



# Achieving Oneness in Marriage

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An arch consists of two pillars that curve upward and fuse together, forming a single architectural support that can carry enormous amounts of weight. In fact, architects and builders know that an arch is many times stronger and can thus uphold far more weight than two separate pillars with a lintel (or cross-beam) placed between them.

This is a beautiful metaphor for marriage. Just as two pillars in an arch lean in and fuse together at the apex to create greater strength, a woman and man, truly committed and united to one another, become stronger together than they could ever be apart.

Christ taught this principle when a cunning Pharisee asked: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

Jesus responded:

“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” (Matthew 19:3–6).

Marriage is more than a legal partnership between two people. It is two people reaching upward toward heaven, where they fuse together to form a union so complete and indivisible that they become one.

Achieving that oneness, however, requires sustained effort from husband and wife.



*With God's loving guidance, a husband and wife can form a special, unbreakable, eternal bond.*

### **1. Make Your Spouse's Happiness Your First Priority**

The first principle of becoming one is to make our marital relationship and the well-being of our spouse the most central element in our lives. Latter-day scripture teaches, "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else" (Doctrine and Covenants 42:22).

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said: "I have learned that the real essence of happiness in marriage lies . . . in an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one's companion. Thinking of self alone and of the gratification of personal desires will build neither trust, love, nor happiness. Only when there is unselfishness will love, with its concomitant qualities, flourish and blossom."<sup>1</sup>

Many people lose this perspective and see marriage as something that will hold them back from accomplishing their dreams. In reality, a gospel-centered marriage enlarges rather than shrinks us. This enlargement comes because of the promise found multiple times in the scriptures: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25; see also Matthew 10:39; Doctrine and Covenants 98:13).

Putting our spouse's well-being and happiness above our own may mean rearranging our priorities and reconsidering how we spend our time.

President Russell M. Nelson put it this way:

"Months ago, I received a heartbreaking letter from a dear sister. She wrote: '[My daughters and I] feel we are in fierce competition for our husbands' and sons' undivided

attention, with 24/7 sports updates, video games, stock market updates, [and] endless analyzing and watching of games of every [conceivable] sport. It feels like we're losing our front-row seats with our husbands and sons because of their permanent front-row seats with [sports and games].'

"Brethren, your first and foremost duty as a bearer of the priesthood is to love and care for your wife."<sup>2</sup>

The instruction here is clear: in our list of priorities and duties, our spouse always takes first position.

One newly married sister shared with us her experience. Both she and her husband led busy and successful lives before deciding to date and marry each other. Their biggest obstacle during their courtship and new marriage was learning how to give each other quality time and attention amidst their busy and ambitious lives.

Eventually they realized that a husband and wife can come together in a couple identity (what some like to call a "we-identity") while still maintaining their individual interests and strengths and that couples should support one another's growth and development. This newly married sister shared, "If something matters to my husband, even if it is not a huge interest or passion for me, that thing matters to me because I love him. I may not love the thing, but I love him more than anything and want to support him."

The importance of giving our spouse top priority is unmistakable in the context of the gospel. Indeed, becoming one in marriage is at the heart of the plan of salvation and is essential to becoming like our heavenly parents. No wonder "marriage is ordained of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 49:15).

### **2. Commit Completely, Especially When Challenges Arise**

Most marriages go through cycles of happy and hard times. Sometimes those hard times are caused by external

stresses. Other times our personal weaknesses, immaturities, and underdeveloped relationship skills divide our hearts.

Whatever the reason, it is wise to be patient and give ourselves time to mature and allow our marriages time to improve rather than abandon them when they are hurting. Jesus affirmed, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6). A second principle of marital oneness, then, is that we remain together; oneness means forever.

Sometimes married couples run into unanticipated problems and doubt their choice to marry. Research shows that more than half of married couples in the United States have thought seriously about divorce at some time and about one in four married individuals have thought about divorce recently.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly there are legitimate justifications for divorce, but ending the marriage is not the right solution for most marital difficulties. We should work hard to repair our marriages.

President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught: “Under the law of the Lord, a marriage, like a human life, is a precious, living thing. If our bodies are sick, we seek to heal them. We do not give up. . . . The same should be true of our marriages, and if we seek Him, the Lord will help us and heal us.”<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Seek Oneness through Fidelity and Marital Intimacy

To be truly one in marriage, we must refrain from developing or maintaining intimate physical or emotional relationships with anyone online or in person who isn’t our spouse. We must never divide our sexual desires—we invest our affection fully and exclusively in our spouse. This includes shunning pornography.

If our health and individual circumstances allow, we also need to nurture sexual intimacy in our marriages and not let that aspect of the marriage be neglected. Sexual inactivity robs a couple of one of God’s most powerful gifts for uniting our hearts.

As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Such an act of love between a man and a woman is . . . a symbol of total union: union of their hearts, their hopes, their lives, their love, their family, their future, their everything.”<sup>5</sup>

Sister Wendy W. Nelson, wife of President Russell M. Nelson, echoed this sentiment when she said, “As an important part of the expression of their love, the Lord wants a husband and wife to partake of the wonders and joys of marital intimacy.”<sup>6</sup>

### 4. Become Equal Partners

In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” we are taught that “fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”<sup>7</sup> As President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority.”<sup>8</sup>

This side-by-side, equal partnership manifests itself in all aspects of the marriage relationship, including in how couples make decisions together. To be one we must counsel with our spouse in all things and strive to come to a union of mind and heart on all matters.


### The Blessings of Becoming One

As in all things, Jesus Christ is our example. He is perfectly united with His Father in purpose, in mission, in mind, and in heart (see John 17:3). Christ expects the same from us. As He taught the early Saints, “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:27).

As we strive for that oneness, as we—like two pillars of a marital arch reaching upward to God—form a lasting union, great blessings result. President Russell M. Nelson taught, “Marriage brings greater possibilities for happiness than does any other human relationship.”<sup>9</sup>

Achieving that oneness requires more than exchanging rings and vows. It is a long and challenging journey. But it is an exciting and fulfilling one. And because marriage is ordained of God and core to our eternal growth and





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development, God will multiply our fishes-and-loaves efforts in marriage to become one. ■

#### NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016), 162.
2. Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign*, May 2019, 68.
3. See Alan J. Hawkins and others, "What Are They Thinking? A National Study of Stability and Change in Divorce Ideation," *Family Process*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Dec. 2017), 852–68. (Sample included married individuals aged 25–50.)
4. Dallin H. Oaks, "Divorce," *Ensign*, May 2007, 71–72.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments" (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 12, 1988), 5, [speeches.byu.edu](https://speeches.byu.edu).
6. Wendy W. Nelson, "Love and Marriage" (worldwide devotional for young adults, Jan. 8, 2017), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
7. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2002, 54.
9. Russell M. Nelson, "Nurturing Marriage," *Ensign*, May 2006, 36.