

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS— THE LORD'S WAY

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The Doctrine and Covenants and the prophets of the Restoration have had much to say about marriage and family, for celestial marriage is a doctrine of major significance. The Creator ordained the family as the basic unit of His kingdom, both in this life and beyond. He has an interest in how families function, for the plan of salvation was designed to exalt His family. Jesus Christ made it possible for us to live forever as male and female beings; therefore it is only natural that after years in marriage and parenting roles, our greatest interest would be the continuation of these relationships when we are resurrected beings in the hereafter. In truth, that is the plan God ordained for His children. Exaltation, the highest of eternal opportunities, is the continuation of marriage and family relationships beyond this brief span of mortality (see D&C 131:1–4). We came to this earth to qualify for eternal life, and marriage is one of the requirements. The highest degree of glory is a family kingdom (see D&C 131:4). The Apostle Paul said, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). Such a lofty ideal is of little value, however, if our family relationships are not strong and healthy in this life. Does it not seem incon-

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sistent to think that our dislike for each other in this life will suddenly change at death, and we then will be forever deeply committed to each other?

The Lord's way of strengthening marriage and family relationships is to reveal to His children the doctrine of their origin and potential. Doctrine is the basis for ethical or Christlike behavior, because what we believe determines how we behave. When people comprehend their relationship to Deity and understand their potential for exaltation, they tend to use their agency to make choices that lead to eternal life. Therefore, it is doctrine that provides a theory or framework to keep marriage and family relationships "on course." President Boyd K. Packer explained the link between doctrine and personal actions: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. . . . That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel."¹

Knowing that marriage is eternal influences us not only to exercise care in our mate selection but also to do all in our power to ensure the success of this newly formed partnership. How we feel about each other, how we treat each other, and how we meet each other's needs are factors that contribute to marital satisfaction; how willingly and how well we function in our marital roles is grounded in our doctrinal framework.

We also need to understand the importance of marriage and family in the eternal plan. In a general conference address, Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: "From the moment of birth into mortality to the time we are married in the temple, everything we have in the whole gospel system is to prepare and qualify us to enter that holy order of matrimony which makes us husband and wife in this life and in the world to come.

"Then from the moment we are sealed together . . . everything connected with revealed religion is designed to help us keep the terms and conditions of our marriage covenant, so that this covenant will have efficacy, virtue, and force in the life to come. . . .

"There is nothing in this world as important as the creation and perfection of family units of the kind contemplated in the gospel of Jesus Christ."²

From this perspective, it is clear why prophet-leaders have made

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statements that give such a high priority to family life. President David O. McKay: “No other success can compensate for failure in the home.”³ President Harold B. Lee: “The most important work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home.”⁴ President Spencer W. Kimball: “Our success [as a people, as a Church] will largely be determined by how faithfully we focus on living the gospel in the home.”⁵ President Ezra Taft Benson: “No other institution can take the place of the home or fulfill its essential function.”⁶

DOCTRINES THAT INFLUENCE OUR ACTIONS IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Doctrines that can generate in our hearts a desire to be effective marriage partners and parents include the following:

1. The premortal life and the purpose of mortality.
2. Eternal marriage.
3. The three degrees of glory.
4. The damnation and curse of Lucifer.
5. Rearing the children of God.

These doctrines provide meaning and perspective to marriage. Covenants strengthen commitment, and Christlike behavior (patience, meekness, charity, kindness, and forgiveness, for example) prepares us for exaltation. It is a dynamic process to move from understanding doctrinal principles to gaining exaltation, and the Atonement of Christ makes the plan operational.

THE PREMORTAL LIFE AND THE PURPOSE OF MORTALITY

The doctrine of the premortal life proclaims us to be the literal offspring of heavenly parents. We lived before this life, in their presence, as their male and female spirit children. Our spirit bodies were similar in appearance to our mortal bodies (see Ether 3:16–17); however, these bodies in the premortal state were not capable, at least to our knowledge, of reproduction, and therefore marriage was not possible. In fact, one of the primary purposes in our coming to this “second estate” was to obtain a body of element—flesh and blood—to begin, for the first time, our stewardship in marriage and parenthood. The Lord explains that marriage was ordained of Him and that the earth was created so that His children could fulfill their destiny:

"I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man. Wherefore . . . they twain shall be one flesh, and all this [marriage] that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that [the earth] might be filled with the measure of man, *according to his creation before the world was made*" (D&C 49:15–17; emphasis added).

This earth, then, becomes the residence for our spirit bodies, which are united with a body of element in a probationary state. Here we are born as infants and grow to be adult men and women. Ideally, we marry and exercise our divine powers to create and bear offspring. For the first time in our existence, we are privileged to marry and participate in a functional sex role whereby we can reproduce "after our kind."

In the premortal life, each of us was a single adult, a spirit son or daughter of God, and we lived in His presence for some time. President Brigham Young explained our relationship: "You are well acquainted with God our Heavenly Father, or the great Elohim. You are all well acquainted with him, for there is not a soul of you but what has lived in his house and dwelt with him year after year. . . ."

"There is not a person here to-day but what is a son or a daughter of that Being. In the spirit world their spirits were first begotten and brought forth, and they lived there with their parents for ages before they came here."

In the premortal realm, the only family relationships we experienced were those of sons or daughters of God and brothers or sisters to each other. There we were never intimately involved with one of the opposite sex in a marriage relationship, possessing the ability to create children.

Consider how long each of us anticipated this opportunity to come to earth to marry and become parents. It has been almost six thousand years since Adam and Eve brought about the Fall; at least seven thousand years were required to create the earth (using the most conservative estimates from Abraham 3:4, 9); there was a period from the beginning of the earth's creation backward to the Council in Heaven; and even further back was our birth as spirit children and a maturing period to become an adult male or female spirit before the Council in Heaven. Even a conservative estimate of these earlier periods (and perhaps it was really eons of time) makes it evident that

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we waited a substantial period of time as “single adults” to come to this earth to experience marriage and the privilege of beginning our own family life.

In comparison to this lengthy premortal period of time as single adults, we are married for only a brief period here in this probation—fifty to perhaps eighty years at most. Yet the staggering reality is that the quality of our marriage and family relationships in this life greatly influences whether these privileges will be extended into eternity. Here we have the privilege to form an eternal partnership if we are faithful to the laws and covenants upon which this relationship is based. How important it is that we build an eternal foundation under marriage and family relationships.

ETERNAL MARRIAGE

In the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul” (D&C 88:15–16). The soul is two separate “bodies,” born of two different sets of parents—one mortal, the other immortal. Our flesh and blood bodies were created by parents who transmitted to us the effects of the Fall. Neither our bodies, nor those of our children, will escape death and dissolution. But the parents of our spirit body are immortal, resurrected parents, and therefore our spirit bodies are not subject to death.⁸ Sexual relations, conception, and birth are important elements in the creation of a soul, for these processes bring together our two bodies for an earthly probation. Through the power of procreation, we assist our Heavenly Father in bringing His children to their mortal state. At death the mortal body and eternal spirit separate. Mortal remains are committed to the earth, while our spirit, the “real” us, inhabits the “spirit world.”⁹ When resurrected, there is no further separation of the body and spirit, for a resurrected person cannot die.

Concerning the spirits who were awaiting the Resurrection, the Lord explained, “Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 138:17).

Clearly we are in a very important phase of our eternal existence. The Savior’s Atonement makes possible our resurrection with “a body

of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (D&C 130:22). Our resurrection enables our eternal spirit to be restored to its former body of "dust" (now refined and purified) with male or female attributes. Exalted beings have bodies capable of generating life.¹⁰ Our association as husband and wife in that sphere will be "coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy" (D&C 130:2). Priesthood keys restored by Elijah to Joseph Smith allow the organization of eternal families through sealings for time and eternity (see D&C 110:13).

If a couple in mortality are married by priesthood authority (the authority of an eternal being), are faithful to their covenants, and become Christlike in nature, they will come forth in the resurrection clothed with immortality and eternal lives, meaning that they shall continue to bear children. "Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue" (D&C 132:20). As resurrected beings, husband and wife will have the power to beget spirit children. On June 30, 1916, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles explained the principle of "eternal lives": "So far as the stages of eternal progression and attainment have been made known through divine revelation, we are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring. Only such exalted souls have reached maturity in the appointed course of eternal life; and these spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation."¹¹

THE THREE DEGREES OF GLORY

Another tenet intertwined with the doctrine of eternal marriage is that of the assignment of souls to degrees of glory. In eternity, the power to beget children is limited to those who reach the highest degree of glory (see D&C 131:4). Elder Melvin J. Ballard explained the meaning of "eternal increase": "What do we mean by endless or eternal increase? We mean that through the righteousness and faithfulness of men and women who keep the commandments of God they will come forth with celestial bodies, fitted and prepared to enter into their great, high and eternal glory in the celestial kingdom of God; and unto them, through their preparation, there will come spirit chil-

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dren. I don't think that is very difficult to comprehend. The nature of the offspring is determined by the nature of the substance that flows in the veins of the being. When blood flows in the veins of the being the offspring will be what blood produces, which is tangible flesh and bone; but when that which flows in the veins is spirit matter, a substance which is more refined and pure and glorious than blood, the offspring of such beings will be "spirit children."¹²

The Doctrine and Covenants explicitly states that only those who attain to the highest degree of glory remain married and possess the power of increase or "eternal lives": "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest [degree], a man must enter into this order of the priesthood (meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage); and if he does not [enter this order of marriage], he cannot obtain it [the highest degree of glory]; he may enter into the other [degrees], but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase" (D&C 131:1-4).

This scripture confirms that those who retain the powers of increase in the next life are those who inherit the highest degree of glory. A temple sealing confers keys to allow a man and woman to come forth in the Resurrection and retain these life-giving powers. At the time of marriage, they enter into the same covenant as did Abraham, in which he was promised innumerable seed (see Abraham 2:9-11). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "Those portions of [the Abrahamic covenant] which pertain to personal exaltation and eternal increase are renewed with each member of the house of Israel who enters the order of celestial marriage."¹³ Those keys were restored by Elias, who appeared to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836. He restored the "dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed [with the gospel and the priesthood]" (D&C 110:12). In the Resurrection, with death no longer a factor, our seed shall be as innumerable as the "sand upon the seashore" (D&C 132:30).

THE DAMNATION AND CURSE OF LUCIFER

Another doctrine that adds to our perspective of marriage and parenthood is that of the limitations placed upon Lucifer for his rebellion in the premortal world. His damnation consists of his never

being allowed to marry or have posterity. He is single and impotent forever, and he wants all of mankind to be as he is. He does not want any who kept their first estate, who now are in their "second estate," to retain the powers of procreation beyond this life. He realizes that we have these powers in mortality, but he knows that if he can prevent us from using these powers within the bounds God has set, or if we fail to build marriages worthy of exaltation, we will lose these powers when we die. Elder Orson Pratt wrote of Satan's limitations and of those who attain to lower degrees of glory: "God . . . has ordained that the highest order and class of beings that should exist in the eternal worlds should exist in the capacity of husbands and wives, and that they alone should have the privilege of propagating their species. . . . Now it is wise, no doubt, in the Great Creator to thus limit this great and heavenly principle to those who have arrived or come to the highest state of exaltation . . . to dwell in His presence, that they by this means shall be prepared to bring up their spirit offspring in all pure and holy principles in the eternal worlds, in order that they may be made happy. Consequently, He does not entrust this privilege of multiplying spirits with the terrestrial or teletial, or the lower order of beings there, nor with angels. But why not? Because they have not proved themselves worthy of this great privilege."¹⁴

Individuals who suffer "deaths" (D&C 132:25) are those who no longer are able to propagate their own kind after resurrection. On another occasion Elder Orson Pratt wrote on a similar theme: "Could wicked and malicious beings, who have irradiated every feeling of love from their bosoms, be permitted to propagate their species, the offspring would partake of all the evil, wicked, and malicious nature of their parents. . . ."

" . . . It is for this reason that God will not permit the fallen angels to multiply: it is for this reason that God has ordained marriages for the righteous only [in eternity]: it is for this reason that God will put a final stop to the multiplication of the wicked after this life: it is for this reason that none but those who have kept the celestial law will be permitted to multiply after the resurrection: . . . for they alone are prepared to beget and bring forth [such] offspring."¹⁵

From these statements we understand what a great privilege it is to come to earth to obtain a physical body, to learn self-discipline, to

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be valiant sons and daughters (faithful to eternal principles), to marry, and to rear a posterity. Satan will do his best to destroy the plan of God by destroying families. He can destroy us if we are careless or fail to keep our covenants.

REARING THE CHILDREN OF GOD

When we speak of “our children,” we mean the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. He places a great trust in us when He assigns His children to our custody. We are honored by the stewardship we are given to create bodies for His spirit children. Because women conceive, carry to term, and bear His offspring, their importance to God’s plan is critical. The Lord explains: “For [a wife is] given unto [her husband] to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for [her] exaltation in the eternal worlds, that [she] may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified” (D&C 132:63).

If couples were to decide not to have children (and many in our society are making that decision), the Father’s plan would cease to function. We are privileged to assist God in His great work to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life” of His children (Moses 1:39). We bring them to this earth to fulfill their eternal destiny, the same as our parents have done for us.

Could there be a greater trust given to two people than to have the children of God assigned to them with the responsibility to prepare them for exaltation? Certainly our heavenly parents have a great interest in how their children are reared during their probationary state. An understanding of this doctrine would surely prevent the physical, verbal, and mental abuse of many of these children in our day.

DOCTRINE LEADS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTLIKE ATTRIBUTES

The five doctrines discussed above can create in us a broader vision of the purpose of life, of marriage, and of our purpose in mortality. We realize that to succeed in these stewardships, our example, our model, must be Christ, for He taught the qualities that are essen-

tial to succeed in family relationships. Not only did Christ make the Father's plan operational through His Atonement, but He also came to the earth to teach us the character traits that are necessary if we are to be part of a celestial society. Gospel doctrine and our faithful observance of covenants make it more probable that we will develop Christlike traits in our character. The Doctrine and Covenants lists a number of these traits that would undoubtedly make a remarkable difference in our marriage and family behavior if were we to incorporate them into our nature: repentance, charity, humility, kindness, temperance, diligence, faith, hope, love, a spirit of meekness, an eye single to the glory of God, virtue, knowledge, patience, brotherly kindness, and godliness. We are taught to be one with God and man, ask, knock, keep the commandments, seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion, seek not for riches but for wisdom, assist in bringing forth God's work, do good, hold out faithful to the end, inquire of God, be sober, doubt not, fear not, be faithful, murmur not, resist temptation, study it out in our mind, pray always, harden not our hearts, read the scriptures, seek counsel from Church leaders, guard against hypocrisy and guile, allow virtue to garnish our thoughts unceasingly, possess a broken heart and a contrite spirit, love our husband or wife with all our heart, live together in love, practice virtue and holiness before the Lord, have the Holy Ghost as a constant companion, and endure to the end.

How could a marriage fail if each spouse made these traits his or her creed to live by? Such attributes would make us more attractive, lovable, and competent marriage partners. On the other hand, when we emulate Satan's traits (temper, anger, contention, bickering), we become repulsive, and relationships suffer. Our goal must be to strive to be like the Savior in every way—emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. If we follow His example, our marriages will be stronger and our children may be more likely to choose to adopt our values and follow our example.

Understanding His Atonement and Resurrection brings an appreciation for Christ, not only for what He did to remit sins but also for how, in overcoming both physical and spiritual death, He made it possible for marriage and family life to be eternal. The Resurrection restores our bodies of element and spirit, male and female attributes in those bodies, and relationships organized by the sealing power to

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be forever. In the Resurrection we retain all of the deep affections of the heart we have come to prize in this life. Elder Parley P. Pratt marveled at this doctrine: "It was at this time that I received from him [Joseph Smith] the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness. . . .

"It was from [Joseph] that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity. . . .

"I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this groveling sphere and expand it as the ocean."¹⁶

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE—PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

These five doctrines should influence in a practical way how well our families function. Knowing the importance of marriage in this life and that we anticipated this experience; knowing that Christ's Atonement and Resurrection restore bodies and sexuality; knowing that the Judgment assigns individuals to kingdoms of no marriage and family if they do not function well in marital roles; realizing that Lucifer's damnation was the denial of marriage and the impossibility of his ever becoming a father, thus explaining his relentless efforts to destroy us and prevent us from having these blessings beyond this life; and realizing that our children are lent to us by eternal parents who expect us to rear them in righteousness—all these should provide us with powerful reasons and incentives to build strong families.

Practically speaking, how could a person who understands these principles abuse a spouse or child? How could a person with an eternal perspective of family life, who has made sacred covenants with the Author of the plan, use anger to control or manipulate or intimidate a spouse or child when it is obvious he is using Satan's techniques? Could an unrepentant person who had violated a position

of trust as spouse or parent ever, in all eternity, be allowed those roles again, especially if that person was no longer subject to death so that his evil influence would never end? It is not reasonable that God would allow a being with that temperament to remain married or continue in a parenting role. A degree of glory with no marriage or children would best satisfy justice. The powers of increase for such a person would be removed at the time of death.

These doctrines should have another effect—that of humbling us. We know so little about marriage or parenting during our brief experience here. Why do we think we are experts on marriage matters or parenting practices when we have been in these roles for such a short period of time? As we look back on a lifetime of parenting, we all realize that we could have done some things better. Marriage is a commitment to learn and work together if we are to succeed in this adventure. We must be good students of marriage and family life as we learn from our spouse and children their perceptions, feelings, and responses, which often vary from ours. Parents must teach, be firm, and insist on obedience to commonsense rules because they are responsible for the direction of the family and they have been down the road a little farther; but even then, our teaching should be charitable and kind to those we are helping along the path. If we choose to be angry or careless through our own spiritual immaturity and offend others, when we regain our senses (perspective), surely we would seek forgiveness as we realize the destructive nature of our actions. We would want to restore our relationships through apologies and repentance. We would make things right with the most important people in our lives. How relieved we would be to know that an atonement had been made that allows us to repent and seek forgiveness of God and others for our mistakes and misjudgments; for when we offend members of our family, we offend God. Anger causes a withdrawal of the Spirit, and that departure should serve as a further reminder to us of our need to repent and repair damaged relationships in seeking a return of the Spirit.

Furthermore, a Christlike attitude would cause us, if others were thoughtless towards us, to quickly forgive, for we realize how shallow it would be to take offense when none was intended and we realize that we too have offended. The Golden Rule would apply. How easily we would forgive little children or an eternal companion for

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any “offense.” In fact, how could a man or woman take offense at the words or actions of any other family member when he or she understands the nature of relationships in the plan of salvation?

It sounds simple, doesn’t it? But why shouldn’t this be the outcome? Perhaps we fail to follow this model because we do not review these doctrines of marriage and family periodically, or we have lost our eternal perspective. If we have never had the vision, or if we lose the ideal of marriage, then we allow the carnal side of our natures to prevail. When our vision is clouded, we act more like the “natural man,” and if we are not careful we will follow Lucifer more than the Savior. When we “lose our temper” or say hurtful things or make statements that devastate others, we need to stop that behavior and begin using skills that will bless and strengthen others. The gospel is repentance-oriented; perhaps that is why the Lord has us renew our covenants with Him each week through the sacrament. A time for rethinking, or renewal, serves to remind us of our origins and our dependence on Him if we expect to gain eternal life. When we do not take the sacrament or renew our eternal perspective and make needed changes (repent), we lose the Spirit of the Lord, turn inward, and become insensitive to the needs and feelings of others, and our family relationships suffer.

We complicate repentance by justifying and defending our behavior or resorting to blaming others for our failures. An arrogant attitude, personal pride, and selfishness may prevent us from humbly reviewing our family relationships to help us make needed changes.

When doctrine guides our minds and hearts, we will not allow anger or negative feelings to generate in the first place. We *are* free agents. We *can* choose how we respond to events. We *can* prevent our interpretation of external events from being used to devastate family members. We surely had that ability to choose responses when we were in our dating years. If a date misses a golf or tennis ball, we laugh; in contrast, when a family member misses the ball, we may be sarcastic and critical. Who does not remember being angry and upset with a family member about some matter, only to have a friend call and we answer with a different voice and demeanor? Somehow, it seems, we have the ability to act more civilized with strangers who have no eternal connections to us than we do with those of our own household whom we have invited to join our eternal family! When

people date, seek affection or intimacy, try to impress customers in business, or visit close friends, they go out of their way not to offend or take offense because they realize that to act on negative emotions brings undesirable consequences. At such times we are able to exercise self-discipline—clear evidence that these responses are within our control.

The Savior was made perfect because of this ability to choose. Though he was “in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15), He chose not to respond destructively or in ways that hurt others. (Occasionally the hypocrisy of His enemies made it necessary for Him to confront them, in which case they chose to take offense rather than repent.) His understanding of doctrine and His role as the Son of God in the plan of salvation gave Him a perspective and love for His brothers and sisters that made it possible for Him not to sin against people.

Modern prophets have emphasized selfishness and pride as common reasons we take offense, delay repentance, or remain unforgiving—traits never part of Christ’s nature. Our sins are a result of our carelessness in losing our eternal perspective and becoming entangled in worldliness. At times we act as if we enjoy being offended so that we have an excuse to retaliate. Or we hold grudges against others to justify our position, not evaluating righteously the circumstances. It seems, at times, as if we prefer being cantankerous rather than exercising charity and forgiveness. When we choose to behave in this manner, we act more like Satan than like Christ.

The Lord told His disciples, “Ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; *for there remaineth in him the greater sin*. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds” (D&C 64:9–11). How could disciples who knew gospel principles and had the vision of eternity do otherwise? No wonder repentance is at the heart of the gospel and the Atonement is so critical to our spiritual progress.

When individuals understand how the doctrines of the gospel apply to their family life and have a vision of eternity, they are able to establish a Zion society—a place not only where people are physi-

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cally cared for but also where they love each other as they understand their relationships to one another and help each other to obtain eternal life. This condition existed for some time after the visit of the resurrected Lord to the American continent:

“There were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers. . . . And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered . . . And there was no contention in all the land” (4 Nephi 1:16–18).

This condition results when people possess a doctrinal perspective on the purposes of mortality, their hearts are softened, and they are under covenant to honor God and to bless their fellow beings. Applying Christlike principles in family relationships is natural under these conditions, thanks to the knowledge and commitment of the participants to the plan of salvation and the place of marriage and family in their lives.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY—A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

When we talk of marriage and family, we touch on the things of eternity, for we are eternal beings. We touch on the true source of happiness, on the fountain of life, on feelings and emotions. God established that man and woman should not be alone. It is through marriage that we develop companionship and intimate relationships that are sacred and divine.

To share my own feelings on this matter, the longer I am married to my wife, the more I love her and cherish our association. The more we share our feelings and experiences, the stronger my love and appreciation for her grows. The more intertwined our lives become through our children, finances, intimacy, and a host of things we must do in life to live together, as we learn to meet each other's needs and deal with mortal limitations (including aging factors), the more I care about her.

Given our intimate association, would I want to worship a God who designed a plan of salvation that has me come to earth, gain a mortal body, marry and have children, spend all of my mortal years in a family, and then, after all the cherished experiences and emo-

tional affiliations gained through such associations, allowed me to die and lose my family connections and ties in the grave? Without any hesitation my answer would be no. If that were the result of this mortal experience, I would want nothing to do with so-called religion. What an uninspired ending! If the Atonement of Jesus Christ had not the power to restore to me a resurrected body and my family associations (knowing that I must be worthy), I could not worship the God who implemented it. Such a theology would cause us to live in constant fear that we might lose our life and cut our family associations short. The death of a loved one would be tragic. Every honest soul would ask himself, under such assumptions, "Why would God perpetrate such a hoax? Why would a Being who knows all things and who has all power instigate such a useless and wasteful plan?" Surely one would be compelled to ask, "What was the purpose of it all?" "Why marry?" "Why bear and rear children?" As the song says, "If love never lasts forever, tell me, what's forever for?"¹⁷

I feel the same about my children. I find myself deeply involved in their lives, wanting to know how to help and assist them without interfering. Each child is important to me and contributes to my happiness. It must be my work (and perhaps my glory) to bring to pass their eternal life in any way that I can. I know in some small degree from my own limited experience with my little kingdom how my Heavenly Father must feel about each of His children. And would not these feelings about marriage and parenting cause any husband or wife, mother or father, to control his or her own reactions and responses?

President George Q. Cannon summarized the potential of this noble adventure of marriage and family: "We believe that when a man and woman are united as husband and wife and they love each other, their hearts and feelings are one, that that love is as enduring as eternity itself, and that when death overtakes them it will *neither extinguish nor cool that love, but that it will brighten and kindle it to a purer flame*, and that it will endure through eternity; and that if we have offspring they will be with us and our mutual associations will be one of the chief joys of the heaven to which we are hastening. . . . God has restored the everlasting priesthood, by which ties can be formed, consecrated and consummated, which shall be as enduring as we ourselves are enduring, that is, as our spiritual nature; and hus-

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bands and wives will be united together, and they and their children will dwell and associate together eternally, and this, as I have said, will constitute one of the chief joys of heaven; and we look forward to it with delightful anticipations.”¹⁸

That is one of the “plain and precious” truths restored in the present dispensation (1 Nephi 13:34). The Lord told Joseph Smith: “And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people; for I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:40–41).

One of the “things” that have been revealed in our day is the eternal nature of the family, information apparently lost during the Great Apostasy. Marriage and family life were meant to be eternal, for we ourselves are eternal.

Adam and Eve made mortality possible in order for us to experience marriage and have children, and Jesus Christ made it possible for marriage to never end. No wonder we shouted for joy in the pre-mortal existence at the prospect of earth life. This is our opportunity to marry, and it provides us the privilege to plumb the depths of another soul in an outpouring and sharing of feelings and passion while participating in the miracle of conception and birth. What a profound experience for a husband to watch his wife bring forth their offspring—to bring into mortality another being, a kindred spirit, with similar desires to accept this mortal stewardship to fashion his or her own eternal family unit. Marriage connects our past eternity of singleness to a never-ending future of marriage and family life. Never again will we be without the companionship of our spouse. Our theology blesses married couples.

CONCLUSION

When we understand clearly the doctrines associated with marriage and family and the priority of marriage and family in the plan of salvation, we are struck with the desire to live in harmony with doctrines that will exalt. Doctrines place in perspective the purpose and meaning of marriage and family; priorities keep us on the path to our potential, which is eternal life. With a vision of eternity, we are more likely to monitor prayerfully and carefully each relationship

in our family because we know our potential. We are more interested and sensitive to the needs of our spouse and children because of our long-range commitment. We are eager to develop bonds of affection and caring when we understand the “big picture.” We are more willing to communicate and share information, our lives, and our feelings to strengthen our relationships with each other when we know we are building for eternity.

When we comprehend the doctrine of eternal families, we gain the power to discipline ourselves (repent) to be the kind of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, who will develop Christlike traits and characteristics essential to qualify to live together in love and happiness in this life as a prelude to eternal life.

The Lord’s solution to marriage and family problems is for each of us to understand and practice the doctrines of the gospel as they apply to marriage and family life. These doctrines place in perspective mortality and the Atonement. We come to know how God would have us live and act if we are to achieve eternal life—the kind of life that He lives. What would be more natural than for two married people to desire to be as their heavenly parents? As God’s children we have that right, if we will abide the laws, covenants, and principles of the gospel. If we will repent, the Atonement clears the way for us to be an eternal family. With an eternal perspective we can fulfill our destiny of gaining immortality and “eternal lives.”

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1986, 20.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “Salvation Is a Family Affair,” *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 43–44.
3. David O. McKay, in *Improvement Era*, June 1964, 445.
4. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 255.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “Let Us Move Forward and Upward,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 83.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Values by Which to Live,” *Leaders Magazine*, October–November 1984, 154.
7. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951), 50.
8. When we speak of a spirit body, it is, nevertheless, a body of matter. “There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes;

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we cannot see it [in our finite, mortal state]; but when our bodies are purified [resurrected] we shall see that it is all matter" (D&C 131:7–8). Thus bodies formed in the premortal life were bodies of celestial matter.

9. The "spirit world" is here on this earth. "The earth and other planets of a like sphere, have their inward or spiritual spheres, as well as their outward, or temporal [spheres]. The one is peopled by temporal tabernacles, and the other by spirits. A veil is drawn between the one sphere and the other, whereby all the objects in the spiritual sphere are rendered invisible to those in the temporal." (Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 9th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965], 126–27.)
10. In mortal life we create bodies that are subject to death and dissolution. In the Resurrection, however, since we will no longer be subject to death, we will have the power to organize bodies that will never die—an endowment greater than that given us in mortal life.
11. James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:34.
12. M. Russell Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard—Crusader for Righteousness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 211.
13. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 13.
14. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 13:186.
15. Orson Pratt, in *The Seer*, January 1853, 156–57; emphasis added.
16. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr., 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 297–98.
17. Rafe Vanhoy, "What's Forever For" (Nashville: Hal Leonard, 1978).
18. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:320–21; emphasis added.