

Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan

Elder David A. Bednar, Ensign, June 2006

The Doctrinal Ideal of Marriage

We have been counseled strongly by the First Presidency to devote our best efforts to the strengthening of marriage and the home. Such instruction has never been more needed in the world than it is today, as the sanctity of marriage is attacked and the importance of the home is undermined.

Even though the Church and its programs support marriage and family and generally are successful at doing so, we should always remember this basic truth: no instrumentality or organization can take the place of the home or perform its essential functions.¹ Consequently, today I will speak with you primarily as men and women, as husbands and wives, and as mothers and fathers and secondarily as priesthood and auxiliary leaders in the Church. My assignment is to discuss the essential role of eternal marriage in our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness.

We will focus on the doctrinal ideal of marriage. My hope is that a review of our eternal possibilities and a reminder about who we are and why we are here in mortality will provide direction, comfort, and sustaining hope for us all, regardless of our marital status or personal present circumstances. The disparity between the doctrinal ideal of marriage and the reality of daily life may seem at times to be quite large, but you gradually are doing and becoming much better than you probably recognize.

I invite you to keep in mind the following questions as we discuss principles related to eternal marriage.

***Question 1:** In my own life, am I striving to become a better husband or a wife, or preparing to be a husband or a wife, by understanding and applying these basic principles?*

***Question 2:** As a priesthood or auxiliary leader, am I helping those I serve to understand and apply these basic principles, thereby strengthening marriage and the home?*

As we prayerfully ponder these questions and consider our own marriage relationships and our responsibilities in the Church, I testify the Spirit of the Lord will enlighten our minds and teach us the things we need to do and to improve (see John 14:26).

Why Marriage Is Essential

In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles 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."² This keynote sentence of the proclamation teaches us much about the doctrinal significance of marriage and emphasizes the primacy of marriage and family in the Father's plan. Righteous marriage is a

commandment and an essential step in the process of creating a loving family relationship that can be perpetuated beyond the grave.

Two compelling doctrinal reasons help us to understand why eternal marriage is essential to the Father's plan.

Reason 1: The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

The eternal nature and importance of marriage can be fully understood only within the overarching context of the Father's plan for 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 ... has a divine nature and destiny."³ The great plan of happiness enables the spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experience, and to progress toward perfection.

"Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose"⁴ and in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary.

After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said it was "not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18; Moses 3:18), and Eve became Adam's companion and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness. Alone, neither the man nor the woman could fulfill the purposes of his or her creation.

By divine design, men and women are intended to progress together toward perfection and a fulness of glory. Because of their distinctive temperaments and capacities, males and females each bring to a marriage relationship unique perspectives and experiences. The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other. "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, *in the Lord*" (1 Cor. 11:11; italics added).

Reason 2: By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

The commandment given anciently to Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. "God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. ... The means by which mortal life is created [are] divinely appointed."⁵ Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

A home with a loving and loyal husband and wife is the supreme setting in which children can be reared in love and righteousness and in which the spiritual and physical needs of children can be met. Just as the unique characteristics of both males and females contribute to the completeness of a marriage relationship, so those same characteristics are vital to the rearing, nurturing, and teaching of children. “Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”⁶

Guiding Principles

The two doctrinal reasons we have reviewed about the importance of eternal marriage in the Father’s plan of happiness suggest guiding principles for those who are preparing to marry, for those who are married, and for our service in the Church.

***Principle 1:** The importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness.*

We frequently speak about and highlight marriage as a fundamental unit of society, as the foundation of a strong nation, and as a vital sociological and cultural institution. But the restored gospel helps us to understand that it is so much more!

Do we perhaps talk about marriage without adequately teaching the importance of marriage in the Father’s plan? Emphasizing marriage without linking it to the simple and fundamental doctrine of the plan of happiness cannot provide sufficient direction, protection, or hope in a world that grows increasingly confused and wicked. We would all do well to remember the teaching of Alma—that “God gave unto [the children of men] commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:32; italics added).

Elder Parley P. Pratt expressed beautifully the blessings that come to us as we learn about, understand, and strive to apply in our lives the doctrinal ideal of marriage:

“It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

“It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. ...

“I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. ... In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.

“Yet, at that time, my dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had ... merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity.”⁷

As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, can we see how the importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father's plan of happiness? The doctrine of the plan leads men and women to hope and prepare for eternal marriage, and it defeats the fears and overcomes the uncertainties that may cause some individuals to delay or avoid marriage. A correct understanding of the plan also strengthens our resolve to steadfastly honor the covenant of eternal marriage. Our individual learning, our teaching, and our testifying in both the home and at church will be magnified as we ponder and more fully understand this truth.

Principle 2: *Satan desires that all men and women might be miserable like unto himself.*

Lucifer relentlessly assails and distorts the doctrines that matter most to us individually, to our families, and to the world. Where is the adversary focusing his most direct and diabolical attacks? Satan works unremittingly to confuse understanding about gender, to promote the premature and unrighteous use of procreative power, and to hinder righteous marriage precisely because marriage is ordained of God and the family is central to the plan of happiness. The adversary's attacks upon eternal marriage will continue to increase in intensity, frequency, and sophistication.

Because today we are engaged in a war for the welfare of marriage and the home, in my latest reading of the Book of Mormon I paid particular attention to the ways the Nephites prepared for their battles against the Lamanites. I noted that the people of Nephi “were *aware of the intent* of [their enemy], and therefore they did prepare to meet them” (Alma 2:12; italics added). As I read and studied, I learned that *understanding the intent of an enemy* is a key prerequisite to effective preparation. We likewise should consider the intent of our enemy in this latter-day war.

The Father's plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him. Lucifer's attacks on the plan are intended to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to halt their eternal progression. The overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become “miserable like unto himself” (2 Ne. 2:27), and he works to warp the elements of the Father's plan he hates the most. Satan does not have a body, he cannot marry, and he will not have a family. And he persistently strives to confuse the divinely appointed purposes of gender, marriage, and family. Throughout the world, we see growing evidence of the effectiveness of Satan's efforts.

More recently the devil has attempted to combine and legally validate confusion about gender and marriage. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit alternatives the adversary advocates can never lead to the completeness that is made possible through the sealing together of a man and a woman, to the happiness of righteous marriage, to the joy of posterity, or to the blessing of eternal progression.

Given what we know about our enemy's intent, each of us should be especially vigilant in seeking personal inspiration as to how we can protect and safeguard our own marriages—and how we can learn and teach correct principles in the home and in our Church assignments about the eternal significance of gender and of the role of marriage in the Father's plan.

Principle 3: *The ultimate blessings of love and happiness are obtained through the covenant relationship of eternal marriage.*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point in a covenant marriage relationship. Please notice how the Savior is positioned at the apex of this triangle, with a woman at the base of one corner and a man at the base of the other corner. Now consider what happens in the relationship between the man and the woman as they individually and steadily “come unto Christ” and strive to be “perfected in Him” (Moro. 10:32). Because of and through the Redeemer, the man and the woman come closer together.

As a husband and wife are each drawn to the Lord (see 3 Ne. 27:14), as they learn to serve and cherish one another, as they share life experiences and grow together and become one, and as they are blessed through the uniting of their distinctive natures, they begin to realize the fulfillment that our Heavenly Father desires for His children. Ultimate happiness, which is the very object of the Father’s plan, is received through the making and honoring of eternal marriage covenants.

As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, one of our paramount responsibilities is to help young men and women learn about and prepare for righteous marriage through our personal example. As young women and men observe worthiness, loyalty, sacrifice, and the honoring of covenants in our marriages, then those youth will seek to emulate the same principles in their courting and marriage relationships. As young people notice that we have made the comfort and convenience of our eternal companion our highest priority, then they will become less self-centered and more able to give, to serve, and to create an equal and enduring companionship. As young women and men perceive mutual respect, affection, trust, and love between a husband and a wife, then they will strive to cultivate the same characteristics in their lives. Our children and the youth of the Church will learn the most from what we do and what we are—even if they remember relatively little of what we say.

Unfortunately many young members of the Church today are fearful of and stumble in their progress toward eternal marriage because they have seen too much of divorce in the world and of broken covenants in their homes and in the Church.

Eternal marriage is not merely a temporary legal contract that can be terminated at any time for almost any reason. Rather, it is a sacred covenant with God that can be binding in time and throughout all eternity. Faithfulness and fidelity in marriage must not simply be attractive words spoken in sermons; rather, they should be principles evident in our own covenant marriage relationships.

As we consider the importance of our personal example, do you and I discern areas where we need to improve? Is the Holy Ghost inspiring our minds and softening our hearts and encouraging us to do and to become better? As priesthood and auxiliary leaders, are we focusing our efforts on strengthening marriage and the home?

Husbands and wives need time together to fortify themselves and their homes against the attacks of the adversary. As we strive to magnify our callings in the Church, are we unintentionally

hindering husbands and wives and mothers and fathers from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities in the home? For example, do we sometimes schedule unnecessary meetings and activities in a way that interferes with the essential relationship between a husband and a wife and their relationships with children?

As we sincerely ponder these questions, I am confident the Spirit is even now helping and will continue to help each of us learn the things we should do at home and in the Church.

The Spiritual Resources We Need

Our responsibilities to learn and understand the doctrine of the plan, to uphold and be examples of righteous marriage, and to teach correct principles in the home and at church may cause us to wonder if we are equal to the task. We are ordinary people who must accomplish a most extraordinary work.

Many years ago, Sister Bednar and I were busy trying to meet the countless competing demands of a young and energetic family—and of Church, career, and community responsibilities. One evening after the children were asleep, we talked at length about how effectively we were attending to all of our important priorities. We realized that we would not receive the promised blessings in eternity if we did not honor more fully the covenant we had made in mortality. We resolved together to do and to be better as a husband and a wife. That lesson learned so many years ago has made a tremendous difference in our marriage.

The sweet and simple doctrine of the plan of happiness provides precious eternal perspective and helps us understand the importance of eternal marriage. We have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need. We have the fulness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Ghost and revelation. We have saving ordinances, covenants, and temples. We have priesthood and prophets. We have the holy scriptures and the power of the word of God. And we have The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I testify that we have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need to learn about, to teach, to strengthen, and to defend righteous marriage—and that indeed we can live together in happiness as husbands and wives and families in eternity. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.