

My dear brothers and sisters, we love you and we love being with you! You are indeed the hope of Israel, which is why as I offer a few thoughts, I pray that the Holy Ghost will deliver the exact message you need to hear.

Prior to our marriage, I was a professor of marriage and family therapy for more than 25 years—the last 13 right here at Brigham Young University. I counseled thousands of couples and heard one tragic story after another about fractured families and ruined relationships. I saw firsthand what works in marriage and what does not. I learned what can heal even ravaged marriages and what can wreck others almost overnight. So today, would you allow me to speak with you about what is surely one of your very favorite topics? Love and marriage?

I'd like to share four truths I believe will not only save you unnecessary heartache but will help you to be, and to choose, a righteous spouse and then to create a happy marriage and a productive family.

Tonight I hope you'll think of me as your "Aunt Wendy" as I speak to you from my heart just as I would—and have—to my own nieces and nephew. So, here are Aunt Wendy's four truths about love and marriage.

Truth #1: Truths about love and marriage are brought to you by the Holy Ghost from our Heavenly Father. He decreed marriage to be an irreplaceable component of His plan of happiness. The Spirit is the messenger of these truths. I urge you to seek to understand them.

By contrast, lies about love and marriage originate with, and are perpetuated by, Satan and his servants. The adversary rejoices every time he persuades a victim to embrace anything that defiles or degrades love and marriage. However, truth is truth, lies are lies, and no amount of clever marketing, campaigning, or advocacy can ever change that.

Truth #2: Personal purity is the key to true love. The more pure your thoughts and feelings, your words and actions, the greater your capacity to give and receive true love.

Trust me on this: Every time you pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father in prayer, and then listen; every time you study the scriptures seeking answers to the questions of your heart; every time you avoid anything that would wound your spirit (such as pornography); every time you worship in the temple; every time you find an ancestor's ordinance-qualifying information, you are choosing to increase your personal purity.

Your future spouse will thank you because in that very moment you will be preparing for true marital intimacy. So, if you're single and wonder how best to prepare for true love, the answer is: Do whatever it takes to keep your thoughts, feelings, words, and actions pure. Invite the Spirit to guide you. He will help you! And if you're married, my counsel is exactly the same!

As you work to become more pure, you will have the Holy Ghost with you more and more. Your ability to receive personal revelation will increase, which means you'll have clearer direction for your life. You'll feel more peace and more joy, less lonely, and more hopeful about your future. You'll also have increased mental clarity as you study and work. And, in addition to these great rewards for working every day to be just a little more pure, you'll be increasing your ability to experience true marital intimacy.

This is why pornography is so devastating! Contrary to what all of its promoters claim, pornography will actually prevent you from experiencing the most marvelous kind of intimacy.

Now, this next truth, Truth #3, may boggle your mind because it's the exact opposite of what the adversary and much of the world would have you believe about love and marriage.

Truth #3: As an important part of the expression of their love, the Lord wants a husband and wife to partake of the wonders and joys of marital intimacy.

Marital intimacy is ordained by God. It is commanded and commended by Him because it draws a husband and wife closer together and closer to the Lord! True marital intimacy involves the whole soul of each spouse. It is the uniting of the body and the spirit of the husband with the body and the spirit of his wife.

That soulful union represents just how united a husband and wife are in all areas of their lives. They work together as partners. They pray, play, struggle, grow, and enjoy life together. They sacrifice for each other and encourage each other to be all they were born to be.

My dear brothers and sisters, marital intimacy is sacred. In fact, a husband and wife can be drawn closer to God when joined in true marital intimacy.

So, how can you prepare for such intimacy? You will need to live righteously so the Spirit can be the companion to you and your spouse.

This leads to Truth #4: For true marital intimacy, the Holy Ghost needs to be involved. It is simply not possible to have the kind of intimate experiences outside of marriage that you can have within because the Spirit will not be present.

Elder Parley P. Pratt taught that the Holy Ghost has the ability to increase, enlarge, expand, and purify "all the natural passions and affections." Just imagine: He can purify your feelings! Therefore, anything that invites the

Spirit into your life, and into the life of your spouse and your marriage, will increase your ability to experience marital intimacy. It really is as simple, and as profound, as that!

On the other hand, anything that offends the Spirit will decrease your ability to be one with your spouse. Things such as anger, lust, unforgiveness, contention, immorality, and unrepented sin will reduce your attempt for marital intimacy to be something that is nothing more than a sexual experience.

So, to recap: While worldly sex is under the influence of the world and the adversary and involves carnal, sensual, and devilish passions, God-ordained marital intimacy is under the influence of the Spirit and involves Spirit-enhanced and purified passions. The truth is, the more pure you are, the more marvelous your marital intimacy will be.

With worldly sex, anything goes. With marital intimacy, exquisite care is taken to avoid anything and everything—from language to music to movies—that offends the Spirit, your spirit, or your spouse's.

While worldly sex is lustful and kills love, marital intimacy generates more love.

Worldly sex degrades men and women and their bodies, while marital intimacy honors men and women and celebrates the body as one of the great prizes of mortal life.

With worldly sex, individuals can feel used, abused, and ultimately more lonely. With marital intimacy, spouses feel more united and loved, more nurtured and understood.

Worldly sex ravages and eventually ruins relationships. Marital intimacy strengthens marriages. It supports, heals, and hallows the lives of spouses and their marriage.

Worldly sex has been likened to the toot of a flute, while marital intimacy has been likened to the grandeur of an entire orchestra.

Worldly sex becomes a total obsession because it never fulfills its promises. God-ordained marital intimacy is glorious and will continue eternally for covenant-keeping husbands and wives.

In short, marital intimacy endorsed by the Spirit is blessed by the Lord and is sanctifying.

Now, creating a strong, happy marriage is not easy! I can attest to that. But it will bring you joy!

For our 10th wedding anniversary, I wondered what I could give my husband to represent the joy our marriage has brought me. This is what I gave him:

A swing!

My dear brothers and sisters, whom we love, if you will intentionally implement these four truths, I am confident that you can build a happy marriage that will sustain and comfort you forever. A marriage that will allow you to be more than you could ever be on your own.

I testify that marriage is one of the greatest privileges God gives to His children, that marriage can be the source of unparalleled joy, and that personal purity is the key to that joy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Wendy Watson Nelson – Wife of President Russell M. Nelson January 2017 Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults.