

# *Some of BYU's Responses to "The Family: A Proclamation to the World"*

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**M**y address today is related to the topic of strengthening marriages and families. It's a topic I'm generally comfortable with. But I'm not comfortable—and not just because I feel inadequate to address this audience. Family has been a popular topic for speeches on this campus recently. Both President Bateman and Elder Eyring have recently addressed us on the topic of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (*Ensign*, November 1995, p. 102). A handful of other General Authority speakers have spoken on campus during the last few years about the importance of families. I've worried that we have reached a saturation point. What could I add? I reviewed these earlier talks in preparation for my talk today and was not surprised to find that these men, special witnesses and servants of the Lord, were lifting a voice of warning about the evil influences that threaten our abilities to build strong families.

If I *can* add something today, perhaps it is a view of the counteracting, good forces that also exist and that "inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; . . . and to love God, and to serve him" (Moroni 7:13). I pray my remarks today will give you a better sense of the small but significant ways in which the Lord is using BYU to bless families. Yes, there is much darkness

and confusion, but I believe a loving God is giving us precious gifts to help us build strong families. I interpret the promise given to Noah after the Great Flood that God would never again destroy the inhabitants of the earth (see Genesis 9:11–17) as a promise to keep the forces of good and evil in relative balance so that the purposes of God will not be hindered as they were during the time of Noah.

Moreover, I believe the prophecy of Malachi also promises us divine blessings related to the family in the last days:

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:*

*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* [Malachi 4:5–6; see also D&C 27:9, 110:15]

President Harold B. Lee and others taught that the mission of Elijah "applies just as much on this side of the veil as it does on the other

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side of the veil” (Harold B. Lee, address given at the Priesthood Genealogy Seminar, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1973; quoted in Leun G. Otten and C. Max Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants* [Springville, Utah: LEMB, 1982–83], 1:16). Hence I believe that the Spirit of Elijah is here in great measure upon the earth, not just to link families to their dead ancestors but also to bless and strengthen living families.

There are strong, counterbalancing forces for good that will help God’s children today build strong families. I will focus my remarks today on these forces for good. And, more specifically, given this campus setting, I will focus primarily on the role BYU is playing in blessing the lives of families today.

Building understanding and faith in the Lord’s plan for eternal families is an essential part of the mission of this university. In a recent conference address, referring to practices for maintaining strong and happy families, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “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” (“Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry,” *Ensign*, May 1998, p. 51). And, in a recent *Ensign* article, Elder Henry B. Eyring said, “Eternal life means to become like the Father and to live in families in happiness and joy forever” (“The Family,” *Ensign*, February 1998, p. 10). In LDS theology, God is a family man—a literal parent and an eternal companion. This life is to prepare us (see Alma 34:32) with earthly experiences that help us to become like him (see D&C 50:24, 93:28).

So, given the centrality of family to LDS theology and BYU’s increased attention to family teaching, scholarship, and outreach, the time seems right to investigate how a loving God is using BYU to bless families. Let me express this in a different way: What are we doing at BYU to respond to the proclamation to the world on the family? From my perspective as a Latter-day Saint, a husband, father, and family scientist,

the proclamation is an inspired document that brings together theology and revealed principles for building strong families. Our response at BYU to the proclamation will be an effective way to see how we are blessing families. I believe the proclamation is a latter-day Liahona for those seeking guidance through the wilderness of contemporary family life (see 1 Nephi 16, Alma 37:38–46). I like the metaphor of the Liahona in this instance. In reading the account of Lehi and his journey in the wilderness and some commentaries on it, it appears that Lehi had some familiarity with the wilderness through which he journeyed, yet it seems that the Lord knew that Lehi would need greater guidance in those challenging circumstances. Thus he provided the faith-activated Liahona as their physical compass to point the way that they should go (see 1 Nephi 16:28).

Similarly, I believe that the proclamation can be both a personal and an institutional Liahona to those who will place even a grain of faith (see Matthew 13:31–32) in its truths. I seek that faith. In addition I am grateful to know that the vast majority of family research that I am aware of is congruent with the principles of strong families articulated in the proclamation. Unlike the truth contained in the Word of Wisdom, which was revealed to Joseph Smith more than a century before its health consequences were clearly understood, the wisdom in the proclamation already has substantial scientific support. That knowledge reinforces my faith.

Unfortunately the breadth of the issues covered by the proclamation and the considerable volume of teaching, research, and outreach on family at BYU prevent a comprehensive treatment of this topic today. So I have had to make some hard choices. I apologize that I will not be able to tell you about all the praiseworthy work of teacher-scholars in various departments across campus. Also, I ask for your tolerance if my sampling is biased by my position in the Department of Family Sciences.

I want to focus my remarks today on two areas that I believe will be the most important, most strategic, and most enduring ways BYU is and will be responding to the proclamation. One area is our teaching related to family. A second area is our effort to understand and promote stable and happy marriages.

### Teaching Related to Family

First, our teaching. I have thought a lot about this, and ranking our teaching as one of the two most important things we do at BYU to promote the proclamation was not simple. Ultimately, however, this ranking should not come as a surprise, given that our primary mission is to provide BYU students with a first-class education in a context of faith and example. Our teaching makes an important contribution to strengthening the families of the world in three ways: first, through the religious education our students receive; second, through students who graduate to go into the helping professions focused on families; and third, through providing a good foundation for students to create their own strong families.

### *Religious Education as a Foundation for Strong Families*

First, I want to note the religious education given to BYU students. Understanding the plan of salvation orients us to the purpose of families in this life and the nature of our premortal life and our eternal possibilities. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin recently said, “Seeing life from an eternal perspective helps us focus our limited mortal energies on the things that matter most” (“The Time to Prepare,” *Ensign*, May 1998, p. 14). Recall that the proclamation, after a brief introductory declaration, begins with instruction on the plan of salvation. Later on, the proclamation sets forth the Christlike life as the surest foundation for successful marriage and family life, emphasizing faith, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreation. By the way, in contrast

to what you may have heard, good research has consistently identified religious devotion as a strong element in happy families (see I. Reed Payne, Allen E. Bergin, Kimberly A. Bielema, and Paul H. Jenkins, “Review of Religion and Mental Health: Prevention and the Enhancement of Psychosocial Functioning,” *Prevention and Human Services* 9, no. 2 [1991]: 11–40; Darwin L. Thomas and Marie Cornwall, “Religion and Family in the 1980s: Discovery and Development,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52, no. 4 [November 1990]: 983–92). Thus I am grateful for the religious instruction and experience students receive here. They are crucial ways in which we are attending to the proclamation and helping to create eternal families.

### *Seeding the Earth with Faithful Family Professionals*

As I have reflected further on family teaching at BYU, one point of analysis is how well our students are providing a positive influence in the family professions. Of course, we start from a strong base. We are all aware of the tremendous quality of students who come to BYU these days. Our students studying family who desire graduate work routinely go to the best programs in the country. We place hundreds of students each year in clinical programs in marriage and family therapy, social work, and psychology, as well as programs focused more on education and research. Our own graduate programs related to family studies are well thought of. I believe the values these students have and the training they receive here and at other institutions combine to create a group of talented professionals that helps many people prepare for and deal with challenging family problems.

To illustrate, I spoke recently with a friend and graduate of our marriage and family therapy program. I’ll call her Kate. During our conversation, Kate recounted to me an inspiring story in her work as a therapist. She had

recently received a note from a couple she had helped five years ago, and they expressed their appreciation for her efforts.

“Thanks for not giving up on us,” the note said. They were doing great. She said that this temple-married couple first came to her with a set of common but serious problems. He had returned from his mission and quickly married a young woman whom his parents wanted him to marry. A baby came within a year. He was feeling smothered and regretted his quick marriage and lack of freedom. He began spending most of his time away with friends. She was needy, lonely, and depressed. They sought professional help, but after working with my therapist friend for six months, nothing was getting better. At one critical session, the couple begged the therapist to acknowledge the failure of their marriage and justify their strong, mutual desire to get divorced.

“We just can’t do it,” they said.

Kate’s trained professionalism covered her natural response: “You’re telling me?!” Kate said she was as frustrated as the couple was. At that time she did not have a great deal of clinical experience, did not know what else to do, and felt that there was no way to save this marriage. Perhaps it was time to end marriage counseling and begin divorce counseling. Kate herself had experienced the divorce of her parents growing up and had survived. She was no stranger to divorce. But something stopped her natural response. Instead, she gently refused to provide the justification the couple wanted. She appropriately placed the burden back on them. “You are the ones who have to decide to break your covenants,” she said. “You are the ones who will have to live with the decision.”

The couple returned two weeks later. They were strangely affectionate and responsive to each other. The therapist asked for an explanation. The husband responded: “I thought a lot about it. I just decided I was going to be committed to this marriage. That’s all.” With that commitment they began working on their

challenges together, with Kate’s help, and resolved their problems. Perhaps there is nothing terribly unusual about this therapeutic incident. But I can’t help but wonder what another therapist, one without a strong faith in the eternal nature of families, would have said at that critical moment when an eternal family hung in the balance.

In addition to fine clinicians, every year we also seed the academic institutions of the United States and beyond with talented young teacher-scholars who studied family as undergraduate or graduate students at BYU. Our influence is being felt; we are not invisible. Indeed, our numbers in the National Council on Family Relations, a national academic and professional organization to which many family scholars here belong, are large enough that we have to be a little careful. A few years ago a colleague of mine at another university was observing the large number of BYU people who were at our national conference and half-jokingly and half-annoyed asked me if we were trying to take over the world. I admit my casual response to her was not completely honest!

Our disproportionate presence in organizations like this are, in part, a result of the large number of students at BYU studying families. This is a phenomenon that requires some explanation and analysis. Over the past 10 to 15 years there has been tremendous growth in the number of students studying families. This is most easily illustrated by looking at the Department of Family Sciences, but I suspect that the growth in some other majors, such as sociology, psychology, political science, and others, may be due in some part to the increased interest our students have in helping families.

BYU has the largest undergraduate enrollment in family sciences in North America and probably the world (see John Touliatos, *Graduate Study in Marriage and the Family*, 3rd ed. [Fort Worth, Texas: Human Sciences

Publications, 1996], pp. 140–41). There are currently about 1,000 students in active majors in family sciences; the department now teaches the most credit hours of any academic unit in the university (3.2 percent of all university credit hours). Since 1989 the number of enrolled students in the active majors that make up the Department of Family Sciences has grown more than 200 percent.

What explains this growth? It is tempting just to see it as following the national trend; family studies and human development departments have experienced a growth rate of almost 150 percent since the mid-1980s (see *Chartbook of Degrees Conferred, 1969–70 to 1993–94* [Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1997], appendix, pp. 103–272 passim). The increasing enrollment nationwide is probably due to such factors as an increased interest in family and human development issues and services, a concern for family problems, and more students coming to college from challenging family backgrounds who desire to prepare for more effective family life. Each of these explanations applies to us as well. But I am convinced there is a deeper, spiritual motive behind the growth. I believe that students here are responding to the call of the Spirit. The Lord needs more of his meek Saints, schooled in good scholarship about families and human development and grounded in their faith in the restored gospel, to join with other good people to be a brighter light (see Matthew 5:14) and the salt of the earth (see Matthew 5:13) to a world that increasingly needs eternal principles of strong families, lest the earth be utterly wasted when the Lord comes again (see D&C 128:17).

#### *Preparing Better Spouses and Parents*

However, less than 20 percent of family sciences undergraduate students go on for graduate education in the field that will allow them to influence the family-related professions. A few will take teaching positions in high schools

and teach classes in family relationships, child development, and home economics. And there are some enterprising students who are building flexible careers as professional family-life educators who will wrap comfortably around full-time family responsibilities. Furthermore, many graduates provide much-needed volunteer services in the community to strengthen families. Still, most family sciences undergraduate majors, even those who now graduate as certified family life educators, are focusing their education to prepare themselves to be better spouses and parents. And, because more than 80 percent of family sciences majors are women, most of whom desire a career at home as full-time mothers and homemakers, we are preparing a substantial army of full-time homemakers. These young women believe what Elder Henry B. Eyring has said, “The highest and best use [they] could make of [their] talents and [their] education would be in [their] home[s]” (“The Family,” p. 16).

Most of these students do not make the choice to be a full-time homemaker naïvely; they are aware of the risks that some will never marry, some will not be mothers, and some will experience the heartbreak of divorce. Hence they choose to do as Elder Eyring recently said, to take “courage and faith to plan for what God holds before [them] as the ideal rather than what might be forced upon [them] by circumstances” (“The Family,” p. 16).

I teach a class with a section devoted to full-time homemaking. We discuss both its challenges and its rewards. The students know the economic risks of removing themselves from the paid labor market in an era of marital instability. They know that full-time homemakers have a higher risk of serious depression compared to mothers who are in the paid labor force. They know the demographic realities of maternal employment outside the home. They are not naïve; or, at least, they don’t leave my class naïve. But they also read the words of the prophets and talk about the rewards of



full-time homemaking. And in their course evaluations, many comment that after staring reality in the face they feel more prepared and even more confident of their career choice as a full-time homemaker and take with them a new appreciation for their courageous choice.

This is not to say it is an easy choice. There are many talented students who want to make a contribution to the professions, and still may at a slower pace or at a later point in life, but who postpone or slow that process by full-time homemaking. A recent example is Sarah, who graduated in family sciences with a 3.9 GPA and was eagerly accepted into a family-related master's program. She completed that program in one year instead of the typical two, leaving a wake of impressed professors behind. She recently had a scaled-down version of her master's thesis accepted for publication in a leading journal in the field. She could go anywhere for a PhD and desires to do so. But she has delayed that course for a small season—a season that often ends up being 20 years or longer—to devote herself to her family. I'm not saying that this is the exact course all should take in similar circumstances. But it is a laudable choice for Sarah and many others, and one that comes with sacrifices and personal struggles. The scriptural counsel given to Emma Smith in section 25 of the Doctrine and Covenants is no easier for Sarah than it was for Emma: "Continue in the spirit of meekness. . . . Let thy soul delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come upon him" (D&C 25:14).

I hope we are honoring this course of study focused on preparation for full-time homemaking, even knowing that many who will follow it will not be able to fulfill that goal quite as planned. As I listen to these students, they sometimes speak of a lack of respect from some students for their course of study. That is unfortunate and unkind.

Of course many students will not major in a family field but will take a class or two in

preparation for that work. Helping so many students prepare well for marriage and parenting, I believe, is one of the most important things we do at BYU to promote the principles of the proclamation and that helps to counterbalance the forces of family disintegration.

Although I give our teaching efforts about family good grades thus far, we can do more. An exact figure is difficult to estimate, but I estimate that less than 20 percent of BYU undergraduate students take a class focused on family. And, given that women make up a large majority of students in these classes, I suspect that the proportion of male students who take a course focused on family may be less than 5 percent. Men, you will benefit from preparing yourself for the work of marriage and parenting as well. Elder G. Homer Durham said, "Man . . . has obligations to learn the difficult art of fatherhood in homemaking" ("Woman's Responsibility to Learn," in *Woman* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979], p. 36). I hope we can increase the proportion of BYU students—especially men—who take advantage of the wonderful resources we have here to prepare them for family life.

One major initiative on the horizon that I hope will increase the number of students taking a family course is a class being developed that focuses directly on the proclamation to the world on the family. The class will bring together the best gospel scholarship and the best family scholarship in a way that promotes a deeper understanding of and commitment to the principles in the proclamation. It will also provide valuable practical information. Development of this course will be benefited by the production of an edited volume on the proclamation now being done under the direction of the Center for Studies of the Family. Scholars will integrate faith and reason in relation to the topics covered in the proclamation. This volume will be an important resource for the course, as well as bless the lives of Saints throughout the Church.

The availability of a new course is only a small thing in the substantial scope of the BYU undergraduate experience. But like the Liahona, “by small means the Lord can bring about great things” (1 Nephi 16:29; see also Alma 37:6–7, D&C 64:33, 123:15–17). I am confident that students who will take this class will be better able to achieve their desires for happy families and to articulate the principles of the proclamation.

I want to extend a challenge to BYU students. First, take seriously your religious education and experience here. As you build faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ and incorporate Christian virtues into your character, they will provide you with the surest foundation possible for building and maintaining a happy and successful family. In addition, prayerfully consider taking advantage of other courses that will increase your knowledge and skills for a strong marriage and family. At BYU all students receive a solid general education to be more effective thinkers and writers, to be better citizens in the community and nation, to lead healthier lives, and to appreciate the arts. This is great. But the greatest source of growth and happiness in your life will come from your family relationships. I especially want to invite male students to consider this invitation. Preparation for your work within the walls of your future home is even more important than preparation for your work in the marketplace. Please do not be tempted to think that your wife or wife-to-be will be able to care for your family without much need of your help.

I sense that many young people today—both men and women—have ambivalent feelings about marriage and parenting. Much of this ambivalence comes from experiencing the effects of family dissolution. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said in a CES fireside address here a few years ago, “The next generation always lives downwind of the toxic trends of the previous generation” (CES fireside, Brigham Young University, June 4, 1995). Successful

marriages and families do require hard work; there are many significant challenges and pitfalls for families today. But there is a knowledge base about strong marriages and families that can help you train better for this challenging work. And ultimately—meaning eternally—it is the most important work you or I will do in this life, as the prophets continually remind us. And it is the work in which your Heavenly Father is engaged (see Moses 1:39). Hence you will come to understand more about divinity and the things of eternal significance through marriage and parenting than in any other way. Do not take lightly the gifts the Lord has provided for you here to help you prepare for a strong marriage and family. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).

### **Promoting Marriage**

Now let me shift to the second area I want to highlight in terms of how a loving God is strengthening families and the role BYU is playing in manifesting that love. It is our efforts to understand and promote marriage as the foundation for personal happiness, strong families, and civil communities. President Hinckley said in a recent conference address, “The truest mark of your success in life will be the quality of your marriage” (“Living Worthy,” p. 51). The proclamation states that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God” (*Ensign*, November 1995, p. 102). The vast majority of people today still desire strong and enduring marriages. But there are many forces that work against these good desires. And in many ways the character traits and skills, as well as the social and ideological reinforcements needed to maintain strong marriages, are weak in their support of those good desires.

I believe BYU can make a valuable contribution to promoting stable and happy marriages.

Of course our teaching is important in this regard, but let me now focus on our scholarship. In the last two years at least four prominent, non-LDS family scholars have visited our campus. Each in one way or another has remarked that they expect and want BYU to be a leader in supporting and promoting the institution of marriage. Their rationale is not complicated. Many family scholars at most academic institutions are ambivalent about the institution of marriage these days. We live in an era of high rates of marital dissolution; about half of first marriages in the United States and a higher proportion of second marriages will end in divorce (see David Popenoe, “American Family Decline, 1960–1990: A Review and Appraisal,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55, no. 3 [August 1993]: 527–55). About 30 percent of children born in the United States are born to unmarried parents (see Tim B. Heaton, *Family Trends* [Provo: Center for Studies of the Family, 1997]). We are all aware of the tragic epidemic of spouse abuse in this country and across the world. Hence it is easy to see why many scholars do not see marriage as a positive or necessary institution these days.

#### *Positive Voices and Trends*

BYU has an important work to do in its scholarship and outreach to strengthen marriage. Fortunately we will not be alone in this effort; God is using many people to bring about his purposes and to counterbalance the forces that view marriage as an outdated or oppressive institution. There are some scholars out there who are rigorously evaluating the research and concluding that the academic ambivalence toward marriage is not well founded; it is more ideological than empirical. For instance, Linda Waite, an excellent demographer and recent president of the American Population Association, argued in her presidential address that

*social scientists have a responsibility to weigh the evidence on the consequences of social behaviors in the same way as medical researchers evaluate the evidence on the consequences of (say) cigarette smoking or exercise. [Linda J. Waite, “Does Marriage Matter?” *Demography* 32, no. 4 (November 1995): 499]*

Based on a broad review of the research literature, Waite concluded that marriage has significant positive effects on physical health and longevity. Married men and women have more frequent and more satisfying sexual relationships. Married men and women also have more occupational success and more economic resources. And on a long list of indicators, and controlling for many factors, children’s well-being is also substantially higher if their parents are married. Waite, like an increasing number of scholars, believes that social scientists have been too quick to assign *all* the responsibility for differences between the married and unmarried to the selection of the psychologically healthy into marriage or the psychologically unhealthy out of marriage, “and not quick enough to consider the possibility that marriage *causes* some of the better outcomes we see for the married” (Linda J. Waite, “Does Marriage Matter?” p. 498; emphasis in original). And let me add to this some research findings just hot off the press that found in 16 of 17 countries studied that married individuals were significantly more happy than non-married individuals. This was true for both men and women. And this was true even when controlling for many potentially confounding variables (see Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, “Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60, no. 2 [May 1998]: 527–36).

In addition, Bill Doherty, an influential marriage and family therapist and current president of the National Council on Family Relations, has been an effective critic of value-neutral marriage counseling. He calls for



therapists “to recognize and affirm the moral nature of marital commitment” and to help build “a cultural ethic that would make it just as irresponsible to terminate a marriage without seeking professional help as it would be to let someone die without seeing a physician” (William J. Doherty, “How Therapists Threaten Marriages,” *The Responsive Community* 7, no. 3 [summer 1997]: 39–40).

In the face of discouraging trends, there is also unprecedented interest in building stronger marriages and preventing preventable divorces. For instance, the state of Louisiana last year passed a law providing couples with a choice to enter into a more committed form of marriage, called a covenant marriage, as opposed to the common no-fault-divorce marriage that can be terminated at any time by either spouse. This voluntary higher level of commitment to marriage requires couples who choose it to have some form of premarital counseling that emphasizes the lifelong commitment associated with marriage and the responsibilities and ethical obligations of marriage and parenting. In addition it requires all couples who choose a covenant marriage to do all they can, including marriage counseling, to rectify marital problems before seeking a divorce. Arizona just became the second state to pass a covenant marriage law. More than 20 other states are currently considering comparable legislation.

Similarly, the Florida legislature became the first in the nation to pass a bill that endorses and provides incentives for premarital education. Couples who take a four-hour educational course before getting married will get a substantial savings on their marriage license. The premarital education will instruct couples on conflict resolution, which is so critical to stable marriages; general communication skills; financial responsibilities; and the challenges of parenting. Instruction may be given by counselors, educators, or clergy. Perhaps even more significant is that the legislation also includes a

requirement for 9th and 10th graders to complete one-half credit in life management skills to include marriage and relationship skill-based education.

I’m not sure what effects policies such as these will have. Overall, perhaps not much. On the other hand, law can be a powerful symbol for what we hold important as a society. I do believe, though, that policies like these are influenced by the Lord’s spirit because he desires to bless his children in their wishes for strong marriages.

#### *BYU Scholarship and Outreach to Promote Strong Marriages*

What are we doing at BYU with our scholarship to strengthen marriage? Again, my sampling is biased. But let me highlight three ongoing efforts.

*Covenant Marriage.* First, an interdisciplinary team of BYU scholars recently was invited to participate in a study of covenant marriage in Louisiana. Time won’t permit me to tell you how this opportunity came about, but I believe the Lord’s hand was in it. We will participate in a national team of scholars to observe changes over the next five years in Louisiana and Arizona with regard to attitudes about marriage and divorce and will study the decision-making processes of couples deciding whether to get a covenant marriage or a no-fault-divorce marriage. This should be fascinating. In Louisiana, when he asks, “Will you marry me?” she is likely to respond with the question “What kind?” Some couples may have their first and last argument over which type of marriage they want. We will also study already-married couples as they think about converting their vows to a covenant marriage. Thousands of couples in Louisiana have already “upgraded.” The potential to learn how people are thinking about marriage these days is tremendous. And we hope to discern if divorce rates will be reduced by these changes.

*Defense of Heterosexual Marriage.* A second ongoing project to strengthen the institution of marriage comes from Professor Lynn Wardle in the Law School. Professor Wardle has been pretty much a lone voice among legal scholars defending marriage as a heterosexual relationship. There are significant efforts in several states to legalize marriage for homosexual couples. Professor Wardle has been active in his scholarship and advocacy, including some involvement in the recent Hawaiian court case, attempting to point out the risks of such a course of action. His scholarly advocacy is unpopular among legal scholars and has come at some professional cost. Given the prevailing philosophies of the day, Professor Wardle has a difficult task to defend marriage as a union exclusively between a man and a woman, as the proclamation says, and he doesn't get enough help from social scientists to do this. Without more work in this area, Professor Wardle's legal defense of traditional marriage will be difficult. I expect BYU scholars can contribute to a greater understanding of why the union of opposite sexes is critical to the purposes of marriage. These efforts are comparatively small, but "by small means the Lord can bring about great things" (1 Nephi 16:29).

*Marriage Preparation Education and Research.* Earlier I mentioned the Florida legislation promoting marriage preparation education. We are well prepared to contribute effectively in this area. A team of BYU scholars, led by Professor Tom Holman, has produced perhaps the finest marital preparation questionnaire available. Engaged or seriously dating couples can take this instrument and receive feedback, preferably with the help of a counselor, on potentially challenging issues they may face to build an enduring marriage. Data collected from tens of thousands of individuals over the past 15 years and follow-up studies are allowing this team of researchers to understand premarital factors that predict stable and happy marriages, which in turn is providing more reliable

information to couples and counselors that should help people be better prepared for the adventure of marriage. BYU is a leader in this area.

This is just a sample of our efforts to strengthen marriage. I wish I had more time to list other worthy efforts. From this sample, however, I hope you can see that we are responding in small ways to the proclamation. I believe the Spirit of the Lord is influencing these and other efforts. I am satisfied that these small offerings are acceptable to the Lord and that he will multiply them in our day, just as he multiplied the fishes and the loaves to feed the hungry during his earthly ministry long ago (see John 6:6–14).

### **Using the Proclamation to Guide our Scholarship**

Of course there is always more we can do to respond to the proclamation and to strengthen families. Earlier I issued a challenge to BYU students. Now I issue a challenge to BYU faculty whose scholarship touches on family issues. I believe it will be valuable to reexamine and refocus our scholarly efforts based on the principles articulated in the proclamation. Just as the Liahona pointed the way Lehi's family should go and led them "in the more fertile parts of the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:16), I believe that if we give greater heed to the proclamation as our guide in family scholarship, it will lead us in the more fertile parts of the academic wilderness to a bountiful land with much intellectual fruit (see 1 Nephi 17:3–5).

I am speaking as much or more to myself as to others. I have concentrated my scholarship in the area of fathering. In the proclamation the most specific language regarding fathering is, "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" (emphasis added). As I think about two

of these concepts—presiding and protecting—I cannot think of two less-studied aspects of fathering than these. The concept of paternal protecting has received little attention despite its obvious relevance to modern-day life with its many physical and spiritual dangers. Also, the concept of paternal presiding has not received much direct investigation. Contemporary notions of egalitarian relationships, which are generally good, probably inhibit investigations of how fathers can preside in their families. Perhaps most family scholars have difficulty seeing how presiding can be a positive feature of family life, or how this can be reconciled with the obligation “to help one another as equal partners,” as stated in the proclamation.

Anyway, as I think out loud, I can see the potential for much intellectual fruit in a study of the concepts of paternal presiding and protecting. Yes, there would be pitfalls and dangers as I journey through this scholarly wilderness. It was not easy for Lehi and his family either; they experienced trials and afflictions as they traveled in the wilderness for

many years (see 1 Nephi 17:1, 4). But they were guided and protected, and they prospered as they followed their Liahona (see 1 Nephi 17:2–3). I pray those blessings flow our way as we place greater faith in proclamation principles and allow them to lead us in fruitful paths.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I am grateful for a loving God who gives when we ask and opens doors to us when we knock (see Luke 11:9–10). There is a great need for a lot of asking and knocking these days when it comes to building strong marriages and families. And I am convinced that in an area so important to our temporal happiness and eternal welfare, the Lord offers to all his children bread, not stones (see Luke 11:11–13), and “milk and honey, without money and without price” (2 Nephi 26:25). For “he doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:24). God is offering many gifts to strengthen families. I pray our small efforts at BYU to respond to the proclamation will add to these good gifts, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.