

Commitment to the Covenant

DEBRA: *Richard and I are very different. The first couple of years of our marriage were difficult and painful. We had a lot of adjustments to make in order to be able to get along, become unified, and find happiness together. When I met Richard, I was a divorced, single mom with two very young daughters, most of the way through a clinical psychology PhD program. Working toward finishing my academic and professional training as a single mom was already difficult, but dating Richard, a longtime bachelor, upped the intensity of this period significantly.*

As the relationship progressed, the thought of being married again created a lot of fear of rejection for me, yet I moved forward in faith because I loved and respected Richard and knew he loved God and took seriously his role in God's plan. I sensed that Richard and I would be very good together, and I felt that God sanctioned the union. I also felt strongly that my daughters needed to be raised in a home with both a mother and a father who loved each other. Yet there were issues.

By the time we married, Richard had lived as a bachelor for twenty-four years post-LDS mission. Needless to say, he had anxiety about getting married,

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wasn't very flexible, and knew how things "should" be done (and I wasn't doing them that way). As a result, he was sometimes critical of me. We had arguments during our early relationship as I tried to defend my own worth and value to him while struggling with very real personal insecurities. I feared rejection, and Richard's actions intensified those fears through his unaccepting stance on a variety of personality issues. To be honest, I wasn't sure whether he was committed to me or to our marriage.

RICHARD: *I was a bachelor until I was forty-five years old. I had accumulated years of formal education and work experience, looking forward to the day when I could be a husband and father. However, many years of bachelorhood had rooted me in a comfortably settled lifestyle. I had some uncertainties, inflexibility, and a lot of anxiety when it came time to finally tying the knot. I had some major adjustments to make being married to a real woman with her own personality with unique strengths and flaws, rather than being married to the imagined, perfect wife that I had spent so many years hoping for. I made a lot of mistakes with Debra, trying to make her what I thought she should be rather than accepting her for who she was. This created a lot of conflict in our early relationship. She was not always patient with me in these situations, but thankfully she was forgiving of my self-righteousness and kept working with me. (I have often joked that it finally took a psychologist to get me married, but perhaps there is some truth to that!)*

Through the Lord's help, and our determination to make our marriage work, we weathered through those difficult early years, holding on to a hope that we could find greater happiness together. We learned critical lessons that, as we implemented them, set our relationship on a more positive course. Years later our marriage is thriving and wonderful. There are times that we still have disagreements, but we have learned to avoid the type of painful arguments we had in the early years. This has come as a result of our commitment to the covenant, which has created a daily, purposeful commitment to each other and to our marital relationship. We work hard to love each other, and we enjoy those marvelous benefits.

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*P*resident Dallin H. Oaks observed that "a good marriage does not require a perfect man or a perfect woman. It only

requires a man and a woman committed to strive together toward perfection.”¹ This book is born from that prophetic counsel. Marriage is an eternal principle in the plan of salvation. Marriage is the institution God established to bring a man and a woman together in order to support and sustain each other while traveling the mortal road toward perfection. Marriage is the workshop or factory where imperfect people join their efforts and synergize their unique individual gifts to build unifying celestial characteristics and find joy. Spouses are often very different from each other. Sometimes this creates misunderstanding and frustration that leads to arguments, resentment, or discord. President Oaks reminds us that regardless of differences, a good marriage is one in which both spouses are highly committed to each other and highly committed to working to improve their marriage.

Commitment to the Covenant seeks to strengthen marriage as a fundamental unit of society, as well as strengthen our individual relationships between husband and wife as a fundamental unit of eternity. We utilize social science research, particularly from the areas of sociology and psychology, as well as doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ to present key principles that, if applied, will help a marriage thrive. To illustrate these various principles, we share many stories. This tripartite approach (religion, science, and personal narrative) is intended to create a comprehensive discussion that is not only theoretical in nature but explicitly practical.

Throughout the book, we include several different types of personal narratives to illustrate principles. We share stories from our marriage that breach the barriers of “proper” social discourse; we go beyond the superficial aspects of marriage to openly share many of our personal triumphs, misunderstandings, arguments, struggles, and moments of clarity, revelation, and closeness. In addition, we provide anonymous stories from others who generously and courageously share their closed-door experiences relative to their personal histories, marriages, and

mental health in hope that their stories will be of service. Our hope is that these narratives will provide a wide variety of experiences and perspectives to supplement the principles shared in this book.

DEBRA: Lastly, throughout the text I share several client stories from my work as a psychologist. Please note that I highly value client confidentiality. Each of these clients has very generously and courageously given me permission to share their personal stories.

Our prayer is that this book will be a valuable resource for couples in their efforts to strengthen their relationship and progress in the quest for eternal, celestial marriage. As an introduction, this chapter frames up *Commitment to the Covenant* by examining how the institution of marriage is currently doing in society as a whole as well as within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We will also introduce the layout and approach for the rest of the book.

The Current State of Marriage

In 2017, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke at the Humanum Colloquium in New York City among a gathering of interreligious leaders. There he raised a warning voice against what he termed as a “skewed conception of marriage” currently being accepted in society. He explained that “increasing numbers of people are giving up on the very idea of marriage, believing that relationships are inherently unstable and transitory, thereby avoiding in their view the unnecessary commitments of formal marriage and pain of the inevitable divorce.”²

Elder Bednar’s observation and warning is both insightful and clear. The institution of marriage is struggling. Indeed, during the past several decades, we have seen the weakening of public support for the marriage vow in the United States and across the world. As prophets and Church leaders have noted

this trend, social science researchers have also identified symptoms of this decline in marriage. For example, in the United States (US) alone, the marriage rate has dropped by about one-third since the 1970s and is at a historic low (see figure 1). This trend is also true in most countries across the world (see figure 2). In the US, millennials are five times less likely to marry by age twenty-five than when baby boomers were the same age.

Divorce rates are another way to measure marital health. When using the crude divorce rate (the number of divorces occurring in a particular geographical area in a given year, per 1,000 population), divorce rates are shown to have actually declined in the United States since the 1980s (see figure 1). Some argue that this is evidence that the health of marriage isn't as bad as some would suggest. We disagree. The problem is that even with such a turnaround, the most current divorce to marriage

Reflections

I have been married for twenty years, but the majority of it I have struggled with feelings of not wanting to stay married. Though I felt completely in love when we were dating and when we got married, I soon discovered that being married wasn't what I was expecting it would be. I thought it would be happiness, togetherness, and unity, but instead for us it became disagreement, stress, criticism, and unhappiness. I constantly felt marriage wasn't worth it. Several times we talked about divorce. I seriously wanted it, desperately wanted it. And several times I left for short periods of time. But I've always tried to rely on God for direction. Many times I prayed and prayed that He would just say I could leave, but He never did. The more I prayed about it and turned to Him in this very trying matter in my life, the clearer it became to me that He wanted me to stay married. I know that's not the case for everyone, but for me it was. So I fought through it, trying as hard as I could and clinging to my relationship with God to provide the love and support I was lacking at home. And He gave that to me. And much to my astonishment, things have gotten better—really, truly better, to the point that I actually feel happy and feel love again. It has been years of struggle and there are still major challenges, but slowly my heart has been changed. The challenges in marriage refine us as nothing else can, but it can take years and years. I'm so grateful that my marriage was preserved and that I have the opportunity to keep working on it, because it truly is worth it.

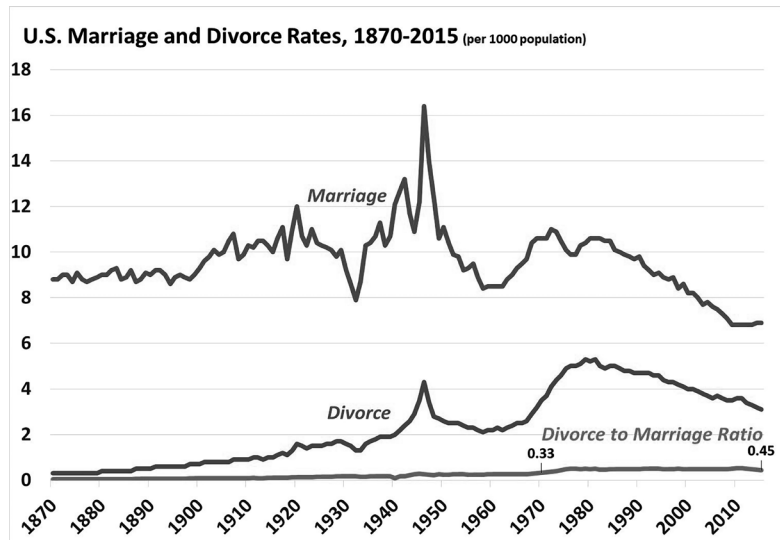


FIGURE 1. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC), (2017). LINE GRAPH ILLUSTRATION: US MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES, 1870–2015 (PER 1,000 POP.), [ROBSLINK.COM/SAS/DEMOC80/US_DIVORCE_AND_MARRIAGE.HTM](https://robslink.com/sas/democd80/us_divorce_and_marriage.htm).

ratio (.45 in 2015), is still far away from what it was in 1970 (.33) when the divorce rate began to climb (see figure 1). The institution of marriage has been hit hard by decades of the divorce culture and has not really recovered. This trend can also be found in other countries across the world (see figure 3). As a side note, some demographers aren't convinced that the crude divorce rate is even the most accurate measure. Instead, they argue that by using other statistical methods, divorce rates are in fact increasing.³

Marriage decline is also revealed by looking at the delay of first marriages. In the United States, the median age at first marriage for women has gone from around age 20 up to 27 since the 1970s. For men, the median age at first marriage has increased from age 23 to almost 30 (see figure 4). Researchers have found that 80 percent of young adults in the 1970s were married by the time they were 30, whereas today 80 percent of young adults

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Crude marriage rate, 1970, 1995 and 2014 or latest available year^a

Marriages per 1000 people

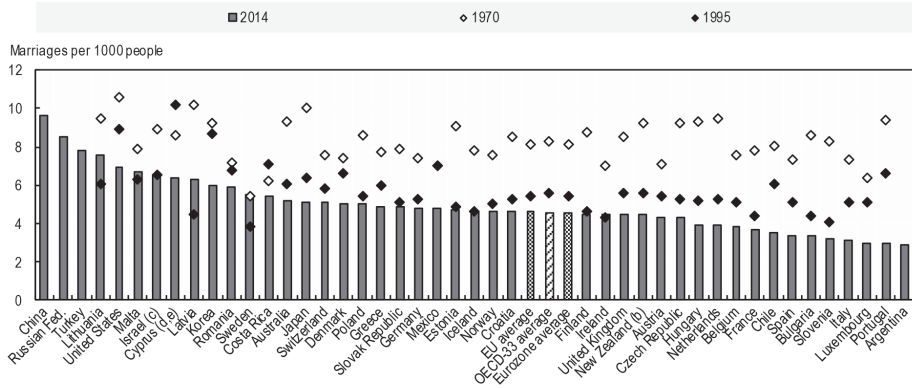


FIGURE 2. OECD FAMILY DATABASE (4 MARCH 2017). BAR GRAPH ILLUSTRATION: CRUDE MARRIAGE RATES, 1970, 1995, AND 2014 OR LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR. *SF3.1: Marriage and Divorce Rates*, [HTTP://WWW.OECD.ORG/ELS/FAMILY/SF_3_1_MARRIAGE_AND_DIVORCE_RATES.PDF](http://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF_3_1_MARRIAGE_AND_DIVORCE_RATES.PDF).

Crude divorce rate, 1970, 1995 and 2014 or latest available year^a

Divorces per 1000 people

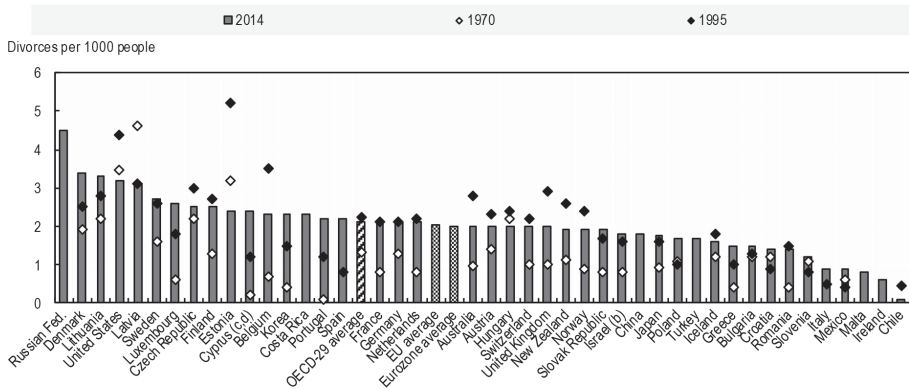


FIGURE 3. OECD FAMILY DATABASE (4 MARCH 2017). BAR GRAPH ILLUSTRATION: CRUDE DIVORCE RATES, 1970, 1995, AND 2014 OR LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR. *SF3.1: Marriage and Divorce Rates*, [HTTP://WWW.OECD.ORG/ELS/FAMILY/SF_3_1_MARRIAGE_AND_DIVORCE_RATES.PDF](http://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF_3_1_MARRIAGE_AND_DIVORCE_RATES.PDF).

aren't married until age 45.⁴ The delay of marriage is widespread in many countries across the world as well. Some have proposed that this increase in age at first marriage is a healthy trend because divorce rates are often lower for those who marry later in life. Yet we see this delay as a reflection of our culture's failure to prioritize or value the institution of marriage.

The increase of cohabitation, which is closely tied to the delay of marriage, is also a strong indicator of marriage decline. Since 1975, cohabitation in the US has increased more than twelve times among young adults (ages 18 to 34).⁵ This change is a clear sign of the lack of interest the rising generation has in formalizing a conjugal relationship. Cohabitors enter into relationships in which they live and have sexual relations with a chosen partner, living together in a similar state as husband and wife, without the actual legal obligations and benefits of marriage. The hope of many is that they can see how the relationship works out while living together, as a trial period per se, and then if all goes as hoped, they may later marry to make the commitment to their love and their relationship official. If the relationship does not go as planned, by cohabitating they have maintained the freedom to separate without any of the legal inconveniences or expense of a divorce and certainly without the stigmatic societal label of being divorced.

Another major element that contributes to the erosion of marriage, at least in the US, is the wide acceptance of no-fault divorce laws. Back in the 1960s, no-fault divorce became popular in America through the lobbying efforts of lawyers to make divorce a faster and less judgmental legal process. Unfortunately, it has created a legal culture relative to marriage and divorce that has spilled over into general societal attitudes toward marriage. As one researcher put it, "Thanks to no-fault, the marriage contract is no longer enforceable. It takes two to marry but only one to divorce at any time, for any reason, as fast as the courts can sort out property and custody issues."⁶

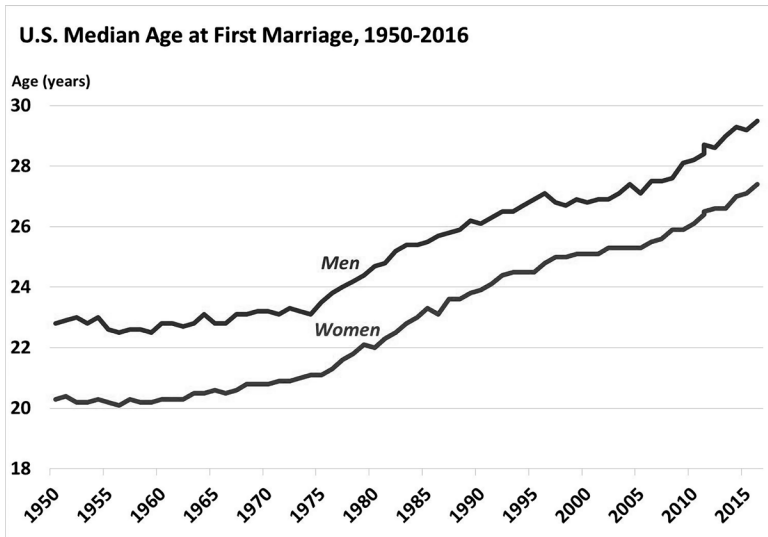


FIGURE 4. US CENSUS BUREAU (4 MARCH 2017). LINE GRAPH ILLUSTRATION: MEDIAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE: 1950 TO 2016, [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/HHES/FAMILIES/FILES/GRAPHICS/MS-2.PDF](https://www.census.gov/hhes/families/files/graphics/ms-2.pdf).

Selfishness Leads to Poor Marital Commitment

So what's behind these unfortunate trends leading to the decay of marriage? In his Humanum Colloquium address Elder Bednar warned: "An increasingly cynical and self-absorbed world sees [the] principle of selflessness [in marriage] as 'old school' and paradoxical. But we know that it is paradisiacal." He promises that "as husbands and wives 'lose' their lives in fulfilling these sacred duties of marriage and family, they find themselves—becoming true servants of God and disciples of Jesus Christ."⁷

As Elder Bednar indicates, we believe that the driving force behind the decline in marriage is a subtle, yet harmful, cultural value shift in society toward self-interest. Such selfishness has been the catalyst leading society to become more casual in its commitments, agreements, and promises as a whole, and marriage in particular. Parties of agreements no longer have high expectations that their contracts will be honored. Such a

tendency can be found in business, law, politics, and professional sports, in which breaking promises and contracts is becoming an accepted part of the natural operation of things. Yet perhaps no other aspect of society has been affected as significantly by this trend than has the institution of marriage. What was once a promise of *until death do us part* has now shifted to *until debt do us part*. The once holy binding of husband and wife is now seen as probationary, often entered into with prenuptial agreements, signaling an odd anticipation of divorce even before the marriage begins.

Historically, marriage was largely viewed by both individuals and society with a deep level of commitment. From a social science perspective, this high level of commitment is not misplaced, because the evidence is clear that it provides greater social stability and well-being. In their widely acclaimed book, *The Case for Marriage*, Waite and Gallagher reported that married individuals have, on average, significantly higher levels of happiness, physical and emotional health, and financial well-being when compared to singles, cohabiters, or divorcees. In addition, they found that the large majority (86 percent) of unhappily married people who stayed married had happier marriages five years later.⁸ In other words, “permanent marital unhappiness is surprisingly rare among the couples who stick it out.”⁹

Further analysis by Waite and colleagues found that “unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were no happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married.” They also reported that “even unhappy spouses who had divorced and remarried were no happier, on average, than unhappy spouses who stayed married.” Thus, if people choose divorce because they think it will bring them a sense of greater happiness, existing research shows little if no evidence that their assumption is true.¹⁰

A second, more recent witness to these findings comes from researchers who analyzed data from 10,000 parents with new-born children. Among couples who initially reported their mar-

riage to be unhappy, ten years later two-thirds of them reported that they were now happy in their marriage, with only 7 percent claiming that they were still unhappy.¹¹ Again, marital happiness is dynamic and rarely settles into a state of chronic unhappiness. Instead, couples find ways to breathe positive feelings back into their marriage over time.

In spite of these compelling findings, around 40 percent of men and women ages fifteen to forty-four in the US continue to agree that divorce is the best solution for couples with ongoing marital difficulties.¹² According to Waite and Gallagher, much of this divorce-culture attitude can be attributed to the “privatization of marriage,” in which marriage has become regarded as a private and individual decision.¹³ When struggling with marital difficulty and considering whether to divorce, the central question often considered by individuals today is “What would make me happy?” This question is often promoted by lawyers, educators, counselors, and even clergy, reinforcing “the idea that emotional gratification is the main purpose and benefit of marriage.”¹⁴

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counters this attitude:

A family built on the marriage of a man and woman supplies the best setting for God’s plan to thrive—the setting for the birth of children, who come in purity and innocence from God, and the environment for the learning and preparation they will need for a successful mortal life and eternal life in the world to come. A critical mass of families built on such marriages is vital for societies to survive and flourish. That is why communities and nations generally have encouraged and protected marriage and the family as privileged institutions. It has never been just about the love and happiness of adults.¹⁵

Unfortunately, our society doesn’t see it this way. Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon described the present law and attitude toward marriage and divorce: “The American story about marriage, as told in the law and in much popular literature, goes something like this: marriage is a relationship that exists primarily

for the fulfillment of the individual spouses. If it ceases to perform this function, no one is to blame and either spouse may terminate it at will.”¹⁶

Self-absorption then has become the preeminent purpose of marriage in society, and unfortunately it’s not very compatible with marriage. Selfishness contributes to society’s general anticommitment attitude, which is driving an unprecedented increase in marital postponement and cohabitation in the US and other countries and is eroding the barrier that once protected society against a casual acceptance of divorce.

LDS Marriage Today

How have these social and legal trends affected marriage and divorce among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Certainly LDS couples have their own problems and struggles, but when looking at the LDS population as a whole, there is good evidence of what President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said: “Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are known throughout the world for having some of the finest marriages and families you can find.”¹⁷

In his research work in 2000, Richard, working with Bruce Chadwick, found that most marriages in the Church were relatively strong and vibrant. When compared to the national percentages, Latter-day Saints were significantly different from their national peers, showing lower age at first marriage, lower numbers of single-parent families, and larger family size. Like the national average, Latter-day Saints also ranked extremely high in marital happiness.¹⁸ Researchers interviewing LDS couples in 2012 found that they believed marriage is meant to be eternal. As a result, these study participants indicated that they are more committed, more willing to sacrifice, and more capable of coping with difficulties and conflict.¹⁹

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Divorce rates among Latter-day Saints are also an important indicator of how they are doing. Many scholars believe that the current lifetime divorce rate in the United States is between 40 percent and 50 percent. In 2000, Bruce Chadwick and Richard, analyzing both civil and temple marriages combined, found an estimated current lifetime divorce rate for returned-missionary men to be approximately 12 percent and for returned-missionary women a divorce rate around 16 percent. They estimated that the lifetime rate for non-returned-missionary men to be approximately 38 percent and about 22 percent for non-returned-missionary women.²⁰ Although these data are somewhat dated, they give a baseline perspective. Thus, although divorce rates among Latter-day Saints are lower when compared to the general American public, LDS marriages are not perfect, and divorce has definitively found its way into many Latter-day Saint households.

In a bold warning to members of the Church about marriage and divorce, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared:

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Of course, all in marriage is not bliss.

. . . The remedy for most marriage stress is not in divorce. It is in repentance. It is not in separation. It is in simple integrity that leads a man to square up his shoulders and meet his obligations. It is found in the Golden Rule. . . .

There must be a willingness to overlook small faults, to forgive, and then to forget.

There must be a holding of one's tongue. Temper is a vicious and corrosive thing that destroys affection and casts out love. . . .

There may be now and again a legitimate cause for divorce. I am not one to say that it is never justified. But I say without hesitation that this plague among us, which seems to be growing everywhere, is not of God, but rather is the work of the adversary of righteousness and peace and truth.²¹

This prophetic warning helps us as Latter-day Saints to recognize that we must avoid the selfish trends of the world and make a thorough and complete commitment to the marriage vow and to God, who is at the center of a successful marriage.

The ME, WE, and THEE of Marriage

This book is divided into three general areas, presented as part 1, part 2, and part 3, respectively: the *Me*, *We*, and *Thee* of marriage.

The ME of Marriage

As discussed earlier, many in society today are led to believe that the most important question about whether a marriage is successful is “Does it make me happy?” or “What’s in it for me?” Part I discusses the *Me* in the covenant of marriage from a strikingly different perspective—the intrapersonal (“intra-” meaning “within”) contributions for building marriage. Rather than asking “What’s in it for me?” we can ask, “What characteristics do I need in order to be a better spouse?” or “What can I do to build the marriage?” At the individual level, each spouse must

contribute to the marriage for it to flourish. This is what we call the *Me* in marriage.

Admittedly, the concept of the *Me* in marriage is a hard doctrine. Many spouses may feel threatened to look at the *Me* in marriage, and so it may feel easier to place responsibility on their spouse or God to make the marriage work. Or they want to place blame when it isn't working. In fact, as we structured this book, we wondered if beginning with the *Me* section might be a turnoff to some readers. Yet we realized the book just could not begin in any other way—for marriage cannot begin in any other way. Marriage starts with *me*. We each must accept personal accountability for how we use our own agency in our marriage—the personal contributions we make (or fail to make) to the relationship. This part of the book will challenge and change you. Therefore, please approach part I with an added dose of openness and humility regarding the offerings therein.

Although there are numerous personal virtues individuals may bring to or develop in their marriage, we have chosen to highlight three principles that we believe are often overlooked or avoided in our current culture yet are foundational in strengthening a marriage: commitment, resilience, and forgiveness.

The commitment chapter, chapter 2, focuses on our personal or individual commitment to the covenant of marriage. Some in our society think commitment in marriage is simply a resolve *not* to divorce. This is certainly important, but we also promote making active, purposeful resolutions for the health of marriage. Our presentation of commitment certainly addresses the resolve to physically stay married, particularly for those in chronically difficult marriages, yet the discussion extends far beyond that. If we are committed to our marriage, we will give our spouse our time, attention, and energy. We will make the relationship with them a priority in our lives above other activities or interests. If we are committed, we are not just enduring, but we are always working to make our marriage thrive.

Chapter 3, the resilience and posttraumatic growth chapter, addresses the concept of building our personal reserves. In large measure, this chapter is about how to handle trials with adaptive coping—trials both within and without the marital relationship that influence the spousal relationship. We speak of the agonies of the soul that we all must encounter—how we can rebuild after we’ve been knocked down and how we can even propel ourselves forward. We present thorough discussions of these principles both from psychological and gospel perspectives. Those who struggle with principles of resilience, perhaps being caught in deeper mental health issues that prevent the healthy flexibility needed to be resilient, are referred to a mental health question and answer discussion found in the appendix of the book.

The forgiveness chapter, chapter 4, focuses on the universal need to forgive and the freeing power that comes to us and our spouse as we forgive them and let go. Likely, our spouse offends us about as frequently as we offend them (even though most of us probably don’t like to think that we have ever done anything wrong or hurtful). Although we strive to be Christlike, we often fail and must figure out how to move past those failings. Forgiveness is a key personal ingredient to any happy marriage. We are to forgive *all* things. Sometimes it may be easier to forgive the “big” offenses because they demand our attention so dramatically. Yet, oftentimes, the “little” offenses get neglected; we fail to give them our attention, and the resentments for those offenses build up and become toxic.

The WE of Marriage

As we strengthen our individual resolve to build our marriage, we may then wonder: “What do spouses in good marriages do between themselves that makes their marriage thrive?” Part 2 discusses the We in the covenant of marriage, the interpersonal (“inter-” meaning “between”) contributions for building

marriage. It looks at the partnership of marriage. It examines the doing of marriage and offers practical marital-enhancement principles to assist couples in working together in their journey toward perfection. Critical topics in interpersonal relationships are covered in this section, including emotional intimacy, the sexual relationship, conflict, and finances.

Chapter 5, the emotional intimacy chapter, highlights the importance of emotional closeness or mutual dependence for the health of the marriage. We present evidence stemming from a seventy-five-year longitudinal study on the lives of men relative to the importance of this topic for men.²² We discuss communication skills such as talking and listening, paying attention to love languages, building positive sentiment, continuing courtship, and creating shared meaning.

The sexual relations chapter, chapter 6, discusses the salience of the sexual relationship in the marital relationship. We explain how the sexual relationship helps husbands and wives build genuine and deep bonds of emotional intimacy if the true purposes of sex are kept in balance. We present the spiritual purposes in sex, such as partnering as creators with God, finding unity with our spouse, and learning about unity with God. We also discuss principles of charity relative to the sexual relationship. We conclude the chapter with a brief discussion about sexual dysfunction and the LDS Church's position on sexual matters.

Chapter 7, the conflict chapter, thoroughly examines destructive attitudes and behaviors that can destroy and undermine our marital relationships. This chapter relies heavily on the work of John Gottman, the nation's foremost researcher on marital relationships. We present processes in marriage that rupture marital trust and loyalty, and then discuss how we can protect ourselves from these destructive forces. We also present what we believe is a critical concept: clarifying the difference between principles and preferences. This involves identifying issues relative to eternal principles in contrast to issues of temporal preference when

faced with differences between ourselves and our spouse. We also offer some practical considerations about the timing of discussions that may have potential conflict.

When all is said and done, couples often don't do so well during conflict, even when they are trying. They may often offend each other, hurt each other, and create opportunities to work through forgiveness anew. Thus, we end the chapter with a discussion about repair attempts, including the importance of making process commentaries and the power of an apology. There is great power in an apology!

We conclude the *We* section with chapter 8 on finances. We examine financial considerations relative to the partnership between husband and wife. We address the importance of both spouses being fully informed and involved in the decision-making processes associated with managing the family finances. We discuss five principles of money management: pay tithes and offerings, avoid debt, use a budget, build a reserve, and teach family members.²³ We discuss each of these areas at length, providing extensive stories to illustrate these principles.

The THEE of Marriage

Finally, although the *Me* and the *We* contributions to building marriage are essential and necessary, we cannot access all that marriage has to offer us for our journey toward perfection unless we look to God. Therefore, part 3 turns more fully to the *Thee* in the covenant of marriage, examining the extrapersonal (“extra” meaning “outside” or “beyond”) contributions to building marriage. This involves asking questions such as “How is God using our marriage to perfect us?” or “How can Heavenly Father help us as we invite Him more fully into our relationship?” His contribution elevates us above and beyond what our intra- and interpersonal efforts can provide, perfecting and exalting us together as husband and wife into the eternities. We discuss

herein principles of personal and couple worship (scripture study, prayer, pondering, and the recording of impressions); the importance of following the prophets and apostles as living oracles, seers, and revelators; and the necessity to fully engage ourselves in honoring the first principles and sacred ordinances of the gospel.

Chapter 9 focuses on worship activities, called “scripture literacy,” that are generally done on a personal basis, but expands the discussion to encourage doing these activities with our spouse as well. This allows us to more fully access the Spirit and receive personal and couple revelation to bless our marriage and our life in general. We share how small and simple things like recording a spiritual impression or spending an evening pondering about a family circumstance have significantly influenced our lives and the lives of those around us (including you, as a reader of this book). There is great security and power in having the Spirit—a member of the Godhead—whisper to us truths we need and then guiding us to accurately discern those promptings for the benefit of ourselves, our marriage, our family, and our community.

Chapter 10, the prophets chapter, promotes the importance of following the prophet. The prophets commune with God and relay to us His will in real time for our day. The prophets are seers—they see clearly what is coming and they counsel us and work to prepare the Church and the body of members in advance for what is coming. There is great safety and peace in following the prophets. Herein we discuss the roles of prophets and apostles as watchtowers or satellites in our day and how we can more fully give heed to the prophets’ counsel. The prophets have shown throughout all ages that our Father in Heaven is keenly concerned about our marriages and families, for His plan is a family plan. If we want to strengthen our marriage we must recommit today to adhere to the counsel of His prophets.

We conclude the *Thee* section, and our book, with a chapter examining gospel principles and ordinances and their relevance

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to our marriage. Chapter II examines how the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, as related in the fourth article of faith, are critical to our marital relationships. We admit these concepts are not generally linked in this way in general discourse, but we believe a deeper understanding of their relevance to our marriage is critical to more fully accessing the power of God and bringing with it greater power into our marriage. This chapter also discusses the sacredness of temple ordinances, concluding with the message that a temple sealing is the crowning ordinance of God. Here, as we are sealed to our beloved spouse, we can be crowned as kings and queens in His glorious kingdom, that we may receive all that He has to offer us and ultimately receive our exaltation. With such great doctrinal significance attached to the sealing ordinance, we as spouses must do all we can to honor our marriage and our spouse as the priority in our mortal efforts to enact the gospel plan.

Appendix

In the appendix of this book, you will find a mental health primer written in a question and answer format for those that may struggle to find resilience after trials, are struggling with psychological disorders (such as anxiety, depression, and the like), or feel they need marital therapy. The following questions are discussed:

- What is mental illness?
- How do I know if my spouse or I need professional help?
- How do we get the right treatment for our needs?
- How do we find a therapist?
- Do we need an LDS therapist?
- What do I do if my spouse refuses treatment?
- What do I do if my spouse is in crisis?

Holding to the Ideal

We want to note that throughout the chapters of this book we are discussing doctrines, ideas, and solutions that can aid us in attaining the ideal. We are well aware that in mortality, attaining the ideal is not always possible, but seeking after it is. As we have illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, we, ourselves, would be defined by the current societal standard as a “blended family.” We have personal understanding of the loneliness of long-term singlehood, the heartache of divorce, the trauma of chronic problems that seem to have no solution no matter how hard one tries to have faith and behave well, and the sensitivity that is required to raise children whose lives are splintered between two households. This personal perspective has supported and even strengthened our religious and scientific convictions about commitment in marriage and has contributed to our strong position about the responsibility each of us has to hold tenaciously to the ideal. Certainly, the manner in which the ideal is implemented in families will vary based on individual circumstances,²⁴ but we discuss what we believe are core principles that can help guide and sustain us as we make decisions to be fully committed to our marriage.

Reflections

Marrying my husband is the best decision I have ever made. He is my best friend and is an absolute gem. He is the kindest, gentlest person I know. He loves and cherishes me with his whole soul. He adores and loves our children. Our camaraderie is something that makes me laugh during the good times and helps me not to cry during the bad times. I cherish our relationship with my whole heart. I can't imagine life without him.

Conclusion

Marriage is more than just an earthly institution that society can redefine at will. Elder D. Todd Christofferson asserts:

Our claims for the role of marriage and family rest . . . on the truth that [they] are God's creation. It is He who in the beginning created Adam and Eve in His image, male and female, and joined them as husband and wife to become "one flesh" and to multiply and replenish the earth. Each individual carries the divine image, but it is in the matrimonial union of male and female as one that we attain perhaps the most complete meaning of our having been made in the image of God—male and female. Neither we nor any other mortal can alter this divine order of matrimony. It is not a human invention. Such marriage is indeed "from above, from God" and is as much a part of the plan of happiness as the Fall and the Atonement.²⁵

Although the institution of marriage is eternal and God given, for us as mortals, it involves two imperfect people working toward building a relationship of God-like, eternal quality. Marriage requires work and constant effort to build and maintain. It requires the commitment to remain together while the imperfections of each partner are being purged. We need to take a long-term view when things are not as we would hope them to be.

Yet marriage is not simply a task of long-suffering—there is stability, there is purpose, there is love, there is joy, and there is peace as spouses work to become unified in love and purpose. The hopeful thread woven throughout the chapters of this book speaks to these possibilities for each of us. President Spencer W. Kimball said: "Real, lasting happiness is possible, and marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive. This is within the reach of every couple, every person. . . . It is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price."²⁶ As we pay that price and strive to continue forward along the path of Christian discipleship, holding hands as

we walk that path side by side with our spouse, we can flourish personally and interpersonally.

Commitment to the Covenant represents both our personal and professional testimonials about the role of marriage in God's great plan of salvation. We pray you will accept our offering, knowing our well wishes are with you and your spouse as you seek to strengthen your marital relationship along the path toward eternal life.

Notes

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