

“HOLDING FAST TO THE ROD OF IRON”

# God's Word in Marriage

**RICHARD:** *Before I was married, I would from time to time theoretically consider how certain scriptures or words of the prophets would someday help me to be a faithful, righteous husband. Once Debra and I were married, things went from theoretical to practical very fast! I can't tell you how many times over our married life I have gone to the word of God to help me figure out how to be a more humble, sensitive, thoughtful, and engaged husband. My connection to God has been my lifeline and road map for my marriage to Debra. His words have encouraged me when I was discouraged. They have revealed to me the course I should take to lift Debra when she has been down. They have guided important decisions we have needed to make as a couple.*

*Doctrine and Covenants 84:85 has comforted us: “Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man.” This scripture represents an ongoing pattern in our marriage: as we have studied the scriptures and been immersed in the word, God has brought to our minds “at the very hour” the ideas and thoughts that we have needed to make choices that would bless our marriage and family. Such experiences bring us closer to Him and to each other.*

Strengthening the *Thee* in marriage refers to learning how to more fully invite the presence and influence of God the Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost into our marriage. In a study examining LDS marriage, some participants spoke of their marriage in terms of a triangle, with God, their spouse, and themselves connected through a covenant relationship.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, illustrations, such as the one to the right, 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.

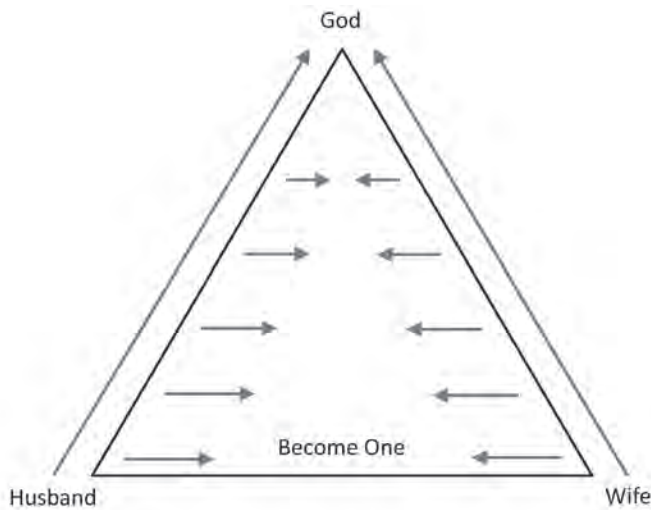
Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles discussed this principle in a Facebook post and illustrated it with his own marriage to his wife, Sister Ruth Lybbert Renlund:

Recently I have had the opportunity to officiate in the temple sealing of four wonderful couples. As I prepared for these wonderful experiences, I found myself pondering I Corinthians II:II, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”

I have found myself thinking about what “in the Lord” means within a marriage relationship. This is a question that each husband and wife would benefit from pondering.

For me, it means that Ruth and I will be stronger as we center our relationship on the teachings, example, and love of Jesus Christ. As we each work to become more like the Savior, we will learn to love each other more and become more unified. It is a lifelong goal—it is actually an eternal goal—and it is well worth the effort.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, it is imperative that we as individuals and as couples keep ourselves connected to His words every day. This is foundational—critical—to keeping our marriages strong and safe. Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “If we are casual or complacent in our worship, drawn off and



MARRIAGE AS A TRIANGLE.

desensitized by worldly pursuits, we find ourselves diminished in our ability to feel [the Spirit].”<sup>4</sup> Yet, as we keep ourselves tethered to the word of God, we will be able to more easily and clearly receive and interpret the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which will guide us as we navigate our marital relationship. What can I do to be a better spouse? How can I show love to my spouse today? What do we need to do together to strengthen our relationship? How can we more fully protect our marriage and our family? The answers to these questions come as gifts of the Spirit from a loving Heavenly Father, who is devoted to our safety, growth, and happiness.

The marital power and protection of bringing the *Thee* into our marriage is corroborated by research. Studies have consistently found that an individual’s or couple’s religious attendance, beliefs, experiences, and rituals are positively correlated with greater marital satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus (agreement

## Reflections

*My husband and I have strived to put our Savior first and foremost in our lives, and the natural consequence has been for us to draw nearer to each other as a couple. We understand the importance of commitment, selflessness, and forgiveness in having a successful marriage, trusting these qualities will see us through every difficult situation. We experience great joy as we build our lives together. We are very different people, the way Heavenly Father intended it to be, yet we are best friends.*

on relationship issues). Researchers found that prayer and religious beliefs were linked to marital satisfaction and also buffered effects of marital risk factors, such as previous divorce, high stress in marriage, and premarital cohabitation.<sup>5</sup> Researchers studying Latter-day Saint marriages and religiosity have shown similar findings. 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.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter we will focus on the personal and marital worship that develops our ability to bring God into our lives through revelation. This revelation will guide us as we seek to strengthen our marital relationship.

We will particularly discuss studying the scriptures, praying, pondering, and recording our sacred impressions as individuals and as a couple. It's interesting that each of these practices is found in the very first chapter of 1 Nephi. Father Lehi is given special revelation to protect himself, his wife, and his family because he reads the scriptures (verses 12–14), prays (verses 5–6, 14–15), ponders (verse 7), and records (verse 16). We encourage couples to follow each of these practices in both individual and marital capacities, as Lehi did. We testify that the Lord will bless us, as he did Lehi, with personal and marital revelations that will protect individuals, couples, and families.

## Scripture Study

Searching the word of God is vital to maintaining a healthy marriage because it increases our ability to receive revelation as individuals and as a couple. Many members of the Church believe that when we pray we tell God what we want Him to know, and that when we read our 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.”<sup>8</sup>

The scriptures are our life-line securing us to our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ. The answers to life’s challenges, and especially marital challenges, are found within the scriptures. Have you ever gone to the scriptures for assistance with your marital difficulties? The answers are there. Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles provided a powerful promise of the influence the Book of Mormon can have in our lives: “Within the book’s pages, you will discover the infinite love and incomprehensible grace of God. As you strive to follow the teachings you find there, your

## Practice

Here is a journaling exercise you can do to evaluate the values and goals you have surrounding your spirituality:

- Write down the type of spiritual relationship you want to have with both your Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, as well as with your spouse. This may be as simple as communing with nature or engaging in personal or private worship or as formal as participating in church or church-related activities. Write about how you want this part of your life to look.
- Rate this value in terms of importance. Scale 1–10. 1 (not at all important), 10 (extremely important) \_\_\_\_\_.
- Now, ask yourself, “How consistent is my life currently (past week or two) in making this value a realization?” Scale 1–10. 1 (not at all consistent), 10 (completely consistent) \_\_\_\_\_.
- Subtract consistency number from importance number = \_\_\_\_\_.
- Look at this number. A high score means you have a large discrepancy between what you value as important and how you are honoring or enacting that value in your day-to-day life. A large discrepancy is not desirable. A small number indicates that you are living your life more closely consistent with your stated values. This is ideal. How are you doing? What are the obstacles, if any? Make a plan to overcome any obstacles.<sup>7</sup>



## Reflections

Some years ago our bishop introduced the “Morning Five” to the youth in the ward. I was the Young Men president at the time. The Morning Five is this:

(1) read the Book of Mormon every morning—it has to be in the morning—to please your spirit; (2) pray every morning to please Heavenly Father and to invite the Spirit to be with you throughout the day;

(3) make your bed to please your mother; (4) eat breakfast to please your body; and (5) brush your teeth to please your friends.

A few months after the bishop gave us the Morning 5, I was visiting with him, and he asked if I was doing the Morning 5. I told him that I wasn’t, that I thought it was only for the youth. He then looked me straight in the eye and gave me a bishop’s promise. He said that if I would do the Morning 5 every day, my relationship with my wife would be better than it had ever been and we would grow closer together than ever before. I testify that it worked and that it is true.

joy will expand, your understanding will increase, and the answers you seek to the many challenges mortality presents will be opened to you. As you look to the book, you look to the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

If we read with discerning eyes and hearts, the scriptures explicate many teachings regarding how couples can strengthen their marriage in spite of trials. We have referenced many such scriptures throughout the chapters of this book; thus, hearkening and holding fast in faith through study and personal application, the scriptures will bring many answers to the issues for which we seek relief.

Nephi felt strongly about the importance of clinging to the word of God. Indeed, he spoke of the spiritual power created by so doing. When his brothers asked him what the “rod of iron” meant in their father’s dream, he answered that those who “hearken” unto and “hold fast” onto the word of God will “never perish” (1 Nephi 15:24). And, extending that promise, we testify that if both spouses are holding fast and hearkening to the word of God, there should be little reason why their marriage should ever perish as well.

### *Principles of Effective Scripture Study for Individuals and Couples*

Individuals and couples approach their scripture study in a variety of ways; how-

ever, there are more effective ways than others. Speaking to seminary and institute teachers about their students, Elder 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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.

While a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder 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.<sup>11</sup>

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. One of the main purposes of scripture study is to open the way for the Lord to reveal His truths to us. If we are reading the scriptures in an effort to cover a certain number of pages, we may likely be focused on finishing our set number of pages or chapters rather than allowing the impressions of the Spirit to guide or teach us as we go. Setting a time aside rather than trying to cover a number of pages tells the Lord that we are willing to let the Holy Ghost guide us through our study time. Some days we may read only one verse because we are pondering and recording insights that the Lord gives us during that time.



In essence, we believe scripture study should not just be considered reading time but rather 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 calling, friendships, etc.

In our own marriage, we have set aside some time in the evening right before going to sleep for scripture study together. For us this time includes reading scriptures, reading or listen-



ing to general conference talks, reading from the *Ensign*, listening to something from the Mormon Channel, or engaging in other such activities. 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.

**RICHARD:** *One of my favorite memories of our couple scripture study time is when Debra and I 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 about the stories and doctrines in the book. It was a special time for me. I felt a special connection with Debra learning together about the love that God has for His daughters and the amazing history of this special organization. Reflecting back, I am not sure why this had such a powerful effect on me in terms of bringing me closer to Debra, but I think a lot of it had to do with realizing that I was blessed to be married to a choice daughter of God and that I belonged to a Church that elevates and reverences God's daughters.*

### *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."<sup>12</sup>

More recently, President Thomas S. Monson reaffirmed the salience of daily study of the Book of Mormon when he declared:

This morning I speak about the power of the Book of Mormon and the *critical* need we have as members of this Church to study, ponder, and apply its teachings in our lives. The importance of having a firm and sure testimony of the Book of Mormon cannot be overstated.

We live in a time of great trouble and wickedness. What will protect us from the sin and evil so prevalent in the world today? I maintain that a strong testimony of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of His gospel will help see us through to safety. If you are not reading the Book of Mormon each day, please do so. . . .

My dear associates in the work of the Lord, I *implore* each of us to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon *each day*. As we do so, we will be in a position to hear the voice of the Spirit, to resist temptation, to overcome doubt and fear, and to receive heaven's help in our lives. I so testify with all my heart in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.<sup>13</sup>

When a prophet uses words such as "critical" and "implore," we would be wise to listen. This wonderful book will preserve us and protect us if we heed counsel from the prophets.

As we study the Book of Mormon, we can connect to the Spirit and more fully deepen our testimony of the Savior as we seek Him. We can ask questions such as "What have I learned about the Savior from what I have read today?" or "What have I learned about the Atonement of Jesus Christ from what I read today?" We can also extend these types of questions to our marriage as well: "What have I learned about my relationship with my spouse from what I read today?"

As we have studied the Book of Mormon individually, as a couple, and as a family, we have been blessed. We will discuss these instances each in turn.

First, personal study of the Book of Mormon has strengthened us *individually*. It has strengthened, and continues to strengthen, our testimonies of Jesus Christ. Our individual resolve and commitment to live the gospel, including the principles of marriage we have shared throughout this book, is bolstered when we read the Book of Mormon. Such 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.

Second, couple study of the Book of Mormon has strengthened our *marriage relationship*. It has taught us about how to resolve marital conflict, such as the story of Lehi and Sariah shared in chapter 7. The Book of Mormon additionally teaches us about how we should be managing our financial stewardships and other aspects of provident living. We learn how we can protect our home

## *Reflections*

*We joined the Church in the 1960s as a family of five. A few weeks after baptism it was not going well with our marriage. My husband had an “intelligent” conversion, and I had more of a spiritual conversion. He knew and believed the Church was the true church, but he looked at it differently than I did. As a result we had some real heated discussions about things we should do, such as family home evening, scripture reading, family prayer, etc. We decided to separate for a while. During the separation I began reading the Book of Mormon. With a prayer in my heart as I read, I received the answers to so many questions. I realized that my place was with my husband and that our family needed to be together for eternity. I realized that I needed to have more patience and honor my husband. There was a lot of conversation. We took one step at a time. Scripture reading became a serious part of our lives. Approximately two years later, we were sealed in the temple as a family. Later in life, we both served as temple workers for many years. When my husband passed away, we had been married for fifty-seven years.*

and marriage from Satan's worldly influences (those war chapters were written for us). Reading the Book of Mormon as a couple grants us the space and energy to think together about our current life events and how we can apply our testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those circumstances. As we do so, we get along with each other easily and have a greater sense of peace and harmony.

Third, Book of Mormon study has strengthened our *family*. As we read with our children, the Book of Mormon provides opportunity not only to teach them basic gospel doctrines but also to discuss how these doctrinal issues are relevant to our current societal challenges. We are able to present scenarios to our children that require them to think about how they would handle a situation at school or with friends. Thus, we are able to fortify our children and prepare them in advance to know how to respond to particular temptations or cunning sophistry so they don't get tricked. While we read and discuss the Book of Mormon with our children, we, as a couple, feel a greater sense of unity as we teach the gospel together. This sense of unity bolsters our relationship and strengthens our marriage.

Thus, the Book of Mormon has brought the spirit of protection and love into our home and into our hearts. The following promises from Elder Marion G. Romney, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, have come to pass in our home:

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 that counsel. 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.<sup>14</sup>

*Prayer*

Another salient practice that will strengthen individuals and couples and facilitate the receipt of revelation is that of prayer. As we said earlier, Richard and Bruce Chadwick found that couples who pray privately and together have significantly higher rates of marital happiness.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> We are taught about prayer in the LDS 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.”

We are further taught about prayer in the Book of Mormon when Alma implores us to

cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good. (Alma 37:36–37)

As we see the word “let” four times in these verses, we are reminded that prayer is a matter of will and agency; it shows our willingness to humbly turn our hearts and choose our Father in Heaven. As we seek to ever turn our hearts toward our loving Father in Heaven in continual prayer, we are given tender blessings. Elder Richard G. Scott taught that “prayer is the source of comfort, relief, and protection, willingly granted by our loving, compassionate Heavenly Father.”<sup>17</sup>





Many of us have great testimonies of the power of personal prayer and make it a daily habit. How blessed we are when we spend time communing directly with our Father in Heaven! We should seek to always maintain the practice of personal prayer. Sometimes, in the busyness of family life, personal time becomes limited, and the time spent in personal prayer is truncated or even neglected. Let us remember always to say our prayers.

In this section we focus on how the gift of prayer plays out in our marital relationships. We have three emphases in this section: 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 Henry B. 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."<sup>18</sup>

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

## Reflections

*Our children have all left home; we are now empty nesters. I look forward to praying with my wife at various times in the day, but my favorite prayer with my wife is before I leave for work in the morning. I hold her in my arms and we bow our heads and pray. It is my chance often to pray for our family—children, grandchildren, and others. It is my time to pray for my wife and hold her after the prayer and tell her I love her. It is my time to tell her to have a great day. Those are the most important things I could ever say to her. I want them to be the last thing she hears me say to her before I leave for the day.*

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.<sup>19</sup>

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,

## *Reflections*

*A great source of strength in our marriage comes from praying together. When I hear my wife pray, I feel closer to her because I hear her express feelings about things about which she feels most strongly. It helps me to better understand what is foremost on her mind, like our kids' physical and emotional well-being, her relationships with others, and concern for family and friends who may be struggling. In the process of praying together I learn more about my wife, what matters most to her, and how I can be a better support to her.*



# Reflections

*Many times while praying with my wife, I have experienced the very strong and overwhelming feeling of how blessed I am to have her as my wife. When we pray together, I feel our faith in the Lord is stronger, our love for our Heavenly Father grows, and our commitment and responsibilities to each other are very clear. I am reminded how deeply I love this amazing woman kneeling next to me and holding my hand. To me this is very humbling and heartwarming. I fall more in love with her in these few minutes each day. We have been having some very difficult times with our son, and we may have different opinions and ideas on how to handle those problems. After kneeling in prayer together, we always come together and agree on how we will work side by side to help our son. The revelation and love from our Heavenly Father is powerful when we pray together!*

it elevates us above the mundane, and it helps us find the eternal happiness we desire. Elder Ezra Taft Benson, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 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.”<sup>20</sup>

The type of humble petition that elicits these blessings from a loving Heavenly Father also brings love and unity into the hearts of spouses. While a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder 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 then 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.<sup>21</sup>



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.

**RICHARD:** *In addition to praying together, the practice of simply kneeling together can also be a unifying experience. Often, while I am kneeling to say my individual prayer at the end of the day, Debra will come and kneel next to me at the side of the bed and just link her arm with mine and begin her personal prayer while I continue mine. I love it when she does that! Those quiet moments are tender and comforting, while also reinforcing the importance of the Me, We, and Thee of our marriage simultaneously. When we are both done with our individual prayers, it is then an easy transition to saying a prayer together arm in arm. This minor practice has been a special blessing to us.*

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.<sup>22</sup>

Since we heard Elder Holland share this story, we have sought to implement this in our relationship as well. We saw the truth—that when we wait until we are half-asleep to pray together, our attitudes are not very positive and the prayers are certainly less effective.

These principles and practical suggestions can be encouraging when feelings between spouses are good and the relationship is strong. Yet when things are difficult—when we are not feeling

## Reflections

*Very early in our married life, my wife and I began to pray together, kneeling before our Heavenly Father and praying out loud. Although it was uncomfortable at the beginning because we had not done this before, the practice quickly became something we just did every morning and night. We have loved hearing each of us pleading for the other and for our children, family, friends, and neighbors. It has become a blessing to us in so many instances. As we pray we have a sense that our Heavenly Father is intimately involved in our lives and watches out for us as we heed the guidance of the Holy Ghost.*

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.<sup>23</sup>

### *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.

**RICHARD:** *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. I feel at peace when I hear Debra pray for me that I might be successful and happy at work, that my projects will go smoothly so that I don't have to spend a lot of time and energy troubleshooting, and that I will receive the promptings necessary to effectively serve in my callings. When I pray for Debra in her presence, I know she really appreciates it. She*

*senses my deep care for her when she hears me pray for her professional success, her Church calling, her personal health and welfare, and her strength to work with our children.*

### *Let Us Pray*

Let us pray individually, pray for our spouse in our personal prayers, pray together with our spouse, pray for our spouse with our spouse, pray in times of peace and unity, and pray in times of conflict. Prayer will soothe our hearts, strengthen our relationship, increase our marital satisfaction, and open a conduit for receipt of personal and marital revelation through the Holy Spirit. If it is not our habit to have individual and couple prayer, may we begin now to establish these routines and allow the influence of the Holy Spirit more fully into our hearts and into our marriage. 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!<sup>24</sup>

### *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 us and them 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 17:2–3). As mortals we are weak and cannot initially understand many things of the Spirit. Yet taking the time



ROBERT T. BARRETT, *The Brother of Jared Seeing the Finger of the Lord*. © 2015 BY INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

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 counseled, “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.*”<sup>25</sup> 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, there may be 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 D&C 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.” (D&C 138:1–11)

His 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 soon after His Resurrection.

**RICHARD:** *Pondering is one of my favorite things to do. Many times inspiration has come to me in the early hours of the morning, while I am still in bed, reflecting on decisions I need to make about my Church calling or family matters. I ponder often throughout the day while driving, walking, or sitting in my office, not just during scripture study, prayer, or sacrament meeting.*

*Personal pondering is also a blessing in helping us get along in our marriage. There have been times when I have walked away from a moment of marital conflict feeling that I was right and feeling determined to stubbornly hold onto my position. Then, as I pondered the situation over several hours, my spirit would soften and I would ask, “Would you rather be right or would you rather have a marriage?” Humbled, I would then go and apologize to Debra (regardless of whether I felt I was right or not). This effort, brought about specifically by several hours of pondering, has always facilitated a path to more quickly resolve a disagreement. When Debra is considering a particular issue in her life, it is not uncommon for her to read and reread the same verses or chapters of scriptures for several days or more to create greater focus for her pondering. This type of pondering has led her*

*to make many trajectory shifts, including changes that positively influenced our relationship.*

As shown by these examples, pondering can bring small and simple, yet powerful, revelations. Through pondering the Lord leads us by the Holy Spirit's voice. Although pondering can be done anytime throughout the day or night, sometimes nighttime can be an especially important time for the Lord to send us messages. In a meeting for new mission presidents and their wives, President Gordon B. Hinckley shared the following regarding counsel he had received from President Harold B. Lee, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "I remember only one thing he said: 'Listen for the whisperings of the Spirit in the middle of the night, and respond to those whisperings.' I don't know why revelation comes sometimes in the night, but it does. It comes in the day as well, of course. But listen to the whisperings of the Spirit, the gift of revelation, to which you are entitled."<sup>26</sup>

### *Pondering Together*

Pondering together as a couple is also very powerful. When we ponder together, it generates tremendous power to reveal the line-upon-line revelations we so desperately need to navigate our personal lives and our marriages.

**RICHARD:** *Often, Debra and I will ponder about our marriage, finances, or other decisions. For example, one time we were seeking to make a financial decision and were struggling to come to resolution about how to proceed. For several days we were stuck, so I just decided to move full steam ahead on what I deemed the right course of action. Debra still struggled to feel good about it. She couldn't articulate her feelings well and wasn't quite sure why she felt as she did. I explained everything from my position, which seemed very logical and which Debra fully understood, yet she still couldn't get on board. When I pushed ahead, Debra grew panicked, and she determined to talk to me one more time about her concerns. I had to leave for a Church meeting just at that time.*

## COMMITMENT TO THE COVENANT

While driving to my meeting, I continued to ponder about the decision. The Spirit came clearly into my mind with a strong rebuke: “Richard, you’re not listening to your wife.” It was very still, yet very powerful and forceful. I knew I had to listen to that counsel. When I got back home, Debra was anxiously waiting in the driveway to meet me as I arrived. She said, “I need you to humor me to have one more conversation on the issue.” You can imagine Debra’s surprise when I immediately agreed to change course on the plan and get on the phone to pull the plug on the deal without even having the discussion!

As we continued later to explore other options, we realized that the Spirit—who knows the truth of all things (see Moroni 10:5)—had communicated through Debra that my original assumption about how to proceed in this situation was not in our best interest. By pondering together and respecting each other’s insights, we were able to establish another plan that we both felt good about and that had the potential to save us a significant amount of money. Marriage naturally provides the law of two witnesses (see D&C 6:28; 8:2; 9:8). When we both, as spouses, ponder, pray, and counsel together, the Spirit can guide us to a unanimous decision that will lead to wise decision making.

**DEBRA:** Richard and I spend a lot of time pondering together. The consequences of one particular pondering session have had a widespread positive impact in my personal life and on our marriage at large.

Shortly after the birth of our fifth child, I felt overwhelmed, as I have shared with you already in chapter 3, but I also felt dramatically understimulated intellectually. I was home all day with three babies, aged two and under, and then in the afternoons, after school let out, I had the addition of our two older daughters. I felt like I had “mommy mush brain.” I was working professionally at that time, but it amounted to no more than a few hours a week and just wasn’t enough to offset the massive amount of time I spent alone with my children and doing domestic chores. As a couple we spent an evening pondering and counseling on how we could provide me with more professional engagement without compromising my role as a stay-at-home mom.

We had recently completed writing a chapter together on commitment in marriage for a book focused on marriage and family,<sup>27</sup> and working on that project during our babies’ nap times and such had been quite a positive for me. So Richard had the idea that we could expand that book chapter into a presentation

for BYU's Education Week. I responded, "I thought you had to be invited to present at Education Week?" to which Richard replied with a wry smile, "Oh, I can find someone to invite us." He did.

Prepping for the Education Week presentation gave me more time in my professional brain, allowing me to feel less like I had mommy mush brain. I felt much happier at home. When Education Week came along, we gave four one-hour lectures on commitment in marriage. We felt the blessings of service as we shared the content of our presentation with those in attendance. The process was a great boost to our marriage too. We saw each other shine in our professional areas of strength and felt proud of each other. Also, speaking about marriage strengthened our marriage intellectually and romantically, and the positive sentiment from that experience had a palpable influence within our relationship for several months. It was a wonderful growing experience for us!

After one of our lectures during Education Week, I was approached by someone about the possibility of writing a book. Richard and I felt prompted to pursue the opportunity; this book is the result.

Writing this book while my three youngest children were still so very small was crazy, but it actually did a tremendous amount of good for me personally. Since I had very few therapy clients at the time we started the book and I was home all day by myself with the kids, it gave me something to think about while I was doing mundane tasks that didn't use much brain power, such as folding the laundry. Over the years of writing, the "Babies 3" became the "Toddlers 3," and my days got even crazier, with all three of them walking, none of them reliable, and all of them screaming, crying, and making demands for one reason or the other. Nevertheless, working on this project gave me a sense of accomplishment as I saw ideas become paragraphs and paragraphs become chapters—

## Reflections

*Serving as a bishop of a BYU married ward, David V. Clare began to ponder on an issue with which his ward members were struggling. He shared the following in a BYU Women's Conference address: It "was serious to me. So I thought, you know, I need to really, prayerfully ask the Lord to help me, so I could teach them. And so for the next two months—literally two months—I pondered . . . , trying to figure out what to do, [and] the Spirit prompted me to write. So I got out my piece of paper, and I was ready to write . . . ; for two hours the Lord taught me. He taught me some very eternal and precious truths that I will forever treasure."*<sup>29</sup>



*and no one undid my work afterwards (unlike my work sweeping the floor, cleaning up after meals, doing the dishes and laundry, or changing diapers). I also felt the blessings of service come into my heart as I got outside of myself and thought about how this material might bless others.*

*Writing this book was also a miracle in our marital relationship, as we previously shared in chapter 5. Our good marriage is now a great marriage! We more fully prioritize our relationship. We spend more time thinking of each other and what we can do to bless each other. We express lots of gratitude to one another. Our efforts to be sensitive or generous are more concerted. In other words, we do our marriage more fully **on purpose**. All of these blessings have come to us as a result of a simple pondering discussion one evening as a couple, trying to help me—as a frazzled, understimulated stay-at-home mother—find an avenue to get a mental break from my kiddos.*



*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. 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."<sup>28</sup> 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!"

In fact, 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 not only to bless us and our marriage but to bless others as well.

**DEBRA:** *As an example, one Easter Sunday I was asked to speak in sacrament meeting. I had spoken on Easter Sunday only two years earlier in our previous ward and had planned to largely rely on the talk I had given then. As I pondered and edited the talk, I felt it was not the message I needed to give and worked to write a new one. Easter morning I again felt that what I had prepared was not the talk I was supposed to give and that I needed to write the talk for a third time. With urgency I searched my scripture journal. I soon found the Easter-appropriate ideas I was supposed to share. This experience confirmed something Elder Richard G. Scott taught,*

that when you record spiritual promptings, “the knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life.”<sup>30</sup>

The Easter talk I gave was a message about Christ and His ability to heal us. After sacrament meeting I was approached by a brother who thanked me for the talk and said that I had tied some things together for him that he had never thought of before. Richard, who was bishop at the time, informed me that the man was not a baptized member of the congregation but attended meetings regularly with his wife. Later in the meeting block, a sister—the wife of the same man that had approached me earlier—came up to me and thanked me for the message and told me that I had taught her something new. I can only imagine the discussion this couple may have had together after church about what they learned that day, perhaps creating a bonding and growing moment for their marriage. This experience was made possible by insights the Holy Spirit had shared with me during my scripture study and that I had taken the time to honor by recording—years earlier.

**RICHARD:** *There are a variety of approaches we can choose to record our gospel insights. My approach to recording my spiritual impressions has evolved over time. I initially began by going beyond highlighting a verse to also writing notes or related quotes in the margins. I began extending those efforts into recording my impressions in a physical journal after my stake president began to emphasize scripture journals. I used small pocket-sized notebooks that I would carry with my scriptures so they would be available and convenient at all times. I would jot down anything that struck me as meaningful, without regard to any particular kind of organization in the notebook.*

*Sometimes I would copy a poignant scripture word for word into the notebook, following Nephi’s pattern of first recording a scripture and then making commentary (see 2 Nephi 12–25). I benefitted by following this pattern; I learned that by physically writing the scripture word for word, I saw words I did not previously notice when reading it because writing it down focused my attention differently.*

*As the Church began to more fully support digital formats, I began reading my scriptures on my laptop, iPad, and smartphone. The digital format allows me to highlight a particular verse and then write impressions, thoughts, and other notes about it directly into the scriptures as a pop-up note. These recordings automati-*

cally save to my copy of the digital scriptures as well as to a notes file which becomes available to me digitally at all times through all of my various electronic devices.

**DEBRA:** Richard introduced me to the idea of a scripture journal while we were dating. I have always chosen to use a simple electronic document on my computer as my scripture journal. I study with my laptop nearby so I can record impressions, or I will jot ideas on a piece of paper and then type them into my scripture-journal document at a later time. I like this format because it is easy for me to find previously written ideas in the electronic document later.

I have taken three various approaches to recording my impressions during scripture study over the years. First, at times when I have studied a particular topic, I have grouped scriptures into my own topical guide and written notes about the verses, definitions of words, and quotes from Church leaders. For example, when I struggled earlier in our marriage to forgive Richard for hurts he had caused, I took this approach to study the topic of forgiveness. Below, I show you my work. The original work was very lengthy, but I have truncated it here, as my purpose is to show you the general structure of my work in the scripture journal rather than focus on the content.

1. Frankly forgive. 1 Nephi 7:21, "And it came to pass that I did frankly forgive them all that they had done." Luke 7:42, "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Frankly = freely, openly, plainly, candidly. I need to do better at this.
2. Do not bring up past misdeeds. Ezekiel 18:22, "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live." If I still bring up Richard's misdeeds against me, it is evidence that I have not yet forgiven him.
3. I must forgive!—it is a commandment. Matthew 6:12, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Substitute the word "like" for "as" to bring a clearer impression of the message of this scripture.
4. Be patient when I am hurt in the present day. Forbearance = refraining from something (anger, offense): forbearing conduct or quality, patient endurance; self-control; abstaining from enforcing a right; a creditor's giving of indulgence after the day originally fixed for payment (e.g., even after I think he should've already learned what not to say). Matthew 18:21–22, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? . . . Not . . . seven times; but . . . seventy times seven." Joseph Smith manual p. 393 about this scripture: "We have not

## COMMITMENT TO THE COVENANT

*(yet) forgiven them seventy times seven, as our Savior directed; perhaps we have not forgiven them once.”*

5. *Seek healing of hurt and wounds through the Atonement of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Alma 7:11–12, “He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” Exodus 15:26, “For I am the Lord that healeth thee.”*
6. *Blessings come by forgiving. Not only will I be forgiven if I forgive (see #3; Matthew 6:14–15; Luke 6:37; D&C 82:1), but I will be further blessed: D&C 132:56, “Let mine handmaid [Debra] forgive my servant [Richard] his trespasses; and then shall she be forgiven her trespasses, wherein she has trespassed against me; and I, the Lord thy God, will bless her, and multiply her, and make her heart to rejoice.” The joy I seek comes from Christ—knowing Him, emulating Him, having gratitude for what He has done. That will overshadow everything else of the world that may bring me sorrow.*

Second, and most commonly, I have recorded an insight on a common gospel principle or familiar verse that I gained by a unique coupling of ideas, verses, or such. I have found this approach to recording to be the most useful to me in gaining spiritual insights. In one scripture–journal entry, as I began to record a new insight gained by familiar verses, I recorded by way of introduction, “The ‘Liahona’ of the Book of Mormon changed its writings to me today.” In this particular instance, I had read Alma 37:13–17, in which Alma gives specific counsel to his son Helaman to care for the plates, of which he has been given stewardship, and to care for the sacred things of God according to His commandments. As I read these verses, I received personal revelation relative to our children. Even though I had read Alma 37 many times, I had never previously thought of these scriptures relative to our children or my role as a mother. Yet I had experienced some significant events with some of our children only the day before, turning my thoughts to them and, thus, affecting my view of the familiar verses to allow me to receive new insights. I now understood that our children were spoken of within those verses—they were the “sacred things”—and I received specific instructions from the verses regarding

RIGHT: JOSEPH BRICKEY, *Lehi and the Liahona*.



## COMMITMENT TO THE COVENANT

God's mandate that I "appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them" (see Alma 37:16). I recorded what I learned in my scripture journal.

Third, there have been times when I have taken a particular verse or idea that has prompted me and then used that idea as a springboard to journal about the personal, marital, and gospel insights I received. For example, the following entry was taken from my scripture journal I kept during our first year of marriage, when adjustment issues, particularly relative to Richard having been a longtime bachelor, were rampant:

*Richard and I are still battling because I perceive he is making judgment that my way of interacting with the world (my personality and the feelings I have as a woman) is wrong, and that I "should" do it his way. So, as I came across this scripture today it was very meaningful: Acts 5:38 "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought." I don't have to prove he is wrong, I don't have to persuade him that he is wrong; as we live together over time, I believe he will start to see the value of being married to someone who is not his emotional clone. He has already come to say that many of the other things he nit-picked me on historically were wrong . . . , and he doesn't say them anymore. Be patient; . . . it's a developmental process.*

Not only does this type of journal entry show that we are trying to honor the principle to "liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23), but it certainly becomes a great piece of personal history. Many happily married years later, it is also amusing to be reminded of where we had first been and how much we struggled to become unified in contrast to where we are today.

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 only matters that you do it.

## Conclusion

To strengthen and bring the *Thee* into our marriage, we need to spend time with the Lord through personal and couple worship. Effective scripture study is done on a daily basis during a regularly scheduled time for a predetermined amount of time. 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 directed by the Holy Ghost.

When we pray individually, as well as with our spouse, we invite not only the spirit of revelation but a soothing, loving spirit into our marital relationship. Prayer can be particularly powerful in helping us overcome dark feelings and in enticing us to want to have the desire to draw nearer to each other.

Since we often cannot understand many things of the Spirit when we first receive them, we will also be blessed with a greater level of understanding and a deeper connection with the Spirit when we take the time to ponder the word in our hearts. As we ponder individually, we can often understand more fully what we can do individually to improve our marital relationship in various circumstances. As we ponder with our spouse, including counseling with them, we can be more clearly directed in the choices we need to make regarding our lives and our marriage.

Writing down our spiritual promptings contributes to our ability to ponder on them with more clarity, helps remind us of what we have learned when we tend to forget, and allows us to access them at a later date. It invites the Lord to give us more revelation as we show Him that we honor the revelations he provides to us.

When we make our personal and couple worship a priority, we invite God to be more fully involved in our marriage and life. He will teach us what we need to know and do to help our marriage thrive. We cannot go wrong with His influence.

### *Notes*

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Nurturing Marriage," *Ensign*, May 2006, 36.
2. Michael A. Goodman, David C. Dollahite, and Loren Marks, "Exploring Transformational Processes and Meaning in LDS Marriages," *Marriage and Family Review* 48, no. 6 (2012): 555–82.

## COMMITMENT TO THE COVENANT

3. Dale G. Renlund's Facebook Page, 21 May 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/DaleGRenlund/posts/1907337372876436>.
4. Ronald A. Rasband, "Let the Holy Spirit Guide," *Ensign*, May 2017, 94.
5. Samuel L. Perry, "Spouse's Religious Commitment and Marital Quality: Clarifying the Role of Gender," *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (June 2016): 476–90; Jonathan R. Olson et al., "Shared Religious Beliefs, Prayers, and Forgiveness as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction," *Family Relations* 64, no. 4 (October 2015): 519–33; Christopher G. Ellison, Amy M. Burdette, and W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Couple That Prays Together: Race and Ethnicity, Religion, and Relationship Quality Among Working-Age Adults," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 4 (August 2010): 963–75.
6. Richard J. McClendon and Bruce A. Chadwick, "Latter-day Saint Families at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century," in *Helping and Healing Families: Principles and Practices Inspired by "The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"* ed. Craig H. Hart et al. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 32–43.
7. Adapted from Kelly G. Wilson, Emily K. Sandoz, Jennifer Kitchens, and Miguel Roberts, "The Valued Living Questionnaire: Defining and Measuring Valued Action within a Behavioral Framework," *Psychological Record* 60 (2010): 249–72.
8. Joseph Smith Jr., "To the Honorable Men of the World," *The Evening and the Morning Star*, August 1832, 22.
9. Gary E. Stevenson, "Look to the Book, Look to the Lord," *Ensign*, November 2016, 47.
10. Henry B. Eyring, "'And Thus We See': Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt" (address to CES religious educators, 5 February 1993), [https://si.lds.org/bc/seminary/content/library/talks/evening-with-and-thus-we-see\\_helping-a-student-in-a-moment-of-doubt\\_eng.pdf](https://si.lds.org/bc/seminary/content/library/talks/evening-with-and-thus-we-see_helping-a-student-in-a-moment-of-doubt_eng.pdf).
11. Howard W. Hunter, "Reading the Scriptures," *Ensign*, November 1979, 64.
12. Ezra Taft Benson, "A Sacred Responsibility," *Ensign*, May 1986, 78.
13. Thomas S. Monson, "The Power of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, May 2017, 86–87; emphasis added.
14. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1960, 110–13.
15. McClendon and Chadwick, "Latter-day Saint Families," 37, 42.
16. Olson et al., "Shared Religious Beliefs." See also Ellison, Burdette, and Wilcox, "The Couple That Prays Together."
17. Richard G. Scott, "Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer," *Ensign*, May 2007, 8.
18. Henry B. Eyring, "Our Perfect Example," *Ensign*, November 2009, 71.

19. Bruce A. Chadwick, "Hanging Out, Hooking Up, and Celestial Marriage" (devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 7 May 2002), [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-a-chadwick\\_hanging-hooking-celestial-marriage/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-a-chadwick_hanging-hooking-celestial-marriage/).
20. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1949, 197–98.
21. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Except the Lord Build the House . . .," *Ensign*, June 1971, 72.
22. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Face to Face with President Eyring and Elder Holland" (worldwide youth broadcast, 4 March 2017), <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/face-to-face/eyring-holland?lang=eng>.
23. David B. Haight, "Marriage and Divorce," *Ensign*, May 1984, 14.
24. M. Russell Ballard, "The Sacred Responsibilities of Parenthood," *Ensign*, March 2006, 33.
25. David O. McKay, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 29; emphasis added.
26. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 117.
27. Richard J. McClendon and Debra Theobald McClendon, "Commitment to the Covenant: LDS Marriage and Divorce," in *By Divine Design: Best Practices for Family Success and Happiness*, ed. Brent L. Top and Michael A. Goodman (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 93–116.
28. Richard G. Scott, "Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge," *Ensign*, November 1993, 86.
29. David V. Clare, "Attaining, Accessing, Using Priesthood Power" (address, BYU Women's Conference, Provo, UT, 2 May 2014), [https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/david\\_clare.pdf](https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/david_clare.pdf).
30. Richard G. Scott, "To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely" (devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 23 January 2001), [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-g-scott\\_acquire-knowledge-strength-use-wisely/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-g-scott_acquire-knowledge-strength-use-wisely/).