

Cornerstones of a Happy Home

By Gordon B. Hinckley

More than half a century has passed, but I have never forgotten my father's tenderness toward my mother. She died when she was fifty, a relatively young woman. During the months of her illness he was constantly solicitous for her comfort. But this attitude was not expressed only after she became ill. It had been evident to us, their children, throughout our lives. In the happy home of our childhood, we knew - and that came of a feeling and not of any declaration - that they loved, respected, and honored one another. What a blessing that image has been. When we were children we felt a certain security because of it. As we grew older our thoughts and our actions were colored by that remembered example.

My own beloved companion and I have now been married for nearly half a century - forty-seven years to be exact. She too was blessed to come from a home where there was an environment of companionship, love, and trust. I know that most of you have come out of such homes; further, I know that most of you live with happiness and love in your own homes. But there are many, very many, who do otherwise.

Troubled Marriages

It is difficult for me to understand the tragic accounts of troubled marriages that come to me. They speak of abuse. They speak of dictatorial attitudes and of some husbands who are bullies in their own homes. They speak of violations of trust and of broken covenants. They speak of divorce and tears and heartache. Only the other day a letter came to my desk from a woman who wrote at length of her troubles. In a spirit of desperation she asked, "Does a woman have any promise of some day being a first class member of the human race? Will she always be a piece of chattel wrapped in a chuddar acting only by the permission of the man who stands at her head?" (A chuddar, incidentally, is a very simple shawl worn by women in India). She then continued, "To me the answers to these questions are no longer important, but I have daughters. If it is possible for a woman to look forward to an eternity of anything other than being barefoot and pregnant, I would like to be able to teach them this."

There is bitter tragedy in the lines of that letter. I fear there are many others who may feel that way. The situation is tragic because it is so extremely different from what our Father in Heaven would have for his daughters. Behind this woman's words I see the picture of a wife who is discouraged, starved for appreciation, ready to give up, and not knowing which way to turn. I see a husband who has defaulted on his sacred obligations, who is calloused in his feelings and warped in his perceptions, and who denies through his manner of living the very essence

of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not doubt that there has been fault on her part as well as his, but I am inclined to think that his is the more serious.

Equality in Marriage

To men within the sound of my voice, wherever you may be, I say, if you are guilty of demeaning behavior toward your wife, if you are prone to dictate and exercise authority over her, if you are selfish and brutal in your actions in the home, then stop it! Repent! Repent now while you have the opportunity to do so.

To you wives who are constantly complaining and see only the dark side of life, and feel that you are unloved and unwanted, look into your own hearts and minds. If there is some thing wrong, turn about. Put a smile on your faces. Make yourselves attractive. Brighten your outlook. You deny yourselves happiness and court misery if you constantly complain and do nothing to rectify your own faults. Rise above the shrill clamor over rights and prerogatives, and walk in the quiet dignity of a daughter of God.

The time has come for all of us to put the past behind us in a spirit of repentance and live the gospel with new dedication. The time is now for husbands and wives who may have offended one another to ask forgiveness and resolve to cultivate respect and affection one for another, standing before the Creator as sons and daughters worthy of his smile upon us.

I should like to read words of the Lord, with a slight modification that does not alter the meaning. Said he: "He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, . . . For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one. . . . Where fore they are no more twain, but one" (Matthew 19:4-6). God our Eternal Father ordained that we should be companions. That implies equality. Marriage is a joint venture. Of course, there are hazards and problems, but these are secondary to the greater opportunities and greater satisfactions that come of sublimating selfish interests to the good of the partnership.

Some years ago I clipped from the Deseret News a column by Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who said, in part: "There seems to be a superstition among many thousands of our young who hold hands . . . in the drive-ins that marriage is a cottage surrounded by perpetual hollyhocks, to which a perpetually young and handsome husband comes home to a perpetually young and beautiful wife. When the hollyhocks wither and boredom and bills appear, the divorce courts are jammed. . . Life is like an old-time rail journey - delays, sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride."

The trick, my brethren and sisters is to enjoy the journey, traveling hand in hand, in sunshine and storm, as companions who love one another. Anyone can do it

with a disciplined effort to live the gospel. Remember, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Four Cornerstones

At the risk of repeating some things I have said before, I should like to suggest four cornerstones on which to establish and nurture your homes. I do not hesitate to promise that if you will do so, your lives will be enriched and be fruitful of great good, and your joy will be everlasting.

MUTUAL RESPECT

The first of these I choose to call mutual respect.

Each of us is an individual. Each of us is different. There must be respect for those differences, and while it is important and necessary that both the husband and the wife strive to ameliorate those differences, there must be some recognition that they exist and that they are not necessarily undesirable. There must be respect one for another, notwithstanding such differences. In fact, the differences may make the companionship more interesting.

I have long felt that happiness in marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well being of one's companion. That involves a willingness to overlook weaknesses and mistakes.

One man has said, "Love is not blind-it sees more, not less. But because it sees more, it is willing to see less" Julius Gordon, *Treasure Chest*, ed. Charles L. Wallis [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], p. 168).

Many of us need to stop looking for faults and begin to look for virtues. Booth Tarkington once remarked that "an ideal wife is any woman who has an ideal husband" (*Looking Forward and Others* [Garden City, N.Y.: Page and Co., 1926]them, p. 97).

Unfortunately, some women want to remake their husbands after their own design. Some husbands regard it as their prerogative to compel their wives to fit their standards of what they think to be the ideal. It never works. It only leads to contention, misunderstanding, and sorrow.

There must be respect for the interests of one another. There must be opportunities and encouragement for the development and expression of individual talent. Any man who denies his wife the time and the encouragement to develop her talents, denies himself and his children a blessing which could grace their home and bless their posterity.

It is commonplace with us to say that we are sons and daughters of God. There is no basis in the gospel for inferiority or superiority as between the husband and

wife. Do you think that God our Eternal Father loves his daughters less than he loves his sons? No man can demean or belittle his wife as a daughter of God without giving offense to her Father in Heaven.

I am offended by the sophistry that the only lot of the Latter-day Saint woman is to be barefoot and pregnant. It's a clever phrase, but it's false. Of course we believe in children. The Lord has told us to multiply and replenish the earth that we might have joy in our posterity, and there is no greater joy than the joy that comes of happy children in good families. But he did not designate the number, nor has the Church. That is a sacred matter left to the couple and the Lord. The official statement of the Church includes this language: "Husbands must be considerate of their wives, who have the greater responsibility not only of bearing children but of caring for them through childhood, and should help them conserve their health and strength. Married couples should exercise self-control in all of their relationships. They should seek inspiration from the Lord in meeting their marital challenges and rearing their children according to the teachings of the gospel" (General Handbook of Instructions [1983], p.77).

Husbands, wives, respect one another. Live worthy of the respect of one another. Cultivate that kind of respect which expresses it self in kindness, forbearance, patience, forgiveness, true affection, without officiousness and without show of authority.

THE SOFT ANSWER

I pass now to the second cornerstone. For want of a better name I call it the soft answer.

The writer of Proverbs long ago declared, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

I hear so many complaints from men and women that they cannot communicate with one another. Perhaps I am naive, but I do not understand this. Communication is essentially a matter of conversation. They must have communicated when they were courting. Can they not continue to speak together after marriage? Can they not discuss with one another in an open and frank and candid and happy way their interests, their problems, their challenges, their desires?

It seems to me that communication is essentially a matter of talking with one another. Let that talk be quiet for quiet talk is the language of love. It is the language of peace. It is the language of God. It is when we raise our voices that tiny mole hills of difference become mountains of conflict.

It seems to me that there is something significant in the description of Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal: "A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks." That is a rather vivid description of some of the

arguments that take place between husbands and wives but, notes the writer of the scripture, "The Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). The voice of heaven is a still small voice. The voice of peace in the home is a quiet voice.

There is need for much discipline in marriage, not of one's companion but of one's self. Husbands, wives, remember, "He [or she] that is slow to anger is better than the mighty" (Proverbs 16:32). Cultivate the art of the soft answer. It will bless your homes, it will bless your lives, it will bless your companionships, it will bless your children.

FINANCIAL HONESTY

Cornerstone number three is financial honesty. I am satisfied that money is the root of more trouble in marriage than all other causes combined.

I am confident that there is no better discipline nor one more fruitful with blessings in the handling of our resources than obedience to the commandment given to ancient Israel through the Prophet Malachi, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

Those who live honestly with God are more likely to live honestly with one another and their associates. Further, as they budget for their tithes and offerings they will cultivate a discipline in the handling of their resources.

We live in an age of persuasive advertising and of skillful salesmanship, all designed to entice us to spend. An extravagant husband or wife can jeopardize any marriage. I think it is a good principle that each have some freedom and independence with everyday, necessary expenditures, while at the same time always discussing and consulting and agreeing on large expenditures. There would be fewer rash decisions, fewer unwise investments, fewer consequent losses, fewer bankruptcies if husbands and wives would counsel together on such matters and unitedly seek counsel from others.

Live honestly with the Lord. Live honestly with one another as companions. Live honestly with others. Make timely payment of obligations a cardinal principle of your lives. Consult with one another and be united in your decisions. The Lord will bless you as you do so.

FAMILY PRAYER

The final cornerstone on which to build your home is family prayer.

I know of no other practice that will have so salutary an effect upon your lives as will the practice of kneeling together in prayer. The very words, Our Father in Heaven, have a tremendous effect. You cannot speak them with sincerity and with recognition without having some feeling of accountability to God. The little storms that seem to afflict every marriage become of small consequence while kneeling before the Lord and addressing him as a suppliant son and daughter.

Your daily conversations with him will bring peace into your hearts and a joy into your lives that can come from no other source. Your companionship will sweeten through the years. Your love will strengthen. Your appreciation one for another will grow.

Your children will be blessed with a sense of security that comes of living in a home where dwells the Spirit of God. They will know and love parents who respect one another, and a spirit of respect will grow in their own hearts. They will experience the security of kind words quietly spoken. They will be sheltered by a father and mother who, living honestly with God, live honestly with one another and with their fellowmen. They will mature with a sense of appreciation, having heard their parents in prayer express gratitude for blessings great and small. They will grow with faith in the living God.

Your companionship will be one that will sweeten and strengthen through the years and that will endure through eternity. Your love and appreciation for one another will increase and, as the years pass, you will be able to say with Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways....
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise....

...I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!-and, if God choose.
I shall but love thee better after death.
(Sonnets from the Portuguese, no.43)

God bless you, my brethren and sisters, husbands and wives, joined together as appreciative companions in sacred covenants of marriage, for time and eternity, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

This address was given by President Gordon B. Hinckley at a satellite broadcast fireside for husbands and wives on January 29, 1984.