

Family Times

No Matter What

As a teenager, I loved the Rocky movies. I can remember walking out of the theatre and wanting to punch a side of beef or slug down 7 raw eggs. More than anything, I remember working out like a mad man after viewing those movies, and feeling like I could conquer the world. Recently, in viewing “Rocky Balboa,” I felt the same way. I felt an irresistible urge to lift weights and jog through the streets of Philly.

Nevertheless, I remember a great line from *Rocky IV*. When Apollo Creed is fighting the Russian, he turns to Rocky and says something to the effect of “Don’t stop this fight, no matter what.” The movie viewer can see deep concern on Rocky’s face. Everyone who watched the movie knew if Apollo kept fighting, he was going to be seriously injured. Sensing such concern, Apollo repeated to Rocky, just before he walked back into the ring, “No matter what.” That was his commitment— that was his pledge, and he took it to his death.

I believe the phrase “no matter what” is just as significant to marriage as it was to *Rocky IV*. A strong marriage

must have commitment— a good dose of “no matter what.” That is, no matter what comes your way, no matter what the trial, no matter what the challenge, you are committed, *no matter what*. Many research studies have confirmed that commitment is the number one ingredient to a healthy and vibrant marriage. Without rock solid commitment, no other marital strength or attributes matter much.

Unfortunately, we live in a world of uncommitted people. The very nature of our society is disposable. No longer do people live in communities their entire lives, or stay with careers longer than a few years. In fact, when I was in elementary school, I could tell you every single player on the Dallas Cowboys roster— offense, defense, special teams, etc. Back in those days, players stayed on one team their entire career. Today, players switch teams as often as my wife changes the sheets on our bed. Players are not loyal to an organization— they simply go where the money is.

This same lack of commitment can be seen in marriage. Couples are joined together in

matrimony, and the first trial or hardship sends them reeling. Next thing you know, they are divorced and looking for greener pastures somewhere else. James Dobson once said that “too many couples today go into marriage with one eye on the exit door.” With such commitment, or lack thereof, most marriages today do not last that long.

A popular bumper-sticker reads, “Marriage— the number one cause of divorce.” Unfortunately, this slogan seems to be consistent with other media messages in our society. In a recent magazine, there was advertisement for a *Honda Civic*. The headline was: “The sad thing is, it’ll probably be the HEALTHIEST RELATIONSHIP of your adult life.” That is a sad thing: the healthiest relationship a person may ever have is with their car.

On a similar note, *Toyota* ran a similar ad in the *New York Times* magazine. The advertisement was for a new car that takes the form of a pre-nuptial agreement. The ad was written in formal legalistic jargon regarding the division of property and other marital assets.

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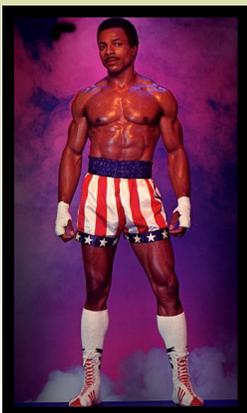
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Quotable:

“No Matter What!” —
Apollo Creed



JAMES DOBSON ONCE SAID THAT “TOO MANY COUPLES TODAY GO INTO MARRIAGE WITH ONE EYE ON THE EXIT DOOR.” WITH SUCH COMMITMENT, OR LACK THEREOF, MOST MARRIAGES TODAY DO NOT LAST THAT LONG.



James Dobson



Marriage is a life-time commitment— in fact, even longer— eternity is what we are expecting! We enter marriage to stay married. No one goes into a marriage to fail at it.

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The conclusion of the ad states: “Now that the formalities are over, let the love affair begin.” The implication being that marriage is a formal institution; real love is for those who don’t need the paper work. Similarly, a *New York Times* Journalist attended a wedding reception and reported hearing a relative say of the bride, “She will make a nice *first* wife for Jason.” So, in America, we get our first car, save up for our first home, and if we are lucky, we find our first wife. In a recent cartoon a woman reassured her boyfriend, “Look, I’m not talking about a lifetime commitment; I’m talking about marriage.” So much for “until death do us part.”

This all seems to be in harmony with a movie character who says of marriage: “Men should be like toilet paper: Soft, strong, and disposable.” Well, thanks a lot. Perhaps some of you have seen the billboard that states: “When you’re thinking of marrying a man, ask yourself if this is the person you want your children to be spending every other weekend with.”¹ All of these media examples strongly reflect the attitude in our society. Marriage is a temporary, disposable entity. We have disposable razors, and disposable cameras. Why not disposable marriages? Both the media and society have “dumbed-down” marriage, presenting as an institution that only the less enlightened embrace.

Several years ago, Arlie Hochschild wrote in *The New York Times*, “In the new

American lifestyle, rootlessness occurs on a global scale. We move not only from one job to another, but from one spouse and sometimes one set of children to the next. We are changing from a society that values employment and marriage to one that values employability and marriage-ability.” Such perspectives have certainly impacted the way we feel towards marriage. Many young people today do not view marriage in a positive light. Over 50 percent of teenagers today accept out of wedlock childbearing as a “worthwhile” lifestyle. Moreover, half of all teenagers agreed that it a good idea for couples to live together before they get married.

Today, there is a lot of rough water in the sea of matrimony. In fact, more than half of all those who take the plunge end up capsizing their boats. For those who marry for the first time, there is a 40 to 50 percent chance of divorcing in their life times. In a recent Gallup poll, 40 percent of married couples had considered leaving their partners and another 20 percent said that they were dissatisfied with their marriage about half of the time. Put another way, nearly half of all married couples in the good old *US of A* currently have divorced, and another 20 percent have seriously considered it. Even though many people assume the divorce rate is leveling out, we are still in trouble—big trouble. In 1994, The fastest growing marital status category was divorced persons. The number of divorced persons quadrupled from 1970, with over 4 mil

lion, to over 17 million in 1994.

We all know someone within close proximity who has been divorced. Perhaps it is a neighbor, a ward member, relative, or close friend.. Perhaps, it is even you. There is no such thing as a pretty divorce; in fact, divorces are one of the most unpleasant experiences that a human can experience, be it child or adult. Elder David B. Haight has written:

The ever-increasing rise in divorce is ample evidence of how acceptable divorce has become as the popular solution to unhappy or “not-quite-up-to-expectation” marriages.

But no matter how acceptable divorce has become—how quick and easy to obtain—divorce is tragic and painful, not only at the outset, but also in the years to come.

Divorce rarely occurs without immense emotional, social, and financial upheaval. Most people underestimate the alienation, bitterness, disruption, and frustration between a divorcing couple, and among their children, friends, and relatives. Some never adjust to the resulting emotional consequence.

Perhaps most tragic of all is that more than 60 percent of all divorces involve children under eighteen years of age. Children of divorce all too often have a higher delinquency rate and less self-confidence, and tend to be more promiscuous and themselves more likely to have unhappy marriages.

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“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 tripClose 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, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 109-110).



Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Despite the fact that marriage as an institution is crumbling around us, we cannot succumb to the ways of the world. As Latter-day Saints, we view marriage differently. We don’t express at wedding receptions, “She will make a nice *first* wife for Jason.” We do not enter into the marriage arena wondering where the escape hatch is. For us, marriage is something that is intended to last not only a lifetime, but even longer.

From the Family Proclamation, one cannot get the idea that marriage is a impermanent institution with disposable spouses and temporary children. The family is eternal. We enter marriage to stay married. No one goes into a marriage to fail at it. Sadly, many people do. And, even among the membership of the Church, we have our share of casualties. Not as many as they do over the mountains in the Valley of Babylon. No, we on Zion’s Mount try our best to make these marriages work. For the most part, they do. In fact, the divorce rate for those members of the Church who marry in Temples is well below the national average. Different scholars have put the temple divorce rate at around 6 percent. In a 1993 study published in *Demography*, it was reported that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the least likely of all Americans to divorce. Furthermore, “Only 13 percent of LDS couples have divorced after five years of marriage, compared with 20 percent for religiously homogametic unions among Catholics and Protestants and 27 percent among Jews. However, when a Mormon marries outside his or her denomination, the divorce rate soars to 40 percent -- second only to mixed-faith marriages involving a Jewish spouse (42 percent).

However, as members of the Lord’s Church, we are not merely about *not* getting divorced. There is more to marriage than just survival. You don’t hear people at Church meetings saying over the pulpit, “Hey, I may be a jerk, and my marriage stinks, but at least I’m not divorced.” That’s the equivalent of the mother who bragged, “At least none of my sons are in prison.” We should expect more out of marriage than that. Much, much, more. Especially out of the marriage relationship. This should be one of the most fulfilling and satisfying relationships in our lifetime.

President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: *Nurture and cultivate your marriage. Guard it and work to keep it solid and beautiful. Divorce is becoming so common, even rampant, that studies show in a few years half of those now married will be divorced. It is happening, I regret to say, even among some who are sealed in the house of the Lord. Marriage is a contract, it is a compact, it is a union between a man and a woman under the plan of the Almighty. It can be fragile. It requires nurture and very much effort.*

Marriage does take effort and nurturing if we want the relationship to thrive and be successful. For those who work at it, there are many benefits and blessings. The National Opinion Research Center does a survey every year on the happiness of adults. Married people report being twice as happy (43.5%) compared to divorced (21%) and individuals who have never married (18.3%). The percentages in parenthesis reflect those who said they were “very happy.”

In fact, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once declared: “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 tripClose 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, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 109-110).

Such commitment is evident in the following experience shared by Elder Marlin K. Jensen:

“Recently, I visited with a widower as he stood bravely at the side of his wife’s casket, surrounded by several handsome and stalwart sons. This man and his wife had been married for fifty-three years, during the last six of which she had been seriously ill with a terminal kidney disease. He had provided the 24-hour care she required until his own health was in jeopardy. I expressed my admiration for him and the great love and care he had given his wife. I felt compelled to ask, ‘How did you do it?’

“It was easy, he replied, when he remembered that fifty-three years earlier, he had knelt at an altar in the temple and made a covenant with the Lord and with his bride. ‘I wanted to keep it,’ he said.

“In an eternal marriage, the thought of ending what began with a covenant between God and each other simply has little place. When challenges come and our individual weaknesses are revealed, the remedy is to repent, improve, and apologize, not to separate or divorce. When we make covenants with the Lord and our eternal companion, we should do everything in our power to honor the terms” (Marlin K. Jensen,



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Ensign, October 1994, 51). This couple understood the phrase, “no matter what.” Despite the fact that his wife was dying, this good man was there for her, daily—no matter what!

Recently, I read the following experience from a woman named Debbi. “I was head over heels in love with Peter and had been dating him for a couple of weeks when I knew how serious we were both feeling. I knew there was something I had to talk to him about but was afraid—would he leave me? I have multiple sclerosis and had been in and out of a wheelchair already. (I was diagnosed at 18). I was afraid that once he found out I was ‘less than perfect’ he would leave for someone better. But we sat down together and I told him, knowing the possibilities. He turned to me, held my hand and looked into my eyes as he said, ‘Deb, if your are going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life, I am going to be there to push it.’ I knew that I could never be with anyone else.” Here is a couple that understood “no matter what.” *No matter what*, regardless of how difficult MS would become her husband was going to be there.

Let me conclude with one of my favorite stories from our Church History.

“Let me share [a story] ... about Orson Spencer. Two missionaries found him. He had graduated from two colleges, one was a school in preparation for the minis-

try. He was going to be a pastor, a minister, somewhere. He met the missionaries. They shared the Book of Mormon with him and he believed it. He shared it with his wife, Catherine. They talked about it, and then they went to tell her parents. While they were visiting with her parents, Catherine announced that she and Orson were joining the Mormon Church. To her astonishment, her father was livid beyond belief. He said, ‘Catherine, if you join the Mormon Church, we never want to see you again in this house. You are never welcome to come here; we disown you, we disinherit you.’ The young couple left and walked down the street. She had her arm through his arm. When they got to the end of the block, she stopped. He kind of swung around, and she said, ‘Orson, I don’t know a lot of things, but I know this: I love you and if you join the Mormon Church, I am going to join the Mormon Church.’

“They joined the Church. She had three little children, one right after another. Three more came later. Orson was concerned about his wife’s health. He thought, ‘Maybe if we can get to Nauvoo, that will help.’ They moved to Nauvoo in 1842. Orson was very energetic and soon had a large home and property. He opened a store in the fall of 1842. Orson and Catherine received their endowments in the Nauvoo temple

in 1843. In 1845 Orson was elected Mayor of Nauvoo. Two more children came into the family. Catherine’s health continued to decline. After the martyrdom, Brigham Young announced that the Saints were getting ready to go westward. Catherine’s health didn’t get better. In fact, it got worse. Finally, Orson despaired for her life. He wrote back to her parents and said, ‘Please let your daughter come home. I love her more than anything else in this life. I will do anything you tell me, but please let her come back home and nurse her back to health.’

“He sent the letter off; weeks passed, months, and finally it was time to roll westward. They made a little bed on the covered wagon for her. Some men helped lift her frail body into the wagon, and then the wagons rolled westward. Several days later, the camp had circled for the night. It was just getting dark, and Orrin Porter Rockwell rode into camp with mail. He found Orson and handed him a letter. Orson looked at the return address, and it was from his wife’s parents. He quickly tore off the end of the envelope and read the letter. It said something like this: ‘Orson, yes, we would love to have our daughter come home. Yes, we will nurse her back to health. We will do everything you ask, but only on the condition that she will leave you and her new-found church. If so, we will welcome her here. If not, we disown her, we disinherit her, and we never want to see her again.’

“Orson felt terrible. He climbed into the wagon. His wife was lying there. He simply shared with her that he had

written to her parents to see if they would let her return home. He said, ‘I love you more than anything in this world and I want you to go back home. They will nurse you back to health.’ She said, ‘Orson, let me read the letter.’ He handed her the letter, and she read what I have related to you, and then, without saying anything about it, she said, ‘Orson, get my Bible.’ He did, and she said, ‘Turn to Ruth, chapter 1.’ He did, and she said, ‘Now, would you read the verse I have underlined?’ He read these words to her: ‘Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for wither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people should be my people, and thy God my God’ (Ruth 1:16).

She said, ‘No, Orson, I will never leave you, and I will never leave the Church.’ Well, they sat and had a tender moment. With his big, rough hands he closed her eyes, and they never opened again on this side of eternity. Catherine died March 12, 1846, at Indian Creek, near Keosauque, Iowa. Orson Spencer climbed up on the wagon. His second-oldest daughter, Aurelia, sat next to him, and the wagons rolled back to Nauvoo, where Catherine’s remains were buried next to their youngest child” (Vaughn J. Featherstone, *Man of Holiness* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998], pp. 143-146).

This is a story of “no matter what” devotion. Catherine Spencer understood what whole-souled devotion was all about. She would be with her husband, *no matter what. No matter what!*