



There is a sweetness and tenderness that comes into our relationship when we kneel together in prayer and hear the other petition the throne of God on our behalf.

Bringing God into Our Marriage

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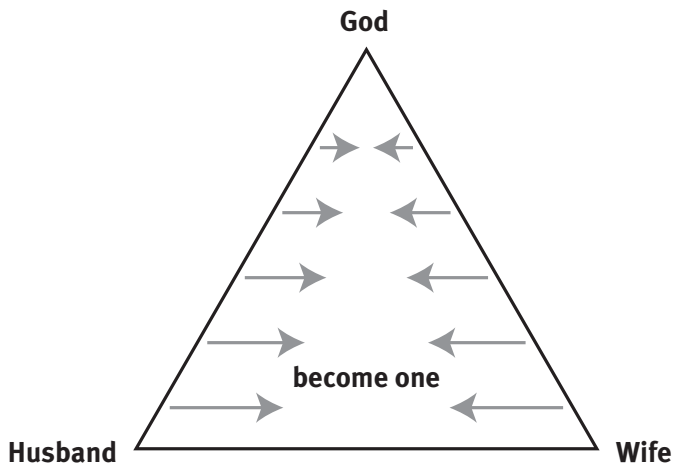
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President Dallin H. Oaks observed that “a good marriage does not require a perfect man or perfect woman. It only requires a man and a woman committed to strive together toward perfection.”¹ Marriage is a journey where spouses learn and grow together as they move toward the eternities. As couples, even though it takes a lot of work, we can create good marriages through our own consistent, diligent efforts to prioritize the relationship. We can work on our own to have a healthy and resilient approach to life and our spouse. We can work together as a couple to navigate daily interpersonal dynamics by working on our communication skills, learning to negotiate finances together as equal partners, and strengthening emotional and physical intimacies. However, regardless of how consistent we are in these efforts, our goal is *not* to just have a good marriage—it is to have a glorious, eternal, Godlike marriage! To attain this lofty goal in our journey toward perfection, we must look to God to uplift and exalt us. We can do this by inviting Him into the marriage! President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Marriage is the foundry for social order, the fountain of virtue, and the foundation for eternal exaltation. Marriage has been divinely designated as an eternal and

everlasting covenant. Marriage is sanctified when it is cherished and honored in holiness. That union is not merely between husband and wife; it embraces a partnership with God.²

What does it mean to have a partnership with God? In a study examining Latter-day Saint marriage, some participants spoke of their marriage in terms of a triangle, with God, their spouse, and themselves connected through a covenant relationship.³ Illustrations, such as the one below, are commonly used in marital counseling with religious couples.



As each spouse focuses on God and moves closer to him, not only do they become more like him, but the distance between husband and wife naturally narrows. They grow closer and become more unified. To maximize our opportunities for marital success, we must allow God to be partnered with us in all aspects of our marital relationship.

Studies have consistently found that an individual or a couple's religious attendance, beliefs, experiences, and rituals are positively correlated with greater marital satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus (agreement on relationship issues). In addition, prayer and religious beliefs are linked to marital satisfaction and also buffered the effects of marital risk factors, such as previous divorce, high stress in marriage, and premarital cohabitation.⁴ In their research studying members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Richard, working with Bruce Chadwick, found that religious behaviors like

personal scripture study, private prayer, family scripture study, family prayer, and temple-worthy actions are each positively associated with both marital happiness and satisfaction.⁵

From a doctrinal perspective, we only need to go to the first chapter in the Book of Mormon to learn the ways to invite our Heavenly Father into the marriage covenant. It is there that we learn that Father Lehi is given special revelation to protect himself, his marriage, and his family. He models for us reading the scriptures (verses 12–14), praying (verses 5–6, 14–15), pondering (verse 7), and recording his revelations (verse 16). Nephi then testifies that those who follow the prophets are given tender mercies and are made “mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (verse 20). Thus, to make God our partner in our marriage, we must (1) practice personal and couple worship behaviors such as: scripture study, prayer, pondering, and writing and recording sacred impressions, as well as (2) make an unwavering commitment to follow the Lord’s prophets who represent him on this earth.

Scripture Study

Becoming one with God in marriage starts with daily scripture study, both as individuals and as a couple. Searching the word of God is vital to maintaining a healthy marriage because it increases our ability to receive revelation on our journey together. When we search the scriptures we give God the opportunity to tell us what He wants us to know. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Search the Scriptures, search the prophets and learn what portion of them belongs to you.”⁶ Our “portion” comes by way of applying the stories and doctrines in the scriptures to our current life and challenges, especially marital challenges.

When married, it’s often the case that spouses continue studying the scriptures on their own as they did when they were single. It is very important to continue to do this. The greater challenge, however, is to start studying together as a couple. Have you ever gone to the scriptures as a couple for assistance with life’s challenges, or even your marital difficulties? Do you set aside time each day as a couple to read and study the scriptures or words of the prophets?

When we do our couple scripture study each evening we include not only our scriptures, but also reading or listening to general conference talks or other Church writings. We try to make this a priority and it has bonded us together and to our Father in Heaven. As we have studied and discussed

together the doctrines of the gospel and the teachings of our living prophets, we have received countless impressions about how we should act going forward concerning our personal and family life. In addition, the powerful, connecting influence of the Spirit permeates this time together and we are able to feel close to each other after we have spent a long day attending to our various work, child, and household duties. One fond memory is when we spent several months reading together *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* when it was first published. We read and talked often about the stories and doctrines in the book. For some reason, the timing in reading that book together was very important for our marriage and helped us become much closer during some difficult times.

The Book of Mormon

Although all the scriptures from the standard works are valuable to us and we should be studying from each of them regularly, the Lord has emphasized the importance and preeminence of the Book of Mormon in our latter-day study. President Ezra Taft Benson gave several talks in the 1980s admonishing us as Church members to make the Book of Mormon the center of our scripture study. On one occasion, President Benson counseled: “There is a book we need to study daily, both as individuals and as families, namely the Book of Mormon. I love that book. It is the book that will get a person nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than any other book. (See Book of Mormon, Introduction.) President Romney recommended studying it half an hour each day. I commend that practice to you. I’ve always enjoyed reading the scriptures and do so on a daily basis individually and with my beloved wife.”⁷

More recently, several prophets have reemphasized that counsel, including President Nelson, who spoke of the value of studying the Book of Mormon: “Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, *daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon*, and regular time committed to temple and family history work.”⁸

Personal study of the Book of Mormon has strengthened us *individually*. It has strengthened, and continues to strengthen, our testimonies of Jesus Christ, as well as our individual resolve and commitment to live the gospel. Principles taught in the Book of Mormon have prepared us for, and continue to remind us of, the seriousness of the marital covenant and teach us about the Christlike characteristics we need to adopt to make our marital

relationship thrive. Ultimately, as we each individually adopt Christlike qualities, we become better spouses to each other.

In addition, couple study of the Book of Mormon has strengthened our *marriage relationship*. It has taught us about how to resolve marital conflict. For example, the story of Lehi and Sariah shows us how to respond to accusations with humility and meekness rather than defensiveness. In 1 Nephi 5:2–3, we see that Sariah has been mourning the perceived loss of her sons after they have gone to recover the brass plates from Laban and have yet failed to return. In her distress, she lays upon her husband severe accusations, including that the death of her sons is *his* fault. We know from the scriptural account that continues that Lehi chose to honestly look at what Sariah had said and found that there *was* truth in what she had spoken. He then validated her by acknowledging that truth (which will always serve to defuse a hostile combatant!): “And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man” (verse 4)—or, in other words, “You know, honey, you are right.” After defusing her negative energy, Lehi continues by explaining how his being “a visionary man” was actually a good thing for them and their family (verses 4–5). We learn in verses 6–8 that Sariah was comforted. Later, when her sons returned, just as Lehi had testified they would, Sariah’s joy was full, and she was additionally comforted so that she was then prompted to offer her own newly strengthened testimony not only of the Lord but of her husband’s role as a prophet—in essence, she embraced the great blessing that her husband was a visionary man (see verse 8). This great transformation in Sariah was possible only because Lehi chose not to become defensive when a criticism from his spouse came his way.

This story, and many others in the Book of Mormon, have taught us important marital principles and have brought the spirit of protection and love into our hearts and home.

Principles of Effective Scripture Study

Individuals and couples approach their scripture study in a variety of ways; however, there are more effective ways than others. Speaking to seminary and institute teachers about their students, President Henry B. Eyring observed that many of the young people who are struggling are praying and studying their scriptures, but “they are not doing it the way that works.”⁹ We as couples need to make sure we are practicing personal and couple scripture study in the way that works. Specific scheduling will, of course, be based on personal

circumstances and family timing. Yet the following provides some guiding principles from prophets and apostles on effective ways to fortify ourselves and our marriages through these practices.

President Howard W. Hunter taught that studying the scriptures daily is more effective than studying sporadically for long periods of time. He encouraged us to set aside a regular study time that allows our focus to remain undisturbed and uninterrupted. He indicated that we should have a plan for our study rather than just reading randomly. He also encouraged setting aside a specific time each day to study rather than reading a set number of chapters or pages. This would allow us time to ponder and give the Spirit the freedom to guide us. He explained that by doing this, perhaps we might spend our entire study time on a single verse.¹⁰

Accordingly, *effective* scripture study is best done daily, during a regularly scheduled time, for a predetermined amount of time, rather than attempting to cover a certain number of pages or chapters. This shifts scripture study from just reading time to devotional time. We want to allow the Spirit to lead our study. Some days the Spirit will guide us through each of the practices we discuss in this chapter—reading, praying, pondering, and recording—all within the time we set aside for our worship. Some days the Spirit may lead us through only one or two of these elements. Yet if we listen, he will teach us things we need to know. That revelation will speak to things about our life, marriage, family, profession, Church callings, friendships, and so forth.

As mentioned, we set aside some time in the evening right before going to sleep for scripture study together. Sometimes we are very tired at night and only spend a few minutes, not able to quite give our full energy to our study and discussion. Other times, we get quite active in discussing what we have studied, and we end up spending much longer than planned. Those types of discussions are always full of positive energy and are some of our favorite times together, even when the specific topic at hand might be quite serious. Such moments create a great sense of closeness and intimacy, strengthening our marital relationship. They also provide the space to discuss and receive revelation on how the doctrinal principles we are studying relate to our marriage and family.

Prayer

Another salient practice that brings God into a marriage is prayer. It strengthens individuals and couples and facilitates the receipt of revelation. As stated

earlier, Richard and Bruce Chadwick found that couples who pray privately and together have significantly higher rates of marital happiness.¹¹ The old saying that “couples who pray together, stay together” is statistically true. There are many studies that have shown that individuals who pray for their spouse in personal prayer or in couple prayer have significantly higher levels of marital well-being.¹² We are taught about prayer in the Latter-day Saint Bible Dictionary: “Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each other. The object of prayer is not to change the will of God but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking for them. Blessings require some work or effort on our part before we can obtain them. Prayer is a form of work and is an appointed means for obtaining the highest of all blessings.”

When it comes to prayer in marriage, there are three practices we suggest: pray for your spouse, pray with your spouse, and pray for your spouse *with* your spouse.

Pray for Your Spouse

When we say our personal or individual prayers, we can strengthen our marriage by including our spouse in our prayers. Does your husband have an important deadline at work? Is your wife overwhelmed with extended family responsibilities? Pray for your spouse’s happiness, health, and success and invite the powers of heaven to bless their life. President Eyring detailed: “I give counsel to husbands and wives. Pray for the love which allows you to see the good in your companion. Pray for the love that makes weaknesses and mistakes seem small. Pray for the love to make your companion’s joy your own. Pray for the love to want to lessen the load and soften the sorrows of your companion.”¹³

Praying for our spouse can strengthen and confirm positive, warm feelings in a strong, vibrant, and loving marital relationship. This can strengthen feelings of emotional closeness to them. As we pray for them, may we also remember to express gratitude to a loving Father in Heaven for bringing them into our lives and hearts.

Praying for our spouse can also be therapeutic in healing hearts and warming up feelings in a difficult moment, especially when struggling with a chronically difficult relationship. When there are dark feelings over our marriage, we may not feel like we want to connect emotionally or spiritually with our spouse, and it may feel impossible to send warm, positive feelings up

into the heavens on behalf of our spouse. Yet if we will humble ourselves and choose to be willing to pray for our spouse in a personal prayer, the Lord will bless our efforts and bless our marriage. This concept of willingness is vital: we can choose to be willing even when we are *not* wanting to be.

Bruce Chadwick illustrates the great power of personal prayer in soothing pained marital relationships. During a BYU devotional, he told this story of a struggling couple who came to him for help. He had worked with the couple for several weeks with no progress relative to reducing marital anger and conflict. After reading in Matthew 5:43–44 about praying for one’s enemy, he felt inspired to have the spouses pray for each other:

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 . . . 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. . . . 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.

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.

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.¹⁴

As this story shows, praying for our spouse can change hearts in a difficult and painful marital relationship. If we do not feel positive emotions toward our spouse and we cannot sincerely pray for our spouse to be happy, healthy, and successful, then let’s begin by praying to our Father in Heaven to ask him to help us to want to pray for them.

Pray with Your Spouse

In addition to praying for our spouse, the blessings of prayer will be more fully realized when we pray with our spouse. Many couples may not have a great testimony of couple prayer and may not make it a daily habit. Yet there is a special power and unity that comes into our lives and into our marriages when we choose to humbly pray together as spouses. It inoculates our

relationship from the hazards of daily living, it elevates us above the mundane, and it helps us find the eternal happiness we desire. President Benson taught, “The differences and irritations of the day melt away as families approach the throne of heaven together. Unity increases. The ties of love and affection are re-enforced and the peace of heaven enters.”¹⁵

The type of humble petition that elicits these blessings from a loving Heavenly Father also brings love and unity into the hearts of spouses. President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke extensively about the effect of couple prayer on a marital relationship:

I know of no single practice that will have a more salutary effect upon your lives than the practice of kneeling together as you begin and close each day. Somehow the little storms that seem to afflict every marriage are dissipated when, kneeling before the Lord, you thank him for one another, in the presence of one another, and together invoke his blessings upon your lives, your home, your loved ones, and your dreams.

God then will be your partner, and your daily conversations with him will bring peace into your hearts and a joy into your lives that can come from no other source. Your companionship will sweeten through the years; your love will strengthen. Your appreciation for one another will grow. . . .

The destroying angel of domestic bitterness will pass you by and you will know peace and love throughout your lives which may be extended into all eternity.¹⁶

Each of us can secure these blessings if we use our will and our agency to choose to turn our relationship ever toward God through couple prayer.

Sometimes coordinating or scheduling couple prayer can become problematic. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland made a practical suggestion regarding couple prayer by sharing a personal story from his own marriage. Speaking of the early years of his marriage to his beloved wife, Sister Patricia Holland, he said:

We were young . . . and we were very busy. We were finding ourselves having our evening prayer at the close of the day. We were exhausted. She had been raising children, I had been off to school or work. . . . We could hardly stay awake. We just decided there was no requirement that this has to be a prayer at 11 o'clock at night when we can hardly form the words. We just moved it up. We just took a time and said we are going to pray together earlier and it won't be flopped against the bed or almost asleep by the time [we] get into the conversation with the Lord just out of fatigue. It really materially changed our lives and our ability to make that evening prayer a meaningful experience with the Lord.¹⁷

These principles can be encouraging when feelings between spouses are good and the relationship is strong. Yet when things are difficult—when we are not feeling unified as spouses, such as when there has been conflict or

when there is chronic interpersonal strain—it can be very difficult to want to pray together. And yet that is exactly what we need to do. In such difficult times, Elder David B. Haight counseled:

If, as husband and wife, you are having serious misunderstandings or if you feel some strain or tension building up in your marriage, you should humbly get on your knees together and ask God our Father, with a sincere heart and real intent, to lift the darkness that is over your relationship, that you may receive the needed light, see your errors, repent of your wrongs, forgive each other, and receive each unto yourselves as you did in the beginning. I solemnly assure you that God lives and will answer your humble pleas.¹⁸

Pray for Your Spouse *with* Your Spouse

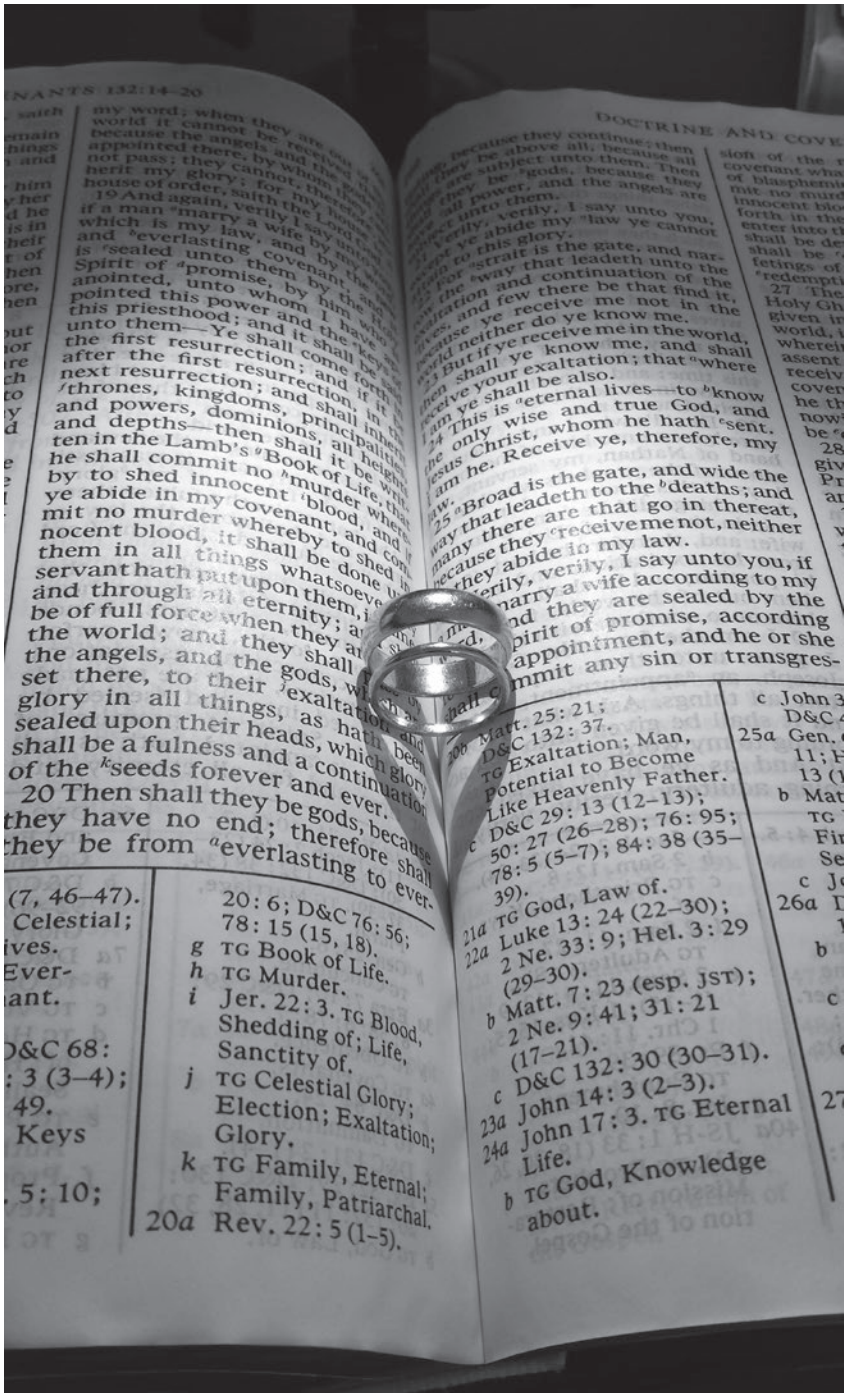
Praying for our spouse in our individual prayers draws our hearts to them, and praying with our spouse creates a sense of unity, but praying for our spouse while they are listening is particularly powerful.

There is a sweetness and tenderness that comes into our relationship when we kneel together in prayer and hear the other petition the throne of God on our behalf. We pray for each other in our professional activities. We pray for each other in our family duties. We pray for each other in our church callings. We pray for each other's health and comfort and happiness. It brings a tremendous feeling of peace when we hear the other thoughtfully ask God for our welfare. It is a most powerful, tender relationship building experience.

President M. Russell Ballard prescribed: "There is great power in prayer. . . . I'm wondering if many of you parents, you couples, have lost that essential moment of kneeling together at the end of the day, just the two of you, holding hands and saying your prayers. If that has slipped away from your daily routine, may I suggest you put it back—beginning tonight!"¹⁹

Pondering

In addition to scripture study and prayer, we should dedicate ourselves to taking time to ponder or meditate, both individually and as a couple. In his postmortal visit to the Nephites, Jesus Christ taught about the important role of pondering when he instructed them, "Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow" (3 Nephi 17:3). As mortals we are weak and cannot initially understand many things of the



ANANTS 132:14-20

my word, when they are out of the world it cannot be received because the angels and the spirits are appointed there, by whom they do not pass; they cannot, therefore, inherit my glory; for my house of order, for my house of glory, and again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my law, which is my law, and by my word, he is sealed unto me by the Spirit of promise, and by the Holy Spirit, unto whom I have appointed this power; and he shall have unto them—the first resurrection; and the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, and powers, dominions, principalities, and depths—then shall it be counted unto them—he shall commit no murder whereby they shall shed innocent blood, it shall be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and through all eternity; and they shall set there, to the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and they shall be sealed upon their heads, as hath been sealed upon the heads of the apostles, and shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

20 Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to ever-

(7, 46–47).
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 D&C 68:
 : 3 (3–4);
 49.
 Keys
 5; 10;
 20a 20: 6; D&C 76: 56;
 78: 15 (15, 18).
 g TC Book of Life.
 h TC Murder.
 i Jer. 22: 3. TC Blood,
 Shedding of; Life,
 Sanctity of.
 j TC Celestial Glory;
 Election; Exaltation;
 Glory.
 k TC Family, Eternal;
 Family, Patriarchal.
 20a Rev. 22: 5 (1–5).

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

because they continue; then they may be above all, because all things are subject unto them; and they are gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.

23 Verily, I say unto you, whosoever will abide in my law, he shall come into the glory. This is the strait way that leadeth unto the Father, and the Father will receive him, and give unto him power, and authority, and few there be that find it. But if ye receive me not in the world, neither do ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am he shall be also.

24 This is eternal life—to know the Father and the Son, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.

25 Broad is the gate, and wide the way that leadeth to the deaths; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law.

26 Verily, I say unto you, if ye marry a wife according to my law, and she is sealed by the Spirit of promise, and he or she shall be my wife, and shall receive of my Father, and shall be my son, and shall inherit all things.

27 The Father will receive him, and give unto him power, and authority, and few there be that find it.

28a Mart. 25: 21;
 D&C 132: 37.
 TC Exaltation; Man,
 Potential to Become
 Like Heavenly Father.
 c D&C 29: 13 (12–13);
 50: 27 (26–28); 76: 95;
 78: 5 (5–7); 84: 38 (35–
 39).
 21a TC God, Law of.
 22a Luke 13: 24 (22–30);
 2 Ne. 33: 9; Hel. 3: 29
 (29–30).
 b Matt. 7: 23 (esp. JST);
 2 Ne. 9: 41; 31: 21
 (17–21).
 c D&C 132: 30 (30–31).
 23a John 14: 3 (2–3).
 24a John 17: 3. TC Eternal
 Life.
 b TC God, Knowledge
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Spirit. Yet taking the time to prepare to receive the word into our hearts will allow us to more fully receive and interpret the whisperings of the Spirit.

President David O. McKay observed, “We pay too little attention to the value of meditation, a principle of devotion. . . . *Meditation is one of the most secret, most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.*”²⁰ Meditation, or pondering, can bring us into the presence of the Lord.

The scriptures provide several examples of those that have received great knowledge and visions after a period of individual or personal pondering. We will discuss three such stories herein: accounts of Lehi and Nephi, the brother of Jared, and President Joseph F. Smith.

The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi saw a pillar of fire in which he “saw and heard much” (1 Nephi 1:6). The record tells us that after the vision he “cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen. And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open” (verses 7–8). We believe as Lehi “cast himself upon his bed,” he lay pondering on the vision he had just seen. As he did so, he received further light and truth through another vision. His pondering was an effective conduit to revelation, as we also learn later of another vision by this great prophet-leader, the vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8). Additionally, Nephi learned from his father and had a desire to know for himself the things his father had seen, and through pondering he received a vision. He recorded that while he “sat pondering in [his] heart [he] was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1). It was there that the Spirit of the Lord gave him a personally guided tour of the things his father saw.

Many years earlier in the Book of Mormon chronology, as the Jaredites prepared to travel to the promised land, the brother of Jared discovered a few complications that the newly built barges would create during their journey: the need for air, the inability to steer, and the necessity of light. He prayed for help (Ether 2:19). The Lord gave him the answers to his questions about the need for air (verse 20) and how to steer (verses 24–25). Yet the brother of Jared did not so quickly or easily provide the answer relative to the need for light. The Lord instead instructed the brother of Jared to ponder upon the dilemma of traveling the ocean in darkness (verses 23, 25). He did so and derived a solution he then proposed to the Lord. As we learn from the narrative, the Lord honored this proposal.

As we see with the brother of Jared, at times the Lord grants us answers to our prayers easily, without much more than the work of belief on our part. However, more often, as with the brother of Jared's question of how to travel the ocean with light, the Lord wants us to do our part in the revelatory process and exercise faith. He wants us to ponder, which includes examining our options (doing our research), making a decision, and then inquiring of him if our decision be right (see Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9).

As a final scriptural example, in Doctrine and Covenants 138, President Joseph F. Smith illustrated the power of pondering on the word through his experience receiving revelation on the redemption of the dead:

I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God. . . . While I was thus engaged, my mind reverted to the writings of the apostle Peter. . . . I opened the Bible and read . . . , and as I read I was greatly impressed, more than I had ever been before. . . . As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great." (Doctrine and Covenants 138:1–11)

President Smith's pondering, intermingled with and informed by his scripture study, opened the door for him to see the Lord's visit to those beyond the veil.

Pondering Alone

Personal pondering may include meditation, thinking, journaling, exploring, and the like. It may include activities such as reading and rereading the same verses or chapters of scriptures, or listening to the same general conference talks, for several days or more to create greater focus. We ponder throughout the day while driving, walking, or sitting in an office, in addition to our scripture study, prayer, or sacrament meeting times. Pondering grants us inspiration about our own personal stewardships, such as things we need to do about Church callings or family matters.

Personal pondering is also a blessing in helping us get along in our marriage. Let's walk through what this process may look like for someone who gets angry quickly, and their abrasive tone and high-volume level sends their spouse into hiding. The Spirit may initially speak to their heart about the importance of reducing their volume through a prompting such as "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). They may decide to work on

reducing their volume even though they know that that one change will not miraculously cure every problem in their marital relationship.

Perhaps at a later occasion during scripture study, this person may feel the spirit of caution as they read about Zeniff's experiences in being overzealous: "And yet, I being over-zealous . . . we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God" (Mosiah 9:3). They may then realize as they ponder the scripture that it is has been not only their volume but also their strong and determined will that comes across as overzealous and intense, which makes their spouse cower and withdraw from them during a discussion or disagreement. They may then begin to think about reducing their intensity from what had been a ten on a scale of one to ten (ten being the strongest) down to about a five or six. They may practice asking their spouse more frequently for their thoughts and opinions, hearing from them how they would solve a problem or what they would like to do in a situation.

As they continue to keep their volume low while practicing the skill of reducing their intensity, over time they may begin to see that their spouse is less anxious and more willing to voice their opinion and have a discussion with them. This newfound ability to peacefully discuss a point of disagreement somehow gets generalized and allows more free-flowing positive energy to be present throughout their other interactions as well. Over time this person may realize that the relationship they now have with their spouse is entirely new, having been miraculously changed for the better.

Pondering Together

Pondering together as a couple is also very powerful. We spend a lot of time pondering together. It is a common practice for us to discuss something and then ponder it for a day or two, then come back together and discuss it some more. We have learned to sit on a decision that needs to be made so that after we have discussed it we can give ourselves some time and space. Then, we go back to it and discuss and ponder again in order to make the decision. It gives us much greater sense of confidence and assurance about the decision we make and it generates feelings of connection and unity. When we ponder together, it generates tremendous power to reveal the line-upon-line revelations we need. This type of pondering has generated course changes, new professional projects, service to others, and so on.

Writing and Recording Spiritual Promptings

When we receive impressions and ideas from the Lord, there is great value in learning to write them down or record them, especially when it comes to strengthening our marriage. Elder Richard G. Scott has said: “Knowledge carefully recorded is knowledge available in time of need. Spiritually sensitive information should be kept in a sacred place that communicates to the Lord how you treasure it. This practice enhances the likelihood of your receiving further light.”²¹ Following this counsel has been a great blessing for us. Writing our impressions in our scriptures and scripture journals has allowed the Lord to give us more ideas and directions. It helps us ponder upon the revelations He gives us with more clarity; seeing them written on the page enhances them. It helps us remember what we have received of the Lord when perhaps we tend to forget. It allows us to go back and review. There have been many times when we have gone back to our scripture journals and have been amazed at what we had previously learned, thinking, “This is good stuff!”

Sharing the ideas we have recorded in our scripture journals has unified our marriage. When we share, it opens wonderful gospel discussions. At these times it is common for us to receive additional insights together about what we need to do to grow closer to our Father in Heaven as a couple.

Additionally, our scripture journals have become great reference books for us. Many of our sacrament meeting talks or Church lessons are laced with ideas or insights the Spirit has given us, sometimes even years earlier, that we are able to access because we have recorded them. In other words, the revelations we personally receive and record remain available to bless not only us but others as well.

There are a variety of approaches we can choose to record our gospel insights. We can highlight scriptural verses and write notes or related quotes in the book’s margins. We can record our impressions in a physical journal or type them into a document on our computer. We can copy a poignant scripture word for word into the journal, following Nephi’s pattern of first recording a scripture and then making commentary (see 2 Nephi 12–25) that can help us focus our attention differently. We can read our scriptures digitally, on our electronic devices. We can highlight a particular verse and then write impressions, thoughts, and other notes about it directly into the scriptures as a pop-up note. How do you prefer to record your impressions? Whether it be one of the ways we have mentioned or your own unique way, it does not matter—it matters only that you do it.

The Doctrine of Prophets

Following God's modern oracles is a critical part of strengthening and growing an eternal marriage. We have the privilege to live in a time when God speaks to us through living prophets and apostles. President Russell M. Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "It is no small thing to have a prophet of God in our midst. Great and wonderful are the blessings that come into our lives as we listen to the word of the Lord given to us through him."²²

Since the days of Adam, the Lord has established a pattern and plan to direct his work here on the earth. He has called special, faithful men throughout the ages to be prophets by communicating with them and giving them authority and keys to direct his work.²³ This pattern was also followed in this final dispensation with the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Heavenly Father sent angels to physically confer priesthood keys and authority upon Joseph. Joseph in turn conferred these keys and authority upon other men who were called as Apostles. This pattern continues within the Church today.

The prophets serve as a liaison between God the Father and his children, leading us and giving us what we need in our daily lives. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi gave a thorough discourse to his rebellious brothers, Laman and Lemuel, on the role of prophets. He taught his brothers using the familiar story of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. Nephi explained to his brothers that the slavery of the children of Israel could not have ended without a decision by the people to listen to the Lord through his prophet Moses. He outlined the miracles God performed on their behalf through his prophet: he split the waters of the Red Sea so the children of Israel could escape (1 Nephi 17:23–26), he fed them with manna (verse 28), he blessed them with water after Moses split a rock (verse 29), and he blessed them with guidance in the wilderness (verse 30).

We see here that everything of importance to the children of Israel was provided by the living prophet: deliverance, food, water, and guidance through the desert. When the people were righteous and followed the prophet, they were blessed; when they were not righteous, they failed to prosper. This example illustrates how God uses His divinely called prophet to do his work among his children. This is true in our day as well.

There may be times when what a prophet speaks is a challenge to follow. In these circumstances, the Lord requires our faith, which will lead us to be humble and seek confirmation. The Book of Mormon is full of stories that contrast those who meekly follow the prophet and are blessed

verses those who rebel and fall. Take for example the story of the prophet Lehi and his family when he left his riches and property back in Jerusalem. Naturally everyone was a bit shocked and upset by the declarations of their prophet-father. Laman and Lemuel murmured and simply did nothing to seek spiritual understanding. This failure to be humble and faithfully seek the Spirit's witness contributed to even greater hardening of their hearts, as they later became angry and murderous. By contrast, Nephi chose to be meek and teachable. "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, . . . having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers" (1 Nephi 2:16).

In this story, Nephi illustrates for us the spiritual work we must do to receive confirmation of prophetic counsel and admonition. President Harold B. Lee stated: "It is not alone sufficient for us as Latter-day Saints to follow our leaders and to accept their counsel, but we have the greater obligation to gain for ourselves the unshakable testimony of the divine appointment of these men and the witness that what they have told us is the will of our Heavenly Father."²⁴

Blessings When We Give Heed to the Prophets

One of the great challenges in today's culture and society is to become aware of and expose Satan's subtle and unseen ways of deception. He often masks destructive influences or lifestyles and makes them look not only innocent but even desirable. We are promised blessings for following the prophets. Doctrine and Covenants 124:45 promises us, "If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place." To this, President Boyd K. Packer added, "Remember this promise; hold on to it. It should be a great comfort to those struggling to keep a family together in a society increasingly indifferent to, and even hostile toward, those standards which are essential to a happy family."²⁵

To us this is very comforting doctrine. In a modern world that often gets caught up in pop culture or alternative fads, following the counsel of leaders is vital to help us avoid getting deceived by Satan and his trends in society that go counter to the commandments of God. It is also important to keep

us from wasting precious resources—such as our time, energy, or money—on ideas or programs or causes that will not bear fruit (see John 15:16).

In our marriage we have sought diligently to follow the counsel of the prophets. One particular example is the counsel of several prophets that we avoid and stay out of debt.²⁶ Although we carry some mortgage and school debt, which represent investments toward building our financial future, we have made considerable effort to avoid consumer debt. We do not pay for anything on a credit card that cannot be fully paid off when the balance comes due each month. We plan ahead and save up for larger purchases, such as cars, rather than buying on credit or with loans and then paying them off with interest. We counsel with each other about significant financial purchases. We pay extra each month on our mortgage to pay down that debt as quickly as possible. Because financial stress and disagreement is at the heart of many divorces, the absence of that heavy burden allows space for other meaningful and positive interactions. Doctrine & Covenants 19:35 counsels, “Pay the debt. . . . Release thyself from bondage.” We cannot underscore enough how much harmony and peace this practice brings into our marriage.

Challenges of Following Prophetic Counsel

Although blessings come from following the prophets, sometimes giving heed to their counsel is not always easy. Sometimes the application becomes painful as that counsel pushes up against our own wants or desires.

We see in the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:10–13) the excruciating decisions and tests that are sometimes required to follow a prophet of God, yet we also see the blessings that come as a result of doing so. Elijah called to the woman as she gathered sticks and asked her to bring him some water to drink. As she left to get a container for the water, he also asked her to bring him some bread. She replied to him that she did not have any bread but only some meal and oil. She then explained that she was currently gathering sticks in order to build a fire so that she and her son could cook what little meal and oil they had so they could then eat it and die. Elijah then said to her, “Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son” (verse 13). In general conference, Sister Carol F. McConkie, first counselor in the Young Women General Presidency, implored us to think about this story: “Imagine for a moment the difficulty of what the prophet was asking a starving mother to do.” She then continued:

But Elijah also promised a blessing for obedience. . . .

In a world threatened by a famine of righteousness and spiritual starvation, we have been commanded to sustain the prophet. . . .

We heed prophetic word even when it may seem unreasonable, inconvenient, and uncomfortable. According to the world's standards, following the prophet may be unpopular, politically incorrect, or socially unacceptable. But following the prophet is always right. . . .

The Lord honors and favors those who will heed prophetic direction. For the widow of Zarephath, obedience to Elijah saved her life and ultimately the life of her son.²⁷

So what seemed at first to be insensitive counsel from Elijah to the widow, in fact was the very thing that saved her and her son. No doubt these types of tests will be asked of us by modern-day prophets as well. As in this story, we have also felt the tremendous burden of faith as we have sought to follow the prophet—even when it has been painfully difficult—yet we have also experienced unforeseen blessings. President Eyring gave a deeply thoughtful and inspired analogy as a witness to this principle: “Sometimes we will receive counsel that we cannot understand or that seems not to apply to us, even after careful prayer and thought. Don’t discard the counsel, but hold it close. If someone you trusted handed you what appeared to be nothing more than sand with the promise that it contained gold, you might wisely hold it in your hand awhile, shaking it gently. Every time I have done that with counsel from a prophet, after a time the gold flakes have begun to appear, and I have been grateful.”²⁸

We have found these flakes many times both personally and as a couple. As we have watched each other make difficult personal decisions, our marriage relationship has been blessed as we experience greater trust and confidence in each other’s commitment to the Lord’s prophets. We have seen mighty protections!

Conclusion

To bring God into our marriage, we need to spend time with the Lord through personal and couple worship. A primary purpose of our scripture study is to open the way for the Lord to give us revelation. Then our study becomes a devotional with the Lord. In tandem with scripture study time, our worship will more fully invite the Spirit of revelation as we include praying, pondering, and writing as directed by the Holy Ghost.

We also bring God into our marriage through committed and careful following of prophetic counsel. We testify that God has sent prophets to protect marriage, because the gospel plan is a marriage plan. The words of the prophets and apostles will promote thriving within the interpersonal context of our marriage and provide protection from outside (extramarital) worldly influences. As we live and apply the words and warnings of the prophets, the gold flakes will appear. He will transform our marriage into an eternal and glorious relationship. **RE**

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