
Putting Our Marriage Back Together

Name Withheld

It was my mistake to encourage my wife to get a job. Now we were paying the price.

"Putting Our Marriage Back Together," *Ensign*, Apr. 1998, 54

I watched my wife kneel down and embrace each of our small children, first holding Jeremy and then Joseph. The children, full of energy and enthusiasm, didn't seem to notice the tears that filled their mother's eyes and ran freely down her cheeks. She held their tiny hands in hers until the last possible moment, then stood in the airport crying as she watched the plane taking me and the children to the other side of the country slowly disappear from view.

We were separating, and we didn't know if we would ever be a family again or even see each other again. As the plane climbed into the sky, I sat quietly feeling numb and confused. I looked at the bewildered faces of our children and wondered why I had just said good-bye to her. I recalled the phone call I had made to my parents. I had been crying so hard that it took a long time before I could explain to them that Jolene and I were breaking up and that I needed to stay with them for a while. Hearing the anguish in my voice, they responded, "We'll be here."

Both Jolene and I had graduated from seminary, and I had served a mission to Japan before marrying Jolene in the Salt Lake Temple. It seemed unbelievable that something so wrong could be happening to us. Even though the plane floated peacefully in a clear blue sky above a sea of fluffy white clouds, heaven seemed far away. Still, my thoughts were prayerful as I tried to sort out the steps that had led to our crisis. As I looked at my boys, I prayed that I might be as teachable and full of trust as these sleeping children. I felt defeated, brokenhearted, and perplexed about what had happened, and I could find no easy solution. All I knew was that I was in trouble, and I needed help.

As I pondered, I gradually began to see things with a new clarity. It came to me that the first mistake had been mine, and it was not a small one. As a young husband, I had convinced myself that my schooling was of primary importance. Instead of carefully following the wisdom of the Lord, I had taken counsel with myself and relied on the unsteady "arm of flesh" (**2 Ne. 4:34**). So even though we had two small children at home, I had concluded it somehow would be best if my wife worked full time to support the family so I could finish my education faster.

My mistake was simple but resulted in tragic consequences for us. In my circumstances, I could have made certain sacrifices to work while obtaining my educational goals, but instead I encouraged my wife to leave the home to begin a career. Without realizing it, I had made the error warned against by the Apostle Paul: "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**). I began to feel a burning sense of shame as I remembered the words of President Spencer W. Kimball, who said, "I know of no scriptures where an authorization is given to young wives to withhold their families and to go to work to put their husbands through school" ("Marriage is Honorable," in *Speeches of the Year, 1973* [1974], 263).

As I looked back, I began to see that much had been sacrificed so I could have the luxury of owning more quickly the precious piece of paper with “Ph.D.” on it—my wife’s role as mother, and now our dreams for our family. In our instance, our priorities had blurred and had become out of focus. I knew there were sometimes circumstances in which a wife has to work, such as when a husband cannot obtain employment, but I realized that my case did not fall into that category. According to President Ezra Taft Benson, “we know that sometimes the mother works outside of the home at the encouragement, or even insistence, of her husband. ... Not only will the family suffer in such instances, brethren, but your own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered” (“To the Fathers in Israel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 49).

The second mistake was Jolene’s. Progressively she had allowed the values of the workplace to gain control of her attitudes. The prestige of her position, the sophistication of a career, and the esteem of coworkers had gradually become more important to her than the needs of her small children. She had failed to heed the words of President Kimball when he pleaded with mothers to “come home from the typewriter, the laundry, the nursing. Come home from the factory, the cafe. No career approaches in importance that of wife, homemaker, [and] mother” (fireside address, San Antonio, Texas, 3 Dec. 1977).

And so instead of following strictly the counsel of prophets, we had taken two very different paths and had grown apart until we no longer walked together. I wondered if her career success offered any more relief to her broken heart than my education offered for mine. And the victims of our ill-advised plans were these innocent children now sleeping next to me. As I contemplated their sweet faces, I realized that the one thing they needed most in this world was the assurance that their mom and dad loved each other and would always be there for them—the very thing we had just taken away from them. It seemed an incredible betrayal to inflict on children for the sake of their parents’ selfish interests.

By the time the plane touched down, I could better understand what had gone wrong, but I didn’t know what to do about it. The distance had grown so great that we had little common ground to work with. I began by talking with my parents at length and with a close friend. My first inclination was that it would be easier to end the marriage and just take my losses. Then I painfully remembered that taking the path that maximized my personal ease had not served me well in the past. My loved ones counseled me to do what the Lord would have me do. I guess I knew what that should be.

One afternoon as I ended a fast in quiet prayer, I received a strong impression I will always remember. Clear thoughts came to my mind. I realized that the well-being of my family was more important than my convenience and personal interests. I sensed I was experiencing the consequences of my mistakes, but the reality remained that I had made commitments. I had brought two children into the world who depended on me to take care of them and to love their mother. I had a sacred duty to do everything in my power to help my family stay together and to help each member realize his or her full potential.

It was a tremendous relief to have clear guidance and to be filled with a strong desire to follow through. I got up from that prayer, went to the telephone, and asked my wife if she would

consider flying to meet me so we could start rebuilding our life together. I found out she too had been fasting and praying to know what to do, and she simply replied, “Yes.”

As I saw our children run into her arms at the airport, tears came to my eyes, and I made a commitment then and there to love *all* of my family with all my heart so we would never have to be separated again.

The process of restructuring our marriage was neither easy nor convenient, and even now, years later, we continue to work at it. We came to think of our marriage as a journey to the top of a mountain. Our problem was that we each had been trying to get to the top of different mountains. Once we agreed on our destination—an eternal family unit guided by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the words of the prophets—we were able to forgo individual satisfactions or pleasures that could be had by playing along the wayside or by exploring other paths during our climb up the mountain.

As we clearly established our priorities, we found the journey easier when we helped each other over the rough places in the trail. President Howard W. Hunter taught that the wife is a “companion equal and necessary in full partnership” with her husband (“Being a Righteous Husband and Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 51). We believed we would both grow and develop more fully as we dedicated our efforts to realizing our fullest potential within our respective roles.

I have never felt a stronger sense of personal honor or integrity than the day I rolled up my sleeves and determined my wife would never have to work outside the home again due to my lack of effort. And Jolene has never been so beautiful as the day she committed to manage our household on the income I earned and to devote her life, time, talents, and energy to giving our children guidance, training, counseling, and love.

The counsel of the prophets to pray together as a family and as a couple, to spend time together in weekly family home evenings, to go on regular dates, and to love and support each other is the path that will lead us to the top of the mountain together. In order to do these things, we further realized that we needed to talk often, plan together, and communicate openly together. We needed to open our hearts to each other.

Doing these things, we began to see we also had a responsibility to help each other grow and develop in rich and rewarding ways. All of Father in Heaven’s children have divine potential to develop their talents, gifts, and spiritual endowments if they but cultivate them throughout life. As Jolene and I realized our role in helping each other grow in good ways, we discovered a broad and enriching basis that we had not seen before upon which our love could grow.

We have been blessed as we have tried to recognize and admit our mistakes and sought to recover from them. While we still experience occasional rough terrain in our climb up our mountain, now we seek to steady each other with help from our Father in Heaven. Each time I look at my family, I am grateful once again for the leadership of our inspired prophets who have clearly marked the path to successful family life and to my Heavenly Father for guiding me toward increased understanding and a second chance to build an eternal marriage.