

“Marriage Is Ordained of God”

(D&C 49:15)

BRENT A. BARLOW

I am honored to be here today, brothers and sisters, to give this devotional address. Brother Fred Skousen contacted me in the middle of June and asked me if I would be a devotional speaker. I told him I would be honored to do so, and we talked about topics. I said that I had a real concern about what is happening to marriage in America and that I would like to come and talk about that and why we all need to become involved—not only concerning families, which we talk a lot about nationwide, but why we have to have renewed interest in marriage as well.

There is nationwide concern about the next generation regarding marriage. I identify particularly the people from the ages 16 to 26 because some of the best thinkers in this nation have said, “As goes the next generation, so goes the nation.” What you do regarding marriage and family will determine a lot about the future of this country. We are at a crossroad in the United States. The trends that have been established during the last four decades regarding marriage and family have contributed to the demise of marriage and family, but there are some indications that, nationwide, your generation is changing and is putting marriage and family as a top priority. So we are very interested to see which way you are going to go.

I believe that your generation is very critical for the Church, not only regarding your own marriages now or in the future, but because you will be training the next generation of young people. Go to the junior highs and elementary schools and look at them, because you will be having them in classes in the next decade or so. It is interesting that just a month ago Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom mandated that elementary school children be taught about marriage. Other nations are concerned about marriage. You have a real challenge ahead of you. I would invite you today to become part of the marriage movement, to become not only concerned about your own marriage and family but also about how and what you are going to teach others.

LDS is an acronym for Latter-day Saints, but I would like it to become also known as “Let’s Do Something.” We need to become involved. I think the Lord expects His people to become involved in good causes, and certainly this is a good cause.

My wife, Susan, is sitting on the stand. We met here at BYU, and I could take the full 30

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minutes to share our experiences here. We took an Old Testament class together. Neither of us got very high grades in that class. To this day we don't know much about Old Testament, but that's where we met, and I'm grateful for that. I get nervous when she comes with me to give speeches, particularly if I'm going to talk about our marriage, because I have to revise my notes when she's here. I often hear whisperings in the night that I should become a better husband. I've recently realized that part of those whisperings are coming from her. Today I commit to her and to you that I will try to be a better husband.

My remarks today can be summarized in a humorous experience I had at BYU not long ago. I love spontaneous humor, and it occurred in a classroom with a parable.

In my marriage preparation classes at BYU I often quote a scripture on the very first day of class. It is the parable of the tower in Luke 14:28–30. It reads:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

This scripture notes that we should not begin something without counting the cost or effort it will take to finish the project. It is a great analogy about contemporary marriage. Almost all Americans (88 percent—down from 94 percent in the early 1970s) still marry during some point in their lives. But many have not counted the cost or effort it takes to stay married—evident by our high divorce rate during the past four decades.

During the first day of one of my classes not long ago, I told the students there was an important scripture in Luke 14:28–30 about contemporary marriage. I asked one of the students to read the scripture, and a young coed

volunteered. Others in the class awaited this important insight from the Bible on contemporary marriage. But the young student mistakenly opened her Bible to Luke chapter 13 (not 14), verse 28, and read the following: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Although the coed made an error in reading the scripture—much to the amusement of the rest of her classmates—she did, perhaps, capture the essence of contemporary marriage in America. Will we count the costs and make the efforts to continue in marriage once we begin? Or will there be, as it says in Luke 13:28, "weeping and gnashing of teeth"? Perhaps we have had too much of the latter and not enough of the former with marriage in America today.

During the week of April 5 through 9 of this year, my community education class sponsored a Marriage Awareness Week at Brigham Young University. We set up a table near the west entrance of the Wilkinson Student Center and put out an assortment of books, videos, pamphlets, and tapes—all describing the importance of marriage in America. Many students and faculty members stopped by our booth during the week, and some were more enthusiastic than others about our endeavor.

While I was with my students at our Marriage Awareness Week booth, one young coed briefly stopped for a moment and then asked, somewhat in jest, "Do we really need something like this at BYU?" My students and I tried to convince her that, yes, indeed, we do need a Marriage Awareness Week, and particularly at BYU. I would like to tell you why I feel so during the few minutes I speak at this BYU devotional this morning and share with you my renewed testimony that, in light of recent trends, "marriage is," indeed, "ordained of God" (D&C 49:15).

To present my case that we do need Marriage Awareness Week not only at BYU but in all communities in America, I would like to briefly call your attention to six items: (1) A Quote 2,000 Years Old, (2) A Scripture About

Marriage and the Last Days, (3) *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*, (4) *The State of Our Unions*, (5) A Government Declaration on Marriage, and (6) A BYU Class Project.

1. A Quote 2,000 Years Old

I have always believed that marriage is very important in life for several reasons. But exactly how important it is I did not realize until the past few years. In the fall of 1996 I read a quote by Roman statesman and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.). It is now hanging on my wall in my office at BYU. He said, “The first bond of society is marriage” (*De Officiis*, I, 78 B.C.). Notice that he did not say that marriage is just one bond, or another bond among several others. Cicero said that marriage is the first bond, and therefore the most important bond on which societies are built! During the priesthood session of our recent general conference, President Hinckley noted the same thing. He said, “God-sanctioned marriage between a man and a woman has been the basis of civilization for thousands of years” (“Why We Do Some of the Things We Do,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 54).

For nearly 30 years I have taught on four major college campuses that marriage is important for a variety of reasons. But I didn’t fully realize its significance until reading and pondering the Cicero quote in light of what has recently been happening to marriage in this country and abroad. I began to read and study more intently what others have said in the past and are now stating about the importance of marriage. I can now say, without hesitation, I believe Cicero was correct: Marriage is the first bond of society.

Many have vigorously claimed that the family is the foundation of society. “Family values” are becoming increasingly popular in our local, state, and even national political campaigns. Family values appear to be an integral part of the political campaigns for the year 2000. We frequently hear about the importance of the family from the pulpit, sometimes from the media, and occasionally from a few other

sources. The concepts of family and, particularly, parenting are “in” at the present time. But who is advocating marriage?

Why is it that we can talk even now on a national basis about the importance of family and almost completely ignore what is becoming more and more evident: stable marriages promote stable parents; stable parents are better able to rear stable children; stable children have a better chance of becoming stable adults; and stable adults are more likely to have stable marriages, thus completing the cycle. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell has observed:

How can a nation nurture family values without consistently valuing and protecting the family in its public policies? How can we value the family without valuing parenting? And how can we value parenting if we do not value marriage? How can there be “love at home” without love in a marriage?

[Neal A. Maxwell, “Take Especial Care of Your Family,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 89]

2. A Scripture About Marriage and the Last Days

There are many scriptures, both ancient and modern, about the last days. Toward the end of His mortal ministry, Christ’s disciples inquired of Him about the last days and His second coming. They asked, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus answered and spoke of conditions that would exist prior to His second coming. Of particular interest regarding marriage and family relationships, Jesus stated:

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. . . .

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. [Matthew 24:10, 12]

We also read in 2 Timothy 3:1–4:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [uncontrolled in seeking sexual gratification], fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. [Also see D&C 29:8–21, 45:16–33; Mormon 8:25–32; and Bruce R. McConkie, “The Coming Tests and Trials and Glory,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 71–73]

But there is one scripture that has been of particular interest to me, and increasingly so during the past few years. That scripture is 1 Timothy 4:1–3. It reads:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.

Pay particular attention to that last phrase about “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.” It is very significant in light of a latter-day revelation in 1831 on marriage: section 49 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the Shakers or the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing.

The Shaker movement began in England about 1706 as an offshoot of the Quakers. Ann Lee (1736–1784) was a member, and in 1770 she became the leader of the church. Mother Ann, as she was called, and some of her followers came to the United States in 1774, and the religious movement grew rapidly. Even though Ann Lee had married and given birth to four children, all of whom died in infancy, it soon became evident

that she believed marriage and the sexual relationships associated with it were detrimental to spiritual growth. The loss of her children and her unhappy experiences with her marriage undermined both her mental and physical health and strongly conditioned her views towards sexual intimacy and the institution of marriage.

As the Shaker movement expanded in America, one community was eventually established near Cleveland, Ohio, where Leman Copley had apparently lived. Among other things, Shakers believed baptism was unnecessary; celibacy was preferable to marriage; eating meat was inappropriate; Christ had returned to the earth as a woman, Ann Lee; and the millennial reign had begun.

There were two levels or orders among the Shakers. Those in the second order continued to live as singles, or, if married, with spouses and children often outside the Shaker communities. Those in the highest order, however, remained single or renounced marital vows to a husband or wife and moved into separate dwellings in Shaker communities where the interaction between men and women was highly regulated. Children from the marriages were well cared for but also lived in separate buildings apart from their parents. (See Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1953]; Marguerite Fellows Melcher, *The Shaker Adventure* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941]; and Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* [1875; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1965].)

In May 1831, the Lord apparently had the scripture of 1 Timothy 4:1–3 in mind when He gave the Prophet Joseph Smith the interesting revelation on the importance of marriage. Leman Copley, a new convert to the Church, had previously been a Shaker. Apparently Latter-day Saints had discussed the Shaker beliefs, and the revelation was given to correct some of the erroneous views.

Shakers believed, among other things, that one became closer to God by remaining single or by abandoning marriage and living a celibate life. When the revelation on marriage was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, however, the Lord declared just the opposite was true: “And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man,” and marriage was instigated “before the world was made” (D&C 49:15, 17).

These sentiments were reiterated 164 years later, in 1995, when the First Presidency of the LDS Church and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave a proclamation to the world on the family. It stated:

We . . . 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. . . .

*The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. [“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102]*

Hence we have a latter-day revelation and a modern proclamation regarding an ancient prophecy: The demise of marriage in the last days.

3. *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*

With scriptural and prophetic admonitions in mind, let me now cite two recent reports. The first came out almost simultaneously with the LDS proclamation on the family in 1995. It was published by the Council on Families in America and is titled *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*. Here are observations from the executive summary of that report:

The divorce revolution—the steady displacement of a marriage culture by a culture of divorce and unwed parenthood—has failed. It has created terrible hardships for children, incurred unsupport-

able social costs, and failed to deliver on its promise of greater adult happiness. The time has come to shift the focus of national attention from divorce to marriage and to rebuild a family culture based on enduring marital relationships. [Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation (New York: Council on Families in America, Institute for American Values, 1995), 1]

The report continues:

The core message of this report is basic and blunt. To reverse the current deterioration of child and societal well-being in the United States, we must strengthen the institution of marriage. We realize that strengthening marriage cannot be our only goal. But we insist that it must become our most important goal. For unless we reverse the decline of marriage, no other achievements—no tax cut, no new government program, no new idea—will be powerful enough to reverse the trend of declining child well-being. . . .

. . . We call for the nation to commit itself to this overriding goal: To increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents and decrease the proportion of children who do not. . . .

. . . Who, today, is still promoting marriage? Who is even talking about it? In place of a national debate about what has happened to marriage there has been silence—stone-cold silence. [Marriage in America, 4–5; emphasis in original]

Notice the report asked in 1995, “Who, today, is still promoting marriage? Who is even talking about it?” Perhaps they had not yet seen the Church’s proclamation on families. I ask, brothers and sisters, should we be doing something about this? Should this topic be in our discussions? Is there something we should be doing particularly at Brigham Young University?

4. *The State of Our Unions*

The second report is from Rutgers University, titled *The State of Our Unions*. It is

part of the National Marriage Project, noting and reporting current trends of marriage in America. It was released in July of this year, ironically just two weeks after I was asked to speak at this devotional on the topic of marriage. The 32-page report noted:

Key social indicators suggest a substantial weakening of the institution of marriage. Americans have become less likely to marry. [This is reflected in a decline of more than 43 percent, from 1960 to 1996, in the annual number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women.] When they do marry their marriages are less happy. And married couples face a high likelihood of divorce. Over the past four decades, marriage has declined as the first living together experience for couples and as a status of parenthood. . . .

Cohabitation [living together] is emerging as a significant experience for young adults. It is now replacing marriage as the first living together union. [The State of Our Unions (New Brunswick, New Jersey: The National Marriage Project, 1999), 3, 10]

I will pause reading from the report for a moment. I just read an article yesterday or the day before that said that it is estimated now that one-half of couples who marry in the United States live together prior to marriage. Rutgers University put out another report about cohabitation indicating that cohabitation in fact increases the likelihood of divorce and does not decrease it (see David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together?: What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage, A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research* [New Brunswick, New Jersey: The National Marriage Project, 1999]). So we have this national trend of people just living together. The divorce rate actually declined in 1998 for the first time. I think one of the reasons is that fewer people are marrying.

Now, continuing with *The State of Our Unions* report:

When men and women marry today, they are entering a union that looks very different from the one that their parents or grandparents entered. . . .

. . . Marriage is surrounded by longer periods of partnered or unpartnered singlehood over the course of a lifetime. [p. 6]

The United States lags well behind England, Australia, and Canada in the level and seriousness of governmental response to the widespread evidence of the weakening of marriage. [p. 7]

Over the past two decades, the percentage of people who say they are in “very happy” first marriages has declined substantially and continuously. . . .

. . . The pervasive generational experience of divorce has made almost all young adults more cautious and even wary of marriage. [p. 8]

Other interesting insights from the Rutgers report point out:

Premarital sex has become something of a misnomer. Sex is increasingly detached from the promise or expectation of marriage. [p. 9]

Marriage has lost broad support within the community and even among some of the religious faithful. [p. 12]

Because women are better educated and more likely to be employed outside of the home today than in the past, they are not as dependent on marriage as an economic partnership. [p. 14]

And what about the future of marriage in America?

Persistent long-term trends suggest a steady weakening of marriage as a lasting union, a major stage in the adult life course, and as the primary institution governing childbearing and parenthood. [p. 15]

With these well-documented trends noted in America, what can we expect from other

countries in the world? I attended a conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors in Dallas, Texas, in 1997, and this same question was posed and discussed. The projection? As goes America, so go the rest of the countries—although at different rates of change. The exposure of other people of the world to the American culture through our media, movies, television programs, and printed materials apparently gives insights and even motivation for change, whether for good or for evil. Americans, it was suggested, cannot be oblivious to the impact we have on the families and cultures of people in other countries. And because we have the greatest knowledge base and resources for helping, we cannot ignore either the opportunity or responsibility to assist marriages and families in other countries in the world as well as in our own.

5. A Government Declaration on Marriage

Even though the U.S. government did pass the Defense of Marriage Act in September 1996, defining marriage as a relationship between a male and female, *The State of Our Unions* report noted that the United States is lagging behind other countries in trying to promote and stabilize marriage. The demise of marriage in America apparently has begun to concern contemporary policy makers at the highest level of government. On September 21, 1999, Bruce Reed, President Clinton's chief domestic policy advisor, was quoted as saying, "To the extent that the collapse of marriage is behind larger social problems, the government has to deal with it." The reporter, Will Dunham, noted that "the Clinton administration has embraced the idea that strong marriages and two-parent families are in the national interest." In reference to this statement, Dunham quoted Reed again:

"That was a controversial notion when political leaders in both parties stepped forward in the early '90s and started talking about it," he added.

*"It's not so controversial now, but I think it's not a moral judgment, it's just simply an analytical fact that if you can increase the ratio of kids who grow up with two parents you're going to reduce a number of social problems associated with (children in single-parent homes)." ["Decline of Marriage Called a Threat to U.S.," *Deseret News*, 21 September 1999, A2]*

But the federal government is paying a high price for the catch-up policy on the importance of marriage. Just a week earlier, on September 13, 1999, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that four states and the District of Columbia had been given an award of a combined \$100 million for reducing the number of births to unwed mothers without increasing the number of abortions. It is anticipated that this welfare windfall will be an annual event. California, Michigan, Alabama, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia were each awarded \$20 million for their efforts to reduce the number of births to unwed mothers based on data from 1996 to 1997. Utah likely will have difficulty qualifying for the \$20 million annual award because it was noted we currently have the lowest percent of births to unwed mothers in the nation. Nationally, about one in three babies is born to unwed parents. Out-of-wedlock birth rates range from 16.4 percent in Utah to 45 percent in Mississippi. In Washington, D.C., the rate is 65 percent. (See Laura Meckler, "4 States, D.C. Rewarded for Cutting Unwed Births," *Deseret News*, 16 September 1999, A16.)

Australia has taken the lead of the countries in the world in trying to promote and stabilize marriage. In June 1998 the Australian government published an extensive report titled *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia). Marital and family disruption in Australia is estimated to cost the government \$3 billion in direct costs and another \$3 billion in indirect costs—a total

of 4.4 percent of their total annual budget (p. 51). Recently, \$18 million a year was set aside to strengthen marriages in that country.

On September 7, 1999, the *London Daily Telegraph* had an article stating “Schoolchildren are to be taught the importance of marriage as part of Tony’s Blair’s new moral crusade.” The article reported that Prime Minister Blair wants “to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies in Britain—the highest in Western Europe” and that “teachers will have to instruct pupils aged between seven and 16 about the value of traditional two-parent families and the responsibilities of bringing up children.” Also, “boys as young as 13 will be warned that they will be pursued by the Child Support Agency if they father babies.” (From George Jones, “Children to Be Taught About Marriage,” *London Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 1999.)

We cannot ignore marriage trends in other countries because they have impact on Latter-day Saints living in those areas. For instance, on September 15, 1999, Peter Lodrup, a professor of law at the University of Oslo, Norway, visited and spoke on the BYU campus. Some of us had a chance to meet informally with Professor Lodrup that morning for about an hour. We discussed marriage trends both in the United States and in Norway. He informed us that the vast majority of firstborn children in families in Norway are born out of wedlock. Nearly all couples live together prior to marriage in Norway, and apparently this is the case in many other Scandinavian countries. When a child is conceived and born in Norway, nearly all of the couples then marry. Thus, cohabitation before marriage and parenthood, according to Professor Lodrup, is nearly universal in Norway. Could this be a future trend for the United States as well? The trends indicate we are heading in that direction.

As Latter-day Saints we should be interested in what is happening in other countries regarding marriage and family. We have a substantial number of Latter-day Saints now who

live outside the United States, so we are our brother’s keeper not only on a national or state basis but, perhaps, on a worldwide basis.

At the state level in the United States, government leaders are beginning to realize a need for marriage awareness. Louisiana and Arizona passed covenant marriage bills in 1998 giving the option, once again, for a marriage commitment of “until death do us part” rather than the contemporary commitment of “as long as our love shall last” in the other 48 states. In April of this year (1999), Governor Frank Keating of Oklahoma in his inaugural address also announced a goal to reduce the divorce rate by one-third by the year 2010. Oklahoma currently has the second-highest divorce rate in the nation.

In relation to this, you might be interested to know that this year Florida passed a law that all high school seniors will take a course that includes marriage education before graduating. That was very controversial.

Governor Leavitt and First Lady Jacalyn S. Leavitt of Utah have also taken the lead among governors in promoting marriage at the state level. For the past seven years they have held a series of marriage conferences each year throughout the state with the largest held in Salt Lake City. The last one was held on September 24, 1999, in the Salt Palace with more than 1,500 in attendance. The first lady of Utah also announced that evening a second marriage conference to be held in Salt Lake City in the early part of the year 2000.

The Leavitts were also the first to organize a commission on marriage in the nation on September 18, 1998. As a result, they were asked to be the keynote speakers on July 1, 1999, at the Smart Marriage Conference in Washington, D.C. They addressed the topic, among other things, of why governments need to be involved in promoting and stabilizing marriage. I really appreciated Governor Leavitt’s comments when he said that it is not so much that we as governments want to promote marriage but that when marriage and

family fail, governments have to pick up the pieces, often at great cost to the government and community. That is why we have to get involved whether we want to or not.

On September 29, 1999, Governor Leavitt signed a declaration of marriage and declared September 25 to October 2, 1999, as Marriage Awareness Week in Utah.

The signing of the declaration in September was at a significant occasion called Utah Celebrates Marriage. It was held in the state capitol building. A highlight of the gathering was the presence of 34 couples from Utah who had been married 70 years or more. It was a marvelous thing. One couple from American Fork, Elijah and Alta Chipman, have been married for 76 years. They were proud to be interviewed about what it takes to be married 76 years. I also want to mention Erlend Peterson from our BYU administration. His family had a display table dedicated to his great-grandparents: Peter and Celestia Peterson from Fairview, Utah. In 1958 they had been married 82 years. It was a world record at the time. The Petersons got a letter from President Eisenhower congratulating them, and there was a write-up in the January 1959 *Life* magazine about them.

The Young Ambassadors were there with their director Randy Boothe. They sang love songs from the '20s and '30s to these couples who have stayed together over the years. I was proud to be from BYU and hear those wonderful young people sing those songs.

Now let me read the declaration on marriage. I think it summarizes very well the sentiments of many government officials—both state and federal—about the importance and prominence of marriage:

Declaration

Whereas, marriage in every known human society creates new families, binds men and women together in a network of affection, mutual aid, and mutual obligation, commits fathers and mothers

to their children and connects children to a wider network of welcoming kin; and

Whereas, a healthy, loving marriage deserves our special respect because it provides irreplaceable personal happiness and creates the safest place for children to flourish and to enjoy the full emotional, moral, educational and financial benefits of both parents; and

Whereas, research indicates that men and women who marry and stay married in mutually supportive relationships generally live longer, experience better health, and enjoy more satisfying lives; and

Whereas, marriage breakdown takes a toll on the emotional, physical and financial well-being of all family members and communities and also increases the cost to taxpayers of many public human service programs; and

Whereas, Utahns are committed to promoting enrichment opportunities and resources that strengthen marital relationships and enhance personal growth, mutual fulfillment and family well-being; and

Whereas, I wish to applaud and encourage efforts by Utah citizens, faith communities, businesses, organizations, and local government and community leaders to strengthen marriages in a variety of ways, including marriage education programs, conferences, enrichment seminars and public policies that support marriage;

Now, Therefore, I, Michael O. Leavitt, Governor of the state of Utah, do hereby declare September 25–October 2, 1999, as Marriage Awareness Week in Utah, and urge each husband and wife to reflect upon their marriage and to commit to building and maintaining a healthy, loving marriage and family.
Governor Michael O. Leavitt

6. A BYU Class Project

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to a class project we recently completed at BYU. During the 1970s in America the value of marriage, and particularly an enduring marriage, was questioned. Fewer people married. Numerous couples started living together

without marriage. Sex both before and outside marriage became more acceptable. And among those who did marry, the divorce rates skyrocketed and rose to an unprecedented 50 percent. Disposable marriages, as predicted in 1970 by Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock*, became a product of the time (see “Temporary Marriage,” “Marriage Trajectories,” and “The Demands of Freedom” in *Future Shock* [New York: Bantam Books, 1970], pp. 253–59).

A decade later, in the 1980s, we stepped back in America and took another look at marriage as an enduring relationship, and the “marriage movement” began. In 1982, for example, Rafe Van Hoy wrote a song that should have particular significance for Latter-day Saints. It was titled “What’s Forever For?” and asked the question “Doesn’t anybody ever stay together anymore?” It was sung by Johnny Mathis in the 1980s and popularized again in the 1990s by singer Michael Martin Murphey. The lyrics are as follows:

*I see love-hungry people
Trying their best to survive.
When right there in their hands is a dying romance,
And they’re not even trying to keep it alive.*

*So what’s the glory in living?
Doesn’t anybody ever stay together anymore?
And if love never lasts forever
Tell me, what’s forever for?*

This song has particular significance for Latter-day Saints because many of us commit to marry for time and eternity (forever) in holy temples of the Lord.

In my preparation for marriage classes at BYU, we have one unit on commitment. We note the observation by Dr. James C. Dobson that marriage is a marathon and not a sprint (see *Love for a Lifetime: Building a Marriage That Will Go the Distance* [Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987], 120). We talk about what we com-

mit to or what covenants we make at the time of marriage, often across sacred and holy altars.

During winter semester 1999 I asked my students at BYU to participate in a class project. I invited them to bring to class pictures of “older couples” who had been married a long time. They wanted to know “how old,” and I just said “old.” For the baby boomers who are listening, you may be interested in knowing that one young coed brought in a picture of Al and Tipper Gore. I looked at the picture and told my student that the vice president and wife were only in their early fifties. “Well,” she responded, “you said you wanted pictures of old people!”

After we had collected a wide variety of pictures, one of my students, Melissa McKnight (now Melissa Wood), teamed up with Tamlisa Wood (not related), a media arts major. Under the guidance and direction of Glenn Anderson of the Instructional Technology Center, they matched the pictures up to another song composed by Lionel Richie in the early 1980s. It was later made popular by Kenny Rogers through his musical releases. The song was “Through the Years.” It answers, in part, the question posed about the same time by Rafe Van Hoy: “Doesn’t anybody ever stay together any more?”

We will now see our class project: *Through the Years*. It portrays what I believe is missing in contemporary marriage education in America today. This is but one example of what undergraduate students are capable of doing at Brigham Young University.

[The 4.5-minute video was shown.]

Do we need Marriage Awareness Week? Particularly at BYU? Let me conclude with an admonition given by President Gordon B. Hinckley just three years ago on September 17, 1996, at a BYU devotional. He said:

I deal much with cases of divorce and requests for cancellation of temple sealings. It is the most difficult of all the things with which I have to do.

*Almost without exception, each case involves deception, dishonesty, broken promises, violated covenants, heartbreak, and tragedy. Begin with your own home to preserve the sanctity of your marriage, the eternity of your covenants, and the happiness that comes where there is love and security and trust in the family. Put the comfort and happiness of your companion and your children ahead of your own and reach out with a helping hand to those whose marriages have become troubled. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stand Up for Truth," *BYU 1996–97 Speeches* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1997), p. 24]*

Note that last sentence: "Reach out with a helping hand to those whose marriages have become troubled."

By being firm advocates of marriage in the latter days, we very realistically can fulfill, in part, an ancient prophecy by Isaiah, also about the last days. This passage of scripture was also quoted by President Hinckley during the last general conference, during the Sunday morning session on October 2, 1999:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. [Isaiah 2:2–3; also 2 Nephi 12:2–3]

It is my hope that we, "in the top of the mountains," will let Christ and not the dominant cultural trends determine our conduct and the choices we make regarding marriage and family in these, the last days. Then we can

teach others His ways that they, too, may walk in His paths.

With this responsibility we can also face the future with hope because the Lord has promised He will prepare the way for those who keep his commandments (see 1 Nephi 3:7).

I share with you my renewed testimony that marriage, the first bond of society, is indeed ordained of God. May we all preserve the sanctity of our marriages now or when they occur. Let us also do as President Hinckley admonished and reach out to others with support and revealed knowledge about marriage in these latter days.

May we act accordingly, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Note

The two reports on marriage cited can be obtained from the following sources:

Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation, 1995
Institute for American Values
1841 Broadway, Suite 211
New York, NY 10023
Phone (212) 246-3942
Fax: (212) 541-6665
Cost \$5.00. The report can be obtained for \$.50 when purchased in quantities of 20 or more.

The State of Our Unions, 1999: The Social Health of Marriage in America
The National Marriage Project
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
25 Bishop Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1181
Phone: (732) 932-2722
E-mail: marriage@rci.rutgers.edu
Web site: <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>
Cost: \$5.00 (There are also discounts on this report for bulk purchases.)