



By Elder Bruce C. Hafen
Served as a member of the
Seventy from 1996 to 2010

THE Temple AND THE NATURAL ORDER OF Marriage



This is the second of two articles by Elder Hafen that help commemorate the 20th anniversary of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” The first article was published in the August 2015 issue of the Liahona.

When a confused culture confuses us about what marriage means, we may give up on ourselves and each other much too soon. But there is hope. The temple’s eternal pattern can help us overcome the modern chaos.

Every time we go to the temple, the ordinances reorient us to the natural order of the universe, including the natural order of marriage. Like the ancient mariner, we look to the heavens to get our bearings—and we do that through the temple. Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley wrote:

“The temple is built so as to represent the organizing principles of the universe. It is the school where mortals learn about these things. . . .

“ . . . The earth temple [is] in the middle of everything, . . . around which all heavenly motions revolve, the knot that ties earth and heaven together.”¹

Thus, the temple has the power to etch God’s natural laws of marriage and family life into our hearts.

The Marriage of Adam and Eve

We first learn the temple’s teachings about marriage in the story of Adam and Eve—the primal story of the temple. A friend once asked me, “If Christ is at the center of the gospel and the temple, why doesn’t the temple

The temple is the knot that ties heaven and earth together.



endowment teach the story of Christ’s life? What’s all this about Adam and Eve?”

I have come to feel that the life of Christ is the story of *giving* the Atonement. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of *receiving* the Atonement, amid the sometimes-formidable oppositions of mortality.

Adam and Eve were the first people to receive the Atonement of Jesus Christ. They were also the first parents to know the love a new child brings, the soul-stretching sacrifices of raising a child, and the agony of watching children use their agency unwisely.

Father Lehi gives us the doctrinal context for understanding their experience—and ours. He tells us that if Adam and Eve had not eaten from the tree of knowledge, they “would have remained in the garden of Eden. . . .

“And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. . . .



“Adam fell that men might be [mortal]; and men are [mortal], that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:22–23, 25).

So, paradoxically, sin, misery, and children help create the context for learning what joy means—a process made possible by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Because of the Atonement, we can learn from our experiences without being condemned by them. And receiving the Atonement, as Adam and Eve did, is not just a doctrine about erasing black marks; it is the core doctrine that allows human development. Thus, Christ’s sacrifice didn’t just return them to an Eden of innocence. That would be a story with no plot and no character growth. Rather, they left the garden holding on to each other and moving forward, together, into the world in which we now live.

The temple’s primal story is quite consciously the story of a married couple who help one another face continuous mortal opposition. For only in confronting that sometimes-miserable opposition could they learn to comprehend true joy.

Let us consider two implications from the Adam and Eve story about our understanding of marriage. First is the

Restoration’s positive view about the Fall. We know that Adam and Eve chose wisely in the garden because only mortality could provide the experience needed to fulfill God’s plan for them—and for us. In contrast, traditional Christianity teaches that Eve’s choice was a tragic mistake, bringing down the wrath of God on all mankind. Some Christian churches still teach that because women are the daughters of foolish Eve, wives should be *dependent* on their husbands.

Reacting strongly against this idea, most people today would say that a wife should be *independent* of her husband. And, in fairness, they would add, a husband should also be independent of his wife. But when both spouses are independent of each other, they accept only today’s “nonbinding commitments,” and people leave their marriage when the fun stops—or when the trouble starts.

Which is correct: dependence or independence? Neither one. The restored gospel—unlike the rest of Christianity—teaches that Eve and Adam’s choice in the garden was not a mistake or an accident; rather, it was a deliberate, even glorious, part of the plan of salvation. Thus the Restoration sees Eve—and all women—as noble beings who are the complete equals of men.

So, Eve is not dependent on Adam; nor is she independent from him. Rather, Eve and Adam are *interdependent* with each other. They are “equal partners” who “help one another” in everything they do.²

Bringing a Broken Heart to the Altar

Second, when Adam and Eve left the garden, the Lord directed them to build an altar and offer animal sacrifices. After many days an angel asked Adam why he offered sacrifices. He answered, “I know not, save

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the Lord commanded me.” Then the angel told him, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten” (Moses 5:6–7).

Thus, the animals Adam and Eve sacrificed were symbols that pointed them toward the Father’s future redemptive sacrifice of His Son. The angel then taught them that Christ’s sacrifice and the plan of redemption would give meaning and purpose to all of their opposition—indeed, to all of their mortal experience.

Some of us go to the temple today the way Adam and Eve first offered sacrifices—simply because we are commanded, without knowing why. Simple obedience is certainly better than not performing the ordinances at all. But the Lord, who sent the angel, must have wanted them to know why—and I believe He wants *us* to know why.

Are today’s temple ordinances also “a similitude . . . of the Only Begotten”? Think of how the temple’s altars, like the altar of Adam and Eve, are altars of prayer, sacrifice, and covenants. Think of the dimensions of sacrifice in all the covenants of the endowment.

Since the time that Christ completed His atoning mission, we no longer offer animal sacrifices, but we do covenant to sacrifice. In what way? Christ taught the Nephites, “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20; see also 2 Nephi 2:7).

Animal sacrifices symbolized the Father’s sacrifice of the Son, but the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit symbolizes the Son’s sacrifice of Himself. Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote that “Jesus died of a broken heart.”³ In similitude, we now offer ourselves—our own broken hearts—as a personal sacrifice.⁴ As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal *in us* upon the altar and letting it be consumed!”⁵

While serving recently as president of the St. George Utah Temple, I was about to seal a young couple. As I invited them to the altar and the groom took his bride by the hand, I realized that they were about to place upon



that altar of sacrifice their own broken hearts and contrite spirits—a selfless offering of themselves to each other and to God in emulation of Christ’s sacrifice for them. And for what purpose? So that through a lifetime of sacrificing for each other—that is, trying to live as He did—they might become ever more as He is.

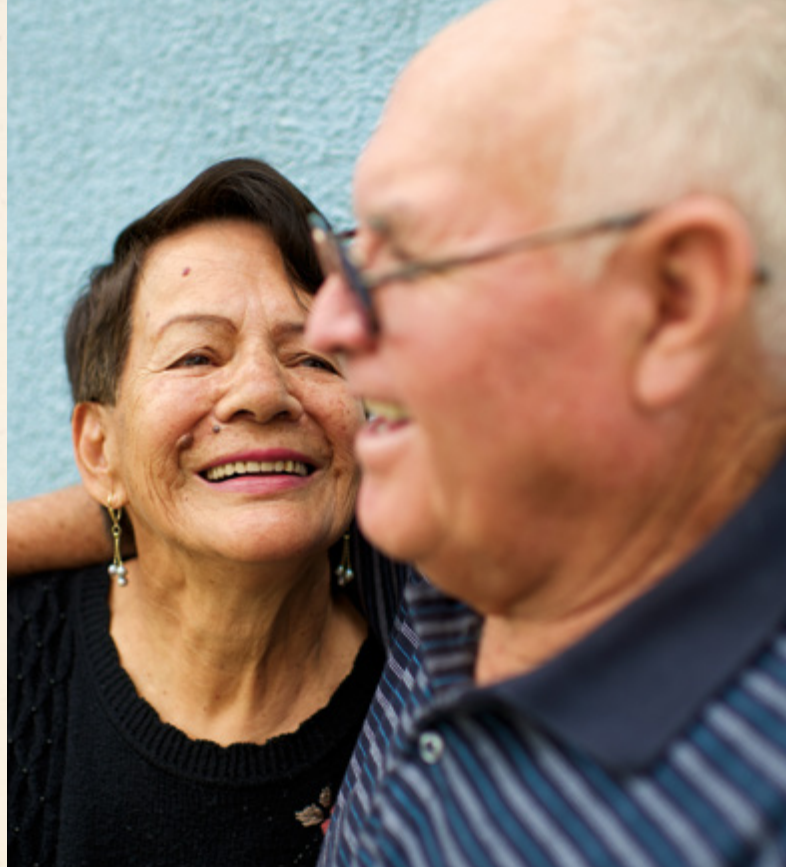
By living that way every day, they would each come closer to God, which would also bring them closer to each other. Thus, living the covenants of the sealing ordinance would sanctify not only their marriage but also their hearts and their very lives.

This understanding of marriage differs starkly and powerfully from the prevailing view of marriage today. In His parable of the good shepherd, Jesus described a hireling—someone who is paid to care for the sheep. When the wolf comes, He said, the hireling “leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.” Why does the hireling run away? Because “his own the sheep are not,” said Jesus. By contrast, He said of Himself, “I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep.” (See John 10:11–15.)

Many people today think of marriage as an informal arrangement between two hirelings. When a hireling feels threatened by some wolf of trouble, he or she simply flees. Why should a mere hireling risk comfort or convenience, let alone life?

But when we offer in our marriage a broken heart and a contrite spirit in similitude of the Good Shepherd, we promise to give our lives for the sheep of our covenant, a day or even an hour at a time. This process invites us to take selflessly upon ourselves both the afflictions and the joys of our companion and children, emulating in our own limited way how the Savior takes upon Himself our afflictions.

“Be you afflicted in all his afflictions” (D&C 30:6), said the Lord to Peter Whitmer about his missionary companion Oliver Cowdery. Isaiah echoed that phrase in describing Christ and those He redeems: “In all their affliction he was afflicted, . . . and he . . . carried them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9; see also D&C 133:53).



A temple worker whose wife passed away after she had suffered a debilitating illness for several years told me, “I thought I knew what love was—we’d had over 50 blessed years together. But only in trying to care for her in these last few years did I discover what love really is.”

By sharing in his wife’s afflictions, this man discovered deep wellsprings of compassion in his heart that a hireling will never know. The accumulation of such discoveries produces the sanctifying process of becoming like the Good Shepherd—by living and giving as He does. Not incidentally, that kind of living breathes irreplaceable strength into the social interests of our culture.

Marriage and Authentic Joy

A friend asked recently, “How close to perfection must we live to receive the exalted promises of a temple sealing?” Husbands and wives know each other so well, especially those who seek for eternal blessings, that on some days they can honestly wonder if they are living close enough to perfection—or if their spouse is.

I like the answer given in Moroni’s farewell words: “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all *your* might, mind and strength, *then* is his grace sufficient for you, that . . . ye may be perfect[ed] in Christ” (Moroni 10:32; emphasis added). One way to rid

ourselves of *ungodliness* is to stay close to the temple, because in its ordinances “the power of *godliness* is manifest” (D&C 84:20; emphasis added). Further, loving “God with all [our] might” means loving to the extent of our own unique personal capacity, not to the extent of some abstract and unreachable scale of perfection.

As we deny ourselves of ungodliness and honestly love God as fully as we are able, Christ’s perfecting grace can complete the process of making us whole. A First Presidency letter written in 1902 suggests what Christ’s total sacrifice combined with our own total sacrifice will look like: “After reaching the perfected state of life people will have no other desire than to live in harmony with [righteousness], including that which united them as husband and wife. . . . Those who attain to the first or celestial resurrection must necessarily be pure and holy, and they will be perfect in body as well. . . . Every man and woman that reaches this unspeakable condition of life will be as beautiful as the angels that surround the throne of God; . . . for the weaknesses of the flesh will then have been overcome and forgotten; and both [will] be in harmony with the law that united them.”⁶

A woman I know was married about 50 years ago in the temple. After she and her husband had had several children, his turbulent life led to their divorce and to his excommunication from the Church. Then she gave up her own Church membership and chose some thorny paths. Later her former husband passed away. I met her when her daughter brought her to my office to explore whether the mother could ever return to the temple.

After a peaceful conversation about how we can learn from experience without being condemned by it, we discussed the processes of repentance, rebaptism, and the restoration of temple blessings. Then I told her that the restoration ordinance would also restore her temple sealing. Was she ready for that?

The daughter spoke first. “I have bipolar disorder,” she said. “My son is bipolar. We know far more about that disorder than we used to, and we take medications that help. Looking back, I believe my father was bipolar, and that probably influenced many of the hard things in our family’s life. I don’t judge him now.”

The mother answered softly, “If I really can return to the temple someday, I will be ready for my sealing to be restored.”

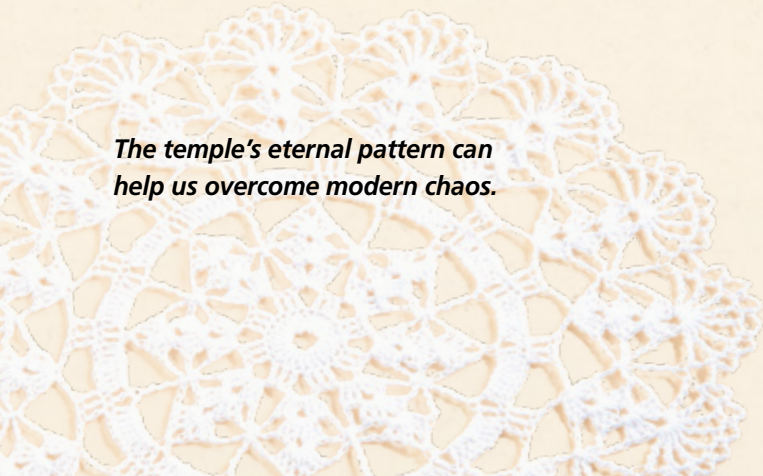
As I watched them walk down the hall, I realized that the temple and Elijah’s sealing power are sources of reconciliation, turning not only the hearts of children and parents toward one another but also turning the hearts of wives and husbands toward one another. I later received a message that the mother was being rebaptized.

I bear witness that the order of marriage God gave to Adam and Eve is worth whatever it takes—to find it, to build it, and to keep it in our lives. I also testify that husbands and wives who try to live like the Good Shepherd will discover, and will give to each other, a more abundant life of authentic joy. ■

From an address, “Marriage, Family Law, and the Temple,” delivered at the J. Reuben Clark Law Society Annual Fireside in Salt Lake City on Jan. 31, 2014.

NOTES

1. Hugh Nibley, *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 19 vols. (2008), 17:312, 313; see also *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), “Meanings and Functions of Temples,” 4:1458–59.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
3. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 669.
4. “And there were gathered together . . . an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name” (D&C 138:12–13).
5. Neal A. Maxwell, “Deny Yourselves of All Ungodliness,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 68; emphasis added.
6. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund letter to Christine Eggleston, Jan. 28, 1902, LDS Church History Library.



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