



# Family Times

## Oneness in Marriage

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See Back Page for Announcement Regarding a Parenting Workshop Coming this month!

### Quotable:

I believe one key weapon Satan is using to destroy marriages today is *distraction*. If Satan cannot get us to commit adultery or to rob a bank, then he certainly can distract us and pull us away from what matters the most to us.

A well circulated joke starts like this: A farmer and his wife went into town for their yearly medical checkup. After the farmer completed the examination, the doctor invited him to leave the room so that he could speak with the wife alone. The doctor then informed the wife that her husband had a very serious disease. The doctor continued, "He must not have any stress in his life. In fact, you will need to do all of his chores and make him three nice meals a day." The farmer's wife began to fidget, but the doctor continued,

"You must be available for him and do things with him, such as watch sports. Do not do anything that would upset him. Without this kind of special treatment, he will die."

The wife then asked, "How long will I need to do this for? A week? A month?" "No," the doctor replied. "You will need to keep this up for at least a year. After that, we'll do another checkup and hopefully clear him with a bill of good health."

Later, on the way home from the clinic, the farmer asked, "What did the doctor tell you?" His wife replied, "You're going to die."

Perhaps we have all felt this way at times! There are certainly many issues today that can pull marriages apart, including doctor's visits. However, the world is a complex place, with many institutions competing for our

time.

I believe one key weapon Satan is using to destroy marriages today is *distraction*. If Satan cannot get us to commit adultery or to rob a bank, then he certainly can distract us and pull us away from what matters the most to us.

Today, as if you haven't noticed, life is extremely busy. It certainly isn't 1950 anymore, when the family can gather around the fireplace and sing songs each night while drinking tang. The world, and especially the demands on our time have changed drastically. Today, especially for Latter-day Saints with several kids, to get a night at home with nothing else on the schedule calls for a celebration.

Our culture has created a time famine. If we are not dashing like mad out the door to a meeting, or rushing our children to a practice, recital, or game, then we don't know what to do with ourselves. In fact, some have created things to do just to make it look like we are busy.

Nevertheless, there are many sources that compete for our time. For instance, our jobs take up much of our time. Did you know that in 1950, 12.6 percent of married mothers with children under age seventeen worked for pay; but by 1994, 69% did so.

It is not just mothers, however, who are busy. Today our children's activities demand our

full attention, and with our own busy schedules, there is not much time left for parent-child time. In a 1990 *Los Angeles Times* survey of 1,000 families, 57 percent of fathers and 55 percent of mothers reported feeling guilty that they had spent too little time with their children.

Data from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, since the late 1970s, Children have lost 12 hours per week in free time; including a 25 percent drop in playing, and a 50 percent drop in unstructured outdoor activities.

We could list a myriad of many more social issues that compete with our time, but those are not the only issues that can distract couples from being close. Simply put, our differences can cause a wedge between us. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that

"Two people coming from different backgrounds learn soon after the ceremony is performed that stark reality must be faced. There is no longer a life of fantasy or of make-believe; we must come out of the clouds and put our feet firmly on the earth. Responsibility must be assumed and new duties must be accepted. Some personal freedoms must be relinquished, and many adjustments, unselfish adjustments, must be made.

"One comes to realize very soon after marriage that the spouse has weaknesses not previously revealed or discovered. The

## Oneness in Marriage (Cont.)



In fact, the number one predictor of divorce today is the habitual avoidance of conflict.



“Someone has said that the opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is apathy. And I say to you brethren, 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” (Harold B. Lee, Regional Representatives Seminar, 12 December 1970; as cited in *Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, 241).

virtues which were constantly magnified during courtship now grow relatively smaller, and the weaknesses which seemed so small and insignificant during courtship now grow to sizable proportions. The hour has come for understanding hearts, for self-appraisal, and for good common sense, reasoning, and planning. The habits of years now show themselves; the spouse may be stingy or prodigal, lazy or industrious, devout or irreligious; he may be kind and cooperative or petulant and cross, demanding or giving, egotistical or self-effacing. The in-law problem comes closer into focus, and the relationship of the spouse to them is again magnified” (President Spencer W. Kimball, Brigham Young University on 7 September 1976).

Differences lead to disagreements; disagreements lead to conflict; conflict leads to anger; and anger leads to divorce. (See Brent A. Barlow, *Dealing with Differences in Marriage*, 10). Without question, one of the significant forces pulling couples apart today are our differences.

Furthermore, another area that can drive wedges between couples is conflict, or more specifically, the way we handle conflict. In fact, the number one predictor of divorce today is the habitual avoidance of conflict. I see this in my counseling practice every week: to many couple in our society have no idea how to resolve some of their serious problems, therefore, they end of sweeping many of their issues under the rug. Obviously, this isn't a healthy approach in any way. As a result, many couples live superficially together. Years later, such unresolved conflicts will take their toll.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen put it this way: “The difference between a successful and an unsuccessful marriage is not in whether there are such times of tension, but in whether and how the ten-

sions are resolved” (*The Broken Heart* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], p. 49). Amen to that.

Another area that can pull couples apart is when their marital expectations are not fulfilled. Recently the *Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists* reported on the most common problems facing couples entering marriage. The therapists ranked unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse as the number one problem facing LDS couples entering marriage (71%), followed by communication (69%), money management/ finances (58%), decision making/problem solving (54%), power struggles (53%), and sex (50%). Unfortunately, couples who are not prepared to resolve some of these problems end up terminating their marriages too quickly. You can salvage your marriage before the damage occurs by taking a preventative approach. Individuals can also realize that many of the expectations they had going into marriage may have been unrealistic as well. For instance, for men, driving home each night with little traffic, walking into your white-picketed fence home, being kissed by each of your children, and having your favorite meal on the table when you walk in— that would be nice on “Fantasy Island,” but it's not as likely in the real world your living in. Unfortunately, most people cannot let go of some of their expectations, and they end up ruining the marriages as a result.

### Nourishing the Tree

If we want our marriages to be close; and if we want our relationships with our spouses to be fulfilling, we can begin by not taking each other for granted.

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It almost goes without saying, but I believe we all need to be reminded that marriage is like a lawn, or a garden, or whatever spring time metaphor your into. Once we have picked out the weeds, we need to add some water, fertilizer, and nutrients. In time, we will have a nice, lush, and rich harvest. Every spring I am always in awe at what a little water, fertilizer, and steer manure [haven't found a marriage analogy for that one yet] can do to resurrect my mealy winter lawn.



Tending a marriage is no different. If we want our relationships to be close, we need to invest time, we need to court and date each other, and we need to serve each other. Those simple things can recharge a stale marriage very quickly.

### Disconnection

Often I will have couples come into my office and explain to me that they have fallen out of love. I don't believe that. I believe couples have quit “taking care of the lawn,” so to speak. They also have become disconnected.

For example, do you remember how you and your spouse connected when you were dating? You probably spent many long hours talking about everything from favorite pizza toppings to the meaning of the universe!

## Oneness in Marriage (Cont.)



**Often, after several years of marriage, men forget how to dress themselves!**

Remember back in the day when you used to give surprises to your partner? Surprises are always fun. Now that you have been married for a while, the only surprise your spouse is going to get is if the toilet seat is up or down.

Do you remember back in the day when you actually prepared for dates instead of thinking about them five minutes before you rush out the door. I have seven daughters, and of course, when they are teenagers, they spend a good deal of their time babysitting. It's always humorous to me that if the wife calls to set up the arrangement, it's usually a day or two, and sometimes a week before the actual event. If a husband calls, it's usually about an hour before they're supposed to leave.

Do you remember back in the day when you dressed to impress each other? Not depress each other. The other day in Church, my wife had to remind me to button my top button on my shirt, and that I had socks on that didn't match. I told that's the price you pay when you have to be at the Church at 6:00 a.m. for meetings, but she wasn't impressed. Remember when you were first married, and you didn't jump into bed until you had prepared yourself for the "Senior Prom," complete with teeth brushing, flossing, and combing. Couple who have been married for a little while now go to bed with breath right nose bandages and Vicks vapor rub smeared on their nostrils.

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Remember back in the day when you talked to your partner about your feelings about life, and your deeper feelings about your partner? Now, your lucky if you see each other. And wives, if you do talk to your spouse longer than ten minutes, they may pass out and be snoring up a storm before you can get your most critical point across.

Men, remember the day when you completely submitted your will to your wife's? It was "whatever you want to do honey?" Can you dig in way deep and find that one hidden in the vault somewhere? I actually remember going to a Barry Manilow Concert. Wow! That would never happen today— not when there are options like calling in sick, picking weeds, or soaking a few bunions.

Women, remember when you laughed at your husbands stories and jokes, even the ones that weren't real funny? Now, my wife doesn't even give a "courtesy laugh." She just rolls her eyes and gives our kids that look like "It's ok kids— you have a 50/50 chance of turning out normal."

Remember back in the day when we viewed our partner as a whole or total person, basically over looking many of the minor flaws that exist in their personalities. Now, we can catalogue each flaw— my wife eats a banana like corn on the cob, and I like to drink milk, right out of the jug. How could any of our kids turn out normal with such wacked out parents? Well, despite all of these crazy things, we still can restore oneness and connection in our marriages. It doesn't matter how long we have been married, or how far we have veered off course. By applying some general principles, we can deepen our connection to our spouse, and consequently, have happier marriages and families. As the marriage goes, I believe, so goes the family.

1. *Have goals together as a couple and review them often.* I'm sure you wouldn't be surprised if I told you that one of the first things I do in counseling is ask couples about goals. When I do that, they usually look at me with a blank stare.

2. *Weekly Couple Meeting;* each Sunday. A time for goals, reviewing the calendar, work on weaknesses; planning meals, budget and financial issues, teaching the gospel. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

3. *Night and Morning Prayer* ... to say thanks, to ask for help in your marriage and family, to worship together. Read and study together as a couple.

4. *A Daily Phone Call or Personal Conversation* ... to say "I love you," to touch base, to discuss the day, to show you care.

5. *A Weekly Date* ... to a favorite park, a concert, the library, the gym; or staying home for a candlelight dinner, a game, or a mutual hobby. Dating your spouse weekly has everything to do with being the right person. Love is a daily decision and a daily portion keeps the marriage alive.

Marriage is not so much a matter of finding the right person as it is of being the right person. In his book, [How to Make a Good Marriage Great](#), Dr. Victor Cline shares the following experience. He was in Houston for a convention, and one spring afternoon he found himself eating dinner with a distinguished psychiatrist. During the evening, the psychiatrist mentioned that he had been recently divorced. As the conversation centered on keeping love alive in marriage, both men agreed that even good therapists can have marital difficulty. The psychiatrist then mentioned that his mother had given him the following advise:

"Son, there are two things you must remember. First you should marry the right person." Then the psychiatrist commented, "I forgot the second thing she said - but, you know, I did marry the right person. It was a great marriage. But I lost her."

## Oneness in Marriage (Cont.)

The second thing my mother told me came back to me many years later.

“Son, after you find that right person - then you have to make it work” (Cline, 1987, p. 43).

“Then, the psychiatrist concluded, “That I didn’t do. My career came first. I neglected her. She felt too abandoned and unloved...That was a divorce that should have never happened.” Tragically, most divorces should have never happened. Running to greener pastures always sounds more appealing than getting a shovel and eliminating the manure. It is my hope that we will all go out today and by a shovel as a reminder of what we all need to do.

6. *Daily Service ...* helping with house or yard work, mending a piece of clothing, taking a turn with the sick baby, fixing a favorite meal. (*Write it down. Do it!*).

7. *Daily Scripture Reading ...* to learn the gospel, to receive inspiration for yourself and your marriage, to become more like Jesus.

8. *Working Together ...* caring for a garden, painting a bedroom, washing the car, scrubbing floors, building a piece of furniture, writing a poem together, team teaching a class.

9. *Courtesies ...* like saying please and thank you, not

Interrupting or belittling, or doing all of the talking, and continuing the niceties of the courtship.

10. *Occasional Gifts ...* such as a note, a needed item—but mostly gifts of *time* and self.

11. *Showing Your Children that Your Marriage Comes First.* Set boundaries. Let your children know that you are in a conversation or activity with your spouse, and that takes priority. You will attend to the child’s needs in a moment. Have a Check in time. Establish a ritual half hour before bed each night to talk. If possible, establish couple time for thirty minutes when husband gets home from work. That is couple time. Door is closed. No interruptions. I love what family scholar Bill Dougherty out of the University of Minnesota taught:

“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*, p. 137).

Bonus Key: Here in the Dallas area, we have a great advantage—we live in a convention city with many hotels. Often you can get on Priceline, Hotwire, or Orbitz, and find great hotel deals for extremely cheap. Take your spouse to a hotel for 24 hours. It will do wonders for your marriage.

I like to tell couples that they ought to look at a 48 hour retreat at least once a year to reconnect, to set goals for the year, and to remind themselves what life is all about, and why they married each other in the first place. If you have to get a babysitter, do it. They are much cheaper than divorces.

Finally, and I do not get any commission for this, so I don’t mind sharing it with you: Go on a cruise as a couple. If you have never done this before, it is a great opportunity and experience that will strengthen your marriage. We have another great blessing living here in Texas. Galveston is a Sea Port for Princess and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. There is nothing better than being with your spouse for seven days on a cruise ship! It is a fantastic way to relax, take it easy, and spend uninterrupted time together without phones, kids, or bill collectors.

Cruises are relatively cheap, and in my mind, there is no better bang for the buck than a cruise. So, ladies, you can pay me later for that advise and counsel. I hope it works!!!

Below is a picture of what I like to refer to as “my” cruise ship. It’s called “Rhapsody of the Sea.” When I am not using it, I like to let Royal Caribbean cruise line take it out in the gulf, put a few passengers on it, and charge



them money. So, start saving now. Cruises leave all of the time, so it’s a matter of deciding that your actually going to do it, and then just making it happen. Have a relative come watch the kids, farm them out, do what you need to do so that you and your spouse can have this great experience.



### Seminars and Workshops Coming to Dallas on Marriage and Family Topics:

As some of you may know, Kevin Hinckley and I have been involved in teaching and presenting workshops at Education Week both at Brigham Young University in Idaho and in Provo. We have had a wonderful time, and have received a great response. Our topics have included marriage and parenting issues. We have entertained several requests to conduct our workshops and seminars here in the Texas. We would like to begin a series of workshops in the Dallas Area beginning in March. Our beginning topic will center on parenting teenagers, and all of the elements that seem to go along with that. We will talk about everything from parenting styles, fortifying our children, For the Strength of Youth, dating, movies, friends, and how to help our youth become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you are interested in our March workshops, or know parents who could benefit by attending, please have them email Doctree10@comcast.net; or call 214.868.6238. Our March workshop will be March 25th from 9 a.m. until noon. We will be at the Holiday Inn Express in Plano, located at 700 Parkway East Right off of Park on the Central Expressway. The cost is \$50 per couple.