

“WE ARE A COVENANT-MAKING PEOPLE”

Gospel Principles and Ordinances in Marriage

The fourth article of faith declares, “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.” These first principles and ordinances, along with higher ordinances that are administered in the holy temple, may not be commonly associated with marriage in general discourse. Yet we testify that these are vital in bringing God into our marriage.

As we have discussed throughout the previous chapters, the relationship with our spouse is inseparable from our journey through the plan of salvation, for we cannot reach the highest degree of glory without our spouse. President Brigham Young taught, “No man can be perfect without the woman, so no woman can be perfect without a man.”¹ We read in Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–3, “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man

must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it.”

Thus, our marital relationship requires our sober attention, which we commit by giving it priority status in our lives and devoting our time and energy to its growth and development. This careful attention is necessary to bring the great joy and happiness that comes from a relationship which is eternal in quality.

Connecting marriage to covenant making, particularly to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel and priesthood ordination, as well as the temple ordinances, is critical in more fully understanding the role of our marriage—its fundamental role—in our salvation and exaltation.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the founding principle of our personal lives; it must also be the founding principle in our marriage. Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described: “Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not something ethereal, floating loosely in the air. . . . It is, as the scriptures say, ‘substance . . . , the evidence of things not seen.’ . . . Your faith is either growing stronger or becoming weaker. Faith is a principle of power, important not only in this life but also in our progression beyond the veil.”²

When we think about it, marriage in and of itself is an extraordinary act of faith: faith in our spouse, faith in our self as a spouse, faith in an unknown future together, and faith that Christ will somehow help us make it all work. Sometimes marriage is called a leap of faith because it is an exciting jump into the unknown—in sickness and in health, for better or for worse. Yet we do it! Every day thousands joyfully begin their journey of faith together. No one knows what the future will hold, but when

a man and a woman make sacred vows, it is an exercise of extraordinary faith.

Why is faith such a necessary part of marital success? How can faith in Jesus Christ help us strengthen and enrich our marital relationship? The Apostle Paul says that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). In Alma 32:21 we read, “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” When we live by faith, we exercise a belief in God and His plans for us, without having a full knowledge. We place our hopes in Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the future they promise us. We believe and act in accordance with His directions, commandments, and counsel because we believe that He and His plans are sure and unshakable. Our future becomes secure because He is secure and faithful Himself. Thus, faith is the substance that must be present for the successes of this life as well as the next.

Reflections

For me it took a huge leap of faith to commit to a temple marriage. Although I was raised in the Church, all around me I saw temple marriages full of emotional abuse and dysfunction. I had a difficult time trusting that my marriage could be different. Faith played an important part in the beginning of our marriage, too—faith that we would find a job, find an apartment we could afford, learn to live within our means, and finish school without debt. A bit later, faith was necessary to begin a family when our other newlywed friends chose to wait until it was more convenient. Faith was needed to start graduate school with a young family, choose a job that allowed me to stay home with my new baby, and have more children before graduate school was over. Faith was essential to find jobs, to know where to move and when, and to know what career path to follow. Faith was an important part of our relationship as well. It helped me forgive, repent, and know when to be more humble and when to require more of our relationship. It helped me to help my husband when I didn't know what he needed and he didn't either. As our marriage has progressed, my faith has begun to be unshaken in God's hand in our lives. He truly knows what we need and is always there to help us when we ask. He knows what is best for us. Today, after twenty-three years of a wonderful life together, I am so grateful that I took the plunge, so grateful that I took that leap of faith.

Reflections

As a frightened young adult on the brink of the most important decision of my life, if I could have glanced, just for a brief moment, down the path that lay before me, I would have shouted for joy at what awaited us in marriage. Hard decisions we have faced over the years have helped unify us, not divide us, through the gift of faith. Do we stay in this career path? Where do we live? Do we take out a loan for a vehicle after years of making expensive repairs? Do we have another baby? If so, when? Can we handle this many babies? No one else is having this many babies. Is this crazy? How do we help our children and teenagers find their testimonies? Are we doing enough? How do we make time for our marriage in the midst of such a busy life? Answers to all of these questions and many, many more have been resolved together as we walked forward in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am immensely thankful for the path the Lord has led us down together as we have turned to Him in faith.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this principle in the *Lectures on Faith*:

Who cannot see, then, that salvation is the effect of faith? for, as we have previously observed, all the heavenly beings work by this principle; and it is because they are able so to do that they are saved, for nothing but this could save them. And this is the lesson which the God of heaven, by the mouth of all his holy prophets, has been endeavoring to teach to the world. . . . These with a multitude of other scriptures . . . plainly set forth the light in which the Saviour, as well as the Former-day Saints, viewed the plan of salvation. That it was a *system of faith*—it begins with faith, and continues by faith; and every blessing which is obtained, in relation to it is the effect of faith, whether it pertains to this life or that which is to come.³

Herein, Joseph Smith called the plan of salvation a “system of faith.” What is a system? A system is an organization of parts put together in an object designed for a specific purpose. For example, a car motor is an example of a system. It is an object that is made up of several specialized parts that work together as a whole to propel a car. However, once created, the car motor must have one additional component for it to work—it must have fuel. Most car motors run on gasoline. This is the *only* thing that it is built to run on. It cannot run on water or any other liquid.

So we say that the motor is a system of gasoline; it cannot run on anything else, or it will sputter and die.

In like manner, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that the gospel or plan of salvation is a system whose fuel is not gasoline, but faith. It cannot run on reason, science, intellectualism, or doubt. It can work only on faith, particularly faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why faith is called the “first principle” of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:4). Thus, once we apply faith in our lives, the eternal effects of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and of His gospel begin to manifest themselves to us. Faith propels our personal plan of salvation: It blesses us with spiritual gifts and insights; it changes us and makes us like Christ, full of love and charity; we gain eternal knowledge and light; and we gain spiritual power and influence. No other fuel but faith will make this happen. Sometimes members of the Church try to utilize other fuels, but testimonies built on these replacements sputter and die. It is faith that brings and sustains light and life in us. Thus, “all the heavenly beings work by [faith]; and it is because they are able so to do that they are saved, for nothing but this could save them.”⁴

From this analogy, faith’s critical role in marriage should be apparent. Spouses must exercise faith in their marriage every day. Faith in the Savior’s Atonement and His plan for us provides the fuel that will propel our marriage forward. When marital challenges come, spouses who exercise their faith receive heavenly help. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared: “You want capability, safety, and security . . . in married life and eternity? Be a true disciple of Jesus. Be a genuine, committed, word-and-deed Latter-day Saint. Believe that your faith has *everything* to do with your romance, because it does. . . . Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, is the only lamp by which you can successfully see the path of love and happiness for you *and* for your sweetheart.”⁵

We have had many challenges in our marriage. Without faith in Jesus Christ and in each other, we could have allowed our marriage to fail when those times wrenched our souls. Yet we have not failed each other; faith in Christ has provided the light to help us see our way through times of darkness.

Repentance

Repentance is the companion to faith as a “first principle” of the gospel. Without applying it, we cannot really begin our journey back to God. When we think of repentance, we think of changing or turning away from sin. The Hebrew root word for repentance is the word *shuv* or *shub* (pronounced *shoob*), which means to turn back or return.⁶ Both the implication and application of this Hebrew word is that we are not just to turn away from one particular sin but rather to turn our *whole life* around and begin returning to God, reconciling everything. We are to do a 180-degree turn from following the world to walking toward God.

In marriage, repentance—this turning toward God—must be an ongoing attitude in order for there to be interpersonal harmony. When both spouses are seeking to follow our Heavenly Father and His commandments, the spirit of unity, forgiveness, and love prevails. Sometimes we offend God, and we must repent before we can feel His Spirit again. Other times we offend our spouse, and it is necessary to reconcile with them before we can feel God’s Spirit and restore a feeling of love and harmony in our marriage. There is a very close tie between marital harmony and the feelings we receive from the Holy Ghost. If there is a rift or contention in our marriage and no reconciliation or repentance, it is very difficult to feel love for our spouse or feel the Spirit and receive revelation.

Consider the following story of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Emma, as told by David Whitmer:

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He [Joseph Smith] was a religious and straightforward man. He had to be; for he was illiterate and he could do nothing of himself. He *had* to trust in God. He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards everyone. To illustrate, so you can see. One morning when [Joseph] was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went up stairs, and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went down stairs, out into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour—came back to the house, asked Emma's forgiveness and then came up stairs where we were and then the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful.⁷

In other words, Joseph needed to have an ongoing spirit and attitude of repentance in order to feel close to God and his wife, Emma. David Whitmer's observation continues:

At times when Brother Joseph would attempt to translate . . . , he found he was spiritually blind and could not translate. He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition he would go out and pray, and when he became sufficiently humble before God, he could then proceed with the translation. Now we see how very strict the Lord is, and how he requires the heart of man to be just right in his sight before he can receive revelation from him.⁸

There have been times over the years when this has happened to us, when we have found ourselves to be in an adversarial position with one another. Regardless of the reason for the conflict, we lack the Spirit's companionship until we have resolved the issue. And it has been very difficult to muster any positive energy for our daily lives without His guidance. That spiritual blunting has affected our ability to relate with each other, parent our children, fulfill our Church callings, or focus adequately in our professional activities. Yet when we humble ourselves, repent, and choose reconciliation, the light comes back into our hearts and

we can move forward with our relationship in a positive manner, as well as with the other things required of us in our daily lives.

Baptism and the Sacrament

Baptism is the first ordinance of the gospel. It is also a saving ordinance. Saving ordinances include promises, or covenants, made between us and God. When we make and keep a covenant, God then extends His promise, which provides saving blessings. Covenants are powerful because they create a way for each of us to exercise our agency. When we do so, it places personal ownership and responsibility on us as we work on following through with our promises. This allows for each of us to personally grow and to show our Father in Heaven that we will obey Him and that He can trust us. So covenants that are made through ordinances are a way that we can bind ourselves to God and build our trust and relationship with Him. The promises we make in the ordinance of baptism are that we will take upon ourselves the name of Christ, keep His commandments, always remember Him, and serve others (see Mosiah 18:8–9). When we do this, our Father promises that He will pour out His Spirit upon us. These promises are renewed each time we partake of the sacrament.

It may seem strange to relate baptism and the sacrament to building and sustaining our marriage relationships, but the covenant we make in the ordinance of baptism, which is renewed weekly through the sacrament, has powerful implications for our marriages. Frankly, it has powerful implications for all of our interpersonal relationships. Partaking of the sacrament is a formal event in which we witness before God, our fellow Saints, and most importantly our spouse that we are seeking to reconcile our hearts with God and promising to follow Him.

Sister Cheryl Esplin, as second counselor in the Primary General Presidency, taught in general conference that “as we partake of the sacrament, we witness to God that we will remember



WALTER RANE, *In Remembrance of Me*. COURTESY OF INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

His Son always, not just during the brief sacrament ordinance. This means that we will constantly look to the Savior's example and teachings to guide our thoughts, our choices, and our acts."⁹ Following His example builds trust and unity in marriage. If we are continually remembering Jesus Christ and looking to Him as our exemplar, particularly regarding our marriage relationship and how we treat our spouse, the behavior between us as spouses will be supportive and loving and the bonds of intimacy will increase. When we know our spouse is working at making and keeping their baptismal promises with God, it helps us to have more trust in them and more patience with their shortcomings, and vice versa. Bringing God into our marriage by renewing the baptismal covenant through the ordinance of the sacrament is a

sure way to remind each of us to support and sustain our spouse. When we keep the promises we make to the Lord during the ordinance of the sacrament, the Lord, in turn, sends to us His Spirit.

DEBRA: *During Richard's Church service as bishop of our congregation, I had the opportunity and privilege of more objectively observing him partake of the sacrament on a weekly basis as he sat up in the front of the chapel facing the congregation. A subtle yet powerful feeling of trust and stability came over me each time I watched Richard partake of the bread and water.*

I knew he did not partake of the sacrament lightly. I was reminded that Richard's first and foremost commitment was to his Father in Heaven by following His Son, Jesus Christ. I knew that all else regarding our life together would follow appropriately, as it should, with that priority recurrently affirmed. I knew that Richard would always try to do the right thing. I knew that he would continue to try to be a good husband and a good father. My confidence in his motives and desires was firmly in place because his personal determination to follow his Savior (made public for me—and for all—to see each week) continually reminded me of who he was at his core. In this stability, minor issues that came up throughout the course of daily living had less pull to become distractions in our relationship.

Beyond the formal witnessing of the sacrament ordinance, the specific covenants we make at baptism, those covenants that we renew weekly with the ordinance of the sacrament, are also critical to our marital relationships. If we humbly examine these covenants relative to building and strengthening our marriage, we realize that our spouse should be the main recipient of the covenants we make. We have committed to bear one another's burdens, mourn together, comfort our neighbor, etc. As mentioned previously, our spouse is our first neighbor for whom we should be doing these things, and we are bound by covenant to do so.

When relationships are close, supportive behaviors often occur naturally as spouses care for each other during the course of daily living. But during times of struggle or in strained relationships, we sometimes neglect this aspect of our baptismal covenant and shift our focus outward. For example, some will dil-

igently serve others outside of the family while neglecting their spouse, who should be their priority, second only to God. It is understandable how this may occur, particularly if a spouse is hurtful, irritating, or neglectful. When a relationship causes us pain, the natural instinct is to pull away. Yet, by resisting the urge to pull away and by committing more deeply to fulfill our baptismal covenants, beginning first by serving and loving our spouse, great power can be brought to the marital relationship.

Honoring our baptismal covenants will reduce contention, help us see eye to eye, and knit our hearts together in unity and love (see Mosiah 18:21). By doing this we become unified and become “the children of God” (Mosiah 18:22), for we are taught, “Behold, thou art *one in me*, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:68; emphasis added).

The Gift of the Holy Ghost

Receiving guidance and comfort from the third member of the Godhead is perhaps the most literal manner by which we bring the *Thee* into our lives and marital relationship. To have a member of the Godhead as a companion in our marriage is truly a remarkable gift. Yet this gift may often be underutilized and unappreciated by many of us.

When we are baptized and confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are told to “receive” the Holy Ghost. The word *receive* is an action word that is a commandment rather than a passive suggestion. It places the responsibility on each of us to act and do things that will invite the Spirit into our life. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to build a close relationship with the Spirit so that He will always be with us as our companion.

Perhaps one of the most powerful illustrations of this principle comes from a dream that Brigham Young had a few years after Joseph Smith died. In his dream, Brother Brigham visited

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ROBERT T. BARRETT, *Moses Parting the Red Sea*. COURTESY OF INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

with the Prophet Joseph and asked if he had any counsel for him. Brigham explained:

Joseph stepped toward me, and looking very earnestly, yet pleasantly said, “Tell the people to be humble and faithful, and be sure to keep the spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits; it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God. Tell the brethren if they will follow the spirit of the Lord

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they will go right. Be sure to tell the people to keep the Spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family. . . .”

Joseph then showed me the pattern, how they were in the beginning. This I cannot describe, but I saw it, and saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity. Joseph again said, “Tell the people to be sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and follow it, and it will lead them just right.”¹⁰

Having the companionship of the Holy Ghost is critical in marriage. He provides guidance by supplying inspiration and revelation that sustains and protects the marriage. He is a partner who helps us make both general decisions about our life together and decisions about how we treat each other interpersonally. Over the years we have sought to be humble and sensitive to invite the Holy Ghost into our marriage. There have been important decisions we have needed to make in which we knew it was vital that we got the Spirit’s input for fear of creating unforeseen negative circumstances years later via a wrong decision. In times such as these, we have done a lot of pondering and discussing together.

One of the keys we use in understanding how the Holy Ghost talks to us is found in section 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord says to Oliver Cowdery: “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind *and* in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground” (D&C 8:2–3; emphasis added). The idea that the Lord will tell us in our minds *and* in our hearts follows the law of two witnesses. When we get both our mind and heart together on a decision, it provides a double witness that the decision is correct. This is what the Lord calls the spirit of revelation, and as the example given by the verse indicates, this is the way He

directed Moses in performing a miracle to save the children of Israel.

As we ponder and pray together about decisions in our marriage, we seek to get our minds and hearts together in unity as well. We ponder and pray about each of the options and seek to feel the rightness both in our minds and our hearts. Once this takes place, we gain confidence in moving forward. This process has blessed us in numerous circumstances in which we had to know the Lord's will and were ready to follow the Holy Ghost.

In addition to general decision-making guidance, the Holy Spirit blesses us with the ability to make good decisions about how we treat each other within the context of the marital relationship. Do we treat our spouse with patience, kindness, respect, and love? These attributes are only borne from the Spirit, and we must be worthy of His assistance. For example, if we are close to the Spirit, the split-second decision to be patient with our spouse could allow a moment of irritation to pass in peace and calm, quickly dissolving into the next moment; contrast this decision to impatiently accusing our spouse, damaging the relationship, and extending the moment of irritation exponentially with now-increased levels of anger and hurt.

RICHARD: *I remember a specific moment when I was irritated with Debra about something minor during an interaction one day. I had the strong impression at that very moment that if I followed the natural man and blurted out my frustration, it would lead to conflict. Instead, I let things pass. Even though Debra had been unaware of my irritation, a few minutes later, in simply an effort to reach out and be kind, she independently came and kissed me and expressed her love for me. It was a great lesson to me about the power and benefit of following the Spirit.*

If we are concerned about our relationship with our spouse and we are frustrated and uncertain about how to lessen or positively influence (what may be chronic) interpersonal strain, the Spirit can soften hearts and give us specific instruction relative to what we can say or do to repair damage and move forward.

Taking Counsel from the Holy Ghost Line upon Line

The scriptures provide us with an illustration of detailed revelation given in a line-upon-line manner. Through revelation, the Lord gave Nephi a commandment to build a ship. However, Nephi was not to build the ship his way; he was to build it the Lord's way: "Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee" (1 Nephi 17:8). Nephi did not know where to begin and petitioned the Lord for help: "Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship *after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?*" (1 Nephi 17:9; emphasis added). The Lord then told Nephi where to go to find the ore (see 1 Nephi 17:10). Nephi took time to make bellows in order to make fire (see 1 Nephi 17:11), and he made tools (see 1 Nephi 17:16).

Each of the steps Nephi took required a great deal of energy and time—yet note that he had not yet begun to build the ship. As we receive instruction from the Spirit regarding how to strengthen or heal our marital relationships, we must be patient to follow the instructions of the Lord through the Holy Ghost—even if some of the instructions may seem insignificant relative to the larger building project; those beginning steps will prepare us for more significant adjustments later.

Continuing with Nephi's experience, we learn that after he took the time to make preparations, he did follow the Lord in building the ship: "Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me" (1 Nephi 18:2).

If we will build our marriages after the manner which the Lord has shown us rather than try to hastily construct them according to our own style or desires, we will have the Holy Ghost as our partner. The Bible teaches us similarly when it counsels, "Except

the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

So how can we allow the Spirit to guide us along the way so that our marriage can be built after the manner of the Lord? Let's use one common interpersonal example. Perhaps we have a tendency to get angry quickly, and our abrasive tone and high-volume level send our spouse into hiding. The Spirit may initially speak to our hearts about the importance of reducing our volume through a prompting such as "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). We may decide to work on reducing our volume even though we know that that one change will not miraculously cure every problem in our relationship.

Perhaps at a later occasion, during scripture study of the Book of Mormon, we may feel the spirit of caution as we read about Zeniff's experiences in being overzealous: "And yet, I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers, collected as many as were desirous to go up to possess the land . . . ; but we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God" (Mosiah 9:3). We may then realize as we ponder the scripture that it is has been not only our volume but also our strong and determined will that comes across as overzealous and intense which makes our spouse cower and withdraw from us during a disagreement. Even though we may have worked successfully to reduce our volume, we see that this additional intensity has continued to hinder our ability to peacefully work through conflict with our spouse, even though we had been previously unaware of it.

We may then begin to think about reducing our intensity from what had been a ten on a scale of one to ten (ten being the strongest) down to about a five or six. We may practice asking our spouse more frequently for their thoughts and opinions, hearing from them how they would solve a problem or what they would like to do in a particular situation.

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

In this scenario, this marital miracle was allowed to occur because we were willing to take step-by-step counsel from the Lord through his Holy Spirit. We are then able to see, as did Nephi, “that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine” (1 Nephi 18:4).

The Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood

In addition to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the ordination to the priesthood is another gift the Lord has provided to bless our marriages. To understand the power and blessings that come to a marriage through this ordination, let’s first look at the doctrine of the priesthood.

The Lord has established that all worthy male members of the Church, based on age and circumstance, may have either the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood conferred upon them and be ordained to a respective office of that priesthood. The priesthood is defined as “the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family.”¹¹ Although “the Lord has directed that only men will be ordained to offices in the priesthood,” President Dallin H. Oaks explained that “men are not ‘the priesthood.’ Men hold the priesthood,

with a sacred duty to use it for the blessing of all of the children of God.”¹²

Each office in the priesthood has inherent rights, responsibilities, and obligations of service that are given to a boy or man when he is ordained. However, priesthood keys held by designated priesthood leaders direct the exercise of those rights and responsibilities. President Oaks further explained, “Every act or ordinance performed in the Church is done under the direct or indirect authorization of one holding the keys for that function.”¹³ Priesthood keys, then, direct priesthood authority. And priesthood authority is and has always been about service and salvation. The Lord has cautioned that ordination to the priesthood does not give any boy or man self-righteous power or authority to control or demean others (D&C 121:34–46).

The doctrine of the priesthood also teaches that priesthood authority, power, and blessings are accessible to women, as well as men. For example, when either a man or woman is set apart for a calling under the direction of a priesthood leader who holds keys, they receive priesthood authority to perform their duties of service in that calling. In addition, as each woman or man acts in faith and worthily seeks the Holy Ghost, she or he has the right to receive priesthood power to lead, teach, and strengthen those of whom she or he is called to serve. Finally, the blessings of the priesthood come to both women and men through faithful and righteous living.

How does all of this apply to marriage? First, although only men are ordained to priesthood offices in the Church, within a marriage *priesthood power* and *blessings* are shared between a husband and wife. The oath and covenant of the priesthood as found in Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–42 explains that only through “obtaining” and “receiv[ing]” the priesthood and “magnify[ing] their calling” are men promised “all that the Father hath.” Of course, the only way a man can receive this promise of eternal inheritance is by way of sharing it with his wife through a tem-

ple sealing in the house of the Lord. No husband can be exalted without his wife and no wife without her husband. So eternal marriage, then, is the catalyst that unlocks the promises found in the oath and covenant of the priesthood. President M. Russell Ballard taught, “Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. In other words, in the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.”¹⁴

Second, priesthood must be understood from the perspective that although a husband and wife have different roles, they are still equal in the sight of God. Sometimes there is misunderstanding about a husband’s priesthood authority and how it works in a marriage. A husband who misunderstands the doctrine of the priesthood might think that his ordination to the priesthood gives him some type of self-privilege to “pull priesthood rank” on his wife. Nothing can be further from the truth. President Gordon B. Hinckley boldly proclaimed:

The wife you choose will be your equal. . . . In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey. She is not your servant, your chattel, nor anything of the kind. . . . Any man in this Church . . . who exercises unrighteous dominion over [his wife] is unworthy to hold the priesthood.¹⁵

As equals, wives and husbands work together in priesthood power for the welfare of their family. We read in “The Family: A Proclamation to the Word”: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers

and mothers are obligated to help one another as *equal partners*.”¹⁶ What does it mean for a man to preside in love and righteousness and for a father and mother to be equal partners? President M. Russell Ballard stated, “Our Church doctrine places women equal to and yet different from men. God does not regard either gender as better or more important than the other. . . . When men and women go to the temple, they are both endowed with the same power, which is priesthood power.”¹⁷ The wise and faithful husband who understands the doctrine of the priesthood correctly knows that to preside in the home as an equal partner with his wife, he will always love and respect his wife’s thoughts, revelation, opinions, and feelings. He would not move ahead on any decision without working together in unity with his wife, always in love and respect. When a husband presides, he is a humble servant, looking out for the welfare, respect, and tender feelings of his beloved eternal companion and children.

The Temple and Higher Ordinances

The word *temple* comes from the Latin root word *templum*, which represents a crossing point where two lines, one vertical and the other horizontal, meet or intersect. Spiritually speaking, it’s the crossing point where heaven and earth meet and where we can go to get our spiritual bearings.¹⁸ It is the perfect place to bring the *Thee* into our marriage. President Gordon B. Hinckley observed:

Everything that occurs in that temple is of an uplifting and ennobling kind, and it speaks of life here and life beyond the grave. It speaks of the importance of the individual as a child of God. It speaks of the importance of the family as a creation of the Almighty. It speaks of the eternity of the marriage relationship. It speaks of going on to greater glory. It is a place of light, a place of peace, a place of love where we deal with the things of eternity.¹⁹

Researchers studying LDS marriages examined religious practices that increased couples’ marital commitment. In qual-



itative interviews, the religious practice most often spoken about in relation to commitment was temple attendance. Interviewees referred to both their own temple sealings as well as to returning to the temple as a couple.²⁰ Richard and Bruce Chadwick found that being temple worthy had a significant relationship with marital happiness among active LDS couples.²¹

Latter-day temple builders have decorated the temples with symbols to help us remember the important role of the temple in receiving revelation from God. For example, the Salt Lake Temple has numerous sun, moon, star, and earth motifs etched throughout its exterior. All of these have been placed by the designers and builders to remind us that God is the Creator

Reflections

My wife and I seek to go to the temple often. Before we visit the temple each time, we pray that we will be taught and will feel the Spirit. The temple reminds us of our relationship to each other. We sit side by side, wearing white, as equals. I am not in front of her; she is not in front of me. We walk through the wilderness of life side by side, counseling together and making decisions together. Attending the temple also helps us connect with each other. We have had many sacred conversations in the celestial room, comparing notes on what we learned that day. I continue to learn so much from her. Our temple experiences together also help us keep things in our relationship in proper perspective; they remind us of the big picture, which helps us move past petty grievances.

Reflections

My husband and I served several years in the temple as ordinance workers and also served in a temple presidency. This service gave us a daily perspective of eternity and God's exquisite plan for us. Each day we were surrounded with sacred things. I would carefully walk through each room in the early morning hours, before anyone else was in the temple, and note the altars and the cloths covering them to make certain that they were straight. While there I would reflect on the covenants and promises made during the sealing ceremony. My husband and I would spend time sitting in the celestial room alone, sharing our thoughts, desires, and feelings. We were a team in our temple service. We came together to clean the temple. We read and studied together. We traveled together to outlying areas to speak. Whenever we spoke, we always shared our love for each other and for the temple. Each time I attend the temple with my sweetheart, I am overwhelmed with the love that I have for him. I look at him, dressed in white, across the room and feel reinforced in my desire to spend all eternity with him.

and Holder of both the heavens and the earth and that He directs His children on their mortal journey.

In addition, with careful eyes we can notice another cosmic pattern etched in the stone on the west wall of the Salt Lake Temple. It is Ursa Major, or the Big Dipper. Why would the designers and builders of the Salt Lake Temple place this constellation on the side of a sacred building? When travelers in the northern hemisphere look for direction at night, they will first find the Big Dipper to guide them to the North Star, or Polaris. It is there that they get their bearings in order to travel in the right direction and avoid getting lost. So it is with the temple; the temple is our North Star, the place where we get our spiritual bearings. It is the place where God comes down to meet us and give us direction and ordinances to help us progress. The higher ordinance of sealing couples together and binding them for eternity is the crowning ordinance in the temple and represents this divine meeting between husband, wife, and Deity.²²

This type of marriage, an eternal marriage, begins at the altar, an altar that represents the Savior's place of sacrifice. As we are sealed, we are reminded that we are covenanting over the altar of Christ, and we thus symbolically invite Him into the covenant, while He promises that

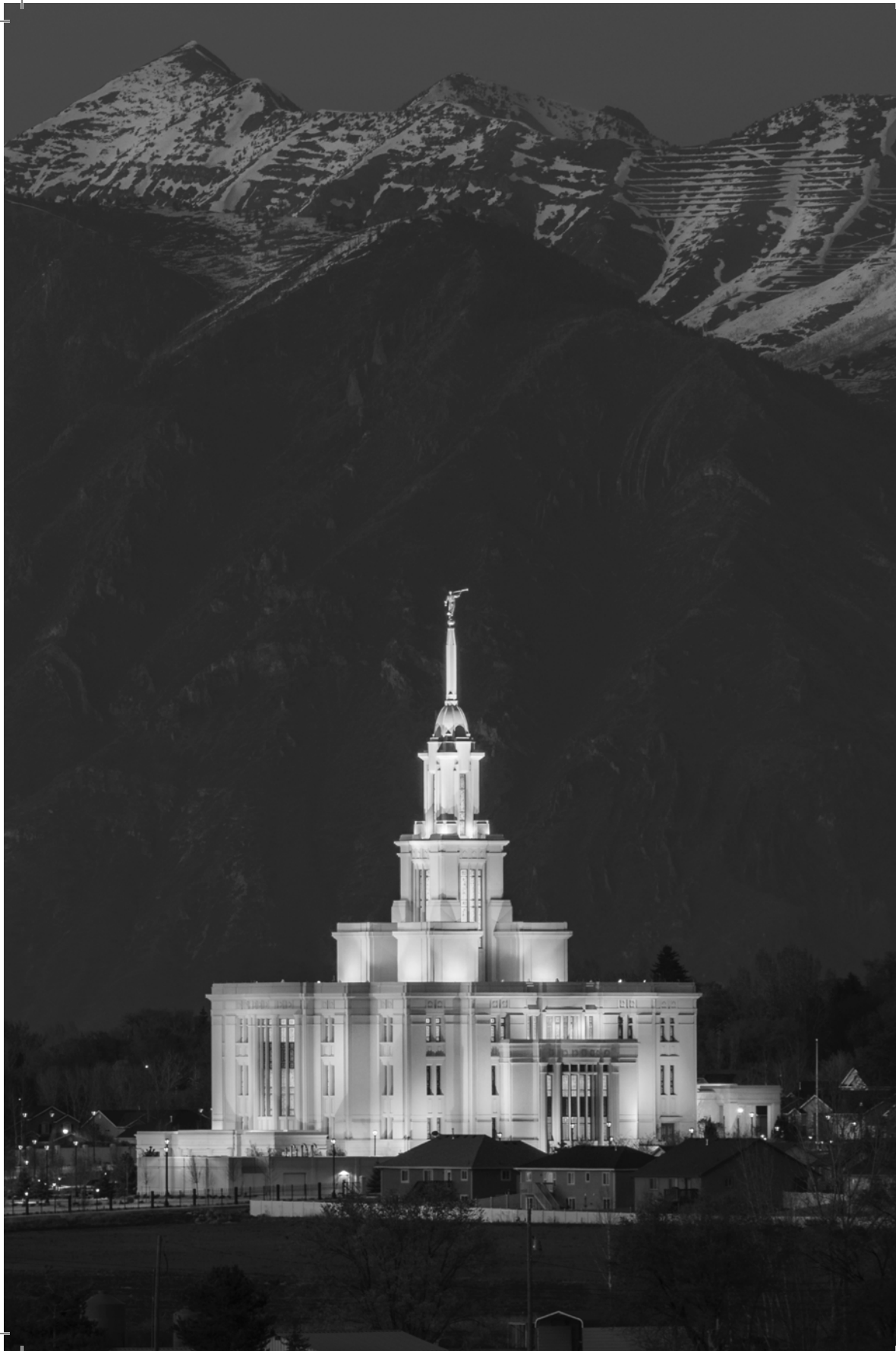
He will be the cornerstone of our marital relationship. When we as couples truly understand this, it should make a significant difference in our daily lives relative to how we treat each other, as well as how we treat our marriage on the whole.

Learning from Temple Ordinances

As we make sacred covenants within the temple, our Father in Heaven teaches us directly and symbolically. The various temple ordinances are rich with instructions and symbolism, symbolism that ultimately leads our hearts to our Savior Jesus Christ. These ordinances include the washings and anointings (or initiatory ordinances), the endowment, and the sealing. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught that washings and anointings are “mostly symbolic in nature, but [promise] definite, immediate blessings as well as future blessings.”²³ The endowment provides a series of instructions “relative to the purpose and plans of the Lord in creating and peopling the earth” as well as “what must be done . . . to gain exaltation.”²⁴ We make covenants “to live righteously and comply with the requirements of the gospel.”²⁵ The sealing ordinance, uniting man and woman as husband and wife for eternity, represents the crowning jewel of the temple ordinances.

Reflections

My wife and I have always had a goal to attend the temple at least monthly. This has not always been easy, and there were many times that it simply didn't work, especially during the years we had many young children or when I was in graduate school and working multiple jobs. However, when we first moved to Provo, Utah, our life was significantly different. Instead of eight children at home with us, we were down to just three. And my wife and I both had lighter Church callings. Since we lived so close to the Provo Temple, we decided we would attend weekly instead of monthly. It was during that time that I noticed a significant change in our marriage. Attending weekly seemed to make a significant difference in the way that we treated each other. We both seemed to have more patience with each other and our children; we seemed to be more humble and meek; we were not easily provoked; we had more control over our emotions; and we didn't get irritated as easily. We were able to demonstrate more kindness, love, and understanding in our marriage.



Within each of these ordinances, those with ears to hear and eyes to see will also learn about ways to strengthen their marriage. We read in the Doctrine and Covenants:

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life . . . and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. (D&C 132:19)

Referring to this scripture, Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “As taught in this scripture, an eternal bond doesn’t just happen as a result of sealing covenants we make in the temple. How we conduct ourselves in this life will determine what we will be in all the eternities to come. To receive the blessings of the sealing that our Heavenly Father has given to us, we have to keep the commandments and conduct ourselves in such a way that our families will want to live with us in the eternities.”²⁶ Elder Hales gives

Reflections

Regular visits to the temple have been a stable influence in our lives and have blessed us as a couple. My wife and I have a strong testimony of the temple because we make it a priority to attend and we have seen how the temple has blessed our family. I have particularly noticed that the longer we are married, the nicer it is to attend the temple together. As we come out of the temple the world just seems clearer and brighter. As we take family names to the temple we have greater joy in our experiences together. Sealings of family members together in the sealing rooms have been especially sweet experiences. Last month we took several family names to be sealed together. As I knelt across the altar from my wife I noticed the mirrors that helped me see into the eternities. My love for my wife increased beyond description.

Reflections

My husband and I were married two weeks ago. As our sealer brought us to stand in front of the mirrors in the sealing room, our images reflected in the mirrors as eternal beings. We have eternal beginnings, and now after being sealed we will continue eternally together. He told us that the first mirror represented our ancestors. I thought of parents, grandparents, and others who were with me and had shaped me into the woman I am today. I felt strongly that my great-grandma and others who had gone before us were also there, proudly watching us make those sacred covenants. The sealer then brought us to the opposite side of the room and we stood in front of the mirror that represents our posterity. I was filled with joy as I thought of those who would shape my life in the future. Those precious spirits who would help me fulfill my role as a mother and who would now be born into the covenant. I looked around and joyfully realized that we are all connected and sealed as part of God's family. We are His children. Knowing that gives me strength in my identity but also courage that when I do become a mother, God will help me care for my children because they are His children first.

us here a simple yet profound idea to ponder: We may love our spouse with a deep commitment and conviction relative to our testimonies of family and our efforts to honor the temple sealing, but do we also *like* our spouse? Does our spouse *like* us? (See chapter 5, particularly the section “Build or Enhance Friendship, Fondness, and Admiration.”) When our mortal probation has come to an end, will we *want* to be together forever? The temple can assist us in receiving the personal answers to those questions.

Elder Royden G. Derrick, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and the president of the Salt Lake Temple, wrote the following:

In the temple, through the power of the Holy Spirit, knowledge is transformed into virtues. A person who attends the temple more regularly grows more patient, more long-suffering, and more charitable. He becomes more diligent, more committed, and more dedicated. He develops a greater capacity to love his wife and children and to respect the good qualities and the rights of others. He develops a greater sense of values, becoming more honorable and upright in his dealings and less critical of others.²⁷

The power the temple can have to transform our marriage, even when

there is significant conflict, is represented in the following story by President Thomas S. Monson:

Many years ago in the ward over which I presided as the bishop, there lived a couple who often had very serious, heated disagreements. I mean real disagreements. . . .

One morning at 2:00 a.m. I had a telephone call from the couple. They wanted to talk to me, and they wanted to talk right then. I dragged myself from bed, dressed, and went to their home. They sat on opposite sides of the room, not speaking to each other. The wife communicated with her husband by talking to me. He replied to her by talking to me. I thought, "How in the world are we going to get this couple together?"

I prayed for inspiration, and the thought came to me to ask them a question. I said, "How long has it been since you have been to the temple and witnessed a temple sealing?" They admitted it had been a very long time. . . .

I said to them, "Will you come with me to the temple on Wednesday morning at 8:00? We will witness a sealing ceremony there."

In unison they asked, "Whose ceremony?"

I responded, "I don't know. It will be for whoever is getting married that morning."

On the following Wednesday at the appointed hour, we met at the Salt Lake Temple. The three of us went into one of the beautiful sealing rooms, not knowing a soul in the room except Elder ElRay L. Christiansen. . . . Elder Christiansen was scheduled to perform a sealing ceremony for a bride and groom in that very room that morning. . . . My couple were seated on a little bench with about a full two feet (0.6 m) of space between them.

Elder Christiansen began by providing counsel to the couple who were being married, and he did so in a beautiful fashion. He mentioned how a husband should love his wife, how he should treat her with respect and courtesy, honoring her as the heart of the home. Then he talked to the bride about how she should honor her husband as the head of the home and be of support to him in every way.

I noticed that as Elder Christiansen spoke to the bride and the groom, my couple moved a little closer together. Soon they were seated right next to one another. What pleased me is that they had both moved at about the same rate. By the end of the ceremony,

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SEALING ROOM IN THE OQUIRRH MOUNTAIN UTAH TEMPLE. CHRISTINA SMITH, © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

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my couple were sitting as close to each other as though *they* were the newlyweds. Each was smiling.

We left the temple that day, and no one ever knew who we were or why we had come, but my friends were holding hands as they walked out the front door. Their differences had been set aside. I had not had to say one word. You see, they remembered their own wedding day and the covenants they had made in the house of God. They were committed to beginning again and trying harder this time around.²⁸

We feel we have been particularly blessed with a spirit of love and unity as we have attended temple sealing sessions together, whether they be for the sealing ordinance for those couples among our family and friends or for the vicarious work we perform for those who have passed on. It is there that we are reminded of the covenants we made when we first knelt across the altar to be married. We also remember the instructions we were given during our sealing ceremony by our temple sealer. It sparks a feeling of closeness, it sparks a feeling of unity, and it sparks loving feelings as we ponder upon our journey together. Regardless of our trials and stresses, in that moment we are where the Lord would have us be, and we are there together, and that recognition brings a feeling of stability and strength to our relationship.

Temple Mirrors and the Crown of Eternal Life

After a man and woman receive the sealing ordinance over the altar of God, they are often invited to look at themselves together as husband and wife for the first time by looking into one of two large mirrors hanging on opposite walls of the sealing room. Those of us who have already received the sealing ordinance can also take the opportunity to do this when we do proxy sealings for those who have passed on before us.

On these occasions, when we stand facing one of the mirrors, side by side, an interesting phenomenon occurs. We can see our own reflection, as we do in any ordinary mirror hanging

on the wall in our own home—we see one level, one plane, one image. But when we glance to look at the reflection of our dear spouse, we become quickly aware that our view in the mirrors has changed. We not only see the first reflection of our spouse, as we did our own, but we also see level beyond level, plane beyond plane, image beyond image of our spouse—continuing on forever.

Such a phenomenon suggests at least a couple of thoughts. First, if we think about our marriage from an interpersonal perspective, if we focus only on ourselves and are concerned only about taking care of ourself, our needs, and our desires, then our development in the eternities will stop abruptly; we will not be able to progress. Yet if we focus with charity and serviceable intention on our spouse—as would our Savior, Jesus Christ—on what they need, on what they desire, making sure they are happy and comfortable, then our development as husband and wife will continue for the eternities. The way to grasp this type of eternal relationship is quite simply by consistently focusing on the other.

DEBRA: *Doctrinally, it may be difficult with our mortal minds in our finite state to comprehend the immensity of the eternal promises of the sealing ordinance. In one of our visits to perform vicarious sealing ordinances in the temple, I took particular time to look into the mirrors while other couples knelt across the altar to participate as proxies in the sealing session. I became overwhelmed with the enormity of it all. For all of my intent staring and straining to look as far as I could into the mirrors as the images got smaller and smaller, I could not see the end of those reflections. As I peered into those eternities while listening to the sacred ordinances being performed, I received the strong impression that the doctrine of the sealing, and all that is accomplished through performing the sealing ordinance, goes way beyond what I could even begin to understand.*

In a BYU documentary on the mission of Jesus Christ, Marcus H. Martins, professor of Religious Education at BYU–Hawaii, reminds us of the expansive nature of this gospel plan:

In the Pearl of Great Price . . . we learn, that not only Jesus Christ was God even before this life, but that He being the creator of

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worlds without number, was not a beginner. That this earth where we live and these experiences that we have here are really nothing new in the eternities and that The Lord is not experimenting with us and hoping that something good comes out of this plan of Salvation. No, he has done this countless times.²⁹

When we reach the limits of our mortal understanding, the temple helps extend our understanding beyond those limits and carries our vision into the eternities. The temple brings heaven to earth, it brings God into our marriage, and it brings us into God's presence. Its ordinances teach us of the plan of salvation and show us the way back to Him.

Learning in the temple is most critical in our relationship with our spouse, for it reminds us that exaltation is a couple's affair. As we make temple covenants and faithfully endure to the end, we "shall have a crown of eternal life" (D&C 66:12), which is "the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7). The temple reminds us that eternal life represents God's life—to live forever as spouses and families in God's presence.

At the beginning of this book, we talked about how marriage is a journey in which two imperfect people strive together toward perfection. The temple sealing promises perfection if we remain true and faithful to God, His priesthood, and each other. We then will be crowned as kings and queens, priests and priestesses in the kingdom of our Father. President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "The main purpose for our mortal existence is that we might obtain tabernacles of flesh and bones for our spirits that we might advance after the resurrection to the fullness of the blessings which the Lord has promised to those who are faithful. They have been promised that they shall become sons and daughters of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and if they have been true to the commandments and covenants the Lord has given us, to be kings and priests and queens and priestesses, possessing the fullness of the blessings of the celestial kingdom."³⁰ As kings and priests, queens and priestesses in His kingdom, we receive from

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our Father His life, eternal life, to rule and reign side by side as spouses throughout the eternities. It is the holy temple and the priesthood ordinances found therein that establish and solemnize these blessings in marriage.

And they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. . . .

This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law. (D&C 132:19–20, 24).

And this glorious sharing of heavenly power, promised to us as we remain true and faithful to our spouse and the covenants of our Father, is most lovingly and generously “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

Conclusion

Marriage is significantly connected to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel even though it is not generally thought of in this way. Yet when we take time to reflect on this connection, there is a rich well of understanding to help our marriages thrive. Further, pondering upon the temple and its higher ordinances can also make our marriage better. Our Father has built His gospel and has provided principles and ordinances in order to bind couples and families to Him. Exercising our faith, repenting, and making covenants at baptism and in holy temples bring the Holy Ghost into the marital relationship, guiding spouses from above on their journey together here on earth.

THE SALT LAKE TEMPLE, COURTESY OF ELLE STALLINGS/PIXABAY.



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