

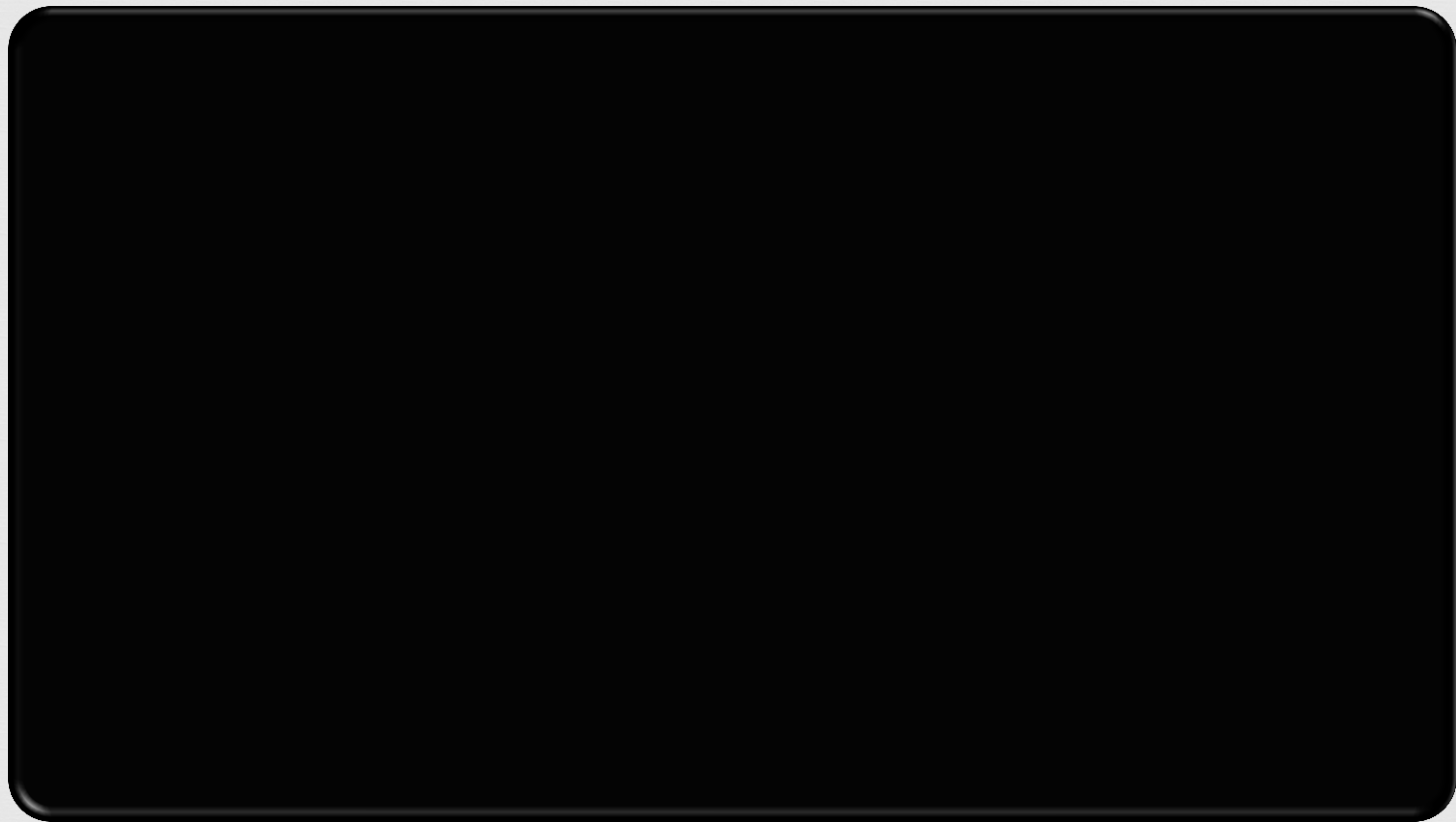
Healing the Time Starved Marriage



“Using Marriage
Rituals to Reconnect”



It's Not About the Nail



Quick Review



- ❧ Intervention #1: Couple Prayer
- ❧ Intervention #2: Do Something Fun Together



You Treat Eternal Things Differently



Elder F. Burton Howard stated, **“If you want something to last forever, you treat it differently. You shield it and protect it. You never abuse it.** You don’t expose it to the elements. You don’t make it common or ordinary. **If it ever becomes tarnished, you lovingly polish it until it gleams like new.** It becomes special because you have made it so, and it grows more beautiful and precious as time goes by. **Eternal marriage is just like that. We need to treat it that way”** (Elder F. Burton Howard, “Eternal Marriage,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 94).

By the Numbers



- ❧ In the *Survey of Marital Generosity*, spouses who experience high levels of couple time are significantly less likely to divorce.
- ❧ **Specifically, wives who reported having couple time less than once a week were four times more likely to report “divorce proneness” when compared to wives who spent at least once a week with their husbands.**
- ❧ **Meanwhile, husbands who reported spending less than once a week in couple time with their wives were 2.5 times more likely to be “divorce prone” when compared to husbands who had couple time at least once a week.**
- ❧ **Moreover, the *National Survey of Families and Households* recently reported that the more time husbands and wives spent together in couple time, the less likely they were to divorce.**
- ❧ **The message is clear: husbands and wives who enjoy high levels of couple time together are more likely to have satisfying and healthy marriages.**
- ❧ Wilcox and Dew have concluded that couple time leads to higher quality marital relationships because communication is strengthened, sexual satisfaction increases, and commitment is fortified.

Connecting Through Rituals

- ❧ One of the most certain ways to ensure couple time together is to employ rituals in the marriage.
- ❧ **Rituals are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant to both parties in the relationship.**
- ❧ It does not matter how often rituals are repeated – it could be nightly, weekly, monthly, or annually. But they are repeated.
- ❧ **Rituals also must be coordinated. There must be a time and place for the ritual to occur, and of course, both parties must know when to show up.**
- ❧ **Mainly, rituals are significant to both husband and wife.**
- ❧ For example, a husband could tell a friend, “My wife and I have a great ritual. Every Monday evening after we put the children in bed, we watch *Monday Night Football* together.”
- ❧ However, if that event is not emotionally significant to the wife, then watching football together isn’t a ritual. Instead, it’s probably a marriage problem.

Rituals vs. Routines



- ❧ Other couples may believe that they have rituals in their relationship, but they are actually routines.
- ❧ **Like rituals, routines are repeated and coordinated.**
- ❧ **However, routines lack emotional significance.**
- ❧ Therefore, if a couple eats dinner each night in front of the television, while the wife views the program, and the husband reads the newspaper, this couple has established a routine that does very little to strengthen the marriage.
- ❧ However, another couple could watch the exact same television program each week – together. As they view the program, they may scratch each other's back, hold hands, and discuss the program together in detail. This would be a ritual.

Rituals Connect Couples



- ❧ The purpose of rituals is to help couples connect and strengthen emotional bonds.
- ❧ Individuals fall in love with each other through rituals of intimacy and connection.
- ❧ When most couples commenced dating each other seriously, their time together most likely consisted of romantic dinners, long talks, bike rides, skiing, dancing, going for walks, exchanging gifts, and talking on the phone for hours.
- ❧ Most often, the very rituals that bring couples together are discontinued shortly after the marriage.
- ❧ LDS Couples can become overwhelmed with time demands, responsibilities, and perhaps even guilt.
- ❧ Before long, their marriages become stale and stagnant. If busy LDS couples desire to spend more time together as husband and wife, they must “ritualize” their time together. **Happy marriages are not created by accident, and couples who spend time together must carve their time out of something. Rituals can restore meaning to marriages. Rituals help couples to connect and stay connected.**

Intervention #3: Connection Rituals



- ❧ **Connection rituals in marriage create opportunities for couples to share time and attention together.**
- ❧ Examples of connection rituals in marriage include good-byes in the morning, greetings in the evening, phone conversations during the day, texting each other, eating together, expressing love to each other, working in the yard together, doing home improvements together, and eating at a favorite restaurant together.
- ❧ William J. Doherty argued that **“Connection rituals are at the base of the pyramid of marriage, right above commitment.”**
- ❧ For marriages to thrive, connection rituals must be employed. **The most significant connection rituals to heal and strengthen a marriage include greeting rituals, talk rituals, and dating rituals.**

Examples of Connection Rituals

1. Checking in on the phone each day as a couple. Remember, it's only a ritual if both couples know that it's connection time.
2. Goodbye's in the morning, greetings in the evening, and going to eat and talk
3. The way couples express love to each other in the morning, midday, and in the evening.
4. Working together in the yard or on a home improvement project.
5. Watching your favorite TV show together
6. Building something together
7. Working on a project

Assignment #1: Greeting Rituals

- ☞ **Healthy greeting rituals occur in a marriage when the couple meets for the first time in the morning, when one spouse has been away on a trip, or when a spouse walks through the front door after a long day at work.**
- ☞ Believe it or not, many spouses can walk through the front door of their homes without anyone in their family taking notice. One husband reported that he would walk into his home in the evening, walk into his bedroom, change his clothes, and read the newspaper before his wife even noticed he was home.



Epic Fail



“I will start with greeting rituals in my own marriage. I don’t remember what Leah’s and my greeting ritual was before we had kids. But I do know it degenerated at some point. This might be our greeting ritual at the end of the day: ‘Hi, Eric threw up, and Beth has been obnoxious.’ Or, ‘Did you remember to close the garage door?’ This is the greeting from the love of one’s life! Many of us greet our coworkers more personally and with more enthusiasm. Leah and I realized that this greeting routine was not working for us anymore, and we decided to take a radical step:

Repentance



“To intentionally say ‘Hi, honey. How are you?’ with a hug and kiss. Pretty radical, huh? Like people who are in love. You heard it hear first, and I’ve taken out a patent on it. You’ll have to pay us 50 cents every time you do it” (William J. Doherty, *Take Back Your Marriage*, 127).



Greeting Rituals



- ❧ **If you and your spouse do not have a strong, noticeable greeting ritual, you need to create one.**
- ❧ Establish a ritual that will mark the moment and remind everyone how much you love each other – including yourselves!
- ❧ **Every child needs to see their parents display some public affection, even if it grosses them out to some degree. Let there be no question in the lives of LDS children that their parents are madly in love.**
- ❧ Greeting rituals could include a hug, a kiss, or a verbal expression of love, a family phrase, or anything else that is significant to both spouses.

Greeting Rituals



Husbands and wives need to be more excited than the family dog when a spouse walks into the home after a long day away. As a couple, choose a greeting ritual and practice it daily.

Assignment #2: Talk Rituals

“Our needs for comforting and encouragement are deep and lasting. A main task of every marriage from the early days of the relationship to its end is **for each partner to nurture the other. The loneliness of life in the cities, the long commutes, the absence of meaningful contact with people have sharpened our emotional hungers. We feel tired, driven, and needy.** More than ever before we need someone special who understands how we feel and responds with tenderness. **Love begins with paying attention..... A marriage that does not provide nurturance and restorative comfort can die of emotional malnutrition. The task of marriage is to give comfort and encouragement in a relationship that is safe for dependency, failure, disappointment, mourning, illness, and aging – in short, for being a vulnerable human being**” (Judith S. Wallerstein & Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts*, [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995], 239; see also Blaine J. Fowers, *Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness*, [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000], 38).

Talk Rituals



“Every marital advice book stresses the importance of taking time to communicate. **But if a married couple with children has fifteen minutes of uninterrupted, nonlogistical, nonproblem-solving talk every day, I would put them in the top five percent of all married couples in the land. It’s an extraordinary achievement. When I say that to my undergraduate students who are not yet married, they can’t believe it.** When we are courting and falling in love we have oodles of time to talk... it’s talk that propels most of us to fall in love and want to get married. **After we get married... we still have time to talk, but even then our time is starting to erode because of the TV, the Internet, the newspaper, and general household management. If we then have kids, time to talk takes a big dive.** You’re not going to have time for personal talk, if you have children, unless you ritualize it. Mumbling at 11 o’clock at night when you are exhausted does not count as a talk ritual” (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 129-130; emphasis added).

Rituals that Die



The same spouse who was quoting poetry to you and singling love songs at 2:00 a.m. before you were married is now snoring like a lumberjack by 10:15 every night. There are many facets of life that compete with quality marriage time, including media, work, school, and even hobbies. Often, the only time couples can connect is at 11:30 p.m. when both are exhausted.

Talk Rituals



- ❧ Couples must ritualize their time together if they are to preserve the quality of their marriages.
- ❧ One couple shared a significant talk ritual in their marriage. **After dinner each night, their children would clean up the kitchen (this is sounding great already!), while the husband and wife slipped off to the family living room.**
- ❧ **There, they would drink their favorite beverage together and discuss their day.**
- ❧ Superficial talk was not allowed! They disciplined themselves to talk on a more personal level, sharing their opinions, beliefs, and ideas about a myriad of topics.
- ❧ It was also a time to validate each other and share compliments and praise.



The Hot Tub Justification

William J. Doherty reported that one of his finest investments was his hot tub. Fourteen years ago, he and his wife purchased the Jacuzzi and placed it out on their deck, underneath the stars. At about 10:00 p.m. each evening, they venture out to their tub, listen to jazz music, and talk about anything other than bills, report cards, and soccer tournaments. In order for couples to strengthen their marriages, they must find the time to talk to renew and strengthen their emotional bonds.



Marriage is the Sun; Children Planets



“I don’t hold out my own marriage as a model for all couples. And I don’t mean to imply that we had no struggles with our children, or made no mistakes. We had our share of both. But I know we did one thing well: we taught our children that we valued our marriage without devaluing them, that more for us meant more for them, that we were mates before we were parents, and that in the solar system of our family, our marriage was the sun and the children the planets, rather than the other way around” (Doherty and Carlson, *Putting Family First*, 137).



Find a Talk Ritual!



- ❧ President Harold B. Lee once declared that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Then President Lee spoke pointedly to the priesthood when he said, **“the most dangerous thing that can happen between you and your wife or between me and my wife is apathy – not hate, but for them to feel that we are not interested in their affairs, that we are not expressing our love and showing our affection in countless ways. Women, to be happy, have to be loved and so do men”** (President Harold B. Lee, Regional Representatives Seminar, 12 December 1970; as cited in *Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, 241).
- ❧ Husbands and wives must nurture each other through talk rituals. Men cannot become apathetic in this endeavor!
- ❧ Find a talk ritual that you are both comfortable with and engage in it daily.

Group Counseling 101



At this time, I would like those of you who are married, or have been married, to reflect for a moment on your own marital rituals of connection, intimacy, and community--big or small, daily or yearly. Here's the plan. I'm going to give you a moment of silence to reflect and come up with a favorite ritual you can share with our group!

Examples of Rituals



“Well, Annabel just wanted me to share with you that we fell into a beautiful ritual in the last year and a half. We decided to take up ballroom dancing every Wednesday night for an hour and a half. And so she just shared with me that when I’m out of town it ain’t the same.”



Examples of Rituals



“We were married on the 22nd of August, and we celebrate each month our monthly wedding anniversary on the 22nd. We do something special. It’s not necessarily a big thing; this past month or this month, in June, we were married 430 months. Always tell that to couples at Pre-Cana or at Engaged Encounter and let them try to figure out what that is in years. It keeps them thinking. But it isn’t necessarily a real great thing? I mean it is a great thing between the two of us, but it might be going out to dinner, it might be a phone call during the day to say "I love you," it might mean leaving a note in the morning, it might mean going out to McDonald’s, maybe, for dinner, it might mean stopping off at Wal-Mart or Kmart and picking up a new potato peeler or wooden spoon, but the thought is that ‘I love you’ and it’s a special day, and we try to keep it alive, and do so each month.”

Examples of Rituals



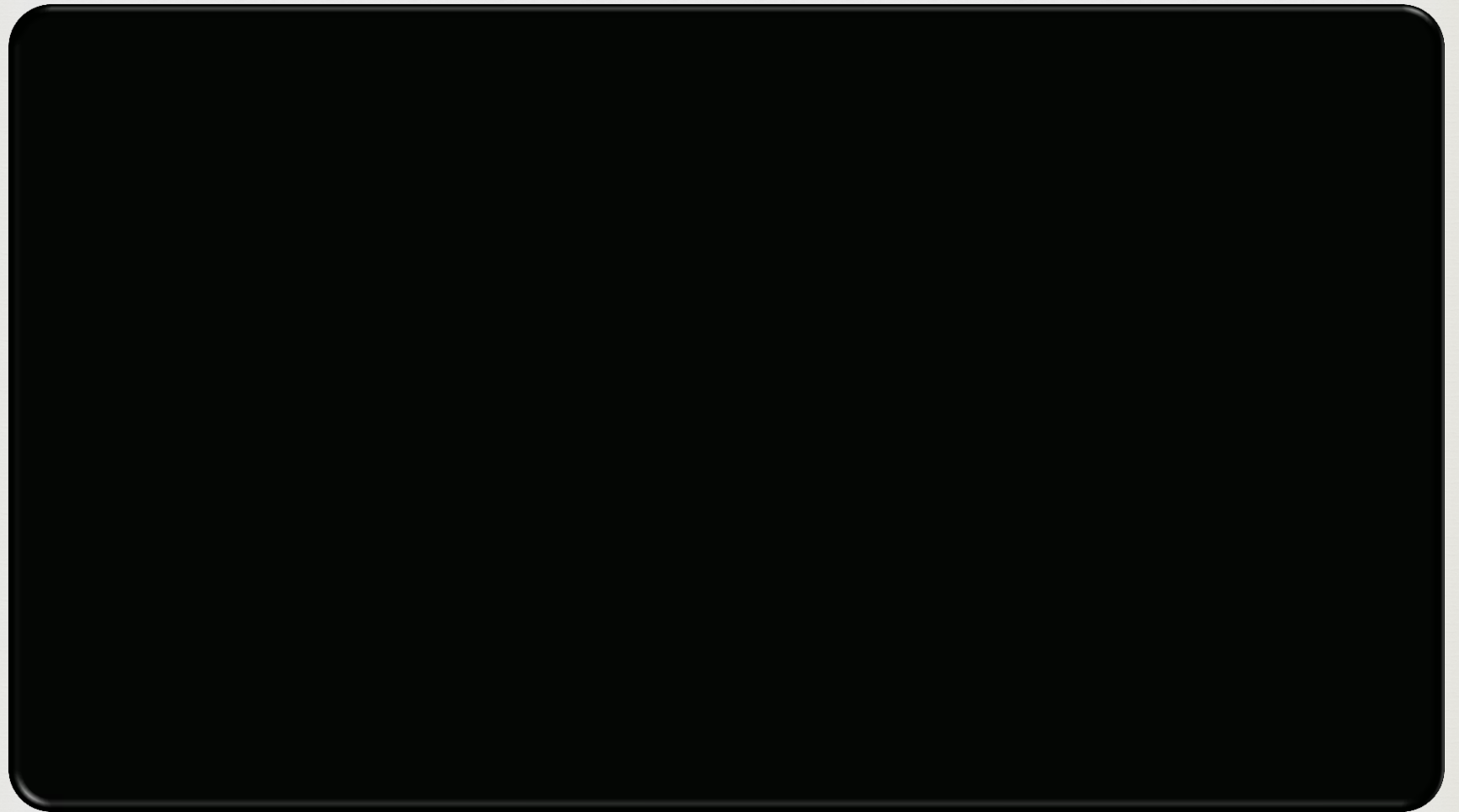
DEAR JIM,

You are receiving this because you are more loved than you will ever know! I don't know you personally, but from what I've heard, you have an incredible personality & values - values that I would love to emulate in my own life. Life is unfair, and I'm so sorry for what you're experiencing, but your strength & bravery are inspiring not only to me but to so many around you. I want to remind you (in case it seems far away at times) that you are & always will be an amazing man and father, that you are always surrounded by love, that even when you feel weak your strength is limitless, and that "the human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it." - C.C. Scott

With hope, love & best wishes, ME

“We have for 25 years written a daily love letter to each other. We haven't missed a day, even when Joe had open heart surgery. And we have 18-19,000 of them in a closet and the kids are going to read them when we're gone. We don't do it at XYZ time every day; but we do it. We don't go to bed without having written that love letter and talked about it” (William J.Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 134).

Expressions of Love



Everyday Ways to Take Back Your Marriage:



- ❧ **Establish a set time every day to talk**– just to check in, with no discussion of money, children, or chores.
- ❧ **Create a greeting ritual that marks the moment** and has meaning for the two of you
- ❧ If you've stopped going to bed together regularly, **start again**
- ❧ **Leave an affectionate note for your spouse** that has no practical purpose
- ❧ **Start dating again.** Go out on a spontaneous date or plan one right now.
- ❧ **Spend more quiet time together** without the television on
- ❧ Move the television out of your bedroom
- ❧ Notice something you like about your spouse and share it with them

Take Back Your Marriage!

- ❧ If you have kids, do leave them at home. You and your spouse need time alone. **The best thing you can do for your kids is make your marriage work.**
- ❧ **Don't waste time trying to figure out whose fault it is that you haven't been spending time together. It really doesn't matter.**
- ❧ **Don't let angry feelings get in the way of making plans with your partner. Research shows that the fastest way to change how you feel is by taking action.** Doing something enjoyable together will make you and your partner feel more loving. As a result, you may even be able to resolve heated topics more easily in the future.
- ❧ **Don't think you have to go to a tropical island to make time together meaningful. You don't have to spend a lot of money to show your love for your partner. Go for a walk around the block. Read a novel together. Set aside ten minutes each day to talk. Ride a bike. Be creative.**

Becoming One in Marriage

“We believe that when a man and woman are united as husband and wife, and they love each other, their hearts and feelings are one, that love is as enduring as eternity itself, **and that when death overtakes them it will neither extinguish nor cool that love, but that it will brighten and kindle it to a purer flame, and that it will endure through eternity**” (George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:320).



A Lesson from A Prophet



Elder Hugh B. Brown served in the First Presidency, as an Apostle, and in many other important church responsibilities during his lifetime. And yet, it was perhaps his service to his wife and hers to him that was most impressive about this man. In his first address after being called to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Brown said, “I would be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge that Zina Card Brown, my beloved wife, is more responsible for my being here today than I” [*An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, 1988, ix].

A Lesson from a Prophet



“The Brown’s daughter, Mary Firmage, related: “Up until mother’s stroke they’ go through a ritual daily... He’d kiss her goodbye and then they would walk to the front porch together. Daddy would go down three steps, and then turn around and ask, ‘Did I kiss you good-bye?’ Mother would answer, ‘Why, no, you didn’t.’ Daddy would kiss her again.”

“As he walked to the car, Mother would run into the dining room, where she would blow kisses to him from the window. While daddy was backing the car out of the drive, Mother would run back to the porch where she’d wave a handkerchief until he drove out of sight. Just before the car turned the corner, Daddy would blink the brake lights three times, his code for “I love you” (*Church News*, 26 October 1974, 5).

Intervention #4: Intentional Marriage



“The only way to take back our marriages from their drift south is to keep paddling and have a joint navigational plan. Paddling means doing the everyday things to stay connected, to find time for each other, to go on dates, to make a big deal of anniversaries and special occasions, to work hard to reconnect after periods when we have been distracted from each other.

Intentional Marriage



“Having a joint navigational plan means that you both are committed for keeps, with no exit strategy, **and that you both take responsibility to monitor how the marriage is doing, when it needs mid course corrections, and when it needs help in the form of marriage education or marital therapy.** Intentional marriage is about everyday attention and long range planning” (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 18-19).



Set some goals together,
dream big dreams
together, make your plans,
write them down, and
review them often.