Building an Eternal Marriage

One of the most devastating statistics in our current day is the rate of successful marriages. As the family becomes less and less important among the world’s priorities so does the value of building a strong family. More young people within the church are putting off marriage for other personal gratifications. With the destruction of the family occurring all around us and the temptations of divorce and infidelity at all corners some could possibly doubt that building an eternal marriage in our day is just too difficult. I would like to talk about 8 keys that I have learned this semester that will aid in building an eternal marriage. Remember these are only keys and will only bring success when followed with faith and hope.

Follow the Brethren

The first key in building an eternal marriage is to follow the brethren. The brethren include the prophet and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and other general authorities of the church. Priesthood leaders like bishops and stake presidents and other local priesthood callings also count among the brethren as long as they follow the prophet. God told His people in the Old Testament that, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”¹ If we want to hear the Lord’s voice, than we must listen to His servants. General conference and the Ensign are perhaps the greatest tools we have to hear modern leaders and the Scriptures provide us with prophets and apostles of old.

President Henry B. Eyring in the May Ensign 1997 talked about finding safety in the counsel of the brethren. He said that “when we honor the keys of that priesthood channel by listening and giving heed, we tie ourselves to a lifeline which will not fail us in any storm.”² God has established His line of authority that connects His children to Him. When we listen to the prophet’s voice we know what dangers lay ahead and how to defeat them. We gain hope in overcoming weaknesses in our marriage and we learn how to bring the Spirit into our homes.

Lehi, in the Book of Mormon, had a vision that gives us a visual of what we face in our marriage. It is found in 1 Nephi chapter 8 and is called the vision of the tree of life. In this dream Lehi is led to a tree which represents the love of God.³ After partaking of the fruit he bids his family to come to the tree and partake as well. He sees the rod of iron leading through the mist of darkness and the great and spacious building full of the pride of the world, mocking those at the tree. This vision represents our marriage in that world has poisoned the view of marriage as something to be made a mockery of. We know that it is ordained of God and is necessary to reach a fullness of joy and eternal life. The building is so easy to see because it is huge and floats above the ground for all to see. The tree, however is much more difficult to see through the mists. Holding on the iron rod means following the brethren. If we follow the brethren we will not be lost, but rather we will make our way to the tree with our families and partake of the love of God.

¹ Amos 3:7
³ 1 Nephi 8
Always Keep an Eternal Perspective in Your Marriage

We believe that marriages can last forever. The Family Proclamation states, “The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave.” One of the purposes of the mist of darkness in the vision of the tree of life was to skew peoples’ vision of the tree and ultimately what they wanted in the end. They could the fun and excitement in the building but it was much harder to see the eternal perspective of their decisions. As marriages move towards exaltation their view of the eternities can be blinded and even forgotten. This is why keeping an eternal perspective on the marriage can save it from those things that really aren’t important in the long run. President Howard W. Hunter said that every couple “has the responsibility of looking far beyond mortality regarding many things that become of prime importance as we walk this way through mortality.” The responsibility is to look past the mists that seek to blind us every day and see what we are to become and what consequence of an eternal nature the daily choices have.

Part of keeping an eternal perspective is agreeing to Lord’s time and His terms. The Lord has established a time for everything and has His own timetable. Elder Dallin H. Oaks addressed this issue in a devotional talk given at Brigham Young University in 2002 titled “Timing.” He taught that true faith requires trust in the Lord and His timetable for everything. There can be a difference between things that are right at the right time and things that are right at the wrong time. My wife Brooke and I had an experience that showed this principle. While we were engaged my mother was battling cancer and was getting worse and worse each week. We were to be married in April at the Dallas temple. My parents were in California and we began to debate whether to move the wedding to California so that my parents could be there. As we prayed and asked for guidance we felt we should not change the date yet. I was getting very nervous and was receiving pressure from many people to move the wedding but I had not yet felt that it was right. Finally, just weeks before the wedding I felt the impression to move the date. We ended up getting married in California and knew that we had done the right thing at the right time. Just because something is right doesn’t make the time right to do it. Elder Oaks said this regarding the issue: “In all the important decisions in our lives, what is most important is to do the right thing. Second, and only slightly behind the first, is to do the right thing at the right time. People who do the right thing at the wrong time can be frustrated and ineffective. They can even be confused about whether they made the right choice when what was wrong was not their choice but their timing.”

As we seek to keep an eternal perspective in our marriages, we will patiently wait for the Lord’s timing and we will put aside those things that really don’t matter and focus on the things that truly do. Never forget the plan of happiness. Never lose faith in your marriage and most importantly, always keep an eternal perspective.

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4 The Family: A Proclamation to the World – paragraph 3
5 The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter, edited by Clyde J. Williams (1997), p.139
Remember What you are Trying to Become in the End

This key goes hand in hand with the previous key. In order to keep an eternal perspective we must realize and remember what we are trying to become through our marriage. We do not get married to have fun or because we want to be with someone. We get married and make covenants because we are trying to become like God. We are seeking to become Gods ourselves. This is not possible without the covenant of marriage and having a family. Elder Dallin H. Oaks underlined the importance of this key; “The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become. This spotless and perfected state will result from a steady succession of covenants, ordinances, and actions, and accumulation of right choices, and from continuing repentance.”  
Sure, the gospel brings joy and is a place where we can worship and come closer to God, but that’s not what the ultimate goal is. We are not here to just be better; we are here to become perfect. That will not happen here on earth but through our covenants we make, in particular the marriage covenant, we continue in our journey to become Gods.

Know the Doctrine of Marriage and Parenthood

In the vision of the tree of life the building represents the pride of the world or in other words the wisdom of the world. Marriage in general and the building of families has decreased greatly in our day and age. The wisdom of the world says that marriage is silly and is not as important as becoming well known and respected through our careers. Divorce is ever plaguing our society and more and more children are being born into single parent homes. The true doctrine of marriage does not come out of the wisdom of the world but from God.

In 1995, President Gordon B. Hinkley read aloud for the first time what we now know as “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” This document should be referred to always when seeking the true doctrine of marriage and parenthood. The first paragraph reads, “We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” No other doctrine of mankind can or will ever replace the eternal doctrine set by our Heavenly Father.

“Satan would have us believe men and women are so alike that our unique gifts are not necessary, or so different we can never hope to understand each other,” taught Sheri Dew. She encourages couple to understand that men and women are different by divine design. Man and woman are like two arms on one body in that without one the body cannot be balanced or fulfill its complete function. Current issues in our society include women’s distance from the home seeking recognition in the workplace. When God created Adam and Eve he taught them their respective roles. Adams was to provide and protect and Eves was to bear and nurture. These roles are being confused by Satan in an effort to destroy the family.

In a pamphlet given by the Quorum of the Twelve called “Father, Consider Your Ways,” the role of the husband is addressed. “The title father is sacred and eternal. It is significant that of all the titles of respect and honor and admiration that are given to Deity, He has asked to

8 “It Is Not Good for Man or Woman to Be Alone,” Sheri L. Dew – General Conference October 2001