

# *“Loving with the Spirit and with the Understanding”*

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**M**y wife and I, brothers and sisters, are very grateful to be here this evening. We are honored—especially honored to have a goodly number of our family here. It is a wonderful thing in life when children begin to eclipse their parents, and we sure feel that way about our children.

Before we came here tonight we had a reception with a number of the men and women who serve as leaders in your stakes here at BYU. I was touched by their quality and goodness, and I hope you realize that there are a few things that older men and women know that younger men and women can learn from them. I certainly commend these people and their teachings to you.

This morning I looked over my talk that I prepared some days ago. It really looked like a rather ordinary collection of words in some ways, and I realized that there is really only one thing that can breathe life into those words—that’s the Spirit of the Lord, which I pray for tonight as I share with you these very humble thoughts. I’ve entitled my talk “Loving with the Spirit and with the Understanding.”

Of all the opportunities for service that have come with my calling as a General Authority in the Church, none exceeds in my

estimation the privilege of performing a sealing ceremony in one of the Lord’s temples. Whenever I am in the setting of a beautifully appointed sealing room, facing a wholesome and anxious young couple about to make the most sacred of vows with God and with each other, I have a feeling that nothing I might say on that occasion will really do justice to the significance of it in their lives.

At such times I frequently remember my own wedding day nearly twenty-six years ago and the strong feelings of love that I had for my wife, Kathy. I also remember our high expectations for the future. I am sure that we had an ideal in mind that wasn’t necessarily peculiar to us, and yet we (or at least I) thought Kathy and I were about to begin a companionship together that would be unparalleled in the romantic history of Western civilization!

Nevertheless, despite our best intentions and efforts, the “ideal” began to collide with reality shortly after our brief honeymoon in

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Salt Lake City at the then existing equivalent of a Motel 6. I cannot speak for Kathy but, on my part, I soon began to feel some small sense of disillusionment—a feeling that there was something more to be had in and from marriage than I, at least, seemed capable of producing.

There began to be a gradual descent from the lofty level of our wedding day to a somewhat lower plateau where we seemed destined to live out our lives well beneath our privileges. One small example from among many will illustrate the type of memories that Kathy and I were accumulating together about that time.

We were living in Salt Lake City, where I was attending law school and Kathy was teaching first grade. The stress of both of us being new to the city, to our schools, and to each other became a little heavy and our relationship a bit testy. One night about dinnertime we had a quarrel that convinced me there was no hope for nourishment at home. So I left our modest apartment and walked to the nearest fast food restaurant a block away. As I entered the north door of this establishment, I looked to my right and, much to my surprise, saw Kathy entering through the south door! We exchanged angry glances and advanced to opposing cash registers to place our orders. We continued to ignore each other as we sat alone on opposite ends of the restaurant sullenly eating our evening meal. We then left as we had entered, taking separate routes home, finally ending this utterly ridiculous episode by reconciling and laughing together about how infantile we had both been.

I realize now that such little tiffs are not uncommon in the early stages of most marriages. However, I also know that my rather lighthearted introduction to the main idea I would like to share with you tonight does not really express the deep feelings I had then and have now about the tremendous potential for fulfillment and happiness that exists in an

eternal marriage—potential that can often go unrealized.

Perhaps I can best express my feelings by reminding all of us that as the restoration of the gospel unfolded, the doctrine of eternal marriage apparently was not taught by the Prophet Joseph until several years after the organization of the Church. When he began to teach it, he did so selectively. Elder Parley P. Pratt, who had been married civilly about thirteen years earlier, first heard about the concept of eternal marriage from Joseph Smith in Philadelphia in 1839. His reaction, as recorded in his autobiography, may be difficult for those of us to understand who have grown up with the anticipation that we would be married in a temple for time and all eternity. This concept was completely new to Elder Pratt, and he was overwhelmed by it.

I will let him speak for himself as he describes his meetings at that time with the Prophet Joseph:

*During these interviews he taught me many great and glorious principles concerning God and the heavenly order of eternity. It was at this time that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness.*

*Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state.*

*It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.*

*It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and*

*affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.*

*It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring.*

*I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also. [Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), pp. 259–60]*

In all of Latter-day Saint literature, I know of no more beautiful or powerful statement than this concerning the potential for fulfillment and happiness we have in marriages created and lived in the Lord's way. Think of the implications of being able to love "with the spirit and with the understanding also." Consider the power of the idea that of all of the people on earth, we Latter-day Saints, because of revealed truth, know the most about genuine romantic love and have the greatest opportunity to have truly happy and enduring marriages. Will it not be a memorable day when as a people we are best known not just for our large families—and, I might add parenthetically, our Suburbans—but

for our truly exceptional marriages? Maybe you are a generation that will help bring that to pass.

What are the gospel truths that permit us to court one another and eventually establish marriages that are happy, fulfilling, and enduring? I will discuss a few that I feel are most vital. All of them are closely related to the Savior, his teachings, and the central role that he plays in the gospel plan.

*Developing Our Capacity to Love.* First, I want to mention that the teachings of Christ suggest that we should begin our search for an eternal companion with greater concern about our ability to give love than about our need to receive it. Of the Savior, John wrote, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Indeed, it may be our own capacity to give love that makes us most lovable. The greater our own substance as a person, the deeper our own mental, emotional, and spiritual reserves, the greater will be our capacity to nurture and love others, especially our companion. In a talk on the welfare program some years ago, President Marion G. Romney posed a question that puts our ability to genuinely care about others in perspective:

*How can we give if there is nothing there? Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves. Money to assist the needy cannot come from an empty purse. Support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved. Teaching cannot come from the unlearned. And most important of all, spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak. ["The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance," *Ensign*, November 1982, p. 93]*

May I also add that very little love can come from one who is not at peace with himself and his God. As Enos learned and shared, no one can be concerned about the welfare of someone else and give love to another until he has taken care of his own soul. Thus, our preparation for an eternal marriage must include repenting, learning, acquiring faith,

and developing the security that comes with a vision of our potential as children of God.

*Virtue Loveth Virtue.* There is a very natural and wonderful consequence of becoming a person capable of great love. It is described in this passage from the Doctrine and Covenants: “For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light” (D&C 88:40).

Here is recorded a gospel truth well worth remembering during the dating and courtship years: Our personal development and spiritual growth will not only give us greater capacity to love, but if we pursue the goal of an eternal marriage with purity and with both our hearts and minds, I believe in most cases we will eventually be rewarded with a companion who is at least our spiritual equal and who will cleave unto intelligence and light as we do; who will receive wisdom as we receive it; who will embrace truth as we embrace it; and who will love virtue as we love it. To spend the eternities with a companion who shares the most important of fundamental values with us and who will discuss them, live them, and join in teaching them to one’s children is among the most soul-satisfying experiences of true romantic love. To know that there really is someone “out there” who is walking a parallel path of goodness and growth and who yearns for the same eternal values and happiness we yearn for is of great comfort.

I witnessed a powerful example of this principle recently as I sealed a stately young couple in the Salt Lake Temple. After I had performed the sealing ceremony and they had exchanged rings and embraces, I asked them to share their feelings with those who were present. The new bride spoke first. Her brief remarks reflected both gratitude and emotion as she told how from her very youngest years she had desired to keep herself virtuous and had hoped to find a companion who shared her values and righteous aspirations. She

confirmed the goodness of her new husband by witnessing that he was all she had hoped for and more.

Then the young man spoke. He, too, was tearful as he shared how at age fourteen he had inexplicably begun to pray to the Lord, asking that the wife of his future, whoever she might be, would be protected and would keep herself virtuous while preparing for an eternal marriage. He also told how he had committed himself again and again over those years to that same path. Then he expressed his great joy at having met this wife of his prayers and at his high hopes for a truly exceptional marriage. I am not a believer in predestined love, but I do believe that truly good people in due time will usually find other truly good people to marry. I also believe such people are worth waiting for. *Virtue loveth virtue! Truth embraceth truth!*

*Bridling Passions.* Although it can only be accorded its fullest expression in marriage, the seeds of fulfilling romantic love are planted during courtship. It is during this time that we should be mindful and appreciative of the truth and level of understanding reflected in Alma’s timeless counsel to his son Shiblon: “And also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12).

Those of you who have grown up around horses, saddles, and bridles will perceive that Alma was not suggesting to Shiblon that he eradicate his passions, but rather that he control or channel them for the very worthwhile purpose of being filled with love. During courtship this control will result in a deferral of the physical gratification that is related to romantic love and to a beautiful blossoming of that love in marriage. But during marriage there will also be restraint and moderation, for the gospel teaches that “unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions” (D&C 88:38).

Married Latter-day Saints must remember that not everything the world condones and even encourages in the name of expressing

romantic love has place in an eternal marriage. In the words of Elder Boyd K. Packer:

*The greatest deception foisted upon the human race in our day is that overemphasis of physical gratification as it is related to romantic love. It is merely a repetition of the same delusion that has been impressed on every generation in ages past. When we learn that physical gratification is only incident to, and not the compelling force of love itself, we have made a supreme discovery. [Eternal Love, adapted from an address given to students at Brigham Young University (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), p. 15]*

As a righteous couple grows and matures in their love, they will come to know that it is a fine blending of the spiritual and physical dimensions of their relationship that forms a solid foundation for their eternal union.

*Marriage as a Priority.* Because the restored gospel reveals that eternal life with our Heavenly Father will be lived in family units, the ultimate and preeminent goal of all of us ought to be to achieve a rewarding marriage and to become effective fathers and mothers as part of that marriage relationship. This truth places a priority and importance on marriage that we cannot afford to ignore. All of the prophets in recent years have made powerful statements about this truth, but the lives of many of us continue to show how lightly we regard their counsel. In a gospel sense there can be only one magnificent obsession—the attainment of an eternal marriage and the development of an eternal family unit.

Nevertheless, Satan will seek to have us do otherwise, and enticing voices will speak to us of worldly achievements and acquisitions that will lead us on dangerous detours from which we can return only with great effort. Small, seemingly insignificant choices along the way will have large consequences and will determine our eventual destiny.

One of these for Kathy and me came early in our marriage when I was struggling as a first-year law student and she was overwhelmed by her first teaching position. We barely met in all of our individual comings and goings, and our relationship with each other was suffering noticeably. Even Sundays were burdensome as we tried to fulfill our Church callings and catch up on our studies and school preparation. Finally we sat down one evening and decided if our marriage was the most important part of our lives, we had better start acting like it was. We agreed to completely honor the Sabbath by refraining from work, including our studies, and by devoting ourselves to the building of a stronger marriage. There was an immediate surge in our feelings toward each other and noticeable improvement in other areas, including my grades and Kathy's teaching. Twenty-six years later we are still faced with many similar choices and issues. I hope and pray we are still resolving them in favor of the things that matter most.

*Perfection Is Gradual.* Another gospel truth that definitely impacts marriage is the one contained in verse 13 of section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants which describes the process by which our Savior became perfect: "And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness."

A recognition that the Savior's perfection came gradually is comforting to two imperfect beings trying to make their marriage resemble the one described in the Laurel lesson manual! In my own case, I recently ventured to ask my wife: "How am I doing?" This was a very risky question to ask, and I suppose I should not have been surprised at her answer.

"Well," she said, "I think you are nicer than you used to be!" You may not think that response is anything to get excited about, but I do.

It also leads me to believe that those of you who are walking around with a checklist of

desirable attributes in a prospective companion may come off empty-handed. Most of those attributes will be only in embryo when you are courting and will take most of a lifetime to perfect. J. Golden Kimball's wry wit perhaps says it best: "I have often wondered what would happen if a perfect man married a perfect woman. I'll bet he would shoot her inside of a week if she didn't poison him first" (Claude Richards, *J. Golden Kimball: The Story of a Unique Personality* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], pp. 99–100).

*Commitment.* There is another gospel principle that significantly contributes to an understanding and realization of an eternal marriage at the level we are discussing. It has to do with the absolute commitment we are to have toward each other in marriage as described in this scripture: "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22).

This obviously means just as completely that "Thou shalt love thy husband with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto him and none else." The giving of ourselves to one another that occurs in an eternal marriage is an unconditional giving of the whole person for the whole journey. None of us knows at the time we marry what life will bring in terms of health challenges, financial setbacks, or even transgressions.

Recently I attended a viewing where a widower, supported by several handsome and stalwart sons, stood bravely at the side of his wife's casket. This man and his wife had been married for fifty-three years, and during the last six of those she had been seriously ill with a terminal kidney disease. She should probably have been placed in a rest home, but he would not hear of it and had provided the twenty-four-hour care she had required until his health, too, was in jeopardy.

As I passed through the receiving line, I expressed my admiration for him and the great love and care he had given his wife. I then felt

compelled to ask: "How did you do it? How did you do it?"

"Oh, that's easy," he replied. "Fifty-three years ago in the Salt Lake Temple I knelt at an altar and made a little deal with her and the Lord, and I wanted to keep it."

In an eternal marriage the thought of ending what has begun with a covenant with God and with each other simply has little place. When challenges come and our individual weaknesses are revealed, the remedy is to repent, to change, to improve, and to apologize, not to separate or divorce. When we make our own "little deal" with the Lord and our eternal companion, we should do everything within our power to honor its terms.

*Loving Kindness.* A final gospel truth that will contribute to our understanding and the quality of our marriages relates to the degree we involve the Savior in our relationships as husbands and wives. Marriage, as designed by our Heavenly Father, contemplates our first entering into a covenant relationship with Christ and then with each other. He and his teachings must be the focal point of our togetherness. As we become more like him and grow closer to him, we will naturally become more loving and grow closer to each other.

I have personally felt the mellowing influence of Christ's example and teachings in my own marriage. I can vividly recall how easy it was to be accusing and judgmental and to find fault in the early years of our marriage. When I came home in the evenings having set the whole world in order, I would often wonder why Kathy was struggling with her few square feet in the kitchen! Then one day a wise teacher shared with me this touching description of the Savior given us by Nephi:

*And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness*

*and his long-suffering towards the children of men.*  
[1 Nephi 19:9]

I suppose “loving kindness” is a synonym for charity or the pure love of Christ. I know that it is an absolutely essential ingredient in an eternal marriage and that romantic love cannot be separated from it nor can it flourish without it. “Loving kindness” is a common thread in all exceptional marriages with which I am personally acquainted.

I know also that “loving kindness” is the remedy for almost all marital problems.

As I near the end of my remarks tonight, I have the distinct feeling that I have only scratched the surface of my chosen topic. How can one ever adequately do justice to doctrines and truths that, if followed, will enable us as husbands and wives to “pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to [our] exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon [our] heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19)?

I also feel I have left much unsaid. I have not spoken of unselfishness, of work, of sacrifice, of forgiveness, of agency, of priesthood, or even of children—all of which, along with many other things, are vital elements in the attainment of the type of marriage we have discussed. However, this much I know: If we will continue to strive to love with understanding, the Spirit of the Lord will “show unto [us] all things what [we] should do” to achieve an eternal marriage pleasing to the Lord (2 Nephi 32:5). Under the influence of his spirit our sympathies and love for our eternal companion will deepen, and we will come to know a happiness and contentment in marriage that the world will never know.

I know, too, that this is possible for each one of us. No matter what our background or the quality of marriage our grandparents or parents enjoyed, we can in time and with the Lord’s help achieve the ideal. If our heritage is

one of a spiritually strong family with healthy marriages and close family relationships, we will be able to build and even improve upon the foundation that has been laid. If we are not so fortunate, we can resolve that this condition will change with our generation and that our children will receive such a legacy.

Above all, I hope we will vow never to be satisfied with a mediocre marriage. Not long ago a friend told me one of his young children had asked: “Do you think Grandpa ever kisses Grandma?” I certainly hope Kathy and I are sufficiently in love and demonstrative enough about it that our grandchildren will never have to wonder. We cannot afford to let our relationships become merely mutual toleration or accommodation. The Lord has intended for us to have much more than that. Eternal marriage is godlike marriage. It is a description of a quality or type of marriage, not of its duration. What type of marriage would our God have? That is a question worthy of our contemplation.

I recently read about the “Rose Street Women” of World War II Germany. These were German women married to Jewish men. These men enjoyed a privileged status for a time as laborers, but they were eventually ordered into a Jewish community center in Berlin on Rose Street pending deportation to Auschwitz, the notorious camp in Poland. Some two dozen women heard rumors that their husbands were being held on Rose Street and went there to protest.

A crowd began to gather, eventually reaching 1,000 people in size. “Give us back our men!” the women shouted. “We want to see our men.” The women refused orders to leave and remained for several days. Then machine gun nests were set up by SS troops who ordered the streets cleared. The women remained.

Six days after the protest began, Joseph Goebbels ordered the release of 1,500 prisoners inside the center. Twenty-five men already

bound for Auschwitz—their concentration-camp numbers freshly tattooed—were returned to their wives.

While it is unclear why the Nazis buckled to the Rose Street women, their strong and enduring love for their men may offer the best explanation.

If such good people without the understanding and spirit that the gospel provides can love so fully, so courageously, think of the potential we have. I pray that we will love purely, and with the Spirit and the understanding, always and forever. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.