeare. I taught college writing classes while my husband finished law school, and when our children were old enough to be in school, I returned to teaching literature on a part-time basis.

21. Within the last year or two, I have accompanied each of my children on their own experiences with Shakespeare, through school assignments or otherwise. We have seen videos together, attended plays, and read and talked together. What a delight it has been for me to interact in intellectually and spiritually stimulating ways with my children as our study of Shakespeare has helped us confront essential questions about ourselves and about human nature.

22. Fourth, before becoming somebody's wife or somebody's mother, become somebody who can make her own life richer. Your education is not only for your possible career or for your children; your education is also for you. As Mr. Keating says in the movie *Dead Poets Society*, "One reads poetry because he's a member of the human race. Poetry, romance, love, beauty—these are what we stay alive for!"

23. A friend I will call Marilyn is enjoying a far richer life today than would have been the case if the world of books and beauty had not opened her eyes and her mind. Marilyn grew up in a small town where the most important things in her friends' lives were being popular and being seen with handsome, athletic guys. She dated a young man who was a natural leader, but at the time he had no serious aspirations for his life. Then Marilyn went with her family to pick up her brother at the close of his mission.

24. For the first time in her life, Marilyn opened her eyes to the size and wonder and richness of the world: She visited great art galleries and historic cathedrals; she saw the remnants of aristocracy and the grimness of urban poverty; she sang hymns in a foreign tongue; she saw mountains and oceans she never knew existed.

25. When she returned, her hometown was not the same. Looking at everything with new eyes, she realized that she was far from ready to make serious commitments to her immature boyfriend. From that time on, her thirst for learning took her far beyond the days when the city limits of her hometown had been the limits of her aspirations.

26. Now Marilyn's continuing curiosity and broad vision of life enhance her well-developed religious faith. Her life is more full, her service to others is more meaningful, and her children share her insights—all because she reached beyond the boundaries of a teenage mind to touch the broader boundaries of an educated mind.

27. Fifth, before becoming somebody's wife and somebody's mother, become somebody who is spiritually strong. King Benjamin spoke of the "happy state of those that keep the commandments of God" and are "blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual" ([Mosiah 2:41](#)). Does this mean that if people keep the basic commandments, they won't have any problems?

28. Lehi taught us that if Adam and Eve had remained in Eden, they would have remained not in a state of true happiness, but "in a state of innocence"—

having no children, no misery, no sin—and no joy ([2 Nephi 2:23](#); emphasis added). So when King Benjamin tells us of the “blessed and happy state” of those who keep God’s commandments, he is not describing a Kingdom of Oz where there are no witches. On the contrary, developing the strength that leads to authentic joy requires us to follow the Adamic pattern into a world of thorns and sorrow.

29. Adam and Eve fell that they might have joy. But they didn’t skip merrily out of Eden singing and wishing everyone a nice day. They walked in sorrow into a lonely world, where they earned their bread by the sweat of their brows and learned about joy in the midst of misery and pain. Can you imagine how Eve felt when she learned that her son Cain had taken the life of her son Abel and that God had banished Cain?

30. How could Mother Eve possibly have found joy in the middle of such affliction? She found it when she let the atonement of Christ heal her pain and sanctify her experience. Indeed, her experience with sin and misery played a crucial role in preparing her for the joy she ultimately found. In Eve’s own words, “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](#)).

31. Women in the modern world, like women in the ancient world, go forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. In such a world, we must be spiritually strong and wise as serpents, like Mother Eve, who “ceased not to call upon God” ([Moses 5:16](#)).

32. A young friend described her feelings as she found her Eve-like experience by serving a mission: “When I left on my mission, faith was still just the first principle of the gospel. Now I need it and live by it more than food. I couldn’t get through a day without it. I know that I was born to be a missionary. I know that my spirit is a warrior, because it loves peace. I now know what it means to say that my spirit rejoiceth. My spirit has found expression and joy and finally has been set free.

33. “Another outcome of this mission that I didn’t expect at all is that I find myself wanting to get married and have a family. After seeing so much unhappiness, I long to establish my own righteous fortress on the earth. I have loved working so closely with the priesthood and realize what an effect it has on my life and attitudes. I also understand that a mission is a priesthood calling. At the end of a great

war, even women and old people have to fight. So here we are.”

34. Sixth, a message especially for young men: Become somebody who encourages young women to reach their full intellectual and spiritual potential. I have heard that many Latter-day Saint men do not understand why Latter-day Saint women attend college; that the vast majority of women say they go to college to gain a serious education; but that when asked why they think women attend college, many men list social rather than educational reasons.

35. Perhaps some women hesitate to tell their real motivations for fear of being criticized. Of greater concern is the possibility that if male students and faculty don’t take women seriously as college students, they may unintentionally discourage women from pursuing their educational goals seriously. Anyone who uses Church teachings as an excuse for thinking women should not wholeheartedly seek an education does not understand what the Church teaches.

36. I am encouraged by seeing more young men learning to share domestic and educational tasks with the women in their lives. This will make their eventual marriages become true partnerships in which a man and woman stand side by side as did Adam and Eve, with neither one behind the other.

37. For example, a recently married friend told me this story: “Not long after we had our first baby, I was in a car accident in which my neck was broken. Because I had to wear a neck brace, Greg had to help me do almost everything. He changed all the baby’s diapers, helped wash my hair, and tied my shoelaces and buttoned my buttons. I thought I loved him before we were married, but during this time I grew to love him much more for what he was willing to do for me.”

38. Finally, become somebody who understands that being a woman is worth celebrating. Women who are prepared for life can celebrate with confidence. Never have opportunities for prepared women been greater—in the home, in the Church, in the work force when appropriate, and in the community.

39. A woman celebrates womanhood in many ways. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, she may “rock a sobbing child without wondering if today’s world is passing [her] by, because [she knows she holds] tomorrow tightly in [her] arms” (Ensign, May 1978, 10).

40. She may watch her toddler look longingly at the stairs he doesn't yet know how to climb. When he looks back eagerly for approval, her answer must be "no," though the little one bursts into tears. She is a teacher of tough love who understands the role of discipline in nurturing her children.

41. She is a Primary teacher who tastes the magic of childhood when she greets a proud seven-year-old wearer of a CTR ring who thrusts his fist forward and exclaims with happy courage, "See this CTR ring? It throws out an invisible shield of protection all around me, and no evil force can break through!"

42. She is educated and able, preparing for her day of marriage that has not come, fully engaged in a professional world that needs the talent and training she offers. Added to these gifts, her caring touch can soothe and heal, for "Charity Never Faileth," even in the corporate business world.

43. She watches as her teenage daughter is not asked to the prom, which brings back her own memories of not having been asked. Her heart aches, but she tells her daughter, "My dear, not everyone in the world needs to fall in love with you. It only takes one."

44. She works patiently as a volunteer committed to nurturing the homeless; she cares lovingly for ten years for an invalid mother-in-law; she accepts the confidence shown by friends and neighbors to run for the state legislature. "Look what you did for our school through the PTA," they say. "We need you."

45. She watches her son kneel across the altar from his bride in a temple sealing room and thinks of her own marriage in such a room, celebrating the sealing of eternal love.

46. She enters a hospital room where her first daughter-in-law gingerly sits up and, holding up her own first baby, greets her: "Isn't she beautiful? Would you like to hold her—Grandma?"

47. She rejoices in the seasons of a woman's life, for each time and each season is worth its own celebration. Spread over a lifetime, celebrating womanhood is a celebration of life.

Hanging Out, Hooking Up, And Celestial Marriage

Bruce A. Chadwick
BYU Speeches, May 2002



1. The topic I selected to discuss this morning was motivated by a research report I read last summer. A study of young women attending colleges and universities across the United States reported that dating has disappeared from campus, and young women have been left to wander in a social wilderness in their search for Mr. Right. The vast majority of the young women interviewed stated that marriage is a "very important" goal for them. In addition, a majority indicated they hoped to find Mr. Right while attending college. They lamented that dating has been replaced by hanging out with acquaintances and then hooking up with young men. Hooking up generally involves drinking alcohol and some degree of sexual activity. These young women, more often than not, felt frustrated and lonely, and most reported they had not found Mr. Right. Drinking and promiscuity are not the Lord's way to find someone to marry! Heavenly Father loves you and desires you to be happy, and thus He has given you righteous procedures to follow in your pursuit of an eternal marriage.

2. In response to this study, my friend and colleague Brent Top—a member of the Religious Education faculty—and I decided to examine the dating culture among LDS youth, particularly those young adults at BYU. Let me compare the desire to marry among college women across the nation to both women and men attending BYU. As mentioned earlier, marriage is a very important goal to 83 percent of the national sample of women college students. Happily, marriage is very important to nearly all BYU students—both men (95 percent) and women (97 percent). It appears almost all of you have the appropriate goal; it seems that it is the implementation that falls a little short.

3. I am confident that each of you has a copy of the proclamation on the family. This is pure doctrine straight from the Lord through His prophet and apostles. There have been only four proclamations in this dispensation, and each teaches important eternal truths. Please take the time to read, ponder, and pray about this counsel from the Lord concerning the eternal significance of the family.

4. Satan still thinks he has a chance to win the war he initiated against God's plan in the premortal existence. One of his most cunning strategies is to turn away the sons and daughters of God from eternal relationships sealed in holy temples. Satan is giving special attention to you, my young friends—both single and married—to create doubt in your minds about marriage and your being ready to marry,

increase your fear of failure to find the right one and your fear of divorce, and heighten your concern about having children. He is providing alluring sexual temptations. All are designed to hinder your embracing and keeping sacred covenants with your companion.

5. Today I want to share with those of you who are single some of the appropriate ways to establish an eternal relationship. For those of you who are married, these suggestions will assist you in nurturing a strong marriage.

6. One of the joys of teaching at BYU is the opportunity to mingle scripture with the philosophy of men in a righteous fashion. I appreciate teaching sociology within a gospel context by linking intellect with inspiration. This morning I will mingle a little social science with the scriptures—revelation with the best research and sound reason.

7. I have five suggestions that I want to share with you today to assist in establishing and strengthening a celestial marriage.

8. The first suggestion is for all Cinderellas and Prince Charmings to throw away their glass slippers. Following Satan's encouragement, contemporary society greatly emphasizes courtship, the hunt, or the conquest. The rest of the story, the most significant part of the life story, is dismissed with six words: "And they lived happily ever after."

9. There is a very dangerous misperception embedded in this Cinderella and glass slipper syndrome. It is the focus on finding the perfect person to marry with whom you will live happily ever after. I am convinced that the Lord's plan is to find a right one rather than the one. I admit there may be rare cases where two people covenanted in the premortal existence to find each other and marry in this life. They see each other across the Marriott Center parking lot, and it is love at first sight. Occasionally students ask if I knew my wife in the premortal existence. What can I say? Of course I did. But then I add that I knew all of my sisters in the premortal existence, and no matter who I married, she would be an acquaintance. Let me be crystal clear: this is not Church doctrine; rather, it is a flippant response to a question for which I don't have an answer. The First Presidency has affirmed that premortal covenanted marriages—glamorized by Saturday's Warrior—are rare indeed. To most of us Heavenly Father says, "There are thousands of my sons and daughters attending BYU who are worthy to enter my house and covenant to be your eternal mate. You pick one you like who is worthy, and I will give

you my blessing." There are actually many whose foot will nicely fit within the glass slipper.

10. A second suggestion is don't wait for others to carry your glass slipper about the campus looking for a match. In other words, don't wait for your Heavenly Father to write the name of the person you are to marry on your kitchen wall or to deliver him or her to your front door. Instead, be a little more proactive and seek someone you like, someone who is worthy, and someone who inspires you to be a better person. The Spirit will guide you but won't do the courting or make the choice for you.

11. Those of you who are married will agree that this Cinderella mentality of "If I marry the right person, we will live happily ever after" fails to prepare couples for married life. When problems arise in a marriage—and they will arise—a husband or wife is tempted to think, "Oh no, I married the wrong person because I am not happy ever after." Nonsense! Good marriages are created after you get up from your knees at the altar of the temple. Strong marriages emerge out of helping each other obtain your education, struggling financially, dealing with sickness, and coping with the shock produced by the birth of your first child. Life changes and moves ahead in many unanticipated ways. Changing jobs, moving to a different city, raising teenagers, caring for an aged parent, retirement, and similar activities and events are what produce eternal marriages. Overcoming these problems as a team—helping and supporting each other along the way—are what produce a happy marriage. I loved my dear wife when we married 40 years ago this summer, but the love I felt for her then is insignificant to my love for her after these many years of trials and triumphs.

12. There are no written "money-back" guarantees for marital happiness. There is no antidiocese insurance. Occasionally a spouse changes in ways that make maintaining a marriage impossible. But I fear that the Cinderella complex encourages people to give up on a relationship too quickly and to start another search for the perfect spouse. The best marriage guarantee you can have is the one you sign in the presence of your bishop—and it has to be renewed once a year. Using this recommend in the companionship of your husband or wife is the best antidiocese guarantee available—not just because you have entered the temple but also because of what temple worthiness represents. This guarantee requires supporting each other in Church callings, working out the payment of tithing, praying together, studying the scriptures together, and giving service together.

13. In rejecting the Cinderella complex, I am not suggesting that you marry just anyone. But I am suggesting that some of us may have raised the bar a little too high. There are very few perfect people in the world, and if you do get lucky and find one, he or she probably won't want to marry you anyway. But don't despair. The traits and characteristics we are looking for in a spouse will emerge out of the years of experience together. My advice is to look for the potential in a spouse and then help each other achieve your desires. In other words, good marriages are earned by experience, not found with glass slippers.

14. My third suggestion is to exercise faith and to have courage in dating and marriage. It is scary to marry! It is scary to stay married during troubled times! It is scary to be responsible for children! Some people are afraid of marriage and parenthood. Perhaps their parents or close friends divorced and they fear the same happening to them.

15. Have faith in God your Father and in His Son. They will guide and strengthen us because we are on Their errand of creating eternal families and raising children in righteousness. This message is simply stated in the words of President Ezra Taft Benson to young adults: "Those fears must be replaced with faith" ("To the Single Adult Brethren of the Church," Ensign, May 1988, 52).

16. Let me share a scriptural example that I think is applicable to those considering marriage or parenthood. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because they feared to enter the land promised them by Jehovah. They eventually wandered up the east side of the Jordan River. They were camped on Mount Nebo, looking across at the promised land. Moses was instructed to pass the prophetic mantle to Joshua. Jehovah was ready to perform a miracle to impress upon the children of Israel that Joshua was the new prophet and also to test their courage one last time. A miracle parallel to Moses' parting of the Red Sea was to demonstrate the Lord's power resting on Joshua.

17. Joshua had the camp of Israel move close to the river and asked each man and woman to "sanctify" themselves (Joshua 3:5). In this day that would mean to wash your clothes, turn off trashy television, catch up on your tithing, read the scriptures for an hour, and say your prayers. These activities would encourage the Spirit to dwell with you. In the morning the children of Israel were not left as spectators high on the riverbanks when it was time to part the waters.

Rather, 12 men carried the ark of the covenant to the water's edge. Then, as the Lord explained:

18. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap. [Joshua 3:13]

19. It took faith and courage for those 12 men and the children of Israel who followed to step off the bank into the swirling waters of the spring runoff. As the water covered the soles of their feet, the miracle then happened, and the waters were stopped.

20. So it may be with you in your quest for an eternal partner or for an eternal relationship. We cannot sit in our apartments, we cannot spend long hours at work, we cannot endlessly play video games and wait for the Lord to bring a spouse to the altar for us. We cannot wait for the Lord to create a special love between our spouse and us. He does not magically cause the perfect family to appear when there has been little, if any, effort on our part. Waving at a group of girls or guys across the cultural hall, driving your spouse to the grocery store once a week, or just knowing the names of your children is not resting the soles of your feet in the waters of marriage and family life.

21. During the 1970s cohabitation became popular, allowing couples to ease into marriage, to try out being married without the commitments and responsibilities of marriage. Social scientists in general applauded this emerging social custom and argued that cohabiting would increase marital satisfaction and reduce divorce. They reasoned that cohabiting is an opportunity to confirm real compatibility and that a marriage that followed would be happier and more stable. This pronouncement was not one of social sciences' finest hours. The truth of the matter is that 30 years of research has made it clear that couples who cohabit and then wed are less happy and are more likely to divorce! Why? Because cohabiting couple are not willing to exercise the faith to make a lifelong commitment, and their commitment does not increase much when they marry.

22. In defense of the social sciences, they are starting to figure this marriage thing out a little better. For example, a recent book entitled *In Defense of Marriage* analyzes mountains of statistical data demonstrating that married men and women are happier, healthier, and live longer than single or

divorced men and women. Marriage is part of God's great plan. It is good for both the body and soul.

23. I realize that not all will have the opportunity to marry in this life, but, with faith and courage, most will. And eventually all righteous men and women will share these blessings. It is estimated that 95 percent of all Americans have been married at least once by age 45. Please don't wait until you are 44 to seriously pursue marriage. Social research reveals that marrying in the 20s somewhat increases marital happiness and reduces the likelihood of divorce. I promise you that if you pursue marriage and family life with sincere intent that the Father will bless you to eventually achieve this blessed state.

24. The fourth suggestion that I offer to establish and nurture an eternal relationship is to keep physical intimacy at an appropriate level so as to enjoy the presence of the Spirit and to be worthy to seal your commitment to each other in the temple. Elder Holland gave a talk here at BYU entitled "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments." Because of its powerful, pure doctrine, he was asked to repeat it in general conference. If you don't have a copy, please ask your campus bishop for one. It is pure doctrine that lovingly explains how chastity is a necessary condition for eternal life.

25. As I mentioned in my introduction, hooking up and dating among non-LDS almost always involve sexual activity. Such must not be the case for Latter-day Saints. I am happy to report that Brother Top's and my research with LDS high school students reveals that their premarital sexual activity is substantially below the national level. But at times it seems like we members of the Church get caught up in the ways of the world and end up adopting them to a degree. We may not be going as fast as the world, but, unfortunately, we sometimes are headed in the same direction.

26. Let me illustrate this worldly marching attitude with an example. A friend of mine was serving as the bishop of a BYU ward. He was teasing the elders quorum president about not being married.

27. He received the stock reply from the quorum president: "I just haven't found the right girl yet."

28. My friend then asked, "What kind of girl are you looking for?"

29. The reply was, "A girl worthy to go to the temple." But then, with a grin, the elders quorum president added, "But just barely."

30. What was this young man saying? He was joking, I hope. But it sounds like he was willing to keep the strict letter of the law but wanted to push as close to the edge of serious sin as he could get. It is highly unlikely that the Spirit will be companion to anyone holding such an attitude. Such a person is heading in a worldly direction away from God's plan.

31. I am not suggesting that you never kiss someone until you kneel across the altar, but I am suggesting that you keep physical intimacy within the bounds set by the Lord. I don't have time to say any more about appropriate intimate behavior, but I am sure your campus bishops frequently discuss the topic.

32. I do want to say a word or two about a different consequence of inappropriate intimacy. Young people sometimes justify inappropriate intimacy on the grounds that it is an expression of their special love and that it strengthens their relationship. I am convinced that more often than not such activity actually destroys a potential eternal relationship. Let me illustrate with a scriptural example.

33. This example involves two of King David's children. His son Amnon fell "in love" with his half-sister, Tamar. They had the same father but different mothers. He had it bad. He thought about her all day and dreamed about her all night. His friend—actually his cousin—noticed Amnon's funk and offered to help him in his pursuit of the maid Tamar. The scriptures say Jonadab, Amnon's friend, was "a very subtil man" (2 Samuel 13:3). In other words, he was a devious man. Jonadab suggested that Amnon fake illness, and when his father asked about his sickness, he should plead that Tamar be sent to cook him some cakes—the Hebrew equivalent of chicken soup. The plan worked perfectly. When Tamar finished cooking the cakes, Amnon sent away the servants and made a strong advance. Tamar resisted: "And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly" (2 Samuel 13:12).

34. In modern English, she told him to stop, that what he was doing was wrong and also rather stupid. She explained that their father, King David, loved Amnon, that he was his favorite son, and David would give him anything he asked, including her as a bride. But Amnon was beyond reason and was driven by his passion: "Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her" (2 Samuel 13:14).

35. What had happened was really bad. But now comes the point I want to make from this example of

inappropriate intimacy: “Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone” (2 Samuel 13:15).

36. Amnon did not send Tamar flowers, nor did he call her to express his undying love. Instead, he hated her so strongly that he shamed her before the king’s court and all of Israel. He loved her, and then a half-hour later he hated her. Why? Tamar was associated with the guilt he felt for the terrible deed he had done. In his mind she became the cause of his sin, and thus he hated her. So it is in today’s world. A couple may have the potential for a celestial marriage, but if they become too intimate, then the feelings of tenderness and love turn to guilt, then to dislike, and perhaps even to hate. Too much intimacy too soon is not the Lord’s way.

37. In this example I have focused on the single members of the Church, but let me stress that married couples have the same responsibility to obey the law of chastity. Forbidden love will have the same terrible consequences. Chastity—which requires virtue in our minds and hearts as well as in our actions—is absolutely necessary for an eternal marital relationship.

38. My final suggestion is appropriate for those seeking a mate, for married couples, and for everyone else, for that matter. Many years ago a couple asked if I would provide them marriage counseling. I resist such requests since I am not a trained counselor—and, besides, I really don’t enjoy doing it. But occasionally circumstances conspire against me and I am forced to do so. This was one of these cases. I had worked with the couple for several weeks, and they had not made any real progress in reducing the anger and conflict. One evening as I waited for them to come to our home, I had a few minutes and opened the scriptures. I decided to read the New Testament to get me in a spiritual mood. One of my favorite sections of the New Testament is the Sermon on the Mount. When I read Matthew 5:43–44, I was struck with a powerful insight.

39. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

40. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. [Matthew 5:43–44]

41. When the couple arrived, I had the husband wait in the living room while I met with the wife in the family room. When I asked her if we could kneel and pray for her husband, she looked at me like I was crazy. When I explained that I did not want her to pray that he would get run over by a large truck, develop a disfiguring disease, or obey her every wish but rather wanted her to sincerely pray for the Father to bless her husband with those things that would bring him true happiness, she simply replied, “I can’t do it.” I had anticipated this response. It is not easy to love your enemy or to do good to him. But I was hoping we could at least pray for him. I asked if we could kneel and pray that she be given the compassion, mercy, and love necessary to do so. We both took turns voicing a prayer, and after she shed a few tears she informed me she was ready to pray for her husband. She then offered a beautiful prayer for him. A remarkable change in her demeanor toward her husband was immediately obvious. This was real progress.

42. I ushered her into the living room and invited the husband into the family room. We repeated the same sequence of events. His initial reaction to my request was one of shocked dismay. But later, after offering a sincere prayer for his wife, his attitude and his feelings toward her changed, and some of the earlier love reappeared. I could see it in his countenance, and he could feel it in his heart.

43. This was our last counseling session. I think the story had a happy ending for the couple. I haven’t seen them for several years, but the last time we had contact they were still happily married.

44. I don’t know whether they ever repeated this simple exercise. But I learned a great lesson that has affected how I live my life, and I pass it on to you as my fifth suggestion: “Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Most of us probably don’t like those who hate us, and, sadly, these feelings of dislike canker our souls. Amazingly, praying for our enemies reverses our feelings. Maybe the person still hates you, but that does not matter. What matters is that your heart is softened and the Spirit abides with you. Usually a change in your feelings and subsequent actions will initiate a reduction of the other person’s hatred of you. Perhaps even reconciliation may occur.

45. Whenever I have been angry over the years with my wife, Carolyn, I kneel and pray for this good woman. She is such a kind and loving person that my anger is usually my own fault. Whatever the cause,

my angry feelings are turned to increased love by sincere prayer.

46. On Sunday afternoon Carolyn saw me editing my remarks and asked if she could read them. She offered some insightful suggestions. Later that night, just as we were drifting off to sleep, she whispered to me, “I heard you share your experience about praying for your enemies when you taught our Jerusalem students during the Mount of the Beatitudes field trip. Since then, whenever I have been angry at you, I have prayed for you. It has worked every time.”

47. I did not know how to respond. I did not know whether to be miffed that she had felt I’d done things that justified her anger or to be happy that she had discovered the same results that I had in applying the Savior’s words. If I were miffed at her, I would have had to get out of bed and pray for her, and since I was very tired, I decided to just go to sleep a happy man. It should be no great surprise that good things come from following the teachings of the Master.

48. Besides this suggestion to pray for your spouse, the implication for those of you who are single is to not only pray for yourself in a dating relationship but also to pray for the young man or woman in whom you are interested. Pray for what is best for them, which may turn out not to be you. But that is okay. The Lord will bless you, and good things will follow. This simple action will change feelings between husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, children and parents, and neighbors and co-workers. When you are angry, when a relationship is stretched thin to the limit, sincerely pray for the person who at that moment “hates” you. It will bring a mighty miracle in your feelings and in your ability to bear affliction.

49. In conclusion I want to encourage you to remember the importance of marriage and family and place them first in your priorities. I want to spare you an experience similar to one I had 15 years ago.

50. Our family was sharing a Christmas afternoon with another family, and at some point we started playing games like Trivial Pursuit. One game was based on Freudian psychology and involved identifying dominant personality traits. My wife and three sons independently wrote their estimation of my dominant personality trait on small pieces of paper. I was confident I would be labeled by my family as “kind,” “righteous,” “loving,” or similar positive traits.

51. Imagine my surprise when my wife’s paper said, “Bruce is a workaholic.” I thought to myself, “That

ungrateful woman! The pleasant quality of life she enjoys is the fruit of my hard work.” But it was Christmas, and I did not want to spoil the day, so I did not respond.

52. My three boys confirmed her diagnosis! One son also used the hated workaholic word. The other two used similar words that made it clear that in their eyes my career, profession, or work was the most important aspect of my life. At this point, even though it was Christmas, I protested a little.

53. One of my sons replied, “Dad, we never went on a family vacation that did not involve your work.”

54. Again I wanted to reply: “True, but you—ungrateful son that you are—have been to Disneyland as well as to Walt Disney World, traveled to Central America, traveled Europe, visited the Holy Land, and lived two summers in a beach house on an island in the Pacific Northwest.” But it was Christmas, and I did not want to be a poor sport, so I remained silent.

55. In the days that followed I tried to justify how I lived my life to myself. But it did not do any good. No matter how I rationalized things, my dear family felt that my career was more important to me than they were. This is not and was not true. But the fact remained that that was the impression I had given by my actions. Since that time I have tried to make my priorities more visible. I occasionally say to Carolyn on Friday morning, “I will be done teaching at noon. Would you like to go to the temple this afternoon? Or go ride around the Alpine Loop, see a movie, or visit the gardens at Thanksgiving Point?” Or, if I am really feeling expansive, “Would you like to go shopping?”

56. I hope during the past 15 years that somehow I have altered the perceptions of my family. They are most important to me. I share this experience in the hope that you will be spared the anguish of confronting who you are at age 45 or 50 and being disappointed. I don’t want a list of my publications or administrative positions chiseled on my headstone. Rather, I hope that the following words reflect my life: “Bruce Chadwick, a devoted husband, loving father, and humble follower of Jesus Christ.”

57. My young friends, remember that marriage is essential to eternal life and that a good marriage and family life is crafted, not found. Please make this an important priority as you finish school and launch a career. Be courageous in seeking after an eternal partner. If you have found him or her, then work together creating an eternal relationship. This is not

hard work. In fact, it is rather pleasant and will bring great joy into your life.

58. May God bless you in your studies at BYU. Be sure to study both the sacred and the secular. You have a great opportunity to do both here at BYU.

59. I bear testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially of the importance of eternal families. I share this testimony in His name, Jesus Christ, amen.

The Right Person-the Right Place-the Right Time--Guidelines for Wisely Choosing a Spouse

Thomas B. Holman

BYU Speeches, August 2000



1. In January of 1972, after eating at a nice restaurant and attending the Osmonds in concert, I asked my wife to marry me. She said, "No." A little over a month later, as I was walking her home from Church, she said,

"Well, are you going to marry me or am I going to have to get a job?" I wisely agreed to marry her. She had, very sensibly, not accepted my invitation too quickly and been careful to make sure she had chosen the right man. She understood President Gordon B. Hinckley's counsel: "This will be the most important decision of your life, the individual whom you marry. . . . Marry the right person in the right place at the right time" ("Life's Obligations," *Ensign*, February 1999, 2).

2. Where is the right place? Who is the right person? When is the right time? Fortunately, President Hinckley and others have given us inspired counsel concerning these questions, and more than 60 years of research in the social sciences adds another witness to their counsel. Although the guidance I am going to share today is primarily for unmarried individuals, much of what I say can help married couples continue to strengthen their marriages.

The Right Place

3. 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" ("Life's Obligations," 2).

The Right Person

4. A person committed to temple marriage must then ask: "Whom should I marry?" "How do I identify the right person for me?"

5. Everyone has advice for single people considering marriage. The Beatles sang: "All you need is love, love; love is all you need." Newsstand magazines claim: "Good communication is all you really need." Television and film media seem to shout: "Find someone who is good looking, someone who really 'turns you on'; then you'll be happy!"

6. We actually have a great deal of advice from sources a lot better than the Beatles, magazines, or television and films. The words of the Savior in the scriptures and the teachings of inspired ancient and modern prophets set us on the right path. This divine and prophetic counsel is supported by more than 60 years of social science research on premarital predictors of later marital quality and stability. First let us look at what the scriptures and General Authorities teach about spouse selection. Then let us see how the results of research on premarital phenomenon that influence later marital success can be a "second witness."

7. Let me make two things clear about what is meant by "the right person." First, movies, plays, and fiction sometimes lead us astray with the idea there is a "one and only" somewhere out there with whom we made a covenant to marry in the premortal existence. We think finding a mate is simply a matter of waiting for "some enchanted evening," locking eyes with someone "across a crowded room," heading off hand-in-hand to the closest temple—probably singing the rest of the score from *South Pacific*—and then living happily ever after. No matter how romantic this idea is, it is not supported by prophetic counsel. President Spencer W. Kimball said this:

8. "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. ["Marriage and Divorce," in *Speeches of the Year, 1976* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1977), 146]

9. Evidently, seeking for a mate is not a matter of waiting for that "one and only" to walk by and grab you.

Being the Right Person

10. Second, one of the most important principles we learn from the scriptures to help us choose an eternal companion is articulated by the Savior in Matthew 7:3–5:

11. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

12. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

13. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

14. Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke more specifically to those in families, including those in the courtship stage, when he said:

15. If the choice is between reforming other Church members [including fiancés, fiancées, spouses, 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. [“A Brother Offended,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 39]

16. Thus, as you think about the prophetic counsel and the research I will now discuss on choosing a spouse, you need first to apply the ideas and counsel to yourself. Then you can more appropriately critique another's rightness for you.

Finding the Right Person

17. 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. Although love is more than physical attraction, being physically attracted to a potential spouse is not bad. Indeed, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “The right person is someone for whom the natural and wholesome and normal affection that should exist does exist.” Then 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” (CR, October 1955, 13).

18. Being “in love” and attracted to a person is a good start, but clearly not enough. President Gordon B. Hinckley suggested several other factors we should keep in mind:

19. Choose a companion of your own faith. You are much more likely to be happy. 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. [Hinckley, “Life's Obligations, 2]

20. Elder Richard G. Scott suggested that in a potential spouse we should look for

21. essential attributes that bring happiness: 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. [“Receive the Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 26]

22. More than 60 years of research proposes several factors that both witness and complement the attributes outlined by President Hinckley and Elder Scott. That research suggests what my colleague Dr. Jeff Larson has called “the marriage triangle” that we need to look at in choosing a spouse (see Thomas B. Holman and Associates, *Premarital Prediction of Marital Quality or Breakup: Research, Theory, and Practice* [New York: Plenum, in press]). These factors are: first, the individual attributes and core values of the person; second, the quality of the relationship we are able to build with the person; and third, the person's past and present circumstances and environments. Let's consider each of these.

23. First, we need to know a lot about the person we are thinking of marrying. As Elder Scott notes, the beliefs the person has about family life matter, and research confirms this. The more the person values marriage and family life, the better the marriage will be. President Hinckley admonishes us to choose a person we can honor, respect, and give our whole heart, love, allegiance, and loyalty to. The research shows that this kind of person will have a healthy sense of self-respect, maturity, self-control, and good mental and emotional health.

The Right Relationship

24. President Hinckley suggested you choose a person “who will complement you,” and Elder Scott says our choice should be a person who “is kindly understanding [and] forgiving of others.” Thus, we need to find a person not only of good character, but a person with whom we can have a good relationship.

25. Two hallmarks of good premarital relationships that Church leaders have stressed are love and communication. These two things help couples solve problems, resolve differences, and increase agreement on important issues. President Spencer W. Kimball helped a young couple on the verge of marriage with this counsel:

26. 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. . . . Today it is a demonstrative love, but in the tomorrows of ten, thirty, fifty years it will be a far greater and more intensified love, grown quieter and more dignified with the years of sacrifice, suffering, joys, and consecration to each other, to your family, and to the kingdom of God. [“An Apostle Speaks About Marriage to John and Mary,” *Improvement Era*, February 1949, 76; also “John and Mary, Beginning Life Together,” *New Era*, June 1975, 7–8]

27. Researchers have also found that the greater the love couples have in their relationships before they marry, the more successful their marriages. However, one researcher reviewed dozens of studies on love and found that there is both “immature love” and “mature love.” Mature love, she declared, is the kind of love needed for successful marriage and family life (Patricia Noller, “What Is This Thing Called Love? Defining the Love That Supports Marriage and Family,” *Personal Relations* 3 [1996]: 97–115). Love, whether immature or mature, has three aspects—how love feels; how you think about love; and how you behave, or act, when in love.

Aspects of Love in the Social Sciences
I. Emotional Part of Love

<i>Immature Love</i>	<i>Mature Love</i>
Possessiveness	Lasting Passion
Jealousy	Desire for
Infatuation	Companionship
Preoccupation	Warm Feeling of
Anxiety	Contentment

II. Belief Part of Love

<i>Immature Love</i>	<i>Mature Love</i>
“Love Is Blind”	Commitment
External to Us	Trust
Beyond Our	Sharing
Control	

III. Behavior Part of Love

<i>Immature Love</i>	<i>Mature Love</i>
Selfish	Create an
	Environment
Lustful	for Growth and
Concerned	Development
Only	
with Satisfying	Allows Other
	Space
Own Needs	for Growth
Clinging	
Overdependent	
Demanding of	
Obedience	

28. Notice how the characteristics of love spoken of by President Kimball mirror what research has found to be the characteristics of the mature kind of love upon which stable, high-quality marriages and family life are built. But the love of which Church leaders speak goes beyond the love even the best social science research has discovered. It includes, as President Kimball noted, a “consecration” to partner, to family, and also to the kingdom of God. This kind of love is intimately connected to covenants and to our love of the Lord. It is a love between couples “that binds them to each other and to the Lord” (Bruce Hafen, “Covenant Marriage,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 28). This kind of love eschews the lust and selfishness of premarital sex and unlawful cohabitation. This kind of love cares more about the other person than the self.

29. The way we communicate in dating and courtship usually influences how our partner will feel about us and our relationship. Relationships are established upon the comfort and trust created by sincere communication. Research notes that positive communication, practiced in dating and courtship relationships, increases the likelihood of greater commitment, better conflict resolution, and more love between partners in their marriage.

30. Good communication begins with a righteous heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” said the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:34). On the other hand, communication from a

selfish heart is generally just manipulation. Elder Marvin J. Ashton adds:

31. 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. ["Family Communications," Ensign, May 1976, 52; emphasis in original]

Past and Present Circumstances

32. Besides checking out the person's character and your ability to create a good couple relationship with them, you need to consider past and present family relationships. President David O. McKay 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" (GI, 459).

33. Research supports 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 result in poor marriages by the children from these homes. Young adults from divorced families, for example, may experience more depression and anger and have trust or commitment issues as a result of the trauma of parental divorce. Some individuals—whether their parents divorced or not—may have been exposed to poor models of communication and conflict resolution in their families. Individuals 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.

34. However, one whose family background is less than perfect must never feel that he or she is "damaged goods" and cannot have a good marriage. Nor should such a person be automatically eliminated from another's "pool of eligible spouses." We are not doomed to suffer the consequences of our parents' iniquities "unto the third and fourth generation." The very scriptures that warn of wickedness being passed on to the third and fourth generation also show the way out of a troubled family background. Doctrine and Covenants 124:50 tells us that the iniquities of the fathers will be visited upon the heads 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. What is most important is that the person has turned from the "wicked

traditions" of the parents and is striving to keep the Lord's commandments (Alma 23:3).

The Right Time

35. When it comes to determining "the right time," at least two questions need to be asked and answered. First, when is the right time of life to get married? Second, how much time should I spend in the process of going "from first date to chosen mate"? Let me briefly address these issues.

36. Years of research suggest that marriage has the fewest risks of later problems when people marry in their twenties. Marrying in your teens or into your thirties simply increases the risk factors associated with poorer marital quality and stability.

37. President Harold B. Lee helps us understand when the best time in life is to marry. He said:

38. Now don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to urge you younger men to marry too early. I think therein is one of the hazards of today's living. We don't want a young man to think of marriage until he is able to take care of a family, to have an institution 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. . . .

39. Please don't misunderstand what we are saying; but, 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. ["Priesthood Address," Ensign, January 1974, 100]

40. Sisters 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.

The ABCs of Courtship

41. How much time does it take to move through the process of finding the right person and preparing to marry him or her in the temple? Two research projects involving largely BYU students show what couples believe or have found to work for them. These two studies show that the average time from first date to temple marriage is about nine to 10 months. Some couples move much faster, some considerably slower. On average, three to four months of that nine to 10 months is the engagement. In a study of LDS couples married eight years, and in another study of single

BYU students asked what the ideal length of an engagement should be, the vast majority think that three to four months is about right. Don't take these numbers as goals you must meet. What the Brethren and the research do seem to suggest is that you can go too fast or too slow through the process. There are, for example, discernible stages that most couples need to go through on the path from first date to chosen mate. We might call these stages the "ABCs of courtship," and there are certain tasks you need to accomplish in each stage (George Levinger, "Development and Change," in Harold H. Kelley et al., *Close Relationships* [New York: W. H. Freeman, 1983], 321).

42. A is the Attraction and Acquaintance stage. Research on LDS students by my colleague Dr. Craig Ostler, in the Department of Religious Education, shows initial attraction usually consists of physical attraction, attraction to the person's personality, and/or attraction to their perceived spiritual qualities. According to Brother Ostler's research, LDS young people are most able to move from initial attraction to acquaintance and the start of a relationship if both the male and female are seeking, sending, and receiving what he called "interest cues and attraction strategies" (Craig J. Ostler, "Initiating Premarital Heterosexual Relationships: A Qualitative Study of Mate Selection Process from a Religiously Conservative Population" [Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1995]). Thus relationships generally develop only when you are seeking to know if a person is interested; sending interest cues appropriately; and receiving back, or understanding how to interpret the other person's interest in you, or lack thereof. One who is deficient in one or more of these processes finds that relationships tend not to develop, and one or both partners can become very frustrated. Dr. Ostler found that the females especially understood what they needed to do—and they were willing to teach roommates who were frustrated. They said, "What you do is touch him on the arm, look him in the eye, and laugh at his jokes. Within a few days he will be asking you out."

43. When the seeking, sending, and receiving is done in sync—in other words, both people are seeking, sending, and receiving the same messages—the couple moves to the B or Build-Up Stage. At this point the couple gets to know each other and checks out the person to see if he or she is the right person for them. Research by two of my master's students—EmRee Pugmire and Nancy McLaughlin—has shown that, generally speaking, LDS males and females

move through this stage best when a friendship is developed first; when both persons feel they are full and equal partners in the growing relationship; when this friendship happens before much, if any, physical involvement has occurred; and when both people are relaxed and not worrying about whether this particular relationship is "the one" and just kind of let things happen.

44. If all these things happen, then the couple is ready to move to the C stage, the stage of Consolidation, Continuation, and mutual Commitment to the eternal relationship.

Making the Decision

45. President Gordon B. Hinckley has some counsel about this stage:

46. 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. ["Thou Shalt Not Covet," *Ensign*, March 1990, 6]

47. We must finally "make a decision," as President Hinckley says. In doing this, most Latter-day Saints want a spiritual confirmation that they are making a wise commitment. As you seek a spiritual confirmation, you need to keep at least five things in mind.

48. First, be worthy to receive the inspiration you need. Elder Boyd K. Packer reminds us that if we "desire the inspiration of the Lord in this crucial decision, [we] must live the standards of the Church" (*Eternal Love* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 11).

49. Second, understand the balance between agency and inspiration. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "We make our own choices, and then we present the matter to the Lord and get his approving, ratifying seal" ("Agency or Inspiration?" *New Era*, January 1975, 42).

50. The experience of one young man illustrates this:

51. 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.

52. Third, seek multiple witnesses. The scriptures teach us that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1; D&C 6:28). A spiritual witness can be confirmed a second or greater time at the altar in the temple, as noted above; in prayer by the Spirit again; in discussions with parents, a bishop, or a trusted friend; while partaking of the sacrament; or in any number of circumstances.

53. Fourth, learn to discern between inspiration, infatuation, desperation, and a desire to please others. Inspiration comes as explained above: when one is living worthy, when one is exercising agency and studying it all out carefully, and when one’s decisions are confirmed by multiple spiritual enlightenments and peaceful feelings (see D&C 6:15, 22–23). Infatuation is usually manifest by the immature “love” I discussed earlier—that including great anxiety, possessiveness, selfishness, clinging, and overdependence. Infatuation 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, and cultural norms may create a sense of desperation that leads to an unwise decision. A desire to get away from an unpleasant family situation or fear of failure in school or work situations can also cause someone to look desperately to marriage as a way out of a problem. On the other hand, pressure from peers, family, and cultural norms may create a situation where you put off marriage for fear that others will think you are just a “Molly Mormon” or a “Norman the Mormon” who doesn’t “understand” that marriage is “old-fashioned” and can “ruin your career.” Such pressures to marry or not marry often create fears and anxieties that “speak” so loudly in our minds that we cannot hear the still, small whisperings of the Spirit.

54. Fifth, the spiritual confirmation needs to come to both parties involved. A person should not feel that if his or her partner receives a confirmation, that he or

she is therefore released from the necessity of seeking a similar confirmation. Elder Dallin H. Oaks discussed this issue:

55. 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. [“Revelation,” 1981–82 BYU Fireside and Devotional Speeches (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1982), 25]

The D and E of Relationship Development

56. Not all relationships end in marriage, and rightly so. Therefore we need to understand not only the ABCs of courtship but also the D and E stages of courtship: Deterioration and Ending. The D and E phases of relationship development are possibly the most difficult to deal with. Relationships, of course, can “deteriorate” and “end” very quickly—after only a few minutes of acquaintance or at any stage of development. But breaking up a relationship that has grown toward a sense of interdependence and possible thoughts of marriage are particularly difficult to end.

57. If it is right to break off a relationship, how can that be done so as to cause the least hurt? The revelation given by the Lord to Joseph Smith and contained in section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants provides excellent counsel not only for strengthening but also ending a relationship. Especially helpful is the counsel contained in these verses:

58. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

59. By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

60. Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

61. That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death. [D&C 121:41–44]

62. Verses 41 and 42 teach us that we should not attempt to continue a relationship by any unrighteous means. A partner should not be coerced into staying in a relationship, nor should we ever feel coerced. Furthermore, when a relationship should end, the principles articulated in verses 41 and 42 can be a guide for dealing with the hurt and emotion that may result. One may need to be very long-suffering, gentle, meek, and kind with a partner who does not understand or resists the change. The counsel given in verses 43 and 44 may seem extreme, but when considered carefully, it is some of the best counsel we can get for ending a relationship. To reprove means “to correct,” and betimes means “early on.” Thus, when “pure knowledge,” received by the Holy Ghost, helps us understand that a relationship must end, we should “correct” the situation (end the relationship) quickly and not let it drag on. The word sharply can mean “with clarity”—think of a sharp picture—rather than “with severity,” as it is most often interpreted. Thus, while being as loving and kind as we can, we should make it clear that the relationship is ending and why—rather than “beating around the bush,” hoping the partner will get the message. Again, this should be done with kindness, meekness, and love unfeigned; recognizing that even if the partner has hurt us in some way, she or he is a beloved child of God who must be treated in a Christlike manner.

63. If one is the “breakee” rather than the “breaker,” the same counsel applies: This partner you believe you love should not be coerced or forced in any way to continue if she or he does not want to continue. Even if the emotional hurt you feel is strong, you need to back off, not try to hurt the partner back in some way, and allow yourself time to heal.

64. Breaking up is not the end of the world. Great learning and maturity can come from surviving a premarital breakup. If one initiates or goes through a breakup with as much Christlike behavior and feelings as possible, and allows himself or herself to be healed by the peace of the Spirit, that person is then more ready to move on to a relationship that can result in an eternal marriage—but not too quickly, mind you.

65. Helps for Choosing the Right Person, the Right Place, and the Right Time

66. The Church and BYU have some wonderful resources to help you choose the right person, the

right place, and the right time. Let me note three of them:

67. Most institutes of religion and Church universities will have a religion course numbered 234 and titled Preparation for a Celestial Marriage. It is my understanding that a new student text for the course is coming out this fall. I encourage you to take this course.

68. The Family Studies Center at Brigham Young University has a Web site designed specifically to provide resources for couples preparing for marriage. It is the Before Forever site. Its URL is <http://marriageinfo.byu.edu>. Before Forever provides comprehensive and ready-to-use information online to help LDS couples better plan their future marriage. Before Forever is not a dating service or a counseling center. The site offers publications such as Ensign articles, books, and speeches about various marital and premarital topics; work sheets about different premarital and marital issues; and news and information about marriage and family events.

69. Another Family Studies Center Web site contains a survey called the RELATIONSHIP Evaluation, or RELATE, which you and your partner can complete online. Within minutes you will receive feedback online regarding the strengths and work areas in your relationship. RELATE is designed for unmarried and newly married couples, and we will soon have adolescent, remarriage, and mature adult versions available. Also, it will soon be available online in Spanish and Portuguese. RELATE’s URL is <http://relate.byu.edu>.

70. The Right Person Is Not Perfect—Yet

71. Our son Matt recently married a wonderful young woman from Oregon, and as my wife, Linda, and I were driving to the reception in Oregon, we reminisced about our own courtship and marriage. The more we talked, the more I remembered how immature I had been when we married.

72. Finally, in bewilderment, I asked Linda, “Why did you marry me?”

73. Her simple answer was, “I saw potential.”

74. As we search for a mate with whom we can spend the eternities, therefore, we would do well to remember Elder Richard G. Scott’s counsel that mirrors my wife’s comments:

75. 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. [“Receive the Temple Blessings,” Ensign, May 1999, 26]

76. That you may “marry the right person in the right place at the right time” is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

77. Thomas B. Holman was a BYU professor of marriage, family, and human development and associate director of outreach for the Family Studies Center in the BYU School of Family Life when this devotional address was given on 1 August 2000.

8. The True Nature of Love

The Eternal Blessings of Marriage

Richard G. Scott
Ensign, May 2011



1. That beautiful message by this magnificent choir describes, I think, the pattern of life for so many of us: “trying to be like Jesus.”

2. On July 16, 1953, my beloved Jeanene and I knelt as a young couple at an altar in the Manti Utah Temple. President Lewis R. Anderson exercised the sealing authority and pronounced us husband and wife, wedded for time and for all eternity. I have no power to describe the peace and serenity that come from the assurance that as I continue to live worthily, I will be able to be with my beloved Jeanene and our children forever because of that sacred ordinance performed with the proper priesthood authority in the house of the Lord.

3. Our seven children are bound to us by the sacred ordinances of the temple. My precious wife, Jeanene, and two of our children are beyond the veil. They provide a powerful motivation for each remaining member of our [family](#) to live so that together we will receive all of the eternal blessings promised in the temple.

4. Two of the vital pillars that sustain Father in Heaven’s plan of happiness are marriage and the family. Their lofty significance is underscored by Satan’s relentless efforts to splinter the family and to undermine the significance of temple ordinances, which bind the family together for eternity. The temple sealing has greater meaning as life unfolds. It will help you draw ever closer together and find greater joy and fulfillment in mortality.

5. Once I learned an important lesson from my wife. I traveled extensively in my profession. I had been gone almost two weeks and returned home one

Saturday morning. I had four hours before I needed to attend another meeting. I noticed that our little washing machine had broken down and my wife was washing the clothes by hand. I began to fix the machine.

6. Jeanene came by and said, “Rich, what are you doing?”

7. I said, “I’m repairing the washing machine so you don’t have to do this by hand.”

8. She said, “No. Go play with the children.”

9. I said, “I can play with the children anytime. I want to help you.”

10. Then she said, “Richard, please go play with the children.”

11. When she spoke to me that authoritatively, I obeyed.

12. I had a marvelous time with our children. We chased each other around and rolled in the fall leaves. Later I went to my meeting. I probably would have forgotten that experience were it not for the lesson that she wanted me to learn.

13. The next morning about 4:00 a.m., I was awakened as I felt two little arms around my neck, a kiss on the cheek, and these words whispered in my ear, which I will never forget: “Dad, I love you. You are my best friend.”

14. If you are having that kind of experience in your family, you are having one of the supernal joys of life.

15. If you are a young man of appropriate age and are not married, don’t waste time in idle pursuits. Get on with life and focus on getting married. Don’t just coast through this period of life. Young men, serve a worthy mission. Then make your highest priority finding a worthy, eternal companion. When you find you are developing an interest in a young woman, show her that you are an exceptional person that she

would find interesting to know better. Take her to places that are worthwhile. Show some ingenuity. If you want to have a wonderful wife, you need to have her see you as a wonderful man and prospective husband.

16. If you have found someone, you can form an extraordinarily wonderful courtship and marriage and be very, very happy eternally by staying within the bounds of worthiness the Lord has established.

17. If you are married, are you faithful to your spouse mentally as well as physically? Are you loyal to your marriage covenants by never engaging in conversation with another person that you wouldn't want your spouse to overhear? Are you kind and supportive of your spouse and children?

18. Brethren, do you lead out in family activities such as scripture study, family prayer, and family home evening, or does your wife fill in the gap your lack of attention leaves in the home? Do you tell your wife often how very much you love her? It will bring her great happiness. I've heard men tell me when I say that, "Oh, she knows." You need to tell her. A woman grows and is greatly blessed by that reassurance. Express [gratitude](#) for what your spouse does for you. Express that love and gratitude often. That will make life far richer and more pleasant and purposeful. Don't withhold those natural expressions of love. And it works a lot better if you are holding her close while you tell her.

19. I learned from my wife the importance of expressions of love. Early in our marriage, often I would open my scriptures to give a message in a meeting, and I would find an affectionate, supportive note Jeanene had slipped into the pages. Sometimes they were so tender that I could hardly talk. Those precious notes from a loving wife were and continue to be a priceless treasure of comfort and inspiration.

20. I began to do the same thing with her, not realizing how much it truly meant to her. I remember one year we didn't have the resources for me to give her a valentine, so I decided to paint a watercolor on the front of the refrigerator. I did the best I could; only I made one mistake. It was enamel paint, not watercolor. She never let me try to remove that permanent paint from the refrigerator.

21. I remember one day I took some of those little round paper circles that form when you punch holes in paper, and I wrote on them the numbers 1 to 100. I turned each over and wrote her a message, one word

on each circle. Then I scooped them up and put them in an envelope. I thought she would get a good laugh.

22. When she passed away, I found in her private things how much she appreciated the simple messages that we shared with each other. I noted that she had carefully pasted every one of those circles on a piece of paper. She not only kept my notes to her, but she protected them with plastic coverings as if they were a valuable treasure. There is only one that she didn't put with the others. It is still behind the glass in our kitchen clock. It reads, "Jeanene, it is time to tell you I love you." It remains there and reminds me of that exceptional daughter of Father in Heaven.

23. As I have thought back over our life together, I realize how blessed we've been. We have not had arguments in our home or unkind words between us. Now I realize that blessing came because of her. It resulted from her willingness to give, to share, and to never think of herself. In our later life together, I tried to emulate her example. I suggest that as husband and wife you do the same in your home.

24. Pure love is an incomparable, potent power for good. Righteous love is the foundation of a successful marriage. It is the primary cause of contented, well-developed children. Who can justly measure the righteous influence of a mother's love? What enduring fruits result from the seeds of truth that a mother carefully plants and lovingly cultivates in the fertile soil of a child's trusting mind and heart? As a mother you have been given divine instincts to help you sense your child's special talents and unique capacities. With your husband you can nurture, strengthen, and cause those traits to flower.

25. It is so rewarding to be married. Marriage is wonderful. In time you begin to think alike and have the same ideas and impressions. You have times when you are extremely happy, times of testing, and times of trial, but the Lord guides you through all of those growth experiences together.

26. One night our little son Richard, who had a heart problem, awoke crying. The two of us heard it. Normally my wife always got up to take care of a crying baby, but this time I said, "I'll take care of him."

27. Because of his problem, when he began to cry, his little heart would pound very rapidly. He would throw up and soil the bed clothing. That night I held him very close to try to calm his racing heart and stop his crying as I changed his clothes and put on new bedsheets. I held him until he went to sleep. I didn't

know then that just a few months later he would pass away. I will always remember holding him in my arms in the middle of that night.

28. I remember well the day he passed away. As Jeanene and I drove from the hospital, we pulled over to the side of the road. I held her in my arms. Each of us cried some, but we realized that we would have him beyond the veil because of the covenants we had made in the temple. That made his loss somewhat easier to accept.

29. Jeanene's kindness taught me so many valuable things. I was so immature, and she was so disciplined and so spiritual. Marriage provides an ideal setting for overcoming any tendency to be selfish or self-centered. I think one of the reasons that we are counseled to get married early in life is to avoid developing inappropriate character traits that are hard to change.

30. I feel sorry for any man who hasn't yet made the choice to seek an eternal companion, and my heart weeps for the sisters who haven't had the opportunity to marry. Some of you may feel lonely and unappreciated and cannot see how it will be possible for you to have the blessings of marriage and children or your own family. All things are possible to the Lord, and He keeps the promises He inspires His prophets to declare. Eternity is a long time. Have faith in those promises and live to be worthy of them so that in His time the Lord can make them come true in your life. With certainty, you will receive every promised blessing for which you are worthy.

31. Please pardon me for speaking of my precious wife, Jeanene, but we are an eternal family. She was always joyously happy, and much of it came from service to others. Even while very ill, in her morning prayer she would ask her Father in Heaven to lead her to someone she could help. That sincere supplication was answered time and again. The burdens of many were eased; their lives were brightened. She was blessed continually for being an instrument directed by the Lord.

32. I know what it is to love a daughter of Father in Heaven who with grace and devotion lived the full feminine splendor of her righteous womanhood. I am confident that when, in our future, I see her again beyond the veil, we will recognize that we have become even more deeply in love. We will appreciate each other even more, having spent this time separated by the veil. In the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

The Reflection In The Water

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Church News, 1 November 2009



1. My dear brothers and sisters, if we take the two hymns that we have just heard — “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” and “Do What Is Right” — and make them the motto of our lives, we will be in good shape on our way back to our Heavenly Father. What a wonderful sight you are! In my mind's eye I can imagine many other beautiful faces like yours — youthful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in all the nations throughout the world. You may not all look exactly alike, but you have so much in common. I consider this a choice assignment, and I'm grateful to President Monson for providing me this opportunity to spend a few minutes with you.

2. The Ugly Duckling

3. One of the most beloved storytellers of all time was the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen. In one of his stories, “The Ugly Duckling,” a mother duck discovers that one of her newly hatched chicks is unusually large and very ugly. At first the mother wonders if she has hatched a turkey egg, but the ugly child can swim as well as her other children. And so she comes to the conclusion that the poor thing is simply abnormal and disfigured.

4. The other ducklings, however, cannot leave the ugly child alone. They punish him mercilessly, pecking at him and teasing him and making him miserable. Finally, the ugly duckling decides it would be better for everyone if he left his family, and he runs away. During the bitter cold of his first winter on his own, the poor duckling nearly freezes to death, but somehow he survives. In spite of his privations, he feels himself getting stronger, and he loves spreading his wings and taking flight even though he's alone.

5. Then one day he sees flying overhead a flock of majestic birds, white as snow, graceful in their movements, with beautiful long necks and wide, elegant wings. Oh, what glorious and happy creatures! The ugly duckling longs to fly with them. He is afraid that they might kill him because he is so ugly. But then he decides that would be better than being pecked at by the other animals forever or freezing to death in the winter. And so he takes flight and follows them to a beautiful lake where they settle onto the water.

6. As he lands, the ugly duckling looks into the water and sees the reflection of a magnificent swan. Gradually, unable to believe it at first, the ugly duckling realizes that the reflection is his own! To his surprise the other swans welcome him, and they even agree that he is the most beautiful, most majestic of all the swans. At last he has discovered who he really is.

7. The Great Questions

8. Like this young swan, most of us have felt at one time or another that we don't quite fit in. Much of the confusion we experience in this life comes from simply not understanding who we are. Too many go about their lives thinking they are of little worth when, in reality, they are elegant and eternal creatures of infinite value with potential beyond imagination.

9. Discovering who we really are is part of this great adventure called life. Mankind's greatest minds have wrestled endlessly with these questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens after we die? And how does all this fit together — how does it make sense?

10. Once we begin to understand the answers to these questions — not with the mind only, but with the heart and the soul — we will begin to understand who we are, and we will feel like the wanderer who is finally finding home. We will feel like the young swan who has discovered at last who he really is. Everything finally makes sense.

11. The challenge is that the answers to these questions are simply beyond man's earthly capacity to logically determine. Questions that reach into spiritual things require spiritual answers. Those who reject revelation and insist on tangible evidence can only speculate or deny that there is life before or after this mortal sphere. Consequently, they may never understand who they really are or what true purpose life has.

12. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, we have been blessed with the answers to these questions, and we freely share them with all who will listen. We know them not because of someone's educated guess or because we found a scientific explanation. We have the answers because heavenly messengers revealed these mysteries to man. That same knowledge is available to anyone on this planet Earth who is honest in heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

13. This is no small thing. Throughout history, emperors and philosophers would have offered a

king's ransom for what God has given freely in our time. Because He is merciful and loves His children, God has given again in these latter-days the truth about where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going.

14. My dear young friends, this knowledge allows you to see your own reflection in the water. It assures you that you are not ordinary, rejected, or ugly. You are something divine — more beautiful and glorious than you can possibly imagine. This knowledge changes everything. It changes your present. It can change your future. And it can change the world.

15. We are profoundly aware, my precious young friends in the Church, wherever you may be, that you face many challenges in your young lives. Through your leaders and contacts with you individually, I have learned about the scope of your concerns. I've chosen from among the many questions I have received just a few that I think are among the harder and more troubling ones affecting you young Saints all around the globe. Today I hope to impress upon your mind and heart how a knowledge of who you really are can help you to successfully conquer the most difficult issues in life.

16. To Be or Not to Be

17. Here is the first question: "I'm unhappy and depressed. Sometimes it seems like the world would be a better place if I weren't in it. Why should I go on living?"

18. Allow me to be clear: severe depression and thoughts of suicide are not trivial matters and should be taken seriously. I urge those who suffer from depression or thoughts of suicide to seek help from trusted professionals and Church leaders. If you know someone who is thinking of suicide, be a true friend and make sure he or she gets help. Please know that we love you and want you to be successful and happy in life.

19. That being said, most people have felt sad or inadequate at one time or another. It's natural to have times of self-doubt or unhappiness. The question "Why should I go on living?" is simply another wording of the age-old phrase penned by William Shakespeare 400 years ago and uttered by millions of Hamlets the world over since that time: "To be, or not to be: that is the question."

20. But Shakespeare was wrong — "To be, or not to be" is not the question at all. There are other options beyond that simple contradiction. For my taste, I'd have Hamlet turn to the audience and say: "Knowing

that I am a child of God, what need I do and be to live up to this potential? That is the question.” Now, I understand that such an edit would hopelessly ruin one of the greatest literary masterpieces of all time. Nevertheless, if I were writing a script for you, that is how I would word it.

21. Think of where you came from. You are sons and daughters of the greatest, most glorious being in the universe. He loves you with an infinite love. He wants the best for you. Do you think our Father in Heaven wants you to feel depressed and sad? He wants no such thing. He has provided the commandments, which are the royal road to a life of purpose, peace, and joy. All we need to do is follow it. Knowing and living God's commandments really do lead to fulfillment and to joy.

22. Our destiny is greater than we can imagine. If only we understood who we are and what is in store for us, our hearts would overflow with such gratitude and happiness that it would enlighten even the darkest sorrows with the light and love of God, our Heavenly Father. The next time you feel unhappy, remember where you came from and where you are going. Rather than focus on things that dampen your thoughts with sorrow, choose to focus on those things that fill your soul with hope. You will realize that these things are always connected to serving God and our fellowmen. Remember that the Lord has given you His word in the scriptures. Pray earnestly to Him; talk with Him daily. Learn of Him, and walk in His way. Serve God and serve your fellowmen.

23. Remember that there is “a time to weep” but also “a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” If your heart has been heavy for a while, perhaps it is time to allow the light of the Son of God into your heart. I plead with you — just look into the water and see your true reflection! Realize the purpose for which you were created! Lift your face toward the far horizon!

24. It is well for you to laugh! It is well for you to be happy! Lift up your voices and “praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.”

25. I cannot imagine a heaven filled only with somber beings who never speak up or who do not enjoy music and visiting with each other. That is not heaven for me. I am certain that you were not created to spend the hours and days of your lives isolated from each other in worry or despair. You were created to have joy, so let's celebrate the merciful blessings of a joyful and loving Heavenly Father!

26. You don't need to wait for permission to fill your hearts with thanksgiving and happiness. You can do this nicely on your own. Get together as young people — in your wards or branches, but also with those in neighboring stakes and districts. Dance together, study the gospel together, work together, serve your fellowmen together — and have fun doing it. It is my earnest prayer that the knowledge of who you are and what you may become will fill your souls with the peaceable love of God and that this will ignite within you a happiness worthy of your true heritage, for in truth you are princes and princesses, kings and queens.

27. Will I Ever Find My Soul Mate?

28. A second question we hear from you young people is “I'm so lonely. Will I ever find my soul mate?” I have a number of things I want to say on this subject, but let's start with the concept of finding the one person you were meant to be with — the one person who is perfect for you.

29. There is an old story about a young woman on an archaeological excavation who discovers an ancient-looking lamp. When she rubs it, a genie appears, offering her one wish. She thinks for a moment and asks for world peace — that people would love each other and live in harmony forever.

30. The genie contemplates her request and finally says: “What you are asking for is impossible. The division among the peoples of the world is too deep and has existed for too long. Please ask for something else. Anything but that.”

31. The young lady thinks again and says: “Somewhere out there is the one person I was meant to be with. I want to find him — someone who is handsome, thoughtful, and has a sense of humor; someone who will help around the house, loves kids, doesn't watch sports all the time, has a great job, and thinks first about my happiness; someone who will go shopping with me and who can get along with my family.”

32. The genie considers her request for a moment, sighs deeply, and then replies, “Let me see what I can do about world peace.”

33. I know this may be a disappointment for some of you, but I don't believe there is only one right person for you. I think I fell in love with my wife, Harriet, from the first moment I saw her. Nevertheless, had she decided to marry someone else, I believe I would have met and fallen in love with someone else. I am eternally grateful that this didn't happen, but I don't

believe she was my one chance at happiness in this life, nor was I hers.

34. Another error you might easily make in dating is expecting to find perfection in the person you are with. The truth is, the only perfect people you might know are those you don't know very well. Everyone has imperfections. Now, I'm not suggesting you lower your standards and marry someone with whom you can't be happy. But one of the things I've realized as I've matured in life is that if someone is willing to accept me — imperfect as I am — then I should be willing to be patient with others' imperfections as well. Since you won't find perfection in your partner, and your partner won't find it in you, your only chance at perfection is in creating perfection together.

35. There are those who do not marry because they feel a lack of “magic” in the relationship. By “magic” I assume they mean sparks of attraction. Falling in love is a wonderful feeling, and I would never counsel you to marry someone you do not love. Nevertheless — and here is another thing that is sometimes hard to accept — that magic sparkle needs continuous polishing. When the magic endures in a relationship, it's because the couple made it happen, not because it mystically appeared due to some cosmic force.

36. Frankly, it takes work. For any relationship to survive, both parties bring their own magic with them and use that to sustain their love. Although I have said that I do not believe in a one-and-only soul mate for anyone, I do know this: once you commit to being married, your spouse becomes your soul mate, and it is your duty and responsibility to work every day to keep it that way. Once you have committed, the search for a soul mate is over. Our thoughts and actions turn from looking to creating.

37. But what about those who despair of ever finding an eternal companion? First, don't give up. Go to activities, meet people, and do all you can. I know that dating can be rough. Rejection is one of the most painful things we can experience. Trust me, I know how this feels. I fell in love with Harriet long before she fell in love with me.

38. But this didn't stop me — not at all. I found ways to be in the same place she was. When I was administering the sacrament at church, I arranged to pass it to her family. I was doing the best I could to impress her, but I think she found me a little immature. The sparks simply weren't there for her. I despaired of ever convincing her that I could be anything more than a friend.

39. I went away, joined the Air Force, and then traveled half a world away to attend pilot training in the United States. It wasn't until I returned to Germany having completed my training as a fighter pilot — years after I had first met her — that this beautiful young woman looked at me and said those magical words I had been longing to hear: “You have matured since the last time I saw you.”

40. I moved quickly after that, and within a few months I married the woman I had loved for a long, long time.

41. So don't give up, brothers and sisters. Just because you have been rejected a time or two — or three or four, or a couple hundred times — don't despair. Brethren, the secret to finding the girl of your dreams is to get to know many of them and then, when you fall in love and it feels right, ask her to marry you. If she says no, you continue to search and to pray until finally you will arrive with that young woman at the altar of the temple. Just don't give up.

42. Now, sisters, be gentle. It's all right if you turn down requests for dates or proposals for marriage. But please do it gently. And brethren, please start asking! There are too many of our young women who never go on dates. Don't suppose that certain girls would never go out with you. Sometimes they are wondering why no one asks them out. Just ask, and be prepared to move on if the answer is no.

43. One of the trends we see in some parts of the world is our young people only “hanging out” in large groups rather than dating. While there is nothing wrong with getting together often with others your own age, I don't know if you can really get to know individuals when you're always in a group. One of the things you need to learn is how to have a conversation with a member of the opposite sex. A great way to learn this is by being alone with someone — talking without a net, so to speak.

44. Dates don't have to be — and in most cases shouldn't be — expensive and over-planned affairs. When my wife and I moved from Germany to Salt Lake City, one of the things that most surprised us was the elaborate and sometimes stressful process young people had developed of asking for and accepting dates.

45. Relax. Find simple ways to be together. One of my favorite things to do when I was young and looking for a date was to walk a young lady home after a Church meeting. Remember, your goal should not be to have a video of your date get a million views

on YouTube. The goal is to get to know one individual person and learn how to develop a meaningful relationship with the opposite sex.

46. Now, there are those among you fine young members of the Church who might never marry. Although they are worthy in every way, they may never find someone to whom they will be sealed in the temple of the Lord in this life. There is no way for those who have not experienced this despair to truly understand the loneliness and pain they might feel. I know of many women who want more than anything else to be a wife and a mother, and they cannot understand why their prayers have never been answered. There are many single men who, for whatever reason, also find themselves alone.

47. First, let me tell you that your prayers are heard. Your Father in Heaven knows the desires of your heart. I cannot tell you why one individual's prayers are answered one way while someone else's are answered differently. But this I can tell you: the righteous desires of your hearts will be fulfilled.

48. Sometimes it can be difficult to see anything beyond the path immediately before us. We are impatient and do not want to wait for a future fulfillment of our greatest desires. Nevertheless, the brief span of this life is nothing in comparison with eternity. And if only we can hope and exercise faith and joyfully endure to the end — and I say joyfully endure to the end — there, in that great heavenly future, we will have the fulfillment of the righteous desires of our hearts and so very much more that we can scarcely comprehend now.

49. In the meantime, do not wait for someone else to make your life complete. Stop second-guessing yourself and wondering if you are defective. Instead, seek to reach your potential as a child of God. Seek learning. Become engaged in a meaningful career, and seek fulfillment in service to others. Use your time, your talents, and your resources to improve yourself and bless those around you. All of this is part of your preparation for having a family. Immerse yourself in your ward or branch and seek to magnify your callings, no matter what they may be.

50. The great purpose of this mortal existence is to learn to fully love our Heavenly Father and our neighbor as ourselves. If we do this with all our might, mind, and strength, our eternal destiny will be glorious and grand beyond our capacity to imagine. Be faithful, and things will work out for you. That is His eternal promise to all who love and honor Him.

51. Can I Remain Faithful?

52. A third question young people have is “Can I remain faithful?” There are those who have doubts about God or the Church. Others give in to temptation that lures them away from the safety of the straight and narrow pathway of discipleship.

53. When I was a pilot, I often saw an interesting weather phenomenon as I flew between Europe and Africa. It is called the intertropical convergence zone — a band of thunderstorms that moves north and south across the equator, filling the horizon with billowing, menacing columns of clouds.

54. I could scarcely look at these clouds without being fascinated with their beauty and majesty. They towered in massive black formations, and within them lightning sparked with brilliant light from one end to the other in an indescribable fury of fire. What a glorious and fascinating sight!

55. But what do you think pilots do when they approach these storms? They avoid them — no matter how beautiful and intriguing they appear. As moisture rises in the clouds, it begins to freeze, forming hail the size of soccer balls that can puncture metal and destroy an aircraft. Severe turbulence and electric discharges can cripple the airplane and its systems.

56. Isn't the same principle true when you see things that could cause spiritual harm? Temptation wouldn't be temptation if it didn't appear attractive, fascinating, or fun. But, like the pilot approaching a storm, you need to learn to avoid it, no matter how beautiful or intriguing it may appear.

57. Because Heavenly Father loves His children, He has given us the commandments to keep us at a safe distance from those harmful storms. He does not force any of His children to walk in His way. He allows and expects you to choose for yourselves. But know this: some choices lead to disaster. So, choose the right.

58. I add my witness to the chorus of warnings against the terrible problem of pornography. Steer clear of it. Stay away from it. The same words we used to train our pilots regarding thunderstorms I say to you regarding pornography: “Avoid, avoid, avoid!”

59. Don't assume that you can put the nose of the plane just a little bit inside the storm — do not flirt with pornography. Remember that often the most disgusting and destructive of things can appear attractive in the beginning. Steer clear of those things that can endanger you.

60. Is It True?

61. Now the next issue: What about doubts and questions? How do you find out that the gospel is true? Is it all right to have questions about the Church or its doctrine? My dear young friends, we are a question-asking people because we know that inquiry leads to truth. That is the way the Church got its start — from a young man who had questions. In fact, I'm not sure how one can discover truth without asking questions. In the scriptures you will rarely discover a revelation that didn't come in response to a question. Whenever a question arose and Joseph Smith wasn't sure of the answer, he approached the Lord, and the results are the wonderful revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. Often the knowledge Joseph received extended far beyond the original question. That is because not only can the Lord answer the questions we ask but, even more importantly, He can give us answers to questions we should have asked. Let us listen to those answers.

62. The missionary effort of the Church is founded upon honest investigators asking heartfelt questions. Inquiry is the birthplace of testimony. Some might feel embarrassed or unworthy because they have searching questions regarding the gospel, but they needn't feel that way. Asking questions isn't a sign of weakness; it's a precursor of growth.

63. God commands us to seek answers to our questions and asks only that we seek “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ.” When we do so, the truth of all things can be manifested to us “by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

64. Fear not; ask questions. Be curious, but doubt not! Always hold fast to faith and to the light you have already received. Because we see imperfectly in mortality, not everything is going to make sense right now. In fact, I should think that if everything did make sense to us, it would be evidence that it had all been made up by a mortal mind. Remember that God has said:

65. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . .

66. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

67. Nevertheless, you know that one of the purposes of mortality is to become more like your Heavenly Father in your thoughts and in your ways. Viewed from this perspective, searching for answers to your questions can bring you closer to God, strengthening

your testimony instead of shaking it. It's true that “faith is not . . . a perfect knowledge,” but as you exercise your faith, applying gospel principles every day under any circumstances, you will taste the sweet fruits of the gospel, and by this fruit you will know of its truth.

68. You Are Eternal

69. There will always be voices telling you that you are foolish to believe that you are swans, insisting you are but ugly ducklings and that you can't expect to become anything else.

70. But you know better. Because of the revealed word of a merciful God, you have seen your true reflection in the water and you have felt the eternal glory of that divine spirit within you. You are no ordinary beings, my beloved young friends all around the world. You are glorious and eternal.

71. No matter your circumstances or trials in life, I urge you to remember who you are, where you came from, and where you are going — for the answers to those questions will truly provide confidence and direction for your life.

72. Your Heavenly Father lives. He knows you. He speaks to you in these latter days through prophets and apostles. President Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's prophet on earth in our day. This Church is directed by the Savior Jesus Christ. I know this. He is at the head of this Church.

73. Today I may speak to you with imperfection — and with a German accent — but I promise you that the words you feel in your heart and in your mind and in your soul come to you through the eloquence, purity, and power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost you can know the truth of all things.

74. Brothers and sisters — my dear friends — I love you. I love you with all my heart. I am grateful for you. I am grateful for your goodness. As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, I bless you individually and collectively that you may learn to know who you really are and what you must do and be to live a happy and fulfilling life.

75. It is my prayer and blessing that when you look at your reflection, you will be able to see beyond imperfections and self-doubts and recognize who you truly are: glorious sons and daughters of the Almighty God. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

9. The Law of Chastity

My Soul Delighteth In The Things Of The Lord

Susan W. Tanner
Ensign, May 2008



1. In the [Book of Mormon](#), Nephi speaks often of delight. He delights “in the things of the Lord,” “in the scriptures,” and “in the great and eternal plan” of our Father in Heaven (see [2 Nephi 4:15–16](#); [11:2–8](#)).

Notably, Nephi often remembers his sources of delight in the midst of affliction, serving to lift and focus his spirit on eternal blessings.

2. We too should delight in the things of the Lord for it will “lift” our hearts and give us cause to “rejoice” ([2 Nephi 11:8](#)). Let me mention a few of the things I delight in.

3. I delight in our Savior, [Jesus Christ](#). Like Nephi, “I glory in my Jesus” ([2 Nephi 33:6](#)), in His ministering and saving roles upon the earth. He provides light and hope and has given us the [Holy Ghost](#) for further guidance and comfort along the pathway we should go. It is only through Him that we can return to our Father. “Salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ” ([Mosiah 3:17](#)).

4. I delight in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets with whom I have had the blessed opportunity to serve. I testify that President Thomas S. Monson is the Lord’s prophet on the earth today. I delight that he is truly a Christlike minister to the one, reaching out in warmth and love to each individual.

5. I delight in priesthood keys and temples that dot the earth, making available to each of us eternal ordinances and covenants. Some of my most celestial days recently have been my own children’s temple marriages, with my father performing that holy ordinance.

6. I delight in the strength of youth as I see them throng the temples to do baptisms for the dead. I love their worthy adherence to the standards leading to the temple and their preparation to be faithful missionaries and righteous mothers and fathers.

7. I delight that I am a daughter of Heavenly Father, who loves me. I learned of my divine identity in my earliest years at my mother’s side. Just recently I saw my then three-year-old granddaughter learning her identity from her mother. Eliza had gone to bed distraught. She could be comforted only as her mother again told Eliza’s favorite true story about the special night when Heavenly Father distinctly and clearly whispered to her mommy’s heart that Eliza was a special spirit with a noble mission ahead.

8. I take great delight in my role as a nurturer, which allows me to express my deepest identity as a woman. I never fail to be struck by the way that women, young women, and even little girls seem to have an instinctive interest and ability in nurturing. It is not only a mother’s primary responsibility but also part of our “individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (“[The Family](#): A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). To nurture is to teach, to foster development, to promote growth, to feed, and to nourish. Who would not shout for joy at being given such a blessed role?

9. The scriptures use the word nurture only twice and in both cases speak of the responsibility of parents to raise their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” ([Ephesians 6:4](#); [Enos 1:1](#)).

10. President Hinckley also admonished both men and women to be nurturers. He said, “How much more beautiful would be the ... society in which we live if every father ... and ... mother regarded [their] children ... as gifts from the God of heaven ... and brought them up with true affection in the wisdom and admonition of the Lord” (“*These, Our Little Ones*,” *Liahona*, Dec. 2007, 7; *Ensign*, Dec. 2007, 9).

11. I delight in families. Recently I delighted in the birth of a new grandchild into a family that understands that parents have the solemn responsibility to rear their children in love and righteousness. The older siblings had a natural curiosity about their little sister’s entrance into this world. Their first lessons about this holy subject were taught by loving parents in a sacred family setting, in the celestial climate that accompanies a new soul’s birth into mortality, and in the context of our Father’s great eternal plan. By contrast, the next day upon returning home from kindergarten, our granddaughter reported that she had learned that day in class “a big new term called sexual abuse.” I felt concerned that at

this early age children already have to be aware, for safety reasons, of the negative facets of the subject they had so beautifully talked of the night before. I delighted as never before in a nurturing family founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ.

12. Jacob taught that the Lord delights “in the chastity of women” ([Jacob 2:28](#)). I delight in the chastity and purity of all women and men. How it must grieve the Lord to see virtue violated and modesty mocked on every side in this wicked world. The Lord has provided for His children great joy through intimate, loving relationships, as my grandchildren were learning. I delight in the clarity of the proclamation to the world on the family, which warns 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.”

13. I delight in the examples of those in the scriptures who walk by faith on their earthly journey. Each time I walk with Abraham and Isaac on the road to Mount Moriah, I weep, knowing that Abraham does not know that there will be an angel and a ram in the thicket at the end of the journey. We are each in the middle of our earthly path, and we don’t know the rest of our own stories. But we, as Abraham, are blessed with miracles.

14. I delight in the Lord’s mercies and miracles (see “Bless Our Fast, We Pray,” Hymns, no. 138). I know that His tender mercies and His miracles, large and small, are real. They come in His way and on His timetable. Sometimes it is not until we have reached our extremity. Jesus’s disciples on the Sea of Galilee had to toil in rowing against a contrary wind all through the night before Jesus finally came to their aid. He did not come until the “fourth watch,” meaning near dawn. Yet He did come. (See [Mark 6:45–51](#).) My testimony is that miracles do come, though sometimes not until the fourth watch.

15. Right now I am exerting my faith and prayers and watching for miracles in behalf of loved ones who are physically sick, emotionally bereft, and spiritually astray. I delight in the Lord’s love for each of His children and in His wisdom to allow us individually tailored earthly experiences.

16. Finally, I delight in, more than I can express, the eternal love and constant help of my husband and the prayers and support of my children and parents during these years of my service as Young Women general president.

17. “My soul delighteth in the things of the Lord” ([2 Nephi 4:16](#))—His law, His life, His love. To delight in Him is to acknowledge His hand in our lives. Our gospel duty is to do what is right and to love and delight in what is right. When we delight to serve Him, our Father in Heaven delights to bless us. “I, the Lord, ... delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end” ([D&C 76:5](#)). I want to be worthy always of His delight. “I love the Lord, in Him my soul delights” (“I Love the Lord,” Jackman Music Corporation). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Personal Purity

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, November 1998



1. As modern winds of immorality swirl luridly around them, I am concerned for any of our youth or young adults who may be confused about principles of personal purity, about obligations of total chastity

before marriage and complete fidelity after it. Against what is happening in the world they see and hear, and hoping to fortify parents as they teach their children a higher standard, I wish to speak today about moral cleanliness. Because this subject is as sacred as any I know, I earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to guide me in remarks that are more candid than I would wish to make. Today I know how Jacob in the [Book of Mormon](#) felt when he said on the same topic, “It grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech.” [1](#)

2. In approaching this subject I do not document a host of social ills for which the statistics are as grim as the examples are offensive. Nor will I present here a checklist of do’s and don’ts about dating and boy-girl relationships. What I wish to do is more personal—I wish to try to answer questions some of you may have been asking: Why should we be morally clean? Why is it such an important issue to God? Does the Church have to be so strict about it when others don’t seem to be? How could anything society exploits and glamorizes so openly be very sacred or serious?

3. May I begin with a lesson from civilization’s long, instructive story. Will and Ariel Durant have written: “No man [or woman], however brilliant or well-informed, can ... safely ... dismiss ... the wisdom of [lessons learned] in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; [but] if he is

unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he ... understand[s] 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.”²

4. A more important scriptural observation is offered by the writer of Proverbs: “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? ... Whoso committeth adultery ... destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.”³

5. 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 the whole world, for that matter—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](#)?”⁴

6. By assigning such seriousness to a physical appetite so universally bestowed, what is God trying to tell us about its place in His plan for all men and women? I submit to you He is doing precisely that—commenting about the very plan of life itself. Clearly among His greatest concerns regarding mortality are how one gets into this world and how one gets out of it. He has set very strict limits in these matters.

7. Fortunately, in the case of how life is terminated, most seem to be quite responsible. But in the significance of giving life, we sometimes find near-criminal irresponsibility. May I offer three reasons why this is an issue of such magnitude and consequence in the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#).

8. First is the revealed, restored doctrine of the human soul.

9. One of the “plain and precious” truths restored in this dispensation is that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man”⁵ and that when the spirit and body are separated, men and women “cannot receive a fulness of joy.”⁶ That is the reason why obtaining a body is so fundamentally important in the first place, why sin of any kind is such a serious matter (namely because it is sin that ultimately brings both physical and spiritual death), and why the [resurrection](#) of the body is so central to the great triumph of Christ’s Atonement.

10. The body is an essential part of the soul. This distinctive and very important Latter-day Saint

doctrine underscores why sexual sin is so serious. We declare that one who uses the God-given body of another without divine sanction abuses the very soul of that individual, abuses the central purpose and processes of life, “the very key”⁷ to life, as President Boyd K. Packer once called it. In exploiting the body of another—which means exploiting his or her soul—one desecrates the Atonement of Christ, which saved that soul and which makes possible the gift of eternal life. And when one mocks the Son of Righteousness, one steps into a realm of heat hotter and holier than the noonday sun. You cannot do so and not be burned.

11. Please, never say: “Who does it hurt? Why not a little freedom? I can transgress now and repent later.” Please don’t be so foolish and so cruel. You cannot with impunity “crucify Christ afresh.”⁸ “Flee fornication,”⁹ Paul cries, and flee “anything like unto it,”¹⁰ the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) adds. Why? Well, for one reason because of the incalculable suffering in both body and spirit endured by the Savior of the world so that we could flee.¹¹ We owe Him something for that. Indeed, we owe Him everything for that. “Ye are not your own,” Paul says. “Ye [have been] bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”¹² In sexual transgression the soul is at stake—the body and the spirit.

12. Secondly, may I stress that human intimacy is reserved for a married couple because it is the ultimate symbol of total union, a totality and a union ordained and defined by God. From the Garden of Eden onward, marriage was intended to mean the complete merger of a man and a woman—their hearts, hopes, lives, love, [family](#), future, everything. Adam said of Eve that she was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and that they were to be “one flesh” in their life together.¹³ This is a union of such completeness that we use the word seal to convey its eternal promise. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) once said we perhaps could render such a sacred bond as being “welded”¹⁴ one to another.

13. But such a total 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 solemn promises and the pledge of all they possess—their very hearts and minds, all their days and all their dreams.

14. Can you see the moral schizophrenia that comes from pretending you are one, pretending you have made solemn promises before God, sharing the physical symbols and the physical intimacy of your counterfeit union but then fleeing, retreating, severing

all such other aspects of what was meant to be a total obligation?

15. In matters of human intimacy, you must wait! You must wait until you can give everything, and you cannot give everything until you are legally and lawfully married. 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 self is emotional Russian roulette. If you persist in pursuing physical satisfaction without the sanction of heaven, you run the terrible risk of such spiritual, psychic damage that you may undermine both your longing for physical intimacy and your ability to give wholehearted devotion to a later, truer love. You may come to that truer moment of ordained love, of real union, only to discover to your horror that what you should have saved you have spent, and that only God’s grace can recover the piecemeal dissipation of the virtue you so casually gave away. On your wedding day the very best gift you can give your eternal companion is your very best self—clean and pure and worthy of such purity in return.

16. Thirdly, may I say that physical intimacy is not only a symbolic union between a husband and a wife—the very uniting of their souls—but it is also symbolic of a shared relationship between them and their Father in Heaven. He is immortal and perfect. We are mortal and imperfect. Nevertheless we seek ways even in mortality whereby we can unite with Him spiritually. In so doing we gain some access to both the grace and the majesty of His power. Those special moments include kneeling at a marriage altar in the house of the Lord, blessing a newborn baby, [baptizing](#) and confirming a new member of the Church, partaking of the emblems of the Lord’s Supper, and so forth.

17. 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. One aspect of that divinity given to virtually all men and women is the use of His power to create a human body, that wonder of all wonders, a genetically and spiritually unique being never before seen 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.

18. Probably only a parent who has held that newborn infant in his or her arms understands the wonder of which I speak. Suffice it to say that of all

the titles God has chosen for Himself, Father is the one He favors most, and creation is His watchword—especially human creation, creation in His image. You and I have been given something of that godliness, but under the most serious and sacred of restrictions. The only control placed on us is self-control—self-control born of respect for the divine sacramental power this gift represents.

19. My beloved friends, especially my young friends, can you see why personal purity is such a serious matter? Can you understand why the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles would issue a proclamation declaring that “the means by which mortal life is created [is] divinely appointed” and that “the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife”? [15](#) Don’t be deceived and don’t be destroyed. Unless such powers are controlled and commandments kept, your future may be burned; your world could go up in flames. Penalty may not come on the precise day of transgression, but it comes surely and certainly enough. And unless there is true repentance and obedience to a merciful God, then someday, somewhere, the morally cavalier and unclean will pray like the rich man who wished Lazarus to “dip ... his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” [16](#)

20. I have declared here the solemn word of revelation that the spirit and the body constitute the soul of man, and that through the Atonement of Christ the body shall rise from the grave to unite with the spirit in an eternal existence. That body is therefore something to be kept pure and holy. Do not be afraid of soiling its hands in honest labor. Do not be afraid of scars that may come in defending the truth or fighting for the right, but beware scars that spiritually disfigure, that come to you in activities you should not have undertaken, that befall you in places where you should not have gone. Beware the wounds of any battle in which you have been fighting on the wrong side. [17](#)

21. If some few of you are carrying such wounds—and I know that you are—to you is extended the peace and renewal of repentance available through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In such serious matters the path of repentance is not easily begun nor painlessly traveled. But the Savior of the world will walk that essential journey with you. He will strengthen you when you waver. He will be your light when it seems most dark. He will take your hand and be your hope when hope seems all you have left. His compassion and mercy, with all their cleansing and healing power, are freely given to all who truly

wish complete [forgiveness](#) and will take the steps that lead to it.

22. I bear witness of the great plan of life, of the powers of godliness, of mercy and [forgiveness](#) and the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ—all of which have profound meaning in matters of moral cleanliness. I testify that we are to glorify God in our body and in our spirit. I thank heaven for legions of the young who are doing just that and helping others do the same. I thank heaven for homes where this is taught. That lives of personal purity may be revered by all, I pray in the name of purity Himself, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

1. [Jacob 2:7](#). See [Jacob 2–3](#) for the full context of his sermon on chastity.
2. The Lessons of History (1968), 35–36.
3. [Prov. 6:27–28, 32–33](#).
4. [Alma 39:5](#).
5. [D&C 88:15](#).
6. [D&C 93:34](#).
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 139; or Ensign, July 1972, 113.
8. See [Heb. 6:6](#).
9. [1 Cor. 6:18](#).
10. [D&C 59:6](#); emphasis added.
11. See especially [D&C 19:15–20](#).
12. [1 Cor. 6:19–20](#); emphasis added; see also [1 Cor. 6:13–18](#).
13. See [Gen. 2:23–24](#).
14. See [D&C 128:18](#).
15. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
16. [Luke 16:24](#).
17. See James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, Oct. 1913, 117.

Trial of Your Faith

Elder Neil L. Andersen

Ensign, November 2012



1. Ten years ago as my wife, Kathy, and I were living in São Paulo, Brazil, President David Marriott was presiding over the Brazil São Paulo Interlagos Mission. He and his wife, Neill, and their sons Will, Wesley, and Trace lived near us. They had left their home, their business, and many in their [family](#) to respond to a call from the prophet to serve a mission.

2. President Marriott called me one afternoon. Their precious, righteous 21-year-old daughter, Georgia, a senior in violin performance at Indiana University, had been hit by a truck while riding her bicycle home after a Church meeting. On first report, Georgia was doing well. Hours later her condition dramatically worsened.

3. Family and friends began fasting and praying for a miracle for Georgia. Her mother flew through the night from Brazil. Arriving in Indiana the next day, she was met by her older children, who tearfully explained that they had been with Georgia as she passed away.

4. I watched the Marriott family at the time of this experience and in the months and years that followed. They wept, they prayed, they spoke of Georgia, they felt immense pain and sadness, but their faith did not falter. In this morning's session, we heard of similar faith in the beautiful lives of the Bowen and Wilberger families.¹

5. The gift of faith is a priceless spiritual endowment. "This is life eternal," Jesus prayed, "that they might know thee the only true God, and [Jesus Christ](#), whom thou hast sent."²

6. Our faith is centered in God, our Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. It is bolstered by our knowledge that the fulness of the gospel has been restored to the earth, that the [Book of Mormon](#) is the word of God, and that prophets and apostles today hold the keys of the priesthood. We treasure our faith, work to strengthen our faith, pray for increased faith, and do all within our power to protect and defend our faith.

7. The Apostle Peter identified something he called a "trial of your faith."³ He had experienced it. Remember Jesus's words:

8. "Simon, ... Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

9. "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."⁴

10. Peter later encouraged others: "Think it not strange," he said, "concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."⁵

11. These fiery trials are designed to make you stronger, but they have the potential to diminish or even destroy your trust in the Son of God and to weaken your resolve to keep your promises to Him. These trials are often camouflaged, making them difficult to identify. They take root in our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, our sensitivities, or in those things that matter most to us. A real but manageable test for one can be a fiery trial for another.

12. How do you remain "steadfast and immovable"⁶ during a trial of faith? You immerse yourself in the very things that helped build your core of faith: you exercise faith in Christ, you pray, you

ponder the scriptures, you repent, you keep the commandments, and you serve others.

13. When faced with a trial of faith—whatever you do, you don't step away from the Church! Distancing yourself from the kingdom of God during a trial of faith is like leaving the safety of a secure storm cellar just as the tornado comes into view.

14. The Apostle Paul said, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."⁷ It is within the sanctuary of the Church that we protect our faith. Meeting together with others who believe, we pray and find answers to our prayers; we worship through music, share testimony of the Savior, serve one another, and feel the Spirit of the Lord. We partake of the [sacrament](#), receive the blessings of the priesthood, and attend the temple. The Lord declared, "In the ordinances ... , the power of godliness is manifest."⁸ When you are faced with a test of faith, stay within the safety and security of the household of God. There is always a place for you here. No trial is so large we can't overcome it together.⁹

15. President Thomas S. Monson said: "The moral compass of society [has been evolving at a rapid rate]. Behaviors ... once ... considered inappropriate and immoral are now ... viewed by ... many as acceptable."¹⁰

16. There are many single adults in the Church well beyond their early adult years. While finding their present life different than they had anticipated, they keep the law of chastity.¹¹ It can be a trial of their faith. I express my deep respect and admiration for these disciples of Christ.

17. "God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."¹² In the New Testament the Savior lifted the moral standard for His followers when He declared, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."¹³ He taught us not to condemn others, but He was unafraid to speak directly: "Go," He said, "and sin no more."¹⁴

18. Our family has a friend. You probably know someone like her, or perhaps you are like her. Always faithful, serves nobly in the Church, admired professionally, adored by her family, and while she anticipated marriage and children, she is single. "I made the decision," she said, "to put my ... trust in Jesus Christ. Going to the temple frequently helps me

keep a more eternal focus. It reminds me I am never alone. I have faith ... that no ... blessing will be withheld ... as I ... remain faithful to my covenants, including the law of chastity."¹⁵

19. Another friend served an outstanding mission, followed by rigorous academic training. He hoped to have a family. His trial of faith: feelings of same-sex attraction. He wrote me recently: "I am promised in my patriarchal blessing that I will have my own family someday. Whether that will occur in this life or the next, I do not know. But what I do know is that I don't want to do anything that will jeopardize the blessings God has promised both me and my future posterity. ... Living [the law of chastity] is a challenge, but did we not come to earth to confront challenges and to show God our love and respect for Him by keeping His commandments? I am blessed with good health, the gospel, a loving family, and loyal friends. I am grateful for my many blessings."¹⁶

20. The world protests, how can you ask so much? The Lord responds:

21. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. ...

22. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."¹⁷

23. These two followers of Christ and tens of thousands like them have felt the Savior's promise: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."¹⁸

24. Here is another trial. There have always been a few who want to discredit the Church and to destroy faith. Today they use the Internet.

25. Some of the information about the Church, no matter how convincing, is just not true. In 1985, I remember a colleague walking into my business office in Florida. He had a Time magazine article entitled "Challenging Mormonism's Roots." It spoke of a recently discovered letter, supposedly written by Martin Harris, that conflicted with [Joseph Smith's](#) account of finding the Book of Mormon plates.¹⁹

26. My colleague asked if this new information would destroy the Mormon Church. The article quoted a man who said he was leaving the Church over the document. Later, others reportedly left the Church.²⁰ I'm sure it was a trial of their faith.

27. A few months later, experts discovered (and the forger confessed) that the letter was a complete fraud.

I remember really hoping that those who had left the Church because of this deception would find their way back.

28. A few question their faith when they find a statement made by a Church leader decades ago that seems incongruent with our doctrine. There is an important principle that governs the doctrine of the Church. The doctrine is taught by all 15 members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. It is not hidden in an obscure paragraph of one talk. True principles are taught frequently and by many. Our doctrine is not difficult to find.

29. The leaders of the Church are honest but imperfect men. Remember the words of Moroni: “Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father ... ; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.”²¹

30. Joseph Smith said, “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations.”²² The miracle of God’s hand in the history and destiny of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is understood only through the lens of spiritual inquiry. President Ezra Taft Benson said, “Every [person] eventually is backed up to the wall of faith, and there ... must make his stand.”²³ Don’t be surprised when it happens to you!

31. By definition, trials will be trying. There may be anguish, confusion, sleepless nights, and pillows wet with tears. But our trials need not be spiritually fatal. They need not take us from our covenants or from the household of God.

32. “Remember, ... it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; 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 the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.”²⁴

33. Like the intense fire that transforms iron into steel, as we remain faithful during the fiery trial of our faith, we are spiritually refined and strengthened.

34. Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained what he learned from a personal trial: “Though I suffered then, as I look back now, I am grateful that there was not a quick solution to my problem. The fact that I was forced to turn to God for help almost daily over an extended period of years taught me truly how to pray and get answers to prayer and taught me in a very practical way to have faith in God. I came to know my Savior and my Heavenly Father in a way and to a degree that might not have happened otherwise or that might have taken me much longer to achieve. ... I learned to trust in the Lord with all my heart. I learned to walk with Him day by day.”²⁵

35. Peter described these experiences as “much more precious than ... gold.”²⁶ Moroni added that a witness follows “the trial of your faith.”²⁷

36. I began with the story of the Marriott family. Last week Kathy and I joined them at Georgia’s grave. Ten years have passed. Family and friends spoke of the love and memories they have of Georgia. There were white helium balloons to celebrate her life. Amid tears, Georgia’s mother tenderly spoke of the increased faith and understanding she has received, and Georgia’s father quietly told me of the promised witness that has come to him.

37. With faith come trials of faith, bringing increased faith. The Lord’s comforting assurance to the Prophet Joseph Smith is the very same promise He makes to you in your trial of faith: “Hold on ... , fear not ... , for God shall be with you forever and ever.”²⁸ Of this I bear my sacred witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Shayne M. Bowen, “Because I Live, Ye Shall Live Also,” and Ann M. Dibb, “I Know It. I Live It. I Love It,” in the Saturday morning session of the October 2012 general conference.
2. [John 17:3](#).
3. [1 Peter 1:7](#).
4. [Luke 22:31–32](#).
5. [1 Peter 4:12](#); emphasis added.
6. [Alma 1:25](#).
7. [Ephesians 2:19](#).
8. [Doctrine and Covenants 84:20](#).
9. See [Mosiah 18:8–10](#).
10. Thomas S. Monson, “Stand in Holy Places,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 82.
11. See Ezra Taft Benson, “The Law of Chastity,” *New Era*, Jan. 1988, 4–7; “The Law of Chastity” in *Brigham Young University 1987–88 Speeches* (1988), 1–5, [speeches.byu.edu](#); see also *Gospel Principles* (2009)

10. - Intimacy in Marriage

About Men And Women

Stephen E. Lamb and Douglas E. Brinley
Between Husband & Wife, 2000

1. Dave had been married to Laura for three years. She was a university graduate working at a local bank, and he was still in college. When they married, Dave really thought he had found his dream girl. She was beautiful, talented, and fun to be around. He was sure he'd be happy for the rest of his life. But now, he privately wondered whether his marriage would survive. What was their problem? He was almost embarrassed to think about it, but it was sex. Their sexual differences had driven a wedge between them, and he didn't know what to do.

2. Laura had been raised in what most people would consider a good home. Her parents were kind people, although intensely private. She never saw them express any outward signs of affection. Sexual matters were not mentioned in the home; they were simply off-limits. The message was, "we don't discuss those kinds of issues here."

3. Dave grew up in a very different kind of home. His parents were openly affectionate and very demonstrative. In addition, he shared a bathroom with three brothers. Being naked around them was no big deal. His family just had a more open approach to sex and nudity.

4. Dave and Laura were not prepared to deal with their different attitudes toward sex when they got married, mostly because they didn't realize they had different attitudes. They had never discussed sex, and their wedding night was a disappointing experience. Laura had never been told what to expect, and she was very uncomfortable with their first attempts at sexual intimacy. This was also new territory for Dave, but while Dave eventually became more comfortable with marital intimacy and enjoyed it, sex continued to be unpleasant for Laura. She wanted to be a good wife, but as hard as she tried, she could not relax and enjoy sex. Over time, she came to hate it and avoided it whenever possible.

5. Their difference in sexual attitudes eventually became the source of repeated disagreements and hurtful feelings. Laura couldn't understand why sex was so important to Dave. Did he really love her, or was he just interested in her for sex? At the same time, Dave couldn't understand why his wife didn't want to be intimate. Why was she so prudish? Why did she push him away? Their differences had driven them apart, and they were uncertain how to resolve

the problem. Privately, Dave wondered if their marriage would make it. What were they to do?

A COMMON SCENARIO

6. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon scenario. It is estimated that more than half of all couples experience significant sexual problems at some point in their marriage. These problems can threaten the entire relationship. As noted previously, President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

7. Divorces often occur over sex, money, and child discipline. 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 the court. They may not even tell that to their attorneys, but that is the reason. Husband and wife . . . are authorized, in fact they are commanded, to have proper sex when they are properly married for time and eternity. (Kimball, Teachings, 329.)

8. Sadly, strained feelings over sex can become a private, silent wedge in a marriage. In some cases, sexual problems weaken an otherwise wonderful relationship or become a source of repeated, hurtful arguments and painful barbs.

9. Of course, dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship in marriage does not always result in divorce. There are many couples who feel their marriage meets their general expectations, except in the area of sexual intimacy. Most of these couples stay together because they really do love each other (Hammond, "Sex Therapy," 14). If they could, however, they would gladly change things about their sex lives. They simply don't know how.

DIFFERENCES

10. Many times the differences between husband and wife are not discovered until after marriage. One woman made this observation: "I think it is very important for girls to realize that sex means two different things to a male and female. Women are more romantic and men are more physical."

11. Differences in attitudes may not cause much concern in other aspects of marriage, but an individual can only find sexual fulfillment with the cooperation of a willing, sensitive, and compatible spouse. One of the most common complaints brought up with marriage counselors has to do with spouses who are not willing to make sex a good experience for their partner. We often hear, "He (or she) doesn't understand my needs and where I'm coming from and doesn't seem to want to."

12. If husbands and wives are to enjoy marital intimacy, it is vital for

13. them to know as much as they can about each other's attitudes and feelings, and accommodate for differences. It is often helpful to know how the opposite gender perceives sex. However, before we talk about male and female characteristics, it should be emphasized that the following descriptions are, at best, generalizations. Not all men, or all women, see sex the same way. For example, it is well known that the sex drive is usually stronger among men than among women, but this is not always the case. In some marriages, the opposite is true. Also, contrary to sex-role stereotypes, there are situations where a wife is more comfortable with sexual matters and initiates intimate activity more often than the husband.

Sex Drive

14. With sexual problems, the greatest source of conflict in marriages relates to differences in sexual desire. Generally speaking, the sex drive is higher in men than in women. This is largely due to the influence of testosterone on the male brain. Short-term differences in libido are not a serious problem. However, if there is a significant difference in sex drive over a long period of time, it usually becomes an issue of concern in the marriage. One woman said,

15. As is usually the case, my husband wanted sex more often than I did, but because he would either suggest or request sex often, I began to want it less and less, and we ended up having it only when I asked for it. This did not please him or me. We finally had a discussion on the topic, and we now have a mutual understanding. He understands that I do not want sex every time he does, and I am more willing to be intimate for his sake, even though I may not want it. This way we are both able to enjoy intimacy.

16. Another major distinction between most men and women is the different emphasis they place on sex in the relationship. It has been said, "Men give love to get sex; women give sex to get love." While this overstates the case, men and women do seem to understand sex quite differently. One woman shared her experience:

17. My husband equates love with sex. I equate love with being allowed to sleep. He would become enraged when I turned him down in the bedroom. He became angry with me, and started treating me with hostility. I felt used, like I was unloved and abandoned. We had petty arguments over how many

times a week we should be intimate. I began to hate that aspect of our life. If he decided to shave at night, I began to dread our encounter. I stayed up late watching TV to avoid a confrontation in the bedroom, and I doubted his motives when he showed kindness to me.

18. Men often have difficulty with the fact that their wives are less interested in sexual intimacy than they are. One new husband said,

19. I was heartbroken the night I asked her what was wrong and she said, "I just don't want to make love tonight." It didn't matter that I knew that she loved me, I still felt like she loved me less that night. I have since learned to accept the fact that her expression of love is not as physical as mine, and I have tried to change how I show her love to match her needs.

20. The male ego can be rather fragile in this regard. Men frequently experience a sense of rejection when their wives are not interested in sexual intimacy. A husband will commonly interpret his wife's disinterest as a personal insult, showing insensitivity to his desires and belittling his virility. On the other hand, women often have difficulty understanding why their husbands want so much sex and why they are not content just being close. They feel used and unappreciated. Clear and considerate communication between husband and wife can help them find an acceptable balance where each feels comfortable and respects the emotions of the other.

SEXUAL CUES

21. Another difference between men and women has to do with how they respond to varying sexual cues. Advertisers spend millions of dollars each year on marketing that capitalizes on the fact that sex sells. They use sexual images to sell everything from cars to razors. This is because people, particularly men, are influenced by these messages. But these images, which are intended to affect a person's buying habits, can also influence sexual attitudes and behavior in a marriage. Men are typically prone to respond to such visual stimuli with heightened sexual desire. Whether processed on a conscious level or subconsciously, this imagery can generate a physiological response in the viewer, affecting hormone production and influencing mood.

22. A billboard message noticed on the drive home from work can subtly

23. increase a husband's interest in being sexually intimate with his wife, that night.

24. On the other hand, women are more apt to

experience an increase in sexual desire in response to emotional cues, such as genuine tenderness or a thoughtful word or deed. And women's sex drives are more likely to be negatively influenced by external factors such as stress. Whereas a man's interest in sexual matters is relatively strong and consistent, with only moderate ups and downs, a woman's sex drive often swings from one extreme to the other and more easily shifts with her moods. If the bills aren't paid, if the house is a mess, if there has been an argument, or if there is anything that upsets the wife's emotional equilibrium, her sex drive can be negatively affected. This also occurs with certain physical conditions, such as pregnancy or the premenstrual phase of the ovulatory cycle. Conversely, a romantic movie that reaches her emotionally can increase her desire for physical intimacy.

25. The need to understand the connection between mood and desire, and to respect differences, was well-expressed by one woman who said,

26. It is important for my husband to realize that I might not always be in the mood for physical intimacy. He needs to respect this. I am not saying this only from a woman's point of view. I know that my husband wants to make love more frequently than I do, but there are also times when I would like it, and he is reluctant for whatever reason. Part of marriage is sacrifice—we need to love our spouse more than ourselves. Sometimes we also need to help fulfill each other's needs—even if we are not in the mood.

27. Approaches to Intimacy

28. Women find fulfillment through nonsexual physical contact more readily than men. A woman may frequently prefer a tender embrace, a romantic walk, or a gentle caress, without the expectation that it will lead to sex. One husband shared his experience:

29. One of the most difficult things for me to understand in our marriage is that if we don't have sex we can still be intimate. I have a real hard time when I initiate something and my wife doesn't feel up to it. It is not that she doesn't love me, or want to be involved, but it just isn't a good time for her. Well, even though she tells me these things, I still feel rejected. Then she wants me to snuggle up to her and hold her and whisper sweet nothings in her ear. For her, it is security and intimacy. For me, it's rejection. But she's helping me learn that I can enjoy being physically intimate with her even when I know we will not necessarily go all the way.

30. When it comes to sexual activity itself, men often

want to rush through the experience faster than women. Women need more time for arousal.

Countless stories could be told of men who don't understand their wives' need to go slowly and take their time. They ignorantly assume that because they are aroused and ready for sex, their wives are too. Next to dealing with differences in sex drive, this is one of the most frequent complaints women voice regarding their sexual expectancies.

31. Fortunately, a husband can learn, but he has to be taught. His

32. wife must serve as the tutor. This requires communication, patience, and understanding. On this subject one wife advised,

33. Don't be shy about discussing your wants and feelings. Things got better when we overcame our shyness and began to discuss our feelings. It helps to talk about what feels good. Your husband can't read your mind. Your body is somewhat of a mystery to him. Sexual intimacy is better when he understands your likes and dislikes.

34. Women are often more sensitive to relationship problems and more expressive about their feelings. They are also more apt to say what they are thinking and feeling. However, as previously noted, men sometimes interpret their wives' comments as criticism or rejection. The art of communication requires thoughtful care on both sides.

WHY ARE WE SO DIFFERENT?

35. It may be helpful to understand why a husband and wife are so different. No two people, even of the same sex, possess exactly the same innate personality, genetic makeup, and set of life experiences. Consequently, every person has his or her own sexual identity: a unique set of sexual ideas, feelings, desires, attitudes, expectations, and needs. Marriage represents, among other things, the uniting of two unique sexual identities into one lifetime relationship, a merging of each person's accumulated attitudes and characteristics.

36. Since no two individuals are exactly alike, there are sure to be differences regarding sexual matters between spouses. These may manifest themselves in a variety of different ways, including the emphasis placed on sex, how often sexual activity is desired, and how each responds to sexual cues. These differences must be accounted for in the relationship. In fact, the degree to which a couple discovers their shared similarities, and resolves their differences, largely determines the success or failure of their

sexual relationship.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

37. An individual's sexual identity is a composite of a complex set of influences. There are two points of view about how a person's sexual characteristics are determined. One is that sexual identity is strictly a product of nature. That is, an individual's genetic makeup and biology determine sexual behavior and attitudes. The second position is that sexual identity is a result of nurture or the environment in which a person is reared. There are very strong arguments to support each viewpoint.

Biological Influences

38. It is well known that biological influences shape an individual's sexual anatomy and physiology. For example, whether an individual is a male or female is determined by the genetic code inside the cells. In a fairly well-understood process, the X and Y chromosomes send signals that determine whether male or female sexual anatomy is formed. Gender is the single most important biological determinant of sexual identity. But chromosomes do much more than determine gender and external anatomy. They also indirectly determine the kind of brain that develops in a particular individual.

39. Researchers have established that the brains of men and women are not exactly the same. Certain areas of the brain, which some experts call sex centers, don't look or function the same in men and women at all—they are distinctly different. These differences can be seen as early as the fetal stage and are believed to be due primarily to the effect of testosterone, which bathes the male brain during early development. Simply put, if testosterone is present, a male brain is formed; if it is absent, a female brain develops. The further release of testosterone at the time of puberty activates the male sex centers, leading to physical development and exerting a strong influence upon men's attitudes and behaviors.

Environmental Influences

40. Many life events from early childhood through adulthood also shape a person's sexual identity. It has been shown that a child's sense of gender, that is, whether he or she identifies himself or herself as a male or female, is determined before age three. A person's sense of gender role, or how he or she should act based upon gender, is established by age five. This means that a child already understands what his or her sex is and how persons of that sex are supposed to behave before starting kindergarten.

41. Relationships also shape sexual identity.

Generally, the single most important relationship in a child's life, and the one that molds his or her sense of sexual-self the most, is the parent-child relationship. Through instruction and example, a parent teaches a child how to behave consistent with socially accepted gender stereotypes. The influence of parents continues to be strong throughout a child's life, although once adolescence is reached, peer influences compete with,

42. and may even overshadow, parental influences.
I

43. The psychosocial development that occurs during adolescence is largely centered on establishing a personal identity. An important task of adolescence is to learn how to respond appropriately to the development of pubertal sexual characteristics and urges. How this stage of psychological development is accomplished is a crucial factor in determining the attitudes and feelings a person has about sex in adulthood.

Spiritual Influences

44. Scientists debate whether it is biology or environment that most strongly determines attitudes and behaviors. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that there is another factor beyond nature and nurture that influences a person's characteristics. Within every man and woman is an individual spirit, possessing agency to make choices that can mold, influence, and even override the input of both genes and environment. This spirit is also sensitive to the influence of the Holy Ghost, which can give wisdom and strength to choose virtuously between competing impulses.

45. Every man and woman is a spirit son or daughter of God. The proclamation on the family states that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." The combination of the spirit and the physical body make up the soul of man (D&C 88:15). Spirits, even when housed in physical bodies, are not inert, nor are they identical. They have individuality, personality, and gender. They respond to light and truth and are quickened by the influence of the Holy Ghost (D&C 93:30-32).

46. The spirit body, which is the offspring of Heavenly Parents, accounts for many of the individual personality traits that people have. For example, Abraham possessed leadership qualities that he brought with him from his premortal life (Abraham

3:23). His actions reflected his particular spiritual strengths. We know that some of God's most choice spirit children were held back from coming to the earth until this last dispensation because of their valiance and strength in the premortal life (Ensign, November 1995:47). Some people have been informed of their spiritual strengths in their patriarchal blessings.

47. A second powerful spiritual factor that influences people's character and behavior is the Holy Ghost, a gift we receive at baptism and can enjoy continually if we are worthy of it. The Lord's powers are inestimable, as is His ability to change men's hearts if men will let Him. Nephi taught that "the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him," (1 Nephi 7:12).

48. On this subject, Elder James E. Talmage wrote, "Subtler, mightier, and more mysterious than any or all of the physical forces of nature are the powers that operate upon conscious organisms, the means by which the mind, the heart, the soul of man may be energized by spiritual forces," (Discourses, 14). In other words, spiritual forces are potentially stronger than biological or environmental forces.

49. Through the refining influence of the Spirit, a man or woman can overcome mortal weaknesses. Their attitudes and behaviors can change. In addition, the Holy Ghost gives people the ability to magnify the godly attributes they were given at birth, even though they may remain in a rudimentary state until activated by the Spirit (see Pratt, Key to Theology, 101).

DOES THIS MATTER?

50. Sexual attitudes and behaviors are a by-product of powerful biological, environmental, and spiritual influences. Through an understanding of these things, we can gain insight into how we function and how our spouse functions.

51. It has been shown that perceived sexual stimuli are processed in

52. male brains differently than in female brains. As a result, "male physiology" leads men to have a higher sex drive and to exhibit more aggressive sexual behavior than women. This tendency is often reinforced by cultural stereotypes, but its precursors are biological. Men don't wake up and consciously decide, "I'm going to be a real he-man today!," Their thoughts and actions are influenced by biological impulses.

53. Men are also notorious for not being willing or able to talk about their feelings. This problem has its roots in societal norms. Young girls are encouraged to express their feelings, particularly when they are hurt, whereas a boy often grows up being warned to hold his feelings inside and "be a man." As a result of this conditioning and some biological input, women are often more capable than men of communicating emotions. Men are sometimes particularly inept at expressing their feelings on sexual issues.

54. Knowing these facts, a woman whose husband tends to rush through sex has two choices: she can either resent his insensitivity and accuse him of being thoughtless, or she can try to appreciate the fact that he may simply be exhibiting his biological and cultural tendencies-and then be patient enough to teach him to slow down. He will, if she teaches him with kindness and love. A man whose wife is reluctant to engage in sexual relations also has two choices. He can think she is an uncaring prude, or he can recognize that she may be expressing her own legitimate biological and emotional needs-and then look for ways to help her feel more comfortable with their sexual relationship. And she will, if she knows that he has her best interests at heart.

55. None of these factors, whether societal or biological, excuses inappropriate behavior. No one is ever justified in saying, "I can't help what I am or what I did." Natural desires can and should be kept in check through self-control. Everyone has agency, the power to determine how to act. That being true, no sane man or woman carries a burden of sexual tendencies or inclinations to which they cannot respond honorably and virtuously.

56. Fortunately, there is a power that can help men and women understand, harness, and ultimately modify the influences of biology and environment. Everyone is entitled to the blessings of the atonement and the Spirit of the Lord to help them control their actions. The Lord "knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them," (D&C 62: 1). He can change hearts, heal problems, soothe painful memories, remove past sins, and do whatever else is necessary to make things right, if we will let Him into our lives. If there are circumstances that directly or indirectly impact marital intimacy in a negative manner, people can ask the Lord for help, and He will do what He can within the limits of their agency.

DIFFERENCES GOOD OR BAD?

57. Many look upon the differences between men and women in a negative light-even as a curse.

You hear men say, "I really wish women were more like men," and women say, "wouldn't it be nice if men were more like women." But whether we like it or not, men and women have differences that are deep seated and innate. And every couple has two choices regarding their differences. They can either resent them and forever experience conflict, or they can adapt, accommodate, and find a common ground where they can build their intimate life and enjoy peace and harmony.

58. One of the secrets of successful marriage is the discovery that differences need not be divisive. They can be the basis of "creative tension" in the relationship: a reason to talk, work together, and compromise. Ultimately, it's nice to be married to someone who is different from us, who can introduce us to alternative opinions, and who has strengths that compensate for our weaknesses. In fact, spouses often lead their partners along exciting paths that they wouldn't normally explore on their own. It is the discovery and blending of contrasting interests and abilities, within a context of mutual cooperation and respect, that allow couples to create wonderful marriages.

Human Intimacy

Robert F. Stahmann, Wayne R. Young, Julie G. Grover

Becoming One: Intimacy In Marriage, 2004

1. Intimacy is expressed in many forms, most of which are nonsexual. Intimacy begins when social, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual experiences are shared: religious activities, social events, leisure activities, sports, talking, and even eating. As your relationship with your partner developed, you probably became intimate doing most of these things. This was appropriate and necessary for a relationship to be meaningful to both of you.

2. An intimate relationship is one of caring, mutual trust, and acceptance. Caring is showing genuine concern for the person's well-being. Mutual trust is the feeling that you will not be harmed or hurt by the other. Acceptance is recognition or approval of each other. A relationship with these qualities sets the foundation for healthy sexual intimacy. Though this book primarily addresses physical affection and sexual intimacy, keep in mind that all the other forms of intimacy are crucial in maintaining a well-functioning relationship. They are indeed the basis for healthy physical affection and sexual intimacy.

The Meaning Of Physical Affection To Men And

Women

3. Both men and women have the basic need to be intimate and close with another person. Yet, what this means from both a sexual and emotional standpoint is different for men and women. This chapter, while somewhat generalized, will help both men and women understand some of their basic differences regarding intimacy. Having a basic understanding of these differences is important so that misunderstanding, frustrations, and anger can be avoided. Being aware of, and understanding, these important differences is necessary if you are to continue to develop a strong and loving relationship in your marriage.

4. It's been said that, typically, men give love and commitment in order to get physical affection and sex. Women give physical affection and sex in order to get commitment and love. It might also be said that men typically hunger for sex while women hunger for romance. Men initially give and receive love to fulfill their physical needs, while women initially give and receive love to fulfill their emotional needs. While these statements may sound like stereotypes, and of course not all relationships are so black and white, we have found that for most couples, there is at least some element of truth in these generalizations.

5. Especially for newlyweds, it's not often that women say, "He's just a cold fish, never responsive to me sexually when I'm in the mood. All he wants to do is cuddle. He hardly has any sexual drive or interest. It must be his hormones." Conversely, seldom do new grooms complain, "She's just an animal. All she wants is sex, sex, sex. She's just interested in my body. After we've made love, she just rolls over and falls asleep." Neither husbands nor wives will have these complaints about their partners if they understand their spouse's physical and emotional needs.

6. Men and women generally have different motivations for seeking sexual intimacy. Men commonly have a stronger or more constant spontaneous sexual drive or interest. Women certainly have this inherent sexual drive, especially early on in a relationship, at certain times of their menstrual cycle, or after a period of separation. But more often women seek sexual intimacy for reasons more closely related to emotional and other types of intimacy: to gain a greater closeness to their spouse, to show love, commitment, and tenderness.

7. As emotional intimacy with her spouse increases, a woman has a greater desire for sexual intimacy, is more responsive to her husband, and generally enjoys sex more. A pleasurable sexual experience then also

makes her feel more emotionally close to her husband. Emotional and sexual intimacy are so closely intertwined that a woman cannot be fulfilled sexually if she is not fulfilled emotionally.

8. We believe that most husbands wouldn't have to talk their wives into sexual relations if they would provide what their wives long for most: emotional intimacy in the areas of trust, tenderness, caring, acceptance, and good communication. Women need to feel loved and nurtured before they begin to be aroused and develop desires for sexual intimacy. For women, emotional intimacy is at least as important as the act of having sex.

9. While women need to feel loved before they can become sexually aroused, men often need to be sexually aroused before they can truly feel loved. It's through sexual activity that men are emotionally and physically fulfilled. It's through a loving sexual relationship that their hearts are opened and they're able to express their love to their wives. Sex allows men to become aware of their wives' need for love and emotional support. Unless partners understand this basic difference between men and women, it will be difficult for them to find a common ground so that the emotional and physical needs of both are fulfilled.

10. When women find themselves losing interest in sex, it's most often not a problem with their hormones. Instead, it's often because their husbands haven't met their emotional and affectional needs. If a husband seeks to fulfill his sexual appetites first, his wife will be left unsatisfied and less inclined in the future to meet his needs. A man needs to learn to be sensitive to and take care of his wife's emotional needs before seeking his own physical and sexual satisfaction. Then, as his wife's emotional needs are fulfilled, both partners will become interested in taking care of each other's needs. The husband who satisfies his wife's emotional needs first, and who then pays attention to her sexual desires, will find his own needs satisfied too.

11. Understanding each other's feelings is the key. When couples understand their own feelings as well as the feelings of their spouse, 70 to 80 percent of the time that is all that is needed. When understanding or agreement are not reached, there are communication skills and problem-solving techniques that can be used. The important thing to remember is that if communication is a problem, like any skill, it can be improved.

Is Disagreement Or Conflict Serious?

12. No, in fact all married couples will have some disagreement or conflict. It's normal to disagree in some things. Two heads are better than one-actually making healthy disagreement a valuable step in decision making. Disagreements can even be used to move a relationship forward. In fact, it's been said that a good marriage has three "C's." Commitment to the marriage and to each other, effective Communication, and the ability to use Conflict to improve the relationship. To properly use conflict is a sign that differences can be worked out. Often differences in opinions lead to better solutions or ideas than either of the two original points of view! However, if bickering and fighting frequently occur and solutions seem difficult to come by due to the emotions generated by the situation, then such disagreements and conflicts can damage the relationship. You may benefit from consulting with your bishop or a professional to help you work through these problems. Putting your heads in the sand and ignoring the signs of dissatisfaction and unhappiness may lead to much more serious problems.

1. 4. Counsel with friends or family. If your spouse does not object and you do not share what would be considered too personal, trusted friends and family may provide helpful counsel and insights regarding successful sexual relations in marriage.

2. 5. Seek Christian information. There are many good Christian literature and information sources online that may be helpful. (See the Appendix for a list of resources.)

3. Seek professional marital counseling. If your questions and concerns seem to be based in emotional or psychological issues, good professional counselors with training in marital and/or sex therapy can provide valuable guidance and assistance. One of the main purposes of a counselor is to teach. Professional help can speed up the processes of learning, healing and overcoming sexual barriers. Be sure you seek divine guidance in

4. finding the right counselor. God will guide you to those who will help you best.

5. If your problems seem to be physical in nature, seek the advice of medical professionals until you find acceptable solutions. You may need to find someone who has had special training in sexual functioning.

6. Seek ecclesiastical counsel. If your concerns are moral in nature, you might consider counseling with your bishop or church leaders. They can provide

inspired counsel and direction. Keep in mind that while they are knowledgeable about moral issues, they rarely have sexual therapy training.

Discuss Sex Openly and Honestly

7. One of the biggest handicaps to improving sexual relations in marriage is the discomfort, embarrassment, hesitancy, and even inability of couples to discuss sex openly, honestly and frankly. Tim and Beverly LaHaye, as well as other professionals, are dismayed by this marital barrier to sexual happiness. The LaHayes stated, "I have been appalled to learn that even well-educated people find it difficult to discuss their love lives frankly.

8. . . They have never been able to communicate with one another on the subject." 13 Dr. Brent Barlow concurred, "Partners who [freely] 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." 14

9. Dr. Dobson, disturbed by the lack of sexual communication in marriage, gave the following counsel:

10. Though it seems impossible, an inhibited husband and wife can make love several times a week for a period of years without ever verbalizing their feelings or frustrations on this important aspect of their lives. When this happens, the effect is like taking a hot coke bottle and shaking it until the contents are ready to explode. Remember this psychological law: any anxiety-producing thought or condition which cannot be expressed is almost certain to generate inner pressure and stress. The more unspeakable the subject, the greater the pressurization. And . . . anxious silence leads to the destruction of sexual desire.15

11. Both men and women can have difficulty broaching the subject of sex. Women might assume their husbands will be more knowledgeable and open on the subject. This may not be true, according to the LaHayes who explain:

12. Most Christian women go into marriage relatively uninformed about sex and often retain the naive idea that their husbands know it all and will teach them. Rarely has she anticipated the fact that discussion of their intimate relations is difficult for most men. In fact, it is frequently the most difficult subject with which a couple has to cope. Consequently those who are most in need of the free-flowing expression of

ideas on the subject practice it the least. 16

Why We Don't Talk About Sex

13. It may be helpful to understand why sex is such a difficult topic of conversation. Below are some of the reasons for the hesitancy to discuss sexual aspects of marriage: 17

14. We are Embarrassed. Some are even mortified by the thought. This can stem from unintentional negative conditioning. Remember Adam and Eve were commanded to become one flesh and were not ashamed. 18

15. We think it's too personal. Sexual specifics that might be embarrassing to your spouse should not be shared outside of the marriage. Certain intimacies should remain between husband and wife, but general knowledge and sharing of ideas and suggestions can be discussed-and need to be discussed-for the sake of those who may be wandering in the marital desert.

16. We think it's too sacred. Sex is sacred, but the sacredness of sexual relations in

17. marriage can lead some to believe that sex should not be discussed at all. When "sacred" becomes "secret," or unspeakable, sacredness may have been misconstrued.

18. We feel ashamed or fearful. If we do not accept or are ashamed of our sexual nature, we may try to hide it from ourselves and others. If there is unresolved sexual sin, sexual abuse, or other negative sexual experiences in our past, there can be great reluctance to discuss this topic. Ecclesiastical or professional help may be needed.

19. 5. We have no example to follow. If children are not taught about sex by their parents, or if they believe their parents would never discuss sex with each other, they will not learn that sex is an appropriate topic for discussion. Sadly, silence on sexual matters is often perpetuated through generations. An example of positive, respectful discussion of sexual matters is needed to break this cycle.

20. 6. We believe that spouses should read minds. While sexual feelings may be automatic, sexual fulfillment-particularly for the wife-is not. A husband will not automatically know what turns his wife on nor what she needs to feel fulfilled. Michele Weiner Davis stated:

21. We have this crazy notion that our spouses are just supposed to know what pleases us. We shouldn't have to talk about having good sex; it should just happen. But good sex doesn't just happen. Since no

two people are alike, no single formula works for everybody. What one person finds arousing and exciting is a pure turn-off to another. If you want your spouse to know how you feel and what you enjoy, you have to tell him or her. Leave mind reading to the soothsayers. 19

22. It's almost ludicrous to assume that our spouse will know exactly what turns us on. How will your spouse know what you like if you don't or won't tell them? The following story of a husband who assumes his wife should have mind-reading capabilities provides a lesson for both husbands and wives:

23. An engineer married to a schoolteacher for ten years reported, "After all this time my wife still doesn't know what turns me on." When I asked, "Have you ever told her?" he replied, "No, I find it embarrassing to talk about sex. Besides, I think she should know." He was surprised when I responded, "How should she? You're different. You feel and react differently than a woman, and you possess an entirely different reproductive apparatus. Who did you think was going to tell her?"²

24. 7. We don't know what turns us on. If sex or sexual parts of the body are incorrectly believed to be bad or evil, the Good Girl may not have any idea how her body works or what arouses her sexually. Michele Weiner Davis suggested this as another barrier to sexual communication:

25. Another reason you might not talk about what turns you on is that you don't really know yourself. Your body is as much a mystery to you as it is to your spouse. If you don't know what gives you pleasure, what makes you feel aroused, what triggers an orgasm, it's time to go back to school. You have to study your body. You need to know what feels good and what leaves you feeling cold. You can't teach your spouse what works for you if you are clueless.²¹

26. 8. We don't want to hurt our spouse's feelings. Let's say you do know what you would like sexually, but you're afraid to correct your spouse. Guiding, teaching and sharing sexual information and desires can be done without offending. If you keep your sexual needs and desires a secret you will potentially do much more damage to your marriage and family than if you are open and honest in a gentle way.

27. 9. We don't want to be considered selfish. There is a stigma implicit to selfishness. If we ask for what we want and need, we feel selfish. Instead of asking, we just hope our spouse will figure it out someday, so we won't have to feel that we are selfishly seeking

our own sexual satisfaction. Women may have a particularly difficult time asking for what they want and need sexually. However, they must learn to ask, rather than wait around hoping their spouse will figure it out. A healthy focus on the "self" is needed in lovemaking for a woman to achieve sexual fulfillment.

28. Sheryl struggled with these conflicting feelings. Though her feelings may be a symptom of deeper issues, the example she shared represents the bind many women feel:

29. I remember feeling the need to be touched and held, but could not bring myself to ask for a hug. I didn't want to bother my husband. I somehow wished he would just know what I needed and offer it—magically reading my mind. By not asking for the hug, I felt abandoned, lonely and angry, while my husband had no idea what was going on within me.

30. At other times I have asked for something I've needed emotionally or sexually, but have felt guilty for asking. I believed I was being selfish or that I was bothering my husband with something he might not really want to do. Sometimes I feel guilty for having needs at all.

31. The ability and willingness to openly discuss sexual issues in your marriage can lead to sexual understanding and fulfillment. If couples can boldly and bravely talk about their sexual relationship and the emotions that attend it, they will probably be able to talk about anything. Opening the door to sexual discussion can open the door to emotional and spiritual intimacy as well. If either husband or wife will initiate conversations regarding sex, they will be doing their marriage a great service.

32. Much good can come from a willingness to openly discuss sexual matters and feelings. Jenny called me the day after a blowout between herself and her husband. He said he couldn't take it anymore. He was unsatisfied sexually and very unhappy. She knew things had to change, but she didn't know how to initiate that change. I gave her a few of the chapters of this book and then I prayed for them.

33. Weeks later I asked her how they were doing. With a big smile on her face, she said things were much better. I asked what had helped. She said, "After our phone call I knelt down and told Heavenly Father I really wanted to fix this. I wanted my husband to feel loved, and I wanted to feel sexual desire again. I read everything you gave me, then we talked about it that

night. I shared everything I was feeling about sex. Just opening up that floodgate so we could talk about sex has made all the difference."

34. An experience of another couple who have been married over 30 years shows the importance of asking for what you want, or asking your spouse what he or she wants sexually. Lynn wrote:

35. The other night we were in the beginning process of making love when I stopped and said, "Wait, I'm supposed to ask what you really like." My husband was embarrassed about the question but he went ahead and told me. My response was, "You're kidding me?! That's easy for me to do. I never knew. I'd much rather do that than other things I thought you liked. All these years. . . . It's so sad we didn't know."

36. Further heartbreak can be avoided through open and honest sharing. Elder Brown stated, "If they who contemplate this most glorifying and intimate of all human relationships 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."²²

37. For another couple, the turning point in their marriage came when Mandy told her husband she hated sex, and always had. After six years of having a "good attitude" about sex, Mandy couldn't fake it any longer. Through all these years she had acted like she enjoyed it, but she had been lying-to herself and to her husband. Tears flowed as she told her husband the truth. Mandy felt like an object: a pleasure provider for her husband. Sex was a service she supplied-a chore and her wifely duty. What a blow this was to her surprised husband! But her willingness to be open and honest stopped the downward spiral and freed them to begin to find solutions.

38. Dr. Dobson has identified the danger when sex is a forbidden subject in marriage and encourages couples to open the door to sexual discussion. He stated:

39. When conversation is prohibited on the subject of sex, the act of intercourse takes on the atmosphere of a "performance"-each partner feeling that he is being critically evaluated by the other. To remove these communicative barriers, [either spouse can] take the lead in releasing the safety valve. . . . That is done by [verbalizing] feelings, . . . fears, . . . aspirations. They should talk about the manners and techniques which stimulate-and those which don't. They should face their problems as mature adults, . . . calmly and

confidently. There is something magical to be found in such soothing conversation; tensions and anxieties are reduced when they find verbal expression.²³

How to Talk About Sex

40. How to actually speak about such a delicate, yet potentially volatile, subject may be a matter of concern for couples. As touchy issues arise, it may be helpful to use the couple's communication tool taught in Chapter 10 of this book. This tool allows both husband and wife the opportunity to be fully heard, validated and understood in a safe and effective way. "Pick a time when you both feel ready to talk. Don't do it when either of you is tired, in a bad mood, or angry at each other or when there are distractions. Make sure you have enough privacy so you don't feel squeamish or nervous about being interrupted or overheard. A safe, comfortable environment is very important."²⁴

41. One of the best ways to talk about sex is to read and discuss helpful books together, allowing the conversation to flow casually. The recommended reading list in the back of this book, as well as books referenced throughout, can provide a rich reservoir of resources.

42. While it can be helpful to guide and encourage particular touches or caresses during lovemaking, this may not be the best time to initiate a lengthy conversation on sexual dos and don'ts. As Dr. John Gray pointed out, "It is just not romantic to ask a woman what she wants while you are having sex. It is best done either after sex or at another time when you are not immediately planning to have sex."²⁵

What to Talk About

43. In addition to subjects encountered while reading this and other helpful books, here are some suggestions for topics of discussion:²⁶

44. Discuss what kinds of touch and caresses turn you on-what feels good?

45. Discuss what turns you off-what doesn't feel good? What makes you uncomfortable or isn't pleasurable?

46. Discuss how you can improve your sexual encounters.

47. Negotiate differences in sexual interests and preferences.

48. Share preconceived expectations and fantasies.

49. Discuss what and how you were taught about sex. Share your vulnerabilities, fears, memories and

inhibitions.

Remember Variety Adds Vitality

50. Even after couples learn to have great sexual relations, an ongoing effort will be necessary to keep vitality in the relationship. Variety renew; vitality, and keeps the fires of passion burning throughout our lives. A little playfulness and creativity in appropriate ways can add vitality to your sexual relationship. Don't let lovemaking become predictable or routine - predictability can squelch sensuality. Use as many senses as you can - sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound. Vary the stimuli that your senses receive to keep lovemaking fresh and new. Here are a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

51. Add music (or new music) to your sexual encounters. Create your own special collection of bedroom music.

52. Wear lingerie. Regularly add new apparel to your intimate collection to keep things new and exciting.

53. Reserve special silky bedding just for lovemaking.

54. Try a new time of day. Surprise yourself and your husband by telling him to come in to be adding variety to your sex life, but also fulfilling his fantasies at the same time! Try new locations. Sex doesn't have to always be in the bedroom. Spread a blanket on the bedroom closet floor. Try the office (make sure you lock the door!). Shower or take a Jacuzzi bath together. Schedule regular overnight getaways.

55. Use colored light bulbs in your bedroom lamp for a sensual ambience.

56. Make love with more light or less light than usual.

57. Change the routine-if you usually begin clothed, begin unclothed instead; if you usually begin naked, try undressing each other first.

58. Try different positions.

59. Change your hairstyle. Put your hair up or let your hair down.

60. Use different scented candles. Keep a supply of delicious candles on hand.

61. Wear perfume or cologne. Try different ones.

62. Stretch yourself to "gift" your spouse with one of his or her sexual fantasies. You may be surprised at your spouse's overflowing willingness to "gift" you with your heart's desires in return.

63. A little playfulness and creativity in appropriate ways add variety to your sexual relationship. Don't let lovemaking become predictable or routine - predictability can squelch sensuality.

64. What else can you think of that would be fun and exciting? Ways of adding variety and vitality to lovemaking could be another topic of discussion during pillow talk time. There is much fun, pleasure and variety within God's realm of sexual relations in marriage. Seek His guidance and He will show you the way.

65. Strive for Sexual Fulfillment for Both Spouses

66. In the introduction to this book, four dangers of sexual dissatisfaction were identified. They were: (1) divorce; (2) emotional and physical ailments; (3) marital emptiness and mediocrity or parallel marriage; and (4) vulnerability to temptation. It is your sexual stewardship in marriage to learn about and then do all you can to create sexual fulfillment for yourself and your spouse to reduce the dangers to your marriage. By so doing greater love, passion and aliveness can define your marital relationship.

67. Vulnerability to temptation can cause dangerous concerns for both husband and wife Joe Beam noted his concern regarding this vulnerability:

68. Sex in marriage is wonderful! But like all blessings, there can be an accompanying curse: When husbands and wives don't find sexual fulfillment in marriage, they will find themselves increasingly susceptible to sexual sin. To avoid that temptation, they have the duty before God to sexually fulfill their mates. That means that wives are to fulfill the sexual needs of their husbands and that husbands are to fulfill the sexual needs of their wives. . . .

69. Each has needs and each has a "heavenly contract" allowing him or her to expect . . . that those sexual needs be met.²⁷

70. The scriptures support the need for sexual fulfillment in marriage as a means of reducing temptation. In Corinthians we read about the sacred obligation couples have to fulfill each other:

71. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 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. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and

come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. 28

72. Joe Beam continued his counsel to couples to seek sexual fulfillment for both husband and wife, "Make every effort to keep your sex life healthy. Never forget God's warning in 1 Corinthians 7 about Satan's attack. . . . Remove that avenue of attack from Satan's forces by keeping your mate thoroughly sexually satisfied."29

73. Solutions have been presented in this chapter for gaining knowledge and understanding of each other sexually. The opportunity to enjoy sex and feel completely fulfilled is available to all couples. Make it your goal to become the best possible lover you can be, not only for your spouse, but for yourself.

74. Regularly set small goals as steppingstones to improving your sexual relationship. Seek professional help when needed. Increasing sexual fulfillment not only removes susceptibility to sexual temptation, but also creates greater happiness, joy and oneness in your marriage. No matter your age or the current state of your sexual relationship, improvement is always possible.

1Nay, "Depend Upon the Lord" online article (emphasis added).

2"The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102 (emphasis added). 3Barlow, "They Twain Shall Be One," Ensign, Sep. 1986, 52.

4See Revelation 3:20.

5pJinders, "Learning to Teach as Jesus Taught," Ensign, Sep. 1974, 65. 6See Matthew 6:8.

7Beam, *Becoming One*, 170.

8LaHaye and LaHaye, *Act of Marriage*, 147.

9John 16:24.

10Dobson, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Marriage*, 128.

11Brown, *You and Your Marriage*, 75. 12Brown, *You and Your Marriage*, 73. 13LaHaye and LaHaye, *Act of Marriage*, 130.

14Barlow, "They Twain Shall Be One," Ensign, Sep. 1986, 51.

15Dobson, *What Wives Wish*, 125.

16LaHaye and LaHaye, *Act of Marriage*, 130.

17See Weiner Davis, *Sex-Starved Marriage*, 185-86. 18See Genesis 2:24-25.

19Weiner Davis, *Sex-Starved Marriage*, 185-86.

20LaHaye and LaHaye, *Act of Marriage*, 130-31.

21Weiner Davis, *Sex-Starved Marriage*, 186.

22Brown, *You and Your Marriage*, 21-22. 23Dobson, *What Wives Wish*, 125-26. 24Weiner Davis, *Sex-Starved Marriage*, 186. 25Gray, *Mars and Venus in*

the Bedroom, 53.

26See Weiner Davis, *Sex-Starved Marriage*, 187.

27Beam, *Becoming One*, 136-37.

281 Corinthians 7:2-5.

29Beam, *Becoming One*, 173

Mature Intimacy: Courtship And Marriage

A Parent's Guide, 1985

1. Courtship and marriage are the culmination of the development that has taken place throughout the first eighteen to twenty years of life. Courtship allows your children to practice in a limited way the roles and virtues necessary in marriage. Marriage permits them to practice the roles and virtues necessary in eternal life.

2. Proper courtship is the phase during which your children will decide whether or not to marry a specific person. It should not begin before your children have nearly reached maturity. This is one reason why the Church counsels youth to date only after age sixteen. President David O. McKay explained:

3. "Ever be mindful that following childhood, youth has other obligations besides choosing a mate or having a 'good time.' He must determine first of all what kind of character he will develop. He must decide what his trade or profession will be, and if and when he chooses a wife, how he will support her and the children.

4. "'Going steady' may so enchant the couple that these other associated obligations may be given too little consideration" ("Ideals for Courtship and Marriage," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1960, p. 109).

5. In proper courtship the partners must recognize that their first responsibilities are to encourage each other in righteous behavior and to sustain and support each other in righteous desires and ambitions. The young man will do anything to protect the young lady's purity. Each partner will unselfishly seek the best for the other while they learn to know each other well. The unmarried couple can talk together without being required to agree, inviting free discussion from both sides. Each partner is free to express his or her full personality and to discover the personality of the other.

6. If youth understand that they are children of God and are secure in their self-esteem, they are prepared to enter into lawful intimate relationships when married. Without this understanding, courtship can be empty because the young people may be insecure,

indifferent, or distrustful of their partner and may be selfish and self-indulgent in personal judgments.

7. If young people court one another without being sexually involved, they can more objectively determine whether they should proceed further or whether they should part and seek other more compatible companions. Tragically, courtship is often misused today by those who either live together for sexual privileges or by those who court hastily and marry foolishly. In either situation the purposes of courtship are not realized and the couple's morality is corrupted:

8. "The world may countenance premarital sex experiences, but the Lord and his church condemn in no uncertain terms any and every sex relationship outside of marriage, and even indecent and uncontrolled ones within marriage" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972], p. 175).

9. When couples respect each other enough to practice virtue in every aspect of their courtship, they lay a foundation likely to withstand the most serious assaults during marriage.

10. Ideally, courtship leads to a wedding in the temple. The reception following should be moderate and dignified.

11. Marriage is another phase of personal development, but it is a shared experience. Marriage permits young people to practice roles and virtues that are necessary for eternal life. President Lorenzo Snow related the blessings that can come from such a marriage:

12. "When two Latter-day Saints are united together in marriage, promises are made to them concerning their offspring that reach from eternity to eternity. They are promised that they shall have the power and the right to govern and control and administer salvation and exaltation and glory to their offspring worlds without end. And what offspring they do not have here, undoubtedly there will be opportunities to have them hereafter. What else could man wish? A man and a woman in the other life, having celestial bodies, free from sickness and disease, glorified and beautified beyond description, standing in the midst of their posterity, governing and controlling them, administering life, exaltation and glory, worlds without end!" (Deseret Weekly, 3 Apr. 1897, p. 481).

13. The challenges and rewards of marriage come as two people learn to be one. It is no easy task for two previously separate individuals to learn what is

needed to become physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually one while retaining healthy self-esteem. Becoming as one requires the best effort from both spouses. But since their goal is eternal life, all the effort is worthwhile.

14. The following ideas should help you teach your children the true principles of courtship and marriage. This is a time when talk and testimony must combine with example as effective teaching methods.

Prepare Your Children for the Physical Intimacies of Marriage

15. By the time people court and marry, most of their physical growth has already occurred. The quality of hygiene, grooming, nutrition, and exercise of previous years will largely determine the physical well-being of the couple and should be carefully evaluated during courtship.

16. Courting couples need to be discreet about what they discuss together because certain information is appropriately shared only within marriage. Besides, there is so great a need for consideration of matters other than physical functions (such as finances, religion, child rearing methods, friendships, relatives, career plans, and living arrangements, not to mention planning the wedding itself) that undue attention to sexual information can actually create problems. The whole point of virtuous courtship is to maintain spirituality while learning about each other as persons and putting temporal and mundane matters into proper perspective.

17. If the two people take care separately to inform themselves of the body and all its parts and functions and practice basic, virtuous courtesies together during courtship, their sexual adjustment after marriage will likely be all that they want it to be. In fact by giving proper attention to social, emotional, and spiritual matters, the couple will create in courtship a foundation upon which deeply pleasing intimacies are built after marriage.

18. God himself performed the marriage of our first parents Adam and Eve and commanded them to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (see [Genesis 1:28](#)) that they might have joy in their posterity. He has ordained that all married couples should participate in the union that makes them one flesh (see [Genesis 2:24](#)).

19. Once the couple is married, sexual expression is ordained of God. The Savior taught that a man should "cleave to his wife" and the two should be "one flesh" (see [Matthew 19:5-6](#)).

20. President Kimball has explained: “It is the destiny of men and women to join together to make eternal [family](#) units. 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 [between a husband and his wife], 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).

21. The courtesy and friendship the couple have shown during courtship are vital on their wedding night. The first night requires nearly perfect courtesy, consideration, and, in many cases, a gentle sense of good humor. They must be the very best of friends on this first occasion when they are able to begin to know one another completely. They may be ill at ease, even awkward, and would do well to smile at their awkwardness. Each must remember that the other person is vulnerable to embarrassment. And, they must realize that the greatest passions of marriage lie ahead, to increase over the years through experience and growth. A truth not generally known to newly married couples is that in virtuous marriages passions increase over the years between the couple. Couples can find great joy through fidelity, childbirth, rearing and teaching their children, providing a home, and striving to live gospel truths. President McKay explained:

22. “Let us instruct young people who come to us, first, young men throughout the Church, to know that a woman should be queen of her own body. The marriage covenant does not give the man the right to enslave her, or to abuse her, or to use her merely for the gratification of his passion. Your marriage ceremony does not give you that right.

23. “Second, let them remember that gentleness and consideration after the ceremony is just as appropriate and necessary and beautiful as gentleness and consideration before the wedding.

24. “Third, let us realize that manhood is not undermined by the practicing of continence, notwithstanding what some psychiatrists claim. Chastity is the crown of beautiful womanhood, and self-control is the source of true manhood, if you will know it, not indulgence. Sexual indulgence whets the passion and creates morbid desire.

25. “Let us teach our young men to enter into matrimony with the idea that each will be just as courteous, and considerate of a wife after the ceremony as during courtship. ...

26. “Fourth, minimize the faults, commend virtues. After the first thrill of the honeymoon is worn off, couples begin to see frailties, idiosyncrasies which they had not noticed before. Responsibilities of motherhood come to the woman. Difficulties in paying debts come. And so we become prone to find fault. Let us learn to control ourselves in that respect” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1952, pp. 86–87).

27. The honeymoon ought to be a time when the partners learn about one another’s minds, emotions, bodies, and spirits. It is not a time for sexual excess. It is not a fling of worldly diversions that is scheduled between the temple wedding ceremony and a return to serious living. For Latter-day Saints, the honeymoon and early weeks of marriage are a time for private discovery on all levels: physical, social, emotional, and spiritual.

28. In sexual matters, as in all other aspects of marriage, there are virtues to be observed: “If it is unnatural, you just don’t do it. That is all, and all the family life should be kept clean and worthy and on a very high plane. There are some people who have said that behind the bedroom doors anything goes. That is not true and the Lord would not condone it” (Spencer W. Kimball, The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 312).

29. Both husbands and wives have physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs associated with this sacred act. They will be able to complement each other in the marriage relationship if they give tender, considerate attention to these needs of their partner. Each should seek to fulfill the other’s needs rather than to use this highly significant relationship merely to satisfy his or her own passion.

30. Couples will discover differences in the needs or desires each partner has for such a relationship, but when each strives to satisfy the needs of the other, these differences need not present a serious problem. Remember, this intimate relationship between husband and wife was established to bring joy to them. An effort to reach this righteous objective will enable married couples to use their complementary natures to bring joy to this union.

31. The intimate relationship between husband and wife realizes its greatest value when it is based on loving kindness and tenderness between the marriage partners. This fact, supported by valid research data, helps newly married couples recognize that the so-called sex drive is mostly myth. Sexual intimacy is not an involuntary, strictly biological necessity for survival, like breathing and eating. Sexual intimacy

between a husband and wife can be delayed or even suspended for long periods of time with no negative effect (for example, when the health of one or the other requires it). Husbands and wives are not compelled to mate because their genes or hormones order them to do so. Sexual powers are voluntary and controllable; the heart and mind do rule. While sex drive is a myth, husbands and wives do have physical and emotional needs that are fulfilled through sexual union. If they perceive and appreciate their masculine and feminine natures as important, complementing, but not controlling, parts of their lives, becoming as one flesh can be one of life's richest and most rewarding experiences.

32. There are times within the marriage when complete abstinence is appropriate for extended periods of time, such as during ill health, difficult pregnancy, separation due to employment away from home, or a need to restore respect and mutually decent emotional and spiritual relationships. There also are times when a spouse's emotional and physical needs would make it desirable for the other to be especially affectionate.

33. Throughout the marriage, the husband is expected, in the name of simple decency, to understand and sustain his wife as she literally gives her body to create life.

34. Although no significant physical changes are likely for men after marriage, bearing children evokes very significant changes for women. These changes are so profound and complex that each couple should seek reliable medical information about them. Ideally, both will study this information before and then again during pregnancy. This study should provoke within pure hearts [gratitude](#) for the human body and its godlike parts. The objective is to increase virtue, not carnality.

35. The health of the fetus is directly affected by the health of the mother and father. Parents whose systems are free of harmful substances are far less likely to bear children with birth defects. These harmful substances include illicit drugs, such as LSD, marijuana, and cocaine, as well as alcohol, tobacco, and even some prescription medications. The prophets who have warned against polluting the fountains of life were speaking for the Creator in warning us that there are diseases, substances, and practices that can harm the child within the womb.

36. A healthy mother is an advantage to a developing fetus. Fundamental hygiene is important, including regular bathing and clean, fresh clothing. Diet is

crucial. The mother should eat healthy foods and liquids during and long before pregnancy so that the baby will receive good nourishment through the umbilical connection between the placenta and the uterus. She should exercise to maintain proper blood circulation and healthy respiration.

37. We would do well to ever remind ourselves of our first mortal parents. Instructing them, Heavenly Father commanded them to give attention to the whole range of their powers and passions. They were to subdue the earth, create and nurture posterity, become one flesh physically, cleave unto each other socially and emotionally, and learn to serve the purposes of God. They, as we, were endowed with bodies, parts, and passions after the image of the Creator. This implies that as we, the children of God, develop virtuously within marriage we will discover ever more profound enjoyments of all his creations, including our own emotions, bodies, and spiritual capacities.

Teach Children What to Look for in Potential Companions

38. Courtship is a time to discover if partners are socially and emotionally matched for an eternal relationship. Selfish, unkind habits may be hidden temporarily but inevitably will break through. Unselfishness, respect, generosity, and kindness may waver under the tension of courtship or the stresses of marriage but will also inevitably break through and dominate.

39. As many bishops know, there are too many heartrending situations where couples ignored social and emotional danger signs during courtship in the vain hope that things would improve after marriage. It is far better to break up an engagement than a marriage. There is no comparison between the temporary annoyance of calling off a wedding and the enduring pain of a broken marriage. President McKay stressed this:

40. "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. You see how necessary it is to look for the characteristics of honesty, of loyalty, of chastity, and of reverence. But after having found them—'How, then,' you ask, 'may you tell whether or not there is any consanguinity, that something which will make you at least congenial in each other's company?' 'Is there,' you ask, 'some guide?' Though love is not always a true guide, especially if that love be not reciprocated or is bestowed upon a surly

creature or a brute, yet certainly there is no happiness without love. ‘Well,’ you may ask, ‘how may I know when I am in love?’

41. “That is a very important question. A fellow student and I considered that query one night as we walked together. As boys of that age frequently do, we were talking about girls. Neither he nor I knew whether or not we were in love. Of course I had not then met my present sweetheart. In answer to my question, ‘How may we know when we are in love?’ he replied: ‘My mother once said that if you meet a girl in whose presence you feel a desire to achieve, who inspires you to do your best, and to make the most of yourself, such a young woman is worthy of your love and is awakening love in your heart.’

42. “I submit that as a true guide. In the presence of the girl you truly love you do not feel to grovel; in her presence you do not attempt to take advantage of her; in her presence you feel that you would like to be everything that a ‘Master Man’ should become, for she will inspire you to that ideal. And I ask you young women to cherish that same guide. What does he inspire in you? ... When a young man accompanies you after a meeting, or after a dance, and he shows an inclination to use you as a convenience or as a means of gratification, then you may put it down that he is not prompted by love.

43. “Under such circumstances, no matter how fascinated you may be, young woman, no matter how confident you may feel that you love him, let your judgment rule and be master of your feelings. It may grieve you not to follow the inclination of your heart, but you had better be pained a little in your youth than to suffer pangs of torture later” (Gospel Ideals [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], pp. 459–60).

44. During courtship a couple practices the merging of two separate lives. Couples should look carefully at one another’s habits and preferences. Clothing, preferences, listening habits, language, hobbies, financial attitudes, personal grooming, manners and courtesies, actions around one’s own family and parents, spiritual values—these and more predict much of what marriage will be. Ordinarily, couples may assume that the other person is behaving as well as possible and, therefore, after marriage some “slipping” is likely. Habits, good or bad, are not easily changed. No one is perfect. Courtship is a time to observe and weigh what the other person is like, at his or her best and worst. It is also a time to evaluate one’s self, as President Spencer W. Kimball explained:

45. “How nice and easy would it be if we had a magic wand! But we haven’t. You might take a careful inventory of your habits, your speech, your appearance, your weight, if it is heavier than most people appreciate, and your eccentricities, if you have them. Take each item and analyze it. What do you like in others? What personality traits please you in others? Are your dresses too short, too long, too revealing, too old-fashioned? Does your weight drive off possible suitors? Do you laugh raucously? Are you too selfish? Are you interested only in your own interests or do you project yourself into the lives of others? Do you have annoying mannerisms? ... Do you repeat old stories till they are threadbare? Are you too anxious or too disinterested? Can you make some sacrifices to be acceptable? Are you dull or are you too exuberant? Are you flashy or are you disinteresting? What do you do to make yourself desirable? Do you overdo or underdo? Too much makeup or too little? Scrupulously clean both physically and morally? Are you in the right place or have you pegged yourself? One young girl was getting into the twenties and without opportunity. I urged her to move from the home which she shared with several older girls, leave the office as stenographer, and go to college where she would meet people of the right age. Time passed. I happened one day to be on that campus sometime later and here she came to me, bubbling like a fresh new breeze, with a bright ribbon tying her hair and an optimistic and happy personality. A few months later I was invited to a temple marriage. It may not always work that well.

46. “What are your eccentricities, if any? I think nearly all people have some. If so, then go to work. Classify them, weigh them, corral them, and eliminate one at a time until you are a very normal person” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], pp. 295–96).

47. It is not an overstatement to say that marriage requires all a couple can do to succeed. That is a law of life for any priceless goal. A courting couple needs to look for each other’s potential. There are enough disruptions in families, divergent life-styles, and differences in society and in the Church that young people may not meet others with similar backgrounds. They should be especially careful in this case to make sure a potential partner has the traits of good character, such as kindness, integrity, and diligence.

48. Conclusion

49. Virtuous living by couples who seek to learn the higher roles of a mother and father requires that they forsake unrighteous and worldly ideas and practices. There is little justification for marriage if its prime purpose is merely to legitimize sexual relations. There is every reason to enjoy sexual intimacies among the various intimacies of a virtuous marriage.

50. The earlier stages of human growth and development all lead to courtship and marriage, either here or hereafter. We serve worthy ends if we accept this goal. Parents should teach each succeeding stage of development by example and instruction. As they help their children through each stage, parents relive and refine their own earlier development.

51. The objective of parents is to prepare their children for successful courtships and eternal marriages. During a child's courtship, parents need to be in close communication with their children. Prayer and spiritual accountability are critical aids to the courting couple.

52. On the occasion of his daughter's engagement, a father interviewed her and her fiancé to determine their feelings and to offer some advice for the special months that would pass before the marriage. They discussed the daughter's happiness, ambitions, and anxieties. She spoke of how much she loved her fiancé and her joy at being with him. They discussed the cautions that should be observed so that the engaged couple would not spoil their love for and commitment to each other. They agreed that the goal of a temple marriage required continued virtue and the avoidance of unchaste familiarities.

53. The father asked the couple how he might help them maintain their virtuous path to a celestial marriage. The daughter reminded her father that he had always taught her that every person is accountable to Heavenly Father for their behavior. She said she accepted that responsibility. "However," she said, "it is sometimes hard to maintain that accountability when Heavenly Father is not where I can see him. But you are, Dad. I can see you. Would it be all right if we accounted to you weekly for our behavior? I know if we could, we would do just fine. How about it, Dad?"

54. The father was overwhelmed at the trust the young couple placed in him. He embraced them both and agreed to ask for an accounting each Monday night. After only a few weeks, the daughter told her father that knowing they would be talking to him each Monday to indicate they were maintaining their course in chaste living had enabled them to control all

thoughts and desires that might be contrary to their objective.

55. Spiritual accountability had been an early expectation in this father-daughter relationship. The holding power of that principle kept the daughter pure throughout her life. Parents often see the fruits of their early efforts with their children during the courting period.

56. Our mortal test is to learn to choose the lives and roles that lead to eternal families and exaltation. A loving Heavenly Father desires to reward us beyond our present comprehension, for it is his plan that in this life we begin to become like him. Such a course of living will enable us someday to acquire his knowledge, powers, passions, and joys. President Kimball expressed his hope that all of us would live worthy to receive these blessings:

57. "I sincerely hope that our Latter-day Saint girls and women, and men and boys, will drink deeply of the water of life and conform their lives to the beautiful and comprehensive roles the Lord assigned to them.

58. "I hope we shall not attempt to perfect an already perfect plan, but seek with all our might, mind, and strength to perfect ourselves in the comprehensive program given to us. Because some of us have failed, certainly it would be unfair to place the blame upon the program. Let us control our attitudes, our activities, our total lives, that we may be heir to the rich and numerous blessings promised to us.

59. "What God-given roles each of us could play in this great divine drama! What satisfying personal lives we can live! What beautiful families we can nurture and train! What a heavenly future is ours!" ("The Lord's Plan for Men and Women," *Ensign*, Oct. 1975, p. 5).

The Couple Connection

Charles B. Beckert

Living a Covenant Marriage, 2004



1. I said good-bye to the couple with whom I had been talking and looked at my appointment book. My next scheduled appointment was to be a double counseling session, one the wife had told me on the phone would provide hope for the marriage or confirm her desire for a divorce. I had encountered this type of pressure before and have never felt comfortable with it. Other than this warning, I had no idea what I would be

facing during the next two hours but hoped that each partner would be willing to listen and be honest in their responses.

2. I opened the door that separated the counseling office from the waiting room and glanced to see if the “new” couple had arrived. There were two people in the room but I wasn’t certain if they were together. These two individuals were sitting in the small waiting area as far apart as was physically possible. I did notice that one was a man and the other a woman; still, for a moment, I wondered if I had scheduled two couples for the same hour. My question was answered as I called out the names of Marty and Jodi. They both stood and looked at me but not at each other. It was obvious from the outset that we had some work to do.

3. I invited them into the inner office and noticed again that their preference seemed to be to sit as far apart as possible. I caught this indication before they sat down and directed them to two chairs that had been placed next to each other and turned slightly so two people could see one another and interact more comfortably. Following a few brief introductory comments, they began to unfold their story. During the initial ten or so minutes they apologized more than once for seeking counseling so late in their discomfort. Their story indicated that they had been experiencing marital problems for several years, and it was the imminent threat of divorce and the realization of what a separation or divorce might mean to their six children and to their financial situation that brought them in for help. They wanted to make certain their marriage could not be salvaged and that the decision to divorce was right for them. They had both decided they would try counseling one last time. If it didn’t help, they would pursue either a separation or a divorce. The warning I had received when the appointment was made was confirmed.

4. From the description of their home life, it was evident this couple was as “disconnected” as a couple could be while still living under one roof. They worked opposite shifts, slept in separate bedrooms, never dated, and didn’t even go to church in the same car. Once in the chapel, however, they sat together—but they informed me this was only for the sake of appearance. They had all the earmarks of being “married singles.” After hearing both sides of the story I thought, “To help this couple become reconnected is going to be a real challenge.” I explained to them the best I could what our plan of action might be. From the outset, we would assume they had been deeply in love when they married. Once we had agreed to this assumption, we would try to discover what had gone wrong with their relationship

and caused them to do everything they could to avoid one another. Secondly, we would discuss and suggest some strategies that would help them regain a comfortable and fulfilling closeness and allow them to enjoy their marriage if each was willing to make some changes. I handed them a small card upon which was written the following statement: “*If nothing changes, nothing will change.*” I wanted them both to realize that they could not continue behaving toward one another as they had been and expect anything to be different. Some things would have to change. They nodded in agreement, and I chose to ignore the “duh!” look on their faces.

5. Following the discussion of a basic plan, I was interested in further assessing the nature of their relationship and wanted to do so from individual perspectives. To accomplish this I handed each of them a sheet of paper containing the following words and phrases and asked them to mark the line that represented where, in their opinion, their relationship stood at the present time. The words were presented in descending order and read like this:

- Successful: at the top.
- Succeeding: in the process of growing.
- Sailing: moving but not gaining.
- Striving: putting forth effort to succeed.
- Surviving: barely making it.
- Struggling: not quite making it.
- Sliding: slipping and going downhill.
- Sinking: going under.
- Submerged: under the surface and finding it difficult to breathe.
- Sunk: at the bottom.

6. We discussed each of the options and any personal implications they might see, and then they marked their sheets. Marty was the more optimistic of the pair and checked the “Sliding” box. Jodi grimaced as she marked a darker “X” next to “Submerged.” Based on their individual responses to this abbreviated exercise, it was obvious that Jodi was the more discouraged of the two. Marty appeared a little confused and had what looked to me like a worried look on his face.

7. My next question was designed to provide further clues as to how each felt about the marriage. There were several questions I wanted answers for. Was there still a spark between the two of them, or had the fire burned completely out? Were they discouraged to the point that change would be unlikely for either or both of them?

8. One question I like to pose in an initial session has to do with what brought the couple to the point of deciding to marry in the first place. I generally direct this question to the partner I feel may offer the most

helpful answer. I will admit that once in a while the question backfires on me and I have some repair work to do, but generally speaking, people come in for counseling before the fire has been totally extinguished. I selected Marty to answer the question, feeling Jodi needed the boost an expected positive answer could provide. “Marty,” I asked, “out of all the girls in the world whom you could have married, what was it about Jodi that caught your eye and touched your heart to the degree that you chose her?” It took a little coaching, but then Marty caught on and began talking about their early relationship, how much fun they had together, things they did together, and how they were able to talk with one another. He continued by saying how great it was for him to find someone he could share his thoughts and feelings with without worrying about rejection. Jodi’s interest was sparked by what she heard Marty say, and I saw her reach up and brush a small tear from her cheek. “There is still a spark,” I thought.

9. When Marty finished I posed the same question to Jodi, and although she struggled to express the positive nature of their early relationship, once started she mentioned many of the same ideas Marty had expressed. She added how grateful she was for her feelings of safety when she was with Marty in their early years. Although Marty didn’t cry, his face indicated an intense interest in what Jodi was sharing, and as she concluded her comments he reached over and touched her knee. She did not pull back or make any attempt to remove his hand. “Another positive connection,” I thought.

10. This brief experience led us to a general discussion on how people fall in love in the first place—and how they fall out of love in the last place. I stressed with Marty and Jodi that in my opinion they had not “fallen out of love” but rather had become disconnected. I have found that to most people the phrase “falling out of love” is far more discouraging and permanent than the concept of “being disconnected,” which seems to suggest a temporary condition.

11. We talked about how couples become connected while they are dating, and we came up with this list of what Marty and Jodi did:

- They anticipated and prepared for each date.
- They dressed to impress or at least to not depress their partner.
- They provided surprises for their partner.
- They talked and listened for hours together. (At least they told their parents that was what they were doing so late into the night.)
- They tried to do things for each other.

- They did things with each other.
- They treated each other with courtesy, respect, and dignity.
- They submitted their will to the will of their partner. (At least each of them felt they were doing so.)
- They laughed at their partner’s stories and jokes, even those that were not so funny.
- They viewed their partner as a “whole” or “total” person, basically overlooking many of the minor flaws existing in most of us.

12. Defining how two people make the transition from a positive connection to a damaged connection is as easy as considering the opposites of the behaviors listed above. As we reviewed the opposite behaviors, Jodi and Marty were squirming in their chairs. In that dialogue, both were able to identify several behaviors that had worked to bring them together and that they were not presently doing. They each expressed a little embarrassment at the realization of their personal neglect of their marriage.

13. Our next challenge for this initial counseling session was to try to identify, other than the neglected behaviors noted, specific attitudes and actions that had helped lead to their disconnection. On the white board located in the office, we created two columns. Above the column on the left we wrote: “*That which makes a connection*” and above the column on the right we wrote: “*That which breaks a connection.*” One by one, specific elements were written below the appropriate heading. We will identify these characteristics and offer a brief commentary after each addition.

14. There is an interesting scriptural challenge in Ephesians 4:29 relative to communication attitude and practices. It reads: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” The message is clear. We should share thoughts, ideas, and feelings with one another only when they build or enhance our partner, and at the same time we should avoid saying anything that tends to corrupt or destroy the other. Marty and Jodi quickly admitted that, in recent years, the majority of their discussions were of the “corrupting” variety and that they had not recently been moved to share positive and helpful things with one another. Marty requested some examples of what might be labeled “corrupt communication,” and I offered the following to help clarify.

15. It has been my experience that prolonged silence can create some very difficult problems, because the receiver is left with the responsibility of determining

what the partner may be feeling or thinking. I suggested to Marty that sarcasm was another form of corrupt communication, because the recipient is never certain as to whether the words were spoken in jest or in seriousness. Deception is generally corrupting, and as a tool of the devil it is never edifying. Similarly, criticism, which is based on personal judgments, is generally disruptive and harmful. We can share frustrations and feelings with our mate without being critical of them or their values. Two additional examples of corrupt communication are profanity and angry outbursts. Each of these behaviors offends the Holy Spirit and insults or injures one's partner. Any intimidating threats we might make in an attempt to defend ourselves provide another example of corrupt communication. Such threats, whether referring to a person or to the relationship, will increase the distance between the couple. Threats never bring two people closer.

16. In my desire to help Marty and Jodi make their discussions more edifying than corrupting, I suggested that edifying communication contains words of encouragement and truth, helpful feedback, sincere compliments, words of support and comfort, and words containing timely information. Communication of this variety will make and maintain a positive connection.

17. The next points we listed on the board were:

18. We are challenged in [1 Corinthians 7:3](#) to "let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband."

Benevolence has been defined as "a kindly disposition toward another." In our discussion about this element of their marriage, both Marty and Jodi agreed that they generally treated their friends and associates much more politely than they did one another. They were beginning to see more clearly why they had become so disconnected in their marriage.

19. I brought up a third variable to see if it played a role in their current problems, but both stated (rather emphatically, I might add) that this was not an issue in their marriage and never had been. I add it to our list for the sake of those who are reading this chapter.

20. Even though this did not appear to be a problem within the Marty-Jodi relationship, I would like to share a thought or two about it. Relationships are disconnected when partners prove unfaithful and disloyal to one another. It has been my experience that one can demonstrate infidelity in a marriage without experiencing a physical and sexual affair. Emotional adultery is very real and usually has a major negative impact on the connectedness between the spouses. We live in a computer generation, and the World Wide

Web has been blamed for many evil things, as well as lauded for countless contributions. Internet pornography has been instrumental in a host of marital breakups. While many males fall victim to the graphic displays available on the web, females often fall prey to what happens in "chat rooms" and the relationships that often result. Obviously, these two experiences are not exclusively male and female, but they occur primarily as we have noted.

21. The more Jodi and Marty shared about their life together, the clearer a major problem became. These two had been living "parallel" lives rather than truly joining in a marriage partnership. Individually, they were doing okay, but as a partnership they were failing. Rather than cooperating and supporting one another in various activities they had become vicious opponents and competitors, desiring to win at any cost. There was constant friction between them as each resisted the efforts of the other. Both had become extremely discouraged with the lack of support and understanding coming from the other, and this neglect resulted in further weakening their connection. Even without obvious resistance, parallel lives place a heavy strain on the relationship. In relationships where each partner does his or her own thing with little consideration and concern for the partner, connections become very difficult to maintain. The Lord stated that it was "not good that the man should be alone" ([Genesis 2:18](#)) and the prophet Lehi added that "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25), suggesting the necessity of there being more than one individual if true joy is to be experienced. One of the most poignant references suggesting the desirability of working together can be read in [Ecclesiastes 4:9-12](#). It reads:

22. Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

23. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

24. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

25. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

26. Marty asked me to reread this reference and as I did, he took a deep breath, leaned back in the chair and lifted his eyes to the ceiling. After a couple of minutes, he lowered his head, looked straight at Jodi and said, "It's like we haven't even been married, isn't it?" Jodi nodded. They both knew they would have been happier and their connection stronger if they had chosen to work together more often.

27. At this point in our discussion I began to sense a change in their basic attitudes toward each other and their marriage. They were actually holding hands as they talked. I mentioned this to them and they glanced at one another without saying anything further about the topic.

28. I used their hand holding as a segue to another point I wanted to write on the white board and to which I wanted to call their attention. So far in our conversation, the topic of their physical relationship had not come up, and I wanted to ascertain its condition in the marriage. Many times a broad description of the physical relationship sheds valuable light on a couple's relationship in general. So we added it to our list.

29. When I initially inquired about their physical relationship, assuring them I was not interested in any details, they looked at each other and then Jodi blurted out, "What physical relationship?" Her point was made and I understood. I have often pondered which comes first, the absence of intimacy or the feeling of disconnectedness. Obviously, the ideas are twins and generally very closely related; but on the other hand, sharing physical intimacy is something a couple can do whether or not they "feel" like it. With this particular couple, it was interesting that the wife was the spouse feeling neglected in this area. Marty readily admitted that for the past several months he had had little motivation and desire for physical closeness with Jodi. In fact, he stated that he had purposefully avoided situations where intimacy may have been invited. Marty and Jodi both said that they had discussed this area of their marriage many times because it had been such a strong and positive part of their early marriage relationship.

30. Because they said they were interested in what the scriptures might say about their marriage relationship, I invited them to read and ponder [1 Corinthians 7:4-5](#), which they did. Here is what it says:

31. 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.

32. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

33. They both expressed surprise at those words and seemed eager to determine what this might mean to their relationship. They said it was intriguing to learn that both the husband and the wife have the responsibility to do what they can to fulfill the sexual needs of the other. I explained that when we marry we

covenant to not become involved in a sexual situation with anyone outside of marriage—and at the same time we promise to participate in a physical relationship with our spouse. I asked them to read the Joseph Smith translation of verse five at the bottom of the page, which changes the words "defraud ye not one the other" to "depart ye not one from the other" for added clarity. Marty's wink and Jodi's slight smile were exciting to watch. Something we had just read had captured their attention.

34. To further foster emotional and physical closeness, I suggested they not confuse certain pairs of words, as so many couples have done and continue to do. For example, they should not confuse *proximity* with *togetherness*. These are not the same, and to assume they are will result in disappointment for both. Similarly, the words *listening* and *hearing* should not be confused. Many times we hear something, but we are not listening to what is being communicated. Along that same line, couples get into trouble when they confuse *talking* with *communicating*. To *communicate* suggests an exchange of information and feelings, while *talking* may mean just talking. Talking in and of itself does not necessarily lead to closeness, while communicating generally does. I asked Marty and Jodi if they had ever confused *intentions* (things we intend to do) with *actions* (actual behavior that is often left undone), and they laughed and said they had made this mistake far too many times. Finally, and in the context of our current topic of conversation, I mentioned the word pair of *sex* and *affection*. Marty looked down, then at Jodi, and said, "That is a mistake I used to make all the time, until I just backed away, completely." Jodi nodded in agreement. I thought my point was made and that we should move on.

35. Another point I wanted to share with Marty and Jodi relative to intimacy was that intimacy has a meaning much broader than physical affection. To help them more fully realize that they could be close in many areas of married life, I handed them a sheet of paper that described ten areas of potential intimacy and strongly suggested how each individual area tends to impact the other nine. These are the areas the sheet contained:

- Physical intimacy: Enjoying the ultimate of physical closeness.
- 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: Closeness in sharing common tasks.
- Conflict intimacy: Facing and struggling with challenges and differences.
- Crisis intimacy: Togetherness in coping with problems and pain.
- Spiritual intimacy: Experiencing the “uniting of spirits.”

36. Although we didn’t spend much time on this exercise, Marty stated that he had not recognized the possibility of being close in so many different ways. He had thought of the physical and the spiritual intimacies but not of the others. Jodi didn’t think they were all equally significant and mentioned, again, how much she missed the physical closeness the two of them had previously enjoyed. Marty nodded in agreement, and we were ready to move on.

37. When our counseling session was almost over, I simply wrote a final note on the board.

38. In the classic book *Marriage*, President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

39. Love is like a flower, and, like the body, it needs constant feeding. The mortal body would soon be emaciated and die if there were not frequent feedings. The tender flower would wither and die without food and water. And so love, also, cannot be expected to last forever unless it is continually fed with portions of love, the manifestation of esteem and admiration, the expressions of gratitude, and the consideration of unselfishness.¹

40. He also made the statement that more marriages die from neglect than from sin. That is an interesting thought, isn’t it? It has been my experience that when a spouse feels “taken for granted,” whether or not the partner so intends, the connection is severely weakened, if not broken. Without continued courtship and frequent expressions of love and concern, a couple will not be able to maintain a positive connection, and with the disconnections comes a sense of a loss of love.

41. Although the phrase “love is a verb” has been used so often it may sound trite, it is nonetheless true. The fact is, love is an action verb, and when treated as one in a marriage relationship, the couple remains positively connected. This perspective need not take away the excitement and enchantment of “being in love.” “Being in love” is a feeling and is generally the result of being loved and of loving another. In my experience with disconnected couples, this feeling of love comes *after* the action of loving and not before. I

cannot count the number of times clients have informed me that the problem in their marriage is that they no longer love their spouse. They are shocked when I agree with them and then even more surprised when I suggest they go home and love their partner. They insist they don’t love them, and I persist and tell them to go home and do so. It is sometimes difficult to help them understand that to *love* someone (action verb) has little to do with being *in love* with them.

When the Savior commanded us to love our neighbors, he was not suggesting that we be in love with them, but that we demonstrate love by our behaviors toward them. Staying connected in marriage is greatly facilitated by loving actions. We truly can “choose to love” our mates, and from my perspective this is what Marty and Jodi needed to do.

42. I knew I had really unloaded on this couple during this initial session, but I didn’t know if I would get a second chance. Their behavior toward one another had changed during the session, and it was my impression that they were willing to try some things to reconnect. I continued with this thought in mind.

43. We talked about the wonderful “date a week” message that persists throughout the Church, and they agreed they would try it. To encourage them to get started, I suggested a simple exercise that had worked for many couples. Each of them was to take five small slips of paper and, on each slip, write an activity he or she would like to enjoy with his or her partner on a date night. There were a few basic ground rules for this exercise. One was that the activity had to be within the time and money budget available to the couple. Another was that it could not create a situation where one or the other would have to compromise his or her standards. Once the ten slips had been filled out, they were to be placed in a bowl or hat and then drawn out, one at a time, early enough so arrangements could be made for the coming date. I explained that planning the dating experience in advance allowed the couple to benefit twice—once by anticipating the date, and again by participating in the date. Marty and Jodi agreed to complete the exercise.

44. They were a little surprised when I informed them there was more I wanted them to do. If they were serious about reconnecting as a married couple, they would need to do more than go on a date once a week. I was, in fact, planning to give them daily assignments. I hoped I wasn’t pushing them too hard. I proceeded to explain what they might do as they chose to demonstrate love to each other each day. Such a list could be unending, but I thought a few specific choices might take away any excuse for not trying. I reminded them that the overall objective of

these suggestions was to help them reconnect with one another by expressing love. Doing so would help them regain their old love feelings.

45. Here are some of the things I suggested they might do with, for, and to each other each day:

46. Plan the day together, either prior to bedtime or before heading out of the house in the morning.

47. Review the day together prior to going to bed. This is a “return and report” exercise.

48. Provide appropriate touches, hugs, and kisses. (Emphasis on “appropriate.”)

49. Touch good-bye and touch hello, meaning that when one leaves the home for an extended time, he or she should seek out the remaining spouse and “touch” good-bye. Similarly, when one arrives home after being gone, he or she should seek out the partner and “touch” hello.

50. Make a timely telephone call from time to time.

51. Say “I love you” to one another in a way that the partner can understand and appreciate. The “Golden Rule” says we are to treat others as we would like to be treated. I do not mean to sound sacrilegious or to suggest the “Golden Rule” is incomplete, but I would suggest a “Silver Rule” to apply as we interact and express love to our spouse. This rule reads: “Do unto others as they would like it done unto them.”

52. Demonstrate interest in and support for what your spouse may be doing.

53. Pray together as a couple. Some couples take turns, with the husband praying on the even-numbered days and the wife on the odd-numbered days.

54. To summarize this “Daisy a Day” approach, I provided Marty and Jodi with some lyrics I had written some time earlier for a marriage workshop experience. The song goes like this:

Marriage Connections

The marriage road is not a breeze;
Most do not travel it with ease.
But when we walk it hand in hand,
And connections we expand.
Then united we will stand.
Then united we will stand.
Marriage is a duet song,
Not a tune to sing alone.
One that’s rich with harmony,
Which makes life full for you and me.
Connected is what we will be.
Connected is what we will be.
If one should fall, the other’s there,
To lift and help with loving care.
To give support when there’s a need
Will help a marriage to succeed.

Connectedness will be our creed.

Connectedness will be our creed.

We’ll talk and plan the day ahead,

Review it e’er we go to bed.

We will on each a kiss bestow,

We’ll touch good-bye and touch hello.

Connecting as we come and go.

Connecting as we come and go.

A timely call will do so much,

When added to a gentle touch,

With tender words like “I love you,”

To keep our love alive and true.

These are connecting things we’ll do.

These are connecting things we’ll do.

If problems ’tween us should arise,

We’ll look each other in the eyes

And say “I’m sorry” if we’re wrong,

Or forgive and then move on,

Keeping our connections strong.

Keeping our connections strong.

We do not want to walk apart,

But hand in hand and heart in heart,

Making contact through each day,

Saying what we need to say.

In love, connected, we will stay.

In love, connected, we will stay.

Chorus:

Connections, connections,

Positive connections.

They keep our marriage glowing,

Our friendship ever growing.

As mates we’ve been selected,

Now we must stay connected.

55. I heard the outside door open and close and knew the next counseling appointment had arrived. As I mentioned to Jodi and Marty that our time was gone, Jodi asked if we were going to meet again. I said, “That is up to the two of you.” They looked at each other, perhaps thinking back on their feelings toward one another a couple of hours earlier. It was Marty who said, “I can’t speak for Jodi, but I would like to meet again.” Jodi nodded in agreement. I expressed appreciation for their trust and thanked them for their willingness to try the things we had discussed and challenged them to do so. I also warned them that some of the old negative feelings would likely creep back into their minds, and if and when that happened they should not become discouraged but move forward. I also suggested that it would be a good idea if they were to look at this counseling experience as a new beginning for their marriage. They nodded and after shaking hands with me, took each other by the

hand and left the office. At least tonight, they had connected and were still a couple.

Note

1. Spencer W. Kimball, *Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 46.

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

Respect and Courtesy

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

Disrespect and Rudeness

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

Respect and Courtesy

Purity in Mind and Body

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

Disrespect and Rudeness

Impurity of Thought and Action

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

Respect and Courtesy

Purity in Mind and Body

Encouragement and Cooperation

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

Disrespect and Rudeness

Impurity of Thought and Action

Discouragement and Resistance

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

Respect and Courtesy

Purity in Mind and Body

Encouragement and Cooperation

Emotional and Physical Closeness

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

Disrespect and Rudeness

Impurity of Thought and Action

Discouragement and Resistance

Emotional and Physical Distance

That Which Makes a Connection

Edifying Communication

Respect and Courtesy

Purity in Mind and Body

Encouragement and Cooperation

Emotional and Physical Closeness

Continued Courtship

That Which Breaks a Connection

Corrupt Communication

Disrespect and Rudeness

Impurity of Thought and Action

Discouragement and Resistance

Emotional and Physical Distance

Neglect of Partner and Relationship

Things As They Really Are

Elder David A. Bednar

BYU-I Devotional May 2009



1. I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls.

2. As I have looked forward to and prepared for this opportunity to learn with you, I have come to better understand the strong feelings of Jacob, the brother of Nephi. He said, “I this day am weighed down with much ... desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls” ([Jacob 2:3](#)). The message I want to share with you today has over time distilled upon my “soul as the dew from heaven” ([D&C 121:45](#)). I invite your earnest attention to a serious subject that has both immediate and eternal implications. I pray for the [Holy Ghost](#) to be with and teach each of us during our time together.

3. I long have been impressed with the simple and clear definition of truth set forth in the [Book of Mormon](#): “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; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls” ([Jacob 4:13](#); see also [D&C 93:24](#)).

4. We will focus upon the first major element of truth identified in this verse: “things as they really are.” We first will review several key elements of our Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness as the doctrinal foundation for knowing and understanding things as they really are. We then will consider methods of attack used by the adversary to distract us from or inhibit our capacity to discern things as they really are. And finally, we will discuss the responsibilities that rest upon you as the rising generation. You will need to be obedient, to honor sacred covenants, and to discern things consistently as they really are in today’s world that grows ever more confused and wicked.

Our Divine Destiny

5. In “The [Family](#): A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles declare that as spirit sons and daughters of God, we “accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”¹ Please note the primary importance of obtaining a physical body in the process of progressing toward our divine destiny.

6. The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) taught with clarity the importance of our physical bodies:

7. “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. ...

8. “The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”²

9. Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate.

President [Boyd K. Packer](#), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught, “Our spirit and our body are combined in such a way that our body becomes an instrument of our mind and the foundation of our character.”³ 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 classroom 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](#)).

10. Apostles and prophets consistently have taught the mortal and eternal importance of our bodies. Paul declared:

11. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

12. “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” ([1 Corinthians 3:16–17](#)).

13. And in this dispensation the Lord revealed that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” ([D&C 88:15](#)). A truth that really is and always will be is that the body and the spirit constitute our reality and identity. When body and spirit are inseparably connected, we can receive a fulness of joy; when they are separated, we cannot receive a fulness of joy (see [D&C 93:33–34](#)).

14. 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. 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 become “miserable like unto himself” ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)), and he works to distort the elements of the Father’s plan he hates the most.

15. Satan 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 tabernacle of flesh and bones. He cannot learn the lessons that only an embodied spirit can learn. He cannot marry or enjoy the blessings of procreation and family life. He cannot abide 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.

16. Because a physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, we should not be surprised that 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, invites and entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have and cannot use is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to physical and spiritual destruction.

The Adversary’s Attacks

17. The adversary attempts to influence us both to misuse our physical bodies and to minimize the importance of our bodies. These two methods of attack are important for us to recognize and to repel.

18. When any of Heavenly Father’s children misuse their physical tabernacles by violating the law of chastity, by using drugs and addictive substances, by disfiguring or defacing themselves, or by worshipping the false idol of body image, whether their own or that of others, Satan is delighted. To those of us who know and understand the plan of salvation, any defiling of the body is rebellion and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God (see [Mosiah 2:36–37](#); [D&C 64:34–35](#)).

19. Now, brothers and sisters, I cannot tell you all the ways whereby you may misuse your bodies, “for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” ([Mosiah 4:29](#)). You know what is right and what is wrong, and you have the individual responsibility to learn for yourself “by study and also by faith” ([D&C 88:118](#)) the things you

should and should not do and the doctrinal reasons you should and should not do those things. I testify that as you desire to so learn, as you “watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives” ([Mosiah 4:30](#)), you will be spiritually enlightened and protected. And according to your faithfulness and diligence, you will have the power to discern the deception and repel the attacks of the adversary as he tempts you to misuse your physical body.

20. Satan also strives to entice the sons and daughters of God to minimize the importance of their physical bodies. This particular type of attack is most subtle and diabolical. I want to provide several examples of how the adversary can pacify and lull us away into a sense of carnal security (see [2 Nephi 28:21](#)) and encourage us to put at risk the earthly learning experiences that caused us to shout for joy in the premortal existence (see [Job 38:7](#)).

21. For example, all of us can find enjoyment in a wide range of wholesome, entertaining, and engaging activities. But we diminish the importance of our bodies and jeopardize our physical well-being by going to unusual and dangerous extremes searching for an ever-greater and more exhilarating adrenaline “rush.” We may rationalize that surely nothing is wrong with such seemingly innocent exploits and adventures. However, putting at risk the very instrument God has given us to receive the learning experiences of mortality—merely to pursue a thrill or some supposed fun, to bolster ego, or to gain acceptance—truly minimizes the importance of our physical bodies.

22. Sadly, some young men and young women in the Church today ignore “things as they really are” and neglect eternal relationships for digital distractions, diversions, and detours that have no lasting value. My heart aches when a young couple—sealed together in the house of the Lord for time and for all eternity by the power of the holy priesthood—experiences marital difficulties because of the addicting effect of excessive video gaming or online socializing. A young man or woman may waste countless hours, postpone or forfeit vocational or academic achievement, and ultimately sacrifice cherished human relationships because of mind- and spirit-numbing video and online games. As the Lord declared, “Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment ... : Thou shalt not idle away thy time,

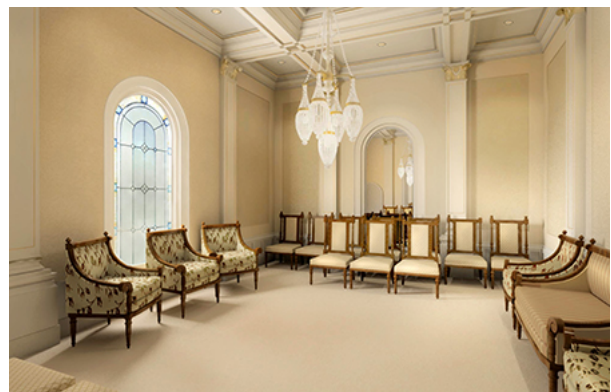
neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known” ([D&C 60:13](#)).

23. You may now be asking yourself, “But, Brother Bednar, you began today by talking about the importance of a physical body in our eternal progression. Are you suggesting that video gaming and various types of computer-mediated communication can play a role in minimizing the importance of our physical bodies?” That is precisely what I am declaring. Let me explain.

24. We live at a time when technology can be used to replicate reality, to augment reality, and to create virtual reality. For example, a medical doctor can use software simulation to gain valuable experience performing a complicated surgical operation without ever putting a human patient at risk. A pilot in a flight simulator repeatedly can practice emergency landing procedures that could save many lives. And architects and engineers can use innovative technologies to model sophisticated design and construction methods that decrease the loss of human life and damage to buildings caused by earthquakes and other natural disasters.

25. In each of these examples, a high degree of fidelity in the simulation or model contributes to the effectiveness of the experience. The term fidelity denotes the similarity between reality and a representation of reality. Such a simulation can be constructive if the fidelity is high and the purposes are good—for example, providing experience that saves lives or improves the quality of life.

26. Please notice the fidelity between the representation of reality in the computer rendering (first image below) and the reality of the completed room (second image).



27. Rendering of sealing room in Newport Beach California Temple by Craig Lofgreen © IRI



28. Photograph of actual sealing room in Newport Beach California Temple by Welden C. Andersen © IRI

29. In the example, high fidelity is employed to accomplish a most important purpose—the design and construction of a sacred and beautiful temple.

However, a simulation or model can lead to spiritual impairment and danger if the fidelity is high and the purposes are bad—such as experimenting with actions contrary to God’s commandments or enticing us to think or do things we would not otherwise think or do “because it is only a game.”

30. I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls. The concerns I raise are not new; they apply equally to other types of media, such as television, movies, and music. But in a cyber world, these challenges are more pervasive and intense. I plead with you to beware of the sense-dulling and spiritually destructive influence of cyberspace technologies that are used to produce high fidelity and that promote degrading and evil purposes.

31. If the adversary cannot entice us to misuse our physical bodies, then one of his most potent tactics is to beguile you and me as embodied spirits to disconnect gradually and physically from things as they really are. In essence, he encourages us to think and act as if we were in our premortal, unembodied state. And, if we let him, he can cunningly employ some aspects of modern technology to accomplish his purposes. Please be careful of becoming so immersed and engrossed in pixels, texting, earbuds, twittering, online social networking, and potentially addictive uses of media and the Internet that you fail to recognize the importance of your physical body and miss the richness of person-to-person communication. Beware of digital displays and data in many forms of computer-mediated interaction that can displace the full range of physical capacity and experience.

32. Read carefully the following quote describing an intense romantic relationship a woman had with a cyberspace boyfriend. And note how the medium of communication minimized the importance of the physical body: “And so PFSlider [the man’s screen name] became my everyday life. All the tangible stuff fell away. My body did not exist. I had no skin, no hair, no bones. All desire had converted itself into a cerebral current that reached nothing but my frontal lobe. There was no outdoors, no social life, no weather. There was only the computer screen and the phone, my chair, and maybe a glass of water.”⁴

33. In contrast, we need to heed the admonition of Paul: “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” ([1 Thessalonians 4:4](#)).

34. Consider again the example I mentioned earlier of a young couple recently married in the house of the Lord. An immature or misguided spouse may devote an inordinate amount of time to playing video games, chatting online, or in other ways allowing the digital to dominate things as they really are. Initially the investment of time may seem relatively harmless, rationalized as a few minutes of needed relief from the demands of a hectic daily schedule. But important opportunities are missed for developing and improving interpersonal skills, for laughing and crying together, and for creating a rich and enduring bond of emotional intimacy. Progressively, seemingly innocent entertainment can become a form of pernicious enslavement.

35. To feel the warmth of a tender hug from an eternal companion or to see the sincerity in the eyes of another person as testimony is shared—all of these things experienced as they really are through the instrument of our physical body—could be sacrificed for a high-fidelity fantasy that has no lasting value. If you and I are not vigilant, we can become “past feeling” ([1 Nephi 17:45](#)), as did Laman and Lemuel long ago.

36. Let me provide another example of disconnecting gradually and physically from things as they really are. Today a person can enter into a virtual world, such as Second Life, and assume a new identity. An individual can create an avatar, or a cyberspace persona, that conforms to his or her own appearance and behavior. Or a person can concoct a counterfeit identity that does not correlate in any way to things as they really are. However closely the assumed new identity approximates the individual, such behavior is the essence of things as they really are not. Earlier I defined the fidelity of a simulation or model. I now emphasize the importance of personal

fidelity—the correspondence between an actual person and an assumed, cyberspace identity. Please note the lack of personal fidelity in the following episode as reported in the Wall Street Journal:

37. Ric Hoogestraat is “a burly [53-year-old] man with a long gray ponytail, thick sideburns and a salt-and-pepper handlebar mustache. ... [Ric spends] six hours a night and often 14 hours at a stretch on weekends as Dutch Hoorenbeek, his six-foot-nine, muscular ... cyber-self. The character looks like a younger, physically enhanced version of [Ric]. ...

38. “... [He] sits at his computer with the blinds drawn. ... While his wife, Sue, watches television in the living room, Mr. Hoogestraat chats online with what appears on the screen to be a tall, slim redhead.

39. “He’s never met the woman outside of the computer world of Second Life, a well-chronicled digital fantasyland. ... He’s never so much as spoken to her on the telephone. But their relationship has taken on curiously real dimensions. They own two dogs, pay a mortgage together and spend hours [in their cyberspace world] shopping at the mall and taking long motorcycle rides. ... Their bond is so strong that three months ago, Mr. Hoogestraat asked Janet Spielman, the 38-year-old Canadian woman who controls the redhead, to become his virtual wife.

40. “The woman he’s legally wed to is not amused. ‘It’s really devastating,’ says Sue Hoogestraat, ... who has been married to Mr. Hoogestraat for seven months.”⁵

41. Brothers and sisters, please understand. I am not suggesting all technology is inherently bad; it is not. Nor am I saying we should not use its many capabilities in appropriate ways to learn, to communicate, to lift and brighten lives, and to build and strengthen the Church; of course we should. But I am raising a warning voice that we should not squander and damage authentic relationships by obsessing over contrived ones. “Nearly 40% of men and 53% of women who play online games said their virtual friends were equal to or better than their real-life friends, according to a survey of 30,000 gamers conducted by ... a recent Ph.D. graduate from Stanford University. More than a quarter of gamers [who responded indicated that] the emotional highlight of the past week occurred in a computer world.”⁶

42. How important, how enduring, and how timely is the Lord’s definition of truth: “things as they really are.” The prophet Alma asked, “O then, is not this real?” ([Alma 32:35](#)). He was speaking of light and good so discernible they can be tasted. Indeed, “they who dwell in [the Father’s] presence ... see as they

are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace” ([D&C 76:94](#)).

43. My beloved brothers and sisters, beware! To the extent personal fidelity decreases in computer-mediated communications and the purposes of such communications are distorted, perverted, and wicked, the potential for spiritual disaster is dangerously high. I implore you to turn away immediately and permanently from such places and activities (see [2 Timothy 3:5](#)).

44. Now I would like to address an additional characteristic of the adversary’s attacks. Satan often offers an alluring illusion of anonymity. Lucifer always has sought to accomplish his work in secret (see [Moses 5:30](#)). Remember, however, that apostasy is not anonymous simply because it occurs in a [blog](#) or through a fabricated identity in a chat room or virtual world. Immoral thoughts, words, and deeds always are immoral, even in cyberspace. Deceitful acts supposedly veiled in secrecy, such as illegally downloading music from the Internet or copying CDs or DVDs for distribution to friends and families, are nonetheless deceitful. We are all accountable to God, and ultimately we will be judged of Him according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts (see [Alma 41:3](#)). “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” ([Proverbs 23:7](#)).

45. The Lord knows who we really are, what we really think, what we really do, and who we really are becoming. He has warned us that “the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed” ([D&C 1:3](#)).

46. I have raised a voice of warning about only a few of the spiritual hazards in our technologically oriented and rapidly changing world. Let me say again: neither technology nor rapid change in or of itself is good or evil; the real challenge is to understand both within the context of the eternal plan of happiness. Lucifer will encourage you to misuse and to minimize the importance of your physical body. He will attempt to substitute the monotony of virtual repetition for the infinite variety of God’s creations and convince us we are merely mortal things to be acted upon instead of eternal souls blessed with moral agency to act for ourselves. Deviously, he entices embodied spirits to forfeit the blessings and learning experiences “according to the flesh” ([1 Nephi 19:6](#); [Alma 7:12–13](#)) that are made possible through the Father’s plan of happiness and the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son.

47. For your happiness and protection, I invite you to study more diligently the doctrine of the plan of salvation—and to prayerfully ponder the truths we have reviewed. I offer two questions for consideration in your personal pondering and prayerful studying:

1. Does the use of various technologies and media invite or impede the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost in your life?

2. Does the time you spend using various technologies and media enlarge or restrict your capacity to live, to love, and to serve in meaningful ways?

48. You will receive answers, inspiration, and instruction from the Holy Ghost suited to your individual circumstances and needs. I repeat and affirm the teaching of the Prophet Joseph: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him.”

49. These eternal truths about the importance of our physical bodies will fortify you against the deception and the attacks of the adversary. One of my deepest desires for you is an ever-increasing testimony of and appreciation for the Resurrection—even your own resurrection with a celestial, exalted body “because of your faith in [the Lord Jesus Christ] according to the promise” ([Moroni 7:41](#)).

The Rising Generation

50. I would like to speak specifically to you as you really are. You really are the rising generation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In October of 1997, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited Brigham Young University–Idaho to speak in a devotional. During the day he was on the campus, we talked together about a variety of gospel topics in general and about the youth of the Church in particular. I remember Elder Maxwell making a statement that greatly impressed me. He said, “The youth of this generation have a greater capacity for obedience than any previous generation.”

51. He then indicated that his statement was based upon a truth taught by President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901), First Counselor in the First Presidency: “God has reserved spirits for this dispensation who have the courage and determination to face the world, and all the powers of the evil one, visible and invisible, to proclaim the gospel and maintain the truth and establish and build up the Zion of our God fearless of all consequences. He has sent these spirits in this generation to lay the foundation of Zion never more to be overthrown, and to raise up a seed that will be righteous, and that will honor God, and honor Him

supremely, and be obedient to Him under all circumstances.”⁷

52. Parents and Church leaders frequently emphasize that the young men and young women of this generation have been reserved for this season in the history of the world and are some of the most valiant of Heavenly Father’s children. Indeed, such statements are true. But I often have wondered if young people hear this description so often that it becomes overused and trite—and that its importance and deep implications may be overlooked. We know that “unto whom much is given much is required” ([D&C 82:3](#)). And the teachings of President Cannon and Elder Maxwell help us to understand more fully what is required of us today. You and I are to be valiant and “obedient to Him under all circumstances.” Thus, obedience is the principal weapon upon which the rising generation must rely in the latter-day battle between good and evil.

53. We rejoice that the Lord through His authorized servants has “raised the bar” for the young men and young women of today. Given what we know about who we are and why we are here upon the earth, such inspired direction is welcomed and appreciated. And we should recognize that Lucifer incessantly strives to “lower the bar” by coaxing us to misuse and minimize the importance of our physical bodies.

54. The Savior has warned us repeatedly to beware of deception by the adversary:

55. “Jesus answered, and said unto them: Take heed that no man deceive you; ...

56. “For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant ...

57. “And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived” ([Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5, 22, 37](#)).

58. Obedience opens the door to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And the spiritual gifts and abilities activated by the power of the Holy Ghost enable us to avoid deception—and to see, to feel, to know, to understand, and to remember things as they really are. You and I have been endowed with a greater capacity for obedience precisely for these reasons. Moroni declared:

59. “Hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.

60. “Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God” ([Mormon 9:27–28](#)).

61. As we heed that inspired counsel, we can and will be blessed to recognize and repel the attacks of the adversary—today and in the days that lie ahead. We can and will fulfill our foreordained responsibilities and contribute to the work of the Lord in all the world.

62. I testify that God lives and is our Heavenly Father. He is the author of the plan of salvation. Jesus is the Christ, [the Redeemer](#), whose body was bruised, broken, and torn for us as He offered the atoning sacrifice. He is resurrected, He lives, and He stands at the head of His Church in these latter days. To be “encircled about eternally in the arms of his love”

([2 Nephi 1:15](#)) will be a real and not a virtual experience.



No Other Gods

Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Ensign, November 2014

1. The [Ten Commandments](#) are fundamental to the [Christian](#) and Jewish faiths. Given by God to the children of Israel through the prophet [Moses](#), the first two of these commandments direct our worship and our priorities. In the first, the Lord commanded, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” ([Exodus 20:3](#)). Centuries later, when Jesus was asked, “Which is the [great commandment](#) in the law?” He answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” ([Matthew 22:36–37](#)).

2. The second of the Ten Commandments elaborates the direction to have no other gods and identifies what should be the ultimate priority in our lives as His children. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing” in the heavens or the earth ([Exodus 20:4](#)). The commandment then adds, “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” ([Exodus 20:5](#)). More than merely forbidding physical idols, this states a fundamental priority for all time. Jehovah explains, “For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, ... shewing mercy unto ... them that love me, and keep my commandments”

63. I testify we can and will be blessed with the courage and determination to face the world and all the powers of the evil one. Righteousness will prevail. No unhallowed hand can stop this work from progressing. I bear witness and testify of these things as they really are and as they really will be, in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 211, 214.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character,” Brigham Young University 2002–2003 Speeches (2003), 2.
4. Meghan Daum, “Virtual Love,” *The New Yorker*, Aug. 25 and Sept. 1, 1997, 82; or Meghan Daum, *My Misspent Youth* (2001), 19.
5. Alexandra Alter, “Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 10, 2007, pp. W8, W1.
6. Alexandra Alter, *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 10, 2007, p. W8.
7. George Q. Cannon, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, May 31, 1866, 203; see also *Journal of Discourses*, 11:230.

11. Sanctity of Life

([Exodus 20:5–6](#)). The meaning of jealous is revealing. Its Hebrew origin means “possessing sensitive and deep feelings” ([Exodus 20:5](#), footnote b). Thus we offend God when we “serve” other gods—when we have other first priorities.[1](#)

I.

3. What other priorities are being “served” ahead of God by persons—even religious persons—in our day? Consider these possibilities, all common in our world:

4. Cultural and [family](#) traditions

5. Political correctness

6. Career aspirations

7. Material possessions

8. Recreational pursuits

9. Power, prominence, and prestige

10. If none of these examples seems to apply to any one of us, we can probably suggest others that do. The principle is more important than individual examples. The principle is not whether we have other priorities. The question posed by the second commandment is “What is our ultimate priority?” Are we serving priorities or gods ahead of the God we profess to worship? Have we forgotten to follow the Savior who taught that if we love Him, we will keep His

commandments? (see [John 14:15](#)). If so, our priorities have been turned upside down by the spiritual apathy and undisciplined appetites so common in our day.

II.

11. For Latter-day Saints, God's commandments are based on and inseparable from God's plan for His children—the great plan of salvation. This plan, sometimes called the “great plan of happiness” ([Alma 42:8](#)), explains our origin and destiny as children of God—where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. The plan of salvation explains the purpose of creation and the conditions of mortality, including God's commandments, the need for a Savior, and the vital role of mortal and eternal families. If we Latter-day Saints, who have been given this knowledge, do not establish our priorities in accord with this plan, we are in danger of serving other gods.

12. Knowledge of God's plan for His children gives Latter-day Saints a unique perspective on marriage and family. We are correctly known as a family-centered church. Our theology begins with heavenly parents, and our highest aspiration is to attain the fulness of eternal exaltation. We know this is possible only in a family relationship. We know that the marriage of a man and a woman is necessary for the accomplishment of God's plan. Only this marriage will provide the approved setting for mortal birth and to prepare family members for eternal life. We look on marriage and the bearing and nurturing of children as part of God's plan and a sacred duty of those given the opportunity to do so. We believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity.

III.

13. Because of what we understand about the potentially eternal role of the family, we grieve at the sharply declining numbers of births and marriages in many Western countries whose historic cultures are Christian and Jewish. Responsible sources report the following:

14. The United States now has the lowest birthrate in its history,² and in many European Union nations and other developed countries, birthrates are below the level necessary to maintain their populations.³ This threatens the survival of cultures and even of nations.

15. In America, the percentage of young adults ages 18 to 29 who are married fell from 59 percent in 1960 to 20 percent by 2010.⁴ The median age for first

marriage is now at its highest level in history: 26 for women and almost 29 for men.⁵

16. In many countries and cultures (1) the traditional family of a married mother and father and children is coming to be the exception rather than the rule, (2) the pursuit of a career instead of marriage and the bearing of children is an increasing choice of many young women, and (3) the role and perceived necessity of fathers is diminishing.

17. In the midst of these concerning trends, we are also conscious that God's plan is for all of His children and that God loves all of His children, everywhere.⁶ The first chapter of the [Book of Mormon](#) declares that God's “power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth” ([1 Nephi 1:14](#)). A later chapter declares that “he hath given [his salvation] free for all men” and that “all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” ([2 Nephi 26:27–28](#)).

Consequently, the scriptures teach that we are responsible to be compassionate and charitable (loving) toward all men (see [1 Thessalonians 3:12](#); [1 John 3:17](#); [D&C 121:45](#)).

IV.

18. We are also respectful of the religious beliefs of all people, even of those increasing numbers who profess no belief in God. We know that through the God-given power of choice, many will hold beliefs contrary to ours, but we are hopeful that others will be equally respectful of our religious beliefs and understand that our beliefs compel us to some different choices and behaviors than theirs. For example, we believe that, as an essential part of His plan of salvation, God has established an eternal standard that sexual relations should occur only between a man and a woman who are married.

19. The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given to His children. Its use was mandated by God's first commandment to Adam and Eve (see [Genesis 1:28](#)), but other important commandments were given to forbid its misuse (see [Exodus 20:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#)). 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. Outside the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman, all uses of our procreative powers are to one degree or another sinful and contrary to God's plan for the exaltation of His children.

20. The importance we attach to the law of chastity explains our commitment to the pattern of marriage that originated with Adam and Eve and has continued through the ages as God's pattern for the procreative relationship between His sons and daughters and for the nurturing of His children. Fortunately, many persons affiliated with other denominations or organizations agree with us on the nature and importance of marriage, some on the basis of religious doctrine and others on the basis of what they deem best for society.

21. Our knowledge of God's plan for His children⁷ explains why we are distressed that more and more children are born outside of marriage—currently 41 percent of all births in the United States⁸—and that the number of couples living together without marriage has increased dramatically in the past half century. Five decades ago, only a tiny percentage of first marriages were preceded by cohabitation. Now cohabitation precedes 60 percent of marriages.⁹ And this is increasingly accepted, especially among teenagers. Recent survey data found about 50 percent of teenagers stating that out-of-wedlock childbearing was a “worthwhile lifestyle.”¹⁰

V.

22. There are many political and social pressures for legal and policy changes to establish behaviors contrary to God's decrees about sexual morality and contrary to the eternal nature and purposes of marriage and childbearing. These pressures have already authorized same-gender marriages in various states and nations. Other pressures would confuse gender or homogenize those differences between men and women that are essential to accomplish God's great plan of happiness.

23. Our understanding of God's plan and His doctrine gives us an eternal perspective that does not allow us to condone such behaviors or to find justification in the laws that permit them. And, unlike other organizations that can change their policies and even their doctrines, our policies are determined by the truths God has identified as unchangeable.

24. Our [twelfth article of faith](#) states our belief in being subject to civil authority and “in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.” But man's laws cannot make moral what God has declared immoral. Commitment to our highest priority—to love and serve God—requires that we look to His law for our standard of behavior. For example, we remain under divine command not to commit adultery or fornication even when those acts are no longer crimes under the

laws of the states or countries where we reside. Similarly, laws legalizing so-called “same-sex marriage” do not change God's law of marriage or His commandments and our standards concerning it. We remain under covenant to love God and keep His commandments and to refrain from serving other gods and priorities—even those becoming popular in our particular time and place.

25. In this determination we may be misunderstood, and we may incur accusations of bigotry, suffer discrimination, or have to withstand invasions of our free exercise of religion. If so, I think we should remember our first priority—to serve God—and, like our pioneer predecessors, push our personal handcarts forward with the same fortitude they exhibited.

26. A teaching of President Thomas S. Monson applies to this circumstance. At this conference 27 years ago, he boldly declared: “Let us have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God's approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but as the determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well.”¹¹

27. I pray that we will not let the temporary challenges of mortality cause us to forget the great commandments and priorities we have been given by our Creator and our Savior. We must not set our hearts so much on the things of the world and aspire to the honors of men (see [D&C 121:35](#)) that we stop trying to achieve our eternal destiny. We who know God's plan for His children—we who have made covenants to participate in it—have a clear responsibility. We must never deviate from our paramount desire, which is to achieve eternal life.¹² We must never dilute our first priority—to have no other gods and to serve no other priorities ahead of [God the Father](#) and His Son, our Savior, [Jesus Christ](#).

28. May God help us to understand this priority and to be understood by others as we seek to pursue it in a wise and loving way, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See, for example, [Doctrine and Covenants 124:84](#).

2. See Joyce A. Martin and others, “Births: Final Data for 2011,” National Vital Statistics Reports, vol. 62, no. 1 (June 28, 2013), 4; Gloria Goodale, “Behind a Looming Baby Bust,” Christian Science Monitor Weekly, Feb. 4, 2013, 21, 23.

3. See Population Reference Bureau, "2012 World Population Data Sheet," www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2012/world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx.
4. See D'Vera Cohn and others, "Barely Half of U.S. Adults Are Married—a Record Low," Pew Research Center, Social and Demographic Trends, Dec. 14, 2011, available at www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/14/barely-half-of-u-s-adults-are-married-a-record-low/; "Rash Retreat from Marriage," Christian Science Monitor, Jan. 2 and 9, 2012, 34.
5. U.S. Census Bureau, "Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to the Present," available at www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ms2.xls.
6. See Dallin H. Oaks, "All Men Everywhere," Ensign or Liahona, May 2006, 77–80.
7. See Dallin H. Oaks, "The Great Plan of Happiness," Ensign, Nov. 1993, 72–75.
8. See Martin, "Births: Final Data for 2011," 4.
9. See The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America, 2012 (2012), 76.
10. See The State of Our Unions, 101, 102.
11. Thomas S. Monson, "Courage Counts," Ensign, Nov. 1986, 41.
12. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Desire," Ensign or Liahona, May 2011, 42–45.

“Set In Order Thy House”

Elder Russell M. Nelson
Ensign, November 2001



1. Years ago when Sister Nelson and I had several teenaged daughters, we took our [family](#) on a vacation far away from telephones and boyfriends. We went on a raft trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. As we started our journey, we had no idea how dangerous this trip could be.

2. The first day was beautiful. But on the second day, when we approached Horn Creek rapids and saw that precipitous drop ahead, I was terrified. Floating on a rubber raft, our precious family was about to plunge over a waterfall! Instinctively I put one arm around my wife and the other around our youngest daughter. To protect them, I tried to hold them close to me. But as we reached the precipice, the bended raft became a giant sling and shot me into the air. I landed into the roiling rapids of the river. I had a hard time coming up. Each time I tried to find air, I hit the underside of the raft. My family couldn't see me, but I could hear them shouting, "Daddy! Where's Daddy?"

3. I finally found the side of the raft and rose to the surface. The family pulled my nearly drowned body out of the water. We were thankful to be safely reunited.

4. The next several days were pleasant and delightful. Then came the last day, when we were to go over

Lava Falls, known as the most dangerous drop of the journey. When I saw what was ahead, I immediately asked to beach the raft and hold an emergency family council meeting, knowing that if we were to survive this experience, we needed to plan carefully. I reasoned with our family: "No matter what happens, the rubber raft will remain on top of the water. If we cling with all our might to ropes secured to the raft, we can make it. Even if the raft should capsize, we will be all right if we hang tightly to the ropes."

5. I turned to our little seven-year-old daughter and said, "All of the others will cling to a rope. But you will need to hold on to your daddy. Sit behind me. Put your arms around me and hold me tightly while I hold the rope."

6. That we did. We crossed those steep, rough rapids—hanging on for dear life—and all of us made it safely. [1](#)

The Lesson

7. Brothers and sisters, I nearly lost my life learning a lesson that I now give to you. As we go through life, even through very rough waters, a father's instinctive impulse to cling tightly to his wife or to his children may not be the best way to accomplish his objective. Instead, if he will lovingly cling to the Savior and the iron rod of the gospel, his family will want to cling to him and to the Savior.

8. This lesson is surely not limited to fathers. Regardless of gender, marital status, or age, individuals can choose to link themselves directly to the Savior, hold fast to the rod of His truth, and lead by the light of that truth. By so doing, they become examples of righteousness to whom others will want to cling.

The Commandment

9. With the Lord, families are essential. He created the earth that we could gain physical bodies and form families. [2](#) He established His Church to exalt families. He provides temples so that families can be together forever. [3](#)

10. Of course, He expects fathers to preside over, provide for, and protect their families. [4](#) But the Master has asked for much more. Etched in sacred scripture is a commandment to "set in order thy house." [5](#) Once we as parents understand the importance and meaning of that commandment, we need to learn how to do it.

How to Set Your House in Order

11. To set our house in an order pleasing to the Lord, we need to do it His way. We are to employ His attributes of “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness.” [6](#) Each father should remember that “no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.” [7](#)

12. Parents are to be living examples of “kindness, and pure knowledge, which ... greatly enlarge the soul.” [8](#) Each mother and father should lay aside selfish interests and avoid any thought of hypocrisy, physical force, or evil speaking. [9](#) Parents soon learn that each child has an inborn yearning to be free. Each individual wants to make his or her own way. No one wants to be restrained, even by a well-intentioned parent. But all of us can cling to the Lord.

13. Ages ago, Job taught that concept. He said, “My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go.” [10](#) Nephi also taught, “Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and ... hold fast unto it, ... would never perish.” [11](#)

14. These tenets are timeless as the gospel and endless as eternity. Ponder these additional scriptural admonitions:

15. From the Old Testament Proverbs we read, “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.” [12](#)

16. From the New Testament: “Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught.” [13](#)

17. From the [Book of Mormon](#) we learn about multitudes who were “continually holding fast to the rod of iron,” [14](#) likening it to “the word of God.” [15](#) Anchored in truth, that iron rod is immovable and immutable.

Other Divine Mandates

18. Not only are parents to cling to the word of the Lord, but they have a divine mandate to teach it to their children. Scriptural direction is very clear: “Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion ... 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.” [16](#)

19. That commandment places responsibility and accountability for the teaching of children squarely upon the shoulders of the parents. The proclamation to the world regarding the family warns that

individuals “who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God.” [17](#) Today I solemnly reaffirm that reality.

20. In discharging these duties, we need both the Church and the family. They work hand in hand to strengthen each other. The Church exists to exalt the family. And the family is the fundamental unit of the Church.

21. These interrelationships are evident as we study the early history of the Church. In 1833 the Lord rebuked young leaders of His Church because of parental shortcomings. The Lord said:

22. “I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.

23. “But verily I say unto you, ...

24. “You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments. ...

25. “And now a commandment I give unto you ... you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house. ... First set in order thy house.” [18](#)

26. This revelation represents one of the many powerful validations of the integrity of the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#). He did not delete from scripture words of stinging rebuke, even though some were directed to himself. [19](#)

27. In our day, the First Presidency has again stressed parental priority. From their recent letter to the Saints, I quote: “We call upon 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.” [20](#)

What Should Parents Teach?

28. With this sacred charge in mind, let us consider what we should teach. Scriptures direct parents to teach faith in [Jesus Christ](#), repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. [21](#) Parents are to teach the plan of salvation [22](#) and the importance of living in complete accord with the commandments of God. [23](#) Otherwise, their children will surely suffer in ignorance of God’s redeeming and liberating law. [24](#) Parents should also teach by example how to consecrate their lives—using their time, talents, [tithing](#), and substance [25](#) to establish the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth. [26](#) Living in that manner will literally bless their posterity. A scripture

states, “Thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family.” [27](#)

Opposition to the Family

29. Parents and children should realize that strong opposition will always come against the work and will of the Lord. [28](#) Because the work (and glory) of God is to bring to pass our [immortality](#) and eternal life as a family, [29](#) it logically follows that the work of the adversary will strike directly at the heart of the home—the family. Relentlessly Lucifer attacks the sanctity of life and the joy of parenthood.

30. Because the evil one is ever at work, our vigilance cannot be relaxed—not even for a moment. A small and seemingly innocent invitation can turn into a tall temptation which can lead to tragic transgression. Night and day, at home or away, we must shun sin and “hold fast that which is good.” [30](#)

31. The seditious evils of [pornography](#), [abortion](#), and addiction to harmful substances serve as termites to erode the undergirding strength of a happy home and a faithful family. We cannot yield to any iniquity without putting our families at risk.

32. Satan wants us to be miserable just as he is. [31](#) He would animate our carnal appetites, entice us to live in spiritual darkness and doubt the reality of life after death. The Apostle Paul observed, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” [32](#)

33. Perpetuation of Family Blessings

34. An understanding of God’s great plan of happiness, however, fortifies our faith in the future. His plan provides answers to ageless questions: Are all our sympathies and love for each other only temporary—to be lost in death? No! Can family life endure beyond this period of mortal probation? Yes! God has revealed the eternal nature of celestial marriage and the family as the source of our greatest joy.

35. Brethren and sisters, material possessions and honors of the world do not endure. But your union as wife, husband, and family can. The only duration of family life that satisfies the loftiest longings of the human soul is forever. No sacrifice is too great to have the blessings of an eternal marriage. To qualify, one needs only to deny oneself of ungodliness and honor the ordinances of the temple. By making and keeping sacred temple covenants, we evidence our love for God, for our companion, and our real regard

for our posterity—even those yet unborn. Our family is the focus of our greatest work and joy in this life; so will it be throughout all eternity, when we can “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, ... powers, dominions, ... exaltation and glory.” [33](#)

36. These priceless blessings can be ours if we set our houses in order now and faithfully cling to the gospel. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley is His prophet. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Russell M. Nelson and Rebecca M. Taylor, “Friend to Friend,” *Friend*, Mar. 1997, 6–7.
2. See [D&C 2:1–3](#).
3. See [D&C 138:47–48](#).
4. See [1 Tim. 5:8](#).
5. [D&C 93:44](#); see also [2 Kgs. 20:1](#); [Isa. 38:1](#).
6. [1 Tim. 6:11](#).
7. [D&C 121:41](#).
8. [D&C 121:42](#).
9. See [1 Pet. 2:1](#).
10. [Job 27:6](#).
11. [1 Ne. 15:24](#).
12. [Prov. 4:13](#).
13. [2 Thes. 2:15](#). Other related scriptures include “Hold fast the ... sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” ([2 Tim. 1:13](#)), and “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” ([Heb. 10:23](#)).
14. [1 Ne. 8:30](#).
15. [1 Ne. 11:25](#).
16. [D&C 68:25](#); emphasis added.
17. “The Family: a Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 1998, 24.
18. [D&C 93:40–44](#).
19. See [D&C 93:47](#).
20. In that letter dated 11 February 1999, signed by Presidents Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust, they also described what parents might do: “We counsel 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” (in “Letter from the First Presidency,” *Liahona*, Dec. 1999, 1).
21. See [Moro. 8:10](#); [D&C 19:31](#); [D&C 68:25–34](#); [D&C 138:33](#); [A of F 1:4](#).
22. See [Moses 6:58–62](#).
23. See [Lev. 10:11](#); [Deut. 6:7](#); [Mosiah 4:14](#).
24. See [2 Ne. 2:26](#); [Mosiah 1:3](#); [Mosiah 5:8](#); [D&C 98:8](#).
25. See [Mosiah 4:21–26](#); [Mosiah 18:27](#); [Alma 1:27](#).
26. See JST, Matt. 6:38.
27. [D&C 23:3](#).
28. See [Moro. 7:12–19](#).
29. See [Moses 1:39](#).
30. [1 Thes. 5:21](#).
31. See [2 Ne. 2:17–18, 27](#).
32. [1 Cor. 15:19](#).
33. [D&C 132:19](#).

12. Principles of Happiness in Family Life

Family Communications

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

Ensign, May 1976



1. Some weeks ago a bewildered father asked, “Why is it I seem to be able to communicate with everyone except my own son?”

2. I responded with, “What do you mean you can’t communicate with your son?”

3. “It’s just that whenever I try to tell him anything, he tunes me out,” he replied.

4. During our private discussion which followed, and very often since, I have concluded that perhaps one of the principal reasons we fail to relate appropriately with [family](#) members is because we fail to apply some basics of personal communications. In Hebrews 13:16 [[Heb. 13:16](#)] we read, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Communication in the family will often be a sacrifice because we are expected to use our time, our means, our talent, and our patience to impart, share, and understand. Too often we use communication periods as occasions to tell, dictate, plead, or threaten. Nowhere in the broadest sense should communication in the family be used to impose, command, or embarrass.

5. To be effective, family communication must be an exchange of feelings and information. Doors of communication will swing open in the home if members will realize time and participation on the part of all are necessary ingredients. In family discussions, differences should not be ignored, but should be weighed and evaluated calmly. One’s point or opinion usually is not as important as a healthy, continuing relationship. Courtesy and respect in listening and responding during discussions are basic in proper dialogue. As we learn to participate together in meaningful associations, we are able to convey our thoughts of love, dependence, and interest.

6. When we are inclined to give up in despair in our efforts to communicate because other family members have failed to respond, perhaps we would do well not to give up, but rather to give and take in our conversations. How important it is to know how to disagree with another’s point of view without being

disagreeable. How important it is to have discussion periods ahead of decisions. Jones Stephens wrote, “I have learned that the head does not hear anything until the heart has listened, and that what the heart knows today the head will understand tomorrow.”

7. Let me share with you seven basic suggestions for more effective family communication.

1. A willingness to sacrifice. Be the kind of a family member who is willing to take time to be available. Develop the ability and self-discipline to think of other family members and their communication needs ahead of your own—a willingness to prepare for the moment—the sharing moment, the teaching moment. Shed the very appearance of preoccupation in self, and learn the skill of penetrating a family member’s shield of preoccupation. Sad is the day when a daughter is heard to say, “My mother gives me everything except herself.”

8. Too early and too often we sow the seeds of “Can’t you see I’m busy? Don’t bother me now.” When we convey the attitude of “Go away, don’t bother me now,” family members are apt to go elsewhere or isolate themselves in silence. All family members on some occasion or other must be taken on their own terms so they will be willing to come, share, and ask.

9. It takes personal sacrifice to communicate when conditions are right for the other person—during the meal preparation, after a date, a hurt, a victory, a disappointment, or when someone wants to share a confidence. One must be willing to forego personal convenience to invest time in establishing a firm foundation for family communication. When communication in the family seems to be bogging down, each individual should look to himself for the remedy.

10. 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. “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” ([James 3:13](#).)

2. A willingness to set the stage. The location, setting, or circumstances should be comfortable, private, and conversation-conducive. Effective

communications have been shared in a grove of trees, on the mount, by the sea, in family home evening, during a walk, in a car, during a vacation, a hospital visit, on the way to school, during the game. When the stage is set, we must be willing to let the other family member be front and center as we appropriately respond.

11. Months and years after the score of a baseball game is long forgotten, the memory of having been there all alone with Dad will never dim. I'll not soon forget a ten-year-old girl excitedly telling me she had just ridden in the car with her daddy all the way from Salt Lake to Provo and back. "Was the radio on?" I asked. "Oh, no," she responded, "all Daddy did was listen and talk to me." She had her daddy all to herself in a setting she'll not soon forget. Let the stage be set whenever the need is there. Let the stage be set whenever the other person is ready.

3. A willingness to listen. Listening is more than being quiet. Listening is much more than silence. Listening requires undivided attention. The time to listen is when someone needs to be heard. The time to deal with a person with a problem is when he has the problem. The time to listen is the time when our interest and love are vital to the one who seeks our ear, our heart, our help, and our empathy.

12. We should all increase our ability to ask comfortable questions, and then listen—intently, naturally. Listening is a tied-in part of loving. How powerful are the words, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

13. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." ([James 1:19–20](#).)

4. A willingness to vocalize feelings. How important it is to be willing to voice one's thoughts and feelings. Yes, how important it is to be able to converse on the level of each family member. Too often we are inclined to let family members assume how we feel toward them. Often wrong conclusions are reached. Very often we could have performed better had we known how family members felt about us and what they expected.

14. John Powell shares this touching experience: "It was the day my father died. ... In the small hospital room, I was supporting him in my arms, when ... my father slumped back, and I lowered his head gently onto the pillow. I ... told my mother ... :

15. "It's all over, Mom. Dad is dead."

16. "She startled me. I will never know why these were her first words to me after his death. My mother said: 'Oh, he was so proud of you. He loved you so much.'

17. "Somehow I knew ... that these words were saying something very important to me. They were like a sudden shaft of light, like a startling thought I had never before absorbed. Yet there was a definite edge of pain, as though I were going to know my father better in death than I had ever known him in life.

18. "Later, while a doctor was verifying death, I was leaning against the wall in the far corner of the room, crying softly. A nurse came over to me and put a comforting arm around me. I couldn't talk through my tears. I wanted to tell her:

19. "'I'm not crying because my father is dead. I'm crying because my father never told me that he was proud of me. He never told me that he loved me. Of course, I was expected to know these things. I was expected to know the great part I played in his life and the great part I occupied of his heart, but he never told me.'" (The Secret of Staying in Love, Niles, Ill.: Argus, 1974, p. 68.)

20. How significant are God's words when he took the time to vocalize his feelings with, "This is my beloved Son," yes, even the powerful communication, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ([Matt. 3:17](#).)

21. Often parents communicate most effectively with their children by the way they listen to and address each other. Their conversations showing gentleness and love are heard by our ever-alert, impressionable children. We must learn to communicate effectively not only by voice, but by tone, feeling, glances, mannerisms, and total personality. Too often when we are not able to converse with a daughter or wife we wonder, "What is wrong with her?" when we should be wondering, "What is wrong with our methods?" A meaningful smile, an appropriate pat on the shoulder, and a warm handshake are all-important. Silence isolates. Strained silent periods cause wonderment, hurt, and, most often, wrong conclusions.

22. God knows the full impact of continuing communication as he admonishes us to pray constantly. He, too, has promised to respond as we relate to him effectively.

5. A willingness to avoid judgment. Try to be understanding and not critical. Don't display

shock, alarm, or disgust with other's comments or observations. Don't react violently. Work within the framework of a person's free agency. Convey the bright and optimistic approach. There is hope. There is a way back. There is a possibility for better understanding.

23. Let a common ground for personal decision be developed. "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" ([John 8:11](#)) are words that are just as gentle and effective today as when they were first uttered.

24. Avoid imposing your values on others. When we can learn to deal with issues without involving personalities and at the same time avoid bias and emotions, we are on our way to effective family communications. When a family member makes a decision which may be inadequate or improper, do we have the ability and patience to convey the attitude that we don't agree with his decision but he has the right of choice and is still a loved member of the family?

25. It is easy to point out mistakes and pass judgment. Sincere compliments and praise come much harder from most of us. It takes real maturity for a parent to apologize to a child for an error. An honest apology often makes the son or daughter feel surprisingly warm toward the mother or father or brother or sister. "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." ([James 3:2](#).)

6. A willingness to maintain confidences. Be worthy of trust even in trivial questions and observations. Weighty questions and observations will only follow if we have been trustworthy with the trivial. Treat innermost trusts and concerns with respect. Build on deserved trust. Individuals who are blessed to have a relationship with someone to whom they can confidently talk and trust are fortunate indeed. Who is to say a family trust is not greater than a community trust?

7. A willingness to practice patience. Patience in communication is that certain ingredient of conduct we hope others will exhibit toward us when we fail to measure up. Our own patience is developed when we are patient with others.

26. "Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope and charity." ([D&C 6:19](#).)

27. "I get sick and tired of listening to your complaints" and "I have told you a thousand times" are but two of many often-repeated family quotations

that indicate patience is gone and channels of communication are plugged.

28. It takes courage to communicate patiently. We constantly need to express pride, hope, and love on a most sincere basis. Each of us needs to avoid coming through as one who has given up and has become totally weary in trying.

29. The correction of family members in front of others is to be avoided. Much more notice is taken in quiet, private conversation. Calm endurance is a priceless virtue in one's relationship with all family members.

30. When family members tune each other out, communication is not taking place. Words spoken are unheard, unwanted, and resisted when we fail to understand the basics for proper interchange. Each must be willing to do his part to improve, since the family unit is the basic foundation of the Church. Proper communication will always be a main ingredient for building family solidarity and permanence.

31. I pray our Heavenly Father will help us to communicate more effectively in the home through a willingness to sacrifice, a willingness to listen, a willingness to vocalize feelings, a willingness to avoid judgment, a willingness to maintain confidences, and a willingness to practice patience. "How forcible are right words!" ([Job 6:25](#).) Yes, how forcible are right words shared at the right moment with the right person.

32. May our gracious and kind Heavenly Father help us in our needs and desires for more effective family communication. Communication can help build family unity if we will work at it and sacrifice for it.

Marriage: Watch And Learn

Elder L. Whitney Clayton

Ensign, May 2013



1. One evening several years ago, my wife and I were visiting the home of one of our sons and his wife and children for dinner. It was a typical event for a [family](#) with small children: there was much noise and even more fun. Shortly after dinner our four-year-old granddaughter, Anna, and I were still sitting at the table. Realizing that she had my full attention, she stood up straight on a bench and fixed her eyes on me. When she was sure that I was looking at her, she

solemnly ordered me to “watch and learn.” She then danced and sang a song for me.

2. Anna’s instruction to “watch and learn” was wisdom from the mouth of a babe. We can learn so much by watching and then considering what we have seen and felt. In that spirit, let me share with you a few principles I have observed by watching and learning from wonderful, faithful marriages. These principles build strong, satisfying marriages that are compatible with heavenly principles. I invite you to watch and learn with me.

3. First, I have observed that in the happiest marriages both the husband and wife consider their relationship to be a pearl beyond price, a treasure of infinite worth. They both leave their fathers and mothers and set out together to build a marriage that will prosper for eternity. They understand that they walk a divinely ordained path. They know that no other relationship of any kind can bring as much joy, generate as much good, or produce as much personal refinement. Watch and learn: the best marriage partners regard their marriages as priceless.

4. Next, faith. Successful eternal marriages are built on the foundation of faith in the Lord [Jesus Christ](#) and adherence to His teachings. [1](#) I have observed that couples who have made their marriages priceless practice the patterns of faith: they attend [sacrament](#) and other meetings every week, hold family home evening, pray and study the scriptures together and as individuals, and pay an honest [tithing](#). Their mutual quest is to be obedient and good. They do not consider the commandments to be a buffet from which they can pick and choose only the most appealing offerings.

5. Faith is the foundation of every virtue that strengthens marriage. Strengthening faith strengthens marriage. Faith grows as we keep the commandments, and so do the harmony and joy in marriage. Thus, keeping the commandments is fundamental to establishing strong eternal marriages. Watch and learn: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of happy eternal marriages.

6. Third, repentance. I have learned that happy marriages rely on the gift of repentance. It is an essential element in every good marital relationship. Spouses who regularly conduct honest self-examination and promptly take needed steps to repent and improve experience a healing balm in their marriages. Repentance helps restore and maintain harmony and peace.

7. Humility is the essence of repentance. Humility is selfless, not selfish. It doesn’t demand its own way or speak with moral superiority. Instead, humility answers softly [2](#) and listens kindly for understanding, not vindication. Humility recognizes that no one can change someone else, but with faith, effort, and the help of God, we can undergo our own mighty change of heart. [3](#) Experiencing the mighty change of heart causes us to treat others, especially our spouses, with meekness. [4](#) Humility means that both husbands and wives seek to bless, help, and lift each other, putting the other first in every decision. Watch and learn: repentance and humility build happy marriages.

8. Fourth, respect. I have observed that in wonderful, happy marriages, husbands and wives treat each other as equal partners. Practices from any place or any time in which husbands have dominated wives or treated them in any way as second-class partners in marriage are not in keeping with divine law and should be replaced by correct principles and patterns of behavior.

9. Husbands and wives in great marriages make decisions unanimously, with each of them acting as a full participant and entitled to an equal voice and vote. [5](#) They focus first on the home and on helping each other with their shared responsibilities. [6](#) Their marriages are based on cooperation, not negotiation. Their dinner hour and the family time that follows become the center of their day and the object of their best efforts. They turn off electronics and forgo personal entertainment in order to help with household duties. To the extent possible, they read with their children every night and both participate in putting the little ones to bed. They retire to their bed together. As their duties and circumstances permit, husbands and wives work side by side in doing the most important work there is—the work we do in our own homes.

10. Where there is respect, there is also transparency, which is a key element of happy marriages. There are no secrets about relevant matters in marriages based on mutual respect and transparency. Husbands and wives make all decisions about finances together, and both have access to all information.

11. Loyalty is a form of respect. Prophets teach that successful marriage partners are “fiercely loyal” to each other. [7](#) They keep their social media use fully worthy in every way. They permit themselves no secret Internet experiences. They freely share with each other their social network passwords. They do not look at the virtual profiles of anyone in any way

that might betray the sacred trust of their spouse. They never do or say anything that approaches the appearance of impropriety, either virtually or physically. Watch and learn: terrific marriages are completely respectful, transparent, and loyal.

12. Fifth, love. The happiest marriages I have seen radiate obedience to one of the happiest commandments—that we “live together in love.” [8](#) Speaking to husbands, the Lord commanded, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.” [9](#) A Church handbook teaches: “The word cleave means to be completely devoted and faithful to someone. Married couples cleave to God and one another by serving and loving each other and by keeping covenants in complete fidelity to one another and to God.” Both the husband and wife “leave behind their single life and establish their marriage as [their] first priority. ... They allow no other person or interest to have greater priority ... than keeping the covenants they have made with God and each other.” [10](#) Watch and learn: successful couples love each other with complete devotion.

13. There are those whose marriages are not as happy as they would wish, as well as those who have never married, are divorced, are single parents, or for various reasons are not in a position to marry. These circumstances can be full of challenge and heartbreak, but they need not be eternal. To those of you in such situations who nevertheless “cheerfully do all things that lie in [your] power” [11](#) to persevere, may heaven bless you richly. Seek after the ideal of forming an eternal marriage, including by striving or preparing to be a worthy spouse. Keep the commandments, and trust the Lord and His perfect love for you. One day every promised blessing concerning marriage will be yours. [12](#)

14. One of the sweetest verses in the [Book of Mormon](#) states simply, “And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.” [13](#) The promises of the Lord are extended to all those who follow the pattern of life that builds happy, holy marriage relationships. Such blessings come as the delightful, predictable consequences of faithfully living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

15. I am grateful for my wonderful wife, Kathy, who is the love of my life.

16. Marriage is a gift from God to us; the quality of our marriages is a gift from us to Him. I bear testimony of the marvelous plan of our loving Heavenly Father, which provides for eternal,

wondrous marriage. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. See [Proverbs 15:1](#).
3. See [Alma 5:11–12, 26–31](#).
4. See [Moroni 7:43–48; 8:25–26](#).
5. See [Doctrine and Covenants 107:27–31](#).
6. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 129.
7. See Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2011, 68; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Life’s Obligations,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1999, 4; *Liahona*, May 1999, 4.
8. [Doctrine and Covenants 42:45](#).
9. [Doctrine and Covenants 42:22](#).
10. Handbook 2: Administering the Church (2010), 1.3.1.
11. [Doctrine and Covenants 123:17](#).
12. See Handbook 2, 1.3.3.
13. [4 Nephi 1:11](#).

Speak, Listen, and Love

Mark Ogletree

Ensign, February 2014



1. Do you communicate effectively with your spouse? Understanding these three types of conversations can help you fortify your relationship.
 2. As a marriage and [family](#) counselor, I often visit with couples to help them repair or strengthen their relationships. In one instance, I met with a woman who had been married to her husband for only a few months, and she told me that they were having major communication problems. After talking to her husband, I noticed that he was actually a skilled communicator—just not with his wife.
 3. I have learned over the years that healthy communication affects both the heart and the mind. If we can communicate better—meaning more clearly and concisely—then we can forge deeper emotional connections, resolve conflicts, and strengthen the bonds in our marital relationship. Following are some ways that each of us can improve the quality of communication in our relationships.
- ### Engage in Meaningful Conversations
4. Dr. Douglas E. Brinley, a Church member who is a marriage and parenting specialist, wrote about three levels of communication in relationships: superficial, personal, and validating. In order for a deep bond to form between a husband and a wife, there needs to be a balance between all three.[1](#)

Superficial

5. Communication that falls in the superficial level is informative and nonconfrontational, and it involves a low level of risk. Every married couple spends some time at this level as they coordinate schedules, discuss the weather, or comment on gas prices. Although this type of communication is necessary, individuals cannot become deeply connected and bound together if the majority of communication remains here.

6. Superficial communication can supplant deep and meaningful conversations. If couples tiptoe around deeper issues that should be discussed, they will never learn to resolve conflict or connect with each other. Couples bond as they discuss things that matter—not things that don't. I have seen many couples in my practice who have tried to preserve their relationship by keeping their communication at the superficial level. By avoiding the "weightier matters" ([Matthew 23:23](#)), they have actually destroyed their marriage.

Personal

7. During personal communication, you share your interests, dreams, passions, beliefs, and goals. You also are open to sharing your fears and inadequacies. Communicating all these issues in a Christlike manner is one way couples connect and strengthen the relationship. Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–1994) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, "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."[2](#)

8. You probably engaged in this level of communication as you were dating. This is the level where men and women fall in love with each other. As you continue to share what is important, you and your spouse will feel mutually appreciated, wanted, valued, and needed. As you learn to validate what your spouse shares—showing that what he or she says is important to you—you will progress to the next level of communication.

Validating

9. Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to nurture and provide comfort to each other.[3](#) Marriage experts Sandra Blakeslee and Judith S. Wallerstein have written: "A marriage that does not provide nurturance and restorative comfort can die of emotional malnutrition."[4](#) Communication that validates is edifying, healing, nurturing, and complimentary. In this level of communication, we express praise and compliments to those we care about. Almost every relationship will thrive if there is a healthy dose of validation.

10. Validation begins with paying attention to what your spouse is saying and includes expressing ideas and thoughts that are edifying and healing. Look for the good in your spouse and tell him or her. If your spouse had a difficult day, you could validate him or her by listening and offering comfort. You could say, "I'm sorry you had a hard day; tell me more about what happened" or "What can I do to make the rest of your day better?" Perhaps you could say, "I can see why your day was so difficult, but I have confidence in your intelligence and work ethic. I know you will be able to solve that problem." Statements such as these demonstrate that you have sympathy for your spouse's distress and care about him or her. By verbally acknowledging your spouse's emotions, fears, thoughts, or concerns, you are communicating validation and conveying appreciation, love, and respect.[5](#)

Practice the Art of Listening

11. The greatest communication skill is being an effective listener. One of the most charitable demonstrations in marriage is to truly focus on your spouse and listen to him or her—really listen—regardless of what we want to say. Being heard is akin to being loved; in fact, being listened to is one of the highest forms of respect and validation. By listening, we are saying to our spouse, "You matter to me, I love you, and what you have to say is important."

12. In marriage the goal of listening should not be to acquire information but to gain understanding. To truly understand your spouse is to see an issue the way your spouse sees it. Elder [Russell M. Nelson](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that husbands and wives should "learn to listen, and listen to learn from one another."[6](#) Effective listening helps us to set aside our own will and pride and connect soul-to-soul with our spouse.

13. Elder Joe J. Christensen, formerly of the Seventy, counseled: "Make the time to listen to your spouse; even schedule it regularly. Visit with each other and assess how you are doing as a marriage partner."[7](#) Setting aside time to talk where there are no distractions will help to solve problems. Make sure to be positive, maintain a Christlike demeanor, and avoid interrupting your spouse when he or she is talking to you.

Nonverbal Cues

14. Another aspect of communication that is sometimes overlooked is nonverbal communication. What you say and how you say it is important, but so

is your body language. Do you look your spouse in the eye when she talks to you? Do you roll your eyes when he tells you that he had a hard time at work? Does your facial expression show interest and sincerity, or does it display boredom and irritation? Do you express your love with physical affection? Sometimes a hug or a smile can convey your love more than words can. Regardless of the type of conversation—whether it's about the latest news article or your life ambitions—positive body language can reinforce validation and strengthen your relationship.

Emulate the Savior's Communication

15. As you engage in meaningful conversations with your spouse, guide your actions and words by following the example of [Jesus Christ](#). His communication with others radiated love, care, and concern. He spoke gently and loved purely. He showed compassion and granted [forgiveness](#). He listened attentively and demonstrated charity. Likewise, if we want our relationships to improve, we must learn to speak in positive ways that edify and build those around us.

16. When I meet with couples, I often ask them to analyze their communication patterns and improve upon them. As they have applied the principles of meaningful conversations in their relationships, I have seen changes toward a healthier marriage. Understanding your spouse, creating an environment that fosters open communication and expression, and demonstrating fondness and admiration are keys to a stronger relationship and a happier marriage.

Improving Your Relationship with Heavenly Father

17. As you incorporate these communication principles in your marriage, you may also want to apply them to your relationship with Heavenly Father. Many people communicate with God at a superficial level. If you pray out of duty or use habitual phrases, you may find it difficult to connect with Heavenly Father and He will feel distant. Communicating with God is different from just talking to Him. President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) taught: “We do not have to cry unto him with many words. We do not have to weary him with long prayers. . . . Let the prayer come from the heart, let it not be in words that are worn into ruts in the beaten tracks of common use, without thought or feeling in the use of those words.”⁸ Do you share with your Heavenly Father your innermost beliefs, feelings, and desires? Have you shared with Him the secret ambitions that lie in

your heart? Can you pour out your heart to Him? And do you practice listening for His responses?

18. Sincere words spoken in humble prayer will allow you to develop a deeper connection with Heavenly Father. Listening for and implementing His counsel will enrich and strengthen the relationship. As you express [gratitude](#) for specific blessings, live the gospel, and become more like [Jesus Christ](#), you will demonstrate your love for Heavenly Father.

Notes

1. See Douglas E. Brinley and Mark D. Ogletree, *First Comes Love* (2002), 123–26.
2. Marvin J. Ashton, “Family Communications,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 52.
3. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
4. Sandra Blakeslee and Judith S. Wallerstein, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (1995), 240.
5. See Douglas E. Brinley, *Strengthening Your Marriage and Family* (1994), 153–54.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Listen to Learn,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 23.
7. Joe J. Christensen, “Marriage and the Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 64.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 23–24.

What Are You Thinking?

Elder W. Craig Zwick
Ensign, May 2014



1. Forty-one years ago I climbed into the driver's seat of an 18-wheel semitruck with my beautiful wife, Jan, and our infant son, Scotty. We were taking a heavy load of construction materials across several states.
2. In those days there were no seat-belt restrictions or infant car seats. My wife held our precious son in her arms. Her comment “We sure are high off the ground” should have given me a clue about her feelings of apprehension.
3. As we made our descent over historic Donner Pass, a steep section of highway, the cab of the semi suddenly and unexpectedly filled with thick smoke. It was difficult to see, and we could hardly breathe.
4. With a heavy rig, brakes alone are not enough to rapidly decrease speed. Using the engine brakes and gearing down, I frantically attempted to stop.
5. Just as I was pulling to the side of the road, but before we had come to a full stop, my wife opened the door of the cab and jumped out with our baby in her arms. I watched helplessly as they tumbled in the dirt.

6. As soon as I had the semi stopped, I bolted from the smoking cab. With adrenaline pumping, I ran through the rocks and weeds and held them in my arms. Jan's forearms and elbows were battered and bleeding, but thankfully she and our son were both breathing. I just held them close as the dust settled there on the side of the highway.

7. As my heartbeat normalized and I caught my breath, I blurted out, "What in the world were you thinking? Do you know how dangerous that was? You could have been killed!"

8. She looked back at me, with tears running down her smoke-smudged cheeks, and said something that pierced my heart and still rings in my ears: "I was just trying to save our son."

9. I realized in that moment she thought the engine was on fire, fearing the truck would explode and we would die. I, however, knew it was an electrical failure—hazardous but not fatal. I looked at my precious wife, softly rubbing the head of our infant son, and wondered what kind of woman would do something so courageous.

10. This situation could have been as emotionally hazardous as our literal engine failure. Gratefully, after enduring the silent treatment for a reasonable amount of time, each of us believing the other person was at fault, we finally expressed the emotions that were churning beneath our heated outbursts. Shared feelings of love and fear for the other's safety kept the hazardous incident from proving fatal to our cherished marriage.

11. Paul warned, "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" ([Ephesians 4:29](#)). His words resonate with a certain purity.

12. What does the phrase "no corrupt communication" mean to you? We all regularly experience highly charged feelings of anger—our own and others'. We have seen unchecked anger erupt in public places. We have experienced it as a sort of emotional "electrical short" at sporting events, in the political arena, and even in our own homes.

13. Children sometimes speak to beloved parents with tongues as sharp as blades. Spouses, who have shared some of life's richest and most tender experiences, lose vision and patience with each other and raise their voices. All of us, though covenant children of a loving Heavenly Father, have regretted jumping headlong from the high seat of self-righteous

judgment and have spoken with abrasive words before we understood a situation from another's perspective. We have all had the opportunity to learn how destructive words can take a situation from hazardous to fatal.

14. A recent letter from the First Presidency states clearly, "The gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) teaches us to love and treat all people with kindness and civility—even when we disagree" (First Presidency letter, Jan. 10, 2014). What a masterful reminder that we can and should participate in continuing civil dialogue, especially when we view the world from differing perspectives.

15. The writer of Proverbs counsels, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" ([Proverbs 15:1](#)). A "soft answer" consists of a reasoned response—disciplined words from a humble heart. It does not mean we never speak directly or that we compromise doctrinal truth. Words that may be firm in information can be soft in spirit.

16. The [Book of Mormon](#) contains a striking example of affirming language also given in the context of a marital disagreement. The sons of Sariah and Lehi had been sent back to Jerusalem to get the brass plates and had not returned. Sariah believed her sons were in harm's way, and she was filled with anger and needed someone to blame.

17. Listen to the story through the eyes of her son Nephi: "For [my mother] had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness" ([1 Nephi 5:2](#)).

18. Now, let's consider what Sariah may have been thinking. She was filled with anxiety about her quarrelsome sons returning to the place where her husband's life had been threatened. She had traded her lovely home and friends for a tent in an isolated wilderness while still in her childbearing years. Pushed to the breaking point of her fears, Sariah seems to have jumped heroically, if not rationally, from the height of a hurtling truck in an attempt to protect her [family](#). She expressed legitimate concerns to her husband in the language of anger and doubt and blame—a language in which the entire human race seems to be surprisingly proficient.

19. The prophet Lehi listened to the fear that underpinned his wife's anger. Then he made a disciplined response in the language of compassion.

First, he owned the truth of what things looked like from her perspective: “And ... my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man; ... but [if I] had tarried at Jerusalem, [we would have] perished with my brethren” ([1 Nephi 5:4](#)).

20. Then her husband addressed her fears concerning the welfare of their sons, as the [Holy Ghost](#) undoubtedly testified to him, saying:

21. “But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban. ...

22. “And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother ... concerning us” ([1 Nephi 5:5–6](#)).

23. There exists today a great need for men and women to cultivate respect for each other across wide distances of belief and behavior and across deep canyons of conflicting agendas. It is impossible to know all that informs our minds and hearts or even to fully understand the context for the trials and choices we each face.

24. Nevertheless, what would happen to the “corrupt communication” Paul spoke about if our own position included empathy for another’s experience first? Fully owning the limits of my own imperfections and rough edges, I plead with you to practice asking this

29.

question, with tender regard for another’s experience: “What are you thinking?”

25. Remember when the Lord surprised Samuel and Saul by choosing a little shepherd boy, David of Bethlehem, as king of Israel? The Lord told His prophet, “For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)).

26. When our truck cab filled with smoke, my wife acted in the bravest manner she could imagine to protect our son. I too acted as a protector when I questioned her choice. Shockingly, it did not matter who was more right. What mattered was listening to each other and understanding the other’s perspective.

27. The willingness to see through each other’s eyes will transform “corrupt communication” into “minister[ing] grace.” The Apostle Paul understood this, and on some level each of us can experience it too. It may not change or solve the problem, but the more important possibility may be whether ministering grace could change us.

28. I bear humble witness that we can “minister grace” through compassionate language when the cultivated gift of the Holy Ghost pierces our hearts with empathy for the feelings and context of others. It enables us to transform hazardous situations into holy places. I testify of a loving Savior who “looketh on [our] heart” and cares what we are thinking. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

13. By Divine Design – Partnership in Marriage

A Solemn Responsibility to Love and Care for Each Other

Elder L. Tom Perry
Ensign, June 2006



1. The subject I have been assigned is the following sentence from the proclamation on the [family](#): “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children.” [1](#) I want to approach

this subject in a very different manner than you might be familiar with in other training meetings. I will not quote much from handbooks; instead, I want to talk to you heart to heart about your service in our Father in Heaven’s kingdom. The purpose will be to see if together we can better understand how to balance our

responsibilities to love and care for our families with the other special callings our Father in Heaven has given to us.

2. As the Church was being organized on April 6, 1830, the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) received a revelation that is now recorded in the 21st section of the [Doctrine and Covenants](#). A portion of the revelation reads:

3. “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of [Jesus Christ](#), an elder of the church through the will of [God the Father](#), and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ,

4. “Being inspired of the [Holy Ghost](#) to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith. ...
5. “Wherefore, meaning the church, 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;
6. “For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” ([D&C 21:1–2, 4–5](#)).
7. Among the first instructions given to this newly organized Church was to follow the inspiration and revelation that comes from the Lord, through His prophet, in fulfilling our responsibilities to build His kingdom. He has promised to direct us in the course that should be ours to carry on this great work.

The Prophet’s Counsel

8. I think President Gordon B. Hinckley, our prophet today, gave us the key to balance our responsibilities in an earlier worldwide leadership training meeting, held on June 21, 2003. In that broadcast he stated:
9. “Yours ... is the privilege of standing in the shadow of [the Redeemer](#) of the world as we carry forward this work. Yours is the opportunity to speak of the beauty of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of His sons and daughters. Could there be a greater privilege than this?
10. “Rejoice in the privilege which is yours. Your opportunity will not last forever. Too soon there will be only the memory of the great experience you are now having.
11. “None of us will accomplish all we might wish to. But let us do the best we can. I am satisfied that the Redeemer will then say, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’ ([Matt. 25:21](#)).” [2](#)
12. As you remember, in that broadcast he explained our fourfold responsibility. The first applies to the subject we are addressing in this broadcast. He stated:
13. “First, it is imperative that you not neglect your families. Nothing you have is more precious. Your wives and your children are deserving of the attention of their husbands and fathers. When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond. To paraphrase the words of scripture, ‘What shall it profit a man though he serve the Church faithfully and lose his own family?’ (see [Mark 8:36](#)).” [3](#)
14. This has been a continuing message from our prophets since the early days of the organization of the Church. The most important place for gospel

teaching and leadership is in the family and in the home. If we follow these instructions, we will give assignments and plan programs, activities, and classes which will complement and support our families.

Establishing Proper Priorities

15. How we use our time and keep our lives in balance is fundamental to how we will perform our family duties and our Church service. Discipline yourself to follow the prophet’s counsel on how you prioritize the use of your time.

Your Eternal Companion

16. Begin by discussing with your eternal companion how much time you need together to strengthen your marriage, to demonstrate the love you have for each other. That is your first priority.

17. The Church is to help individuals and families come unto Christ and obtain eternal life. Eternal life is God’s greatest gift to His children, and it is obtained only through a family relationship. This relationship must start with the union between husband and wife, which is sacred to the Lord and is something not to be trifled with. The marriage covenant is essential for the Lord’s plan and is the purpose for which He created the heavens and the earth. In all periods of history, He has given His divine law to safeguard and protect the holy union between husband and wife.

Your Children

18. Second, consider the spiritual needs of your children. How much time is necessary to be certain you are being close to them? It is your responsibility as fathers and mothers to provide adequate time to teach them, for the most important instruction children will ever receive should come from their parents. We need to be familiar with what the Church is teaching our children so that we can be in harmony with that teaching in our instructions to each child. For example, the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*, quoting the proclamation on the family, gives young people this counsel about families:

19. “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.” [4](#)

20. The pamphlet continues:

21. “Being part of a family is a great blessing. Your family can provide you with companionship and

happiness, help you learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and help you prepare for eternal life. Not all families are the same, but each is important in Heavenly Father's plan.

22. "Do your part to build a happy home. Be cheerful, helpful, and considerate of others. Many problems in the home are created because family members speak and act selfishly or unkindly. Concern yourself with the needs of other family members. Seek to be a peacemaker rather than to tease, fight, and quarrel. Remember that the family is the most sacred unit of the Church." [5](#)

Providing for Your Family

23. Our third priority is to provide for our family units. Again from the proclamation on the family:

24. "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." [6](#)

25. We need to maintain good skills to be gainfully employed. In a changing world, we must keep up-to-date, or our skills will become obsolete. Even though we are busy in Church assignments, we should not pass up opportunities to increase our development and improve the welfare of our families. This requires that we invest adequate time and thought to preparing for the future.

26. This counsel applies to the sisters as well as the brethren. Although the responsibility to provide for the family belongs primarily to fathers, the proclamation indicates that "disability, death, or other circumstances" [7](#) may also require you sisters to use and develop your skills to provide for your families.

Church Service

27. Fourth in our priority is our commitment to the time we spend in Church activities. Active Latter-day Saint families value their Church time and make choices in their family life to make room for it.

28. Leaders need to be especially sensitive to different family situations when they extend calls and create expectations. Families with young children where both parents have demanding calls that take them out of the home are the most likely to feel that Church activities interfere with their family life. Church leaders can help by acknowledging and validating members' efforts to balance Church service with their family responsibilities.

Involving Family Members

29. There are ways to increase our association with our families while we serve in our Church callings by involving our families, when appropriate, in our Church service. Let me give you one personal example.

30. My father served as my bishop during the early years of my life. He was a busy man with a demanding legal practice. He was also active in civic affairs and in demand as a public speaker. And, of course, he was the father of six children. I was always grateful that my father had his priorities right. Mother was always his first priority. It was evident by the way he treated her. This was followed by a real dedication to each of his children.

31. When I was about six years old, I received a red wagon as a Christmas gift. It was exactly like this one in miniature. The little red wagon provided a real bond between my father and me. In his busy life, he had to find ways of involving his family in activities without diminishing his own productivity.

32. Much of his service as a bishop occurred during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Many of our ward members were in desperate need. As the bishop, he had the responsibility of supplying the means to sustain their lives. This seemed to be a good activity for a bishop, his son, and the little red wagon.

33. I would come home from school and find stacks on the side of the garage—flour, sugar, wheat, and other commodities. I knew that that evening my father and I would have the opportunity of being together.

34. When he would arrive home, the little red wagon was loaded with supplies to take to a family. The two of us, walking and talking together, would complete our welfare assignment by delivering the commodities to those in need.

35. I was able to witness firsthand the love and care a good priesthood leader had for his ward members. More important, I had an opportunity of spending precious time with my father.

Focusing on Basic Priorities

36. Let me encourage you to do what we taught you in the first worldwide leadership training meeting. We remind you that all units of the Church are at different stages of development, and all units have different needs. When we are planning our Church programs, the families must be taken into consideration.

37. Again, we caution you not to burden your membership with more than one Church calling, plus home teaching and visiting teaching. Discipline

yourself to stick to the basic priorities, and you will be surprised how the inspiration of the Lord will direct you as you carry on your responsibilities to be a servant in His kingdom.

38. The ultimate focus of the restored Church is to facilitate and bring about opportunities for us to assist the Lord in His work to bring to pass the [immortality](#) and eternal life of man. We do this primarily by [strengthening families](#). In an age of moral decline, political uncertainty, international unrest, and economic instability, our focus on strengthening and stabilizing families must be enhanced and magnified. The very purpose of the Church is to assist families in obtaining salvation and exaltation in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

The Family Guidebook

39. Several years ago we published a special Family Guidebook. It was for the use of members, especially those who are new converts or have limited Church experience. We encourage you to use it. It begins with a statement:

40. “The family is the basic unit of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the most important social unit in time and eternity. God has established families to bring happiness to His children, allow them to learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and prepare them for eternal life.

41. “The home is the best place to teach, learn, and apply gospel principles.” [8](#)

42. Again, we encourage you to refer to this booklet’s helpful teachings.

The Savior’s Example

43. Our Lord and Savior ministered personally to the people, lifting the downtrodden, giving hope to the discouraged, and seeking out the lost. By His words and actions, He showed the people that He loved and understood and appreciated them. He recognized the divine nature and eternal worth of each individual. Even when calling people to repentance, He condemned the sin without condemning the sinner.

44. Like our Savior, as Church leaders we should love the people we serve, showing care and concern for each one individually. May the Lord bless us in the sacred responsibility He has given us is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.

2. “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, June 21, 2003, 24.

3. Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, June 21, 2003, 22.
4. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. For the Strength of Youth (pamphlet, 2001), 10.
6. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; or Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. Family Guidebook (2001), 1.

Broken Things to Mend

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Ensign, May 2006



1. The first words Jesus spoke in His majestic Sermon on the Mount were to the troubled, the discouraged and downhearted. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” He said, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”[1](#) Whether you are members of The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints or among the tens of thousands listening this morning who are not of our faith, I speak to those who are facing personal trials and [family](#) struggles, those who endure conflicts fought in the lonely foxholes of the heart, those trying to hold back floodwaters of despair that sometimes wash over us like a tsunami of the soul. I wish to speak particularly to you who feel your lives are broken, seemingly beyond repair.

2. To all such I offer the surest and sweetest remedy that I know. It is found in the clarion call the Savior of the world Himself gave. He said it in the beginning of His ministry, and He said it in the end. He said it to believers, and He said it to those who were not so sure. He said to everyone, whatever their personal problems might be:

3. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

4. “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.”[2](#)

5. In this promise, that introductory phrase, “come unto me,” is crucial. It is the key to the peace and rest we seek. Indeed, when the resurrected Savior gave His sermon at the temple to the Nephites in the New World, He began, “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”[3](#)

6. When Andrew and John first heard Christ speak, they were so moved they followed Him as He walked away from the crowd. Sensing He was being pursued, Jesus turned and asked the two men, “What seek ye?” They answered, “Where dwellest thou?” And Christ said, “Come and see.” The next day He found another disciple, Philip, and said to him, “Follow me.”[4](#) Just a short time later He formally called Peter and others of

the new Apostles with the same spirit of invitation. Come, “follow me,”⁵ He said.

7. It seems clear that the essence of our duty and the fundamental requirement of our mortal life is captured in these brief phrases from any number of scenes in the Savior’s mortal ministry. He is saying to us, “Trust me, learn of me, do what I do. Then, when you walk where I am going,” He says, “we can talk about where you are going, and the problems you face and the troubles you have. If you will follow me, I will lead you out of darkness,” He promises. “I will give you answers to your prayers. I will give you rest to your souls.”

8. My beloved friends, I know of no other way for us to succeed or to be safe amid life’s many pitfalls and problems. I know of no other way for us to carry our burdens or find what Jacob in the [Book of Mormon](#) called “that happiness which is prepared for the saints.”⁶

9. So how does one “come unto Christ” in response to this constant invitation? The scriptures give scores of examples and avenues. You are well acquainted with the most basic ones. The easiest and the earliest comes simply with the desire of our heart, the most basic form of faith that we know. “If ye can no more than desire to believe,” Alma says, exercising just “a particle of faith,” giving even a small place for the promises of God to find a home—that is enough to begin.⁷ Just believing, just having a “molecule” of faith—simply hoping for things which are not yet seen in our lives, but which are nevertheless truly there to be bestowed⁸—that simple step, when focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, has ever been and always will be the first principle of His eternal gospel, the first step out of despair.

10. Second, we must change anything we can change that may be part of the problem. In short we must repent, perhaps the most hopeful and encouraging word in the [Christian](#) vocabulary. We thank our Father in Heaven we are allowed to change, we thank Jesus we can change, and ultimately we do so only with Their divine assistance. Certainly not everything we struggle with is a result of our actions. Often it is the result of the actions of others or just the mortal events of life. But anything we can change we should change, and we must forgive the rest. In this way our access to the Savior’s Atonement becomes as unimpeded as we, with our imperfections, can make it. He will take it from there.

11. Third, in as many ways as possible we try to take upon us His identity, and we begin by taking upon us His name. That name is formally bestowed by covenant in the saving ordinances of the gospel.

These start with [baptism](#) and conclude with temple covenants, with many others, such as partaking of the [sacrament](#), laced throughout our lives as additional blessings and reminders. Teaching the people of his day the message we give this morning, Nephi said: “Follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, ... with real intent, ... take upon you the name of Christ. ... Do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer [will] do.”⁹

12. Following these most basic teachings, a splendor of connections to Christ opens up to us in multitudinous ways: prayer and fasting and meditation upon His purposes, savoring the scriptures, giving service to others, “succor[ing] the weak, lift[ing] up the hands which hang down, ... strengthen[ing] the feeble knees.”¹⁰ Above all else, loving with “the pure love of Christ,” that gift that “never faileth,” that gift that “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, [and] endureth all things.”¹¹ Soon, with that kind of love, we realize our days hold scores of thoroughfares leading to the Master and that every time we reach out, however feebly, for Him, we discover He has been anxiously trying to reach us. So we step, we strive, we seek, and we never yield.¹²

13. My desire today is for all of us—not just those who are “poor in spirit” but all of us—to have more straightforward personal experience with the Savior’s example. Sometimes we seek heaven too obliquely, focusing on programs or history or the experience of others. Those are important but not as important as personal experience, true discipleship, and the strength that comes from experiencing firsthand the majesty of His touch.

14. Are you battling a demon of addiction—tobacco or drugs or gambling, or the pernicious contemporary plague of [pornography](#)? Is your marriage in trouble or your child in danger? Are you confused with gender identity or searching for self-esteem? Do you—or someone you love—face disease or depression or death? Whatever other steps you may need to take to resolve these concerns, come first to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Trust in heaven’s promises. In that regard Alma’s testimony is my testimony: “I do know,” he says, “that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions.”¹³

15. This reliance upon the merciful nature of God is at the very center of the gospel Christ taught. I testify that the Savior’s Atonement lifts from us not only the burden of our sins but also the burden of our disappointments and sorrows, our heartaches and our despair.¹⁴ From the beginning, trust in such help was to give us both a reason and a way to improve, an

incentive to lay down our burdens and take up our salvation. There can and will be plenty of difficulties in life. Nevertheless, the soul that comes unto Christ, who knows His voice and strives to do as He did, finds a strength, as the hymn says, “beyond [his] own.” [15](#) The Savior reminds us that He has “graven [us] upon the palms of [His] hands.” [16](#) Considering the incomprehensible cost of the Crucifixion and Atonement, I promise you He is not going to turn His back on us now. When He says to the poor in spirit, “Come unto me,” He means He knows the way out and He knows the way up. He knows it because He has walked it. He knows the way because He is the way.

16. Brothers and sisters, whatever your distress, please don’t give up and please don’t yield to fear. I have always been touched that as his son was departing for his mission to England, Brother Bryant S. Hinckley gave young Gordon a farewell embrace and then slipped him a handwritten note with just five words taken from the fifth chapter of Mark: “Be not afraid, only believe.” [17](#) I think also of that night when Christ rushed to the aid of His frightened disciples, walking as He did on the water to get to them, calling out, “It is I; be not afraid.” Peter exclaimed, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” Christ’s answer to him was as it always is every time: “Come,” He said. Instantly, as was his nature, Peter sprang over the vessel’s side and into the troubled waters. While his eyes were fixed upon the Lord, the wind could toss his hair and the spray could drench his robes, but all was well—he was coming to Christ. It was only when his faith wavered and fear took control, only when he removed his glance from the Master to look at the furious waves and the ominous black gulf beneath, only then did he begin to sink into the sea. In newer terror he cried out, “Lord, save me.”

17. Undoubtedly with some sadness, the Master over every problem and fear, He who is the solution to every discouragement and disappointment, stretched out His hand and grasped the drowning disciple with the gentle rebuke, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” [18](#)

18. If you are lonely, please know you can find comfort. If you are discouraged, please know you can find hope. If you are poor in spirit, please know you can be strengthened. If you feel you are broken, please know you can be mended.

19. In Nazareth, the narrow road,

20. That tires the feet and steals the breath,

21. Passes the place where once abode

22. The Carpenter of Nazareth.

23. And up and down the dusty way

24. The village folk would often wend;
25. And on the bench, beside Him, lay
26. Their broken things for Him to mend.
27. The maiden with the doll she broke,
28. The woman with the broken chair,
29. The man with broken plough, or yoke,
30. Said, “Can you mend it, Carpenter?”
31. And each received the thing he sought,
32. In yoke, or plough, or chair, or doll;
33. The broken thing which each had brought
34. Returned again a perfect whole.
35. So, up the hill the long years through,
36. With heavy step and wistful eye,
37. The burdened souls their way pursue,
38. Uttering each the plaintive cry:
39. “O Carpenter of Nazareth,
40. This heart, that’s broken past repair,
41. This life, that’s shattered nigh to death,
42. Oh, can You mend them, Carpenter?”
43. And by His kind and ready hand,
44. His own sweet life is woven through
45. Our broken lives, until they stand
46. A New Creation—”all things new.”
47. “The shattered [substance] of [the] heart,
48. Desire, ambition, hope, and faith,
49. Mould Thou into the perfect part,
50. O, Carpenter of Nazareth!” [19](#)
51. May we all, especially the poor in spirit, come unto Him and be made whole, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, amen.

1. [Matt. 5:3](#).

2. [Matt. 11:28–29](#).

3. [3 Ne. 12:3](#); emphasis added.

4. [John 1:35–39, 43](#).

5. See [Matt. 4:19](#).

6. See [2 Ne. 9:43](#).

7. See [Alma 32:27](#); emphasis added.

8. See [Alma 32:21](#).

9. [2 Ne. 31:13, 17](#).

10. [D&C 81:5](#).

11. [Moro. 7:47, 46, 45](#).

12. See Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson* (1898), 89.

13. [Alma 36:3](#).

14. See [Alma 7:11–12](#).

15. “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” Hymns, no. 220.

16. [1 Ne. 21:16](#).

17. [Mark 5:36](#).

18. [Matt. 14:27–31](#); emphasis added.

19. George Blair, “The Carpenter of Nazareth,” in Obert C. Tanner, *Christ’s Ideals for Living* (Sunday School manual, 1955), 22.

Focus and Priorities

Elder Dallin H. Oaks



1. As we approach the conclusion of this wonderful conference, it is timely to ask ourselves what we are going to strive to become because of what we have heard from the Lord's servants.

2. We are accountable and will be judged for how we use what we have received. This eternal principle applies to all we have been given. In the parable of the talents (see [Matt. 25:14–30](#)), the Savior taught this principle with reference to the use of property. The principle of accountability also applies to the spiritual resources conferred in the teachings we have been given and to the precious hours and days allotted to each of us during our time in mortality.

3. I wish to examine how this principle of accountability applies to our use of the enlarged time and information we have been given in our day.

4. Because of increased life expectancies and modern timesaving devices, most of us have far more discretionary time than our predecessors. We are accountable for how we use that time. "Thou shalt not idle away thy time" ([D&C 60:13](#)), and "Cease to be idle" ([D&C 88:124](#)), the Lord commanded the early missionaries and members. "Time flies on wings of lightning," we sing in a popular hymn; "we cannot call it back. It comes, then passes forward along its onward track. And if we are not mindful, the chance will fade away, for life is quick in passing. 'Tis as a single day" ("Improve the Shining Moments," Hymns, no. 226).

5. The significance of our increased discretionary time has been magnified many times by modern data-retrieval technology. For good or for evil, devices like the Internet and the compact disc have put at our fingertips an incredible inventory of information, insights, and images. Along with fast food, we have fast communications and fast facts. The effect of these resources on some of us seems to fulfill the prophet Daniel's prophecy that in the last days "knowledge shall be increased" and "many shall run to and fro" ([Dan. 12:4](#)).

6. With greatly increased free time and vastly more alternatives for its use, it is prudent to review the fundamental principles that should guide us. Temporal circumstances change, but the eternal laws and principles that should guide our choices never change.

7. I.

8. A homely story contains a warning. I like this story because it translates easily into different languages and cultures.

9. Two men formed a partnership. They built a small shed beside a busy road. They obtained a truck and drove it to a farmer's field, where they purchased a truckload of melons for a dollar a melon. They drove the loaded truck to their shed by the road, where they sold their melons for a dollar a melon. They drove back to the farmer's field and bought another truckload of melons for a dollar a melon. Transporting them to the roadside, they again sold them for a dollar a melon. As they drove back toward the farmer's field to get another load, one partner said to the other, "We're not making much money on this business, are we?" "No, we're not," his partner replied. "Do you think we need a bigger truck?"

10. We don't need a bigger truckload of information, either. Like the two partners in my story, our biggest need is a clearer focus on how we should value and use what we already have.

11. Because of modern technology, the contents of huge libraries and other data resources are at the fingertips of many of us. Some choose to spend countless hours in unfocused surfing the Internet, watching trivial television, or scanning other avalanches of information. But to what purpose? Those who engage in such activities are like the two partners in my story, hurrying to and fro, hauling more and more but failing to grasp the essential truth that we cannot make a profit from our efforts until we understand the true value of what is already within our grasp.

12. A poet described this delusion as an "endless cycle" that brings "knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word," in which "wisdom" is "lost in knowledge" and "knowledge" is "lost in information" (T. S. Eliot, "Choruses from 'The Rock,'" in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950* [1962], 96).

13. We have thousands of times more available information than Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln. Yet which of us would think ourselves a thousand times more educated or more serviceable to our fellowmen than they? The sublime quality of what these two men gave to us—including the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address—was not attributable to their great resources of information, for their libraries were comparatively small by our

standards. There was the wise and inspired use of a limited amount of information.

14. Available information wisely used is far more valuable than multiplied information allowed to lie fallow. I had to learn this obvious lesson as a law student.

15. Over 45 years ago, I was introduced to a law library with hundreds of thousands of law books. (Today such a library would include millions of additional pages available by electronic data retrieval.) When I began to prepare an assigned paper, I spent many days searching in hundreds of books for the needed material. I soon learned the obvious truth (already familiar to experienced researchers) that I could never complete my assigned task within the available time unless I focused my research in the beginning and stopped that research soon enough to have time to analyze my findings and compose my conclusions.

16. Faced with an excess of information in the marvelous resources we have been given, we must begin with focus or we are likely to become like those in the well-known prophecy about people in the last days—"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" ([2 Tim. 3:7](#)). We also need quiet time and prayerful pondering as we seek to develop information into knowledge and mature knowledge into wisdom.

17. We also need focus to avoid what is harmful. The abundant information and images accessible on the Internet call for sharp focus and control to avoid accessing the [pornography](#) that is an increasing scourge in our society. As the Deseret News noted in a recent editorial, "Images that used to be hidden in out-of-the-way store counters now are as close as a mouse click" ("Staying ahead of Pornography," 21–22 Feb. 2001, A12). The Internet has made pornography accessible almost without effort and often without leaving the privacy of one's home or room. The Internet has also facilitated the predatory activities of adults who use its anonymity and accessibility to stalk children for evil purposes. Parents and youth, beware!

18. There are many gospel implications of this easily accessible flood of information. For example, our Church Web site now provides access to all of the general conference addresses and other contents of Church magazines for the past 30 years. Teachers can download bales of information on any subject. When highly focused, a handout can enrich. But a bale of handouts can detract from our attempt to teach gospel

principles with clarity and testimony. Stacks of supplementary material can impoverish rather than enrich, because they can blur students' focus on the assigned principles and draw them away from prayerfully seeking to apply those principles in their own lives.

19. Nephi taught, "Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do" ([2 Ne. 32:3](#)). That is focus. Nephi also said that as he taught from the scriptures, "I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" ([1 Ne. 19:23](#)). That is personal application.

20. As a further illustration of the need for focus in using and teaching from the great information resources of the past, consider the comparative value today of the advice Brigham Young gave to an audience 140 years ago with what President Hinckley and other servants of the Lord are saying to each of us right now, in this conference. Or compare the value to each of us of some other facts or advice from the distant past with what our stake president said at our last stake conference or what our bishop counseled us last Sunday.

21. Overarching all of this is the importance of what the Spirit whispered to us last night or this morning about our own specific needs. Each of us should be careful that the current flood of information does not occupy our time so completely that we cannot focus on and hear and heed the still, small voice that is available to guide each of us with our own challenges today.

22. I hope that these cautions on the need for focus will not be understood as hostile to selective use of the new technology that has put such a wealth of information at our fingertips. In this I echo Brigham Young, who declared:

23. "Every discovery in science and art, that is really true and useful to mankind, has been given by direct revelation from God. ... We should take advantage of all these great discoveries ... and give to our children the benefit of every branch of useful knowledge, to prepare them to step forward and efficiently do their part in the great work" (Deseret News, 22 Oct. 1862, 129).

24. II.

25. We also need priorities. Our priorities determine what we seek in life. Most of what has been taught in this conference concerns priorities. I hope we will heed these teachings.

26. Jesus taught about priorities when He said, “Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (JST, Matt. 6:38, in [Matt. 6:33](#), footnote a). “Seek ... first to build up the kingdom of God” means to assign first priority to God and to His work. 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. Think about that reality as we consider some teachings and some examples on priorities. As someone has said, if we do not choose the kingdom of God first, it will make little difference in the long run what we have chosen instead of it.

27. As regards knowledge, the highest priority religious knowledge is what we receive in the temple. That knowledge is obtained from the explicit and symbolic teachings of the endowment, and from the whisperings of the Spirit that come as we are desirous to seek and receptive to hear the revelation available to us in that sacred place.

28. As regards property, Jesus taught that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” ([Luke 12:15](#)). Consequently, we should not lay up for ourselves “treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” ([Matt. 6:19](#)). In other words, the treasures of our hearts—our priorities—should not be what the scriptures call “riches [and] the vain things of this world” ([Alma 39:14](#)). The “vain things of [the] world” include every combination of that worldly quartet of property, pride, prominence, and power. As to all of these, the scriptures remind us that “you cannot carry them with you” ([Alma 39:14](#)). We should be seeking the kind of treasures the scriptures promise the faithful: “great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” ([D&C 89:19](#)).

29. All around us we have the good examples of those who seek permanent treasures—those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” ([Matt. 5:6](#)) and put the kingdom of God first in their lives. Among the most visible such examples are the men and women who set aside their worldly pursuits and even say good-bye to their families to serve missions for the Lord. Tens of thousands of these are young missionaries. In addition, I pay particular tribute to those who serve missions in their mature years, some as mission leaders and some as what we call couple missionaries. Their remarkable service evidences their

priorities, and their impressive example is a guide to their families and to all who know them.

30. Our priorities are most visible in how we use our time. Someone has said, “Three things never come back—the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity.” We cannot recycle or save the time allotted to us each day. With time, we have only one opportunity for choice, and then it is gone forever.

31. Good choices are especially important in our [family](#) life. For example, how do family members spend their free time together? Time together is necessary but not sufficient. Priorities should govern us in the precious time we give to our family relationships. Compare the impact of time spent merely in the same room as spectators for television viewing with the significance of time spent communicating with one another individually and as a family.

32. To cite another example, how much time does a family allocate to learning the gospel by scripture study and parental teachings, in contrast to the time family members spend viewing sports contests, talk shows, or soap operas? I believe many of us are over nourished on entertainment junk food and undernourished on the bread of life.

33. In terms of priorities for each major decision (such as education, occupation, place of residence, marriage, or childbearing), we should ask ourselves, what will be the eternal impact of this decision? Some decisions that seem desirable for mortality have unacceptable risks for eternity. In all such choices we need to have inspired priorities and apply them in ways that will bring eternal blessings to us and to our family members.

34. Then, after we have done all that we can, we should remember the wise counsel and comforting assurance of King Benjamin, who taught, “And 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](#)).

35. The ultimate Latter-day Saint priorities are twofold: First, we seek to understand our relationship to God the Eternal Father and His Son, [Jesus Christ](#), and to secure that relationship by obtaining their saving ordinances and by keeping our personal covenants. Second, we seek to understand our relationship to our family members and to secure those relationships by the ordinances of the temple and by keeping the covenants we make in that holy place. These relationships, secured in the way I have

explained, provide eternal blessings available in no other way. No combination of science, success, property, pride, prominence, or power can provide these eternal blessings!

36. I testify that this is true, and I testify of [God the Father](#), whose plan establishes the way, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose Atonement makes it all possible.

37. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Lessons From Liberty Jail

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Ensign, September 2009



The Prophet in Liberty Jail

1. One of the most trying times in the history of the Church, both in terms of its impact on the Church generally and in the life of the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) personally, occurred during the winter of 1838–39. The Prophet, who bore the brunt of the persecution in that period, had been imprisoned in the ironically named Liberty Jail. Until his martyrdom five and a half years later, there was no more burdensome time in Joseph’s life than this cruel, illegal, and unjustified incarceration.

2. Liberty Jail, one of the more forbidding structures in that region, was considered escape proof, and it probably was. Surrounded by stone walls four feet thick, the floor-to-ceiling height in the dungeon was barely six feet. Inasmuch as some of the men, including the Prophet Joseph, were over six feet tall, this meant that when standing they were constantly in a stooped position. When they lay down, it was mostly upon the rough, bare stones of the prison floor covered here and there by a bit of loose, dirty straw or an occasional dirty straw mat.

3. The food given to the prisoners was coarse and sometimes contaminated, so filthy that one of them said they “could not eat it until [they] were driven to it by hunger.” [1](#) On as many as four occasions poison was administered to them in their food, making them so violently ill that for days they alternated between vomiting and a kind of delirium, not really caring whether they lived or died.

4. In the Prophet Joseph’s letters, he spoke of the jail being a “hell, surrounded with demons ... where we are compelled to hear nothing but blasphemous oaths, and witness a scene of blasphemy, and drunkenness and hypocrisy, and debaucheries of every

description.” [2](#) “We have ... not blankets sufficient to keep us warm; and when we have a fire, we are obliged to have almost a constant smoke,” he said. [3](#) “Our souls have been bowed down” [4](#) and “my nerve trembles from long confinement,” Joseph wrote. [5](#) “Pen, or tongue, or angels,” could not adequately describe “the malice of hell” that he suffered there. [6](#) All of this occurred during what, by some accounts, was considered the coldest winter on record in the state of Missouri.

A Prison-Temple Experience

5. Most of us, most of the time, speak of the facility at Liberty as a “jail” or a “prison”—and certainly it was that. But Elder Brigham H. Roberts (1857–1933) of the First Council of the Seventy, in recording the history of the Church, spoke of the facility as a temple, or, more accurately, a “prison-temple.” [7](#) Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) used the same phrasing in some of his writings. Certainly this prison-temple lacked the purity, beauty, comfort, and cleanliness of our modern temples. The speech and behavior of the guards and criminals who came there were anything but temple-like. In fact, the restricting brutality and injustice of this experience at Liberty would make it seem the very antithesis of the liberating, merciful spirit of our temples and the ordinances performed in them.

6. So in what sense could Liberty Jail be called a “temple,” and what does such a title tell us about God’s love and teachings, including where and when that love and those teachings are made manifest? In precisely this sense: that you can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences with the Lord in any situation you are in. Indeed, you can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences with the Lord in the most miserable experiences of your life—in the worst settings, while enduring the most painful injustices, when facing the most insurmountable odds and opposition you have ever faced.

7. In one way or another, great or small, dramatic or incidental, every one of us is going to spend a little time in Liberty Jail—spiritually speaking. We will face things we do not want to face for reasons that may not be our fault. Indeed, we may face difficult circumstances for reasons that were absolutely right and proper, reasons that came because we were trying to keep the commandments of the Lord. We may face persecution, we may endure heartache and separation from loved ones, we may be hungry and cold and forlorn. Yes, before our lives are over we may all be

given a little taste of what the prophets faced often in their lives.

8. But the lessons of the winter of 1838–39 teach us that every experience can become a redemptive experience if we remain bonded to our Father in Heaven through it. These difficult lessons teach us that man’s extremity is God’s opportunity, and if we will be humble and faithful, if we will be believing and not curse God for our problems, He can turn the unfair and inhumane and debilitating prisons of our lives into temples—or at least into a circumstance that can bring comfort and revelation, divine companionship and peace.

Lessons from Liberty Jail

9. The truths Joseph received while in Liberty Jail reveal that God was not only teaching Joseph Smith in that prison circumstance, but He was also teaching all of us, for generations yet to come. How empty our lives as Latter-day Saints would be if we did not have sections 121, 122, and 123 of the [Doctrine and Covenants](#)! They are contained in a mere six pages of text, but those six pages touch our hearts with their beauty and their power. And they remind us that God often “moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” [8](#) He certainly turned adversity into blessing in giving us those sacred writings and reflections—so pure, noble, and [Christian](#) in both tone and content, yet produced in such an impure, ignoble, and unchristian setting.

1. Everyone Faces Trying Times

10. The first lesson from Liberty Jail is inherent in what I’ve already mentioned—that everyone, including, and perhaps especially, the righteous, will be called upon to face trying times. When that happens we can sometimes fear that God has abandoned us, and we might be left, at least for a time, to wonder when our troubles will ever end. As individuals, as families, as communities, and as nations, probably everyone has had or will have an occasion to feel as Joseph Smith felt when he cried from the depth and discouragement of his confinement: “O God, where art thou? ... How long shall thy hand be stayed ... ? Yea, O Lord, how long shall [thy people] suffer ... before ... thy bowels be moved with compassion toward them?” ([D&C 121:1–3](#)).

11. Whenever these moments of our extremity come, we must not succumb to the fear that God has abandoned us or that He does not hear our prayers. He does hear us. He does see us. He does love us.

When we are in dire circumstances and want to cry, “Where art Thou?” it is imperative that we remember He is right there with us—where He has always been! We must continue to believe, continue to have faith, continue to pray and plead with heaven, even if we feel for a time our prayers are not heard and that God has somehow gone away. He is there. Our prayers are heard. And when we weep He and the angels of heaven weep with us.

12. When lonely, cold, hard times come, we have to endure, we have to continue, we have to persist. That was the Savior’s message in the parable of the importuning widow (see [Luke 18:1–8](#); see also [Luke 11:5–10](#)). Keep knocking on that door. Keep pleading. In the meantime, know that God hears your cries and knows your distress. He is your Father, and you are His child.

13. When what has to be has been and when what lessons to be learned have been learned, it will be for us as it was for the Prophet Joseph. Just at the time he felt most alone and distant from heaven’s ear was the very time he received the wonderful ministration of the Spirit and the glorious answers that came from his Father in Heaven:

14. “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

15. “And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes” ([D&C 121:7–8](#)).

16. Even though seemingly unjust circumstances may be heaped upon us, and even though unkind and unmerited things may be done to us—perhaps by those we consider enemies but also, in some cases, by those whom we thought were friends—nevertheless, through it all, God is with us.

17. We are not alone in our little prisons here. When suffering, we may in fact be nearer to God than we’ve ever been in our entire lives. That knowledge can turn every such situation into a would-be temple.

18. Regarding our earthly journey, the Lord has promised, “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” ([D&C 84:88](#)). That is an everlasting declaration of God’s love and care for us, including—and perhaps especially—in times of trouble.

2. Even the Worthy Will Suffer

19. Second, we need to realize that just because difficult things happen, it does not mean that we are

unrighteous or that we are unworthy of blessings or that God is disappointed in us. Of course, sinfulness does bring suffering, and the only answer to that behavior is repentance. But sometimes suffering comes to the righteous too. You will recall that from the depths of Liberty Jail when Joseph was reminded that he had indeed been “cast ... into trouble,” had passed through tribulation and been falsely accused, had been torn away from his [family](#) and cast into a pit and into the hands of murderers, nevertheless, he was to remember that the same thing had happened to the Savior of the world, and because He was triumphant, so shall we be (see [D&C 122:4–7](#)). In giving us this sober reminder of what the Savior went through, the revelation from Liberty Jail records, “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” ([D&C 122:8](#)).

20. No, Joseph was not greater than the Savior, and neither are we. And when we promise to follow the Savior, to walk in His footsteps, and be His disciples, we are promising to go where that divine path leads us. And the path of salvation has always led one way or another through Gethsemane. So if the Savior faced such injustices and discouragements, such persecutions, unrighteousness, and suffering, we cannot expect that we are not going to face some of that if we still intend to call ourselves His true disciples and faithful followers.

21. In fact, it ought to be a matter of great doctrinal consolation to us that Jesus, in the course of the Atonement, experienced all of the heartache and sorrow, all of the disappointments and injustices that the entire family of man had experienced and would experience from Adam and Eve to the end of the world in order that we would not have to face them so severely or so deeply. However heavy our load might be, it would be a lot heavier if the Savior had not gone that way before us and carried that burden with us and for us.

22. Very early in the Prophet Joseph’s ministry, the Savior taught him this doctrine. After speaking of sufferings so exquisite to feel and so hard to bear, Jesus said, “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they [and that means you and I and everyone] might not suffer if they would repent” ([D&C 19:16](#)). In our moments of pain and trial, I guess we would shudder to think it could be worse, but without the Atonement it not only could be worse, it would be worse. Only through our faith and repentance and obedience to the gospel that provided the sacred Atonement is it kept from being worse.

23. Furthermore, we note that not only has the Savior suffered, in His case entirely innocently, but so have most of the prophets and other great men and women recorded in the scriptures. The point is this: if you are having a bad day, you’ve got a lot of company—very, very good company. The best company that has ever lived.

24. Now, don’t misunderstand. We don’t have to look for sorrow. We don’t have to seek to be martyrs. Trouble has a way of finding us even without our looking for it. But when it is obvious that a little time in Liberty Jail waits before you (spiritually speaking), remember that God has not forgotten you and that the Savior has been where you have been, allowing Him to provide for your deliverance and your comfort.

3. Remain Calm, Patient, Charitable, and Forgiving

25. Third, remember that in the midst of these difficult feelings when one could justifiably be angry or reactionary or vengeful, wanting to demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, the Lord reminds us from the Liberty Jail prison-temple that “the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only [or ‘except’] upon the principles of righteousness” ([D&C 121:36](#)). Therefore, even when we face such distressing circumstances in our life and there is something in us that wants to strike out at God or man or friend or foe, we must remember that “no power or influence can or ought to be maintained ... [except] by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; ... without hypocrisy, and without guile” ([D&C 121:41–42](#); emphasis added).

26. It has always been a wonderful testimony to me of the Prophet Joseph’s greatness and the greatness of all of our prophets, including and especially the Savior of the world in His magnificence, that in the midst of such distress and difficulty they could remain calm and patient, charitable and forgiving—that they could even talk that way, let alone live that way. But they could, and they did. They remembered their covenants, they disciplined themselves, and they knew that we must live the gospel at all times, not just when it is convenient and not just when things are going well. Indeed, they knew that the real test of our faith and our Christian discipleship is when things are not going smoothly. That is when we get to see what we’re made of and how strong our commitment to the gospel really is.

27. Surely the classic example of this is that in the most painful hours of the Crucifixion the Savior could say, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)). That is a hard thing to ask when we’re hurting or have been offended, are tired or stressed out or suffering innocently. But that is when Christian behavior may matter the most. As Joseph was taught in his prison-temple, even in distress and sorrow we must “let [our] bowels ... be full of charity towards all men ... ; then [and only then] shall [our] confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and ... the [Holy Ghost](#) shall be [our] constant companion” ([D&C 121:45–46](#)).

28. Remaining true to our Christian principles is the only way divine influence can help us. The Spirit has a near impossible task to get through to a heart that is filled with hate or anger or vengeance or self-pity. Those are all antithetical to the Spirit of the Lord. On the other hand, the Spirit finds instant access to a heart striving to be charitable and forgiving, long-suffering, and kind—principles of true discipleship. What a testimony that if we strive to remain faithful, the triumph of a Christian life can never be vanquished, no matter how grim the circumstance might be. How I love the majesty of these elegant, celestial teachings taught, ironically, in such a despicable setting and time.

Do All Things Cheerfully

29. As a valedictory to the lessons from Liberty Jail, I refer to the last verse of section 123: “Therefore ... 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](#); emphasis added).

30. What a tremendously optimistic and faithful concluding declaration to be issued from a prison-temple! When he wrote those lines, Joseph did not know when he would be released or if he would ever be released. There was every indication that his enemies were still planning to take his life.

31. Furthermore, his wife and children were alone, frightened, often hungry, wondering how they would fend for themselves without their husband and father. The Saints, too, were without homes and without their prophet. They were leaving Missouri, heading for Illinois, but who knew what tragedies were awaiting them there? Surely, to say it again, it was the bleakest and darkest of times.

32. Yet in these cold, lonely hours, Joseph says let us do all we can and do it cheerfully. And then we can

justifiably turn to the Lord, wait upon His mercy, and see His arm revealed in our behalf.

33. What a magnificent attitude to maintain in good times or bad, in sorrow or in joy!

34. I testify that the Father and the Son live and that They are close, perhaps even closest via the Holy Spirit, when we are experiencing difficult times. I testify that heaven’s kindness will never depart from you, regardless of what happens (see [Isaiah 54:7–10](#); see also [3 Nephi 22:7–10](#)). I testify that bad days come to an end, that faith always triumphs, and that heavenly promises are always kept. God is our Father, Jesus is the Christ, and this is the true and living gospel—found in this, the true and living Church. I testify that President [Thomas S. Monson](#) is a prophet of God, our prophet for this hour and this day. I love him and sustain him as I know you do. In the words of the Liberty Jail prison-temple experience, “Hold on thy way. ... Fear not ... , for God shall be with you forever and ever” ([D&C 122:9](#)).

35. The lessons of the winter of 1838–39 teach us that every experience can become a redemptive experience if we remain bonded to our Father in Heaven.

36. The height of the dungeon in Liberty Jail was barely six feet. Some of the men, including the Prophet Joseph, when standing had to stoop constantly.

37. We must not succumb to the fear that God has abandoned us or that He does not hear our prayers. He does hear us. He does see us. He does love us.

38. Joseph was to remember that the same thing had happened to the Savior of the world. “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” ([D&C 122:8](#)).

39. In our moments of pain and trial, I guess we would shudder to think it could be worse, but without the Atonement it not only could be worse, it would be worse.

40. In the most painful hours of the Crucifixion the Savior could say, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)).

41. In the cold, lonely hours, Joseph says let us do all we can and do it cheerfully. And then we can justifiably turn to the Lord, wait upon His mercy, and see His arm revealed in our behalf.

Notes

1. Alexander McRae, in B. H. Roberts, in *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:521.

2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:290.
3. Letter to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. Dean C. Jessee (2002), 456.
4. Letter to the Church in Caldwell County, Dec. 16, 1838; “Communications,” *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1840, 85.
5. Letter to Emma Smith, Mar. 21, 1839, in *Personal Writings*, 449.
6. Letter to Emma Smith, Apr. 4, 1839, in *Personal Writings*, 463, 464; spelling and capitalization standardized.
7. See *Comprehensive History*, 1:521 chapter heading; see also 526.
8. “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” *Hymns*, no. 285.

With Love One toward Another in All Things, Under All Circumstances - Becoming Repairers Of The Breach

Marie K. Hafen

BYU Women's Conference, April 2010



1. Our grandson, Ben, decided he would dig up some extra courage and ask a girl to prom. Since the method of asking is so important these days, his mom suggested he fill a bucket with popcorn and put a clever note on it about “popping” the question. He thought that was stupid. So he came up with his own idea. He wrote a double random encryption algorithmic module {sigh, pause} which converts words into a code. He then printed out a page-long invite in this code with a blank key at the top, that the girl had to figure out with the help of only one clue: E=24. Hmmmm. His mom couldn't resist asking, “What happens if this girl cannot crack the code and figure out what the paper says? Then do we do popcorn?”

a. Each in our own way, we all have codes that need cracking—it's just that some people's codes are more difficult to crack than others; some people are more difficult for us to love than others. Even so, God asks us to love one another without qualification. In Joseph Smith's words, we are to have “love one toward another in ALL things [and] under ALL circumstances.” ALL is a big, overwhelming word. So I'd like to focus our attention on learning to love with more completeness those important people in our lives, who, for whatever the reason, are especially difficult for us to love. I believe that if we can learn to love when it is hard, we will be stretched closer to loving ALWAYS—the way Jesus loves us.

b. I'd like to ask each of you to think of a relationship in your personal life that might be a little brittle,

maybe one that is patched-up mostly on the surface, or maybe one that might even be broken but is still very dear. I want to offer hope to each of us in our efforts to become, in the eloquent words of Isaiah, “The repairers of the breach.”

c. Are you familiar with the story *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean? The father in the story is a Presbyterian minister. He and his wife have two sons. The younger son, though charming and gifted, causes them increasing anxiety, and, finally, tragic heart-break. They anguish over him and his choices; they understand him only slightly. Near the end of the story, the older son recalls the last sermon he hears his father give before his father's death.

d. From the pulpit, the father begins (and I paraphrase): “Each one of us here today will at one time in our lives look upon a loved one who is in need and ask [a] question. ‘We are willing to help, Lord, but what if anything is needed?’ For it is true, we cannot always help those who are closest to us. Either we don't know what part of ourselves to give; or more often than not, the part we have to give is not wanted. And so, it is [sometimes] those we live with and should know who elude us. But we can still love them. We can love completely without complete understanding.”¹

2. Learning to love completely even without complete understanding is what we came to earth to learn. When we have gained the capacity for such fullness of love, we will be more like the God who is our Eternal Father, and when we are complete—as He is complete—we WILL completely understand. For now, however, our primary job is simply to love. As Marion D. Hanks once said, sometimes those who deserve our love the least need it the most. But that can be so hard! How do we learn to love when we, honestly, would rather not. We would rather avoid, rebuke, or even condemn? How do we choose to not be bitter but rather to simply love?

3. Even though I am the grandma of a brilliant code-crafting mathematician, I'm no guru with a code-cracking formula for mending breached relationships. But I'd like to discuss three concepts that have helped me. These are not sequential steps, but important parts of an ongoing process.

4. The first idea asks that, as we look at our personal relationships, we look at our relationship with God. Then, second, as we look to mend a breach with another person, we must be willing to exercise enough faith to take some guided risks and to be open to learning about our own weaknesses. And finally,

improving our close relationships with others can hasten and deepen our own personal spiritual growth.

a. How does our relationship with God affect our relationships with others? In one of the first Relief Society meetings in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith referenced the consecrated people in 4th Nephi, in whose hearts the “love of God . . . did dwell.” Then he said, and I suspect with some intensity, “Sisters, shall there be strife among you? I will not have it—you must repent and get the love of God. . . .Not war, not jangle, not contradiction, but meekness, love, purity, these are the things that should magnify us.”²

b. Joseph taught that if the sisters exchanged contention for genuine kindness, they would have “the love of God” within their hearts. Further, in Joseph’s charge to “repent AND get the love of God,” he laid before them a choice. They, WE, must choose to make this exchange. If we can do that, we will be like the people of 4th Nephi who were among the happiest of God’s children.

5. Let me give you an example of how choosing to “get the love of God” helped one woman mend a serious breach with her husband. A friend, I’ll call Anne, had been feeling discouraged and unworthy because her marriage was so far from the ideal she hoped for. A few years after their temple marriage, her husband Sam began losing interest in the Church which left Anne feeling spiritually very alone. Even God felt more distant to her, which fueled her belief that she had to be perfectly righteous before the Lord would want to bless her.

6. She began to recognize that this belief was false as she sought for help and inspiration. She read more about Christ’s Atonement and found “truth and hope and light being unfolded.” Her life began to change. Instead of worrying about her husband’s choices, she felt to put her own “spirituality back on track.” She prayed specifically for strength to make new choices of her own as well as praying for her husband. Eventually, “through obedience to promptings,” as she wrote, she felt herself changing “in the most subtle ways.” Then, “last Sunday, with no forewarning and with no apparent catalyst, Sam awoke and casually announced he was coming to Church.”

7. She had stopped trying to force Sam’s Church activity. Rather, Anne focused on being “faithful regardless of others’ decisions” and on making herself “the kind of wife and person that Sam [would want] to be with forever.” She wrote, “[Even though at times] I have questioned my testimony and have wanted to

give up many times, the Lord has blessed me with strength, understanding, and healing. He has become my friend and my support.”

8. In Moroni 7, Mormon anchors the pattern that Anne experienced. If we are true followers of Jesus Christ, and pray specifically with all energy of heart, we will be filled with

9. Christ’s love. He will “bestow” His charity upon us as a gift. Then, by the light of His love we will know how to help someone who is difficult to help. As our vertical relationship with God becomes more secure, we can, with more heart and more ability, repair our difficult horizontal relationships with others.

10. Next, what does it mean to exercise enough faith to take some risks in trying to mend a breached relationship? Those risks include our willingness to open up and learn how our own weaknesses may be part of the problem. I think of faith, in part, as trust in the Lord’s saving power and influence coupled with our patience and determined effort. Faith requires us to step into the unseen while trusting that the light will follow. We can take such steps with reverent confidence in the protective power of Christ’s Atonement, which allows us to learn from our weaknesses, mistakes, and immaturity without being condemned by them.

11. Let me tell you a story I learned from a family we know. In high school Allie thought she was not smart and certainly not pretty. She wanted the boys to pay attention, but they didn’t. So she and a friend decided they’d cruise Main Street. From their car they’d make eye contact with guys in other cars and get them to stop to talk and flirt. When that wasn’t fun enough, they decided to go dancing at the dance clubs.

12. Allie’s mom and dad warned her about what would happen in those places. Allie would protest, “Oh, Mom, we’re just going to go dancing, just have a little fun.” At this point, she had one hand on the temple (she’d always wanted to get married there), but now the other hand was reaching toward the things of the world which started to pull little by little—just one drink for starters, then a new low-cut shirt. The boys at the club wanted more. The stretch between the world and the temple became too great; she had to let go of one of them. She turned toward the world, but, she rationalized, “only for a little while.”

13. Her parents tried everything they knew. They lectured, “Can’t you see what you’re doing to

yourself?" They scolded, they nagged, they begged. "I know what I'm doing," Allie retorted sharply, "Don't tell me what to do. I'm old enough to make my own decisions." Allie's relationships with her parents grew ragged as the wearying months dragged on. She had a job, but going dancing was what she lived for. One night after Allie had left to go dancing, her dad's patience fizzled. "I can't stand this anymore," he said to his wife in exasperation. "Should we just ask her to move out?"

14. This ultimatum was never delivered. Partly through the help of a good professional counselor, Allie's own weariness started to cause her to shift. She began to see that the smoke and mirrors of the world were NOT making her happy. In time she started to sense the truth of 2 Nephi 9:51. Don't give your efforts for "that which CANNOT satisfy." She began to feel that all the glitz, the drinking, the slinky clothes, the raucous music, and the guys with empty words simply did NOT have the POWER to truly satisfy the desires of her heart.

15. When the emptiness started to gnaw at Allie, she began to remember what she had been forgetting—what it felt like to live righteously, to feel the peace of the Spirit. She decided she would try to come back. Thankfully, she turned to her parents. Despite how baffled they were, they had maintained an open—even if sometimes strained—relationship. They, too, had been learning from their mistakes and were finding how to love her in ways she could accept. She could see that she needed to replace going to the clubs with something wholesome.

16. Soon she discovered that the bishop in her young single adult ward had been watching for her. He was spiritually prepared to help her make the needed changes. As he helped her gain enough confidence to confide in him, he kindled her desire to repent. As she followed that desire, she felt, as she said, "He treats me the way I think Christ would treat me".

17. Even still, at times she got discouraged enough to slip back a step or two. One night she got dressed up to go dancing. Her dad saw her sliding out the door. "Allie! Where are you going?" She shrugged. "Just dancing."

18. "Dancing!" He was stunned. "But Allie how can you do that when you've come so far? This is crazy!"

19. "Dad! Stop! I'm not changing for you. I'm trying to do it for myself, and it's hard. And when you tell me what to do like this, it just makes me NOT

want to do what you want. It's MY life!" And she stomped out of the house.

20. But, she discovered again that the clubs had nothing she really wanted—they were just as empty as before. In her backslide, she could see where the rush of the world would take her, and she turned her back to it—this time for good.

21. One day, for example, when the doorbell rang, her mom answered it to see a young man in black leather, with chains and body piercings. "Allie here?" Allie talked with him for a few minutes then told her mother, "Boy, am I glad I'm not seeing him anymore! He's not a bad guy, but . . ." Then her face wilted, saddened. Her mom could see what Allie was thinking, "Would any really good guy ever want to date me now?"

22. Not long after this she bore her tentative but growing testimony at a niece's baptism. "I know now, more than I have ever known that Jesus actually loves me. And, through her tears, "I'm starting to know what He has done for me."

23. The breaches in Allie's relationships with her parents also began to mend, with thin fabric at first, but eventually that fabric became thicker, more comfortable, more trusting. Their relationships grew steadily warmer.

24. Her mom and dad told us they learned plenty during this process. They learned both concepts and skills. They learned from a good counselor, from a wise bishop, and from their own experience with praying, fasting, and seeking spiritual guidance.

25. They learned to praise, praise, praise—when the praise can be genuine. They tried to catch Allie doing good things and to compliment her for them. Honest encouragement, even about small things, was such a welcome change from all the negative No's and Don'ts!

26. They learned, as George Durrant once put it, "My children will only talk to me when I am WITH them." That takes time. They learned that gentle conversations WITH her, not speeches to her or against her, helped her to discover truths for herself. People value what they discover more than what they are told. If they come to it themselves, they will own it.

27. They learned that their children are not a herd or a flock. They are ones—individuals who each deserves, at times, our totally undivided attention. We can't assume our children are all fine because the group seems to be fine. One of our daughters-in-law

discovered that when their son gets out of control, she needs to spend one-on-one time with him, whatever it takes, to bring him back to balance.

28. Allie's parents also learned to stop lecturing and to start listening. Pat Holland shared these lines she heard from someone else, "Listening creates a sanctuary for the homeless parts within another person, that which has been denied, unloved, and devalued by others."

29. They learned what Joseph taught to the Nauvoo sisters, "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 pow'r it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind."³

30. Allie's parents learned the power of righteous affection. Listen to the effect of Joseph's affection on his cousin George A. Smith: "At the close of [a] conversation, Joseph wrapped his arms around me [not an easy task since George A. weighed about 300 pounds] and squeezed me to his bosom and said, 'George A. I love you as I do my own life.' I felt so affected, I could hardly speak."⁴

31. Those parents learned that children, especially teenagers can actually stretch the "hell" out of you. But as Elder Maxwell said, a violin string makes music only when it is stretched. One of those stretches for them was to suspend judgment—in the sense of condemnation—and stop making their love for her dependent upon her performing her life the way they thought she should. But Allie also learned a thing or two about judgment. Like when judgment—in the sense of discernment—is not only good, but necessary to keep us safe from mortal harm.

32. Our friends tell us that Allie did eventually find a good man, marry in the temple, and that she and her husband now have a growing family of their own. They say that their relationship with her is now mellow, knowing, and sweet.

33. Finally, mending a relationship can greatly bless our own spiritual growth. My husband and I had a child of our own who was difficult to raise. A good boy, but such a challenge! (You don't have any like that, do you?) Ours was a red headed, freckle-faced, big-toothed, wild-haired package of boundless energy. He is the one of whom the seminary teacher wrote on his report card, "He's a good boy, but I think he learned to whisper in a saw mill."

34. Trying to direct his energy toward anything that wasn't his idea was often extremely frustrating. One night, after an agitating encounter, Bruce asked me in utter frustration, "The Lord put Adam and Eve on the earth as full-grown people! Why couldn't He have done that with this child of ours?!"

35. In a flash of insight from somewhere, I found myself answering, "That child was given to us to make Christians out of US." I think that's what Elder Maxwell meant when he said that in our marriages and families, we are "each other's clinical material." The intimacy, the commitments, and the demands of family life make that life the best possible laboratory for us to learn what it means to become more Christian—more like Him.

36. This boy has grown up to be a remarkable man (if for no other reason than because he married an extraordinary woman). We can see how his children are also making Christians of him. It's that way for all of us. No matter the generational direction, our sacrificing for one another is a reflection of what Christ does for us. That sacrificing—that loving no matter what—is the making of a true Christian.

37. Catherine Thomas has shared how her own difficult family demands taught her to become more Christ-like.⁵ She grew up as the child of an alcoholic father. After she joined the Church, got married, and had children of her own, she was still plagued with recurrent feelings of fear, guilt, and anger that caused difficult breaches in her relationships in her own home. Late one night while waiting up for one of her teenagers, she reached a crisis point. She cried out in anguish to the Lord "for deliverance from my indefinable distress." The words "go home" came to her, but without explanation.

38. She acted on this impression and flew immediately to her parents' home. She found her father just finishing a rehab program in which she was invited to take part as his adult child. This experience opened a completely new understanding for her about her father, helped her identify connections between the emotional trauma of her childhood and her adult anxieties that were now causing such difficulty in her own family.

39. The new-found understanding gave Catherine the courage to humble herself and "repent of bad mental habits [such as] fear, self-pity, self-condemnation, and [being unforgiving]" . . . especially toward herself. She accepted that changing these habits of thought—no matter how she had learned them—was something that no one could do for her, but she also couldn't do

it without the healing power that only comes from Christ. Only with His miraculous intervention could her mind be fully reshaped and healed. And when she was healed, she could then be a much better mother to her children—guided by love rather than driven by fear.

40. Because Catherine was willing to turn her heart in new empathy to her father, a relationship that had once been so strained, she became more able to be gathered herself under the Lord's "healing wing" where she found new safety and nourishment. "For behold," He says, "I will gather [you] as a hen gather[s] her chickens under her wings, if [you] will not harden [your] heart. Yea, if [you] will come, [you] may . . . partake of the waters of life freely."

41. When we become willing to set aside our own perceived needs and turn to the needs of those who may have caused previous trauma in our lives, we can become a kind savior on Mount Zion. Dr. Allen Bergin of BYU calls this being a "transitional figure."⁶ We can absorb the toxins that may have afflicted us and refuse to pass them on to others, transforming the bitterness into something sweet. In this small but still significant way, our actions echo what Christ has done for the entire human family. By doing something this Christ-like, we become better Christians. This is part of what Christ means when He says, "Come, follow me."

42. Yet, it is still painfully true, that even when we do follow Christ, some relationships elude us and remain cracked or broken. This was true for the father and mother and older brother in "A River Runs Through It." Healing distressed relationships requires that sacrificial offerings be made AND that they be received. So, what if our heart-felt offerings aren't accepted, or aren't even wanted? For one thing, true love is never wasted. And Christ knows something about unaccepted offerings. That is one reason why He bought for us, by His grace, both time and space to practice how to love as He does.

43. I suppose that each of us has some relationship that weighs on our hearts. We've been focusing on those today. But what if YOU are the one whom someone finds difficult to love? If we look for a moment at each of our stories and put ourselves in the shoes of the "difficult ones," what would each want to say, if they spoke from their souls, to those who are trying to love them? Wouldn't they all say, "Just love

me where I am, for who I am. Don't condemn me. Don't force me. I am in process, just like you."

44. Even the "difficult ones" want to love others and to have their love be accepted. They might say, "Please accept the love that I give. I am offering it in the best ways I know how."

45. The closing lines from the musical *Les Misérables* set to song the heart of today's message. "Take my hand, and lead me to salvation. Take my love, for love is everlasting. And remember, the truth that once was spoken, 'To love another person is to see the face of God.'"

46. I offer my testimony through the words of the prophet Isaiah. In chapter 58, he has left us powerful clues for breaking the codes in each of us. If we follow his Messianic teaching of the law of the fast, the resultant blessings are BEAUTIFUL. When we fast righteously, and add to that our sincere prayers and earnest efforts to reach out, the Lord can give us the keys to unlock the riddles in our relationships, perhaps helping to heal our own generational chain as we to turn our hearts to one another in fulfillment of the purpose of this earth. Wrote Isaiah, "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry and he shall say, Here I am. . . . And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

47. I am grateful for THE Repairer of the Breach. I love Him, with all of my heart. I want to be tender to Him and His guidance in all my relationships, because I want to be like Him.

48. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. See Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Univ. of Chicago 1976), p. 81. Some of the quoted language is based on the film version.
2. Relief Society Minutes, April 28, 1842.
3. Quoted in *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church—Joseph Smith* (LDS Church, 2007), p. 428
4. *Ibid.*, p. 466.
5. M. Catherine Thomas, "When Our Reaching Reaches His," in Dawn H. Anderson and Marie Cornwall, eds., *Women and the Power Within* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991), pages 186-89.
6. Quoted in Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen, *The Belonging Heart* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), page 118.

14. Parenting Principles

Are We Not All Mothers?

Sheri L. Dew

Ensign, November 2001



1. This summer four teenage nieces and I shared a tense Sunday evening when we set out walking from a downtown hotel in a city we were visiting to a nearby chapel where I was to speak. I had made that walk many times, but that evening we suddenly found ourselves engulfed by an enormous mob of drunken parade-goers. It was no place for four teenage girls, or their aunt, I might add. But with the streets closed to traffic, we had no choice but to keep walking. Over the din, I shouted to the girls, “Stay right with me.” As we maneuvered through the crush of humanity, the only thing on my mind was my nieces’ safety.

2. Thankfully, we finally made it to the chapel. But for one unnerving hour, I better understood how mothers who forgo their own safety to protect a child must feel. My siblings had entrusted me with their daughters, whom I love, and I would have done anything to lead them to safety. Likewise, our Father has entrusted us as women with His children, and He has asked us to love them and help lead them safely past the dangers of mortality back home.

3. Loving and leading—these words summarize not only the all-consuming work of the Father and the Son, but the essence of our labor, for our work is to help the Lord with His work. How, then, may we as Latter-day women of God best help the Lord with His work?

4. Prophets have repeatedly answered this question, as did the First Presidency six decades ago when they called motherhood “the highest, holiest service ... assumed by mankind.” [1](#)

5. Have you ever wondered why prophets have taught the doctrine of motherhood—and it is doctrine—again and again? I have. I have thought long and hard about the work of women of God. And I have wrestled with what the doctrine of motherhood means for all of us. This issue has driven me to my knees, to the scriptures, and to the temple—all of which teach an ennobling doctrine regarding our most crucial role as women. It is a doctrine about which we must be clear if we hope to stand “steadfast and immovable” [2](#) regarding the issues that swirl around

our gender. For Satan has declared war on motherhood. He knows that those who rock the cradle can rock his earthly empire. And he knows that without righteous mothers loving and leading the next generation, the kingdom of God will fail.

6. When we understand the magnitude of motherhood, it becomes clear why prophets have been so protective of woman’s most sacred role. While we tend to equate motherhood solely with maternity, in the Lord’s language, the word mother has layers of meaning. Of all the words they could have chosen to define her role and her essence, both [God the Father](#) and Adam called Eve “the mother of all living” [3](#)—and they did so before she ever bore a child. Like Eve, our motherhood began before we were born. Just as worthy men were foreordained to hold the priesthood in mortality, [4](#) righteous women were endowed premortally with the privilege of motherhood. [5](#) Motherhood is more than bearing children, though it is certainly that. It is the essence of who we are as women. It defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits our Father gave us.

7. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated that “God planted within women something divine.” [6](#) That something is the gift and the gifts of motherhood. Elder Matthew Cowley taught that “men have to have something given to them [in mortality] to make them saviors of men, but not mothers, not women. [They] are born with an inherent right, an inherent authority, to be the saviors of human souls ... and the regenerating force in the lives of God’s children.” [7](#)

8. Motherhood is not what was left over after our Father blessed His sons with priesthood ordination. It was the most ennobling endowment He could give His daughters, a sacred trust that gave women an unparalleled role in helping His children keep their second estate. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. declared, motherhood is “as divinely called, as eternally important in its place as the Priesthood itself.” [8](#)

9. Nevertheless, the subject of motherhood is a very tender one, for it evokes some of our greatest joys and heartaches. This has been so from the beginning. Eve was “glad” after the Fall, realizing she otherwise “never should have had seed.” [9](#) And yet, imagine her anguish over Cain and Abel. Some mothers experience pain because of the children they have

borne; others feel pain because they do not bear children here. About this Elder John A. Widtsoe was explicit: “Women who through no fault of their own cannot exercise the gift of motherhood directly, may do so vicariously.” [10](#)

10. For reasons known to the Lord, some women are required to wait to have children. This delay is not easy for any righteous woman. But the Lord’s timetable for each of us does not negate our nature. Some of us, then, must simply find other ways to mother. And all around us are those who need to be loved and led.

11. Eve set the pattern. In addition to bearing children, she mothered all of mankind when she made the most courageous decision any woman has ever made and with Adam opened the way for us to progress. She set an example of womanhood for men to respect and women to follow, modeling the characteristics with which we as women have been endowed: heroic faith, a keen sensitivity to the Spirit, an abhorrence of evil, and complete selflessness. Like the Savior, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,” [11](#) Eve, for the joy of helping initiate the human [family](#), endured the Fall. She loved us enough to help lead us.

12. As daughters of our Heavenly Father, and as daughters of Eve, we are all mothers and we have always been mothers. And we each have the responsibility to love and help lead the rising generation. How will our young women learn to live as women of God unless they see what women of God look like, meaning what we wear, watch, and read; how we fill our time and our minds; how we face temptation and uncertainty; where we find true joy; and why modesty and femininity are hallmarks of righteous women? How will our young men learn to value women of God if we don’t show them the virtue of our virtues?

13. Every one of us has an overarching obligation to model righteous womanhood because our youth may not see it anywhere else. Every sister in Relief Society, which is the most significant community of women on this side of the veil, is responsible to help our young women make a joyful transition into Relief Society. This means our friendship with them must begin long before they turn 18. Every one of us can mother someone—beginning, of course, with the children in our own families but extending far beyond. Every one of us can show by word and by deed that the work of women in the Lord’s kingdom is magnificent and holy. I repeat: We are all mothers in

Israel, and our calling is to love and help lead the rising generation through the dangerous streets of mortality.

14. Few of us will reach our potential without the nurturing of both the mother who bore us and the mothers who bear with us. I was thrilled recently to see one of my youth leaders for the first time in years. As a teenager who had absolutely no self-confidence, I always sidled up to this woman because she would put her arm around me and say, “You are just the best girl!” She loved me, so I let her lead me. How many young men and women are desperate for your love and leadership? Do we fully realize that our influence as mothers in Israel is irreplaceable and eternal?

15. When I was growing up, it was not uncommon for Mother to wake me in the middle of the night and say, “Sheri, take your pillow and go downstairs.” I knew what that meant. It meant a tornado was coming, and I was instantly afraid. But then Mother would say, “Sheri, everything will be OK.” Her words always calmed me. Today, decades later, when life seems overwhelming or frightening, I call Mother and wait for her to say, “Everything will be OK.”

16. Recent horrifying events in the United States have underscored the fact that we live in a world of uncertainty. Never has there been a greater need for righteous mothers—mothers who bless their children with a sense of safety, security, and confidence about the future, mothers who teach their children where to find peace and truth and that the power of [Jesus Christ](#) is always stronger than the power of the adversary. Every time we build the faith or reinforce the nobility of a young woman or man, every time we love or lead anyone even one small step along the path, we are true to our endowment and calling as mothers and in the process we build the kingdom of God. No woman who understands the gospel would ever think that any other work is more important or would ever say, “I am just a mother,” for mothers heal the souls of men.

17. Look around. Who needs you and your influence? If we really want to make a difference, it will happen as we mother those we have borne and those we are willing to bear with. If we will stay right with our youth—meaning, if we will love them—in most cases they will stay right with us—meaning, they will let us lead them.

18. As mothers in Israel, we are the Lord’s secret weapon. Our influence comes from a divine endowment that has been in place from the beginning. In the premortal world, when our Father described our role, I wonder if we didn’t stand in wide-eyed wonder

that He would bless us with a sacred trust so central to His plan and that He would endow us with gifts so vital to the loving and leading of His children. I wonder if we shouted for joy [12](#) at least in part because of the ennobling stature He gave us in His kingdom. The world won't tell you that, but the Spirit will.

19. We just can't let the Lord down. And if the day comes when we are the only women on earth who find nobility and divinity in motherhood, so be it. For mother is the word that will define a righteous woman made perfect in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, a woman who has qualified for eternal increase in posterity, wisdom, joy, and influence.

20. I know, I absolutely know, that these doctrines about our divine role are true, and that when understood they bring peace and purpose to all women. My dear sisters, whom I love more than I know how to express, will you rise to the challenge of being mothers in these perilous times, though doing so may test the last ounce of your endurance and courage and faith? Will you stand steadfast and immovable as a mother in Israel and a woman of God? Our Father and His Only Begotten Son have given us a sacred stewardship and a holy crown in their kingdom. May we rejoice in it. And may we be worthy of Their trust. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. "The Message of the First Presidency to the Church," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1942, 761.
2. [Mosiah 5:15](#).
3. [Moses 4:26](#).
4. See [Alma 13:2–4, 7–8](#).
5. See Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102.
6. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 387.
7. *Matthew Cowley Speaks* (1954), 109.
8. "Our Wives and Our Mothers in the Eternal Plan," *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1946, 801.
9. [Moses 5:11](#).
10. *Priesthood and Church Government*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (1939), 85.
11. [Heb. 12:2](#).
12. See [Job 38:7](#).

Brethren, We Have Work to Do

Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Ensign, November 2012



1. Brethren, much has been said and written in recent years about the challenges of men and boys. A sampling of book titles, for example, includes *Why There Are No Good Men Left*, *The Demise of Guys*, *The End of*

Men, *Why Boys Fail*, and *Manning Up*. Interestingly, most of these seem to have been written by women. In any case, a common thread running through these analyses is that in many societies today men and boys get conflicting and demeaning signals about their roles and value in society.

2. The author of *Manning Up* characterized it this way: "It's been an almost universal rule of civilization that whereas girls became women simply by reaching physical maturity, boys had to pass a test. They needed to demonstrate courage, physical prowess, or mastery of the necessary skills. The goal was to prove their competence as protectors of women and children; this was always their primary social role. Today, however, with women moving ahead in an advanced economy, provider husbands and fathers are now optional, and the character qualities men had needed to play their role—fortitude, stoicism, courage, fidelity—are obsolete and even a little embarrassing."[1](#)

3. In their zeal to promote opportunity for women, something we applaud, there are those who denigrate men and their contributions. They seem to think of life as a competition between male and female—that one must dominate the other, and now it's the women's turn. Some argue that a career is everything and marriage and children should be entirely optional—therefore, why do we need men?[2](#) In too many Hollywood films, TV and cable shows, and even commercials, men are portrayed as incompetent, immature, or self-absorbed. This cultural emasculation of males is having a damaging effect.

4. In the United States, for example, it is reported: "Girls outperform boys now at every level, from elementary school through graduate school. By eighth grade, for instance, only 20 percent of boys are proficient in writing and 24 percent proficient in reading. Young men's SAT scores, meanwhile, in 2011 were the worst they've been in 40 years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), boys are 30 percent more likely than girls to drop out of both high school and college. ... It is predicted that women will earn 60 percent of bachelor's, 63 percent of master's and 54 percent of doctorate degrees by 2016. Two-thirds of students in special education remedial programs are guys."[3](#)

5. Some men and young men have taken the negative signals as an excuse to avoid responsibility and never really grow up. In an observation that is too often accurate, one university professor remarked, “The men come into class with their backward baseball caps and [their lame] the ‘word processor ate my homework’ excuses. Meanwhile, the women are checking their day planners and asking for recommendations for law school.”⁴ One female movie reviewer expressed the rather cynical view that “what we can count on men for, if we’re lucky and we choose to have a partner, is to be just that—a partner. Someone who stands in his own space even as he respects our standing in our own.”⁵

6. Brethren, it cannot be this way with us. As men of the priesthood, we have an essential role to play in society, at home, and in the Church. But we must be men that women can trust, that children can trust, and that God can trust. In the Church and kingdom of God in these latter days, we cannot afford to have boys and men who are drifting. We cannot afford young men who lack self-discipline and live only to be entertained. We cannot afford young adult men who are going nowhere in life, who are not serious about forming families and making a real contribution in this world. We cannot afford husbands and fathers who fail to provide spiritual leadership in the home. We cannot afford to have those who exercise the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God, waste their strength in [pornography](#) or spend their lives in cyberspace (ironically being of the world while not being in the world).

7. Brethren, we have work to do.

8. Young men, you need to do well in school and then continue your education beyond high school. Some of you will want to pursue university studies and careers in business, agriculture, government, or other professions. Some will excel in the arts, music, or teaching. Others will choose a military career or learn a trade. Over the years, I have had a number of craftsmen work on projects and repairs at my home, and I have admired the hard work and skill of these men. In whatever you choose, it is essential that you become proficient so that you can support a [family](#) and make a contribution for good in your community and your country.

9. I recently saw a video showing a day in the life of a 14-year-old young man in India named Amar. He gets up early and works two jobs, before and after school, six and a half days a week. His income provides a substantial part of his family’s livelihood. He hurries

home on his worn bicycle from his second job after dark and somehow squeezes in a few hours of homework before dropping onto his bed on the floor between sleeping siblings around eleven o’clock at night. Although I’ve never met him, I feel proud of him for his diligence and courage. He is doing the very best he can with his limited resources and opportunities, and he is a blessing to his family.

10. You adult men—fathers, single adults, leaders, home teachers—be worthy models and help the rising generation of boys become men. Teach them social and other skills: how to participate in a conversation, how to get acquainted and interact with others, how to relate to women and girls, how to serve, how to be active and enjoy recreation, how to pursue hobbies without becoming addicted, how to correct mistakes and make better choices.

11. And so to all who are listening, wherever this message may reach you, I say as Jehovah said to Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage” ([Joshua 1:6](#)). Take heart and prepare the best you can, whatever your circumstances. Prepare to be a good husband and father; prepare to be a good and productive citizen; prepare to serve the Lord, whose priesthood you hold. Wherever you are, your Heavenly Father is mindful of you. You are not alone, and you have the priesthood and the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#).

12. Of the many places you are needed, one of the very most important is your priesthood quorum. We need quorums that provide spiritual nourishment to members on Sunday and that also serve. We need leaders of quorums who focus on doing the Lord’s work and on supporting quorum members and their families.

13. Consider [missionary work](#). Young men, you have no time to waste. You can’t wait to get serious about preparing until you are 17 or 18. Aaronic Priesthood quorums can help their members understand the oath and covenant of the priesthood and get ready for ordination as elders, they can help them understand and prepare for the ordinances of the temple, and they can help them get ready for successful missions. Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and the Relief Society can help parents prepare missionaries who know the [Book of Mormon](#) and who will go into the field fully committed. And in each ward and branch, these same quorums can lead out in an effective collaboration with the full-time missionaries who are serving there.

14. A related work that rests primarily on priesthood shoulders is the Savior's call, echoed by President Thomas S. Monson, to rescue those who have drifted from the gospel or who have become disaffected for any reason. We have had wonderful success in this effort, including excellent work by young men. An Aaronic Priesthood quorum in the Rio Grande (Spanish) Ward in Albuquerque, New Mexico, counseled together about whom they could bring back and then as a group went to visit each of them. One said, "When they came to my door, I felt important," and another confided, "I feel happy inside that someone actually wants me to go to church; it makes me want to go to church now." When the quorum members invited one young man to come back, they asked him to come with them on the next visit, and he did. They were not just inviting him to attend church; they were immediately making him a part of the quorum.

15. Another challenging but stimulating priesthood work is that of family history and the temple. Watch for a First Presidency letter arriving shortly that will offer a renewed call and a higher vision of this vital part of the work we have to do.

16. Our quorums also form a brotherhood of mutual support. President Gordon B. Hinckley once said: "It will be a marvelous day, my brethren—it will be a day of fulfillment of the purposes of the Lord—when our priesthood quorums become an anchor of strength to every man belonging thereto, when each such man may appropriately be able to say, 'I am a member of a priesthood quorum of The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints. I stand ready to assist my brethren in all of their needs, as I am confident they stand ready to assist me in mine. ... Working together, we can stand, without embarrassment and without fear, against every wind of adversity that might blow, be it economic, social, or spiritual.'" [6](#)

17. Despite our best efforts, things don't always work out as we have planned, and a particular "wind of adversity" that can come into a man's life is unemployment. An early Church welfare pamphlet stated: "A man out of work is of special moment to the Church because, deprived of his inheritance, he is on trial as Job was on trial—for his integrity. As days lengthen into weeks and months and even years of adversity, the hurt grows deeper. ... The Church cannot hope to save a man on Sunday if during the week it is a complacent witness to the crucifixion of his soul." [7](#)

18. In April 2009 former Presiding Bishopric counselor Richard C. Edgley told the story of an exemplary quorum that mobilized to assist a fellow member who had lost his job:

19. "Phil's Auto of Centerville, Utah, is a testament of what priesthood leadership and a quorum can accomplish. Phil was a member of an elders quorum and worked as a mechanic at a local automobile repair shop. Unfortunately, the repair shop where Phil worked experienced economic trouble and had to let Phil go from his job. He was devastated by this turn of events.

20. "On hearing about Phil's job loss, his bishop, Leon Olson, and his elders quorum presidency prayerfully considered ways they could help Phil get back on his feet. After all, he was a fellow quorum member, a brother, and he needed help. They concluded that Phil had the skills to run his own business. One of the quorum members offered that he had an old barn that perhaps could be used as a repair shop. Other quorum members could help gather needed tools and supplies to equip the new shop. Almost everyone in the quorum could at least help clean the old barn.

21. "They shared their ideas with Phil; then they shared their plan with the members of their quorum. The barn was cleaned and renovated, the tools gathered, and all was put in order. Phil's Auto was a success and eventually moved to better and more permanent quarters—all because his quorum brothers offered help in a time of crisis." [8](#)

22. Of course, as has been repeated by prophets over the years, "The most important of the Lord's work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes." [9](#) We have much to do to strengthen marriage in societies that increasingly trivialize its importance and purpose. We have much to do to teach our children "to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord" ([D&C 68:28](#)). Our task is nothing less than to help our children experience the mighty change of heart or conversion to the Lord spoken of so eloquently in the Book of Mormon (see [Mosiah 5:1–12](#); [Alma 26](#)). Together with the Relief Society, priesthood quorums can build up parents and marriages, and quorums can provide the blessings of the priesthood to single-parent families.

23. Yes, brethren, we have work to do. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and the good you do. Keep going, and the Lord will help you. At times you may not know quite what to do or what to say—just move forward. Begin to act, and the Lord assures that

“an effectual door shall be opened for [you]” ([D&C 118:3](#)). Begin to speak, and He promises, “You shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say” ([D&C 100:5–6](#)). It is true that we are in many ways ordinary and imperfect, but we have a perfect Master who wrought a perfect Atonement, and we have call upon His grace and His priesthood. As we repent and purge our souls, we are promised that we will be taught and endowed with power from on high (see [D&C 43:16](#)).

24. The Church and the world and women are crying for men, men who are developing their capacity and talents, who are willing to work and make sacrifices, who will help others achieve happiness and salvation. They are crying, “Rise up, O men of God!” [10](#) God help us to do it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (2011), 16.
2. “When you ask young people today what will make them adults, almost no one mentions marriage. They are far more likely to see issues around work—completing education, financial independence, a full-time job—as the signs that they have arrived. Work, career, independence: these are the primary sources of identity today” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 45). The pressure on women to adopt this anti marriage ethic is especially intense. A Times of London contributor wrote: “No one, not my family or my teachers, ever said, ‘Oh yes, and by the way you might want to be a wife and mother too.’ They were so determined we would follow a new, egalitarian, modern path that the historic ambitions of generations of women—to get married and raise a family—were intentionally airbrushed from their vision of our future” (Eleanor Mills, “Learning to Be Left on the Shelf,” *Sunday Times*, Apr. 18, 2010, www.thetimes.co.uk; in Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 72). Another writer in her 40s quoted some responses to an article she wrote about her regrets over not marrying: “I am totally appalled by your need for a man,” “Get some self-esteem!” “You have taken codependency to a whole new low,” and “If my daughter grows up to want a man half as much as you do, I will know that I’ve done something wrong in raising her” (Lori Gottlieb, *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough* [2010], 55). The good news is that most people, including educated young adults, aren’t buying the anti-marriage, antifamily message. “According to a study by a University of Pennsylvania economist, in the United States in 2008, 86 percent of college-educated white women were married by age 40, compared with 88 percent of those with less than a four-year degree. The numbers for white, college-educated men are similar: 84 percent of them were married by 40 in 2008. The conventional wisdom, not borne out by research, by the way, may have it that marriage is a raw deal for women. But college-educated white women don’t seem to believe it. They are the most likely of any group to think that ‘married people are generally happier than unmarried people.’ ... The large majority—70 percent—of first-year college students think raising a family is ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to their futures” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 173–74).
3. Philip G. Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan, *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do about It* (2012), e-book; see the chapter “Behind the Headlines.”
4. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Why There Are No Good Men Left:*

- The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (2003), 67.
5. Amanda Dickson, “‘Hunger Games’ Main Character a Heroine for Our Day,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 2, 2012, www.deseretnews.com.
 6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Welfare Responsibilities of the Priesthood Quorums,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 86.
 7. *Helping Others to Help Themselves: The Story of the Mormon Church Welfare Program* (1945), 4.
 8. Richard C. Edgley, “This Is Your Phone Call,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2009, 54.
 9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.
 10. “Rise Up, O Men of God,” *Hymns*, no. 323.

Fatherhood—Our Eternal Destiny

Larry M. Gibson

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1. My father taught me a significant lesson when I was young. He sensed that I was becoming too enamored with temporal things. When I had money, I immediately spent it—almost always on myself.
2. One afternoon he took me to purchase some new shoes. On the second floor of the department store, he invited me to look out the window with him.
3. “What do you see?” he asked.
4. “Buildings, sky, people” was my response.
5. “How many?”
6. “A lot!”
7. He then pulled this coin from his pocket. As he handed it to me, he asked, “What is this?”
8. I immediately knew: “A silver dollar!”
9. Drawing on his knowledge of chemistry, he said, “If you melt that silver dollar and mix it with the right ingredients, you would have silver nitrate. If we coated this window with silver nitrate, what would you see?”
10. I had no idea, so he escorted me to a full-length mirror and asked, “Now what do you see?”
11. “I see me.”
12. “No,” he replied, “what you see is silver reflecting you. If you focus on the silver, all you will see is yourself, and like a veil, it will keep you from seeing clearly the eternal destiny Heavenly Father has prepared just for you.”
13. “Larry,” he continued, “seek not the things of this world but seek ... first ... the kingdom of God, and to establish [His] righteousness, and all these

things shall be added unto you” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38 [in Matthew 6:33, footnote a]).

14. He told me to keep the dollar and never lose it. Each time I looked at it, I was to think about the eternal destiny that Heavenly Father has for me.

15. I loved my father and how he taught. I wanted to be like him. He planted in my heart the desire to be a good father, and my deepest hope is that I am living up to his example.

16. Our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, has often said that our decisions determine our destiny and have eternal consequences (see “Decisions Determine Destiny” [Church Educational System fireside, Nov. 6, 2005], 2; lds.org/broadcasts).

17. Should we not, then, develop a clear vision of our eternal destiny, particularly the one that Heavenly Father wants us to achieve—eternal fatherhood? Let our eternal destiny drive all of our decisions. Regardless of how difficult those decisions may be, Father will sustain us.

18. I learned about the power of such a vision when I joined my 12- and 13-year-old sons for a 50/20 competition. A 50/20 consists of walking 50 miles (80 km) in less than 20 hours. We started at 9:00 p.m. and walked all that night and most of the next day. It was an excruciating 19 hours, but we succeeded.

19. Upon returning home, we literally crawled into the house, where a wonderful wife and mother had prepared a lovely dinner, which we didn’t touch. My younger son collapsed, totally exhausted, on the couch, while my older son crawled downstairs to his bedroom.

20. After some painful rest of my own, I went to my younger son to make sure he was still alive.

21. “Are you OK?” I asked.

22. “Dad, that was the hardest thing I have ever done, and I never want to do it again.”

23. I wasn’t about to tell him that I would never do it again either. Instead, I told him how proud I was that he had accomplished such a hard thing. I knew it would prepare him for other hard things he would face in his future. With that thought, I said, “Son, let me make you this promise. When you go on your mission, you will never have to walk 50 miles in one day.”

24. “Good, Dad! Then I’m going.”

25. Those simple words filled my soul with gratitude and joy.

26. I then went downstairs to my oldest son. I lay by him—then touched him. “Son, are you all right?”

27. “Dad, that was the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life, and I will never, ever do it again.” His eyes closed—then opened—and he said, “Unless my son wants me to.”

28. Tears came as I expressed how grateful I was for him. I told him I knew he was going to be a much better father than I was. My heart was full because at his young and tender age he already recognized that one of his most sacred priesthood duties was to be a father. He had no fear of that role and title—the very title that God Himself wants us to use when we speak to Him. I knew I had the responsibility to nurture the embers of fatherhood that were burning within my son.

29. These words of the Savior took on a much deeper meaning to me as a father:

30. “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for [whatsoever things He] doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

31. “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me” (John 8:28).

32. I love being a husband and father—married to a chosen daughter of heavenly parents. I love her. It is one of the most fulfilling parts of my life. My hope that night was that my five sons and their sister would always see in me the joy that comes from eternal marriage, fatherhood, and family.

33. Fathers, I am sure you have heard the saying “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words” (attributed to Francis of Assisi). Every day you are teaching your children what it means to be a father. You are laying a foundation for the next generation. Your sons will learn how to be husbands and fathers by observing the way you fulfill these roles. For example:

34. Do they know how much you love and cherish their mother and how much you love being their father?

35. They will learn how to treat their future wife and children as they watch you treat each one of them just as Heavenly Father would.

36. Through your example, they can learn how to respect, honor, and protect womanhood.

37. In your home, they can learn to preside over their family in love and righteousness. They can learn to provide the necessities of life and protection for their family—temporally and spiritually (see “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129).

38. Brethren, with all the energy of my soul, I ask you to consider this question: Do your sons see you striving to do what Heavenly Father would have them do?

39. I pray the answer is yes. If the answer is no, it’s not too late to change, but you must begin today. And I testify that Heavenly Father will help you.

40. Now, you young men, whom I dearly love, you know you are preparing to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, receive sacred temple ordinances, fulfill your duty and obligation to serve a full-time mission, and then, without waiting too long, get married in the temple to a daughter of God and have a family. You are then to lead your family in spiritual things as guided by the Holy Ghost (see D&C 20:44; 46:2; 107:12).

41. I have asked many young men around the world, “Why are you here?”

42. So far, not one has responded, “To learn to be a father, that I might be prepared and qualified to receive all that Heavenly Father has.”

43. Let’s examine your Aaronic Priesthood duties as described in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Be sensitive to what you feel as I apply these duties to your service in your family.

44. “Invite all [of your family] to come unto Christ” (verse 59).

45. “Watch over [them] always, and be with and strengthen them” (verse 53).

46. “Preach, teach, expound, exhort, and baptize” members of your family (verse 46).

47. “Exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties” (verse 47).

48. “See that there is no iniquity in [your family], neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking” (verse 54).

49. “See that [your family meets] together often” (verse 55).

50. Assist your father in his duties as patriarch. Support your mother with priesthood strength when a father is not present (see verses 52, 56).

51. When asked, “ordain other priests, teachers, and deacons” in your family (verse 48).

52. Doesn’t this sound like the work and role of a father?

53. Fulfilling your Aaronic Priesthood duties is preparing you young men for fatherhood. The Duty to God resource can help you learn about and make specific plans to fulfill your duties. It can serve as a guide and assistance as you seek Heavenly Father’s will and set goals to accomplish it.

54. Father in Heaven has brought you here at this particular time for a special work and eternal purpose. He wants you to see clearly and understand what that purpose is. He is your Father, and you can always turn to Him for guidance.

55. I know that Heavenly Father is concerned about each of us individually and has a personal plan for us to achieve our eternal destiny. He has sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to help us overcome our imperfections through the Atonement. He has blessed us with the Holy Ghost to be a witness, companion, and guide to our eternal destination if we will rely on Him. May we each enjoy the fulness of Father’s blessings in this life and the fulfillment of His work and His glory by becoming fathers to our families for eternity (see Moses 1:39). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen

Let Us Be Men

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Ensign, November 2006



1. Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.

2. One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one’s knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our [family](#) of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy

the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.

3. On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally Dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."

4. The prophet Lehi pled with his rebellious sons, saying, "Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men" ([2 Nephi 1:21](#); emphasis added). By age, Laman and Lemuel were men, but in terms of character and spiritual maturity they were still as children. They murmured and complained if asked to do anything hard. They didn't accept anyone's authority to correct them. They didn't value spiritual things. They easily resorted to violence, and they were good at playing the victim.

5. We see some of the same attitudes today. Some act as if a man's highest goal should be his own pleasure. Permissive social mores have "let men off the hook" as it were, so that many think it acceptable to father children out of wedlock and to cohabit rather than marry. [1](#) Dodging commitments is considered smart, but sacrificing for the good of others, naive. For some, a life of work and achievement is optional. A psychologist studying the growing phenomenon of what he calls "young men stuck in neutral" describes this scenario:

6. "Justin goes off to college for a year or two, wastes thousands of dollars of his parents' money, then gets bored and comes home to take up residence in his old room, the same bedroom where he lived when he was in high school. Now he's working 16 hours a week at Kinko's or part time at Starbucks.

7. "His parents are pulling their hair out. 'Justin, you're 26 years old. You're not in school. You don't have a career. You don't even have a girlfriend. What's the plan? When are you going to get a life?'

8. "'What's the problem?' Justin asks. 'I haven't gotten arrested for anything, I haven't asked you guys for money. Why can't you just chill?'" [2](#)

9. How's that for ambition?

10. We who hold the priesthood of God cannot afford to drift. We have work to do (see [Moroni 9:6](#)). We must arise from the dust of self-indulgence and be men! It is a wonderful aspiration for a boy to become a man—strong and capable; someone who can build and create things, run things; someone who makes a difference in the world. It is a wonderful aspiration for those of us who are older to make the vision of true manhood a reality in our lives and be models for those who look to us for an example.

11. In large measure, true manhood is defined in our relationship to women. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have given us the ideal to pursue in these words:

12. "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. ... 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." [3](#)

13. Over the years, I have visited members of the Church in many countries, and despite differences in circumstances and cultures, everywhere I have been impressed with the faith and capacity of our women, including some of the very young. So many of them possess a remarkable faith and goodness. They know the scriptures. They are poised and confident. I ask myself, Do we have men to match these women? Are our young men developing into worthy companions that such women can look up to and respect?

14. President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking in this meeting in April 1998, gave specific counsel for young men:

15. "The girl you marry will take a terrible chance on you. ... [You] will largely determine the remainder of her life. ...

16. "Work for an education. Get all the training that you can. The world will largely pay you what it thinks you are worth. Paul did not mince words when he wrote 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](#))." [4](#)

17. Integrity is fundamental to being men. Integrity means being truthful, but it also means accepting responsibility and honoring commitments and covenants. President N. Eldon Tanner, a former

counselor in the First Presidency and a man of integrity, told of someone who sought his advice:

18. “A young man came to me not long ago and said, ‘I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can’t make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?’

19. “I looked at him and said, ‘Keep your agreement.’

20. “‘Even if it costs me my home?’

21. “I said, ‘I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, ... and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.’” [5](#)

22. Good men sometimes make mistakes. A man of integrity will honestly face and correct his mistakes, and that is an example we can respect. Sometimes men try but fail. Not all worthy objectives are realized despite one’s honest and best efforts. True manhood is not always measured by the fruits of one’s labors but by the labors themselves—by one’s striving. [6](#)

23. Though he will make some sacrifices and deny himself some pleasures in the course of honoring his commitments, the true man leads a rewarding life. He gives much, but he receives more, and he lives content in the approval of his Heavenly Father. The life of true manhood is the good life.

24. Most importantly, when we consider the admonition to be men, we must think of [Jesus Christ](#). When Pilate brought Jesus forth wearing a crown of thorns, he declared, “Behold the man!” (see [John 19:4-5](#)). Pilate may not have fully understood the significance of his own words, but the Lord indeed stood before the people then as He stands today—the highest ideal of manhood. Behold the man!

25. The Lord asked His disciples what manner of men they should be and then answered, “Verily I say unto you, even as I am” ([3 Nephi 27:27](#); see also [3 Nephi 18:24](#)). That is our ultimate quest. What did He do that we can emulate as men?

26. Jesus rejected temptation. When confronted by the great tempter himself, Jesus “[yielded] not to the temptation” ([Mosiah 15:5](#)). He countered with scripture: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” ([Matthew 4:4](#)). Gospel commandments and standards

are our protection also, and like the Savior, we may draw strength from the scriptures to resist temptation.

27. The Savior was obedient. He forsook completely the “natural man” ([Mosiah 3:19](#)) and yielded His will to the Father (see [Mosiah 15:7](#)). He was baptized to show “that, according to the flesh he humbled himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” ([2 Nephi 31:7](#)).

28. Jesus “went about doing good” ([Acts 10:38](#)). He employed the divine powers of the holy priesthood to bless those in need, “such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” ([Mosiah 3:5](#)). Jesus told His Apostles: “Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” ([Mark 10:44-45](#)). As His fellow servants, we may become great in His kingdom through love and service.

29. The Savior was fearless in opposing evil and error. “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple ... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” ([Matthew 21:12-13](#)). He called upon all to repent (see [Matthew 4:17](#)) and be forgiven (see [John 8:11](#); [Alma 5:33](#)). So might we stand firm in defending sacred things and in raising the warning voice.

30. He gave His life to redeem mankind. Surely we can accept responsibility for those He entrusts to our care.

31. Brethren, let us be men, even as He is. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See, for example, James E. Faust, “Challenges Facing the Family,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 1–2; Eduardo Porter and Michelle O’Donnell, “Middle-Aged, No Degree, No Wife,” New York Times, published in Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Aug. 6, 2006, p. A7; Peg Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys,” Newsweek, Jan. 30, 2006, 44–51.

2. Leonard Sax, “Project Aims to Study Young Men Stuck in Neutral,” Washington Post, published in Deseret Morning News, Apr. 3, 2006, p. A13. “According to the Census Bureau, fully one-third of young men ages 22 to 34 [in the U.S.] are still living at home with their parents—a roughly 100 percent increase in the past 20 years.”

3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.

4. “Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry,” Ensign, May 1998, 49–50.

5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1966, 1137.

6. In the late 1830s, after the Saints had abandoned Kirtland, the Lord called a man named Oliver Granger to go back and try to settle some unfinished matters for the First Presidency. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said: “Therefore, let [Oliver Granger] contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord. . . . Therefore let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings of my people be on him forever and ever” ([D&C 117:13, 15](#); emphasis added).

Make The Exercise Of Faith Your First Priority

Elder Richard G. Scott

Ensign, November 2014



1. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, all that they needed for daily sustenance was abundantly given to them. They had no difficulties, challenges, or pain. Because they had never experienced hard times, they did not know they could be happy. They had never felt turmoil, so they could not feel peace.

2. Eventually Adam and Eve transgressed the command to not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By so doing they were no longer in a state of innocence. They began to experience principles of opposition. They began to encounter sickness that weakened their health. They began to feel sadness as well as joy.

3. Through Adam and Eve’s partaking of the forbidden fruit, knowledge of good and evil was introduced into the world. Their choice made it possible for each of us to come to this earth to be tried and tested.¹ We are blessed with agency, which is our ability to make decisions and to become accountable for those decisions. The Fall made possible in our lives feelings of both happiness and sadness. We are able to understand peace because we feel turmoil.²

4. Our Father in Heaven knew this would happen to us. It is all part of His perfect plan of happiness. He prepared a way through the life of His perfectly obedient Son, [Jesus Christ](#), our Savior, for His Atonement to overcome every difficulty that we may experience in mortality.

5. We live in trying times. I need not list all of the sources of evil in the world. It is not necessary to describe all of the possible challenges and heartaches that are a part of mortality. Each of us is intimately aware of our own struggles with temptation, pain, and sadness.

6. We were taught in the premortal world that our purpose in coming here is to be tested, tried, and stretched.³ We knew we would face the evils of the adversary. Sometimes we may feel more aware of the negative things of mortality than we are of the positive. The prophet Lehi taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”⁴ Despite all of the negative challenges we have in life, we must take time to actively exercise our faith. Such exercise invites the positive, faith-filled power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ into our lives.

7. Our Father in Heaven has given us tools to help us come unto Christ and exercise faith in His Atonement. When these tools become fundamental habits, they provide the easiest way to find peace in the challenges of mortality. Today I have chosen to discuss four of these tools. As I speak, consider evaluating your personal use of each tool; then seek the guidance of the Lord to determine how you could make better use of each one of them.

Prayer

8. The first tool is prayer. Choose to converse with your Father in Heaven often. Make time every day to share your thoughts and feelings with Him. Tell Him everything that concerns you. He is interested in the most important as well as the most mundane facets of your life. Share with Him your full range of feelings and experiences.

9. Because He respects your agency, Father in Heaven will never force you to pray to Him. But as you exercise that agency and include Him in every aspect of your daily life, your heart will begin to fill with peace, buoyant peace. That peace will focus an eternal light on your struggles. It will help you to manage those challenges from an eternal perspective.

10. Parents, help safeguard your children by arming them morning and night with the power of [family](#) prayer. Children are bombarded every day with the evils of lust, greed, pride, and a host of other sinful behaviors. Protect your children from daily worldly influences by fortifying them with the powerful blessings that result from family prayer. Family prayer should be a nonnegotiable priority in your daily life.

Scripture Study

11. The second tool is to study the word of God in the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. We talk to God through prayer. He most often communicates back to us through His written word. To know what the voice of the Divine sounds and

feels like, read His words, study the scriptures, and ponder them.⁵ Make them an integral part of everyday life. If you want your children to recognize, understand, and act on the promptings of the Spirit, you must study the scriptures with them.

12. Don't yield to Satan's lie that you don't have time to study the scriptures. Choose to take time to study them. Feasting on the word of God each day is more important than sleep, school, work, television shows, video games, or social media. You may need to reorganize your priorities to provide time for the study of the word of God. If so, do it!

13. There are many prophetic promises of the blessings of daily studying the scriptures.⁶

14. I add my voice with this promise: as you dedicate time every day, personally and with your family, to the study of God's word, peace will prevail in your life. That peace won't come from the outside world. It will come from within your home, from within your family, from within your own heart. It will be a gift of the Spirit. It will radiate out from you to influence others in the world around you. You will be doing something very significant to add to the cumulative peace in the world.

15. I do not declare that your life will cease to have challenges. Remember when Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were free from challenges, yet they were unable to experience happiness, joy, and peace.⁷ Challenges are an important part of mortality. Through daily, consistent scripture study, you will find peace in the turmoil around you and strength to resist temptations. You will develop strong faith in the grace of God and know that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ all will be made right according to God's timing.

Family Home Evening

16. While you are working to strengthen your family and cultivate peace, remember this third tool: weekly family home evening. Be cautious not to make your family home evening just an afterthought of a busy day. Decide that on Monday night your family will be together at home for the evening. Do not let employment demands, sports, extracurricular activities, homework, or anything else become more important than that time you spend together at home with your family.

17. The structure of your evening is not as important as the time invested. The gospel should be taught both formally and informally. Make it a meaningful experience for each member of the family. Family

home evening is a precious time to bear testimony in a safe environment; to learn teaching, planning, and organizational skills; to strengthen family bonds; to develop family traditions; to talk to each other; and more important, to have a marvelous time together!

18. At last April's conference, Sister Linda S. Reeves boldly declared: "I must testify of the blessings of daily scripture study and prayer and weekly family home evening. These are the very practices that help take away stress, give direction to our lives, and add protection to our homes."⁸ Sister Reeves is a very wise woman. I strongly urge you to earn your own testimony of these three crucial habits.

Temple Attendance

19. The fourth tool is to go to the temple. We all know there is no more peaceful place on this earth than in the temples of God. If you don't have a temple recommend, qualify to get one. When you have a recommend, use it often.⁹ Schedule a regular time to be in the temple. Don't let anyone or anything prevent you from being there.

20. While you are in the temple, listen to the words of the ordinances, ponder them, pray about them, and seek to understand their meaning. The temple is one of the best places to come to understand the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Seek Him there. Remember that many more blessings come from providing your own family names in the temple.

21. These four tools are fundamental habits for securing your life in the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Remember our Savior is the Prince of Peace. Peace in this mortal life comes from His atoning sacrifice. When we are consistently praying morning and night, studying our scriptures daily, having weekly family home evening, and attending the temple regularly, we are actively responding to His invitation to "come unto Him." The more we develop these habits, the more anxious is Satan to harm us but the less is his ability to do so. Through the use of these tools, we exercise our agency to accept the full gifts of His atoning sacrifice.

22. I am not suggesting that all of life's struggles will disappear as you do these things. We came to mortal life precisely to grow from trials and testing. Challenges help us become more like our Father in Heaven, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes it possible to endure those challenges.¹⁰ I testify that as we actively come unto Him, we can endure every temptation, every heartache, every challenge we face, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See [Moses 5:11](#).
2. See [Moses 4–5](#).
3. See [Abraham 3:25](#).
4. [2 Nephi 2:11](#).
5. See [Doctrine and Covenants 18:36](#); see also [verses 34–35](#).
6. Some examples include: President Thomas S. Monson said: “As we read and ponder the scriptures, we will experience the sweet whisperings of the Spirit to our souls. We can find answers to our questions. We learn of the blessings which come through keeping God’s commandments. We gain a sure testimony of our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of Their love for us. When scripture study is combined with our prayers, we can of a certainty know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. . . . As we remember prayer and take time to turn to the scriptures, our lives will be infinitely more blessed and our burdens will be made lighter” (“We Never Walk Alone,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 122). President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “Without reservation I promise you that if each of you will observe this simple program, regardless of how many times you previously may have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God” (“A Testimony Vibrant and True,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Aug. 2005, 6). President Howard W. Hunter said: “Families are greatly blessed when wise fathers and mothers bring their children about them, read from the pages of the scriptural library together, and then discuss freely the beautiful stories and thoughts according to the understanding of all. Often youth and little ones have amazing insight into and appreciation for the basic literature of religion” (“Reading the Scriptures,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 64). President Ezra Taft Benson said: “Often we spend great effort in trying to increase the activity levels in our stakes. We work diligently to raise the percentages of those attending sacrament meetings. We labor to get a higher percentage of our young men on missions. We strive to improve the numbers of those marrying in the temple. All of these are commendable efforts and important to the growth of the kingdom. But when individual members and families immerse themselves in the scriptures regularly and consistently, these other areas of activity will automatically come. Testimonies will increase. Commitment will be strengthened. Families will be fortified. Personal revelation will flow” (“The Power of the Word,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 81). President Spencer W. Kimball declared: “I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns. I find myself loving more intensely those whom I must love with all my heart and mind and strength, and loving them more, I find it easier to abide their counsel” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 67). President Marion G. Romney said: “I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness” (“The Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 67). President Boyd K. Packer said: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The

study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior” (“Do Not Fear,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2004, 79). Elder David A. Bednar said: “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” (“More Diligent and Concerned at Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 19–20).

7. See [2 Nephi 2:13](#).

8. Linda S. Reeves, “Protection from Pornography—a Christ-Focused Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 16–17.

9. President Howard W. Hunter said: “In that spirit I invite the Latter-day Saints to look to the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of your membership. It is the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church worthy to enter the temple. It would please the Lord if every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend. The things that we must do and not do to be worthy of a temple recommend are the very things that ensure we will be happy as individuals and as families. Let us be a temple-attending people. Attend the temple as frequently as personal circumstances allow. Keep a picture of a temple in your home that your children may see it. Teach them about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Have them plan from their earliest years to go there and to remain worthy of that blessing” (“Exceeding Great and Precious Promises,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 8).

10. See [2 Nephi 2:2](#).

What Latter-day Saint Women Do Best: Stand Strong and Immovable

President Julie B. Beck
Ensign, November 2007



1. My dear sisters, I approach this awesome responsibility with a prayer in my heart. I have a testimony of the true restored gospel of [Jesus Christ](#). The Savior is our leader and exemplar, our rock, our strength, and our advocate.

Any part I can play in helping Him and His ordained prophet is a blessing in my life. I have always had a great love and respect for the sisters of this society, and I believe that the women of this Church are the finest, most capable women in the world. Please know of my love for you—the magnificent women of this Church.

2. President Hinckley said in a worldwide leadership training meeting: “I am convinced there is no other organization anywhere to match the Relief Society of this Church. It has a membership of more than five million women across the earth. If they will be united and speak with one voice, their strength will be incalculable. . . . It is so tremendously important that the women of the Church stand strong and immovable

for that which is correct and proper under the plan of the Lord.”¹

3. I have pondered and studied this inspiring charge, and I have sought answers regarding how the women of this Church could fulfill President Hinckley’s challenge and promise. How can they speak with one voice and stand strong and immovable for those things which are correct and proper? Within the plan of the Lord there are specific things Latter-day Saint women must do because they are daughters of God, chosen to come to the earth at a time which has been called “a very difficult season in the history of the world.”²

4. In order to do our part as women under the Lord’s plan, we must stand strong and immovable in faith, strong and immovable in [family](#), and strong and immovable in relief. We must excel in these three important areas which set us apart as the Lord’s disciples. Through Relief Society we practice being disciples of Christ. We learn what He would have us learn, we do what He would have us do, and we become what He would have us become. When we gather with this focus, the work of Relief Society is relevant whatever your circumstance—whether you are 18 or 88, single or married, have children or not, or whether you live in Bountiful, Utah, or Bangalore, India.

Stand Strong and Immovable in Faith

5. First, Latter-day Saint women must be strong and immovable in their faith. They can and should excel in living and sharing their testimonies of the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. We do this as we:

1. Make and keep covenants with Him.
2. Are worthy and worship in His temples.
3. Study His doctrine in the scriptures and the words of prophets.
4. Qualify for, recognize, and follow the [Holy Ghost](#).
5. Share and defend His gospel.
6. Participate in sincere personal and family prayer.
7. Have family home evening.
8. Live principles of self-reliance and provident living.

6. These are essential things which must be done before nonessential things. These are simple,

indispensable practices that almost seem mundane when we talk about them. However, they are marks of discipleship which have always been foundational for Relief Society sisters. No one can do these things for us—these are personal practices and habits that set us apart as strong and immovable for that which is correct.

7. What a different world and Church this would be if every Latter-day Saint sister excelled at making, renewing, and keeping covenants; if every sister qualified for a temple recommend and worshipped more often in temples; if every sister studied the scriptures and doctrines of Christ and knew them so well that she could teach and defend those doctrines at any time or place. Think of our combined strength if every sister had sincere prayer every morning and night or, better yet, prayed unceasingly as the Lord has commanded. If every family had family prayer daily and had a family home evening once a week, we would be stronger. If every sister was self-reliant enough to be able to give freely of her knowledge, talents, and resources and if every sister’s discipleship was reflected by what she said and what she wore, we would be immovable in that which is correct.

Stand Strong and Immovable in Family

8. Second, Latter-day Saint women must be strong and immovable in family. They can and should do families better than anyone else. We, as disciples of Christ, can and should be the very best in the world at upholding, nourishing, and protecting families. We do this as we:

1. Understand and defend the divine roles of women.
2. Embrace the blessings of the priesthood.
3. Form eternal families.
4. Maintain strong marriages.
5. Bear and rear children.
6. Express love for and nurture family members.
7. Accept responsibility to prepare a righteous rising generation.
8. Know, live, and defend the doctrine of the family.
9. Search out and perform temple ordinances for extended family members.

9. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, every woman in this Church is given the responsibility for upholding,

nurturing, and protecting families. Women have distinct assignments given to them from before the foundation of the world. And as a covenant-keeping Latter-day Saint woman, you know that raising your voice in defense of the doctrine of the family³ is critical to the strength of families the world over.

10. Knowing and defending the divine roles of women is so important in a world where women are bombarded with false messages about their identity. Popular media figures on the radio and television set themselves up as authorities and spokespersons for women. While these media messages may contain elements of truth, most preach a gospel of individual fulfillment and self-worship, often misleading women regarding their true identity and worth. These voices offer a counterfeit happiness, and as a result, many women are miserable, lonely, and confused.

11. The only place Latter-day Saint women will learn the whole and complete truth about their indispensable role in the plan of happiness is in this Church and its doctrine. We know that in the great premortal conflict we sided with our Savior, Jesus Christ, to preserve our potential to belong to eternal families. We know we are daughters of God, and we know what we are to do. Women find true happiness when they understand and delight in their unique role within the plan of salvation. The things women can and should do very best are championed and taught without apology here. We believe in the formation of eternal families. That means we believe in getting married. We know that the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. That means we believe in having children. We have faith that with the Lord's help we can be successful in rearing and teaching children. These are vital responsibilities in the plan of happiness, and when women embrace those roles with all their hearts, they are happy! Knowing and defending the truth about families is the privilege of every sister in this Church.

12. Because families are eternal, we cannot afford to be casual or complacent about those relationships. Much of the great work of this society in the past has been centered in helping Latter-day Saint women strengthen families, with emphasis on improving our nurturing skills—homemaking skills, parenting skills, and marriage skills. Families mean work, but they are our great work—and we are not afraid of work. This is what we do best; no one does families better than the sisters of this Relief Society. We uphold, nourish, and protect them.

Stand Strong and Immovable in Relief

13. Third, Latter-day Saint women must be strong and immovable in relief. We are a Relief Society, and we should be the best women in the world at providing relief. This has been our special province from the beginning. The word relief means “to lift up, lighten.” It means “a raising [up].” “The notion is ‘to raise (someone) out of trouble.’”⁴ Our service and the relief that we offer are a sign that we are the Lord's disciples and we are members of His true restored Church. It is a privilege to be part of this worldwide organization for women, whose name describes what we are meant to do: provide relief.

14. [Joseph Smith](#) said that the women of this Church were organized to provide for “the relief of the poor, the destitute, the widow and the orphan, and for the exercise of all benevolent purposes”⁵ and “not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls.”⁶ That relief effort was further defined by Elder John A. Widtsoe as “relief of poverty, relief of illness, relief of doubt, relief of ignorance—relief of all that hinders the joy and progress of woman.”⁷

15. Notwithstanding the important relief efforts of the past, the greatest and most important work for the women of this Church still lies ahead. The earth must be prepared to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and we must help with this preparation in the midst of wars, turmoil, natural calamities, and an increase of evil. There has not been a time in the history of the world when a full-scale relief effort was more needed. Because we are disciples of Jesus Christ and we have made covenants with Him, we are already committed by covenant to participate in that relief effort.

16. You are each unique and precious. Each of you has your own burdens and challenges, which give you the blessing of turning to the Lord for help. We also have the opportunity to assist the Lord by providing relief for others, which is the greatest, fastest solution to loneliness and hopelessness and a sure way to obtain the companionship of the Spirit. All we need to do to start offering relief is get on our knees and ask, “Who needs my help?” Every sister—married or single, young or old—is needed in this relief effort, and it is what we should do better than anyone else.

Strong and Immovable Leaders

17. Now, some thoughts for you great Relief Society presidencies, who serve so faithfully. You have an exciting responsibility and hold a sacred trust as you carry out the work of Relief Society. Yours is the obligation to help Latter-day Saint women excel in faith, family, and relief. You will help the gospel become a great and compelling interest to the women

of the Church. You will help the women perfect homemaking, parenting, and marriage skills so they can fully live the gospel in their own homes.

18. Every called and set apart Relief Society leader has the right and authority to be guided in fulfilling her inspired assignment to best meet the needs of those she serves.⁸ You will receive the help of the Holy Spirit as you focus on essentials and will be given the courage to forego the frivolous.

19. Every leader knows that families are being hit hard by the storms of this world, storms such as addictions, debt, unfaithfulness, and disobedience. The Savior saw our day as “the beginning of sorrows,”⁹ when many would be deceived. He told of wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences. This describes the world we live in today, and it is essential that the women of this Church take hold of their responsibility to be prepared in all things.

20. As leaders of Relief Society, you can help every sister in every home in every ward and branch become self-reliant. They should be laying up a store of money, food, and skills, which will sustain them and their families in perilous times. The Church has provided you great helps, such as self-reliance pamphlets, to get you started. This is part of your work.

21. You have the privilege to counsel in unity with priesthood leaders to plan a defense and refuge against those storms and tailor a relief effort for the specific needs of your people. The friendship and sociality that make life so much sweeter will be a natural by-product of our efforts. Focusing on relief will always build sociality, whereas focusing on sociality may not always bring relief.

22. When we gather for any purpose under the banner of Relief Society, we must spend our precious time and consecrated funds for the purpose of helping sisters do what we should do best. In our Sunday Relief Society meetings, openings should be brief and invite the Spirit to be with us. We need every possible minute to study the gospel together so we can be best in our responsibilities. All Relief Society conferences, activities, gatherings, and meetings must focus on helping sisters do what they should do best. President Hinckley’s plea to us is:

23. “We have a greater challenge than we realize. ...

24. “... ‘Do the best you can.’ But I want to emphasize that it be the very best. ... We are capable of doing so much better. ...

25. “... We must get on our knees and plead with the Lord for help and strength and direction. We must then stand on our feet and move forward.”¹⁰

26. My dear sisters, our prophet, whom I sustain with all my heart, has said that there is a better way than the way of the world. He has called upon the women of the Church to stand together for righteousness. He has said that if we are united and speak with one voice, our strength will be incalculable. I have expressed to him my confidence that the women of this Church will stand strong and immovable in our faith in Jesus Christ and His restored gospel; strong and immovable in upholding, nourishing, and protecting our families; and strong and immovable in providing relief. May the Lord bless us as we do this most essential work of women is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. “Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.
2. Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.
3. See “The [Family](#): A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
4. See Online Etymology Dictionary, “relief,” “relieve,” www.etymonline.com.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:567.
6. *History of the Church*, 5:25.
7. *Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham, 3 vols. in 1 (1960), 308.
8. See Richard G. Scott, “The Doctrinal Foundation of the Auxiliaries,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 8; see also *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 67.
9. [Matthew 24:8](#); see also [vv. 3–7](#); [1 Timothy 4:1–2](#); [2 Timothy 3:1–5](#).
10. Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 21

Women of Righteousness

Elder M. Russell Ballard
Ensign, April 2002



1. My topic is something that is very close to my heart. I have been married to Sister Ballard for 50 years. The greatest day in my life was the day I met Barbara Bowen. My greatest accomplishment was convincing her that I was the only true and living returned missionary among all of those she was dating. It was a most important day when we were married in the Salt Lake Temple. We are the parents of two sons and five daughters. Perhaps being the father of our five daughters and now the grandfather of 22 granddaughters makes me an expert on the subject of women.

2. As I have considered the days that lie ahead, I believe this message is vital to both men and women.

So I invite the men to prayerfully consider these words: Your lives are significantly influenced by the women who are your wives, your daughters, and your associates with whom you are privileged to work and serve in the Church.

3. Let me set the stage by quoting from a letter sent to Church headquarters. This woman wrote:

4. “I have a wonderful husband and children, whom I love deeply. I love the Lord and His Church more than I can say. I know the Church is true! I realize I shouldn’t feel discouraged about who I am. Yet I have been going through an identity crisis most of my life. I have never dared utter these feelings out loud but have hidden them behind the huge, confident smile I wear to church every week. For years I have doubted if I had any value beyond my roles as a wife and mother. I have feared that men are that they might have joy, but that women are that they might be overlooked. I long to feel that I, as a woman, matter to the Lord.”

5. I would like to respond to the issue that underlies the concern of this faithful woman. Does the Lord respect women? Do women matter to the Lord? The answer is yes—a resounding yes!

6. The Value of Women

7. Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated that “the world’s greatest champion of woman and womanhood is Jesus the Christ” (Jesus the Christ, 3rd ed. [1916], 475). I believe that. The first time the Lord acknowledged Himself to be the Christ, it was to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. He taught her about living water and proclaimed, simply, “I ... am he” ([John 4:26](#)). And it was Martha to whom He proclaimed: “I am the [resurrection](#), and the life. ... And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” ([John 11:25–26](#)).

8. Then, during His greatest agony as He hung on the cross, the Savior reached out to one person—His mother—when in that terrible but glorious moment He asked John the Beloved to care for her as though she were his own (see [John 19:26–27](#)).

9. Of this you may be certain: The Lord especially loves righteous women—women who are not only faithful but filled with faith, women who are optimistic and cheerful because they know who they are and where they are going, women who are striving to live and serve as women of God.

10. There are those who suggest that males are favored of the Lord because they are ordained to hold

the priesthood. Anyone who believes this does not understand the great plan of happiness. The premortal and mortal natures of men and women were specified by God Himself, and it is simply not within His character to diminish the roles and responsibilities of any of His children.

11. As President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained, “The Lord offers to his daughters every spiritual gift and blessing that can be obtained by his sons” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 59; or “Magnifying Our Callings in the Priesthood,” Improvement Era, June 1970, 66). All of us, men and women alike, receive the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#) and are entitled to personal revelation. We may all take upon us the Lord’s name, become sons and daughters of Christ, partake of the ordinances of the temple from which we emerge endowed with power, receive the fulness of the gospel, and achieve exaltation in the celestial kingdom. These spiritual blessings are available to men and women alike, according to their faithfulness and their effort to receive them.

12. The basic doctrinal purpose for the Creation of the earth is to provide for God’s spirit children the continuation of the process of exaltation and eternal life. God said to [Moses](#):

13. “And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them.

14. “And I, God, blessed them, and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” ([Moses 2:27–28](#)).

15. The Church’s proclamation on the [family](#) confirms that God has not revoked or changed this commandment. The First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

16. This doctrine sometimes causes women to ask: “Is a woman’s value dependent exclusively upon her role as a wife and mother?” The answer is simple and obvious: No. Although there is nothing a woman can do that has more far-reaching, eternal impact than to rear her children to walk in righteousness, motherhood and marital status are not the only measures of a woman’s worth. Some women do not have the privilege of marrying or rearing children in this life. Yet if they are worthy, these blessings will

come later. Men and women who do have the privilege of rearing children will of course be held accountable for that priceless, eternal stewardship. Although there is simply not a more significant contribution you can make to society, to the Church, or to the eternal destiny of our Father's children than what you will do as a mother or father, motherhood and fatherhood are not the only measures of goodness or of one's acceptance before the Lord. Every righteous man and woman has a significant role to play in the onward march of the kingdom of God.

17. Concern about Satan's Distortions

18. I have a deep and abiding feeling about women and about the crucial difference they make in every important setting—particularly in the family and in the Church. I have spoken boldly about the role women must play in the council system of the Church (see "Strength in Counsel," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 76). We cannot fulfill our mission as a Church without the inspired insight and support of women.

19. For that reason I am concerned about what I see happening with some of our young women. Satan would have you dress, talk, and behave in unnatural and destructive ways in your relationships with young men. The adversary is having a heyday distorting attitudes about gender and roles and about families and individual worth. He is the author of mass confusion about the value, the role, the contribution, and the unique nature of women. Today's popular culture, which is preached by every form of media from the silver screen to the Internet, celebrates the sexy, saucy, socially aggressive woman. These distortions are seeping into the thinking of some of our own women.

20. My deep desire is to clarify how we in the presiding councils of the Church feel about the sisters of this Church, how our Heavenly Father feels about His daughters, and what He expects of them. My dear sisters, we believe in you. We believe in and are counting on your goodness and your strength, your propensity for virtue and valor, your kindness and courage, your strength and resilience. We believe in your mission as women of God. We realize that you are the emotional (and sometimes spiritual) glue that holds families and often ward families together. We believe that the Church simply will not accomplish what it must without your faith and faithfulness, your innate tendency to put the well-being of others ahead of your own, and your spiritual strength and tenacity. And we believe that God's plan is for you to become queens and to receive the highest blessings any

woman can receive in time or eternity. On the other hand, Satan's plan is to get you so preoccupied with the world's glitzy lie about women that you completely miss what you have come here to do and to become. Remember, he wants us to "be miserable like unto himself" ([2 Ne. 2:27](#)). Never lose your precious identity by doing anything that would jeopardize the promised eternal future your Heavenly Father has provided for you.

21. Young men, lest you get too comfortable while I focus on the women, you have a significant role in all of this. You are sometimes the reason our young women get distracted from their eternal mission here. Let the women in your life know that you want them to be women of God and not women of the world. Of you the Lord expects protection and safety for His daughters. Great will be your remorse if you should steal from anyone her virtue and purity.

22. Women Are Vital to the Lord's Work

23. My earnest plea and prayer is that young men and women will understand that our sisters have always been vital and integral to the work of the Lord. Faithful women have labored valiantly in the cause of truth and righteousness from before the foundations of this world. In his vision of the redemption of the dead, President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) saw not only Father Adam and other prophets but "our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God" ([D&C 138:39](#)).

24. Think about the incomparable role of Eve, whose actions set in motion the great plan of our Father. And what about Mary, the "precious and chosen vessel" ([Alma 7:10](#)) who bore the Christ child? Surely no one would question the contributions made by these majestic women.

25. Our dispensation is not without its heroines. Countless women from every continent and walk of life have made dramatic contributions to the cause of Christ. Consider Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of the martyred prophets Joseph and Hyrum and the grandmother of President Joseph F. Smith. Her resilience and righteousness under the most emotionally and spiritually taxing conditions surely influenced her prophet sons and set them firmly on the path toward fulfilling their foreordained destiny.

26. At this point you may be thinking, "But what about me and my contribution? I'm not Eve or Mary or even Lucy Mack Smith. I'm just regular, plain old me. Is there something about my contribution that is

significant to the Lord? Does He really need me?" Remember, the righteous who are not highly visible are valued too and, in the words of a [Book of Mormon](#) prophet, are "no less serviceable unto the people" ([Alma 48:19](#)).

27. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) responded to that question this way: "Both a righteous man and a righteous woman are a blessing to all those whom their lives touch.

28. "... In the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, ... we are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of us" (My Beloved Sisters [1979], 37).

29. Every sister in this Church who has made covenants with the Lord has a divine mandate to help save souls, to lead the women of the world, to strengthen the homes of Zion, and to build the kingdom of God. Sister Eliza R. Snow (1804–87), the second general president of the Relief Society, said that "every sister in this church should be a preacher of righteousness ... because we have greater and higher privileges than any other females upon the face of the earth" ("Great Indignation Meeting," Deseret Evening News, 15 Jan. 1870, 2).

30. Every sister who stands for truth and righteousness diminishes the influence of evil. Every sister who strengthens and protects her family is doing the work of God. Every sister who lives as a woman of God becomes a beacon for others to follow and plants seeds of righteous influence that will be harvested for decades to come. Every sister who makes and keeps sacred covenants becomes an instrument in the hands of God.

31. The Savior's Example

32. I have been drawn to an interchange between [God the Father](#) and His eldest and Only Begotten Son, who is the ultimate example of living up to one's premortal promises. When God asked who would come to earth to prepare a way for all mankind to be saved and strengthened and blessed, it was [Jesus Christ](#) who said, simply, "Here am I, send me" ([Abr. 3:27](#)).

33. Just as the Savior stepped forward to fulfill His divine responsibilities, we have the challenge and responsibility to do likewise. If you are wondering if you make a difference to the Lord, imagine the impact when you make commitments such as the following:

34. "Father, if You need a woman to rear children in righteousness, here am I, send me."

35. "If You need a woman who will shun vulgarity and dress modestly and speak with dignity and show the world how joyous it is to keep the commandments, here am I, send me."

36. "If You need a woman who can resist the alluring temptations of the world by keeping her eyes fixed on eternity, here am I, send me."

37. "If You need a woman of faithful steadiness, here am I, send me."

38. Between now and the day the Lord comes again, He needs women in every family, in every ward, in every community, in every nation who will step forward in righteousness and say by their words and their actions, "Here am I, send me."

39. My question is, "Will you be one of those women? And will you men who hold the priesthood answer the same call?"

40. Now, I know most of you want to. But how will you do it? How, in a world filled with deceptive messages about women and the family—and the significance of both to the Lord—will you perpetually respond to the Lord, "Here am I, send me"?

41. For those who really want to live up to who you are, for those who at all costs want to repent if necessary and who want to see through Satan's deceptions, I have two suggestions: First, listen to and follow those whom we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. Second, learn to hear the voice of the Spirit, or the voice of the Lord as communicated by the power of the Holy Ghost.

42. Follow the Prophet and the Apostles

43. I cannot stress enough the importance of listening to and following the prophet and the apostles. In today's world, where 24 hours a day the media's talking heads spew forth conflicting opinions, where men and women jockey for everything from your money to your vote, there is one clear, unpolluted, unbiased voice that you can always count on. And that is the voice of the living prophet and the apostles. Their only motive is "the everlasting welfare of your souls" ([2 Ne. 2:30](#)).

44. Think of it! Think about the value of having a source of information that you can always count on, that will always have your eternal interests at heart, and that will always provide inspired truth. That is a phenomenal gift and guide.

45. In November 2000, President Hinckley spoke to youth in a Churchwide fireside (see “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11). Have you young adults studied his message and identified things you need to avoid or do differently? I know a 17-year-old who just prior to the prophet’s talk had pierced her ears a second time. She came home from the fireside, took off the second set of earrings, and said to her parents, “If President Hinckley says we should only wear one set of earrings, that’s good enough for me.”

46. Wearing two pairs of earrings may or may not have eternal consequences for this young woman, but her willingness to obey the prophet will. And if she will obey him now, on something relatively simple, how much easier it will be to follow him when greater issues are at stake.

47. I make you a promise. It is a simple one, but it is true. If you will listen to the living prophet and the apostles and heed our counsel, you will not go astray.

48. Learn to Hear the Voice of the Spirit

49. If you want to avoid the snares of Satan, if you need direction when the choices in front of you are puzzling and perplexing, learn to hear the voice of the Lord as communicated through the Holy Ghost. And then, of course, do what it tells you to do.

50. Nephi taught clearly that the Holy Ghost “is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him” and that “he that diligently seeketh shall find” ([1 Ne. 10:17, 19](#)). The stunning reality, my dear brothers and sisters, is that you control how close you are to the Lord. You determine just how clear and readily available promptings from the Holy Ghost will be. You determine this by your actions, by your attitude, by the choices you make, by the things you watch and wear and listen to and read, and by how consistently and sincerely you invite the Spirit into your life.

51. Contemplate for a moment the extent and the impact of this blessing! You have been given a gift that when exercised and respected will give you the answers to all of the confusing, thorny questions and problems you face in your lives.

52. I can only imagine some of the questions you young women are facing right now. Should you marry the young man you are now dating, or not? Should you finish your degree, or not? Should you serve a mission, or not? What career should you pursue? Why pursue a career with vigor when all you’ve ever really wanted is to be a mother?

53. As life progresses, how will you respond to challenges that will inevitably come? Will you know where to turn for peace and consolation if you are called upon to bury a child—as two of our own children have done—or if a child threatens to stray from the gospel path? How will you know what to do when you face financial reverses? Where will you turn for insight and inspiration when you are called upon to lead in your ward or stake? You young men are facing similar kinds of questions.

54. To all of you there is only one way to safely and confidently meet the obstacles and opportunities that are part of life’s path. First, listen to the prophet and the apostles. Study the principles we teach. Then take those principles to the Lord and ask Him how you should apply them in your life. Ask Him to influence your thoughts, temper your actions, and guide your steps. “Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good” ([Alma 37:37](#)). He will communicate with you through the power and presence of the Holy Ghost.

55. Heed Spiritual Promptings

56. There are several things that greatly enhance our ability to understand the promptings of the Holy Ghost and thereby hear the voice of God.

57. First is fasting and prayer. When the sons of Mosiah were united with Alma the Younger, they rejoiced in their reunion and acknowledged that because “they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting,” they had been gifted with the spirit of prophecy and revelation, “and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God” ([Alma 17:3](#)).

58. Second is immersing yourself in the scriptures. The word of God “will tell you all things what ye should do” ([2 Ne. 32:3](#)). The scriptures are a conduit for personal revelation. Young adults, your generation is much more versed in holy writ than was mine at your age. You have been taught to read and study the scriptures. I urge you to intensify your study of them. I promise that your ability to hear the voice of the Lord as communicated through the Holy Ghost will increase and improve.

59. Third is preparing to spend time in the house of the Lord. When the time appropriately comes for us to go to the temple, we leave the temple “armed with ... power” ([D&C 109:22](#)) and with the promise that as we “grow up” in our knowledge of the Lord, we will “receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost” ([D&C 109:15](#)). The temple is a place of personal revelation. If you are endowed, visit the temple regularly. If you are not,

prepare yourself to enter, for inside the doors of the temple rests the power that will fortify you against the vicissitudes of life.

60. Fourth is listening to the counsel of your father and mother and your spouse. They are wise and experienced. Share with them your fears and concerns. Seek blessings from your father. If for some reason he is not worthy or able, go to your bishop or your stake president. They love you and will count it a privilege to bless your life. If you have not already done so, you should also receive your patriarchal blessing.

61. Fifth is obedience and repentance. There are certain things you simply cannot do if you want to have the Holy Ghost with you. It is not possible to listen to vulgar lyrics, watch movies filled with sexual innuendo, tamper with [pornography](#) on the Internet (or anywhere else, for that matter), take the name of the Lord in vain, wear revealing clothing, compromise in any way the law of chastity, or disregard the values of true manhood and womanhood and expect the Holy Ghost to remain with you. Whenever anyone participates in those kinds of activities, it should not be a surprise if feelings of loneliness, discouragement, and unworthiness follow. Do not make the choice to go it alone rather than have the Spirit of the Lord to guide, to protect, to prompt, to warn, and to fill you with peace. Repent if you need to so you can enjoy the companionship of the Spirit.

62. Women and men who can hear the voice of the Lord, and who respond to those promptings, become invaluable instruments in His hands. I will never forget an experience I had following a stake conference. I was asked to participate in a blessing for a young woman who was suffering with cancer. The family were converts, and they had found peace through the promptings of the Spirit. Prior to our giving the blessing, this dear sister said to me: “Elder Ballard, I am not afraid to die, but I would like to live here with my family. I am prepared to accept the will of my Father in Heaven. Please bless me to find peace and to know that He will be with me.” What faith, insight, and courage the Spirit had blessed her with! A few months later the family advised me that Heavenly Father had called her home. She died in peace, and the family lived in peace because they were familiar with the Spirit. One of the sweetest messages the Spirit will

relay is how the Lord feels about you. And that reassurance will strengthen you in a way that almost nothing else can.

63. Now, finally, I turn again to you dear sisters, you who have such a profound, innate spiritual ability to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. You need never wonder again if you have worth in the sight of the Lord and to the Brethren in the presiding councils of the Church. We love you. We cherish you. We respect you. Never doubt that your influence is absolutely vital to preserving the family and to assisting with the growth and spiritual vitality of the Church. This Church will not reach its foreordained destiny without you. We men simply cannot nurture as you nurture. Most of us don’t have the sensitivity—spiritual and otherwise—that by your eternal nature you inherently have. Your influence on families and with children, with youth, and with men is singular. You are natural-born nurturers. Because of these unusual gifts and talents, you are vital to taking the gospel to all the world, to demonstrating that there is joy in living the way the prophets have counseled us to live.

64. More than ever before we need women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity, as the Relief Society declaration proclaims. We need women who can hear and who will respond to the voice of the Lord, women who at all costs will defend and protect the family. We don’t need women who want to be like men, sound like men, dress like men, drive like some men drive, or act like men. We do need women who rejoice in their womanhood and have a spiritual confirmation of their identity, their value, and their eternal destiny. Above all, we need women who will stand up for truth and righteousness and decry evil at every turn and simply say, “Lord, here am I, send me.”

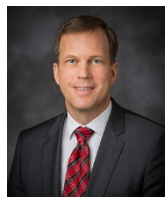
65. I bear my witness and testimony to you that you are precious, that this is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The kingdom of God will roll forward until it fills the entire earth. It is for you to be beacons and banners to the entire world, to show the women and the men of the world there is such a natural disposition in women to do good, and to seek after things of the Spirit.

66. I simply say to you, God bless the women of the Church.

15. Providing for Temporal Needs

Approaching the Throne of God with Confidence

Elder Jörg Klebingat
Ensign, November 2014



1. By applying the Atonement of Jesus Christ, you can begin increasing your spiritual confidence today if you are willing to listen and act.
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your spiritual confidence before God? Do you have a personal witness that your current offering as a Latter-day Saint is sufficient to inherit eternal life? Can you say within yourself that Heavenly Father is pleased with you? What thoughts come to mind if you had a personal interview with your Savior one minute from now? Would sins, regrets, and shortcomings dominate your self-image, or would you simply experience joyful anticipation? Would you meet or avoid His gaze? Would you linger by the door or confidently walk up to Him?
3. Whenever the adversary cannot persuade imperfect yet striving Saints such as you to abandon your belief in a personal and loving God, he employs a vicious campaign to put as much distance as possible between you and God. The adversary knows that faith in Christ—the kind of faith that produces a steady stream of tender mercies and even mighty miracles—goes hand in hand with a personal confidence that you are striving to choose the right. For that reason he will seek access to your heart to tell you lies—lies that Heavenly Father is disappointed in you, that the Atonement is beyond your reach, that there is no point in even trying, that everyone else is better than you, that you are unworthy, and a thousand variations of that same evil theme.
4. As long as you allow these voices to chisel away at your soul, you can't approach the throne of God with real confidence. Whatever you do, whatever you pray for, whatever hopes for a miracle you may have, there will always be just enough self-doubt chipping away at your faith—not only your faith in God but also your confidence in yourself. Living the gospel in this manner is no fun, nor is it very healthy. Above all, it is completely unnecessary! The decision to change is yours—and yours alone.
5. I would like to share six practical suggestions that, if heeded, will dissipate these evil voices and restore to you the kind of peaceful assurance and spiritual confidence that is yours to have if you only want it.

Regardless of the rating you gave yourself on that 1-to-10 scale, by applying the Atonement of [Jesus Christ](#), you can begin increasing your spiritual confidence today if you are willing to listen and act. I will speak boldly, hoping to edify and not to offend.

1. Take responsibility for your own spiritual well-being. Stop blaming others or your circumstances, stop justifying, and stop making excuses for why you may not be fully striving to be obedient. Accept that you are “free according to the flesh” and “free to choose liberty and eternal life” ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)). The Lord knows your circumstances perfectly, but He also knows perfectly well whether you simply choose not to fully live the gospel. If that is the case, be honest enough to admit it, and strive to be perfect within your own sphere of circumstances. Spiritual confidence increases when you take responsibility for your own spiritual well-being by applying the Atonement of Jesus Christ daily.
2. Take responsibility for your own physical well-being. Your soul consists of your body and spirit (see [D&C 88:15](#)). Feeding the spirit while neglecting the body, which is a temple, usually leads to spiritual dissonance and lowered self-esteem. If you are out of shape, if you are uncomfortable in your own body and can do something about it, then do it! Elder Russell M. Nelson has taught that we should “regard our body as a temple of our very own” and that we should “control our diet and exercise for physical fitness” (“We Are Children of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 87; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 103).
6. President Boyd K. Packer has taught “that our spirit and our body are combined in such a way that our body becomes an instrument of our mind and the foundation of our character” (“The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character” [Church Educational System fireside, Feb. 2, 2003], 2; [speeches.byu.edu](#)). Therefore, please use good judgment in what and especially how much you eat, and regularly give your body the exercise it needs and deserves. If you are physically able, decide today to be the master of your own house and begin a regular, long-term exercise program, suited to your abilities, combined with a healthier diet. Spiritual confidence increases when your spirit, with the help of the Savior, is truly in charge of your natural man or woman.
3. Embrace voluntary, wholehearted obedience as part of your life. Acknowledge that you cannot love

God without also loving His commandments. The Savior's standard is clear and simple: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)). Selective obedience brings selective blessings, and choosing something bad over something worse is still choosing wrong. You can't watch a bad movie and expect to feel virtuous because you did not watch a very bad one. Faithful observance of some commandments doesn't justify neglecting others. Abraham Lincoln rightly said, "When I do good I feel good, when I do bad I feel bad" (in William H. Herndon and Jesse William Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, 3 vols. [1889], 3:439).

7. Also, do the right things for the right reasons. The Lord, who "requireth the heart and a willing mind" ([D&C 64:34](#)) and who "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" ([D&C 33:1](#)), knows why you go to church—whether you are present in body only or truly worshipping. You can't sing on Sunday, "O Babylon, O Babylon, [I] bid thee farewell" and then seek or tolerate its company again moments later ("Ye Elders of Israel," Hymns, no. 319). Remember that casualness in spiritual matters never was happiness. Make the Church and the restored gospel your whole life, not just a part of your outward or social life. Choosing this day whom you will serve is lip service only—until you actually live accordingly (see [Joshua 24:15](#)). Spiritual confidence increases when you are truly striving, for the right reasons, to live a consecrated life in spite of your imperfections!

4. Become really, really good at repenting thoroughly and quickly. Because the Atonement of Jesus Christ is very practical, you should apply it generously 24/7, for it never runs out. Embrace the Atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance as things that are to be welcomed and applied daily according to the Great Physician's orders. Establish an attitude of ongoing, happy, joyful repentance by making it your lifestyle of choice. In doing so, beware of the temptation to procrastinate, and don't expect the world to cheer you on. Keeping your eyes on the Savior, care more about what He thinks of you, and let the consequences follow. Spiritual confidence increases when you voluntarily and joyfully repent of sins, both small and great, in real time by applying the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

5. Become really, really good at forgiving. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" ([D&C 64:10](#)). Forgive everyone, everything, all the time, or at least strive to do so, thus allowing [forgiveness](#) into

your own life. Don't hold grudges, don't be easily offended, forgive and forget quickly, and don't ever think that you are exempt from this commandment. Spiritual confidence increases when you know that the Lord knows that you bear no ill feelings toward another soul.

6. Accept trials, setbacks, and "surprises" as part of your mortal experience. Remember that you are here to be proved and tested, "to see if [you] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [your] God shall command [you]" ([Abraham 3:25](#))—and may I just add, "under all circumstances." Millions of your brothers and sisters have been or are being thus tested, so why would you be exempt? Some trials come through your own disobedience or negligence. Other trials come because of the negligence of others or simply because this is a fallen world. When these trials come, the adversary's minions begin broadcasting that you did something wrong, that this is a punishment, a sign that Heavenly Father does not love you. Ignore that! Instead, try to force a smile, gaze heavenward, and say, "I understand, Lord. I know what this is. A time to prove myself, isn't it?" Then partner with Him to endure well to the end. Spiritual confidence increases when you accept that "often trials and tribulations are allowed to come into [your life] because of what [you] are doing right" (Glenn L. Pace, "Crying with the Saints" [Brigham Young University devotional, Dec. 13, 1987], [2;speeches.byu.edu](#)).

8. While presiding over the Ukraine Kyiv Mission, I once asked one of my most faithful sisters why she was always so hard on herself, why she was always beating herself up over the smallest things. Her answer was a classic example of someone listening to the wrong voice as she replied, "So no one can beat me to it."

9. Brothers and sisters, my counsel to this sister missionary is my counsel to you: acknowledge and face your weaknesses, but don't be immobilized by them, because some of them will be your companions until you depart this earth life. No matter what your current status, the very moment you voluntarily choose honest, joyful, daily repentance by striving to simply do and be your very best, the Savior's Atonement envelops and follows you, as it were, wherever you go. Living in this manner, you can truly "always retain a remission of your sins" ([Mosiah 4:12](#)) every hour of every day, every second of every minute, and thus be fully clean and acceptable before God all the time.

10. Yours is the privilege, if you want it, to come to know for yourself, today or soon, that you are pleasing God in spite of your shortcomings. I testify of a loving Savior who expects us to live the commandments. I testify of a loving Savior who is so very anxious to bestow His grace and mercy. I testify of a loving Savior who rejoices when we apply His Atonement daily with the calm and happy assurance that we are facing in the right direction. I testify of a loving Savior who is anxious for your “confidence [to] wax strong in the presence of God” ([D&C 121:45](#)). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Earthly Debts, Heavenly Debts

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Ensign, May 2004



1. My beloved brethren and sisters, what a glorious event it is to attend conference. We find that the words spoken are words of inspiration, and it's a joy to be present.

2. I would like to talk about our heavenly debts and earthly debts. The Gospels record that nearly everywhere the Savior went, He was surrounded by multitudes of people. Some hoped that He would heal them; others came to hear Him speak. Others came for practical advice. Toward the end of His mortal ministry, some came to mock and ridicule Him and to clamor for His crucifixion.

3. One day a man approached the Savior and asked Him to intervene in a [family](#) dispute. “Master, speak to my brother,” he pleaded, “that he divide the inheritance with me.”

4. The Savior refused to take sides on this issue, but He did teach an important lesson. “Beware of covetousness,” He told him, “for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” [1](#)

5. Brothers and sisters, beware of covetousness. It is one of the great afflictions of these latter days. It creates greed and resentment. Often it leads to bondage, heartbreak, and crushing, grinding debt.

6. The number of marriages that have been shattered over money issues is staggering. The amount of heartbreak is great. The stress that comes from worry over money has burdened families, caused sickness, depression, and even premature death.

Earthly Debts

7. In spite of the teachings of the Church from its earliest days until today, members sometimes fall victim to many unwise and foolish financial practices. Some continue to spend, thinking that somehow the money will become available. Somehow they will survive.

8. Far too often, the money hoped for does not appear.

9. Remember this: debt is a form of bondage. It is a financial termite. When we make purchases on credit, they give us only an illusion of prosperity. We think we own things, but the reality is, our things own us.

10. Some debt—such as for a modest home, expenses for education, perhaps for a needed first car—may be necessary. But never should we enter into financial bondage through consumer debt without carefully weighing the costs.

11. We have often heard that interest is a good servant but a terrible master. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. described it this way: “Interest never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation. ... Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away from it; you cannot dismiss it; it yields neither to entreaties, demands, or orders; and whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you.” [2](#)

12. The counsel from other inspired prophets in our time on this subject is clear, and what was true 50 or 150 years ago is also true today.

13. President Heber J. Grant said, “From my earliest recollections, from the days of Brigham Young until now, I have listened to men standing in the pulpit ... urging the people not to run into debt; and I believe that the great majority of all our troubles today is caused through the failure to carry out that counsel.” [3](#)

14. President Ezra Taft Benson said, “Do not leave yourself or your family unprotected against financial storms. ... Build up savings.” [4](#)

15. President Harold B. Lee taught, “Not only should we teach men to get out of debt but we should teach them likewise to stay out of debt.” [5](#)

16. President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “Many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings. ...

17. “... I urge you to be modest in your expenditures; discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid debt to the extent possible. Pay off debt as

quickly as you can, and free yourselves from bondage.” [6](#)

18. My brothers and sisters, many have heeded this prophetic counsel. They live within their means, they honor the debts they have incurred, and they strive to reduce the burden they owe to others. We congratulate those who are doing so, for the day will come when they will reap the blessings of their efforts and understand the value of this inspired counsel.

19. However, others struggle when it comes to finances. Some are victims of adverse and often unforeseen events that have financially damaged them. Others are in financial bondage because they have not learned to discipline themselves and control their impulses to spend. Consequently, they have made unwise financial choices.

20. May I suggest five key steps to financial freedom for your consideration.

21. First, pay your [tithing](#). Do you want the windows of heaven opened to you? Do you wish to receive blessings so great there is not room enough to receive them? [7](#) Always pay your tithing and leave the outcome in the hands of the Lord.

22. Obedience to God’s commandments is the foundation for a happy life. Surely we will be blessed with the gifts of heaven for our obedience. Failure to pay tithing by those who know the principle can lead to heartache in this life and perhaps sorrow in the next.

23. Second, spend less than you earn. This is simple counsel but a powerful secret for financial happiness. All too often a family’s spending is governed more by their yearning than by their earning. They somehow believe that their life will be better if they surround themselves with an abundance of things. All too often all they are left with is avoidable anxiety and distress.

24. Those who live safely within their means know how much money comes in each month, and even though it is difficult, they discipline themselves to spend less than that amount.

25. Credit is so easy to obtain. In fact, it is almost thrust upon us. Those who use credit cards to overspend unwisely should consider eliminating them. It is much better that a plastic credit card should perish than a family dwindle and perish in debt.

26. Third, learn to save. Remember the lesson of Joseph of Egypt. During times of prosperity, save up for a day of want. [8](#)

27. Too often, people assume that they probably never will be injured, get sick, lose their jobs, or see their investments evaporate. To make matters worse, often people make purchases today based upon optimistic predictions of what they hope will happen tomorrow.

28. The wise understand the importance of saving today for a rainy day tomorrow. They have adequate insurance that will provide for them in case of illness or death. Where possible, they store a year’s supply of food, water, and other basic necessities of life. They set aside money in savings and investment accounts. They work diligently to reduce the debt they owe to others and strive to become debt free.

29. Brothers and sisters, the preparations you make today may one day be to you as the stored food was to the Egyptians and to Joseph’s father’s family.

30. Fourth, honor your financial obligations. From time to time, we hear stories of greed and selfishness that strike us with great sorrow. We hear of fraud, defaulting on loan commitments, financial deceptions, and bankruptcies.

31. We hear of fathers who financially neglect their own families. We say to men and women everywhere, if you bring children into the world, it is your solemn obligation to do all within your power to provide for them. No man is fit to be called a man who gathers around himself cars, boats, and other possessions while neglecting the sacred financial obligations he has to his own wife and children.

32. We are a people of integrity. We believe in honoring our debts and being honest in our dealings with our fellow men.

33. Let me tell you the story of one man who sacrificed greatly to maintain his own financial integrity and honor.

34. In the 1930s Fred Snowberger opened the doors of a new pharmacy in northeastern Oregon. It had been his dream to own his own business, but the economic turnaround he had hoped for never materialized. Eight months later, Fred closed the doors of his pharmacy for the last time.

35. Even though his business had failed, Fred was determined to repay the loan he had secured. Some wondered why he insisted on repaying the debt. Why didn’t he simply declare bankruptcy and have the debt legally forgiven?

36. But Fred did not listen. He had said he would repay the loan, and he was determined to honor his

word. His family made many of their own clothes, grew much of their food in their garden, and used everything they had until it was thoroughly worn out or used up. Rain or shine, Fred walked to and from his work each day. And every month, Fred paid what he could on the loan.

37. Years passed and finally the wonderful day arrived when Fred made the last payment. He delivered it in person. The man who had loaned him the money wept and with tears streaming down his face, said, “You not only paid back every penny, but you taught me what a man of character and honesty is.”

38. To this day, nearly 70 years after Fred signed his name to that note, descendants of Fred and Erma Snowberger still tell this story with pride. This act of honor and nobility has lived through the decades as a cherished example of family integrity.

39. Fifth, teach your children to follow your example. Too many of our youth get into financial difficulty because they never learned proper principles of financial common sense at home. Teach your children while they are young. Teach them that they cannot have something merely because they want it. Teach them the principles of hard work, frugality, and saving.

40. If you don’t consider yourself informed well enough to teach them, all the more reason for you to begin learning. Abundant resources are available—from classes, to books, to other resources.

41. There are those among us who have been blessed abundantly with enough and to spare. Our Heavenly Father expects that we do more with our riches than build larger barns to hold them. Will you consider what more you can do to build the kingdom of God? Will you consider what more you can do to bless the lives of others and bring light and hope into their lives?

Heavenly Debts

42. We have spoken of earthly debts and our duty to repay them. But there are other debts—debts more eternal in nature—that are not so easy to repay. In fact, we will never be able to repay some of them. These are heavenly debts.

43. Our mothers and fathers gave us life and brought us into this world. They gave us the opportunity to obtain mortal bodies and experience the joys and sorrows of this bounteous earth. In many cases, they set their own dreams and desires aside for the sake of their children. How fitting it is that we honor them

and show by word and deed our love for them and our [gratitude](#).

44. We also have a great debt to our ancestors who have preceded us and who wait beyond the veil for those ordinances that will allow them to continue their eternal progression. This is a debt we can repay for them in our temples.

45. What a debt we owe to the Lord for restoring His divine Church and true gospel in these latter-days through the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#). From his youth until his Martyrdom, he devoted his days to bringing to mankind the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) that had been lost. We owe our deepest gratitude to him and to all men in this sacred calling who have been given the mantle to preside over His Church.

46. How can we ever repay the debt we owe to the Savior? He paid a debt He did not owe to free us from a debt we can never pay. Because of Him, we will live forever. Because of His infinite Atonement, our sins can be swept away, allowing us to experience the greatest of all the gifts of God: eternal life. [9](#)

47. Can such a gift have a price? Can we ever make compensation for such a gift? The [Book of Mormon](#) prophet King Benjamin taught “that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess ... [and] serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.” [10](#)

48. We have earthly debts and heavenly debts. Let us be wise in dealing with each of them and ever keep in mind the words of the Savior. The scriptures tell us, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” [11](#) The riches of this world are as dust compared to the riches that await the faithful in the mansions of our Heavenly Father. How foolish is he who spends his days in the pursuit of things that rust and fade away. How wise is he who spends his days in the pursuit of eternal life.

49. Know within your hearts that Jesus the Christ lives. Be at peace, for as you draw near to Him, He will draw near to you. Let not your hearts be weary, but rejoice. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel is restored once again. The heavens are not sealed. As in ancient days, we have a man who communicates with the Infinite. A prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, walks the earth in our day and at this time. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. [Luke 12:13, 15.](#)
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1938, 103.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 3.
4. Pay Thy Debt, and Live ... , Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (28 Feb. 1962), 10.
5. The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1996), 315.
6. "To the Boys and to the Men," Liahona, Jan. 1999, 65–66; Liahona, Nov. 1998, 53–54.
7. See [Mal. 3:10](#).
8. See [Gen. 41:47–57](#).
9. See [D&C 14:7](#).
10. [Mosiah 2:20–21](#).
11. [Matt. 6:19–20](#).

Power Tools For Family Finances

Ensign, June 2009

1. The First Presidency has counseled: "Pay off debt as quickly as you can, and free yourselves from this bondage" (All Is Safely Gathered In: [Family](#) Finances, 2). But how do you do that when your financial house is shaky and you seem to spend all your time and energy just trying to hold it together?

2. Here's how one couple might tackle the challenge using some simple but powerful tools available to everyone. "Ruth" and "Elliot" are a composite of many real couples who have used these tools successfully. They have a mortgage balance of \$223,345, credit card and retail store debt totaling \$8,456, and an \$11,465 car loan. They currently spend \$25,836 per year on debt payments. Paying off their debts at the current rate will take 25 years. Tired of the strain of juggling bills and feeling no control over their situation, they turn to their bishop, who suggests they visit www.providentliving.org.

3. First, Ruth and Elliot use the chart on page 7 of One for the Money (see fig. 1) to create a family budget. In the process, they see expenses that could be eliminated, such as the money Elliot spends each day on soft drinks and snacks at work. They quickly identify \$100 per month that could be better spent.

BUDGET FOR _____		
(Month/Year)		
INCOME	PLANNED	ACTUAL
Wages/Salaries (after taxes)		
Other income		
Total income		
EXPENSES	PLANNED	ACTUAL
Church donations		
Savings		
Food		
Mortgage or rent		
Utilities		
Transportation		
Debt payments		
Insurance		
Medical		
Clothing		
School expenses		
Other		
Total expenses		
Income less expenses		

4. Next, they enter current debt information into the How Soon Could I Pay off All My Debts? calculator (see fig. 2). It shows how funds that are freed up when one debt is repaid can be used to pay down remaining debt. The results are dramatic. Without paying one dollar more per month, they could pay off all their debts in 15 years, 10 years sooner than they would have otherwise (assuming their income remains stable and they incur no additional debt).

Current Debt Information					
	Creditor	Balance	Minimum Payment	Actual Payment	Interest Rate
Debt-1	Mortgage	\$223,345	\$1,514	\$1,514	6.5%
Debt-2	Credit Card 1	\$4,146	\$165	\$165	22.15%
Debt-3	Credit Card 2	\$1,490	\$62	\$62	18.2%
Debt-4	Retail Credit	\$2,820	\$77	\$77	22.6%
Debt-5	Auto Loan	\$11,465	\$335	\$335	4.9%
Debt-6	Creditor 6	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.0%
Debt-7	Creditor 7	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.0%
Additional Debt Payments					
Extra monthly payment		\$100			
One-time payment		\$0	January	2009	
Assumptions					
Debt ordering		Highest to Lowest Interest Rate			
Interest earned on new savings		5.0%			

5. Using the same calculator, they now add that \$100 per month of misspent money as an extra monthly payment. The result: they will be able to pay off all debt (mortgage included) in just under 14 years. This cuts an additional year off their payoff time. They

would save 11 years of payments and \$209,392 in interest.

6. Now Ruth and Elliot wonder: When they no longer have debt payments to make, what would happen if they put the equivalent into savings and added that \$1,200 per year of misspent money? To find out, they use the How Much Could I Have If I Saved Regularly? calculator (see fig. 3). Here they enter savings goals based on reasonable assumptions.

Savings and Assumptions	
Current age	35
Age when income should start	65
Number of years to receive income	20
Current savings balance (\$)	0
Annual savings amount (\$)	0
Annual savings increase (%)	0%
Before-tax return on savings (%)	8% ?
Marginal tax bracket (%)	25% ?

7. What they find both shocks and motivates them. They realize that they will not only save 11 years of debt repayment and \$209,392 in interest paid, but could have \$429,060 in the bank at the end of the originally scheduled 25-year repayment plan.

8. Ruth and Elliot may be fictitious, but their situation is reality for many. Details will differ. Some people earn more money, some earn less. Some owe much more money, some people owe much less. No matter. These concepts and tools have universal application.

9. To access these financial tools online, go to providentliving.org or ensign.lds.org.

The False Gods We Worship

By President Spencer W. Kimball

Ensign, June 1976



1. I have heard that the sense most closely associated with memory is the sense of smell. If this is true, then perhaps it explains the many pleasing feelings that overtake me these mornings when I am able to step outdoors for a few moments and breathe in the warm and comfortable aromas that I have come to associate over the years with the soil and vegetation of this good earth.

2. Now and then, when the moment is right, some particular scent—perhaps only the green grass, or the

smell of sage brought from a distance by a breeze—will take me back to the days of my youth in Arizona. It was an arid country, yet it was fruitful under the hands of determined laborers.

3. We worked with the land and the cattle in all kinds of weather, and when we traveled it was on horseback or in open wagons or carriages, mostly. I used to run like the wind with my brothers and sisters through the orchards, down the dusty lanes, past rows of corn, red tomatoes, onions, squash. Because of this, I suppose it is natural to think that in those days we were closer to elemental life.

4. Some time ago I chanced to walk outdoors when the dark and massive clouds of an early afternoon thunderstorm were gathering; and as the large raindrops began to drum the dusty soil with increasing rapidity, I recalled the occasional summer afternoons when I was a boy when the tremendous thunderheads would gather over the hills and bring welcome rain to the thirsty soil of the valley floor. We children would run for the shed, and while the lightning danced about we would sit and watch, transfixed, marveling at the ever-increasing power of the pounding rainfall. Afterward, the air would be clean and cool and filled with the sweet smells of the soil, the trees, and the plants of the garden.

5. There were evenings those many years ago, at about sunset, when I would walk in with the cows. Stopping by a tired old fence post, I would sometimes just stand silently in the mellow light and the fragrance of sunflowers and ask myself, “If you were going to create a world, what would it be like?” Now with a little thought the answer seems so natural: “Just like this one.”

6. So on this day while I stood watching the thunderstorm, I felt—and I feel now—that this is a marvelous earth on which we find ourselves: and when I thought of our preparations for the United States Bicentennial celebration I felt a deep [gratitude](#) to the Lord for the choice land and the people and institutions of America. There is much that is good in this land, and much to love.

7. Nevertheless, on this occasion of so many pleasant memories another impression assailed my thoughts. The dark and threatening clouds that hung so low over the valley seemed to force my mind back to a theme that the Brethren have concerned themselves with for many years now—indeed a theme that has often occupied the attention of the Lord’s chosen prophets since the world began. I am speaking of the general state of wickedness in which we seem to find the

world in these perilous yet crucially momentous days; and thinking of this, I am reminded of the general principle that where much is given, much is expected. (See [Luke 12:48](#).)

8. The Lord gave us a choice world and expects righteousness and obedience to his commandments in return. But when I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened. Iniquity seems to abound. The Destroyer seems to be taking full advantage of the time remaining to him in this, the great day of his power. Evil seems about to engulf us like a great wave, and we feel that truly we are living in conditions similar to those in the days of Noah before the Flood.

9. I have traveled much in various assignments over the years, and when I pass through the lovely countryside or fly over the vast and beautiful expanses of our globe, I compare these beauties with many of the dark and miserable practices of men, and I have the feeling that the good earth can hardly bear our presence upon it. I recall the occasion when Enoch heard the earth mourn, saying, “Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me?” ([Moses 7:48](#).)

10. The Brethren constantly cry out against that which is intolerable in the sight of the Lord: against pollution of mind, body, and our surroundings; against vulgarity, stealing, lying, pride, and blasphemy; against fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and all other abuses of the sacred power to create; against murder and all that is like unto it; against all manner of desecration.

11. That such a cry should be necessary among a people so blessed is amazing to me. And that such things should be found even among the Saints to some degree is scarcely believable, for these are a people who are in possession of many gifts of the Spirit, who have knowledge that puts the eternities into perspective, who have been shown the way to eternal life.

12. Sadly, however, we find that to be shown the way is not necessarily to walk in it, and many have not been able to continue in faith. These have submitted themselves in one degree or another to the enticings of Satan and his servants and joined with those of “the world” in lives of ever-deepening idolatry.

13. I use the word idolatry intentionally. As I study ancient scripture, I am more and more convinced that there is significance in the fact that the commandment “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is the first of the [Ten Commandments](#).

14. Few men have ever knowingly and deliberately chosen to reject God and his blessings. Rather, we learn from the scriptures that because the exercise of faith has always appeared to be more difficult than relying on things more immediately at hand, carnal man has tended to transfer his trust in God to material things. Therefore, in all ages when men have fallen under the power of Satan and lost the faith, they have put in its place a hope in the “arm of flesh” and in “gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know” ([Dan. 5:23](#))—that is, in idols. This I find to be a dominant theme in the Old Testament. Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.

15. It is my firm belief that when we read these scriptures and try to “liken them unto [our]selves,” as Nephi suggested ([1 Ne. 19:24](#)), we will see many parallels between the ancient worship of graven images and behavioral patterns in our very own experience.

16. The Lord has blessed us as a people with a prosperity unequaled 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—to further the missionary effort and the genealogical and temple work; to raise our children up as fruitful servants unto the Lord; to bless others in every way, that they may also be fruitful. Instead, we expend these blessings on our own desires, and as Moroni said, “Ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick

and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not.” ([Morm. 8:39](#).)

17. As the Lord himself said in our day, “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.” ([D&C 1:16](#); italics added.)

18. One man I know of was called to a position of service in the Church, but he felt that he couldn’t accept because his investments required more attention and more of his time than he could spare for the Lord’s work. He left the service of the Lord in search of Mammon, and he is a millionaire today.

19. But I recently learned an interesting fact: If a man owns a million dollars worth of gold at today’s prices, he possesses approximately one 27-billionth of all the gold that is present in the earth’s thin crust alone. This is an amount so small in proportion as to be inconceivable to the mind of man. But there is more to this: The Lord who created and has power over all the earth created many other earths as well, even “worlds without number” ([Moses 1:33](#)); and when this man received the oath and covenant of the priesthood ([D&C 84:33–44](#)), he received a promise from the Lord of “all that my Father hath” ([D&C 84:38](#)). To set aside all these great promises in favor of a chest of gold and a sense of carnal security is a mistake in perspective of colossal proportions. To think that he has settled for so little is a saddening and pitiful prospect indeed; the souls of men are far more precious than this.

20. One young man, when called on a mission, replied that he didn’t have much talent for that kind of thing. What he was good at was keeping his powerful new automobile in top condition. He enjoyed the sense of power and acceleration, and when he was driving, the continual motion gave him the illusion that he was really getting somewhere.

21. All along, his father had been content with saying, “He likes to do things with his hands. That’s good enough for him.”

22. Good enough for a son of God? This young man didn’t realize that the power of his automobile is infinitesimally small in comparison with the power of the sea, or of the sun; and there are many suns, all controlled by law and by priesthood, ultimately—a priesthood power that he could have been developing

in the service of the Lord. He settled for a pitiful god, a composite of steel and rubber and shiny chrome.

23. An older couple retired from the world of work and also, in effect, from the Church. They purchased a pickup truck and camper and, separating themselves from all obligations, set out to see the world and simply enjoy what little they had accumulated the rest of their days. They had no time for the temple, were too busy for genealogical research and for missionary service. He lost contact with his high priests quorum and was not home enough to work on his personal history. Their experience and leadership were sorely needed in their branch, but, unable to “endure to the end,” they were not available.

24. I am reminded of an article I read some years ago about a group of men who had gone to the jungles to capture monkeys. They tried a number of different things to catch the monkeys, including nets. But finding that the nets could injure such small creatures, they finally came upon an ingenious solution. They built a large number of small boxes, and in the top of each they bored a hole just large enough for a monkey to get his hand into. They then set these boxes out under the trees and in each one they put a nut that the monkeys were particularly fond of.

25. When the men left, the monkeys began to come down from the trees and examine the boxes. Finding that there were nuts to be had, they reached into the boxes to get them. But when a monkey would try to withdraw his hand with the nut, he could not get his hand out of the box because his little fist, with the nut inside, was now too large.

26. At about this time, the men would come out of the underbrush and converge on the monkeys. And here is the curious thing: When the monkeys saw the men coming, they would shriek and scramble about with the thought of escaping; but as easy as it would have been, they would not let go of the nut so that they could withdraw their hands from the boxes and thus escape. The men captured them easily.

27. And so it often seems to be with people, having such a firm grasp on things of the world—that which is telestial—that no amount of urging and no degree of emergency can persuade them to let go in favor of that which is celestial. Satan gets them in his grip easily. If we insist on spending all our time and resources building up for ourselves a worldly kingdom, that is exactly what we will inherit.

28. In spite of our delight in defining ourselves as modern, and our tendency to think we possess a

sophistication that no people in the past ever had—in spite of these things, we are, on the whole, an idolatrous people—a condition most repugnant to the Lord.

29. We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become anti enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching:

30. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

31. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” ([Matt. 5:44–45.](#))

32. We forget that if we are righteous the Lord will either not suffer our enemies to come upon us—and this is the special promise to the inhabitants of the land of the Americas (see [2 Ne. 1:7](#))—or he will fight our battles for us ([Ex. 14:14](#); [D&C 98:37](#), to name only two references of many). This he is able to do, for as he said at the time of his betrayal, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” ([Matt. 26:53.](#)) We can imagine what fearsome soldiers they would be. King Jehoshaphat and his people were delivered by such a troop (see [2 Chr. 20](#)), and when Elisha’s life was threatened, he comforted his servant by saying, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” ([2 Kgs. 6:16](#)). The Lord then opened the eyes of the servant, “And he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” ([2 Kgs. 6:17.](#))

33. Enoch, too, was a man of great faith who would not be distracted from his duties by the enemy: “And so great was the faith of Enoch, that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch.” ([Moses 7:13.](#))

34. What are we to fear when the Lord is with us? Can we not take the Lord at his word and exercise a particle of faith in him? Our assignment is affirmative: to forsake the things of the world as ends in themselves; to leave off idolatry and press forward in faith; to carry the gospel to our enemies, that they might no longer be our enemies.

35. We must leave off the worship of modern-day idols and a reliance on the “arm of flesh,” for the Lord has said to all the world in our day, “I will not spare any that remain in Babylon.” ([D&C 64:24.](#))

36. When Peter preached such a message as this to the people on the day of Pentecost, many of them “were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” ([Acts 2:37.](#))

37. And Peter answered: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of [Jesus Christ](#) for the remission of sins, and ... receive the [Holy Ghost.](#)” ([Acts 2:38.](#))

38. As we near the year 2,000, our message is the same as that which Peter gave. And further, that which the Lord himself gave “unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear:

39. “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh.” ([D&C 1:11–12.](#))

40. We believe that the way for each person and each [family](#) to prepare as the Lord has directed is to begin to exercise greater faith, to repent, and to enter into the work of his kingdom on earth, which is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It may seem a little difficult at first, but when a person begins to catch a vision of the true work, when he begins to see something of eternity in its true perspective, the blessings begin to far outweigh the cost of leaving “the world” behind.

41. Herein lies the only true happiness, and therefore we invite and welcome all men, everywhere, to join in this work. For those who are determined to serve the Lord at all costs, this is the way to eternal life. All else is but a means to that end

Two Principles For Any Economy

Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Ensign, November 2009



1. In our travels visiting Church members throughout the world and by means of established priesthood channels, we receive firsthand feedback on the conditions and challenges of our members. For years

many of our members have been affected by worldwide disasters, both natural and man-made. We also understand that families have had to tighten their belts and are concerned about enduring these challenging times.

2. Brethren, we do feel very close to you. We love you, and we pray always for you. I have seen enough ups and downs throughout my life to know that winter will surely give way to the warmth and hope of a new spring. I am optimistic about the future. Brethren, for our part, we must remain steadfast in hope, work with all our strength, and trust in God.

3. Lately I have been thinking of a time in my life when the weight of worry and concern over an uncertain future seemed ever present. I was 11 years old and living with my [family](#) in the attic of a farmhouse near Frankfurt, Germany. We were refugees for the second time in a period of only a few years, and we were struggling to establish ourselves in a new place far away from our previous home. I could say that we were poor, but that would be an understatement. We all slept in one room that was so tiny there was scarcely space to walk around the beds. In the other small room, we had a few pieces of modest furniture and a stove that Mother used to cook meals on. To get from one room to the other, we had to pass through a storage area where the farmer kept his equipment and tools, along with assorted meats and sausages hanging from the rafters. The aroma always made me very hungry. We had no bathroom, but we did have an outhouse—down the stairs and some 50 feet (15 m) away, though it seemed much farther during wintertime.

4. Because I was a refugee and because of my East German accent, other children often made fun of me and called me names that deeply hurt. Of all the times of my youth, I believe this may have been the most discouraging.

5. Now, decades later, I can look back on those days through the softening filter of experience. Even though I still remember the hurt and despair, I can see now what I was unable to see then: this was a period of great personal growth. During this time, our family bonded together. I watched and learned from my parents. I admired their determination and optimism.

From them I learned that adversity, when confronted with faith, courage, and tenacity, could be overcome.

6. Knowing that some of you are experiencing your own periods of anxiety and despair, I wanted to speak today about two important principles that sustained me through this formative period of my life.

The First Principle: Work

7. To this day, I am deeply impressed by the way my family worked after having lost everything following World War II! I remember my father—a civil servant by education and experience—taking on several difficult jobs, among which were coal miner, uranium miner, mechanic, and truck driver. He left early in the morning and often returned late at night in order to support our family. My mother started a laundry and worked countless hours doing menial labor. She enlisted my sister and me in her business. With my bike I became the pickup and delivery service. It felt good to be able to help the family in a small way, and though I did not know it at the time, the physical labor turned out to be a blessing to my health as well.

8. It wasn't easy, but the work kept us from dwelling too much on the difficulties of our circumstances. Although our situation didn't change overnight, it did change. That's the thing about work. If we simply keep at it—steady and constant—things certainly will improve.

9. How I admire men, women, and children who know how to work! How the Lord loves the laborer! He said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," [1](#) and "The laborer is worthy of his hire." [2](#) He also gave a promise: "Thrust in your sickle with all your soul, and your sins are forgiven you." [3](#) Those who are unafraid to roll up their sleeves and lose themselves in the pursuit of worthwhile goals are a blessing to their families, communities, nations, and to the Church.

10. The Lord doesn't expect us to work harder than we are able. He doesn't (nor should we) compare our efforts to those of others. Our Heavenly Father asks only that we do the best we can—that we work according to our full capacity, however great or small that may be.

11. Work is an antidote for anxiety, an ointment for sorrow, and a doorway to possibility. Whatever our circumstances in life, my dear brethren, let us do the best we can and cultivate a reputation for excellence in all that we do. Let us set our minds and bodies to the glorious opportunity for work that each new day presents.

12. When our wagon gets stuck in the mud, God is much more likely to assist the man who gets out to push than the man who merely raises his voice in prayer—no matter how eloquent the oration. President Thomas S. Monson put it this way: “It is not enough to want to make the effort and to say we’ll make the effort. ... It’s in the doing, not just the thinking, that we accomplish our goals. If we constantly put our goals off, we will never see them fulfilled.” [4](#)

13. Work can be ennobling and fulfilling, but remember Jacob’s warning not to “spend ... your labor for that which cannot satisfy.” [5](#) If we devote ourselves to the pursuit of worldly wealth and the glitter of public recognition at the expense of our families and our spiritual growth, we will discover soon enough that we have made a fool’s bargain. The righteous work we do within the walls of our homes is most sacred; its benefits are eternal in nature. It cannot be delegated. It is the foundation of our work as priesthood holders.

14. Remember, we are only temporary travelers in this world. Let us not devote our God-given talents and energies solely to setting earthly anchors, but rather let us spend our days growing spiritual wings. For, as sons of the Most High God, we were created to soar unto new horizons.

15. Now, a word to us seasoned brethren: retirement is not part of the Lord’s plan of happiness. There is no sabbatical or retirement program from priesthood responsibilities—regardless of age or physical capacity. While the phrase “been there, done that” may work as an excuse to avoid skateboarding, decline the invitation for a motorbike ride, or bypass the spicy curry at the buffet, it is not an acceptable excuse for avoiding covenant responsibilities to consecrate our time, talents, and resources in the work of the kingdom of God.

16. There may be those who, after many years of Church service, believe they are entitled to a period of rest while others pull the weight. To put it bluntly, brethren, this sort of thinking is unworthy of a disciple of Christ. A great part of our work on this earth is to endure joyfully to the end—every day of our life.

17. Now, a word also to our younger brethren of the Melchizedek Priesthood, who are pursuing the righteous goals of obtaining an education and finding an eternal spouse. These are the correct goals, my brethren, but remember: working diligently in the Lord’s vineyard will greatly upgrade your résumé and increase the probability for success in both of these worthy endeavors.

18. Whether you are the youngest deacon or the oldest high priest, there is work to do!

The Second Principle: Learn

19. During the difficult economic conditions of postwar Germany, opportunities for education were not as abundant as they are today. But in spite of limited options, I always felt an eagerness to learn. I remember one day, while I was out on my bike delivering laundry, I entered the home of a classmate of mine. In one of the rooms, two small desks were nestled against the wall. What a wonderful sight that was! How fortunate those children were to have desks of their own! I could imagine them sitting with open books studying their lessons and doing their homework. It seemed to me that having a desk of my own would be the most wonderful thing in the world.

20. I had to wait a long time before that wish was fulfilled. Years later, I got a job at a research institution that had a large library. I remember spending much of my free time in that library. There I could finally sit at a desk—by myself—and drink in the information and knowledge that books provide. How I loved to read and learn! In those days I understood firsthand the words of an old saying: Education is not so much the filling of a bucket as the lighting of a fire.

21. For members of the Church, education is not merely a good idea—it’s a commandment. We are to learn “of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad.” [6](#)

22. [Joseph Smith](#) loved learning even though he had few opportunities for formal education. In his journals, he spoke happily of days spent in study and often expressed his love of learning. [7](#)

23. Joseph taught the Saints that knowledge was a necessary part of our mortal journey, for “a man is saved no faster than he [gains] knowledge,” [8](#) and that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain ... in this life, it will rise with us in the [resurrection](#).” [9](#) During challenging times, it is even more important to learn. The Prophet Joseph taught, “Knowledge does away with darkness, [anxiety], and doubt; for these cannot exist where knowledge is.” [10](#)

24. Brethren, you have a duty to learn as much as you can. Please encourage your families, your quorum members, everyone to learn and become better educated. If formal education is not available, do not allow that to prevent you from acquiring all the

knowledge you can. Under such circumstances, the best books, in a sense, can become your “university”—a classroom that is always open and admits all who apply. Strive to increase your knowledge of all that is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy.” [11](#) Seek knowledge “by study and also by faith.” [12](#) Seek with a humble spirit and contrite heart. [13](#) As you apply the spiritual dimension of faith to your study—even of temporal things—you can amplify your intellectual capacity, for “if your eye be single to [God’s] glory, your whole [body] shall be filled with light, ... and [comprehend] all things.” [14](#)

25. In our learning, let us not neglect the fountain of revelation. The scriptures and the words of modern-day apostles and prophets are the sources of wisdom, divine knowledge, and personal revelation to help us find answers to all the challenges in life. Let us learn of Christ; let us seek out that knowledge which leads to peace, truth, and the sublime mysteries of eternity. [15](#)

Conclusion

26. Brethren, I think back on that 11-year-old boy in Frankfurt, Germany, who worried about his future and felt the lasting sting of unkind remarks. I remember this time with a sort of sad fondness. While I would not be eager to relive those days of trial and trouble, I

have little doubt that the lessons I learned were a necessary preparation for future opportunity. Now, many years later, I know this for a certainty: it is often in the trial of adversity that we learn those most critical lessons that form our character and shape our destiny.

27. I pray that during the coming months and years we can fill our hours and days with righteous work. I pray that we will seek to learn and improve our minds and hearts by drinking deeply from the pure fountains of truth. I leave you my love and blessings in the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

1. [Genesis 3:19](#).
2. [D&C 84:79](#).
3. [D&C 31:5](#).
4. Thomas S. Monson, “A Royal Priesthood,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 59.
5. [2 Nephi 9:51](#).
6. See [D&C 88:79–80](#).
7. See *Journals*, Volume 1: 1832–1839, vol. 1 of the *Journals* series of The Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (2008), 84, 135, 164.
8. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:588.
9. See [D&C 130:18–19](#).
10. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:340.
11. [Articles of Faith 1:13](#).
12. [D&C 109:7](#).
13. See [D&C 136:33](#).
14. [D&C 88:67](#).
15. See [D&C 42:61](#).

16. Promoting and Defending the Family

How We Lost The Plot

Elder Bruce C. Hafen
2005



1. I have watched the universal marriage plot unravel over the last thirty years, as our society has experienced what some observers now call the “collapse of marriage.” Writer Maggie Gallagher believes this pattern is “destroying American society” by creating fatherless homes and increasing single-parent families and births outside wedlock. These conditions all damage children’s health, their psychological development, their social behavior, and their personal happiness. The ripple effects from so much personal harm then devastate the entire society. And yet, she notes, “we have refused to act, taking . . . bizarre comfort in the [new] belief that . . . marriage is ultimately a private matter, and therefore we can do

nothing as a society to prevent its collapse.” ¹

2. How did it come to this, that most people now see marriage—once widely perceived as the core structure of society—as “ultimately a private matter” that, being private, may now be beyond society’s ability to repair? Looking back, we can now see that changes in United States divorce laws and attitudes about marriage in the 1960s and 70s were really part of a much larger historical change that moved many Americans to care more about their self-interest than about the interest of their families and communities.

3. Some of those changes will be explored a bit further in Part III, but consider here a few headlines about five trends that have contributed to the confusion that almost unconsciously perplexes us today about modern marriage attitudes—individual rights, no-fault divorce, same-gender marriage, the interest of others in our marriages, and optimism and pessimism as defining attitudes.

Individual Rights and the “Liberation”

Movements

4. The individual rights causes that date back to the 1960s began with a compelling need to eliminate racial discrimination, which had become a shameful blot on the nation's conscience. This original civil rights movement was followed by an important women's rights movement that eliminated much unfair gender-based discrimination. But before long, some extremist critics went far beyond these much-needed movements, using "rights" language to challenge many laws and customs that had long supported traditional family relationships.

5. For example, a noted advocate of individual rights said in 1978 that he feared any kind of "domination" by one person over another. So he argued that American law should liberate "the child—and the adult—from the shackles of . . . family" commitments. In that way, "individual rights" attitudes began to challenge one spouse's right to keep a marriage together and parents' right to raise children as they thought best, claiming that traditional family ties interfered with the individual's right to be "free" from the demands or needs of other people, even in the family.² To these advocates, the right to be free was simply more important than the right to be together, because being expected to stay together seemed to them like bondage.

6. One illustration of how individual rights ideas influenced traditional family law was the famous 1973 abortion case, *Roe v. Wade*.³ There the Supreme Court removed the historic right of state legislatures to say when a woman could choose an elective abortion. *Roe* gave that choice to individual women, rejecting long-held beliefs in our culture about the rights of the unborn child and society's right to define when life begins.

7. Building on such individualistic theories, some advocates of extremist radical feminism have more recently attacked the very concept of marriage, insisting that traditional ideas confine mothers and other women to stereotypes of subordination and oppression.

8. Some court and legislative decisions also began to give individual rights priority over traditionally structured families. These included cases granting parental rights to unwed fathers, or giving child custody and adoption rights to people who lived in unmarried cohabitation or homosexual relationships. These decisions helped develop the legal theories that would one day support the more extreme idea of gay marriage.

9. Until the 1970s and 80s, American courts would never have awarded child custody to parents living in such "alternative lifestyles," unless the circumstances allowed no reasonable option. Nearly all of our judges and legislators had long believed that such custody awards were contrary to children's interests—verified by "several decades of social science evidence which strongly indicates that children do best when raised by a mother and a father."⁴ That's why children born out of wedlock were considered "illegitimate," and social agencies tried to place them in two-parent homes. But as a more permissive cultural climate accelerated the momentum of ever-expanding personal rights, more and more judges allowed claims of adult personal liberty to trump children's interests.

10. When the liberation movements first started, I wondered if a children's rights movement would follow the civil rights and women's movements. Children had long enjoyed such "rights" as being entitled to a public education, parental protection, and protection against abuse. But soon the "kiddie libbers" began to urge children's liberation from any kind of "discrimination" based only on their age—even if that discrimination was designed for children's own (or society's) protection, like age limits for driving a car, drinking alcohol, or voting.

11. For example, I recall explaining in 1972 to our politically alert seven-year-old son that he was too young to vote in the upcoming national election between Nixon and McGovern. He was quite indignant, pointing out, "Hey, I know a lot more about the issues than Grandma and Grandpa do!" He did feel discriminated against—though he has since changed his view about when young people should be old enough to vote.

12. Since those days, American laws about "liberating children" have changed only somewhat, but many adults still came to favor "leaving children alone," often to the point of abandoning children to their "rights" to make their own lifestyle choices—everything from writing obscenities in the school newspaper to being sexually active. In 1989 the United Nations adopted a new Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the United States Senate still has not ratified, although most other nations have now accepted it.

13. According to a UN document, this charter was designed "to protect children from the power of parents" and other adults in children's decision-making about their own lives.⁵

14. In a summary of how individualistic attitudes

have changed American family law, professor Janet Dolgin says our society has now moved from an “outdated” world in which attitudes about women and children were “founded in a hierarchical ideology” to “an egalitarian ideology that presumes the autonomy of the individual in a world of contract.”⁶ Our laws thus increasingly recognizes a “right to be let alone,” even in a family. We will see more about this “world of contract” when we compare legalistic “contractual” attitudes toward marriage with more spiritually based “covenant” attitudes (see chapter 7).

15. Professor Dolgin realizes that her new vision of family life leaves spouses and children “without a sense of ultimate responsibility within, and toward, any social group.”⁷ She also senses that the new spirit of individual freedom is unable to “anchor people in a social order that encourages responsible connection.”⁸ But in the world she describes, the priority of personal liberty remains, eroding our interdependence within families and leaving people unsure whether the natural bonds between spouses, parents, and children are valuable ties that bind or are sheer bondage.

No-Fault Divorce

16. I graduated from law school just before California passed the nation’s first no-fault divorce law in 1968. That law tried to ease the pain of divorce, partly by creating new legal standards and partly by making divorce seem more acceptable. Then, like a fire raging out of control, this movement swept the country until it became easier to end a marriage in America than in any other nation—and the United States still has the world’s highest divorce rate.⁹ The wind that fanned that social prairie fire was individual rights theory.

17. Prior to 1968, someone who wanted a divorce had to prove in court that his or her spouse had engaged in real misconduct, such as abandoning the family, adultery, or aggravated mental cruelty.

18. It wasn’t enough just to show that both spouses wanted to end the marriage, because marriage was not understood as simply a private agreement between two people. Rather, people saw marriage as a social institution that played the crucial role of rearing children and teaching all family members to obey unenforceable but vital moral and social obligations. When a truly “broken home” fell apart, society picked up the pieces and covered the costs. Theoretically, only a judge, who represented society’s and children’s interests, could determine if a troubled marriage met the standards for divorce.

19. These traditional divorce laws created strong incentives for couples to stay together and work out their problems; however, the old laws did have limits. Some people felt hopelessly stuck in miserable marriages, which aroused public sympathy, especially when no young children were involved. Women caught in messy divorces were often disadvantaged by economic inequalities that left them dependent on their former husbands for financial support. Many divorcing couples fabricated claims of abandonment and adultery to satisfy strict legal standards. The search for “fault” also increased the bitterness in already bitter disputes.

20. Some family law scholars thought this untidy situation wasn’t so bad, because the old divorce laws were written strictly enough to keep the conservatives happy and enforced flexibly enough to keep the liberals happy. Nonetheless, California’s 1968 no-fault law tried to remedy the problems by removing any requirement to prove misconduct on the part of either spouse. It also added a new, no-fault basis for divorce—irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, regardless of who or what caused it.

21. In theory, family court judges still represented society’s interests in deciding whether a marriage was, in fact, shattered beyond repair. The new law never intended to let spouses end their relationship simply as a matter of personal choice. And it certainly never intended that one party alone could just announce a marital breakdown and walk away. In practice, however, no-fault judges soon found themselves simply unable or unwilling to impose their judgment about “marriage breakdown” against the will of the partners—or, eventually, even one partner—who had decided he or she wanted to get out of the marriage.

22. No-fault reform ultimately took on a life of its own. Blending in with the anti-authority mood of the 1960s, the movement gradually altered how society viewed the very nature of marriage.

23. No-fault divorce was the first family law that no longer “looked at marriage . . . as an institution” that held parents and children together. Rather, the reformers came to view marriage as “an essentially private relationship between adults terminable at the will of either”¹⁰ and with no one feeling much responsibility for the way a “termination” would affect other people, especially children.

24. This interpretation led to a fundamental change in attitude, sending married people the signal that, because their marriage was not society’s business, no

one had a right to expect the marriage partners to keep striving when their marriage ran into turbulence. It wasn't long, then, until judges' doubts about society's right to enforce wedding vows gave some couples the false impression that those promises held no great social or moral value.

Same-Gender Marriage

25. In July 2003, the United States Supreme Court overturned a Texas law that made it a crime for unmarried homosexual people to have sexual relations.¹¹ Five months later the Massachusetts Supreme Court, in a 4–3 vote, cited that precedent in concluding that the state could not constitutionally deny gay and lesbian couples the right to marry.¹² As recently as fifteen years earlier, no American court or legislature—in fact, no country in the world—had ever been willing to take same-gender marriage so seriously.

26. With visible support from the Church in the early 1990s, the citizens of Hawaii, Alaska, and California all adopted public initiatives that explicitly opposed same-gender marriages. Eleven other states joined this list in November 2004. The legislatures of more than thirty other states have enacted similar legislation. Still, a few European countries and the state of Vermont have recently authorized same-gender “domestic partnerships” that confer many legal benefits of marriage. By 2005 only Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain allowed gay “marriage,” but a similar proposal was pending in Canada.

27. The current American tensions over same-gender marriage may not be resolved without amending the United States Constitution. On July 7, 2004, the First Presidency issued a statement that “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints favors a constitutional amendment preserving marriage as the lawful union of a man and a woman.”

28. The dramatic 2003 cases were but the latest steps in an evolution in judicial reasoning that had long been gaining momentum. As described further in chapter 24 (of Elder Hafen's book), the radical “personal autonomy” theory behind the gay marriage case logically extends the same individualistic legal concept that created no-fault divorce in the 1960s. When the law upholds the individual's right to end a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as happened with no-fault divorce), that principle can also seem to uphold the individual's right to start a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as with same-gender marriage). That is how today's national debate on gay marriage is conceptually linked to no-

fault divorce.

29. These ideas have clear implications for traditional marriage. When one believes that starting or ending a marriage is just a personal choice, one is less likely to think of one's own marriage as a serious social or moral obligation. Without even realizing why they assume and expect what they do, some people therefore feel less committed to making their marriages work and more willing to walk away when they're not getting what they want.

30. Same-gender marriage also alters society's judgment about preserving the best home environment for raising children. Once a couple of the same gender is entitled to a legal marriage, a family court would have more difficulty denying them the right to raise children. Until now, we collectively believed that, whenever possible, children should be raised by both a father and mother.

31. As recently as 2004, for example, a twelve-judge federal appeals court upheld the constitutionality of a 1977 Florida law that forbids homosexual parents from adopting a child. The law was based on the state legislature's finding that children are better off in homes that have a mother and father.¹³

32. This pattern made allowance for such obvious exceptions as the death of a parent or a divorce. But until recent years, our experience-based beliefs about the best interests of children would never have allowed a single person to adopt a child, much less simply make a trip to a sperm bank. Swept along by the currents of individual liberation, however, many judges are now simply unwilling to make judgments about the best moral and developmental home atmosphere for children.

The Interests of Others in Our Marriage

33. The changes in recent decades have portrayed marriage as an individual adult choice, rather than as a crucial knot in the very fabric that holds society together. We have increasingly lost sight of how much every marriage, and every divorce, affects other people—especially children.

34. American writer Wendell Berry once described why relatives and friends come so gladly to wedding receptions. These happy gatherings have the feel of a community event—because that's what they are: “Marriage [is] not just a bond between two people but a bond between those two people and their forebears, their children, and their neighbors.” Therefore, Berry continues: “Lovers must not . . . live for themselves alone. . . . They say their vows to the community as

much as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well, on their behalf and on its own. It gathers around them because it understands how necessary, how joyful, and how fearful this joining is. These lovers . . . are giving themselves away, and they are joined by this as no law or contract could ever join them. Lovers, then, 'die' into their union with one another as a soul 'dies' into its union with God. . . . If the community cannot protect this giving, it can protect nothing. . . . It is the fundamental connection without which nothing holds, and trust is its necessity."14

35. Picture the community silently saying to the new couple, "We need your marriage to succeed - for our sake!" And picture the new couple silently saying to the community, "We need your support to help us succeed - for our sake!"

36. Most people in the past understood Berry's insight enough to know that shattered families would damage children and parents and thus destabilize society. That's why G. K. Chesterton once remarked that we should "regard a system that produces many divorces as we do a system that drives men to drown or shoot themselves."15

37. The need to protect children from this kind of harm was traditionally the basis for the idea that marriage is a social institution, not just a private partnership—because "marriage brings into being an organization to serve interests beyond those of [the husband and wife]" such as those of "the children of that marriage, the extended family," and society at large. "Marriage is the principal institution for raising children. . . . If it is undermined, children will suffer and are suffering. In the end, society and the state will be afflicted and are being afflicted."16

38. When divorce and illegitimacy rates began climbing in the 1970s, scholars argued about whether these trends would harm children. In more recent years, a flood of evidence has demonstrated the psychic and social harm of severe family disruption (see chapter 21). Primarily because of these findings, in 2000 a diverse group of leaders and scholars created a new, grass-roots "marriage movement."17 President Bush's 2003 initiative to strengthen marriage drew directly from this movement. Partly through their efforts, partly because of an increased age at first marriage,18 and partly because many of today's "children of divorce" want a different life for their children from the life their parents gave them, today's divorce rate has declined slightly from its historic high a decade ago.19 Even so, the current

United States divorce rate would have been dismissed as impossible had it been predicted during the mid-1960s when Marie and I were married.

39. As the children of the divorce culture now look at their own marriage prospects, the family trauma many of them personally endured has shaken their confidence in traditional family assumptions. This "relationship revolution" has changed "the whole language and concept of marriage. Where 1950s couples spoke of sacrifice, loyalty, unconditional love and hard work in marriage, those values have [now] become unfashionable." Today's unmarried live-in couples are "here for a good time, not for a long time." Yet, as psychologist Hugh McKay put it, this anti-marriage revolution destroys the motivation to "hang on and work it out." If marriage seems "too easy, and easy to get out of, maybe you never break through to a rock solid commitment."20

Optimism and Pessimism as Defining Attitudes

40. Ironically, many of today's undercommitted American couples still dream of "a big wedding," symbolizing their longing for the certainty of permanent ties. Some families risk bankruptcy just to throw a massive wedding party, and many of these weddings are second and third marriages. Said one news story, "here comes the bride—again and again."21

41. This reference to big weddings and a longing for permanence introduces an odd paradox about today's confusion: Just when their families have never seemed less lovable, many people today hunger for eternal family love. The public resonates to movies and books that develop the theme that love can outlast death.

42. For example, in the 1999 movie *What Dreams May Come*, a character played by Robin Williams dies in an accident and then joyously finds his family in a dazzlingly colorful "heaven" but only after going through a very ugly "hell" to save his wife.

43. The concluding scene of the popular musical *Les Misérables* reinforces a similar hope. In a moving depiction of life and love after death, Fantine returns in a white dress from beyond the veil to welcome the dying Jean Val Jean to her heavenly presence.

44. Mitch Albom's best-selling book *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* explores how death lets us find explanations for life's mysteries from the people whose lives most deeply touched us in mortality including, above all, our families.

45. Others have also documented this modern hunger

for a heaven where people live forever with those they love. For instance, two scholars writing a history about the idea of heaven in Western society found that most Americans today believe not only in a life after death but that family life should continue beyond the grave. This popular belief persists, they said, even though churches other than the LDS Church offer little insight about the subject.²²

46. For Latter-day Saints, of course, the dream of an eternal family is a natural as breathing. A few years ago our six-year-old granddaughter was with her family as they drove by an LDS temple one evening. The temple grounds were beautifully lit, symbolically and actually chasing away the dark night. As the car stopped, she looked at the shining temple and said, “When I get bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and BIGGER . . . I’m going to get married in the temple.” Her dream makes us all want to stretch to be big enough for blessings so large.

47. At first it could seem contradictory that people today would yearn to take their family ties to heaven when so many of their own families are in disarray. In his book *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah reported that many Americans have shifted their view of marriage from that of a relatively permanent social institution to a temporary source of personal fulfillment. So when marriage commitments intrude on people’s preferences and convenience, they tend to walk away. Yet, ironically and significantly, Bellah also found that most of the people he interviewed still cling, perhaps in a hopelessly dreamy sense, to the nostalgic notion of marriage based upon loving and permanent commitments as “the dominant American ideal.”²³

48. Perhaps this modern “longing to belong”²⁴ is not really in spite of today’s widespread family decay but because of the decay. Sometimes we don’t appreciate life’s sweetest gifts until we no longer have them or we seriously fear losing them. Nobody really wants to be lonely, but the lifestyles associated with today’s frenzied search for “individual freedom” often lead, unsurprisingly, to loneliness. And the search to transcend loneliness is a theme of modern life. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said that the laughter of the world is just a lonely crowd trying to reassure itself.²⁵

49. Research on current American attitudes toward family life further illustrates the difference between what people accept and what they wish for. People today are more tolerant than previous generations about the lifestyle choices others make. Yet, in spite of this new tolerance, most people still don’t believe

that everything they tolerate is a wise choice. One survey found that “while there were marked shifts toward permitting previously [socially prohibited] behavior, there were no significant shifts toward believing that remaining single, getting divorced, not having children, or reversing gender roles were positive goals to be achieved. . . . [T]he vast majority of Americans still value marriage, parenthood, and family life. . . . [W]hat has changed [is] an increased tolerance for behavior not previously accepted, but not an increase in the active embracement of such behavior.”²⁶

50. James Q. Wilson said of such data: “Half [of] us approve of other people’s daughters having children out of wedlock, but hardly any of us approve of that for our daughters.” In today’s “widening tension between tolerance and belief,” we “don’t wish to be ‘judgmental,’ unless [we are judging] something we care about, [like] the well-being of the people we cherish.”²⁷

51. Despite society’s increased tolerance for behavior once considered immoral, most people today—paradoxically—do still long deeply for permanent, loving marriages in their own lives.

52. Yet despite those private hopes, the cultural changes of the last generation have also created a widespread pessimism about binding commitments. Such pessimism collides with the popular personal dream of family fulfillment, and that very pessimism is one of the biggest obstacles to fulfilling the dream.

53. In earlier years, most people worked hard to reach high ideals, such as stable marriage, even when they didn’t achieve their hopes “except at the high points of their lives.” And in those days, the ideals still served as “signposts pointing the way for man’s endless striving,”²⁸ even in the presence of common human weaknesses.

54. Striving is a crucial word when the subject is marriage. Marriage, like religious faith, is no more satisfying than we are willing—striving—to make it. William James said: “Belief and doubt are living attitudes, and involve conduct on our part.” If you are climbing a mountain and must jump a chasm to survive, you must “have faith that you can successfully make [the leap. For if you do,] your feet are nerved to its accomplishment. But mistrust yourself . . . and you will hesitate so long that . . . all unstrung and trembling . . . you roll into the abyss. . . . Refuse to believe, and you shall indeed be right, for you shall . . . perish. But believe, and again you shall be right. . . . You make one . . . of two possible

universes true by your trust or mistrust. [Thus] optimism and pessimism are definitions of the world, [and often we create the kind of world we live in because] our faith beforehand in an uncertified result is the only thing that makes the result come true.”²⁹

55. This principle applies to marriage with uncommon force. Whether we “strive” to make the marriage work may be the most important ingredient in whether it does work. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, marriage is never easy:

56. “Happiness does not come by pressing a button. . . It must be earned. . .” One comes to realize very soon after the marriage that the spouse has weaknesses not previously revealed or discovered. The virtues which were constantly magnified during courtship now grow relatively smaller, and the weaknesses that seemed so small and insignificant during courtship now grow to sizeable proportions. . . The habits of years now show themselves. . .

57. “Often there is an unwillingness to settle down and to assume the heavy responsibilities that immediately are there. . .

58. “[Still,] while marriage is difficult, and discordant and frustrated marriages are common, yet real, lasting happiness is possible, and marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive. This is within the reach of every couple, every person . . . if both are willing to pay the price.”³⁰

59. Because this is a true principle, the survivability, the happiness, even the “exultant ecstasy” that is possible in a marriage may depend—more than it depends on any other single thing—on whether spouses (and their family and community) expect their marriage to succeed.

60. Most ordinary people, despite their disappointments, are still willing to believe that marriage can, or at least ought to, work. But as the pessimistic strains of modern culture stir their doubts, more and more people are losing the confidence they need to make their dream possible by their conduct. Then their own doubts will confirm that they were right.

61. As a silver lining to these modern clouds of confusion, the changing attitudes of the last thirty years may at least help us appreciate the clarity and power of the gospel’s teachings about marriage more than we did when society supported our assumptions. In this world of bewildering lifestyles and compromised commitments, the gospel is our surest

hope for gaining the perspective and the discipline we need to fill our heart’s longing for the fullness that marriage can provide.

Notes

- Gallagher, Abolition of Marriage, 4. See generally Waite and Gallagher, Case for Marriage.
 Tribe, American Constitutional Law, sections 988-89.
 Roe v. Wade, United States, 1973.
 Schlesinger, “How Gay Marriage Thrust Two Outsiders onto Center Stage.”
 Quoted in Hafen and Hafen, “Abandoning Children to Their Autonomy,” 450.
 Dolgin, “Family in Transition,” 1519, 1520. 7. Ibid., 1570.
 8. Ibid., 1571. v
 “The trend towards getting married later has helped reduce the nationwide [United States] divorce rate from 4.7 per 1,000 people in 1990 to 4 in 2001. However, the figure still dwarfs the European Union’s rate of 1.9.” Ward, “South Finds Families That Pray Together May Not Stay Together,” 3.
 Moir, “New Class of Disadvantaged Children,” 63.
 Lawrence v. Texas, United States, 2003.
 Goodridge et al. v. Department of Public Health et al., Massachusetts, 2003.
 “Court Upholds Ban on Same-Sex Adoptions,” 23 July 2004, citing worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp. The United States Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from this decision.
 Biskupic, “Ban on Adoption by Gays Left Intact.”
 Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community, 125, 137 39; italics added.
 Chesterton, “Superstition of Divorce,” Collected Works, 4:239.
 Moir, “New Class of Disadvantaged Children,” 63 n. 2, 65; italics omitted.
 For a brief historical summary of the movement and for a statement of its goals as of 2004, see What Next for the Marriage Movement? www.americanvalues.org.
 Heaton, “Factors Contributing to Increasing Marital Stability in the United States,” 392–409.
 Gallagher, “What Marriage Is For,” 22.
 Stuart, “Three Weddings and a Contract,” 22.
 Saulny, “Here Comes the Bride, Again.”
 McDannel and Lang, Heaven, 308.
 Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, 86.
 See Hafen and Hafen, Belonging Heart, 3-20.
 See Hafen, Disciple’s Life, 528.
 Thornton, “Changing Attitudes,” 873, 891.
 Wilson, Marriage Problem, 4–5.
 Schneider, “Moral Discourse and the Transformation of Family Law,” 1803, 1860; italics added.
 James, Essays on Faith and Morals, 23–28.
 Kimball, Marriage and Divorce, 12–16; italics added; or “Marriage and Divorce” (address); see also Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 305. President Gordon B. Hinckley has similarly said, “There is no greater happiness than is found in the most meaningful of all human relationships the companionships of husband and wife and parents and children.” “Marriage That Endures,” 4.

Let Our Voices Be Heard

M. Russell Ballard

Ensign, November 2003



1. The fall of the year is when television airs its season premieres and introduces its new shows. A friend told me that there are 37 new TV series being inaugurated this fall. As he has read the reviews, he has found few if any of them that he would want his children to watch. Most of the sitcoms, dramas, and reality shows contain immorality, violence, and subtle ridicule of traditional values and traditional families. Each year the new shows seem to get worse, pushing the envelope of what the public will accept. What comes out of Hollywood, off the Internet, and in much of today's music creates a web of decadence that can trap our children and endanger all of us.

2. Church leaders have the responsibility to speak out on moral issues and to counsel individuals and families. The [family](#) is the basic unit of society; it is the basic unit of eternity. Thus, when forces threaten the family, Church leaders must respond.

3. The family is at the heart of Heavenly Father's plan because we are all part of His family and because mortality is our opportunity to form our own families and to assume the role of parents. It is within our families that we learn unconditional love, which can come to us and draw us very close to God's love. It is within families that values are taught and character is built. Father and mother are callings from which we will never be released, and there is no more important stewardship than the responsibility we have for God's spirit children who come into our families.

4. Within this context of the preeminent importance of families and the threats families face today, it is not surprising that the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles used strong words in the proclamation to the world on families: "We warn that individuals ... 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." ¹ One such prophet was Malachi, who admonished parents to turn their hearts to their children and children to their parents, lest the whole earth be cursed (see [Mal. 4:6](#)).

5. To these warnings, ancient as the Old Testament and current as the proclamation on the family, I add my own voice of warning, specifically concerning today's media and the powerful negative effect it can have on families and on family life.

6. Because of its sheer size, media today presents vast and sharply contrasting options. Opposite from its harmful and permissive side, media offers much that is positive and productive. Television offers history channels, discovery channels, education channels. One can still find movies and TV comedies and dramas that entertain and uplift and accurately depict the consequences of right and wrong. The Internet can be a fabulous tool of information and communication, and there is an unlimited supply of good music in the world. Thus our biggest challenge is to choose wisely what we listen to and what we watch.

7. As the prophet Lehi said, because of Christ and His Atonement, we are "free forever, knowing good from evil," able to act for ourselves rather than be acted upon, "free to choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death" ([2 Ne. 2:26-27](#)).

8. The choices we make in media can be symbolic of the choices we make in life. Choosing the trendy, the titillating, the tawdry in the TV programs or movies we watch can cause us to end up, if we're not careful, choosing the same things in the lives we live.

9. If we do not make good choices, the media can devastate our families and pull our children away from the narrow gospel path. In the virtual reality and the perceived reality of large and small screens, family-destructive viewpoints and behavior are regularly portrayed as pleasurable, as stylish, as exciting, and as normal. Often media's most devastating attacks on family are not direct or frontal or openly immoral. Intelligent evil is too cunning for that, knowing that most people still profess belief in family and in traditional values. Rather the attacks are subtle and a moral—issues of right and wrong don't even come up. Immorality and sexual innuendo are everywhere, causing some to believe that because everyone is doing it, it must be all right. This pernicious evil is not out in the street somewhere; it is coming right into our homes, right into the heart of our families.

10. To be strong and happy, families need to be nourished by the truths depicted in the thirteenth article of faith—by a belief "in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men." [[A of F 1:13](#)] Gratefully, there are many like-minded men and women of all cultures and faiths who also seek that which is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy."

11. But we live in the "perilous times" to which the Apostle Paul referred when he warned about our day as one when "men shall be lovers of their own selves,

covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, ... false accusers, ... despisers of those that are good, ... heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” ([2 Tim. 3:1-4](#)).

12. Conspiring men and women, intent on gain rather than goodness, “stir up the people” to “all manner of ... wickedness” (see [Alma 11:20](#)), preventing the noble uses to which the media could be employed.

13. The new morality preached from the media’s pulpit is nothing more than the old immorality. It attacks religion. It undermines the family. It turns virtue into vice and vice into virtue. It assaults the senses and batters the soul with messages and images that are neither virtuous, nor lovely, nor of good report, nor praiseworthy.

14. The time has come when members of the Church need to speak out and join with the many other concerned people in opposition to the offensive, destructive, and mean-spirited media influence that is sweeping over the earth.

15. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the percentage of television prime-time shows with sexual content jumped from 67 percent in 1998 to 75 percent in the year 2000. [2](#) Media with this kind of content has numerous negative effects. It fosters a callous attitude toward women, who are often portrayed as objects of abuse and not as precious daughters of God who are essential to His eternal plan. The long-cherished values of abstinence from intimate relationships before marriage and complete fidelity between husband and wife after marriage are denigrated and derided. Children and youth are confused and misled by the deviant behavior they see demonstrated by so-called stars they admire and want to emulate. In the moral confusion created by the media, enduring values are being abandoned.

16. We see a rapid increase in cyber porn, involving sexual addiction over the Internet. Some become so addicted to viewing Internet [pornography](#) and participating in dangerous online chat rooms that they ignore their marriage covenants and family obligations and often put their employment at risk. Many run afoul of the law. Others develop a tolerance to their perverted behavior, taking ever more risks to feed their immoral addiction. Marriages crumble and relationships fail, as addicts often lose everything of real, eternal value.

17. According to one social observer: “Television ... has replaced the family, the school, and the church—in that order—as the principal [instrument] for socialization and transmission of values. ... Greed, debauchery, violence, unlimited self-gratification, absence of moral restraint ... are the daily fare glamorously dished up to our children.” [3](#)

18. We must be concerned with the violent and sexually charged lyrics of much of today’s popular music and the relatively new “art form” of the music video. According to industry observers, 40 percent of the music video audience is under the age of 18. [4](#) One study reports that approximately three-fourths of all the music videos that tell a story utilize sexual imagery, and nearly half involve violence. [5](#) And the fashion trends spawned in their images are about as far away from being “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” as you can get. Ours surely is a time when men “call evil good, and good evil” ([Isa. 5:20](#)).

19. Let me say again that the family is the main target of evil’s attack and must therefore be the main point of our protection and defense. As I said once before, when you stop and think about it from a diabolically tactical point of view, fighting the family makes sense to Satan. When he wants to disrupt the work of the Lord, he doesn’t poison the world’s peanut butter supply, thus bringing the Church’s missionary system to its collective knees. He doesn’t send a plague of laryngitis to afflict the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He doesn’t legislate against green Jell-O and casseroles. When evil wants to strike out and disrupt the essence of God’s work, it attacks the family. It does so by attempting to disregard the law of chastity, to confuse gender, to desensitize violence, to make crude and blasphemous language the norm, and to make immoral and deviant behavior seem like the rule rather than the exception.

20. We need to remember Edmund Burke’s statement: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” [6](#) We need to raise our voices with other concerned citizens throughout the world in opposition to current trends. We need to tell the sponsors of offensive media that we have had enough. We need to support programs and products that are positive and uplifting. Joining together with neighbors and friends who share our concerns, we can send a clear message to those responsible. The Internet Web sites and their local affiliates will have their addresses. Letters and e-mails have more effect than most people realize, especially those like one sent by a Relief Society sister that

stated, “I represent a group of over a hundred women that meets every week and often talks about the harm your program is doing to our children.”

21. Of course the most basic way to protest negative-impact media is simply not to watch it, see it, read it, or play it. We should teach our family members to follow the First Presidency’s counsel to young people. From the For the Strength of Youth pamphlet, their instruction regarding entertainment and the media is very clear:

22. “Do not attend, view, or participate in entertainment that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way. Do not participate in entertainment that in any way presents immorality or violent behavior as acceptable. ...

23. “Have the courage to walk out of a movie or video party, turn off a computer or television, change a radio station, or put down a magazine if what is being presented does not meet Heavenly Father’s standards. Do these things even if others do not.” [7](#)

24. Brothers and sisters, refuse to be used. Refuse to be manipulated. Refuse to support those programs that violate traditional [family values](#). We may be a small voice to begin with; nevertheless, let us speak out and encourage a more uplifting, inspiring, and acceptable media.

25. Besides making our voices heard, let me conclude with seven things that every parent can do to minimize the negative effect media can have on our families:

1. We need to hold family councils and decide what our media standards are going to be.
2. We need to spend enough quality time with our children that we are consistently the main influence in their lives, not the media or any peer group.
3. We need to make good media choices ourselves and set good examples for our children.
4. We need to limit the amount of time our children watch TV or play video games or use the Internet each day. Virtual reality must not become their reality.
5. We need to use Internet filters and TV programming locks to prevent our children from “chancing upon” things they should not see.
6. We need to have TVs and computers in a much-used common room in the home, not in a bedroom or a private place.

7. We need to take time to watch appropriate media with our children and discuss with them how to make choices that will uplift and build rather than degrade and destroy.

26. May God bless us with courage and wisdom in doing what each one of us can to help turn the tide in the media away from darkness toward truth and light. And may God bless our families to be strong and true to the principles of the gospel is my humble prayer, in the name of [Jesus Christ](#), amen.

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Liahona, Oct. 1998, 24; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. See Dale Kunkel and others, Sex on TV 2003: A Biennial Report to the Kaiser Family Foundation (2003), 40.
3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Weak Ramparts of the Permissive West,” in Nathan P. Gardels, ed., At Century’s End: Great Minds Reflect on Our Times (1995), 53.
4. See National Institute on Media and the Family, “Fact Sheet,” Internet, http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_mtv.shtml.
5. See Barry L. Sherman and Joseph R. Dominick, “Violence and Sex in Music and Videos: TV and Rock ‘n’ Roll,” Journal of Communication, Winter 1986, 79–93.
6. Attributed in John Bartlett, comp., Familiar Quotations, 15th ed. (1980), ix.
7. For the Strength of Youth (2001), 17, 19.

Protect The Children

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Ensign, November 2012



1. We can all remember our feelings when a little child cried out and reached up to us for help. A loving Heavenly Father gives us those feelings to impel us to help His children. Please recall those feelings as

I speak about our responsibility to protect and act for the well-being of children.

2. I speak from the perspective of the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#), including His plan of salvation. That is my calling. Local Church leaders have responsibility for a single jurisdiction, like a ward or stake, but an Apostle is responsible to witness to the entire world. In every nation, of every race and creed, all children are children of God.

3. Although I do not speak in terms of politics or public policy, like other Church leaders, I cannot speak for the welfare of children without implications for the choices being made by citizens, public officials, and workers in private organizations. We are all under the Savior’s command to love and care for each other and especially for the weak and defenseless.

4. Children are highly vulnerable. They have little or no power to protect or provide for themselves and little influence on so much that is vital to their well-being. Children need others to speak for them, and they need decision makers who put their well-being ahead of selfish adult interests.

I.

5. Worldwide, we are shocked at the millions of children victimized by evil adult crimes and selfishness.

6. In some war-torn countries, children are abducted to serve as soldiers in contending armies.

7. A United Nations report estimates that over two million children are victimized each year through prostitution and [pornography](#).¹

8. From the perspective of the plan of salvation, one of the most serious abuses of children is to deny them birth. This is a worldwide trend. The national birthrate in the United States is the lowest in 25 years,² and the birthrates in most European and Asian countries have been below replacement levels for many years. This is not just a religious issue. As rising generations diminish in numbers, cultures and even nations are hollowed out and eventually disappear.

9. One cause of the diminishing birthrate is the practice of [abortion](#). Worldwide, there are estimated to be more than 40 million abortions per year.³ Many laws permit or even promote abortion, but to us this is a great evil. Other abuses of children that occur during pregnancy are the fetal impairments that result from the mother's inadequate nutrition or drug use.

10. There is a tragic irony in the multitude of children eliminated or injured before birth while throngs of infertile couples long for and seek babies to adopt.

11. Childhood abuses or neglect of children that occur after birth are more publicly visible. Worldwide, almost eight million children die before their fifth birthday, mostly from diseases both treatable and preventable.⁴ And the World Health Organization reports that one in four children have stunted growth, mentally and physically, because of inadequate nutrition.⁵ Living and traveling internationally, we Church leaders see much of this. The general presidency of the Primary report children living in conditions "beyond our imaginations." A mother in the Philippines said: "Sometimes we do not have enough money for food, but that is all right because it gives me the opportunity to teach my children about faith. We gather and pray for relief,

and the children see the Lord bless us."⁶ In South Africa, a Primary worker met a little girl, lonely and sad. In faint responses to loving questions, she said she had no mother, no father, and no grandmother—only a grandfather to care for her.⁷ Such tragedies are common on a continent where many caregivers have died of AIDS.

12. Even in rich nations little children and youth are impaired by neglect. Children growing up in poverty have inferior health care and inadequate educational opportunities. They are also exposed to dangerous environments in their physical and cultural surroundings and even from the neglect of their parents. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland recently shared the experience of an LDS police officer. In an investigation he found five young children huddled together and trying to sleep without bedding on a filthy floor in a dwelling where their mother and others were drinking and partying. The apartment had no food to relieve their hunger. After tucking the children into a makeshift bed, the officer knelt and prayed for their protection. As he walked toward the door, one of them, about six, pursued him, grabbed him by the hand, and pleaded, "Will you please adopt me?"⁸

13. We remember our Savior's teaching as He placed a little child before His followers and declared:

14. "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

15. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" ([Matthew 18:5-6](#)).

16. When we consider the dangers from which children should be protected, we should also include psychological abuse. Parents or other caregivers or teachers or peers who demean, bully, or humiliate children or youth can inflict harm more permanent than physical injury. Making a child or youth feel worthless, unloved, or unwanted can inflict serious and long-lasting injury on his or her emotional well-being and development.⁹ Young people struggling with any exceptional condition, including same-gender attraction, are particularly vulnerable and need loving understanding—not bullying or ostracism.¹⁰

17. With the help of the Lord, we can repent and change and be more loving and helpful to children—our own and those around us.

II.

18. There are few examples of physical or emotional threats to children as important as those arising out of their relationships with their parents or guardians. President Thomas S. Monson has spoken of what he called the “vile deeds” of child abuse, where a parent has broken or disfigured a child, physically or emotionally.¹¹ I grieved as I had to study the shocking evidence of such cases during my service on the Utah Supreme Court.

19. Of utmost importance to the well-being of children is whether their parents were married, the nature and duration of the marriage, and, more broadly, the culture and expectations of marriage and child care where they live. Two scholars of the [family](#) explain: “Throughout history, marriage has first and foremost been an institution for procreation and raising children. It has provided the cultural tie that seeks to connect the father to his children by binding him to the mother of his children. Yet in recent times, children have increasingly been pushed from center stage.”¹²

20. A Harvard law professor describes the current law and attitude toward marriage and divorce: “The [current] American story about marriage, as told in the law and in much popular literature, goes something like this: marriage is a relationship that exists primarily for the fulfillment of the individual spouses. If it ceases to perform this function, no one is to blame and either spouse may terminate it at will. ... Children hardly appear in the story; at most they are rather shadowy characters in the background.”¹³

21. Our Church leaders have taught 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.”¹⁴ And children are impacted by divorces. Over half of the divorces in a recent year involved couples with minor children.¹⁵

22. Many children would have had the blessing of being raised by both of their parents if only their parents had followed this inspired teaching in the family proclamation: “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, and to teach them to love and serve one another.”¹⁶ The most powerful teaching of children is by the example of their parents. Divorcing parents inevitably teach a negative lesson.

23. There are surely cases when a divorce is necessary for the good of the children, but those circumstances are exceptional.¹⁷ In most marital contests the contending parents should give much greater weight to the interests of the children. With the help of the Lord, they can do so. Children need the emotional and personal strength that come from being raised by two parents who are united in their marriage and their goals. As one who was raised by a widowed mother, I know firsthand that this cannot always be achieved, but it is the ideal to be sought whenever possible.

24. Children are the first victims of current laws permitting so-called “no-fault divorce.” From the standpoint of children, divorce is too easy. Summarizing decades of social science research, a careful scholar concluded that “the family structure that produces the best outcomes for children, on average, are two biological parents who remain married.”¹⁸ A New York Times writer noted “the striking fact that even as traditional marriage has declined in the United States ... the evidence has mounted for the institution’s importance to the well-being of children.”¹⁹ That reality should give important guidance to parents and parents-to-be in their decisions involving marriage and divorce. We also need politicians, policy makers, and officials to increase their attention to what is best for children in contrast to the selfish interests of voters and vocal advocates of adult interests.

25. Children are also victimized by marriages that do not occur. Few measures of the welfare of our rising generation are more disturbing than the recent report that 41 percent of all births in the United States were to women who were not married.²⁰ Unmarried mothers have massive challenges, and the evidence is clear that their children are at a significant disadvantage when compared with children raised by married parents.²¹

26. Most of the children born to unmarried mothers—58 percent—were born to couples who were cohabitating.²² Whatever we may say about these couples’ forgoing marriage, studies show that their children suffer significant comparative disadvantages.²³ For children, the relative stability of marriage matters.

27. We should assume the same disadvantages for children raised by couples of the same gender. The social science literature is controversial and politically charged on the long-term effect of this on children, principally because, as a New York Times writer

observed, “same-sex marriage is a social experiment, and like most experiments it will take time to understand its consequences.”²⁴

III.

28. I have spoken for children—children everywhere. Some may reject some of these examples, but none should resist the plea that we unite to increase our concern for the welfare and future of our children—the rising generation.

29. We are speaking of the children of God, and with His powerful help, we can do more to help them. In this plea I address not only Latter-day Saints but also all persons of religious faith and others who have a value system that causes them to subordinate their own needs to those of others, especially to the welfare of children.²⁵

30. Religious persons are also conscious of the Savior’s New Testament teaching that pure little children are our role models of humility and teachableness:

31. “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

32. “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 18:3–4](#)).

33. In the [Book of Mormon](#) we read of the risen Lord teaching the Nephites that they must repent and be baptized “and become as a little child” or they could not inherit the kingdom of God ([3 Nephi 11:38](#); see also [Moroni 8:10](#)).

34. I pray that we will humble ourselves as little children and reach out to protect our little children, for they are the future for us, for our Church, and for our nations. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2005: Childhood under Threat* (2004), 26.
2. See Haya El Nasser, “National Birthrate Lowest in 25 Years,” *USA Today*, July 26, 2012, A1.
3. See Gilda Sedgh and others, “Induced Abortion: Incidence and Trends Worldwide from 1995 to 2008,” *The Lancet*, vol. 379, no. 9816 (Feb. 18, 2012), 625–32.
4. See UNICEF, “Young Child Survival and Development,” <http://www.unicef.org/childsurvival/index.html>.
5. See World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics 2012* (2012), 109, 118.
6. Report of Primary general presidency, Sept. 13, 2012.
7. Report of Primary general presidency.
8. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “[Israel, Israel, God Is Calling](#)” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 9, 2012), lds.org/broadcasts; see also R. Scott Lloyd, “Zion Not Only Where, but How We Live, Says Elder Holland,” *Deseret*

News, Sept. 10, 2012, B2.

9. See Kim Painter, “Parents Can Inflict Deep Emotional Harm,” *USA Today*, July 30, 2012, B8; Rachel Lowry, “Mental Abuse as Injurious as Other Forms of Child Abuse, Study Shows,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 5, 2012, A3.
10. See “End the Abuses,” *Deseret News*, June 12, 2012, A10.
11. Thomas S. Monson, “A Little Child Shall Lead Them,” *Liahona*, June 2002, 2; *Ensign*, May 1990, 53.
12. W. Bradford Wilcox and Elizabeth Marquardt, eds., *The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America* (2011), 82.
13. Mary Ann Glendon, *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law: American Failures, European Challenges* (1987), 108.
14. David O. McKay, “Structure of the Home Threatened by Irresponsibility and Divorce,” *Improvement Era*, June 1969, 5.
15. See Diana B. Elliott and Tavia Simmons, “Marital Events of Americans: 2009,” *American Community Survey Reports*, Aug. 2011.
16. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
17. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Divorce,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2007, 71.
18. Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010* (2012), 158.
19. Ross Douthat, “Gay Parents and the Marriage Debate,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2012, <http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/gay-parents-and-the-marriage-debate>.
20. See Joyce A. Martin and others, “Births: Final Data for 2010,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 61, no. 1 (Aug. 2012), 10.
21. See William J. Doherty and others, *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (2002); W. Bradford Wilcox and others, *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (2011).
22. See Martin, “Births: Final Data for 2010,” 10–11.
23. See Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters*.
24. Douthat, “Gay Parents and the Marriage Debate.” The latest and most thorough study finds significant disadvantages reported by young adults with a parent who had same-sex relationships prior to the child’s turning age 18 (see Mark Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research*, vol. 41 [2012], 752–70).
25. Latter-day Saints are especially committed to parenthood as one of the most important goals in life (see Pew Research Center’s *Forum on Religion and Public Life, Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society*, Jan. 12, 2012, 10, 16, 51).

Religious Freedom

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Mormon Newsroom, 4 February 2011



1. I am here to speak of the state of religious freedom in the United States, why it seems to be diminishing, and what can be done about it.
2. Although I will refer briefly to some implications of the Proposition 8 controversy and its constitutional arguments, I am not

here to participate in the debate on the desirability or effects of same-sex marriage. I am here to contend for religious freedom. I am here to describe fundamental principles that I hope will be meaningful for decades to come.

3. I believe you will find no unique Mormon doctrine in what I say. My sources are law and secular history. I will quote the words of Catholic, Evangelical Christian, and Jewish leaders, among others. I am convinced that on this issue what all believers have in common is far more important than their differences. We must unite to strengthen our freedom to teach and exercise what we have in common, as well as our very real differences in religious doctrine.

I.

4. I begin with a truth that is increasingly challenged: Religious teachings and religious organizations are valuable and important to our free society and therefore deserving of special legal protection. I will cite a few examples.

5. Our nation's inimitable private sector of charitable works originated and is still furthered most significantly by religious impulses and religious organizations. I refer to such charities as schools and higher education, hospitals, and care for the poor, where religiously motivated persons contribute personal service and financial support of great value to our citizens. Our nation's incredible generosity in many forms of aid to other nations and their peoples are manifestations of our common religious faith that all peoples are children of God. Religious beliefs instill patterns of altruistic behavior.

6. Many of the great moral advances in Western society have been motivated by religious principles and moved through the public square by pulpit-preaching. The abolition of the slave trade in England and the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States are notable illustrations. These revolutionary steps were not motivated and moved by secular ethics or coalitions of persons who believed in moral relativism. They were driven primarily by individuals who had a clear vision of what was morally right and what was morally wrong. In our time, the Civil Rights movement was, of course, inspired and furthered by religious leaders.

7. Religion also strengthens our nation in the matter of honesty and integrity. Modern science and technology have given us remarkable devices, but we are frequently reminded that their operation in our

economic system and the resulting prosperity of our nation rest on the honesty of the men and women who use them. Americans' honesty is also reflected in our public servants' remarkable resistance to official corruption. These standards and practices of honesty and integrity rest, ultimately, on our ideas of right and wrong, which, for most of us, are grounded in principles of religion and the teachings of religious leaders.

8. Our society is not held together just by law and its enforcement, but most importantly by voluntary obedience to the unenforceable and by widespread adherence to unwritten norms of right or righteous behavior. Religious belief in right and wrong is a vital influence to advocate and persuade such voluntary compliance by a large proportion of our citizens.¹ Others, of course, have a moral compass not expressly grounded in religion. John Adams relied on all of these when he wisely observed that "we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."²

9. Even the agnostic Oxford-educated British journalist Melanie Phillips admitted that "one does not have to be a religious believer to grasp that the core values of Western Civilization are grounded in religion, and to be concerned that the erosion of religious observance therefore undermines those values and the 'secular ideas' they reflect."³

10. My final example of the importance of religion in our country concerns the origin of the Constitution. Its formation over 200 years ago was made possible by religious principles of human worth and dignity, and only those principles in the hearts of a majority of our diverse population can sustain that Constitution today.⁴ I submit that religious values and political realities are so interlinked in the origin and perpetuation of this nation that we cannot lose the influence of religion in our public life without seriously jeopardizing our freedoms.

11. Unfortunately, the extent and nature of religious devotion in this nation is changing.⁵ Belief in a personal God who defines right and wrong is challenged by many. "By some counts," an article in *The Economist* declares, "there are at least 500 [million] declared non-believers in the world—enough to make atheism the fourth-biggest

religion.”⁶ Others who do not consider themselves atheists also reject the idea of a supernatural power, but affirm the existence of some impersonal force and the value of compassion and love and justice.⁷

12. Organized religion is surely on the decline. Last year's Pew Forum Study on Religion and Public Life found that the percentage of young adults affiliated with a particular religious faith is declining significantly.⁸ Scholars Robert Putnam and David Campbell have concluded that “the prospects for religious observance in the coming decades are substantially diminished.”⁹

13. Whatever the extent of formal religious affiliation, I believe that the tide of public opinion in favor of religion is receding. A writer for the *Christian Science Monitor* predicts that the coming century will be “very secular and religiously antagonistic,” with intolerance of Christianity “ris[ing] to levels many of us have not believed possible in our lifetimes.”¹⁰

14. A visible measure of the decline of religion in our public life is the diminished mention of religious faith and references to God in our public discourse. One has only to compare the current rhetoric with the major addresses of our political leaders in the 18th, 19th, and the first part of the 20th centuries. Similarly, compare what Lincoln said about God and religious practices like prayer on key occasions with the edited versions of his remarks quoted in current history books.¹¹ It is easy to believe that there is an informal conspiracy of correctness to scrub out references to God and the influence of religion in the founding and preservation of our nation.

15. The impact of this on the rising generation is detailed in an Oxford University Press book, *Souls in Transition*. There we read:

16. “Most of the dynamics of emerging adult culture and life in the United States today seem to have a tendency to reduce the appeal and importance of religious faith and practice. . . . Religion for the most part is just something in the background.”¹²

17. Granted that reduced religious affiliation puts religion “in the background,” the effect of that on the religious beliefs of young adults is still in controversy. The negative view appears in the Oxford book, whose author concludes that this age group of 18 to 23 “had difficulty seeing the possible distinction between, in this case, objective moral truth and relative human invention. . . . [T]hey simply cannot, for whatever reason, believe in—or sometimes even conceive of—a given, objective truth, fact, reality, or nature of the

world that is independent of their subjective self-experience.”¹³

18. On the positive side, the Pew Forum study reported that over three-quarters of young adults believe that there are absolute standards of right and wrong.¹⁴ For reasons explained later, I believe this finding is very positive for the future of religious freedom.

II.

19. Before reviewing the effects of the decline of religion in our public life, I will speak briefly of the free exercise of religion. The first provision in the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution is what many believe to be its most important guarantee. It reads:

20. “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

21. The prohibition against “an establishment of religion” was intended to separate churches and government, to forbid a national church of the kind found in Europe. In the interest of time I will say no more about the establishment of religion, but only concentrate on the First Amendment's direction that the United States shall have “no law [prohibiting] the free exercise [of religion].” For almost a century this guarantee of religious freedom has been understood as a limitation on state as well as federal power.

22. The guarantee of religious freedom is one of the supremely important founding principles in the United States Constitution, and it is reflected in the constitutions of all 50 of our states. As noted by many, the guarantee's “pre-eminent place” as the first expression in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution identifies freedom of religion as “a cornerstone of American democracy.”¹⁵ The American colonies were originally settled by people who, for the most part, came to this continent for the freedom to practice their religious faith without persecution, and their successors deliberately placed religious freedom first in the nation's Bill of Rights.

23. So it is that our federal law formally declares: “The right to freedom of religion undergirds the very origin and existence of the United States.”¹⁶ So it is, I maintain, that in our nation's founding and in our constitutional order religious freedom and its associated First Amendment freedoms of speech and press are the motivating and dominating civil liberties and civil rights.

III.

24. Notwithstanding its special place in our Constitution, a number of trends are eroding both the protections the free exercise clause was intended to provide and the public esteem this fundamental value has had during most of our history. For some time we have been experiencing laws and official actions that impinge on religious freedom. In a few moments I will give illustrations, but first I offer some generalizations.

25. The free “exercise” of religion obviously involves both (1) the right to choose religious beliefs and affiliations and (2) the right to “exercise” or practice those beliefs without government restraint. However, in a nation with citizens of many different religious beliefs the right of some to act upon their religious beliefs must be qualified by the government's responsibility to further compelling government interests, such as the health and safety of all. Otherwise, for example, the government could not protect its citizens' persons or properties from neighbors whose religious principles compelled practices that threatened others' health or personal security. Government authorities have wrestled with this tension for many years, so we have considerable experience in working out the necessary accommodations.

26. The inherent conflict between the precious religious freedom of the people and the legitimate regulatory responsibilities of the government is the central issue of religious freedom. The problems are not simple, and over the years the United States Supreme Court, which has the ultimate responsibility of interpreting the meaning of the lofty and general provisions of the Constitution, has struggled to identify principles that can guide its decisions when a law or regulation is claimed to violate someone's free exercise of religion. As would be expected, many of these battles have involved government efforts to restrict the religious practices of small groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Recent experience suggests adding the example of Muslims.

27. Much of the controversy in recent years has focused on the extent to which state laws that are neutral and generally applicable can override the strong protections contained in the free exercise clause of the United States Constitution. As noted hereafter, in the 1990s the Supreme Court ruled that such state laws could prevail. Fortunately, in a stunning demonstration of the resilience of the guarantee of free exercise of religion, over half of the states have passed legislation or interpreted their state constitutions to preserve a higher standard for

protecting religious freedom. Only a handful have followed the Supreme Court's approach that the federal free exercise protection must bow to state laws that are neutral as to religion.¹⁷

28. Another important current debate over religious freedom concerns whether the guarantee of free exercise of religion gives one who acts on religious grounds greater protection against government prohibitions than are already guaranteed to everyone by other provisions of the constitution, like freedom of speech. I, of course, maintain that unless religious freedom has a unique position we erase the significance of this separate provision in the First Amendment. Treating actions based on religious belief the same as actions based on other systems of belief is not enough to satisfy the special guarantee of religious freedom in the United States Constitution. Religion must preserve its preferred status in our pluralistic society in order to make its unique contribution—its recognition and commitment to values that transcend the secular world.

29. Over a quarter century ago I reviewed the history and predicted the future of church/state law in a lecture at DePaul University in Chicago.¹⁸ I took sad notice of the fact that the United States Supreme Court had diminished the significance of free exercise by expanding the definition of religion to include what the Court called “religions” not based on belief in God. I wrote:

30. “The problem with a definition of religion that includes almost everything is that the practical effect of inclusion comes to mean almost nothing. Free exercise protections become diluted as their scope becomes more diffuse. When religion has no more right to free exercise than irreligion or any other secular philosophy, the whole newly expanded category of ‘religion’ is likely to diminish in significance.”¹⁹

31. Unfortunately, the tide of thought and precedent seems contrary to this position. While I have no concern with expanding comparable protections to non-religious belief systems, as is done in international norms that protect freedom of religion or belief,²⁰ I object to doing so by re-interpreting the First Amendment guarantee of free exercise of religion.

32. It was apparent twenty-five years ago, and it is undeniable today, that the significance of religious freedom is diminishing. Five years after I gave my DePaul lecture, the United States Supreme Court issued its most important free exercise decision in

many years. In *Employment Division v. Smith*,²¹ the Court significantly narrowed the traditional protection of religion by holding that the guarantee of free exercise did not prevent government from interfering with religious activities when it did so by neutral, generally applicable laws. This ruling removed religious activities from their sanctuary—the preferred position the First Amendment had given them.

33. Now, over twenty years later, some are contending that a religious message is just another message in a world full of messages, not something to be given unique or special protection. One author takes the extreme position that religious speech should have even less protection. In *Freedom from Religion*, published by the Oxford University Press, a law professor makes this three-step argument:

1. In many nations “society is at risk from religious extremism.”²²
2. “A follower is far more likely to act on the words of a religious authority figure than other speakers.”²³
3. Therefore, “in some cases, society and government should view religious speech as inherently less protected than secular political speech because of its extraordinary ability to influence the listener.”²⁴

34. The professor then offers this shocking conclusion:

35. “[W]e must begin to consider the possibility that religious speech can no longer hide behind the shield of freedom of expression. . . .”²⁵

36. “Contemporary religious extremism leaves decision-makers and the public alike with no choice but to re-contour constitutionally granted rights as they pertain to religion and speech.”²⁶

37. I believe most thoughtful people would reject that extreme conclusion. All should realize how easy it would be to gradually manipulate the definition of “religious extremism” to suppress any unpopular religion or any unpopular preaching based on religious doctrine. In addition, I hope most would see that it is manifestly unfair and short-sighted to threaten religious freedom by focusing on some undoubted abuses without crediting religion’s many benefits. I am grateful that there are responsible voices and evidence affirming the vital importance of religious freedom, worldwide.²⁷

38. When Cardinal Francis George, then President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, spoke at Brigham Young University last year, he referred to “threats to religious freedom in America that are new to our history and to our tradition.”²⁸ He gave two examples, one concerning threats to current religious-based exemptions from participating in abortions and the other “the development of gay rights and the call for same-sex ‘marriage.’” He spoke of possible government punishments for churches or religious leaders whose doctrines lead them to refuse to participate in government sponsored programs.

39. Along with many others, I see a serious threat to the freedom of religion in the current assertion of a “civil right” of homosexuals to be free from religious preaching against their relationships. Religious leaders of various denominations affirm and preach that sexual relations should only occur between a man and a woman joined together in marriage. One would think that the preaching of such a doctrinal belief would be protected by the constitutional guarantee of the free exercise of religion, to say nothing of the guarantee of free speech. However, we are beginning to see worldwide indications that this may not be so.

40. Religious preaching of the wrongfulness of homosexual relations is beginning to be threatened with criminal prosecution or actually prosecuted or made the subject of civil penalties. Canada has been especially aggressive, charging numerous religious authorities and persons of faith with violating its human rights law by “impacting an individual’s sense of self-worth and acceptance.”²⁹ Other countries where this has occurred include Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Singapore.³⁰

41. I do not know enough to comment on whether these suppressions of religious speech violate the laws of other countries, but I do know something of religious freedom in the United States, and I am alarmed at what is reported to be happening here.

42. In New Mexico, the state’s Human Rights Commission held that a photographer who had declined on religious grounds to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony had engaged in impermissible conduct and must pay over \$6,000 attorney’s fees to the same-sex couple. A state judge upheld the order to pay.³¹ In New Jersey, the United Methodist Church was investigated and penalized under state anti-discrimination law for denying same-sex couples access to a church-owned pavilion for their civil-union ceremonies. A federal court refused to give relief from the state penalties.³² Professors at

state universities in Illinois and Wisconsin were fired or disciplined for expressing personal convictions that homosexual behavior is sinful.³³ Candidates for masters' degrees in counseling in Georgia and Michigan universities were penalized or dismissed from programs for their religious views about the wrongfulness of homosexual relations.³⁴ A Los Angeles policeman claimed he was demoted after he spoke against the wrongfulness of homosexual conduct in the church where he is a lay pastor.³⁵ The Catholic Church's difficulties with adoption services and the Boy Scouts' challenges in various locations are too well known to require further comment.

43. We must also be concerned at recent official expressions that would narrow the field of activities protected by the free exercise of religion. Thus, when President Obama used the words freedom of worship instead of free exercise of religion, a writer for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty sounded this warning:

44. "To anyone who closely follows prominent discussion of religious freedom in the diplomatic and political arena, this linguistic shift is troubling.

45. "The reason is simple. Any person of faith knows that religious exercise is about a lot more than freedom of worship. It's about the right to dress according to one's religious dictates, to preach openly, to evangelize, to engage in the public square."³⁶

46. Fortunately, more recent expressions by President Obama and his state department have used the traditional references to the right to practice religious faith.³⁷

47. Even more alarming are recent evidences of a narrowing definition of religious expression and an expanding definition of the so-called civil rights of "dignity," "autonomy," and "self-fulfillment" of persons offended by religious preaching. Thus, President Obama's head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Chai Feldblum, recently framed the issue in terms of a "sexual-orientation liberty" that is such a fundamental right that it should prevail over a competing "religious-belief liberty."³⁸ Such a radical assertion should not escape analysis. It has three elements. First, the freedom of religion—an express provision of the Bill of Rights that has been recognized as a fundamental right for over 200 years—is recast as a simple "liberty" that ranks among many other liberties. Second, Feldblum asserts that sexual orientation is now to be defined as a "sexual liberty" that has the status of a fundamental right. Finally, it is claimed that "the best framework

for dealing with this conflict is to analyze religious people's claims as 'belief liberty interest' not as free exercise claims under the First Amendment." The conclusion: Religious expressions are to be overridden by the fundamental right to "sexual liberty."³⁹

48. It is well to remember James Madison's warning:

49. "There are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations."⁴⁰

50. We are beginning to experience the expansion of rhetoric and remedies that seem likely to be used to chill or even to penalize religious expression. Like the professors in Illinois and Wisconsin and the lay clergyman in California, individuals of faith are experiencing real retribution merely because they seek to express their sincerely held religious beliefs.

51. All of this shows an alarming trajectory of events pointing toward constraining the freedom of religious speech by forcing it to give way to the "rights" of those offended by such speech. If that happens, we will have criminal prosecution of those whose religious doctrines or speech offend those whose public influence and political power establish them as an officially protected class.

52. Closely related to the danger of criminal prosecutions are the current arguments seeking to brand religious beliefs as an unacceptable basis for citizen action or even for argument in the public square. For an example of this we need go no further than the district court's opinion in the Proposition 8 case, *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*.⁴¹

53. A few generations ago the idea that religious organizations and religious persons would be unwelcome in the public square would have been unthinkable. Now, such arguments are prominent enough to cause serious concern. It is not difficult to see a conscious strategy to neutralize the influence of religion and churches and religious motivations on any issues that could be characterized as public policy. As noted by John A. Howard of the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, the proponents of banishment "have developed great skills in demonizing those who disagree with them, turning their opponents into objects of fear, hatred and scorn."⁴² Legal commentator Hugh Hewitt described the current circumstance this way:

54. "There is a growing anti-religious bigotry in the United States. . . .

55. “For three decades people of faith have watched a systematic and very effective effort waged in the courts and the media to drive them from the public square and to delegitimize their participation in politics as somehow threatening.”⁴³

56. The forces that would intimidate persons with religious-based points of view from influencing or making the laws of their state or nation should answer this question: How would the great movements toward social justice cited earlier have been advocated and pressed toward adoption if their religious proponents had been banned from the public square by insistence that private religious or moral positions were not a rational basis for public discourse?

57. We have already seen a significant deterioration in the legal position of the family, a key institution defined by religious doctrine. In his essay “The Judicial Assault on the Family,” Allan W. Carlson examines the “formal influence of Christianity” on American family law,⁴⁴ citing many state and United States Supreme Court decisions through the 1950s affirming the fundamental nature of the family.⁴⁵ He then reviews a series of decisions beginning in the mid-1960s that gave what he calls “an alternate vision of family life and family law.”⁴⁶ For example, he quotes a 1972 decision in which the Court characterized marriage as “an association of two individuals each with a separate intellectual and emotional makeup.”⁴⁷ “Through these words,” Carlson concludes, “the U.S. Supreme Court essentially enlisted in the Sexual Revolution.”⁴⁸ Over these same years, “the federal courts also radically altered the meaning of parenthood.”⁴⁹

58. I quote Carlson again:

59. “The broad trend has been from a view of marriage as a social institution with binding claims of its own and with prescribed rules for men and women into a free association, easily entered and easily broken, with a focus on the needs of individuals. However, the ironical result of so expanding the ‘freedom to marry’ has been to enhance the authority and sway of government.”⁵⁰

60. “As the American founders understood, marriage and the autonomous family were the true bulwarks of liberty, for they were the principal rivals to the state. . . . And surely, as the American judiciary has deconstructed marriage and the family over the last 40 years, the result has been the growth of government.”⁵¹

61. All of this has culminated in attempts to redefine marriage or to urge its complete abolition. The debate continues in the press and elsewhere.⁵²

IV.

62. What has caused the current public and legal climate of mounting threats to religious freedom? I believe the cause is not legal but cultural and religious. I believe the diminished value being attached to religious freedom stems from the ascendancy of moral relativism.

63. More and more of our citizens support the idea that all authority and all rules of behavior are man-made and can be accepted or rejected as one chooses. Each person is free to decide for himself or herself what is right and wrong. Our children face the challenge of living in an increasingly godless and amoral society.

64. I have neither the time nor the expertise to define the various aspects of moral relativism or the extent to which they have entered the culture or consciousness of our nation and its people. I can only rely on respected observers whose descriptions feel right to me.

65. In his book, *Modern Times*, the British author Paul Johnson writes:

66. “At the beginning of the 1920s the belief began to circulate, for the first time at a popular level, that there were no longer any absolutes: of time and space, of good and evil, of knowledge, above all of value.”⁵³

67. On this side of the Atlantic, Gertrude Himmelfarb describes how the virtues associated with good and evil have been degraded into relative values.⁵⁴

68. A variety of observers have described the consequences of moral relativism. All of them affirm the existence of God as the Ultimate Law-giver and the source of the absolute truth that distinguishes good from evil.

69. Rabbi Harold Kushner speaks of God-given “absolute standards of good and evil built into the human soul.”⁵⁵ He writes:

70. “As I see it, there are two possibilities. Either you affirm the existence of a God who stands for morality and makes moral demands of us, who built a law of truthfulness into His world even as He built in a law of gravity. . . . Or else you give everyone the right to decide what is good and what is evil by his or her own lights, balancing the voice of one's

conscience against the voice of temptation and need. . .”⁵⁶

71. Rabbi Kushner also observes that a philosophy that rejects the idea of absolute right and wrong inevitably leads to a deadening of conscience.

72. “Without God, it would be a world where no one was outraged by crime or cruelty, and no one was inspired to put an end to them. . . . [T]here would be no more inspiring goal for our lives than self-interest. . . . Neither room nor reason for tenderness, generosity, helpfulness.”⁵⁷

73. Dr. Timothy Keller, a much-published pastor in New York, asks:

74. “What happens if you eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibility and crosses your will? If you pick and choose what you want to believe and reject the rest, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won’t! . . .

75. “Though we have been taught that all moral values are relative to individuals and cultures, we can’t live like that. In actual practice we inevitably treat some principles as absolute standards by which we judge the behavior of those who don’t share our values. . . . People who laugh at the claim that there is a transcendent moral order do not think that racial genocide is just impractical or self-defeating, but that it is wrong. . . .”⁵⁸

76. My esteemed fellow Apostle, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, asked:

77. “[H]ow can a society set priorities if there are no basic standards? Are we to make our calculations using only the arithmetic of appetite?”⁵⁹

78. He made this practical observation:

79. “Decrease the belief in God, and you increase the numbers of those who wish to play at being God by being ‘society’s supervisors.’ Such ‘supervisors’ deny the existence of divine standards, but are very serious about imposing their own standards on society.”⁶⁰

80. Elder Maxwell also observed that we increase the power of governments when people do not believe in absolute truths and in a God who will hold them and their government leaders accountable.⁶¹

81. Moral relativism leads to a loss of respect for religion and even to anger against religion and the guilt that is seen to flow from it. As it diminishes religion, it encourages the proliferation of rights that claim ascendancy over the free exercise of religion.

82. The founders who established this nation believed in God and in the existence of moral absolutes—right and wrong—established by this Ultimate Law-giver. The Constitution they established assumed and relied on morality in the actions of its citizens. Where did that morality come from and how was it to be retained? Belief in God and the consequent reality of right and wrong was taught by religious leaders in churches and synagogues, and the founders gave us the First Amendment to preserve that foundation for the Constitution.

83. The preservation of religious freedom in our nation depends on the value we attach to the teachings of right and wrong in our churches, synagogues and mosques. It is faith in God—however defined—that translates these religious teachings into the moral behavior that benefits the nation. As fewer and fewer citizens believe in God and in the existence of the moral absolutes taught by religious leaders, the importance of religious freedom to the totality of our citizens is diminished. We stand to lose that freedom if many believe that religious leaders, who preach right and wrong, make no unique contribution to society and therefore should have no special legal protection.

V. Conclusion

84. I have made four major points:

1. Religious teachings and religious organizations are valuable and important to our free society and therefore deserving of their special legal protection.
2. Religious freedom undergirds the origin and existence of this country and is the dominating civil liberty.
3. The guarantee of free exercise of religion is weakening in its effects and in public esteem.
4. This weakening is attributable to the ascendancy of moral relativism.

85. We must never see the day when the public square is not open to religious ideas and religious persons. The religious community must unite to be sure we are not coerced or deterred into silence by the kinds of intimidation or threatening rhetoric that are being experienced. Whether or not such actions are anti-religious, they are surely anti-democratic and should be condemned by all who are interested in democratic government. There should be room for all good-faith views in the public square, be they secular, religious, or a mixture of the two. When expressed sincerely and without sanctimoniousness, the religious

voice adds much to the text and tenor of public debate. As Elder Quentin L. Cook has said:

86. “In our increasingly unrighteous world, it is essential that values based on religious belief be part of the public discourse. Moral positions informed by a religious conscience must be accorded equal access to the public square.”⁶²

87. Religious persons should insist on their constitutional right and duty to exercise their religion, to vote their consciences on public issues, and to participate in elections and in debates in the public square and the halls of justice. These are the rights of all citizens and they are also the rights of religious leaders and religious organizations. In this circumstance, it is imperative that those of us who believe in God and in the reality of right and wrong unite more effectively to protect our religious freedom to preach and practice our faith in God and the principles of right and wrong He has established.

88. This proposal that we unite more effectively does not require any examination of the doctrinal differences among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, or even an identification of the many common elements of our beliefs. All that is necessary for unity and a broad coalition along the lines I am suggesting is a common belief that there is a right and wrong in human behavior that has been established by a Supreme Being. All who believe in that fundamental should unite more effectively to preserve and strengthen the freedom to advocate and practice our religious beliefs, whatever they are. We must walk together for a ways on the same path in order to secure our freedom to pursue our separate ways when that is necessary according to our own beliefs.

89. I am not proposing a resurrection of the so-called “moral majority,” which was identified with a particular religious group and a particular political party. Nor am I proposing an alliance or identification with any current political movement, tea party or other. I speak for a broader principle, non-partisan and, in its own focused objective, ecumenical. I speak for what Cardinal Francis George described in his address at Brigham Young University just a year ago. His title was “Catholics and Latter-day Saints: Partners in the Defense of Religious Freedom.” He proposed “that Catholics and Mormons stand with one another and with other defenders of conscience, and that we can and should stand as one in the defense of religious liberty. In the coming years, interreligious coalitions formed to defend the rights of conscience for individuals and for religious institutions should

become a vital bulwark against the tide of forces at work in our government and society to reduce religion to a purely private reality. At stake is whether or not the religious voice will maintain its right to be heard in the public square.”⁶³

90. We join in that call for religious coalitions to protect religious freedom. In doing so we recall the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin. At another critical time in our nation’s history, he declared:

91. “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.”⁶⁴

92. In conclusion, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ I affirm His love for all people on this earth, and I affirm the importance His followers must attach to religious freedom for all people—whatever their beliefs. I pray for the blessings of God upon our cooperative efforts to preserve that freedom.

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2. CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, *THE WORKS OF JOHN ADAMS, SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES*, 228–29 (Books for Libraries Press, 1969).

3. MELANIE PHILLIPS, *THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: THE GLOBAL BATTLE OVER GOD, TRUTH, AND POWER*, xiii (1st Am. ed., Encounter Books, 2010); see generally ROBERT D. PUTNAM & DAVID E. CAMPBELL, *AMERICAN GRACE* (2010).

4. See JOHN A. HOWARD, *CHRISTIANITY: LIFEBLOOD OF AMERICA’S FREE SOCIETY (1620-1945)*, 57 (2008); see also Dinesh D’Souza, *Created Equal: How Christianity Shaped the West*, IMPRIMIS, Nov. 2008 at 5 (available at http://www.hillsdale.edu/hctools/ImprimisTool/archives/2008_11_Imprimis.pdf).

5. See PUTNAM & CAMPBELL, *supra* note 3, at Chs. 3–4.

6. John Micklethwait, *In God’s Name: A Special Report on Religion and Public Life*, THE ECONOMIST, Nov. 3, 2007, at 10.

7. See, e.g., Lisa Miller, *Sam Harris Believes in God*, NEWSWEEK, Oct. 25, 2010, at 42.

8. See *Religion Among the Millennials*, PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE (Pew Research Center), Feb. 17, 2010 at 1–3 (available at <http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Demographics/Age/millennials-report.pdf>).

9. Robert D. Putnam & David E. Campbell, *The Tide of Public Opinion in Favor of Religion is Receding*, DESERET NEWS, Nov. 20, 2010 at E1 (quoting L.A. TIMES syndicated art.); see also PUTNAM & CAMPBELL, *supra* note 3.

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11. See, e.g., MATTHEW S. HOLLAND, *BONDS OF AFFECTION: CIVIC CHARITY AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA*, 252–53 n. 22 (Geo. Univ. Press, 2007).

12. CHRISTIAN SMITH, *SOULS IN TRANSITION*, 84, 145 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); cf. PUTNAM & CAMPBELL, *supra* note 3.

13. SMITH, *supra* note 12 at 46.

14. PEW FORUM, *supra* note 8 at 13.
15. FINAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ABROAD TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, May 17, 1999, at 6.
16. International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, 22 U.S.C. § 6401(a).
17. See WILLIAM W. BASSETT, W. COLE DURHAM, JR. & ROBERT T. SMITH, *RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND THE LAW* "2.65-2.66 (Thomson Reuters/West, 2010 ed., forthcoming).
18. Dallin H. Oaks, Separation, Accommodation and the Future of Church and State, 35 DEPAUL L. REV. 1, 1–22 (1985).
19. *Id.* at 8. See also Michael McConnell, The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion, 103 HARV. L. REV. 1409, 1488–1500 (1990).
20. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 18, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 302.
21. 494 U.S. 872 (1990).
22. AMOS N. GUIORA, *FREEDOM FROM RELIGION*, 27 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).
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60. *Id.* at 53.
61. See Maxwell, *supra* note 59, at 52–53.
62. Cook, *supra* note 1, at 29.
63. George, *supra* note 28.
64. At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

Why Marriage, Why Family

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

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1. A family built on the marriage of a man and woman supplies the best setting for God’s plan to thrive.
2. Above the Great West Door of the renowned Westminster Abbey in London, England, stand the statues of 10 [Christian](#) martyrs of the 20th century. Included among them is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a brilliant German theologian born in 1906.¹ Bonhoeffer became a vocal critic of the Nazi dictatorship and its treatment of Jews and others. He was imprisoned for his active opposition and finally executed in a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was a prolific writer, and some of his best-known pieces are letters that sympathetic guards helped him smuggle out of prison, later published as *Letters and Papers from Prison*.
3. One of those letters was to his niece before her wedding. It included these significant insights: “Marriage is more than your love for each other. ... In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to his glory, and calls into his kingdom. In your

love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man. ... So love comes from you, but marriage from above, from God.”²

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

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

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

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

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

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

physical body as we came to dwell on the earth that He created for us.

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

11. At least four things are needed for the success of this divine plan:

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

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

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

grace providing [forgiveness](#) of sins and sanctification of the soul, we can spiritually be born again and reconciled to God. Our spiritual death—our separation from God—will end.¹⁵

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

16. “Teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

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

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

19. A [family](#) built on the marriage of a man and woman supplies the best setting for God’s plan to thrive—the setting for the birth of children, who come in purity and innocence from God, and the environment for the learning and preparation they will need for a successful mortal life and eternal life in the world to come. A critical mass of families built on such marriages is vital for societies to survive and flourish. That is why communities and nations generally have encouraged and protected marriage and the family as privileged institutions. It has never been just about the love and happiness of adults.

20. The social science case for marriage and for families headed by a married man and woman is compelling.¹⁹ And so “we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”²⁰ But our claims for the role of marriage and family rest not on social science but on the truth that they are God’s creation. It is He who in the beginning created Adam and Eve in His image, male and female, and joined them as husband and wife to become “one flesh” and to multiply and replenish the earth.²¹ Each individual carries the divine image, but it is in the matrimonial union of male and female as one that we attain perhaps the most complete meaning of our having been made in the image of God—male and female. Neither we nor any other mortal can alter this divine order of matrimony. It is not a human invention. Such marriage is indeed “from above, from God” and is as much a part of the plan of happiness as the Fall and the Atonement.

21. In the premortal world, Lucifer rebelled against God and His plan, and his opposition only grows in intensity. He fights to discourage marriage and the formation of families, and where marriages and families are formed, he does what he can to disrupt them. He attacks everything that is sacred about human sexuality, tearing it from the context of marriage with a seemingly infinite array of immoral thoughts and acts. He seeks to convince men and women that marriage and family priorities can be ignored or abandoned, or at least made subservient to careers, other achievements, and the quest for self-fulfillment and individual autonomy. Certainly the adversary is pleased when parents neglect to teach and train their children to have faith in Christ and be spiritually born again. Brothers and sisters, many things are good, many are important, but only a few are essential.

22. To declare the fundamental truths relative to marriage and family is not to overlook or diminish the sacrifices and successes of those for whom the ideal is not a present reality. Some of you are denied the blessing of marriage for reasons including a lack of viable prospects, same-sex attraction, physical or mental impairments, or simply a fear of failure that, for the moment at least, overshadows faith. Or you may have married, but that marriage ended, and you are left to manage alone what two together can barely sustain. Some of you who are married cannot bear children despite overwhelming desires and pleading prayers.

23. Even so, everyone has gifts; everyone has talents; everyone can contribute to the unfolding of the divine plan in each generation. Much that is good, much that is essential—even sometimes all that is necessary for now—can be achieved in less than ideal circumstances. So many of you are doing your very best. And when you who bear the heaviest burdens of mortality stand up in defense of God’s plan to exalt His children, we are all ready to march. With confidence we testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ has anticipated and, in the end, will compensate all deprivation and loss for those who turn to Him. No one is predestined to receive less than all that the Father has for His children.

24. One young mother recently confided to me her anxiety about being inadequate in this highest of callings. I felt that the issues that concerned her were small and she needn’t worry; she was doing fine. But I knew she only wanted to please God and to honor His trust. I offered words of reassurance, and in my heart I pleaded that God, her Heavenly Father, would buoy her up with His love and the witness of His approval as she is about His work.

25. That is my prayer for all of us today. May we each find approval in His sight. May marriages flourish and families prosper, and whether our lot is a fulness of these blessings in mortality or not, may the Lord’s grace bring happiness now and faith in sure promises to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Kevin Rudd, “Faith in Politics,” *The Monthly*, Oct. 2006, themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-kevin-rudd-faith-politics--300.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prisoned*. Eberhard Bethge (1953), 42–43.

3. See, for example, [Psalm 82:6](#); [Acts 17:29](#); [Hebrews 12:9](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 33](#); [Moses 6:51](#); [Abraham 3:22](#). The Prophet Joseph Smith provided this detail: “The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits [or intelligences] and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. . . . He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 210).

4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 210.

5. [Alma 24:14](#).

6. [Alma 42:8](#).

7. [Alma 12:25](#); see also [verses 26–33](#).

8. [Abraham 3:24–26](#).

9. The Prophet Joseph Smith offered this summary statement: “The design of God before the foundation of the world was that we should take tabernacles [bodies], that through faithfulness we should overcome and thereby obtain a resurrection from the dead, in this wise obtaining glory, honor, power, and dominion.” The Prophet also stated: “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil

has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine's body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not" (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 211).

10. [Job 38:7](#).

11. [John 1:3](#); see also [Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24](#).

12. See [1 Corinthians 15:21–22](#); [2 Nephi 2:25](#).

13. See [2 Nephi 2:15–18](#); [Alma 12:24](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 29:39](#); [Moses 4:3](#). Joseph Smith said: "All persons are entitled to their agency, for God has so ordained it. He has constituted mankind moral agents, and given them power to choose good or evil; to seek after that which is good, by pursuing the pathway of holiness in this life, which brings peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost here, and a fulness of joy and happiness at His right hand hereafter; or to pursue an evil course, going on in sin and rebellion against God, thereby bringing condemnation to their souls in this world, and an eternal loss in the world to come." The Prophet also noted: "Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. Our organization is such that we can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents" (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 213).

14. See [Genesis 3:22–24](#); [Alma 42:2–6](#); [Moses 4:28–31](#).

15. Even those who do not repent are redeemed from spiritual death by the Atonement in the sense that they come again into the presence of God for the Final Judgment (see [Helaman 14:17](#); [3 Nephi 27:14–15](#)).

16. Teachings: Joseph Smith, 210.

17. See [Doctrine and Covenants 93:36–40](#).

18. [Moses 6:58–59](#).

19. People may be loyal to one another in nonmarital relationships, and children can be born and raised, sometimes quite successfully, in other than a married two-parent family environment. But on average and in the majority of cases, evidence of the social benefits of marriage and of the comparatively superior outcomes for children in families headed by a married man and woman is extensive. On the other hand, the social and economic costs of what one commentator calls "the global flight from the family," weigh increasingly on society. Nicholas Eberstadt catalogs the worldwide declines in marriage and childbearing and the trends regarding fatherless homes and divorce and observes: "The deleterious impact on the hardly inconsequential numbers of children disadvantaged by the flight from the family is already plain enough. So too the damaging role of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing in exacerbating income disparities and wealth gaps—for society as a whole, but especially for children. Yes, children are resilient and all that. But the flight from family most assuredly comes at the expense of the vulnerable young. That same flight also has unforgiving implications for the vulnerable old." (See "The Global Flight from the Family," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 21, 2015, [wsj.com/articles/nicholas-eberstadt-the-global-flight-from-the-family-1424476179](http://www.wsj.com/articles/nicholas-eberstadt-the-global-flight-from-the-family-1424476179).)

20. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

21. See [Genesis 1:26–28](#); [2:7, 18, 21–24](#); [3:20](#); [Moses 2:26–28](#); [3:7–8, 18, 20–24](#); [4:26](#).