

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE



RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR COUPLES

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THE LORD HAS PROMISED
ETERNAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS TO
THOSE WHO MAKE AND KEEP
TEMPLE MARRIAGE COVENANTS.



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THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly 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.

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, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a

sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. 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. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.



- **Balance.** You may speak as often as time allows, as long as you give other class members an equal opportunity.
- **Patience and kindness.** As you learn new skills, be patient and kind to your spouse, yourself, and other class members.
- **Encouragement.** Encourage other participants in the class, and encourage your spouse as you work together to strengthen your marriage.
- **Forgiveness.** Everyone makes mistakes, even after being taught new ways of doing things. Learn to forgive yourself and others.

You are invited to share your experiences in class, but you should not bring up matters that require ecclesiastical or professional assistance. Be careful not to embarrass your spouse or others. Be careful about disclosing highly personal, sensitive information with other class members. If you need individual help or a referral to a counselor at LDS Family Services, consult with your bishop or branch president.

Applying Doctrines and Principles

You will strengthen your marriage as you apply the principles you learn in this course. President Harold B. Lee observed, “We never really know anything of the teachings of the gospel until we have experienced the blessings that come from living each principle.”²

The more you practice new skills, the better you will be at applying them when appropriate situations arise. Continually seek to increase your understanding of gospel doctrines and principles about marriage. May the Lord bless you in this righteous endeavor.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
2. *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 215.



WITH DISCIPLESHIP COMES DIVINE
GUIDANCE IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIVING,
INCLUDING HOW TO BE A GOOD
HUSBAND OR WIFE.



The family is a creation of God, and it is central to His plan. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

“The Lord has ordained that we should marry, that we shall live together in love and peace and harmony, that we shall have children and rear them in His holy ways. . . .

“When all is said and done, this is what the gospel is about. The family is a creation of God. It is the basic creation. The way to strengthen the nation is to strengthen the homes of the people.

“I am satisfied that if we would look for the virtues in one another and not the vices, there would be much more of happiness in the homes of our people. There would be far less of divorce, much less of infidelity, much less of anger and rancor and quarreling. There would be more of forgiveness, more of love, more of peace, more of happiness. This is as the Lord would have it.”¹¹

PRACTICE

Discuss with your spouse how gospel principles (such as faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, and love) and covenants can strengthen your marriage. Write a plan to make needed improvements. Begin by working on the area of greatest need.

SCRIPTURES

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your marriage:

John 8:31–32 *1 Corinthians 2:9* *D&C 76:5–10*

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1949, 197.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World, *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 26.
6. *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1954–56), 2:58–59.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 35, 36.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 95; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 68.
9. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1941), 195.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 117–18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.
11. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 69; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 51.



**"HUSBAND AND WIFE HAVE A SOLEMN
RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE AND CARE
FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR THEIR CHILDREN."**

"THE FAMILY: A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD"



- **Defensiveness:** Responding defensively to complaints, criticism, or contempt by making excuses, denying, arguing, whining, or counter-blaming, rather than trying to solve the problem.
- **Stonewalling:** Withdrawing physically or emotionally from the relationship when disagreements occur, becoming like a stone wall.³

“The magic ratio is 5 to 1,” said Gottman. When positive feelings and interactions occurred five times more often than negative interactions and feelings, “the marriage was likely to be stable.”⁴

Recognize and Accept Differences between You and Your Spouse

Some individuals behave as if they believe husband and wife should think and act alike. If you recognize, accept, and appreciate differences between you and your spouse, you will be more understanding and responsive to your spouse’s needs and ways of doing things.

Examine Destructive Thought Patterns

You will find it difficult to communicate positively if you have negative thoughts about your spouse. Negative thoughts are often distorted; you might magnify your strengths and minimize your weaknesses, while magnifying your spouse’s weaknesses and minimizing his or her strengths. Correct any distorted thoughts you might have by challenging them, looking for evidence that they are inaccurate, viewing objectionable behavior in a different light, and considering that your spouse may have good intentions for his or her behavior. Pray that the Lord will help you see your spouse as He does.

Use Good Communication Skills

You can consciously practice and strengthen skills that will help you communicate better. To improve communication, you can do the following.

Be interested and attentive when your spouse is talking. Show nonverbal interest in what your spouse says by maintaining eye contact without staring and by paying attention instead of seeming distant or bothered.

Ask questions. Ask questions that invite your spouse to talk, such as “Something seems to be troubling you. Do you want to talk about it?”

Listen actively. Sometimes rephrase what you hear. For example: “You’re worried that your boss doesn’t like you.” When you rephrase, you show interest and understanding of your spouse’s message. If you misunderstood it, your spouse can clarify it.

Share intentions. When approaching a difficult topic, first identify and share your intentions—what you want for the relationship and what you want for your spouse and for yourself. For example: “I want you to know that I love you and that I want us to feel close to one another and to be able to trust each other fully.” When you share positive intentions, you will help your spouse understand that you are initiating the conversation to resolve problems and strengthen the relationship, not to criticize and complain.

Use “I” statements. Use “I” statements that share personal feelings when you are upset, rather than “you” messages that imply blame. For example, “I get upset when the rent isn’t paid on time,” rather than, “You’re irresponsible, and you make me mad.” “You” messages are judgmental and place blame. They invite resentment and defensiveness.

Agree with the truth. Agree with the truth when you receive criticism or blame. When you take responsibility for mistakes, you can calm arguments and increase your credibility. If you deny the truth, you often intensify problems and appear weak and guilty.

Praise your spouse. Honest praise enhances communication. As Gottman suggested, “Reminding your partner (and yourself!) that you really admire him or her is likely to have a powerful, positive effect on the rest of your conversation.”⁵

Clearly state preferences. Share your desires and expectations with your spouse. He or she may not know what you want and expect from your relationship. Use good judgment when asking for what you want; some wants and desires are inappropriate, harmful, or contrary to gospel principles.

Examine How You Talk to Each Other (process versus content)

Sometimes couples focus so much on the issues at hand, such as who takes out the garbage, that they fail to recognize that the way they communicate (the process) is the greater problem. For example, a wife may unrelentingly pursue an argument while her husband withdraws, trying to avoid conflict. Her intensity provokes his withdrawal, and his withdrawal provokes her unrelenting pursuit. Once they identify and correct the process (she backs off and he stops withdrawing), they can more easily resolve the problems that concern them both.

Examine your communication processes. See what you can do to avoid practices that undermine your ability to communicate.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve indicated how people could learn more loving communication: "I pray our Heavenly Father will help us to communicate more effectively in the home through a willingness to sacrifice, a willingness to listen, a willingness to vocalize feelings, a willingness to avoid judgment, a willingness to maintain confidences, and a willingness to practice patience. . . . May our gracious and kind Heavenly Father help us in our needs and desires for more effective family communication. Communication can help build family unity if we will work at it and sacrifice for it."⁶

PRACTICE

Choose one of the recommendations in this session for improving communication. Together with your spouse, make a plan to implement it. Practice communication skills together, taking turns talking and listening. Do not interrupt, even if your spouse interrupts you. If discussions become contentious, set a time to resume them later and take a break until then. Once you begin to master the skill you have chosen, choose another one to work on.

SCRIPTURES

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your marriage:

Proverbs 18:21 Matthew 15:18 James 3:2 3 Nephi 27:27

NOTES

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. "Healing Wounds in Marriage," *Ensign*, July 1993, 18–19.
3. From *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman, Ph.D. Copyright © 1994 by John Gottman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. NY. Pages 72–95. Quotations from pages 73, 79.
4. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 57.
5. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 196.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1976, 82; or *Ensign*, May 1976, 54.



**“THERE CAN BE NOTHING OF INFERIORITY OR
SUPERIORITY BETWEEN THE HUSBAND AND WIFE
IN THE PLAN OF THE LORD.”**

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



priesthood accepts his wife as a partner in the leadership of the home and family with full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating thereto. . . . The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (*meet* means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership.”⁵

Preside in Righteousness

Sometimes a husband uses his responsibility to preside as an excuse to dominate or abuse his wife or children. President Gordon B. Hinckley strongly condemned such actions: “Any man in this Church who abuses his wife, who demeans her, who insults her, who exercises unrighteous dominion over her is unworthy to hold the priesthood.”⁶

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord instructed that relationships should be guided by righteousness and “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; see also verse 36). In all your relationships, be sure to follow these leadership principles.

Identify and Rechanel Controlling Behavior

Taking charge is useful in the workplace to accomplish work-related goals. But taking charge is not the same as controlling others. Ordering others around can be quick and efficient, but it often provokes resentment and resistance, especially among family members. Ultimately, it causes problems that require far more effort to resolve than is needed to establish good relationships in the first place. If you have any tendency to control others, rechannel it and learn to control yourself. Control what you think, how you act, and what you say. Practice the behaviors taught in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42.

Identify and Correct Thoughts and Beliefs about Control

Thoughts underlie virtually all our feelings and behavior. For example, a controlling husband may think, “I’m in charge. My wife should do as I say.” A controlling wife may think, “I have to be in control. My husband can’t do anything right.”

If you challenge and correct your own distorted thinking, you will be more likely to act appropriately. To recognize underlying thoughts, start asking yourself why you tend to be controlling. The answers that come to mind will reveal your thoughts and beliefs. Next, challenge the accuracy of your thinking. For example, “Is it really true that my wife should do as I say? Is that belief consistent with Christ’s teachings?” “Is it really true that my husband can’t do anything right?” Correct your thinking, and your behavior is likely to improve.

Share Decision Making

In healthy marriages, husbands and wives make some decisions independently and some decisions together. You should make decisions together when the outcome affects both of you or when it affects others in the family. Some husbands and wives approach decision making in terms of winning and losing (for example, “If she decides, she’ll get her way,” or “If he gets his way, I’ll feel like a loser”).

With a little effort and a willingness to talk, you can make decisions that are acceptable to both of you. When one person dominates decision making, both people lose because one is ignored and the other is resented. Furthermore, the family fails to benefit from the wisdom of two experienced adults. As you make decisions with your spouse, you gain confidence that on those occasions when you must make decisions alone, your decisions will more likely represent your spouse’s views as well as your own.

Be Persistent

Established ways of thinking and behaving are often difficult to change. Old habits are hard to break, but they can be changed through persistent effort. As you invest time and energy in fostering unity and equality, you will bring new life to your marriage and help your spouse develop as a person; in turn, he or she will have greater love and respect for you.

ACTING AND REJOICING AS ONE

When you and your spouse work together in love and unity as equal partners, the results are synergistic—your combined effort is greater than the sum of your individual contributions.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve taught that oneness is essential for well-being in marriage: “Marriage allows [the] different characteristics [of men and women] to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren. For the greatest happiness and productivity in life, both husband and wife are needed. Their efforts interlock and are complementary. Each has individual traits that best fit the role the Lord has defined for happiness as a man or woman. When used as the Lord intends, those capacities allow a married couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and overcome them as one, to grow in love and understanding, and through temple ordinances to be bound together as one whole, eternally. That is the plan.”⁷

President Ezra Taft Benson declared that unity in marriage is essential for happiness and personal growth: “The secret of a happy marriage is to serve God and each other. The goal of marriage is unity and oneness, as well as self-development. Paradoxically, the more we serve one another, the greater is our spiritual and emotional growth.”⁸

PRACTICE

Choose one of the principles in this session that seems appropriate for you. Make a plan to work on it until you begin to master your objective. Then select another principle to work on.

SCRIPTURES

Study these scriptures, and consider how they can help you:

John 13:34–35 *Ephesians 5:33* *D&C 38:27* *D&C 121:39*

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 12; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 13.
3. David H. Olson and Amy K. Olson, *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths* (Minneapolis: Life Innovations, Inc., 2000), 7, 9. More information is available at www.prepare-enrich.com. This Web site is not affiliated with the Church; its inclusion here does not imply endorsement.
4. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 322.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 50–51.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 64; or *Ensign*, May 2002, 54.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 101; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 74.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 60.



**“WHO CAN CALCULATE THE WOUNDS INFLICTED,
THEIR DEPTH AND PAIN, BY HARSH
AND MEAN WORDS SPOKEN IN ANGER?”**

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



can control your anger. The following recommendations will help. Read through them, and apply those practices that work best for you.

Identify Your Anger Cycle

If you become angry often or regularly, you may engage in cyclical behavior that includes four phases. In the first phase, you may pretend that everything is normal, but anger lurks beneath the surface. This phase may be brief, or it may last for days, weeks, or longer. The second phase involves anger build-up, where you focus on distorted, anger-producing thoughts and make plans to act on the anger. This phase may also last for days or weeks at a time. Phase three is the acting-out phase—you explode and demean and assault another person physically or verbally. Phase four is the downward-spiral phase, in which you feel guilty and ashamed and try to cover your outburst by trying to be a good person. As your resolve breaks down, the cycle repeats.

Keep an Anger Log

Keep a record of when you become angry and how you deal with your anger. Write down the triggering event or person, the date, and the intensity of your anger on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being mild and 10 severe. Record the thoughts feeding your anger, how you dealt with the anger (your success or failure in controlling it), what seemed to help, and what you could do better next time. As you keep an anger log, your awareness of your anger cycle will increase. You can then interrupt anger in the early stages by using the principles in this session.⁴

Defuse Anger-Provoking Thoughts

Look for alternate explanations for the situations that provoke your anger. For example, the person who cuts in front of you in traffic may be late for an appointment. The person who makes fun of you may be trying to be funny, not trying deliberately to insult you. Think of troublesome situations as problems that need to be resolved, not as threatening events that demand a dramatic response. Work on changing your thoughts as soon as possible. People tend to become irrational after anger-buildup has occurred.

Raymond Novaco of the University of California at Irvine recommended coping statements to defuse anger-provoking thoughts.⁵ Such statements could include: "I'm not going to gain anything by getting mad," "If I get angry, I'll pay a price I don't want," "I can't assume the worst or jump to conclusions," "I can reason this out." Mentally rehearse such statements before you become angry so they will be available to you when the need arises.

Get Out of Anger-Provoking Situations

The best time to avoid anger is when you notice your stress increasing. As chemicals build in your body, your ability to reason and to control your behavior decreases. An enraged person often becomes irrational, possessing a false sense of power that fosters aggression, regardless of outcome or consequences. Monitor your anger. Imagine a thermometer that measures your anger level. If you lose control at 80 degrees, get out of the situation before it gets that hot. Tell the other person, "I'm getting angry. I need time to cool down." Don't blame the other person by saying, "You're making me angry." Set an agreeable time to resume the discussion.

Identify Activities that Calm You Down

Many kinds of activities can help you calm down when you begin to get angry. Relaxing activities include meditating, working, jogging, swimming, listening to music, reading a book, studying scriptures, or praying. Do not try to calm down by venting your anger or brooding over the incident. If you brood or vent, your anger will most likely escalate.

As you review the event in your mind again and again, you will often continue to exaggerate the situation. As you vent, you do the same, justifying in your mind the violent expression of your anger.

Share Underlying Feelings

Anger is often expressed in place of feelings of hurt, fear, embarrassment, or rejection. Some individuals are hesitant to share these feelings, fearing they will show weakness or vulnerability. However, being honest and forthright takes great strength, courage, and humility. When you share your underlying feelings, you will be able to resolve conflicts more easily. You will find that others are less defensive and more willing to work out problems. Your relationships with family members and others will improve.

Seek Spiritual Change

The process of coming unto Christ involves a spiritual transformation that results in peaceful, loving behavior. As Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve explained, when we become truly converted “the way we treat others becomes increasingly filled with patience, kindness, a gentle acceptance, and a desire to play a positive role in their lives.”⁶

If anger is a problem for you, your bishop or branch president can help you develop a plan to increase your spirituality. As you come unto Christ, you will become angry much less often.

THE PEACE OF GOD

The Apostle Paul said, “The peace of God . . . passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Those who have struggled with anger know how liberating it is to feel peace and freedom from this emotion. As one person described it, “I used to walk around feeling like I wanted to hurt everyone I saw. Anger dominated my life. As I applied gospel principles and as I learned to think differently and to view others in a better way, my anger went away. Now I can enjoy being around others. I have my life back again.”

PRACTICE

Develop a plan to resolve any anger problems in your life, using the principles taught in this session. Disrupt anger during the early stages of the anger cycle, before build-up occurs. Involve others in your plan, such as your family, friends, bishop, and others who can help. Write your plan and follow it, making changes as needed.

SCRIPTURES

Study these scriptures, and consider how they can help you:

Proverbs 16:32

3 Nephi 11:29–30

3 Nephi 12:22

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 74.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 106; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 80–81.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 71; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 50.
4. Suggestions for an anger log are adapted from Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 31–32. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.
5. *Anger Control: The Development and Evaluation of an Experimental Treatment* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1975). See pages 7, 95–96.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 26; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 20.



“HE THAT HATH THE SPIRIT OF CONTENTION
IS NOT OF ME, BUT IS OF THE DEVIL,
WHO IS THE FATHER OF CONTENTION.”

3 NEPHI 11:29



Phase Two—Explore Concerns

Explore the concerns that underlie each other's points of view. Explore the feelings, wishes, fears, memories, likes, dislikes, and values connected with the conflict. The focus must be on understanding and accepting the other person's point of view, even though it may differ from your own. Otherwise, postpone your discussion until each of you can understand and accept the view of the other. Look for compatible thoughts and feelings, and you will often find them. In the example above, both John and Jan were afraid of being left out of money management. Both were reared in homes where one parent dominated financial matters.

As you come to understand your spouse's motives, your empathy will usually increase and you will often discover a common ground. This phase is often successful when you broaden the frame of the problem from "what I want" and "what you want" to "what we would both like."

If concerns seem incompatible and resolution is not forthcoming, you may need to explore them in greater depth. Good communication skills are important. Review session 2 for information.

Phase Three—Select Mutually Satisfying Solutions

Sometimes an acceptable solution will become obvious to you and your spouse as you thoroughly explore your underlying concerns together. If a solution is not evident, brainstorm possibilities, writing down every idea that comes to mind. Then look for the solution that best addresses the underlying needs and wants you both have. Once you have reached a solution, ask yourselves whether any aspect of the problem still feels unresolved. If you feel unsettled with the solution or if you are unable to come up with an acceptable solution, repeat phase two, taking more time to explore the underlying concerns. Then repeat phase three, and you will likely find an acceptable solution.

RULES FOR DISCUSSING PROBLEMS

The following rules will help you through the conflict resolution process. Please review them before using the model.

- **Decide on a time and place to talk.** Don't begin until you both feel ready.
- **Stay on topic.** If needed, write down your points of view (phase one of the conflict-resolution model) and keep them in front of you. It's easy to get sidetracked.
- **Seek to understand instead of argue.** Both of you will lose if you seek to win an argument. Instead of arguing, try to understand your spouse's point of view.
- **Let your spouse talk.** Both of you should have an equal chance to talk without interruption.
- **Speak softly.** You and your spouse can more easily share thoughts and feelings in a stable, noncombative, calm environment. When voices are quiet, you are more likely to hear and feel the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
- **Take a break, if necessary.** If tempers flare, take a time-out, agreeing on a time to resume the discussion once tempers have cooled.
- **Be kind.** Do not attack your spouse's weaknesses or sensitive "hot spots."
- **Use appropriate language.** Profanity and name-calling are offensive, demeaning, and abusive. They impede the conflict-resolution process.
- **Discuss current issues.** Don't dredge up the past. Past issues should only be discussed if they are part of an ongoing unresolved problem.

- **Do not use violence.** Violent behavior is destructive and contrary to gospel principles.
- **Do not threaten divorce or separation.** Such threats have provoked couples into taking actions they later regret.
- **Seek spiritual help.** As you earnestly pray for assistance, the Lord will direct your efforts, soften hearts, and help you find solutions.
- **Rest and try again.** If you cannot solve a problem by using the model, agree to set the problem aside temporarily. Schedule a time to resume working on it with renewed energy.
- **Find measurable solutions.** For example, a solution such as “I’ll initiate family prayer, and you’ll initiate scripture study” is both measurable and observable.
- **Plan the implementation of the solution.** Decide who will do what, when it will be done, and how often it will be done.
- **Agree on reminders.** Agree on whether reminders are needed, who will give them, and how they will be given.
- **Plan for exceptions.** Plan how you will deal with circumstances that may interfere with the solution.
- **Reevaluate and revise.** Set a day and time to reevaluate your solution, making revisions if needed.

HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Individuals can find beauty in marriage as they strive to abide by gospel principles, as they work diligently to resolve disagreements and conflict, and as they strive to promote each other’s happiness and well-being.

Speaking of marriage, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “There is no other arrangement that meets the divine purposes of the Almighty. Man and woman are His creations. Their duality is His design. Their complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to His purposes. One is incomplete without the other. . . .

“The cure for most marital troubles does not lie in divorce. It lies in repentance and forgiveness, in expressions of kindness and concern. It is to be found in application of the Golden Rule.”⁴

PRACTICE

As a couple, use the conflict-resolution model to resolve an issue of lesser importance in your relationship. After learning to use the model successfully, apply it to issues of greater importance, addressing one conflict at a time.

SCRIPTURES

Consider how these scriptures can help you:

3 Nephi 11:29–30

D&C 38:27

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 86; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 65.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 109; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 82.
3. See *From Conflict to Resolution: Skills and Strategies for Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy* by Susan M. Heitler, Ph.D. Copyright © 1990 by Susan Heitler. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Pages 22–43.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 87–88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 84.



“IN THE ENRICHING OF MARRIAGE THE BIG THINGS ARE THE LITTLE THINGS. . . MARRIAGE IS A JOINT QUEST FOR THE GOOD, THE BEAUTIFUL, AND THE DIVINE.”

PRESIDENT JAMES E. FAUST



all centered in one being, their companion, and both are working together for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God, then happiness is at its pinnacle.”⁵

Take Time for Each Other

Because of many demands on your time, you must persistently seek ways to nurture your marriage relationship. Quite often, the activities that siphon away time and energy are good. Completing your education, succeeding in a career, raising children, fulfilling Church callings, and honoring civic and military obligations may all compete with marriage and family time.

Sometimes you have to make difficult decisions. When happiness and marital stability are at stake, you may need to sacrifice lucrative, time-consuming jobs and delay financial and personal goals. You may even need to reduce the amount of time spent in serving others to allow time for this most sacred relationship.

With your spouse, explore ideas for finding and spending time together. Possibilities include taking time in weekly planning meetings or family councils to schedule time when you can be alone together, taking a few minutes to talk at the end of each day, scheduling an occasional lunch together, scheduling a date night, or taking your spouse with you on a business trip.

Have Fun Together

During courtship, many couples become interested in each other as they participate together in fun activities; after they get married, they become so busy that all their interaction time is spent resolving the problems of life, work, and child rearing. Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan Blumberg observed that couples do not just suddenly find each other unattractive. Rather, “the biggest reason attraction dies down is that couples neglect the very things that built and maintained it in the first place, friendship and fun.”⁶ They recommended that you need to set aside time for fun and not try to solve problems during that time.⁷

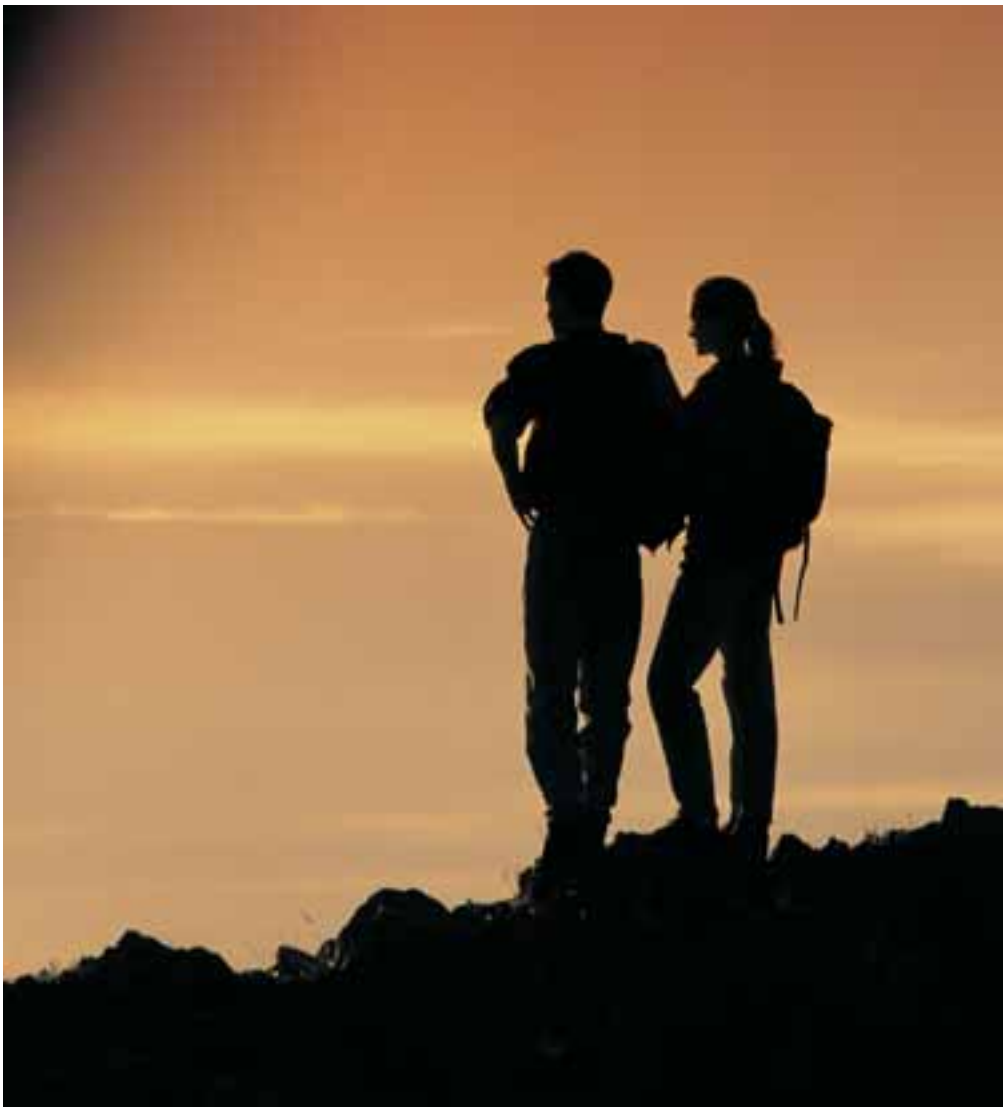
Writer Susan Page found in her research that thriving couples spend lots of recreational time together, away from the distractions of home and career. The activities themselves are not as important as the attitudes you have while doing them. Page noted that thriving couples do such things as “dance; run or work out; hike; ski; play volleyball; . . . eat out; go to movies, theater, or concerts; entertain friends; play parlor games.”⁸ Often, the most enjoyable activities cost the least.

Church leaders have taught that recreation strengthens family life. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve described the importance of “wholesome recreational activities” in establishing successful marriages and families.⁹

President Ezra Taft Benson taught that family home evening is a good time for family fun: “Family home evenings should be scheduled once a week as a time for recreation, work projects, skits, songs around the piano, games, special refreshments, and family prayers. Like iron links in a chain, this practice will bind a family together, in love, pride, tradition, strength, and loyalty.”¹⁰

Talk Frequently and Positively

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized the importance of frequent communication: “Some couples seem not to listen to one another. Taking time to talk is essential to keep lines of communication intact. 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.”¹¹



John Gottman of the University of Washington observed that successfully married couples engage in positive communication, which includes showing interest in what your spouse says; being affectionate verbally and physically; showing you care through thoughtful acts such as telephone calls and small gifts; being appreciative; showing concern by being supportive and expressing concern; being empathetic; accepting what your spouse is saying even if you disagree; joking in playful, witty, inoffensive ways, unless your spouse sees your humor negatively; and sharing your joy when you are delighted, excited, or having a good time.¹²

Perform Acts of Kindness

President Gordon B. Hinckley stressed the importance of the kindness that you can show to your spouse: "If every husband and every wife would constantly do whatever might be possible to ensure the comfort and happiness of his or her companion, there would be very little, if any, divorce." Speaking directly to the brethren, he added: "The women in our lives [have] particular qualities, divine qualities, which cause them to reach out in kindness and with love to those about them. We can encourage that outreach if we will give them opportunity to give expression to the talents and impulses that lie within them. In our old age my beloved companion said to me quietly one evening, 'You have always given me wings to fly, and I have loved you for it.'"¹³

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You can ask your spouse what he or she would like you to do more often to show that you care. Even better, you can perform caring acts without being asked to do them. However, in some cases, you may not know what your spouse wants without asking. Continued acts of kindness and expressions of love create a strong, enduring bond between you and your spouse.

HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE

Your relationship will thrive when you show love and appreciation. Acts of tenderness, consideration, and compassion are essential nutrients. When you give these nutrients, your spouse will feel alive and motivated to reach his or her highest potential. Do not expect that everything will always go well; you will have challenges. But if you and your spouse love and respect each other, you will find great satisfaction in marriage. As President Faust noted, "Happiness in marriage and parenthood can exceed a thousand times any other happiness."¹⁴

PRACTICE

Choose one of the principles for enriching your marriage. Make a plan to incorporate it in your life. Once you begin to master it, work on the next most important principle.

SCRIPTURES

Study these scriptures and consider how they apply to your marriage:

1 Corinthians 13 *Ephesians 5:25, 33*

NOTES

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1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
 2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1981, 17; or *Ensign*, May 1981, 15.
 3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 13; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 10.
 4. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.
 5. *Marriage and Divorce* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 24.
 6. *Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1994), 262-63.
 7. *Fighting for Your Marriage*, 254-56.
 8. *The 8 Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 54.
 9. "The Family: A Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
 10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 60.
 11. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 28; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 23.
 12. From *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman, Ph.D. Copyright © 1994 by John Gottman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. NY. Pages 59-61.
 13. In Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 87-88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 84-85.
 14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.

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