

In Partnership with the Lord

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Within the first few months of our marriage, my dear wife expressed her desire to study music. Intending to please her, I decided to orchestrate a big, heartfelt surprise for my sweetheart. I went to a musical instrument store and bought her a piano as a gift. I excitedly put the purchase receipt in a box with a beautiful bow and gave it to her, expecting an effusive reaction of gratitude for her extremely loving and attentive husband.

When she opened that little box and saw its contents, she lovingly looked at me and said, “Oh, my dear, you are wonderful! But let me ask you a question: Is this a gift or a debt?” After counseling together about the surprise, we decided to cancel the purchase. We were living on a student budget, as is the case with many young newlyweds. This experience helped me recognize the importance of the principle of full partnership in a marital relationship and how its application could help my wife and me to be of one heart and one mind.¹

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims the principle of full partnership between woman and man, both in mortal life and in the eternities. Although each possesses specific attributes and divinely appointed responsibilities, woman and man fill equally relevant and essential roles in God’s plan of happiness for His children.² This was evident from the very beginning when the Lord declared “that it was not good that the man should be alone; wherefore [He would] make an help meet for him.”³

In the Lord’s plan, a “help meet” was a companion who would walk shoulder to shoulder with Adam in full partnership.⁴ In fact, Eve was a heavenly blessing in Adam’s life. Through her divine nature and spiritual attributes, she inspired Adam to work in partnership with her to achieve God’s plan of happiness for all mankind.⁵

Let us consider two fundamental principles that strengthen the partnership between man and woman. The first principle is we are all alike unto God.⁶ According to gospel doctrine, the difference between woman and man does not override the eternal promises that God has for His sons and daughters. One has no greater possibilities for celestial glory than the other in the eternities.⁷ The Savior Himself invites all of us, God's children, "to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him."⁸ Therefore, in this context, we are all considered equal before Him.

When spouses understand and incorporate this principle, they do not position themselves as president or vice president of their family. There is no superiority or inferiority in the marriage relationship, and neither walks ahead of or behind the other. They walk side by side, as equals, the divine offspring of God. They become one in thought, desire, and purpose with our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ,⁹ leading and guiding the family unit together.

In an equal partnership, "love is not possession, but participation, ... part of that co-creation which is our human calling."¹⁰ "With true participation, husband and wife merge into the synergistic oneness of an 'everlasting dominion' that 'without compulsory means' will flow with spiritual life to them and their posterity 'forever and ever.'"¹¹

The second relevant principle is the Golden Rule, taught by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."¹² This principle indicates an attitude of mutuality, reciprocity, unity, and interdependence and is based on the second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."¹³ It merges with other Christian attributes such as long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and kindness.

To better understand the application of this principle, we can look at the sacred and eternal bond established by God between our first parents, Adam and Eve. They became one flesh,¹⁴ creating a dimension of unity that allowed them to walk together with respect, gratitude, and love, forgetting about themselves and seeking each other's well-being on their journey to eternity.

Those same characteristics are what we strive for in a united marriage today. Through the temple sealing, a woman and a man enter the holy order of matrimony in the new and everlasting covenant. By way of this order of the priesthood, they are given eternal blessings and divine power to direct their family affairs as they live according to the covenants they have made. From that point on, they move forward interdependently and in full partnership with the Lord, especially in regard to each of their divinely appointed responsibilities of nurturing and presiding in their family.¹⁵ Nurturing and presiding are interrelated

and overlapping responsibilities, which means that mothers and fathers “are obligated to help one another as equal partners”¹⁶ and share a balanced leadership in their home.

“To nurture means to nourish, teach, and support” family members, which is done by helping them to “learn gospel truths and develop faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ” in an environment of love. To preside means to “help lead family members back to dwell in God’s presence. This is done by serving and teaching with gentleness, meekness, and pure love.” It also includes “leading family members in regular prayer, gospel study, and other aspects of worship. Parents work in unity,” following the example of Jesus Christ, “to fulfill these [two great] responsibilities.”¹⁷

It is important to observe that the government in the family follows the patriarchal pattern, differing in some respects from priesthood leadership in the Church.¹⁸ The patriarchal pattern entails that wives and husbands are accountable directly to God for the fulfillment of their sacred responsibilities in the family. It calls for a full partnership—a willing compliance with every principle of righteousness and accountability—and provides opportunities for development within an environment of love and mutual helpfulness.¹⁹ These special responsibilities do not imply hierarchy and absolutely exclude any kind of abuse or improper use of authority.

The experience of Adam and Eve, after they left the Garden of Eden, beautifully illustrates the concept of interdependence between a mother and father in nurturing and presiding over their family. As taught in the book of Moses, they worked together to till the earth by the sweat of their brow in order to provide for the physical well-being of their family;²⁰ they brought children into the world;²¹ they called on the name of the Lord together and heard His voice “from the way toward the Garden of Eden”;²² they accepted the commandments the Lord gave them and strove together to obey them.²³ They then “made [these] things known unto their sons and their daughters”²⁴ and “ceased not to call upon God” together according to their needs.²⁵

My dear brothers and sisters, nurturing and presiding are opportunities, not exclusive limitations. One person may have a responsibility for something but may not be the only person doing it. When loving parents well understand these two major responsibilities, they will strive together to protect and care for the physical and emotional well-being of their children. They also help them face the spiritual dangers of our day by nurturing them with the good word of the Lord as revealed to His prophets.

Although husband and wife support each other in their divinely appointed responsibilities, “disability, death, or other circumstances

may necessitate individual adaptation.”²⁶ Sometimes one spouse or the other will have the responsibility of acting in both roles simultaneously, whether temporarily or permanently.

I recently met a sister and a brother who each live in this condition. As single parents, each of them, within their family sphere and in partnership with the Lord, has decided to devote their lives to the spiritual and temporal care of their children. They have not lost sight of their temple covenants made with the Lord and His eternal promises despite their divorces. Both have sought the Lord’s help in all things as they continually strive to endure their challenges and walk in the covenant path. They trust that the Lord will take care of their needs, not only in this life but throughout eternity. Both have nurtured their children by teaching them with gentleness, meekness, and pure love, even while experiencing difficult circumstances in life. From what I know, these two single parents do not blame God for their misfortunes. Instead, they look forward with a perfect brightness of hope and confidence to the blessings the Lord has in store for them.²⁷

Brothers and sisters, the Savior set the perfect example of unity and harmony of purpose and doctrine with our Father in Heaven. He prayed in behalf of His disciples, saying, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: ... that they may be one, even as we are one.”²⁸

I testify to you that as we—women and men—work together in a true and equal partnership, we will enjoy the unity taught by the Savior as we fulfill the divine responsibilities in our marriage relationships. I promise you, in the name of Christ, that hearts will be “knit together in unity and in love one towards another,”²⁹ we will find more joy in our journey to eternal life, and our capacity to serve one another and with one another will multiply significantly.³⁰ I bear witness to these truths in the holy name of the Savior Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Moses 7:18.
2. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
3. Moses 3:18; see also Genesis 2:18.
4. “The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (*meet* means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Howard W. Hunter* [2015], 224).
5. See Moses 3:18–24; 4:12; 5:10–12.
6. See Romans 2:11; 1 Nephi 17:35; 2 Nephi 26:33.

7. See Mosiah 2:41.
8. 2 Nephi 26:33.
9. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Unity,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
10. Madeleine L’Engle, *The Irrational Season* (1977), 48.
11. Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, “Crossing Thresholds and Becoming Equal Partners,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2007, 28; *Liahona*, Aug. 2007, 30; see also Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46.
12. Luke 6:31; see also Matthew 7:12.
13. Mark 12:31.
14. See Genesis 2:23–24.
15. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
16. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
17. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2.1.3, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:21–26; see also *General Handbook*, 4.2.4.
19. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 24–27; Ezra Taft Benson, “What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, 6–10; *Tambuli*, Apr./May 1986, 1–6.
20. See Moses 5:1.
21. See Moses 5:2.
22. Moses 5:4.
23. See Moses 5:5.
24. Moses 5:12.
25. Moses 5:16.
26. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
27. See 2 Nephi 31:20.

28. John 17:21–22.
29. Mosiah 18:21.
30. See Henry B. Eyring, “Our Hearts Knit as One,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 68–71.