

## Take Your Marriage Back

### Who Owns Your Marriage

Brigham Young University  
Campus Education Week, August 2007



"Some people spend their entire lives indefinitely preparing to live" (Abraham Maslow, as cited in *Your Time Starved Marriage*, Parrott, 25).

## Common Phrases I hear in Counseling:

- "The relationship just wasn't working for me anymore"
- "Our needs are just so different"
- "We just grew apart"
- "I deserve more"
- "Everyone else's marriage is so much better than ours"
- "He's not the same person that I married"
- "After the children left home, there was nothing left"
- "Our relationship became stale"
- "My wife is a real jerk"

## Consumer Marriage and our Disposable Society

- Psychological Individualism
- "Is this marriage meeting my needs?"
- "Am I getting enough back for what I am putting into the marriage?"
- In America, we purchase a new car every five years; shouldn't our marriages be *renewable*?
- "When choosing a husband, ask yourself if this is the man you want your children to visit every other weekend?"

## Consumer Marriage and Disposable Society

- Consumer culture based on individuals pursuing their personal desires [i.e. "Obey Your Thirst"].
- Consumer culture tells us that we never have enough of anything we want
- Consumers are inherently disloyal– we go where the best deal is

## Consumer Culture and Disposable Marriage

- Americans are less loyal to our neighborhoods and communities than in the past
- Who doesn't move because of their loyalty to a neighborhood?
- We live where our personal needs can be met best

## When Consumer Marriage Enters In

"Consumer marriage enters the picture when I focus mainly on what I am not getting in the marriage and how my mate is not meeting my needs. I am in consumer mode when I fail to look at my own limitations, when I continually compare my spouse or marriage to my fantasies of other relationships, when I confuse my desires with my needs, when I lose the distinction between behavior that is completely unacceptable [such as physical abuse, infidelity, alcoholism, emotional cruelty, and chronic lying] and behavior that bothers me or saddens me [such as a spouse not giving me enough affection or emotional support, working excessive hours, showing lack of sexual interest, or having certain unlikable personality characteristics]."

## When Consumer Marriage Enters In

"The consumer attitude turns marital disappointments into marital tragedies and constructive efforts for improvement into entitled demands for change" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 38-39).

## Is Your Marriage Becoming a Consumer Marriage?

1. I [often, sometimes, rarely] compare my spouse unfavorably to others.
2. In relation to our problems, I [often, sometimes, rarely] dwell on my spouses deficiencies; not my own.
3. I [often, sometimes, rarely] concentrate on how my spouse is not meeting my needs rather than how I am not meeting my spouse's needs.
4. I [often, sometimes, rarely] keep score: I add up when I do good things or when I think my spouse does something bad.

## Is Your Marriage Becoming a Consumer Marriage?

5. I [often, sometimes, rarely] think that my spouse is getting a better deal in this marriage than I am.
6. I [often, sometimes, rarely] focus on my spouses defects rather than on his or her strengths.
7. I [often, sometimes, rarely] wonder if I should have held out for someone better when I chose a mate.
8. When we have hard times, I [often, sometimes, rarely] ask myself whether the effort I am putting into this marriage is worth it.

## So How Did You Do?

"If most of your answers are 'rarely,' congratulations. You do not treat marriage like a car that you can trade in when it ages and develops a touch of rust. If most of your answers are 'sometimes,' ask yourself if things that you want are disguising themselves as things that you absolutely need. Try discussing your spouses needs and wants. If three or more of your answers are 'often,' consumerism has severely infected your view of marriage. Do you want to be a 'citizen' of your marriage, or take a 'tourist visa' to travel the way of fantasy?" (From William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 37-38).

## Specific Thoughts and Confusions of Consumer Marriage

- "I am not getting my needs met"
- "I deserve better"
- "If only I were married to that one"
- "My marriage is not as good as your marriage"
- "My spouse is a flawed person"
- "My marriage ideals and goals will never happen as long as I'm with this clown"
- "I'm the good guy here"

## Stale Marriages

"There are many people who do not find divorce attorneys and who do not end their marriages, but who have permitted their marriages to grow stale and weak and cheap. There are spouses who ... are in the low state of mere joint occupancy of the home. ... These people will do well to reevaluate, to renew their courting, to express their affection, to acknowledge kindnesses, and to increase their consideration so their marriage can again become beautiful, sweet, and growing" (President Spencer W. Kimball, *Marriage and Divorce* [1976], 22).



## Stale and Bale

- To many people bale on marriages when things get tough, when the marriage goes stale, or when their needs are met.
- James Dobson has said that too many people go into marriage with one eye on the exit door.



## Those Living in Quiet Desperation

"We are concerned, brethren, over the mounting number of divorces not only in our society, but also in the Church. We are just as concerned with those whose families and marriages seem to be held together in 'quiet desperation'" (President Spencer W. Kimball, "Boys Need Heroes Close By," *Ensign*, May 1976, 45).

## The Real Threat

- Most LDS couples are not going to bale out on their marriage
- Most are not going to file for divorce or separation
- In fact, most are probably not looking elsewhere for greater prospects
- However, what many do is disengage from the marriage— living separate lives together— in quiet desperation

## Marriage Takes Work & Effort

"No one would wish a bad marriage on anyone. But where do we think "good marriages" come from? They don't spring full-blown from the head of Zeus any more than does a good education, or good home teaching, or a good symphony. Why should a marriage require fewer tears and less toil and shabbier commitment than your job or your clothes or your car?"

"Yet some couples spend less time on the quality and substance and purpose of their marriage—the highest, holiest culminating covenant we can make in this world—than they do in maintaining their '72 Datsun. And they break the hearts of many innocent people, including perhaps their own, if that marriage is then dissolved" (Jeffrey R. Holland, *However Long and Hard the Road*, 122).



## Not Half-hearted Compliance

As President Spencer W. Kimball has counseled, we must not give half-hearted compliance to marriage. Marriage requires all of our consecration (See Spencer W. Kimball, *Marriage*, Deseret Book, 1978, 10).



Whole-Souled Devotion  
Words of Mormon 1:18

## What Is It That Pulls Us Apart? Why Is the Marriage Gig So Difficult?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Covenant vs. Contractual Marriage

"When troubles come, the parties to a *contractual* marriage seek happiness by walking away. They marry to obtain benefits and will stay only as long as they're receiving what they bargained for. But when troubles come to a *covenant* marriage, the husband and wife work them through. They marry to give and to grow, bound by the covenants to each other, to the community and to God. *Contract* companions each give 50 percent; *covenant* companions each give 100 percent" (Elder Bruce C. Hafen, *Living A Covenant Marriage*, eds. Douglas E. Brinley and Daniel K. Judd [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004], 1).

## The Hireling vs. The Shepherd

"Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will. Jesus taught about contractual attitudes when he described the 'hireling' who performs his conditional promise of care only when he receives something in return. When the hireling 'seeth the wolf coming,' he 'leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.... because he ... careth not for the sheep.' By contrast, the Savior said, 'I am the good shepherd,.... and I lay down my life for the sheep' (John 10:12-15). Many people marry today as hirelings. And when the wolf comes, they flee. This idea is wrong. It curses the earth, turning parents' hearts away from their children and from each other" (Elder Bruce C. Hafen, *Living A Covenant Marriage*, eds. Douglas E. Brinley and Daniel K. Judd [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004], 1-2).



## Every Marriage is Threatened by Three Kinds of Wolves

1. Natural Adversity
2. Our Own Imperfections
3. Excessive Individualism

(See Hafen, *Covenant Marriage*, 3)



## Marriage and Commitment

"Of course some days are going to be more difficult than others, but if you leave the escape hatch in the airplane open because you think even before takeoff you might want to bail out in mid-flight, then I can promise you it's going to be a pretty chilly trip less than fifteen minutes after the plane leaves the ground. Close the door, strap on those seat belts, and give it full throttle. That's the only way to make a marriage fly" (Jeffrey R. Holland, *However Long and Hard the Road*, 110).

## Two Common Deceptions

### I. The Children/Family Centered Marriage

- Be careful here; the line is very fine
- Note the difference between adjusting your marriage to meet your children's needs and losing your marriage to parenthood.

## Putting it into Perspective

"In a two-parent family, marriage is the foundation of the family, the base of the family pyramid. It is the core relationship that preceded the children and the parent-child relationship. We fall in love with each other before we fall in love with our kids. After they leave home, we will still have each other, or so we hope. Our children rely on the stability and security of our marriage for their own stability and security.... Spoiling kids with material things is a cultural no-no except for buying them electronics, which seems to have no limits these days. But setting limits on how much time and attention we give them, and how many opportunities and activities we provide, is not stressed in our culture. *Children nowadays own their parents. In a swift turn of a generation or two, we went from the norm that children should be seen and not heard when adults are around, to the norm that it is only the children who should be seen and heard when adults are around*" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 51; emphasis added).

## Who Owns Your Marriage— You or the Kids?

- It's easy to find reasons why your kid's needs are front and center, but if you neglect your spouse in the process of parenting, you won't be doing your kids any favors. If you read these statements and answer 'yes' more than three times, your giving away your married life to your kids and should work to set up boundaries to get back a life back with your mate.
1. Five nights out of seven, your preadolescent kids go to bed whenever they want, and it's usually well after 9:00 p.m.
  2. When you've finally found a moment with your spouse, even if it's in the car on the way to the soccer match, your kids invariably ask you to turn up the music, give them a juice box, or demand you hear about the latest video game, and you find it easier to listen than to ask them to wait until you're done talking with your spouse.

## Who Owns Your Marriage— You or the Kids?

3. You haven't had a night out alone together in a month—and you can't even remember the last one before that.
4. The lock on your bedroom door is growing rusty with disuse.
5. Your down time as a couple is always family time, for example, spent watching a *Disney* video with the kids instead of listening to jazz on the deck while the kids watch the movie indoors.

## Who Owns Your Marriage— You or the Kids?

6. When the choice at the moment is between talking to your spouse about his or her day, or playing ball with your kids, and you almost always chose the kids.
7. When you've finally finished driving the kids to violin lessons and swim practice and have completed that science project you just found out was due tomorrow and your spouse wants to sit down and relax with you, you just can't resist folding Johnny's laundry or working on building Tanya's dollhouse while we talk.

## Sentence Sermons

"The First Bond of Society is Marriage"

-- Cicero



And, might I add, "As the marriage goes, so goes the family."

## Two Common Deceptions

### II. The Church Centered Marriage

"Sometimes as I go throughout the Church, I think I am seeing a man who is using his church work as a kind of escape from family responsibility. And sometimes when we've talked about whether or not he's giving attention to his family, his children and his wife, he says something like this: 'Well, I'm so busy taking care of the Lord's work that I really don't have time.' And I say to him, 'My dear brother, the greatest of the Lord's work that you and I will ever do is the work that we do within the walls of our own home.' Now don't you get any misconception about where the Lord's work starts. That's the most important of all the Lord's work. And you wives may have to remind your husbands of that occasionally" (Harold B. Lee, *Address to seminary and institute personnel at Brigham Young University Summer School, BYU, 8 July 1966*).

## This Is Gospel Truth



"[The most important of the Lord's work that you [fathers] will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home. Home Teaching, bishopric's work, and other Church duties are all important, but the most important work is within the walls of your home" (Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973], pp. 248-249).

## Finding Ourselves; Losing Our Spouse

- Many adults over schedule themselves in worthwhile community activities, [i.e. committees, PTA, coaching, and Church callings]. All of these are worthwhile endeavors.
- "The problem is that when we have no counter-balancing schedule with our spouse, our individual schedules swallow the time for our marriages."

## Finding Ourselves (Cont.)

"If most parents were not already overbooked with children's activities, perhaps the adult activities would not be such a concern. But in truth, between chauffeuring kids and being personally involved in two or three adult activities, you know what will come last in your life— your marriage."

## Finding Ourselves (Cont.)

"It's a function of what is scheduled and to whom we feel accountable for our time. We feel accountable to our children and the commitments we have made to and for them. We feel accountable to the book club we promised to attend monthly, to the religious education committee we joined, and to the fund raising committee of the PTA. But most of us do not feel accountable to have face-to-face time alone with our mate, because we never schedule it. *Our marriage gets what is left over on our schedules*" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 66; emphasis added).

## Other Deceptions

### III. Hobbies and recreation interfering with marriage

- Counseling clients who go off each week to a) play computer games, b) golf, c) hunt, d) watch professional sports teams

### IV. Media interfering with marriage

## The Technology Trap

"Who'd have thought that with all the technology designed to give us more time— the microwave ovens, cell phones, email, the Internet, TiVo, iPods, Palm Pilots, Blackberry's— we'd be cramming all those 'extra moments' we've saved with even more time consuming technological wizardry? The trouble is that, with all the gizmos and gadgets, we feel more frenzied, more harried, more out of breath than ever before. Seems ironic, but the very things we think are going to save us time often end up stealing it" (Les & Leslie Parrott, *Your Time-Starved Marriage* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan], 85).

## "Turn Off the Dang TV"

"Couples tell me that when they finally get their kids to bed, or chores done, they tend to collapse in front of the television set. Often, one of the spouses has been there first, is watching a show, and may not want to be interrupted. When the other spouse starts talking, the TV watcher doesn't look that person's way and responds shortly. 'Is there a problem?' the other asks. 'No, I'm just trying to watch this show. Wait for a commercial.' At the first moment of the day when the couple are alone, they have to wait for a TV commercial."

## Bedroom and Television

"When the couple goes to bed, chances are there is a TV in the bedroom. In my view, that is one of the worst mistakes a married couple can make, because this invites the greatest household absorber of time and attention directly in the intimate sanctum of a marriage. I realize that the decision is an innocent one and that some couples relax together watching the news or Jay Leno, but they can do that on the couch in the living room. The bedroom, in my view, should be media free and thus open to couple connection through words and touch" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 70).

## Strategies for Taking Marriage Back

- Keep a log of hours away from home so you can begin to notice how often you are really gone.
- Plan marital time.
- Use the time you have to do better.
- Remind yourself repeatedly that your marriage is the foundation for your family and the cornerstone of your children's security.
- Limit your families outside activities.
- Have fixed bedtimes for your children.
- Have a time to connect to your spouse each day—without children!

## Strategies for Taking Marriage Back

- Carve out private times each week for you as a couple.
- Carve out private space where there are no children allowed.
- Go on regular dates.
- Never complain about your spouse to the children.
- Go away for an occasional weekend together.
- Be creative and open with Church callings and assignments.

## Strategies for Taking Marriage Back

- Look for the good in each other and in the family.
- Touch to say "hello" and "goodbye"
- Avoid the discouraging word.
- Stop and smell the roses.
- Now, disregard this list completely and make up your own. Take your marriage back!

## Make Time For Your Marriage

"If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time! Yet less important appointments are often given priority, leaving only leftover moments for listening to precious partners.

"Keeping the garden of marriage well cultivated and free from weeds of neglect requires the time and commitment of love. It is not only a pleasant privilege, it is a scriptural requirement with promise of eternal glory" (Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign*, May 1991, 22-24).