

# The Latter-day Saint Concept of Marriage



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## By President Hugh B. Brown (1883–1975)

First Counselor in the First Presidency

Marriage is and should be a sacrament. The word *sacrament* is variously defined, but among Christian people it signifies a religious act or ceremony, solemnized by one having proper authority. It is a pledge, or solemn covenant, a spiritual sign or bond between the contracting parties themselves and between them and God. That marriage was instituted and sanctified by the Lord Himself is shown by the following quotations:

“And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . .

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and

shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:18, 24).

When Jesus departed from Galilee and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan, a great multitude followed Him, and the Pharisees questioned Him regarding divorce.

“And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined

together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4–6).

## Marriage Fulfills God’s Purposes

It is plain that God intended that man and woman should become one. By personally officiating at this first wedding, He sanctified the institution of marriage. It is a normal, healthful, and desirable state and was instituted to fulfill God’s purpose in the earth.

It is the central element in the domestic establishment. It is more than a human institution to be regulated solely by custom and civil law. It is more than a contract under the sanction of moral law. It is or should be a religious sacrament by which men and women solemnly undertake to cooperate with God in His avowed purpose to make earth life and mortality available to His spirit children and to bring to pass their immortality and eternal life.

There are those who say that the highest, most dedicated, and most desirable life may be achieved outside the marriage covenant. In other words, they would forbid those who seek the highest glory to be “contaminated by physical and animal-like associations.” There



is no warrant in the scripture for such doctrine. In the book of Proverbs we read, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22). . . .

And in the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “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” (D&C 49:15).

### Temple Marriage Brings True Happiness

The Latter-day Saints believe that in order to attain the best in life and the greatest happiness in this world and for the next, men and women must be married in the temple for time and eternity. Without the sealing ordinances of temple marriage,

man cannot achieve a godlike stature or receive a fulness of joy. . . .

To a Latter-day Saint, there is only one kind of marriage that is wholly acceptable: temple or celestial marriage, which is performed only in the temples of the Church. Temples are erected and dedicated in holiness to the Lord to provide a place where spiritual and eternal ceremonies and ordinances may be performed. While we recognize civil marriages performed by ministers of other churches and civil marriages performed by officers of the law or others legally qualified to perform them, we believe that only in a temple of God can a marriage for time and eternity be performed and then only by one having the authority which Christ gave to Peter when

He said, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

This authority is referred to in the scriptures as “the keys of the

kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19), and in celestial marriage those keys open the door to that kingdom.

### Needs Are Fully Realized

Man has certain basic needs—moral, social, biological, and spiritual—and these can only be fully realized in the God-ordained institution of eternal marriage.

To live the abundant life here and eternal life hereafter, man must love and be loved, serve

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blessings are intended to continue throughout the eternities to come. But to enjoy the privileges and advantages of eternal love as it relates to husbands and wives, parents and children, the ordinance that authorizes and sanctifies this most beautiful of all relationships is not acceptable if it contains the limitation “until death do you part.” For family relationships and conjugal associations to be eternal, the marriage contract must

*authoritatively* state, “for time and for all eternity.”

All people should realize their responsibility to their offspring and to the covenants they make with respect thereto. When the Lord said, “We without them cannot be made perfect” (D&C 128:18), He was referring to a chain whose links extend into the future as well as the past. In fact, we may

have more direct responsibility for those entrusted to us in this life than to our ancestors. We cannot be held responsible for the sins, either of commission or of omission, of our ancestors, but He has warned that in case of failure on the part of our

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and sacrifice, have responsibility and exercise his God-given creative powers. “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

But perhaps the greatest value of marriage is not that which accrues to the individual man and woman. The purpose of their union in the beginning is indicated by the Lord’s commandment: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). In proper marriage, there is opportunity for man to realize his natural urge to be creative and productive. This can be completely fulfilled and properly enjoyed only in the marriage relationship, in child bearing and child rearing. Parents should remember that the children born to them—their children—are also the children of God. He is the Father of their spirit bodies, and during the pre-earth existence He wisely made provision

for eternal element and eternal spirit to be inseparably connected and receive a fulness of joy. Latter-day Saints therefore believe that God is actually the third partner in this relationship and that bringing children into the world within the divinely sanctioned institution of marriage is part of His plan to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

### **The Eternal Nature of Marriage**

When the Lord Jesus designated love of God and love of fellowmen as the two great commandments, He glorified love. In fact, we are told that God is love. Therefore, as God is eternal, so love must be eternal, and its fruits and



posterity, if it can be attributed to our failure in our duty to them, then the sins will be upon our heads.

Among the blessings of those who attain the highest degree in the celestial kingdom is the blessing of eternal increase, which, among other things, means that even after death men may continue to cooperate with God in bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

### Progressing as Eternal Companions

The Latter-day Saint concept of eternal progression includes eternal development, eternal increase of knowledge, power, intelligence, awareness, and all the characteristics and capacities that make for godhood. But in the economy of God, man cannot attain this state of continuing perfection in his unfinished or unmarried state. There must be growth and increase of the whole man—in other words, the man who has found and been united to his other half.

This concept of marriage, with its divine perspective, gives new meaning and adds importance, dignity, and glory to the idea of marriage. With this concept the thoughtful person will be more careful and selective in the choice of his eternal companion. Certainly before entering into such an eternal contract, both men and women should be humble and thoughtful and should prayerfully seek for divine guidance.

The religious sanctity and sanction of the marriage relationship [are] greatly enhanced and appreciated where the couple, before marriage—and they must, necessarily, be of the same faith—start with the same goal in mind. They must prepare and be worthy to receive the sacred ordinance in edifices where only the worthy may enter. Here they receive instruction, make covenants, and then at the altar pledge eternal love and fidelity, each for the other, in the presence of

God and of angels. Surely such a concept and practice, with its accompanying obligations, makes for the permanence of the home, the glorifying of the institution of marriage, and the salvation of the souls of men.

### An Act of Faith

Such marriage is essentially an act of faith, solemnized in the presence of a divine partner. There must be faith and courage to see it through, to endure to the end, despite the difficulties, trials, disappointments, and occasional bereavements which may be encountered.

When one accepts the conditions and obligations of this eternal partnership, he must realize that failure here is almost total failure. Whatever his successes may be in other fields of activity, if a man fails to discharge the obligations imposed by the eternal covenant, the appalling penalty will be the loss of celestial glory, accompanied by responsibility for the losses sustained by those with whom he made the contract and for whom he is responsible.

“Marriage is ordained of God unto man.

“Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might

answer the end of its creation;

“And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made” (D&C 49:15–17). ■

*Subheads added; punctuation and capitalization standardized.*



### NO BLESSINGS WITHHELD

“What of the many mature members of the Church

who are not married? Through no failing of their own, they deal with the trials of life alone. Be we all reminded that, in the Lord’s own way and time, no blessings will be withheld from His faithful Saints. The Lord will judge and reward each individual according to heartfelt desire as well as deed.”

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Celestial Marriage,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 94.