



By Mark T. Hales,  
Counseling Manager

LDS Family Services

# U BECOMING United

## AS PARENTS

**E**lder Richard G. Scott said, “In the Lord’s plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. . . .

“Marriage allows . . . different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no higher calling or opportunity than to be a husband or wife, a father or mother. There is also no greater challenge. Mortals are by their nature imperfect, and family life is a laboratory for trial and error. The unique contributions that men and women bring to a marriage are enhanced when spouses serve each other and work to create unity.

However, the very traits that make individuals unique and that can make marriage fulfilling, such as differences in life experiences, personalities, skills, and talents, can also present challenges to establishing unity. As “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” teaches, “Happiness

in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”<sup>2</sup>

Working at creating unity between spouses can be even more challenging when children come along. Although children are a blessing and “an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3), raising children can create stresses strong enough to pull husbands and wives apart. Thus, by adding the roles of father and mother to those of husband and wife, individuals will find they need extra diligence in developing unity in the home.

No matter what differences spouses may have or what challenges they may face, when a husband and wife are unified under the basic principles of the gospel their



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*As we develop unity in our marriages, we strengthen relationships that protect our families and bring us joy.*

relationship as husband and wife, as well as their relationships with their children, will be improved.

### **United through Work**

I have a friend whose family lived on an acre of land when he was young. That acre was mostly occupied by a large garden, and each child was responsible for weeding, watering, and caring for the plants in an assigned section of the garden. My friend remembers how his father and mother brought the family together and worked side by side with their children as they cultivated the garden and gathered its crops. Now a grown man with his own family, my friend and his wife are continuing this tradition of working together. Although they don't have a garden, they do have an orderly method of working with their children to maintain their home. Each week family members are assigned different tasks, and they work together—with the

parents as the leaders—to set the house in order. My friend has often commented that he is grateful for the example of unity through work that his parents set. As he carries on this tradition in his own home, his family continues to be blessed with a sense of peace, love, and togetherness.

Balancing the responsibilities of a home is hard work—and not just because the work of building a home is physically demanding. Husbands and wives have different roles to play in the family. The Family Proclamation teaches, “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. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”<sup>3</sup>

Most couples have to figure out how to implement those roles within their own family units. As the Family



Proclamation explains, “Circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation.”<sup>4</sup> Depending on their needs, husbands and wives may sometimes take on what some might consider nontraditional roles. To establish a successful home, couples need to share their burdens and openly discuss their needs. Rotating tasks may help a husband and wife gain new experience and appreciate each other’s contributions.

Frequently, what is required of spouses to complete all the work necessary to take care of a family in a gospel setting is not adaptation but sacrifice. For example, individuals may need to let go of worldly possessions or sacrifice personal interests for the betterment of the family. This can be difficult, but as spouses build unity through work and share the load of caring for their family, they will find that their love and joy for each other and for their family grow.

### United through Equal Partnership

President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) said, “The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (*meet* means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership. Presiding in righteousness necessitates a shared responsibility between husband and wife; together you act with knowledge and participation in all family matters.”<sup>5</sup>

If you have ever watched children playing on a seesaw, think about how the mechanics of this playground device apply to a marriage. When the children adjust their weight and position on opposite sides of the seesaw, one child goes up, and the other child goes down. If they are of equal weight and refrain from kicking off the ground or jostling the seesaw, they will balance, both suspended in midair. If one child suddenly jumps off his or her end of



*Consistent daily family prayer, offered sincerely both morning and night, will bring greater peace, understanding, inspiration, and love to our homes.*

the seesaw, it’s impossible for the other child to stay balanced. The child left on the seesaw then falls to the ground and can be injured.

The same is true of husbands and wives as they work as a united team, balancing on the various seesaws in their own lives and cooperating to maintain stability in the home. Chores, finances, their relationship, and other challenges require give and take, adapting and responding as situations change. Fathers and mothers can achieve this balance by following gospel principles and the guidance of inspired leaders and by regularly consulting with each other to evaluate needs and finding ways to work together better.

### United through Prayer

Couples will find no greater help than seeking Heavenly Father’s guidance in their marriage and as parents. As fathers and mothers kneel each day, offering their gratitude to God and praying for each other and their family, they invite the love of Heavenly Father into their hearts and home. Open, humble prayer unifies hearts and can dispel anger, disharmony, and frustration. Prayer brings unique blessings to each family. And when combined with temple worship and personal scripture study, prayer offers enlightenment into how to deal with challenges that threaten the harmony of a marriage.

*Unity in families grows out of active efforts to create unity. It won't often happen by accident.*



Consistent prayer between a father and mother does not guarantee that trials will cease. The adversary continues his attack on the family, and as he continues his attempts to destroy bonds of spouses, parents, and children, husbands and wives must increase their own righteous efforts.

Several years ago our family decided to make a more focused effort on family prayer because we had been pretty good about holding family prayer in the evening but couldn't seem to make morning prayer happen quite as often. True to our commitment, we knelt in family prayer on that first morning with our hearts ready to reap the blessings. But I felt discouraged when the rest of the day turned out horribly. All I could think was, "Well, morning family prayer didn't work."

The problem was this: I had thought we would be blessed by having fewer trials as we prayed more as a family and that one prayer would fix all our problems. However, my experience revealed that isn't usually the case. When spirituality increases, the adversary often increases his efforts to discourage us from following gospel principles. As my family consistently engaged in morning prayer over the next couple of months and then years, we felt greater peace, understanding, inspiration, and love in our home and were strengthened to meet the ongoing challenges in our lives.

### **United through Expressing Love**

Raising children through life's challenges can put a strain on marriages. Fathers and mothers will need to make a conscious effort to continue cultivating their marriage relationship.

Fostering love requires fathers and mothers to actively express their love for each other every day. Such expressions—honestly given and done in ways that appropriately communicate the message of love that each person needs, whether that be through physical contact, a smile, service, or other means—unify companionships by increasing and sustaining the feelings of mutual affection and appreciation.



PHOTO BY MATT REIER

President Thomas S. Monson has counseled, "Brethren, let's treat our wives with dignity and with respect. They're our eternal companions. Sisters, honor your husbands. They need to hear a good word. They need a friendly smile. They need a warm expression of true love."<sup>6</sup>

That does not mean that disagreements will not crop up, for they inevitably will. But husbands and wives who have expressed love will have a greater capacity to weather the storms successfully and likely will have a greater desire to forgive and move forward.

Parents should also remember that their example influences others in their home. As President Hunter said, "You should express regularly to your wife and children your reverence and respect for her. Indeed, one of the greatest things a father can do for his children is to love their mother."<sup>7</sup> Children take a lot of cues from watching their parents. The more children see their parents express love for each other, the more likely they are to follow that example themselves.

### **United through Faithful Effort**

Building unity between husbands and wives requires effort, but the effort is worth it. There are many things parents can do that will help them become more unified, and I have highlighted just a few. As parents consistently seek to unify their marriages by working together, by establishing and evaluating an equal partnership, by offering regular prayer together to solicit the help of the Lord, and by engaging in frequent expressions of love, they will foster a unity that will bring greater peace and joy into their personal lives, the marriage, and the family. ■

#### **NOTES**

1. Richard G. Scott, "The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 73–74.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 102.
4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 102.
5. Howard W. Hunter, "Being a Righteous Husband and Father," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 51.
6. Thomas S. Monson, "Abundantly Blessed," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 112.
7. Howard W. Hunter, "Being a Righteous Husband," 50.