

Some Things We Have Learned—Together

JEFFREY R. AND PATRICIA T. HOLLAND

Jeff: Each time we have given an address to this student body, we have started off with a moment or two together, usually including a couple of jokes about my father-in-law. Then we have each presented individual messages. Today we are going to do something a little different—we are both going to stay up here because our message today is a shared one. What you see is what you get—the two of us—“The Pat and Jeff Show.” Indeed, we have tentatively entitled our remarks “Some Things We Have Learned—Together” and we hope both the audience and the television camera can handle two of us at once.

Pat: We are going to talk about some of the “before” and “after” of marriage—our marriage. But this will be slightly different from what might seem a traditional BYU sermonette on the subject. For one thing, this year we reach a milestone in our lives—we will have lived as long married to each other, twenty-two years, as we did before marriage. Surely that ought to justify some sort of sage advice from us.

Jeff: Yes, I was told on that fateful day in 1963 that with marriage I had come to the end of my troubles. I just didn’t realize which end they were speaking of.

Pat: The last thing we want to do is sound self-righteous, so our first assurance is that our marriage is *not* perfect, and we have the scar tissue to prove it. To quote my father, the rocks in Jeff’s head have not yet filled the holes in mine.

Jeff: So forgive us for using the only marriage we know, imperfect as it is, but for some time now we have wanted to reflect back on the half of our lives spent together since we were students at BYU and to see what, if anything, it might mean to you as you look ahead twenty-two years from now.

Pat: Before you get up and leave, let me again reassure you that this isn’t going to be the usual BYU talk on matrimony, important as that is. For one thing, we are going to try to apply these little lessons we have learned to all of you—single or married. For another thing, we fear that too many of you, especially the *women* in our student body, are too anxious about the subject already. So please don’t be anxious.

Jeffrey R. Holland, president of BYU, and his wife, Patricia T. Holland, delivered this devotional address on January 15, 1985.

Jeff: On the other hand, I know a few *men* around here who ought to be a little more anxious than they are.

Pat: Well, you're the president. Do something about it!

Jeff: Brethren, get anxious. Or, to be slightly more scriptural, get "anxiously engaged."

Pat: For all of the rest of you out there, women and men, we really believe romance and marriage, if they are going to come, will come a lot more naturally if you worry about them a lot less. By the same token we also know that is easy to say and hard to do. It's hard because so much of our young life in the Church is measured on a precise time sequence. We are baptized at eight. At twelve the young men are ordained deacons and the young women enter Mutual. Then we date at sixteen, graduate from high school at eighteen, and go on missions at nineteen or twenty-one.

Jeff: But then, suddenly, it is less and less structured, less and less certain. When do we marry? Surely in a Church manual somewhere there must be a specific year for that! Well, there *isn't*. Matters of marriage are much more personal than a prepublished celestial calendar would allow. And so our anxiety level leaps.

Pat: With that acknowledgment we are aware that some of you will not marry during your years at BYU, nor perhaps during the years thereafter. By talking on this subject we do not intend to make it more painful for some than it already is, but rather to draw some observations from our own marriage that might be of value to all of you—younger, older, married, or single. We pray for the blessings of the Lord to help us share something of our brief, ordinary, and sometimes tumultuous life together. *Another* twenty-two years of working things out would let us give a *much* better talk.

Jeff: With that long introduction I don't know whether this is our first piece of counsel or our last, but in any case, don't rush things needlessly and unnaturally. Nature has its rhythms and its harmonies. We would do well

to fit ourselves as best we can *with* those cycles rather than frantically throwing ourselves against them. As suggested a moment ago, I know that for some of you "rushing things" is *not* the problem. For the group whose progress is being measured in glacial centimeters, forget this part of the message. But for the rest of you, be calm, be patient, be happy with the season you are in.

Pat: As we look back on it now, twenty-two seems, if anything, pretty young to be getting married, though that was the right time for us. When it is right, it should be pursued, and for some that will be younger—or older—than others. But don't march to an arbitrary drummer who seems to be beating a frenzied cadence to the passing years.

Jeff: Twenty-one—

Pat: (Oh, dear, I'm facing . . .)

Jeff: Twenty-two—

Pat: (Will I ever find him?)

Jeff: Twenty-three—

Pat: (Oh, woe is me, woe is me.)

Jeff: Twenty-four—

Pat: (Death, make me thine! O grave, receive me!)

Jeff: Well, that's a little melodramatic, but not much.

Pat: We know of a few—not many, but a few—who have panicked that she . . .

Jeff: or he . . .

Pat: has not yet hit that matrimonial target established at ten years of age, *or*, worse yet, one established by a well-meaning aunt whose greeting every Christmas seems to be, "Well, you've been at BYU a full semester now. Have you found Mr. Right?"

Jeff: Or that solicitous uncle who says, "You've been home from your mission six weeks now. I guess wedding bells will be ringing soon, won't they? *They will, won't they?*"

Pat: Of course, we are not the best ones in the world to speak on that *particular* aspect inasmuch as we were engaged thirty days after Jeff got home from his mission.

Jeff: Well, I had a solicitous uncle.

Pat: But you also have to remember—and this is the point we hope to make here—that we knew each other well for two years before we started dating, dated another two years before Jeff’s mission, and then wrote for those two years he was away. That’s six years of friendship before we were engaged. Besides, when I first dated Jeff I couldn’t stand him. (I just throw that in as reassurance to you women out there who are dating men you can’t stand.)

Jeff: I throw it in as reassurance to the men who can’t be stood!

Pat: Then, still not to be outdone in the waiting game, I left for New York the day after we were engaged, leaving Jeff to hammer away at school while I studied music and filled a stake mission three-fourths of a continent away from him. That added another ten months, so I think it’s fair to say we didn’t rush things.

Jeff: Quite apart from the matter of school or missions or marriage or whatever, life ought to be enjoyed at every stage of our experience and should not be hurried and wrenched and truncated and torn to fit an unnatural schedule which you have predetermined but which may not be the Lord’s personal plan for you at all. As we look back with you today, we realize we have probably rushed too many things and been too anxious and too urgent for too much of our life, and perhaps you are already guilty of the same thing. We probably all get caught thinking real life is still ahead of us, still a little farther down the road.

Pat: Don’t wait to live. Obviously, life for all of us began a long time ago—twenty-two years longer for us than for you—and the sand is falling through that hourglass as steadily as the sun rises and rivers run to the sea. Don’t wait for life to gallop in and sweep you off your feet. It is a quieter, more pedestrian visitor than that. In a church which understands more about time and its relationship to eternity than any other, we of all people ought to savor every moment, ought to enjoy the time of

preparation *before* marriage, filling it full of all the truly good things of life—one of the most valuable of which is a university education.

Jeff: Before we leave this subject, let me add just one other related caution. In my professional and ecclesiastical life working with young adults—roughly the same second-half period of my life that corresponds to our marriage—I have regularly run into young men and women who are looking for that idealized partner who is some perfect amalgamation of virtues and characteristics seen in parents, loved ones, Church leaders, movie stars, sports heroes, political leaders, or any other wonderful men and women they may have known.

Pat: Certainly it is important to have thought through those qualities and attributes which you most admire in others, and which you yourself ought to be acquiring. But remember that when young people have visited with Sister Camilla Kimball about how wonderful it must be to be married to a prophet, she has said, “Yes, it is wonderful to be married to a prophet, but I didn’t marry a prophet. I just married a returned missionary.” Consider this statement from President Kimball on such down-to-earth choices:

Two people coming from different backgrounds soon learn 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. . . .

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

. . . yet real, lasting happiness is possible. . . . [and it] is within the reach of every couple, every person. “Soul mates” are fiction and an illusion; and while every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a

mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price. [Spencer W. Kimball, “Marriage and Divorce,” *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976), pp. 145–46; emphasis added]

On that note let us share with you a little “stark reality” of our own. Jeff and I have conversations from time to time which bring us down “out of the clouds,” to use President Kimball’s phrase.

Do you want to know what I have told him he does that irritates me the most? It is that he walks everywhere in a hurry—first five, then ten, then fifty feet in front of me. I have learned now to just call out and tell him when he gets where he’s going to save me a place.

Jeff: Well, as long as we are telling secrets, do you want to know what irritates me? It is that she is always late and that we are therefore always running to get somewhere, with me first five, then ten, then fifty feet in front of her.

Pat: We have learned to laugh about that a little, and now compromise—I watch the time a bit better, he slows down a stride or two, and we actually touch fingertips about every other bounce.

Jeff: But we don’t have everything worked out yet—like room temperatures. I used to joke about LDS scripturalists who worried about the body temperature of translated beings. I don’t joke anymore, because I now worry seriously about my wife’s body temperature. She has an electric blanket on high for eleven months of the year. She suffers hypothermia at the Fourth of July picnic. She thaws out from about 2:00 to 3:30 on the afternoon of August 12th, then it’s bundle-up time again.

Pat: He ought to talk. He throws the window open every night as if he’s Admiral Peary looking for the South Pole. But just let someone suggest a little winter morning’s jogging and

he sounds like a wounded Siberian sheepdog. Mr. Health here can’t tie his shoelaces without taking oxygen.

Jeff: As for different backgrounds, it’s hard to think two kids from St. George could have different backgrounds—or even any background at all. But regarding financial matters, Pat came from a family in which her father was very careful with money (and therefore always had some to share generously) while I came from a family in which my dad grew up without any money but later spent it as generously as if he had. Both families were very happy, but when the two of us came together it was “Hail, Columbia . . .”

Pat: “. . . and the devil take the hindmost.” That introduces to us another of those “stark realities” of marriage. To quote Elder Marvin J. Ashton in an address he recently gave to the membership of the Church:

How important are money management and finances in marriage and family affairs? Tremendously. The American Bar Association recently indicated that 89 percent of all divorces could be traced to quarrels and accusations over money. [Another study] estimated that 75 percent of all divorces result from clashes over finances. Some professional counselors indicated that four out of [every] five families [wrestle] with serious money problems. . . .

*. . . A prospective wife could well concern herself not with the amount her husband-to-be can earn in a month, but rather how will he manage the money that comes into his hands. . . . A prospective husband who is engaged to a sweetheart who has everything would do well to take yet another look and see if she has money management sense. [Marvin J. Ashton, “One for the Money,” *Ensign*, July 1975, p. 72]*

Controlling your financial circumstances is another one of those “marriage skills”—and we put that in quotation marks—that obviously matters to everyone and matters *long*

before entering into marriage. It matters while you're here at the university and you should learn to use a budget right now—today—this moment. One of the great laws of heaven and earth is that your expenses need to be less than your income. You can reduce your anxiety and your pain and your early marital discord—indeed, you can reduce your *parents'* anxiety and pain and marital discord right now!—if you will learn to manage a budget.

Jeff: As part of this general financial caution, we encourage, if necessary, plastic surgery for both husband and wife. This is a very painless operation and it may give you more self-esteem than a new nose job or a tummy tuck. Just cut up your credit cards. Unless you are prepared to use those cards under the *strictest* of conditions and restraints, you should not use them at all—at least not at 18 percent or 21 percent or 24 percent interest. No convenience known to modern man has so jeopardized the financial stability of a family—especially young struggling families—like the ubiquitous credit card. “Don’t leave home without it?” That’s precisely why he is leaving home—

Pat: and why she is leaving him! May I paraphrase something President J. Reuben Clark said once in general conference:

[Debt] *never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation; . . . it is never laid off work . . . ; it buys no food; it wears no clothes; it is unhoused . . . ; it has neither weddings nor births nor deaths; it has no love, no sympathy; it is as hard and soulless as a granite cliff. Once in debt, [it] is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away from it; you cannot dismiss it; . . . and whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you.* [J. Reuben Clark, Jr., CR, Apr. 1938, p. 103]

Jeff: Your religion should protect you against immorality and violence and any

number of other family tragedies which strike at marriages throughout the land. And if you will let it, your religion will protect you against financial despair as well. Pay your tithes and offerings first. No greater financial protection can be offered you. Then simply budget what is left the rest of that month. Make do with what you have. Do without. Say no. Your head can be held high even if your clothing is not the most stylish nor your home the most regal. It can be held high for the simple reason that it is not bent or bowed with the relentless burden of debt.

Pat: Well, that’s more than we intended to say about money, but we remember when we were your age.

Jeff: I remember last month.

This last topic is the most difficult of all, and probably the most important. I hope we can communicate our feelings about it. Much has been said to you during your dating years about the impropriety of intimacy before marriage. We have spoken on that here in this setting in earlier speeches. It is a message we hope you continue to hear often and one which we hope you honor with the integrity expected of a Latter-day Saint man or woman. But in these concluding moments we wish to say something about intimacy *after* marriage, an intimacy that goes far beyond the physical relationship a married couple enjoys. Such an issue seems to us to be at the very heart of the true meaning of marriage.

Pat: Marriage is the highest and holiest and most sacred of human relationships. And it is, because of that, the most intimate. When God brought Adam and Eve together before there was any death to separate them, he said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). To reinforce the imagery of that unity, the scriptures indicate that God had figuratively taken a rib from Adam’s side to make Eve, not from his front that she should lead him and not from his

back that she should despise him, but from his side, under his arm, close to his heart. There, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, husband and wife were to be united in every way, side by side. They were to give themselves totally to each other, and to “cleave unto [each other] and none else” (D&C 42:22).

Jeff: To give ourselves so totally to another person is the most trusting and perhaps the most fateful step we take in life. It seems such a risk and such an act of faith. None of us walking toward the altar would seem to have the confidence to reveal *everything* that we are—all our hopes, all our fears, all our dreams, all our weaknesses—to another person. Safety and good sense and this world’s experience suggest that we hang back a little, that we not wear our heart on our sleeve where it can so easily be hurt by one who knows so much about us. We fear, as Zechariah prophesied of Christ, that we will be “wounded in the house of [our] friends” (Zechariah 13:6).

But no marriage is really worth the name, at least not in the sense that God expects us to be married, if we do not fully invest all that we have and all that we are in this other person who has been bound to us through the power of the holy priesthood. Only when we are willing totally to share life does God find us worthy to give life. Paul’s analogy for this complete commitment was that of Christ and the Church. Could Christ, even in his most vulnerable moments in Gethsemane or Calvary, hold back? In spite of what hurt might be in it, could he fail to give all that he was and all that he had for the salvation of his bride, his church, his followers—those who would take upon them his name even as in a marriage vow?

Pat: And by the same token, his church cannot be reluctant or apprehensive or doubtful in its commitment to him whose members we are. So, too, in a marriage. Christ and the Church, the groom and the bride, the man and the woman must insist on the most complete union. Every mortal marriage is to recreate the

ideal marriage sought by Adam and Eve, by Jehovah and the children of Israel. With no hanging back, “cleaving unto none other,” each fragile human spirit is left naked, as it were, in the custody of its marriage partner, even as our first parents were in that beautiful garden setting. Surely that is a risk. Certainly it is an act of faith. But the risk is central to the meaning of the marriage and the faith moves mountains and calms the turbulent sea.

Jeff: It would be worth our time with you today if we could impress upon you the sacred obligation a husband and wife have to each other when the fragility and vulnerability and delicacy of the partner’s life is placed in the other’s keeping. Pat and I have lived together for twenty-two years, as she said earlier—roughly the time that each of us had lived alone prior to the wedding day. I may not know everything about her, but I know twenty-two years’ worth, and she knows that much of me. I know her likes and dislikes, and she knows mine. I know her tastes and interests and hopes and dreams, and she knows mine. As our love has grown and our relationship matured, we have been increasingly open with each other about all of that for twenty-two years now, and the result is that I know much more clearly how to help her and I know exactly how to hurt her. I may not know all the buttons to push, but I know most of them. And surely God will hold me accountable for any pain I cause her by intentionally pushing the hurtful ones when she has been so trusting of me. To toy with such a sacred trust—her body, her spirit, and her eternal future—and exploit those for my gain, even if only emotional gain, should disqualify me to be her husband and ought to consign my miserable soul to hell. To be that selfish would mean that I am a legal, live-in roommate who shares her company, but I am not her husband in any Christian sense of that word. I have not been as Christ is to the Church. We would not be bone of one bone, and flesh of one flesh.

Pat: God expects a marriage, not just a temple-sanctioned understanding or arrangement or live-in wage earner or housekeeper. Surely everyone within the sound of my voice understands the severe judgment that comes upon such casual commitments before marriage. Today I want you to know that I believe there is an even more severe judgment upon me *after* marriage if all I do is share Jeff's bed and his work and his money and, yes, even share his children. It is not marriage unless we literally share each other, the good times and the bad, the sickness and the health, the life and the death. It is not marriage unless I am there for him whenever he needs me.

Jeff: You can't be a good wife or a good husband or a good roommate or a good Christian just when you "feel well." A student once walked into the office of Harvard Dean LeBaron Russell Briggs and said he hadn't done his assignment because he hadn't felt well. Looking the student piercingly in the eye, Dean Briggs said, "Mr. Smith, I think in time you may perhaps find that most of the work in the world is done by people who aren't feeling very well" (quoted by Vaughn J. Featherstone, "Self-Denial," *New Era*, November 1977, p. 9). 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 may want to bail out in midflight, then I can promise you it's going to be a pretty chilly trip less than fifteen minutes after leaving 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.

Pat: Is it any wonder that we dress ourselves in white and go to the house of the Lord and kneel before God's administrators to pledge ourselves to each other with a confession of Christ's atonement? How else can we bring the strength of Christ to this union? How else can we bring his patience and his peace and his preparation? And above all, how else can we bring his permanence, his staying

power? We must be bonded so tightly that *nothing* will separate us from the love of this man or this woman.

Jeff: In that regard we have that most reassuring of all final promises; *that the power which binds us together in righteousness is greater than any force—any force—which might try to separate us*. That is the power of covenant theology and the power of priesthood ordinances. That is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pat: Just one concluding experience which, although taken from our marriage, has application to you right now—young or old, married or single, new convert or longtime member. Twenty-two years ago (we're coming full circle to close on that number) Jeff and I, marriage certificate in hand, made our way to Brigham Young University. We put all we owned in a secondhand Chevrolet and headed for Provo. We were not uneasy. We were not frightened. We were terrified. We were little hayseeds from St. George, Utah, and here we were in Provo—at Brigham Young University, where the world was to be our campus.

The housing people were very helpful in providing lists of apartments. The registration staff helped straighten out some transfer credits. The folks in the employment center suggested where we might work. We pieced together some furniture and found some friends. Then we splurged, left our new \$45-a-month, two-room-and-a-shower apartment to have an evening meal in the Wilkinson Center cafeteria. We were impressed and exhilarated and still terrified. We knew we were on the greatest of all possible campuses.

Jeff: I remember on one of those beautiful summer evenings walking up from our apartment on Third North and First East to the brow of the hill where the Maeser Building so majestically stands. Pat and I were arm in arm and very much in love, but school had not started and there seemed to be so very much at stake. We were nameless, faceless, meaningless little undergraduates seeking our place in the sun.

And we were newly married, each trusting our future so totally to the other, yet hardly aware of that at the time. I remember standing about halfway between the Maeser Building and the President's Home and being suddenly overwhelmed with the challenge I felt—new family, new life, new education, no money and no confidence. I remember turning to Pat and holding her in the beauty of that August evening and fighting back the tears. I asked, "Do you think we can do it? Do you think we can compete with all these people in all these buildings who know so much more than we do and are so able? Do you think we've made a mistake?" Then I said, "Do you think we should withdraw and go home?"

As a brief tribute to her in what has been a very personal message anyway, I guess that was the first time I saw what I would see again and again and again in her—the love, the confidence, the staying power, the reassurance, the careful handling of my fears, and the sensitive nurturing of my faith, especially faith in myself. She (who must have been terrified herself, especially now, linked to me for life) nevertheless set aside her own doubts, slammed shut the hatch on the airplane and grabbed me by the safety belt. Of course we can do it," she said. "Of course we're not going home." Then, standing there, almost literally in the evening shadows of a home we would much later, for a time, call our own, she gently reminded me that surely others were feeling the same thing, that what we had in our hearts was enough to get us through, that our Father in Heaven would be helping.

Pat: If you stand on the south patio of the President's Home you can see the exact spot

two vulnerable, frightened, newly married BYU students stood twenty-two years ago, fighting back the tears and facing the future with all the faith they could summon.

Some nights we stand and look out on that spot—usually nights when things have been a little challenging—and we remember those very special days.

Please don't feel you are the only ones who have ever been fearful or vulnerable or alone—before marriage or after. Everyone has, and from time to time perhaps everyone will yet be.

Help each other. You don't have to be married to do that. Just be a friend, be a BYU student and all that that means. Be a Latter-day Saint. And if you are married, no greater blessings can come to your union than some of the troubles and challenges you'll face if you'll rev up your motor and bear straight ahead through lightning and thunder and turbulence and all.

Jeff: Paraphrasing James Thurber in one of the best and simplest definitions of love ever given, "Love is what you go through together" ("Thurber," *Life*, March 14, 1960, p. 108). That counts not only for husbands and wives but also parents and children, brothers and sisters, roommates and friends, missionary companions, and every other human relationship worth enjoying.

Love, like individuals, is tested by the flame of adversity. If we are faithful and determined it will temper and refine us, but it will not consume us. Enjoy what you now have. Be a disciple of Christ. Live worthy of marriage even if it doesn't come soon. And cherish it with all your heart when it does. We say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.