

Faith and Families

Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign* March 2007

I would like you to do some personal soul-searching. You are eager and young. Most of you are students with great ambitions for the future. I want you to think about yourself, not as you are, but as you may become—50 years from now. Through your imaginary time tunnel, look at yourself as you will be then. Your broad minds and narrow waists have traded places. You are finished with your careers. Your working days are over—no more time clocks to punch or paychecks to collect. Are you with me?

Now, here are my questions: What do you see in yourself 50 years from now? What do you want *to be* 50 years from now? What do you *really want*, most of all, 50 years from now?

I think I can hear your minds working. Some of you might say, “I just want to be alive 50 years from now.” Not a bad idea. Accidents and illnesses are part of mortality, which means that some of you won’t be here 50 years from now. But most of you will. So plan for the rule, not the exception. Some of you see fame or fortune in your future. And most of you want families.

The Lodestar of Our Marriage

If Sister Nelson were here, I would invite her to stand beside me. As you know, man is not without the woman in the Lord.¹ The title of my message tonight is “Faith and Families.” Purposely, I have listed faith first. That has always been the lodestar for our married life: to have faith to seek *first* the kingdom of God. We have learned that unshakable faith in the Lord enriches married life and love. Faith in Him increases one’s very capacity to love, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

More than 50 years ago we were young adults, as you are now. We were both university students. I was a sophomore premedical student; she was a freshman on a scholarship. We were very much in love.

My career as a doctor of medicine has now been completed. All of my many surgical operations have been done. Sister Nelson has had extremely demanding responsibilities as a mother of 10 children. Our first 9 children were all little girls. Our home was like a girls’ dormitory until our one and only son came along. Poor boy! He didn’t know who his real mother was for his first couple of years.

Now Sister Nelson’s life has matured. She has taken on a less rigorous role as grandmother of our grandchildren. We are blessed with 56 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Those numbers are likely to increase.

What is most important to Sister Nelson and me now? That we are husband and wife, wedded for time and all eternity. Our children are born in the covenant and are sealed to us forever. What joy that knowledge brings!

When we married in the temple, we didn't know many scriptures. But we did know Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." That became the lodestar for every decision we made together. Only years later did we learn that the Joseph Smith Translation of that verse was even more compelling and clear: "Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."² We have been guided well by that scripture! I have been inspired well by this woman of faith who has stood beside me all these years. Blessings that mean the most to me have come because of her.

Hold the Line

Times have changed in half a century. The world is ailing spiritually. That sickness is rapidly becoming more rampant. Temptations to sin go way beyond anything we knew at your age. You are entering a consumer culture obsessed with materialistic goals. Multitudes worship at the shrine of selfishness. Loud voices defend the fallacious doctrine that all lifestyles are of equal value. People want more rights than responsibilities. They seem more concerned with entitlement than enlightenment. Responsible fatherhood is being defined as a weekly visit and financial support. In short, we face a mind-boggling moral inversion.

Against this backdrop of spiritual decay, you young adults of the Church enter the stage. You have a firm foundation of faith. You are role models, both in courtship and in marriage. You know what's right and what's wrong! You hold the line! You know the Lord's teachings. And you will teach them to your own children and grandchildren. You have far more spiritual power than we did at your age. As you go forward on life's battlefield, you are numbered with "the covenant people of the Lord, ... scattered upon all ... the earth; ... armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory."³ We are very, very proud of you!

As Sister Nelson and I look back, we can honestly say that our family and membership in the Church are most important to us. How thankful we are that we heeded the counsel of Church leaders to marry in the temple, to invite children into our family, and to serve the Lord! If we had placed our education ahead of our family, we would not be so blessed now. Education was a lengthy process for us. Earning two doctor's degrees took me a long time. Then we struggled through many more years of surgical specialization. I did not send a bill for surgical services until I had been out of medical school for more than 12 years! By then we had five children. But somehow we managed.

I pay tribute to Sister Nelson, who never murmured because she had to make do with very little. I recall an experience one night in downtown Boston. We were walking along Boylston Street. There we passed a furniture store. Sister Nelson pressed her nose against the windowpane and asked, "Do you think we will ever be able to afford a lamp?"

Brethren, I suggest that you look for a companion with long-range vision, like Sister Nelson. To each sister I suggest that you motivate your husband to become all he can become, even if it takes a long time.

We have tasted of life's successes and sorrows. We have dealt with disappointment, disease, and death among our children. But death cannot divide families sealed in the temple. That period of separation is only temporary. Thanks to the Lord's great plan of happiness, we can all face the future with great faith and optimism.

Life Is Not a One-Act Play

Sister Nelson and I have learned that life is not a one-act play. There really is a premortal period. And there really is life after death. Premortal and mortal portions are but preludes to our postmortal life. Knowledge of the three degrees of glory, as revealed to prophets, gives us a glimpse of our postmortal potential.⁴ Eternal life is glorious and well worth the quest.

The premortal period has important doctrinal underpinnings that fortify our faith. Then the everlasting gospel was set in place. Before the foundation of the earth, the plan of salvation was prepared.⁵ It included the glorious possibility of a divine inheritance for us in the kingdom of God.⁶

Central to that plan of salvation is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In premortal councils He was foreordained by His Father to atone for our sins and break the bands of physical and spiritual death.⁷ Jesus declared: "I ... was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. ... In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name."⁸

Also pivotal to God's plan is the family. In fact, a purpose of the plan is to exalt the family. The earth was created so that we as premortal spirit children of our Father in Heaven could come to the earth and obtain physical bodies. We are here to be tried and tested.⁹ We are here to "choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death."¹⁰ And best of all, we are allowed to fall in love, to be married, and to invite children into our families.

Certain blessings were to be reserved for the latter days. The Lord had planned to reveal "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."¹¹ Those things included revelations as recorded in the Book of Mormon.¹² They also included ordinances and covenants of the holy temple.¹³

The Lord teaches that "in order to obtain the highest [degree of celestial glory], 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."¹⁴

Satan Wages War against the Family

Before the world was formed, opposition was allowed to come from Satan.¹⁵ He has always fought against the Savior's sacred work and will continue to do so. He has opposed the prophets and the scriptures of the Restoration. And in our day Satan has chosen to wage war directly at the heart of God's plan, which is the family. Signs of his attacks are all about us. The proportion of mature adults who are married is declining,¹⁶ as are birth rates.¹⁷ The age at which couples get

married is increasing,¹⁸ as are the numbers of unmarried couples.¹⁹ Immorality and pornography are pervasive and pernicious.²⁰

With such spiritual sickness all about us, it takes real faith in the Lord and in His gospel to withstand attacks from the adversary. I urge you to deny yourselves of all ungodliness, both physical and spiritual.²¹ Keep a firm grasp on the iron rod of the gospel!

Brothers and sisters, before the world was, the gospel was central to God's eternal plan. It is an everlasting gospel—now restored in its fulness.²² With such a foundation, this Church will not be moved from its place,²³ even through the Millennium.²⁴ The gospel of Jesus Christ is a sure foundation upon which we can build our individual faith.

Such faith will not prevent life's problems but will help when things go wrong. Bad things happen to good people. Accidents occur. Some married couples may not be blessed with children. Some individuals may not marry in this life, or they may find themselves married to one who fails to keep the commandments of God. The Lord is aware of these circumstances. He will bestow all the blessings that He has in store for His faithful children—in His own way and in His own time.²⁵ Be righteous, be patient, keep an eternal perspective, and you will be protected.²⁶

Through the years you will note that apostles and prophets teach the rule. We don't teach exceptions to the rule. Exceptions are left to individual agency and accountability. The Lord knows we live in an imperfect world. He knows it is "ripening in iniquity."²⁷ His judgments will be fair, just, and merciful.

The Proclamation

A decade ago the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, foreseeing this spiritual slide, prepared a proclamation to the world on the family. It is even more relevant today. We proclaim "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

"All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. ...

"The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

"We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan."

Now, dear friends, note this warning:

“Individuals who violate covenants of chastity ... or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”²⁸

If you will heed that proclamation, brothers and sisters, you will be blessed. God lives and loves us.²⁹ With His help, we can foster our faith and families. We can qualify for this promise from the Lord: “If a man marry a wife by my word ... and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, ... [they] shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, ... powers, [and] dominions.”³⁰

I testify that your faith and your families will bring you great joy, here and hereafter. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. His Church has been restored. We are led by His prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Upon each of you beloved young adults of the Church, I leave my love and blessing.