

Marriage: Covenants and Commitment

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"Thou shalt live together in love" (D&C 42:45).

Marriage is a sacred covenant that requires love, commitment, and unity.

Marriage Is Ordained of God

As Latter-day Saints, our beliefs about marriage and family are unique and in sharp contrast to many practices of our day. The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith and has reaffirmed through other latter-day prophets the importance and sacredness of marriage. Our knowledge of God's plan and our desire to follow it sets us apart from the world. We understand the eternal nature of marriage and family relationships.

The Lord declared to Joseph Smith, "I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man" (D&C 49:15).

Our Heavenly Father will not deny any of his children the blessings of exaltation if they are worthy to receive them. We will have the opportunity to live the commandment of marriage, in this life or the next. President Harold B. Lee explained:

" 'You young women advancing in years who have not yet accepted a proposal of marriage, if you make yourselves worthy and ready to go to the house of the Lord and have faith in this sacred principle of celestial marriage for eternity, even though the privilege of marriage does not come to you now in mortality, the Lord will reward you in due time and no blessing will be denied you. You are not under obligation to accept a proposal from someone unworthy of you for fear you will fail of your blessings. . . . The Lord knows the intent of your hearts, and in His own due time He will reward you with opportunities made possible through temple ordinances instituted in the Church for that purpose.'

"Do all you can to comply with the laws of God pertaining to an exaltation in the kingdom of God. The Lord will judge you too by

your works, as well as by the desires of your hearts, and your reward will be assured" (*Ye Are the Light of the World* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974], pp. 308–9).

The choice of a marriage partner is a choice with eternal consequences. Elder Dean L. Larsen counseled: "The best and most effective time to be concerned about conflicts over the basic principles that bring happiness to marriage is *before* the decision to enter into marriage is made. Some of the greatest tragedies occur because of decisions made largely on whimsical, emotional impulses. Every successful marriage requires much selfless effort and adjustment on the part of both partners. The more ideals and fundamental purposes in life that are held in common by the husband and wife, the more likelihood of success in their marriage. When differences exist, they can become a source of constant or recurring stress and contention" ("Marriage and the Patriarchal Order," *Ensign*, Sept. 1982, p. 13).

Having been prudent and prayerful in choosing a marriage partner, we need to then commit ourselves to that partner and to the vows and covenants we make together with the Lord.

President Ezra Taft Benson said: "Marriage itself must be regarded as a sacred covenant before God. A married couple have an obligation not only to each other, but to God. He has promised blessings to those who honor that covenant" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, p. 85; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, p. 59).

Marriage Requires Love, Commitment, and Unity

The scriptures teach us some gospel principles that are necessary in successful marriages.

Love

In the scriptures we find only two situations in which we are commanded to love with all our hearts. We are commanded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" (Matthew 22:37), and "Thou shalt love thy wife [or husband] with all thy heart" (D&C 42:22).

President Spencer W. Kimball explained the meaning of this commandment: "When the Lord says *all* thy heart, it allows for no sharing nor dividing nor depriving. . . .

"Marriage presupposes total allegiance and total fidelity. Each spouse takes the partner with the understanding that he or she gives totally to the spouse all the heart, strength, loyalty, honor, and affection, with all dignity. Any divergence is sin; any sharing of the heart is transgression. As we should have 'an eye single to the glory of God,' so should we have an eye, an ear, a heart single

to the marriage and the spouse and family" (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975], pp. 142–43).

The Lord not only commanded that we love our spouse with all our heart but that we "cleave unto [him or] her and none else" (D&C 42:22). This scripture suggests two other important principles necessary in establishing an eternal marriage—commitment (cleave unto), and unity (none else).

Commitment

Commitment is dedication or loyalty to a principle, person, or institution. This loyalty does not waver but remains constant regardless of the situation. Commitment is a binding force in a good marriage. Emotions come and go. One day we may see the person we love as all things perfect and desirable. Another day irritations or conflicts may bring us to the point of dislike for the same person. Emotions may fluctuate, but loyalty does not. If commitment is firm, we do not give up or desert a relationship when adverse circumstances occur.

In the beginning of a marriage we need to be committed to the institution of marriage itself. We must remain loyal to that commitment until years of living together and sharing experiences makes that commitment more personal. Couples who are truly committed to their marriage and determined to make it work can usually have a good marriage.

Every marriage has difficulties, and many of them have difficulties as serious as those cited in the divorce courts. But a great many of the partners with such difficulties stay with the marriage, resolve their problems, rear families, and, in the long run, count their marriages as happy and successful.

Unity

The Lord established the first husband and wife relationship with Adam and Eve. He has commanded that husband and wife should be "one flesh" (see Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31; D&C 49:16; Moses 3:24). This principle of marital unity involves all facets of the relationship—physical, emotional, and spiritual. The husband and wife should live in harmony, showing respect and consideration for one another. Neither should plan or follow an independent course of action. They should consult, plan, and decide together.

President Kimball said: "When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a *full* partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be *silent* partners or *limited* partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a *contributing* and *full* partner" ("Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, p. 106).

Could anything be more destructive of unity in marriage than to transfer loyalty from one's spouse to others or to things that may interfere with the relationship? Elder Hugh W. Pinnock cautioned: "Never turn to a third party in time of trouble, except appropriate family members or your bishop or stake president. . . . When marriage partners have no one to talk with at home, unfortunately too many seek a friend elsewhere.

"And that is where much adultery begins. It can happen in the neighborhood, in a ward choir, at the office, or anywhere else" ("Making a Marriage Work," *Ensign*, Sept. 1981, p. 37).

Elder James E. Faust suggested a few relevant questions that we could ask ourselves as we attempt to become "one flesh":

"First, am I able to think of the interest of my marriage and partner first before I think of my own desires?

"Second, how deep is my commitment to my companion, aside from any other interests?

"Third, is he or she my best friend?

"Fourth, do I have respect for the dignity of my partner as a person of worth and value?

"Fifth, do we quarrel over money? Money itself seems neither to make a couple happy, nor the lack of it, necessarily, to make them unhappy, but money is often a symbol of selfishness.

"Sixth, is there a spiritually sanctifying bond between us?" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1977, p. 13; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, p. 10).

When husbands and wives become one, they do not lose their individuality. Being one does not mean having the same interests and talents. Much of the joy in marriage comes from the different interests and perspectives of the partners. While unity in goals and devotion is essential, individuality in other areas lends strength to a marriage.

A happy marriage is one of the greatest blessings that can come to anyone. President Kimball declared: "If two people love the Lord more than their own lives and then love each other more than their own lives, working together in total harmony with the gospel program as their basic structure, they are sure to have this great happiness. When a husband and wife go together frequently to the holy temple, kneel in prayer together in their home with their family, go hand in hand to their religious meetings, keep their lives wholly chaste, mentally and physically, so that their whole thoughts and desires and love are all centered in one being, their companion, and both are working together for the

upbuilding of the kingdom of God, then happiness is at its pinnacle" (*Marriage and Divorce* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976], p. 24).

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Read Doctrine and Covenants 42:22. Ask: What does it mean to love your wife or husband with all your heart? What things keep love growing in marriage? Why do people sometimes fall out of love?
2. Ask: What attitudes encourage commitment in a marriage? What attitudes discourage commitment? What can we do to create a greater sense of commitment in our marriages?
3. Ask: How can differences between spouses be used to strengthen a marriage? What can we do to encourage more unity in our marriages?
4. Ask the sisters to silently answer Elder Faust's questions and make plans to discuss them with their husbands.