

ings of President Heber J. Grant, who said, "I can never think of [the pioneers] but I am full of admiration and gratitude, and utter a prayer to the Lord to help me, as one of the descendants of that noble band, to be loyal, to be true, to be faithful as they were!"¹⁸

Brothers and sisters, join with us and begin now to prepare for a spiritual journey next year by walking in the footsteps of our beloved pioneers in every land. We must be sure that the legacy of faith received from them is never lost. Let their heroic lives touch our hearts, and especially the hearts of our youth, so the fire of true testimony and unwavering love for the Lord and His Church will blaze brightly within each one of us as it did in our faithful pioneers. Their accomplishments were possible because they knew, as I know, that our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, restored the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith and that this Church will continue to roll forth until it fills the whole earth. To this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1904, 1.
2. See Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Resource Study: Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* (1991), 40, 49, 62–63.
3. Holograph quoted in Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion* (1994), 37.
4. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 255.
5. See George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:85.
6. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (1983–85), 3:55; spelling and punctuation modernized.
7. Reed C. Durham Jr., "The Iowa Experience: A Blessing in Disguise," *Brigham Young University Studies*, fall 1981, 463; see also 474.
8. See Kimball, *Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail*, 35, 49.
9. See Kimball, *Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail*, 66.
10. See Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West*, 6 vols. (1939–51), 6:360–61.
11. Peter Howard McBride, quoted in Madsen, *I Walked to Zion*, 45–46; see also 41, 43.
12. See Jens Neilson journal, quoted in *Wyoming Trails Resource Handbook* (Church Educational System, 1996), 29.
13. Address delivered near Riverton, Wyoming, 15 Aug. 1992, quoted in *Wyoming Trails Resource Handbook* (Church Educational System, 1995), 27.
14. See Jens Neilson journal, quoted in *Wyoming Trails Resource Handbook* (Church Educational System, 1996), 29.
15. Margaret McNeil Ballard autobiography, quoted in Madsen, *I Walked to Zion*, 126.
16. "This Is the Place," in Preston Nibley, comp., *Faith Promoting Stories* (1943), 81; see also *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, 1917, 157.
17. Joseph F. Smith, in Nibley, *Faith Promoting Stories*, 83; see also *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, 1917, 159.
18. In Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 7.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen

Marriage is a covenant, not a contract

Three summers ago I watched a new bride and groom, Tracy and Tom, emerge from a sacred temple. They laughed and held hands as family and friends gathered

to take pictures. I saw happiness and promise in their faces as they greeted their reception guests, who celebrated publicly the creation of a new family. I wondered that night how long it would be until these two faced the opposition

that tests every marriage. Only then would they discover whether their marriage was based on a *contract* or a *covenant*.

Another bride sighed blissfully on her wedding day, "Mom, I'm at the end of all my troubles!" "Yes," replied her mother, "but at which end?" When troubles come, the parties to a *contractual* marriage seek happiness by walking away. They marry to obtain benefits and will stay only as long as they're receiving what they bargained for. But when troubles come to a *covenant* marriage, the husband and wife work them through. They marry to give and to grow, bound by covenants to each other, to the community, and to God. *Contract* companions each give 50 percent; *covenant* companions each give 100 percent.

Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will. Jesus taught about contractual attitudes when he described the "hireling," who performs his conditional promise of care only when he receives something in return. When the hireling "seeth the wolf coming," he "leaveth the sheep, and fleeth . . . because he . . . careth not for the sheep." By contrast, the Savior said, "I am the good shepherd, . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep."¹ Many people today marry as hirelings. And when the wolf comes, they flee. This idea is wrong. It curses the earth, turning parents' hearts away from their children and from each other.²

An eternal perspective of marriage

Before their marriage, Tom and Tracy received an eternal perspective on covenants and wolves. They learned through the story of Adam and Eve about life's purpose and how to return to God's presence through obedience and the Atonement. Christ's life is the story of giving the Atonement. The life of Adam and Eve is the story of receiving the Atonement, which empowered

them to overcome their separation from God and all opposition until they were eternally "at one" with the Lord and with each other.

Without the Fall, Lehi taught, Adam and Eve would never have known opposition. 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."³ Astute parents will see a little connection here—no children, no misery! But left in the garden, Adam and Eve could never know joy. So the Lord taught them they would live and bear children in sorrow, sweat, and thorns.

Still, the ground was cursed *for their sake*:⁴ their path of affliction also led to the *joy* of both redemption and comprehension.⁵ That is why the husband and wife in a covenant marriage sustain and lift each other when the wolf comes. If Tom and Tracy had understood all this, perhaps they would have walked more slowly from the gardenlike temple grounds, like Adam and Eve, arm in arm, into a harsh and lonely world.

And yet—marrying and raising children *can* yield the most valuable religious experiences of a couple's lives. Covenant marriage requires a total leap of faith: they must keep their covenants without knowing what risks that may require of them. They must surrender unconditionally, obeying God and sacrificing for each other. Then they will discover what Alma called "incomprehensible joy."⁶

Of course, some have no opportunity to marry. And some divorces are unavoidable. But the Lord will ultimately compensate those faithful ones who are denied mortal fulfillment.

The "wolf" of natural adversity

Every marriage is tested repeatedly by three kinds of wolves. The first wolf is natural adversity. After asking God for years to give them a first child, David and Fran had a baby with a serious

heart defect. Following a three-week struggle, they buried their newborn son. Like Adam and Eve before them, they mourned together, brokenhearted, in faith before the Lord.⁷

The “wolf” of personal imperfections

Second, the wolf of their own imperfections will test them. One woman told me through her tears how her husband’s constant criticism finally destroyed not only their marriage but her entire sense of self-worth. He first complained about her cooking and housecleaning, and then about how she used her time, how she talked, looked, and reasoned. Eventually she felt utterly inept and dysfunctional. My heart ached for her, and for him.

Contrast her with a young woman who had little self-confidence when she first married. Then her husband found so much to praise in her that she gradually began to believe she was a good person and that her opinions mattered. His belief in her rekindled her innate self-worth.

The “wolf” of excessive individualism

The third wolf is the excessive individualism that has spawned today’s contractual attitudes. A seven-year-old girl came home from school crying, “Mom, don’t I belong to you? Our teacher said today that nobody *belongs* to anybody—children don’t belong to parents, husbands don’t belong to wives. I am *yours*, aren’t I, Mom?” Her mother held her close and whispered, “Of course you’re mine—and I’m yours too.” Surely marriage partners must respect one another’s individual identity, and family members are neither slaves nor inanimate objects. But this teacher’s fear, shared today by many, is that the bonds of kinship and marriage are not valuable ties that bind, but are, instead, sheer bondage. Ours is the age of the waning of belonging.

The adversary has long cultivated this overemphasis on personal autonomy, and now he feverishly exploits it. Our deepest God-given instinct is to run to the arms of those who need us and sustain us. But he drives us away from each other today with wedges of distrust and suspicion. He exaggerates the need for having space, getting out, and being left alone. Some people believe him—and then they wonder why they feel left alone. And despite admirable exceptions, children in America’s growing number of single-parent families are far more at risk than children in two-parent families.⁸ The primary cause of today’s general decline in child well-being is a remarkable “collapse of marriage.”⁹

Modern questions about marriage

Many people even wonder these days what marriage is. Should we prohibit same-sex marriage? Should we make divorce more difficult to obtain? Some say these questions are not society’s business because marriage is a private contract.¹⁰ But as the modern prophets recently proclaimed, “marriage . . . is ordained of God.”¹¹ Even secular marriage was historically a three-party covenant among a man, a woman, and the state. Society has a huge interest in the outcome and the offspring of every marriage. So the public nature of marriage distinguishes it from all other relationships. Guests come to weddings, wrote Wendell Berry, because sweethearts “say their vows to the community as much as to one another,” giving themselves not only to each other, but also to the common good “as no *contract* could ever join them.”¹²

Observing covenants brings strength

When we observe the covenants we make at the altar of sacrifice, we discover hidden reservoirs of strength. I once said in exasperation to my wife, Marie, “The

Lord placed Adam and Eve on the earth as full-grown people. Why couldn't he have done that with this boy of ours, the one with the freckles and the unruly hair?" She replied, "The Lord gave us that child to make Christians out of us."

One night Marie exhausted herself for hours encouraging that child to finish a school assignment to build his own diorama of a Native American village on a cookie sheet. It was a test no hireling would have endured. At first he fought her efforts, but by bedtime, I saw him lay "his" diorama proudly on a counter. He started for his bed, then turned around, raced back across the room, and hugged his mother, grinning with his fourth-grade teeth. Later I asked Marie in complete awe, "How did you do it?" She said, "I just made up my mind that I couldn't leave him, no matter what." Then she added, "I didn't know I had it in me." She discovered deep, internal wellsprings of compassion because the bonds of her covenants gave her strength to lay down her life for her sheep, even an hour at a time.

Be as shepherds, not hirelings

Now I return to Tom and Tracy, who this year discovered wellsprings of their own. Their second baby threatened to come too early to live. They might have made a hireling's convenient choice and gone on with their lives, letting a miscarriage occur. But because they tried to observe their covenants by sacrifice,¹³ active, energetic Tracy lay almost motionless at home for five weeks, then in a hospital bed for another five. Tom was with her virtually every hour when he was not working or sleeping. They prayed their child to earth. Then the baby required 11 more weeks in the hospital. But she is here, and she is theirs.

One night as Tracy waited patiently upon the Lord in the hospital, she sensed that perhaps her willingness to sacrifice

herself for her baby was in some small way like the Good Shepherd's sacrifice for her. She said, "I had expected that trying to give so much would be really difficult, but somehow this felt more like a privilege." As many other parents in Zion have done, she and Tom gave their hearts to God by giving them to their child. In the process they learned that theirs is a covenant marriage, one that binds them to each other and to the Lord.

May we restore the concept of marriage as a covenant, even the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.¹⁴ And when the wolf comes, may we be as shepherds, not hirelings, willing to lay down our lives, a day at a time, for the sheep of our covenant. Then, like Adam and Eve, we will have joy.¹⁵ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. John 10:12-15.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 2.
3. 2 Nephi 2:23.
4. See Moses 4:23.
5. See Moses 5:11.
6. Alma 28:8.
7. See Moses 5:27.
8. See Barbara Dafeo Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly*, Apr. 1993, 47.
9. Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage* (1996), 4.
10. See Bruce Dunford, "Governor: Take State Out of Marriage Role," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 9 Jan. 1996, p. A5; "Family Cannot Be Forced," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 Jan. 1996, p. A10.
11. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
12. Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (1993), 125, 137-39; italics added.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 97:8.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:2.
15. See 2 Nephi 2:25.