



Enriching Your Marriage

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Many years ago when I was practicing law, I was consulted by a woman who wanted a divorce from her husband on grounds that, in my opinion, seemed justified. After the divorce was concluded, I did not see her again for many years. In a chance meeting with her on the street, I noticed that the years of loneliness and discouragement were evident in her once-beautiful face.

After we passed a few pleasantries, she was quick to say that life had not been rich and rewarding for her and that she was tired of facing the struggle alone. Then she startled me by disclosing, "Bad as it was, if I had to do it over again and had known then what I do now, I would not have sought the divorce. This is worse."

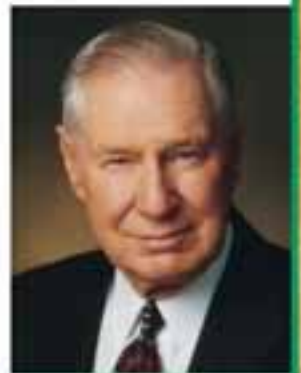
Statistically, it is difficult to avoid divorce. Experts project that about half of the women in the United States will have a marriage dissolve some time in their lives. Divorce is also increasing in many other countries. Unless the present rate of ever-increasing divorces diminishes, even more marriages will come to a tragic end.

Divorce can be justified only in the rarest of circumstances. In my opinion, "just cause" for divorce should be nothing less serious than a prolonged and apparently irredeemable relationship that destroys a person's dignity as a human being. Divorce often tears people's lives apart and shears family happiness. Frequently in a divorce the parties lose much more than they gain.

The traumatic experience one goes through in divorce seems little understood and is perhaps not well enough appreciated. Certainly, much more sympathy and understanding need to be extended to those who have experienced this great tragedy and whose lives cannot be reversed. Yet for those who are divorced, there is still much to be hoped for and expected in terms of fulfillment and happiness in life, particularly in the forgetting of self and in the rendering of service to others.

Difficult Questions

Why is happiness in marriage so fragile and fleeting for so many yet so abundant for others? Why does the resulting train of heartache and suffering have to be so



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long and have so many innocent people on board?

What are the missing enriching ingredients in so many marriages that began with such happiness and so many high hopes?

I have long pondered these difficult questions. Having spent almost a lifetime dealing with human experiences, I am somewhat familiar with the problems of unhappy marriages, of divorce, and of heartbroken families. I can also speak of great happiness because, thanks to my beloved Ruth, I have found in marriage the richest fulfillment of human existence.

Reasons for Divorce

There are no simple, easy answers to the challenging and complex questions of happiness in marriage. Among the many supposed reasons for divorce are the serious problems of selfishness, immaturity, lack of commitment, inadequate communication, and unfaithfulness.

In my experience there is another reason for failure of marriage that seems not so obvious but that precedes and laces through all of the others. It is the lack of a constant enrichment in marriage, an absence of that something extra which makes it precious, special, and wonderful, and without which it becomes drudgery or difficult or even dull.

Enriching a Marriage

You might wonder, "How can a marriage be constantly enriched?" We build our marriages with endless friendship, confidence, and integrity and also by ministering to and sustaining each other in our difficulties. Adam, speaking of Eve, said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). There are a few simple, relevant questions that each person, whether married or contemplating marriage, should honestly ask in an effort to become "one flesh." They are:

First, am I able to think of the interest of my marriage and spouse first before I think of my own desires?

Second, how deep is my commitment to my companion, aside from any other interests?

Third, is he or she my best friend?

Fourth, do I have respect for the dignity of my spouse as a person of worth and value?

Fifth, do we quarrel over money? Money itself seems neither to make a couple happy, nor the lack of it, necessarily, to make them unhappy. A quarrel over money is often a symbol of selfishness.

Sixth, is there a spiritually sanctifying bond between us?

Building Bridges of Enrichment

Several key practices can contribute to enriching a marriage.

Prayer. Marriage relationships can be enriched by better communication. One important way is to pray together. This will resolve many of the differences, if there are any, between the couple before going to sleep. I do not mean to overemphasize differences, but they are real and do make things interesting. I believe our differences are the little pinches of salt that can make the marriage seem more flavorful.

We communicate in a thousand ways, such as a smile, a brush of the hair, a gentle touch. We should remember each day to say, "I love you." The husband should say to his wife, "You're beautiful." Some other important words for both husband and wife to say, when appropriate, are, "I'm sorry." Listening is also an excellent form of communication.

Trust. Complete trust in each other is one of the greatest enriching factors in marriage. Nothing devastates the core of mutual trust necessary to maintain a fulfilling relationship like infidelity. There is never any justification for adultery. Despite this destructive experience, occasionally marriages are saved and families preserved. To do so



requires the aggrieved party to be capable of giving unreserved love great enough to forgive and forget. It requires the errant party to want desperately to repent and actually forsake evil.

Our loyalty to our eternal companion should not be merely physical, but mental and spiritual as well. Since there are no harmless flirtations and there is no place for jealousy after marriage, it is best to avoid the very appearance of evil by shunning any questionable contact with another to whom we are not married.

Virtue. Virtue is the strong glue that holds it all together. Said the Lord, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22).

Divine presence. Of all that can bless marriages, there is one special enriching ingredient that above all else will help join a man and a woman together in a very real, sacred, spiritual sense. It is the presence of the divine in marriage. Shakespeare, speaking through Queen Isabel in *King Henry the Fifth*, said, “God, the best maker of all marriages, / Combine your hearts in one” (act 5, scene 2, lines 67–68). God is also the best keeper of marriages.

There are many things that go into enriching a marriage, but some of them seem to be of the husk of the relationship. Having the companionship and enjoying the fruits of a holy and divine presence become the kernel of great happiness in marriage.

Spiritual oneness is the anchor. Slow leaks in the sanctifying dimension of marriage often cause marriages to become flat tires.

I believe that divorces are increasing because in many cases the union lacks that sanctifying benediction that flows from keeping the commandments of God. Marriages can die from a lack of spiritual nourishment.

Tithing. I learned in serving almost 20 years as bishop and as stake president that an excellent insurance against divorce is the payment of tithing. Payment of tithing seems to facilitate keeping the spiritual battery charged in order to make it through the times when the spiritual generator has been idle or is not working.

There is no great or majestic music that constantly produces the harmony of a great love. The most perfect music is a welding of two voices into one spiritual song. Marriage is the way provided by God for the fulfillment of the greatest of human needs, based upon mutual respect, maturity, selflessness,

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decency, commitment, and honesty. Happiness in marriage and parenthood can exceed a thousand times any other happiness.

Parenthood. The soul of the marriage is greatly enriched and the spiritual growing process is greatly strengthened when a couple become parents. For couples who can have children, parenthood should bring the greatest of all happiness. Men grow because as fathers they must take care of their families. Women blossom because as mothers they must forget themselves. We understand best the full meaning of love when we become parents. However, if children do not come, couples who are nevertheless prepared to receive them with love will be honored and blessed by the Lord for their faithfulness. Our homes should be among the most hallowed of all earthly sanctuaries.

In the enriching of marriage, the big things are the little things. There must be constant appreciation for each other and thoughtful demonstration of gratitude. A couple must encourage and help each other grow. Marriage is a joint quest for the good, the beautiful, and the divine.

The Savior has said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

May the presence of God be found enriching and blessing all marriages and homes, especially those of His Saints, as part of His eternal plan. ■

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Roll two different colors of clay into balls. Explain that each color represents a marriage partner. Roll the two balls into one ball. Ask a family member to try to separate the two colors. Discuss President Faust’s six questions one should ask when married or contemplating marriage. Testify of the importance of being unified in marriage.
2. Invite the family to stand in a circle. Have each person represent a key practice of enriching marriage. As you discuss the practice they represent, have them link arms or hold hands with the person at their side. Explain that the link would be broken if one family member was removed from the circle. Testify of the importance of keeping marriages strong.
3. Bring a saltshaker. Explain how salt enhances the flavor of food. Read the sentence where President Faust compares differences in marriage to pinches of salt, and discuss how differences can enhance marriage. If teaching a married couple, ask what they have done to increase their appreciation of one another.