The Eternal Family
Brigham Young University-Idaho

Eternal Truth & Law

Protect the Family
THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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.

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divinely ordained destinies of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be reunited eternally.

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.
The Eternal Family - Intro Packet Contents

* Day One Reading

Intro

Families in the Church," Handbook 2: Administering the Church  
Sister Julie Beck, "Teaching the Doctrine of the Family"  
Elder Bruce C. Hafen, "How We Lost the Plot"
1. God the Father’s Plan for His Eternal Family

1.1.1 The Premortal Family of God
The family is ordained of God. It is the most important unit in time and in eternity. Even before we were born on the earth, we were part of a family. Each of us “is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents” with “a divine nature and destiny” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). God is our Heavenly Father, and we lived in His presence as part of His family in the premortal life. There we learned our first lessons and were prepared for mortality (see D&C 138:56).

1.1.2 The Purpose of Mortality
Because of God’s love for us, He prepared a plan that included our coming to the earth, where we would receive bodies and be tested so that we could progress and become more like Him. This plan is called “the plan of salvation” (Alma 24:14), “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), and “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25; see also verses 26–33).

The purpose of God’s plan is to lead us to eternal life. God declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Eternal life is God’s greatest gift to His children (see D&C 14:7). It is exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Through the plan of salvation, we can receive this blessing of returning to God’s presence and receiving a fullness of joy.

1.1.3 The Atonement of Jesus Christ
In order to gain exaltation in the kingdom of God, we must overcome two obstacles of mortality: death and sin. Because we cannot overcome either obstacle by ourselves, Heavenly Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior and Redeemer. The Savior’s atoning sacrifice made it possible for all of God’s children to overcome physical death, be resurrected, and gain immortality. The Atonement also made it possible for those who repent and follow Him to overcome spiritual death, return to God’s presence to dwell with Him, and obtain eternal life (see D&C 45:3–5).

1.1.4 The Role of Families in God’s Plan
As part of our Heavenly Father’s plan, we were born into families. He established families to bring us happiness, to help us learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare us for eternal life.

Parents have the vital responsibility to help their children prepare to return to Heavenly Father. Parents fulfill this responsibility by teaching their children to follow Jesus Christ and live His gospel.

1.1.5 The Role of the Church
The Church provides the organization and means for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God’s children. It provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them.

1.2 Returning to the Father

1.2.1 The Gospel of Jesus Christ
The plan of salvation is the fullness of the gospel. It includes the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and all the laws, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel. It provides the way for us to experience joy in mortality (see 2 Nephi 2:25) as well as the blessing of eternal life. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be cleansed and sanctified from sin and prepare to enter again into the presence of our Eternal Father. To receive this blessing, we must follow the principles and ordinances of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:3). We must:

1. Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.
2. Turn to God through sincere repentance, having a change of heart and confessing and forsaking sins.
3. Receive the saving ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins.
4. Be confirmed a member of the Church and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.
5. Endure to the end by keeping sacred covenants.

These principles have been taught since the days of Adam. As we come to understand and believe these truths and gain a firm testimony of Jesus Christ, we strive to obey His commandments and want to share our blessings with our family and others (see 1 Nephi 8:9–37). With this secure foundation of testimony, other elements of Church activity follow naturally.
Personal spiritual growth takes place as we draw close to God through prayer, scripture study, pondering, and obedience. Nephi taught:

“After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

Each of us is accountable before God to learn and keep His commandments and to live the gospel. We will be judged according to our actions, the desires of our hearts, and the kind of people we have become. As we become true followers of Jesus Christ, we experience a mighty change of heart and “have no more disposition to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2; see also Alma 5:12–15; Moroni 10:32–33). As we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, we grow line upon line, becoming more like the Savior in loving and serving others.

1.2.2 The Role of Church Leaders and Teachers
Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers strive to help others become true followers of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 18:18–30). To assist individuals and families in this effort, they:

1. Teach and testify of the pure doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Strengthen individuals and families in their efforts to keep their sacred covenants.
3. Provide counsel, support, and opportunities for service.

In addition, certain priesthood leaders have the authority to oversee the performance of the saving priesthood ordinances.

1.3 Establishing Eternal Families

Families are central to God’s plan, which provides a way for family relationships to extend beyond the grave. Sacred temple ordinances and covenants, faithfully kept, help us return to the presence of God, united eternally with our families.

1.3.1 Husband and Wife
Exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom can be attained only by those who have faithfully lived the gospel of Jesus Christ and are sealed as eternal companions. The sealing of husband and wife for time and eternity by the authority of the priesthood—also known as temple marriage—is a sacred privilege and obligation that all should strive to receive. It is the foundation of an eternal family.

The nature of male and female spirits is such that they complete each other. Men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.

The Lord has commanded husbands and wives to cleave to each other (see Genesis 2:24; D&C 42:22). In this commandment, the word cleave means to be completely devoted and faithful to someone. Married couples cleave to God and one another by serving and loving each other and by keeping covenants in complete fidelity to one another and to God (see D&C 25:13).

A couple is to become one in establishing their family as the basis of a righteous life. Latter-day Saint husbands and wives leave behind their single life and establish their marriage as the first priority in their lives. They allow no other person or interest to have greater priority in their lives than keeping the covenants they have made with God and each other. Nonetheless, married couples continue to love and support their parents and siblings while focusing on their own families. Similarly, wise parents realize that their family responsibilities continue throughout life in a spirit of love and encouragement.

Being one in marriage requires a full partnership. For example, Adam and Eve worked together, prayed and worshipped together, sacrificed together, taught their children the gospel together, and mourned over wayward children together (see Moses 5:1, 4, 12, 27). They were united with each other and with God.

1.3.2 Parents and Children
“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. … God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). By divine design, both a man and a woman are essential for bringing children into mortality and providing the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.

Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred responsibility. Parents and priesthood and auxiliary leaders should do all they can to reinforce this teaching. Concerning the roles of fathers and mothers, Church leaders have taught: “Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). When there is no
father in the home, the mother presides over the family. Parents have a divinely appointed responsibility "to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World"; see also Mosiah 4:14–15).

Wise parents teach their children to apply the healing, reconciling, and strengthening power of the Atonement within their family. Just as sin, mortal weaknesses, emotional hurt, and anger are conditions that separate God's children from Him, these same conditions can separate family members from each other. Each family member has a responsibility to strive for family unity. Children who learn to strive for unity at home will find it easier to do so outside the home.

1.3.3 Unmarried Members of the Church

All members, even if they have never married or are without family in the Church, should strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. This means preparing to become worthy spouses and loving fathers or mothers. In some cases these blessings will not be fulfilled until the next life, but the ultimate goal is the same for all.

Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God.

1.4 The Home and the Church

In the teachings and practices of the restored gospel, the family and the Church help and strengthen each other. To qualify for the blessings of eternal life, families need to learn the doctrines and receive the priesthood ordinances that are available only through the Church. To be a strong and vital organization, the Church needs righteous families.

God has revealed a pattern of spiritual progress for individuals and families through ordinances, teaching, programs, and activities that are home centered and Church supported. Church organizations and programs exist to bless individuals and families and are not ends in themselves. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers seek to assist parents, not to supersede or replace them.

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders must endeavor to strengthen the sacredness of the home by ensuring that all Church activities support the lives of individuals and families. Church leaders need to be careful not to overwhelm families with too many Church responsibilities. Parents and Church leaders work together to help individuals and families return to our Father in Heaven by following Jesus Christ.

1.4.1 Strengthening the Home

Followers of Christ are invited to "gather" “stand in holy places,” and “be not moved” (D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22; see also 2 Chronicles 35:5; Matthew 24:15). These holy places include temples, homes, and chapels. The presence of the Spirit and the behavior of those within these physical structures are what make them “holy places.” Wherever Church members live, they should establish a home where the Spirit is present. All members of the Church can make efforts to ensure that their place of residence provides a place of sanctuary from the world. Every home in the Church, large or small, can be a “house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119). Church members can invite the Spirit into their homes through simple means such as wholesome entertainment, good music, and inspiring artwork (for example, a painting of the Savior or a temple).

A home with loving and loyal parents is the setting in which the spiritual and physical needs of children are most effectively met. A Christ-centered home offers adults and children a place of defense against sin, refuge from the world, healing from emotional and other pain, and committed, genuine love.

Parents have always been commanded to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; Enos 1:1) and “in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). The First Presidency proclaimed:

“We call upon parents to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility.

“We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform” (First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999).

Parents have the primary responsibility for helping their children know Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (see John 17:3). Latter-day Saint fathers and mothers have been commanded to teach gospel doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and ways of righteous living to their children (see D&C 68:25–28). Children who are so reared and taught are more likely to be prepared at the appropriate age to receive priesthood ordinances and to make and keep covenants with God.
Strengthening families is the focus of inspired Church programs such as home teaching (see D&C 20:47, 51), visiting teaching, and family home evening. As in all things, Jesus set the example of entering homes to minister, teach, and bless (see Matthew 8:14–15; 9:10–13; 26:6; Mark 5:35–43; Luke 10:38–42; 19:1–9).

1.4.2 Family Home Evening

Latter-day prophets have counseled parents to hold a weekly family home evening to teach their children the gospel, bear testimony of its truthfulness, and strengthen family unity. Stake and ward leaders are to keep Monday evenings free from all Church meetings and activities so family home evenings may be held.

Family home evening may include family prayer, gospel instruction, testimony sharing, hymns and Primary songs, and wholesome recreational activities. (For information on using music in the home, see 14.8.) As part of family home evening, or separately, parents may also call a periodic family council to set goals, resolve problems, coordinate schedules, and give support and strength to family members.

Family home evening is sacred, private family time under the direction of the parents. Priesthood leaders should not give directions as to what families should do during this time.

1.4.3 Strengthening Individuals

Church leaders should give special attention to individuals who do not presently enjoy the support of a family of strong Church members. These members may include children and youth whose parents are not members of the Church, other individuals in part-member families, and single adults of all ages. They are covenant members of God’s eternal family, deeply loved by Him. These individuals should be given opportunities for service in the Church. The Church can provide wholesome sociality and fellowship that these members can find nowhere else.

Every member of the Church is as precious as every other. God’s eternal plan provides for all of His faithful children to receive every blessing of eternal life, exalted in families forever.
1. It's a great blessing for me to be with you, my wonderful friends in the seminary and institute program. Thank you for the service that you give throughout the Church in the world. As I have traveled in my Church responsibilities, I've met so many of you. You are ecclesiastical leaders and also the leaders and teachers of the rising generation. Thank you for all you do.

2. A few of your number are here in the studio with me today representing the rest of you. These are seminary and institute teachers from the Ogden, Utah, area. We are so grateful to them for coming with their wives and husbands to share this experience together.

3. It is a blessing for us to have the quality of teachers and leaders that you are helping our rising generation. You have a great responsibility, and you have a position of influence in the kingdom. We know that we couldn't teach the rising generation with such effectiveness without you—those who are full time and those who are volunteers. Thank you, thank you, thank you. My heart swells with gratitude for all that you do.

4. I've served on the Board of Education and on the Executive Committee of the Board of Education for almost two and a half years now, and I've seen that every single teacher who is recommended for employment and every leader in Church education passes through a review process that goes all the way to the First Presidency. How blessed we are to have that process.

5. We are very interested in who is teaching the rising generation. A major financial commitment of the Church's education program is to the seminaries and institutes of religion. I've been studying again your Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders (2001) and hope that you are reviewing this also. This is a marvelous resource for you in all that you do. In the front section it says, "Religious education is education for eternity and requires the influence of the Spirit of the Lord" (p. 1). I pray that we will have that influence with us as we review some things today.

6. I've mentioned how carefully the First Presidency worries about every detail of Church education. I know much money they spend on the rising generation. I know how many people are employed to take care of the rising generation. Why do they invest so much?

7. As I've met with young single adults around the world, I ask these questions: Why does the First Presidency care so much about the youth of the Church, and why do they invest so much? In their focus groups and their firesides, these are the answers I get, and you should be interested in these answers. You might ask your own students these questions. They say: "Well, we are the future Church leaders." "Education is the key to success." "We need training so we can stay strong." "Our testimonies are strengthened in our classes." "We need to meet other great Latter-day Saint youth." "We are the hope of the future." One said, "We appreciate it." Another one said, "Well, they spend so much money on us because we're worth it."

8. I was very interested in those answers. You have to know that after pushing hard and receiving response after response, I have rarely heard, "So I will someday be a better father, or a better mother, or a better family leader." Family is rarely on their minds. Their responses are generally about self, and of course we know this is the time of life they're in. They're living in a very self-interested time of life, but they aren't thinking about family.

**The Objective**

9. You have some revised seminary and institute objectives. When you got these objectives, family was mentioned in them. It says that your purpose is "to help the youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven." That's your objective. So, you're going to do that through your purpose of living the gospel, of teaching students the gospel, and administering in such a way that you will be strengthening parents in those families. There are a couple of places where references to the family were added.

10. We're here to help with the Lord's purpose, as it says, to help them achieve "eternal life." In Moses 1:39 we learn,
“For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” We know that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ our immortality has been taken care of, but to receive eternal life we have some responsibilities. There are certain things that we have to do.

11. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “Your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as that has been revealed in these latter days” (“The Charted Course of the Church in Education” [address to seminary and institute of religion leaders, Aug. 8, 1938], 6, www.ldsces.org; see also Teaching the Gospel, 4). So, what is that gospel, and what is essential to achieve eternal life?

12. We know that we cannot achieve eternal life without the ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We find other teachings about living the commandments, serving, and giving away all we have to the Lord, but all of those things are based on the covenants we make. Without those covenants, we cannot achieve eternal life. That’s why we share the gospel and prepare missionaries—because Heavenly Father says, “All my children need to be taught and given an opportunity to make the covenants that will save them.” That’s why we build temples—because Heavenly Father says, “All my children need an opportunity to make these covenants.” So, we do vicarious work for those who have died. Heavenly Father wants every one of His children to have an opportunity. That’s why we teach the gospel to our youth—so they will understand and make and keep the covenants that they need to receive eternal life.

13. My purpose today is to talk to you about why the Board of Education wanted an emphasis on family in your objectives. Why would we want you to talk about family or understand family when you’re teaching a generation of unmarried people? We will review the theology of the family, threats to the family, and what we hope the rising generation—your students—will understand and do because of what you will teach them about the family.

The Theology of the Family

14. Let’s talk, first of all, about the theology of the family and why seminary and institute teachers need to understand and teach this. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a theology of the family. It’s based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. I don’t know how well your students understand that. They may be able to recite the facts about the Creation, but do they know that this is a theology of the family? The Creation of the earth was the creation of an earth where a family could live. It was a creation of a man and a woman who were the two essential halves of a family. It was not about a creation of a man and a woman who happened to have a family. It was intentional all along that Adam and Eve form an eternal family. It was part of the plan that these two be sealed and form an eternal family unit. That was the plan of happiness.

15. The Fall provided a way for the family to grow. Through the leadership of Eve and Adam, they chose to have a mortal experience. The Fall made it possible for Adam and Eve to have a family, to have sons and daughters. They needed to grow in numbers and grow in experience. The Fall provided that for the family.

16. The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. The plan of happiness and the plan of salvation was a plan created for families. I don’t think very many of the rising generation understand that the main pillars of our theology are centered in the family.

17. When we speak of qualifying for the blessings of eternal life, we mean qualifying for the blessings of eternal families. This was Christ’s doctrine, and this is some of what was restored that had been lost—understanding and clarity about family. Without these blessings, the earth is wasted. When did we learn that? Let’s turn in our scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants 2. Section 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants is the only part that we have in the Doctrine and Covenants that Joseph Smith recorded from his visits with the angel Moroni. This is what section 2 says:

18. “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

19. “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

20. “If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (vv. 1–3).

21. How early did the Prophet Joseph Smith understand that this was going to be a theology about the family? He understood it when he was 17 and he began to be taught. What are the promises made to the fathers? Who were the fathers? The fathers were Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah—those ancient prophets who understood the doctrine of eternal families. The promises of the children made to the fathers was that their hearts would turn to their fathers. Their hearts would be turned to the blessings of eternal life that they could have. This is talking about temple blessings—temple ordinances and covenants without which “the whole earth [is] utterly wasted.”

22. So, if we teach about what is in every section of the Doctrine and Covenants, if we teach so that our students know all the rivers in the Book of Mormon, if they can name all the prophets of the Old Testament, if they can describe to you the pioneer trek and the history of the Latter-day Saints...
in the restored times but they don't understand the promises made to the fathers and their part in it, it is "utterly wasted." I would submit that all of our teaching is utterly wasted if they don't understand the context that all of this is taught within.

23. The proclamation on the family was written to reinforce that. It reinforces the family being central to the Creator's plan. Without the family, there is no plan; there is no reason for it. I'm not certain that everyone of the rising generation understands that with clarity.

**Threats to the Family**

24. Let's review some of the threats to the family. We have to know what we're fighting against. If our young people don't understand what they're fighting against, then they can't prepare for the battle, and neither can you. We see evidence all around us that the family is not important. It's becoming less important in all societies. We know that because marriage rates are declining, the age of marriage is rising, divorce rates are rising, and more than a fourth of all births are out of wedlock. We see lower birth rates, and they're dropping every year worldwide. Abortion is rising and becoming increasingly legal around the world. We see unequal relationships with men and women, and we see a lot of cultures that still practice abuse of some kind within family relationships. Many times a career is gaining importance over the family.

25. We know, from our studies here at Church headquarters concerning the rising generation, that our youth are increasingly less confident in the institution of families. They are less confident in their ability to form a successful eternal family. Because they are less confident in families, they're placing more and more value on education and less and less importance on forming an eternal family.

26. We know, from visiting with them and conducting studies, that they show a lack of faith in their ability to be successful in families. They don't see forming families as a faith-based work. For them, it's a selection process much like shopping. They don't see it as something that the Lord will bless them and help them to accomplish. They also distrust their own moral strength and the moral strength of their peers. Because temptations are so fierce, they aren't sure they can be successful in keeping covenants. They also have insufficient and underdeveloped social skills, which are an impediment to them in forming eternal families.

27. They all have cell phones. I haven't been to a country in the world in the last three years where every young person doesn't have a cell phone. They all have a cell phone, and they all have an e-mail address. They're getting increasingly adept at talking to somebody 50 miles away and less and less able to carry on conversations with people in the same room. That makes it difficult for them to socialize with each other.

28. We also have the problem that we read about in Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

29. This is the world our young people are growing up in. They are in this world where there is "spiritual wickedness in high places." Public policies are being made every day that are anti family, and the definition of family is changing legally around the world. Concerning spiritual wickedness, we could call attention to pornography, which is rampant. The use of pornography among our youth is growing. The new target audience for those who create pornography is young women. There are media messages everywhere that are anti family, and our young people are very connected with media—Internet, television, the things they receive on their phones, all electronic devices are delivering anti family messages to them every day. Increasingly, our youth are seeing no reason to form a family or get married in spite of all the teaching you give them. They are being desensitized about the need to form eternal families.

30. Let's read about how this is happening. Let's turn to Alma 30. This is Korihor. Let's put the family lens on this to see how this stacks up with what you're hearing today about family messages. Korihor, who in verse 12 was described as an anti Christ, said in verses 13–14:

31. "O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come."

32. "Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers."

33. This is what our rising generation is starting to think about families. Continuing in Alma:

34. "How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ."

35. "Ye look forward and say that ye see a remissions of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

36. "And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature" (vv. 15–17).

37. Have you heard that in the world's messages? "You are the one who will get yourself ahead. It's because of your skills
and your intelligence that you will be successful.” That’s the media message young people are getting every day.

38. Another message: “Therefore every man prospered according to his genius” (v. 17). Get your education. Be the best. There are TV shows they are watching that are competitive shows—they are seeing American Idol, So You Think You Can Dance, lots of competition shows. The more of a genius you are, the more famous you will be. These types of shows are popular among our youth.

39. “And that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime” (v. 17). That’s what they’re hearing every day. “Live the life that’s going to make you happy.” That’s the media message that they are getting.

40. I’m finding verse 18 interesting: “Thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms.”

41. A lot of the anti family messages that you are hearing are targeting young women. Satan knows that he will never have a body; he will never have a family. He will target those young women who create the bodies for the future generations and who should teach the families. They don’t even know what they’re being taught in the messages. It’s just seeping in, almost through their pores. Because Satan can’t have it, he’s luring away many women, and also men, and they’re losing confidence in their ability to form eternal families.

42. Korihor was an anti-Christ. Anti-Christ is anti family. Any doctrine or principle our youth hear from the world that is anti family is also anti-Christ. It’s that clear. They need to know that if it’s anti family, it’s anti-Christ. An anti-Christ is anti family.

43. We are in danger of getting a generation like we see described in Mosiah 26, where many of the rising generation don’t believe in the traditions of their fathers, and they become a separate people as to their faith and remain so ever after. Despite all the money, all the effort you put in, they could be led away if they don’t understand their part in the plan.

Teaching the Rising Generation

44. Let’s go to the question “What is it we hope this rising generation will understand and do because of what you will teach them?” Teach so they don’t misunderstand that every doctrine, every principle, everything you’re teaching leads them to the fullness of the gospel. And the fullness of the gospel is found in the temples—in temple ordinances and covenants and their eternal role. That is the full gospel.

45. In the Church, a primary concern is to teach the saving principles of the gospel, and the saving principles are those that are the family principles, the principles that will teach them to form a family, to teach that family, and to prepare that family for ordinances and covenants. Then teach it to the next generation, and the next. Your students have that responsibility.

46. Let’s be very clear on key elements of doctrine. I hope every one of your classrooms has a copy of the proclamation on the family in it and that all of your students have a copy of the proclamation with them. Then, when you are teaching them, you can tie back teachings to key statements and phrases that are in the proclamation on the family. The proclamation is not a standalone lesson. If you’re teaching in the Old Testament, the proclamation should be a partner piece that they are circling and underlining and finding where the Old Testament families understood these principles. If you’re teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants, you can tie it back to the proclamation. This also applies to the Book of Mormon. If they have the proclamation with them in their scriptures, they will be learning and tying it together as you work.

47. President Hinckley said in 1995, when he read the proclamation on the family in a general Relief Society meeting and revealed it to the Church, that the proclamation was “a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices” that this Church has always had (“Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 100). This is not new doctrine from 1995. It was a reaffirmation of understanding that was there since Joseph Smith understood it at age 17.

48. One of those doctrines is the understanding of parents, sons, and daughters. President Spencer W. Kimball said this: “From the beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints has emphasized family life. We have always understood that the foundations of the family, as an eternal unit, were laid even before this earth was created! Society without basic family life is without foundation and will disintegrate into nothingness” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 3; or Ensign, Nov. 1980, 4).

49. Elder Robert D. Hales said this about marriage:

50. “The family is not an accident of mortality. It existed as an organizational unit in the heavens before the world was formed; historically, it started on earth with Adam and Eve, as recorded in Genesis. Adam and Eve were married and sealed for time and all eternity by the Lord, and as a result their family will exist eternally” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” in Dawn Hall Anderson, ed., Clothed with Charity [1997], 134). That’s very clear, isn’t it?

51. President Ezra Taft Benson said this:
52. “This order is … described in modern revelation as an order of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity, and to do the will and work of God throughout their mortality. …

53. “…This order of priesthood has been on the earth since the beginning, and it is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live. (See D&C 84:22.)” (“What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple,” Ensign, Aug. 1985, 9).

54. Elder David A. Bednar taught us in his wonderful message “Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan.” (I recommend this to you for your study; it is from the Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Supporting the Family held February 11, 2006. There are other foundational messages there—one from President Thomas S. Monson, one from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, and another one from Elder L. Tom Perry.)

55. Elder Bednar talked specifically about two important reasons why we have the family, why we have marriage. “Reason 1: The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation” (p. 3). Do your students understand that with clarity? “Reason 2: By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children” (p. 4). Wonderful principles taught there.

56. Students also need to understand that the command to “multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28) remains in force. It’s okay for them to bear children. Bearing children is a faith-based work. President Kimball said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1979, 6; or Ensign, May 1979, 6).

57. The media messages that are coming at your youth are antichildren. Motherhood and fatherhood are eternal roles and responsibilities. I don’t know if they understand that. Each carries the responsibility for either the male or the female half of the plan. They are preparing in this life for those eternal roles. They’re not just preparing their testimonies—they are preparing for eternal responsibilities.

58. What we’re really preparing them for is the blessings of Abraham. We can review that in Abraham 1 of the Pearl of Great Price. Let’s read this and ask ourselves some questions. (When I’m talking to young adults, I say, “How do we know Abraham was a young adult male?” It says that Abraham “saw that it was needful for [him] to obtain another place of residence” [v. 1]. So they can think of themselves: “It is needful for me to obtain another place of residence. I don’t need to live with my father forever.”)

59. In verse 2, Abraham said: “Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers.” We often call Abraham the father, so who were Abraham’s fathers? Adam, Noah, Seth, and the ancient prophets; those were the fathers he knew about, and he knew about the plan and their responsibilities. What were the blessings? He wanted “the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers” (Abraham 1:2).

60. Where do we learn about these things in our day, and where do we receive these blessings? He wanted the blessings of the temple that were available to him so he could become “a rightful heir,” “a father of many nations.” That blessing only comes to those who have a temple sealing and marriage. You cannot be a father of many nations without a wife that you are sealed to. He could not hold the right belonging to the fathers without a wife who had the rights belonging to the mothers.

61. Abraham wanted and sought the temple blessings that we learn about in section 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants, that same priesthood. So, who were the mothers? Do your young women know who the mothers were? Do they know that their ancestral mothers were Eve and Sarah and Rebekah and those other important women? The scriptures call Eve “our glorious Mother Eve” (D&C 138:39). And why was she glorious? Because she understood her responsibility in the formation of an eternal family.

62. I love the story of Abraham and Sarah and of Isaac and Rebekah that is found in Genesis. If Abraham wanted these blessings, his wife was pretty important. Abraham and Sarah had one son—the golden son, Isaac. If Abraham wanted these blessings—to be the “father of many nations”—how important was Isaac’s wife? Isaac’s wife was pivotal in Abraham being able to receive his blessings. She was so important that he sent his servant on a mission to find the right girl—a girl who would keep her covenants, a girl who understood what it meant to form an eternal family and have those same blessings. (It’s a great study to just see what Rebekah’s qualities were. You can start in Genesis 24:15 and read through sometime with your students and learn what some of her qualities were. Ask: What do we learn about Rebekah? What was she like? What was her character that made her the kind of person to qualify to be the wife of the one golden child who was then going to pass on these blessings?)

63. In verse 60 we come to the point where Rebekah was blessed by her brothers. It says, “Be thou the mother of
thousands of millions.” Where do you get those kinds of blessings? You get those in the temple. And Rebekah was blessed and wanted these blessings. So Rebekah left her family and her former life. She wanted those blessings so much that she said, “I don't need to wait. I will go now” (see Genesis 24:61). And she and Isaac formed an eternal family. They had two boys. One of their boys chose to marry out of the covenant.

64. We learn from Rebekah that she was weary of her life because of the daughters of Heth. Those were the women who were not in the covenant. This is in Genesis 27:46 where she said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?” Now, Rebekah gave up everything—she left her family and her homeland to go form an eternal family because she wanted these blessings. And of her two sons, she had one left; and of the daughters of the land, there was not one who could form an eternal marriage with her son. She needed to see that her righteous son got the blessings. Rebekah used her influence to see that the priesthood blessings and keys passed to the righteous son. It's a perfect example of the man who has the keys and the woman who has the influence working together to ensure their blessings.

65. Now we had Isaac and Rebekah, who knew about the promises to “be … the mother of thousands of millions” or the “father of many nations.” How important was the wife of Jacob? Very important. Because of Rebekah’s influence and Isaac’s priesthood keys, we have the twelve tribes of Israel, who now people the earth. That story of Isaac and Rebekah is pivotal. Everything depended on a man and a woman who understood their place in the plan and their responsibilities to form an eternal family, to bear children, and to teach them.

66. So, what I submit to you as one of your responsibilities—besides teaching those doctrines so your students don’t misunderstand—is send Isaac and Rebekah forth from every classroom. We need every one of your students to understand his or her role in this great partnership—that they are each an Isaac or a Rebekah. Then they will know with clarity what they have to do.

Live the Hope of Eternal Life

67. Next, I would have you live in your homes, in your families, in your marriages so your students have the hope of eternal life from watching you. Your objective is to live the kind of a home life that your students want to have—have that kind of a family. They won’t get that message from many other places. Live it and teach it with so much clarity that what you teach will cut through all the noise they are hearing and pierce their hearts and touch them. You don’t need to compete in volume; you don’t need to compete in the number of words; you just need to be very clear in your examples. You are the ideal for them.

68. Live in your home so that you’re brilliant in the basics, so that you’re intentional about your roles and responsibilities in the family. You think in terms of precision, not perfection. (Perfection is difficult to obtain in this life, but live your family life with precision.) If you have your goals and you’re precise in how you go about them in your homes, your students will learn from you. They learn that you pray, you study the scriptures together, you have family home evening together, you make a priority of mealtimes and teach your family during those times. You are constantly teaching your families the same things that you’re teaching your students. You speak respectfully of your marriage partners. Then from your example the rising generation will gain great hope and will understand—not just from the words you teach, but from the way you feel and emanate the spirit of family.

Review

69. The seminary and institute objective is to prepare our youth for the blessings of eternal life. You are preparing your students for the temple; you are preparing them for eternal families, without which the earth is “utterly wasted.” There are many threats that are coming at the rising generation—threats to them forming an eternal family—and they are being hit with those and losing confidence in their ability to form eternal families. In a lot of ways they’re similar to Abraham, living in a land where there’s idolatry and wickedness, and they need to mentally take themselves out of that into the land where the Lord can bless them to receive the covenants.

70. Your role in this is to teach them so they don’t misunderstand, to be very clear on key points of doctrine, which you find in the proclamation on the family. This is prominent in your teaching, prominent in your classrooms, prominent in what they’re learning. You are preparing them for the blessings of Abraham in everything you are teaching. You are preparing them for the temple. You are seeking to send forth from every classroom an Isaac and a Rebekah. You’re living so they have confidence in you, and through your example they know they can form eternal families.

71. Oftentimes with young adults I’ll tell the story about the day my husband and I were married. We had three dollars. Even worldwide, that’s not very much money nowadays. It was a faith-based work when we got married. We didn’t get married because of money, or because our education was complete, or because we even had a place to live. We lived with Grandpa and took care of him for the first season of our marriage. We went to school and worked hard, but we entered that relationship as a faith-based work. We knew that we had made a covenant with the Lord and that He would bless us. It didn’t take money; it took faith. Those are
messages they need to have and get confidence in because of you.

72. This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before in the history of the world. If they don’t know it, they can’t defend it. They need to understand temples and priesthood. If you don’t know that they are meant to be fathers and mothers, then they won’t know that they are meant to be fathers and mothers. Your effort will be wasted.

73. President Kimball said this in 1980, so this is almost 30 years ago, and I find it prophetic and very applicable to us:

74. “Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us.

75. “… There are those who would define the family in such a nontraditional way that they would define it out of existence. …

76. “We of all people, brothers and sisters, should not be taken in by the specious arguments that the family unit is somehow tied to a particular phase of development a moral society is going through. We are free to resist those moves which downplay the significance of the family and which play up the significance of selfish individualism. We know the family to be eternal. We know that when things go wrong in the family, things go wrong in every other institution in society” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 3–4; or Ensign, Nov. 1980, 4).

77. My brothers and sisters, my wonderful friends and partners in this work, “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ” and His full doctrine (2 Nephi 25:26), His doctrine which is based on the theology of the family. We are “not ashamed of the gospel of [Jesus] Christ” (Romans 1:16) or His doctrine. We are willing to defend it and teach it with clarity. And we know that as we do so we will have heavenly help. Our covenants make it possible for us to live with Heavenly Father eternally. That is our great blessing.

78. I leave with you my testimony that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that it was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We have the fullness of the gospel this day. I bear you my testimony that we are sons and daughters of heavenly parents, who sent us forth to have this earthly experience to prepare us for the blessing of eternal families. I bear you my testimony of our Savior Jesus Christ, that through His Atonement we can become perfect and equal to our responsibilities in our earthly families, and that through His Atonement we have the promise of eternal life in families. I bear you my testimony of the power of the Holy Ghost to be with us and guide us in all of our teaching. And if we call upon that power, that power will pierce the hearts and souls and minds of this generation, which are hungry to learn the truth. They will recognize it because they did receive their first lessons in the world of spirits. It will ring true to them. We are led today by a living prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. I also thank each of you for your dedicated service, your lives of faith and consecration, and your living examples of the truthfulness of this gospel. I pray the Lord’s blessings to be with you in all that you do, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
1. I have watched the universal marriage plot unravel over the last thirty years, as our society has experienced what some observers now call the "collapse of marriage." Writer Maggie Gallagher believes this pattern is "destroying American society" by creating fatherless homes and increasing single-parent families and births outside wedlock. These conditions all damage children's health, their psychological development, their social behavior, and their personal happiness. The ripple effects from so much personal harm then devastate the entire society. And yet, she notes, "we have refused to act, taking . . . bizarre comfort in the [new] belief that . . . marriage is ultimately a private matter, and therefore we can do nothing as a society to prevent its collapse." 1

2. How did it come to this, that most people now see marriage—once widely perceived as the core structure of society—as "ultimately a private matter" that, being private, may now be beyond society's ability to repair? Looking back, we can now see that changes in United States divorce laws and attitudes about marriage in the 1960s and 70s were really part of a much larger historical change that moved many Americans to care more about their self-interest than about the interest of their families and communities.

3. Some of those changes will be explored a bit further in Part III, but consider here a few headlines about five trends that have contributed to the confusion that almost unconsciously perplexes us today about modern marriage attitudes—individual rights, no-fault divorce, same-gender marriage, the interest of others in our marriages, and optimism and pessimism as defining attitudes.

**Individual Rights and the “Liberation” Movements**

4. The individual rights causes that date back to the 1960s began with a compelling need to eliminate racial discrimination, which had become a shameful blot on the nation's conscience. This original civil rights movement was followed by an important women's rights movement that eliminated much unfair gender-based discrimination. But before long, some extremist critics went far beyond these much-needed movements, using "rights" language to challenge many laws and customs that had long supported traditional family relationships.

5. For example, a noted advocate of individual rights said in 1978 that he feared any kind of "domination" by one person over another. So he argued that American law should liberate "the child—and the adult—from the shackles of . . . family" commitments. In that way, "individual rights" attitudes began to challenge one spouse's right to keep a marriage together and parents' right to raise children as they thought best, claiming that traditional family ties interfered with the individual's right to be "free" from the demands or needs of other people, even in the family. To these advocates, the right to be free was simply more important than the right to be together, because being expected to stay together seemed to them like bondage.

6. One illustration of how individual rights ideas influenced traditional family law was the famous 1973 abortion case, Roe v. Wade. There the Supreme Court removed the historic right of state legislatures to say when a woman could choose an elective abortion. Roe gave that choice to individual women, rejecting long-held beliefs in our culture about the rights of the unborn child and society's right to define when life begins.

7. Building on such individualistic theories, some advocates of extremist radical feminism have more recently attacked the very concept of marriage, insisting that traditional ideas confine mothers and other women to stereotypes of subordination and oppression.

8. Some court and legislative decisions also began to give individual rights priority over traditionally structured families. These included cases granting parental rights to unwed fathers, or giving child custody and adoption rights to people who lived in unwed cohabitation or homosexual relationships. These decisions helped develop the legal theories that would one day support the more extreme idea of gay marriage.

9. Until the 1970s and 80s, American courts would never have awarded child custody to parents living in such "alternative lifestyles," unless the circumstances allowed no reasonable option. Nearly all of our judges and legislators had long believed that such custody awards were contrary to children's interests—verified by "several decades of social science evidence which strongly indicates that children do
best when raised by a mother and a father.” That's why children born out of wedlock were considered “illegitimate,” and social agencies tried to place them in two-parent homes. But as a more permissive cultural climate accelerated the momentum of ever-expanding personal rights, more and more judges allowed claims of adult personal liberty to trump children's interests.

10. When the liberation movements first started, I wondered if a children's rights movement would follow the civil rights and women's movements. Children had long enjoyed such “rights” as being entitled to a public education, parental protection, and protection against abuse. But soon the “kid-die libbers” began to urge children's liberation from any kind of “discrimination” based only on their age—even if that discrimination was designed for children’s own (or society’s) protection, like age limits for driving a car, drinking alcohol, or voting.

11. For example, I recall explaining in 1972 to our politically alert seven-year-old son that he was too young to vote in the upcoming national election between Nixon and McGovern. He was quite indignant, pointing out, “Hey, I know a lot more about the issues than Grandma and Grandpa do!” He did feel discriminated against—though he has since changed his view about when young people should be old enough to vote.

12. Since those days, American laws about “liberating children” have changed only somewhat, but many adults still came to favor “leaving children alone,” often to the point of abandoning children to their “rights” to make their own lifestyle choices—everything from writing obscenities in the school newspaper to being sexually active. In 1989 the United Nations adopted a new Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the United States Senate still has not ratified, although most other nations have now accepted it. According to a UN document, this charter was designed “to protect children from the power of parents” and other adults in children’s decision-making about their own lives.

13. In a summary of how individualistic attitudes have changed American family law, professor Janet Dolgin says our society has now moved from an “outdated” world in which attitudes about women and children were “founded in a hierarchical ideology” to “an egalitarian ideology that presumes the autonomy of the individual in a world of contract.” Our laws thus increasingly recognizes a “right to be let alone,” even in a family. We will see more about this “world of contract” when we compare legalistic “contractual” attitudes toward marriage with more spiritually based “covenant” attitudes (see chapter 7).

14. Professor Dolgin realizes that her new vision of family life leaves spouses and children “without a sense of ultimate responsibility within, and toward, any social group.” She also senses that the new spirit of individual freedom is unable to “anchor people in a social order that encourages responsible connection.” But in the world she describes, the priority of personal liberty remains, eroding our interdependence within families and leaving people unsure whether the natural bonds between spouses, parents, and children are valuable ties that bind or are sheer bondage.

No-Fault Divorce

15. I graduated from law school just before California passed the nation’s first no-fault divorce law in 1968. That law tried to ease the pain of divorce, partly by creating new legal standards and partly by making divorce seem more acceptable. Then, like a fire raging out of control, this movement swept the country until it became easier to end a marriage in America than in any other nation—and the United States still has the world’s highest divorce rate. The wind that fanned that social prairie fire was individual rights theory.

16. Prior to 1968, someone who wanted a divorce had to prove in court that his or her spouse had engaged in real misconduct, such as abandoning the family, adultery, or aggravated mental cruelty. It wasn’t enough just to show that both spouses wanted to end the marriage, because marriage was not understood as simply a private agreement between two people. Rather, people saw marriage as a social institution that played the crucial role of rearing children and teaching all family members to obey unenforceable but vital moral and social obligations. When a truly “broken home” fell apart, society picked up the pieces and covered the costs. Theoretically, only a judge, who represented society’s and children’s interests, could determine if a troubled marriage met the standards for divorce.

17. These traditional divorce laws created strong incentives for couples to stay together and work out their problems; however, the old laws did have limits. Some people felt hopelessly stuck in miserable marriages, which aroused public sympathy, especially when no young children were involved. Women caught in messy divorces were often disadvantaged by economic inequalities that left them dependent on their former husbands for financial support. Many divorcing couples fabricated claims of abandonment and adultery to satisfy strict legal standards. The search for “fault” also increased the bitterness in already bitter disputes.

18. Some family law scholars thought this untidy situation wasn’t so bad, because the old divorce laws were written strictly enough to keep the conservatives happy and enforced flexibly enough to keep the liberals happy. Nonetheless, California’s 1968 no-fault law tried to remedy the problems by removing any requirement to prove misconduct on the part of either spouse. It also added a new, no-fault basis for divorce—irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, regardless of who or what caused it.
19. In theory, family court judges still represented society’s interests in deciding whether a marriage was, in fact, shattered beyond repair. The new law never intended to let spouses end their relationship simply as a matter of personal choice. And it certainly never intended that one party alone could just announce a marital breakdown and walk away. In practice, however, no-fault judges soon found themselves simply unable or unwilling to impose their judgment about “marriage breakdown” against the will of the partners—or, eventually, even one partner—who had decided he or she wanted to get out of the marriage.

20. No-fault reform ultimately took on a life of its own. Blending in with the anti-authority mood of the 1960s, the movement gradually altered how society viewed the very nature of marriage. No-fault divorce was the first family law that no longer “looked at marriage . . . as an institution” that held parents and children together. Rather, the reformers came to view marriage as “an essentially private relationship between adults terminable at the will of either” and with no one feeling much responsibility for the way a “termination” would affect other people, especially children.

21. This interpretation led to a fundamental change in attitude, sending married people the signal that, because their marriage was not society’s business, no one had a right to expect the marriage partners to keep striving when their marriage ran into turbulence. It wasn’t long, then, until judges’ doubts about society’s right to enforce wedding vows gave some couples the false impression that those promises held no great social or moral value.

### Same-Gender Marriage

22. In July 2003, the United States Supreme Court overturned a Texas law that made it a crime for unmarried homosexual people to have sexual relations. Five months later the Massachusetts Supreme Court, in a 4–3 vote, cited that precedent in concluding that the state could not constitutionally deny gay and lesbian couples the right to marry. As recently as fifteen years earlier, no American court or legislature—in fact, no country in the world—had ever been willing to take same-gender marriage so seriously.

23. With visible support from the Church in the early 1990s, the citizens of Hawaii, Alaska, and California all adopted public initiatives that explicitly opposed same-gender marriages. Eleven other states joined this list in November 2004. The legislatures of more than thirty other states have enacted similar legislation. Still, a few European countries and the state of Vermont have recently authorized same-gender “domestic partnerships” that confer many legal benefits of marriage. By 2005 only Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain allowed gay “marriage,” but a similar proposal was pending in Canada.

24. The current American tensions over same-gender marriage may not be resolved without amending the United States Constitution. On July 7, 2004, the First Presidency issued a statement that “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints favors a constitutional amendment preserving marriage as the lawful union of a man and a woman.”

25. The dramatic 2003 cases were but the latest steps in an evolution in judicial reasoning that had long been gaining momentum. As described further in chapter 24 (of Elder Hafen’s book), the radical “personal autonomy” theory behind the gay marriage case logically extends the same individualistic legal concept that created no-fault divorce in the 1960s. When the law upholds the individual’s right to end a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as happened with no-fault divorce), that principle can also seem to uphold the individual’s right to start a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as with same-gender marriage). That is how today’s national debate on gay marriage is conceptually linked to no-fault divorce.

26. These ideas have clear implications for traditional marriage. When one believes that starting or ending a marriage is just a personal choice, one is less likely to think of one’s own marriage as a serious social or moral obligation. Without even realizing why they assume and expect what they do, some people therefore feel less committed to making their marriages work and more willing to walk away when they’re not getting what they want.

27. Same-gender marriage also alters society’s judgment about preserving the best home environment for raising children. Once a couple of the same gender is entitled to a legal marriage, a family court would have more difficulty denying them the right to raise children. Until now, we collectively believed that, whenever possible, children should be raised by both a father and mother. As recently as 2004, for example, a twelve-judge federal appeals court upheld the constitutionality of a 1977 Florida law that forbids homosexual parents from adopting a child. The law was based on the state legislature’s finding that children are better off in homes that have a mother and father.

28. This pattern made allowance for such obvious exceptions as the death of a parent or a divorce. But until recent years, our experienced-based beliefs about the best interests of children would never have allowed a single person to adopt a child, much less simply make a trip to a sperm bank. Swept along by the currents of individual liberation, however, many judges are now simply unwilling to make judgments about the best moral and developmental home atmosphere for children.

### The Interests of Others in Our Marriage

29. The changes in recent decades have portrayed marriage as an individual adult choice, rather than as a crucial knot in the very fabric that holds society together. We have
increasingly lost sight of how much every marriage, and every divorce, affects other people—especially children.

30. American writer Wendell Berry once described why relatives and friends come so gladly to wedding receptions. These happy gatherings have the feel of a community event—because that's what they are: “Marriage [is] not just a bond between two people but a bond between those two people and their forebears, their children, and their neighbors.” Therefore, Berry continues: “Lovers must not . . . live for themselves alone. . . . They say their vows to the community as much as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well, on their behalf and on its own. It gathers around them because it understands how necessary, how joyful, and how fearful this joining is. These lovers . . . are giving themselves away, and they are joined by this as no law or contract could ever join them. Lovers, then, ‘die’ into their union with one another as a soul ‘dies’ into its union with God. . . . If the community cannot protect this giving, it can protect nothing. . . . It is the fundamental connection without which nothing holds, and trust is its necessity.”

31. Picture the community silently saying to the new couple, “We need your marriage to succeed - for our sake!” And picture the new couple silently saying to the community, “We need your support to help us succeed - for our sake!”

32. Most people in the past understood Berry’s insight enough to know that shattered families would damage children and parents and thus destabilize society. That’s why G. K. Chesterton once remarked that we should “regard a system that produces many divorces as we do a system that drives men to drown or shoot themselves.”

33. The need to protect children from this kind of harm was traditionally the basis for the idea that marriage is a social institution, not just a private partnership—because “marriage brings into being an organization to serve interests beyond those of [the husband and wife]” such as those of “the children of that marriage, the extended family, and society at large. “Marriage is the principal institution for raising children. . . . If it is undermined, children will suffer and are suffering. In the end, society and the state will be afflicted and are being afflicted.”

34. When divorce and illegitimacy rates began climbing in the 1970s, scholars argued about whether these trends would harm children. In more recent years, a flood of evidence has demonstrated the psychic and social harm of severe family disruption (see chapter 21). Primarily because of these findings, in 2000 a diverse group of leaders and scholars created a new, grass-roots “marriage movement.” President Bush’s 2003 initiative to strengthen marriage drew directly from this movement. Partly through their efforts, partly because of an increased age at first marriage, and partly because many of today’s “children of divorce” want a different life for their children from the life their parents gave them, today’s divorce rate has declined slightly from its historic high a decade ago. Even so, the current United States divorce rate would have been dismissed as impossible had it been predicted during the mid-1960s when Marie and I were married.

35. As the children of the divorce culture now look at their own marriage prospects, the family trauma many of them personally endured has shaken their confidence in traditional family assumptions. This “relationship revolution” has changed “the whole language and concept of marriage. Where 1950s couples spoke of sacrifice, loyalty, unconditional love and hard work in marriage, those values have [now] become unfashionable.” Today’s unmarried live-in couples are “here for a good time, not for a long time.” Yet, as psychologist Hugh McKay put it, this anti-marriage revolution destroys the motivation to “hang on and work it out.” If marriage seems “too easy, and easy to get out of, maybe you never break through to a rock solid commitment.”

Optimism and Pessimism as Defining Attitudes

36. Ironically, many of today’s undercommitted American couples still dream of “a big wedding,” symbolizing their longing for the certainty of permanent ties. Some families risk bankruptcy just to throw a massive wedding party, and many of these weddings are second and third marriages. Said one news story, “here comes the bride—again and again.”

37. This reference to big weddings and a longing for permanence introduces an odd paradox about today’s confusion: Just when their families have never seemed less lovable, many people today hunger for eternal family love. The public resonates to movies and books that develop the theme that love can outlast death.

38. For example, in the 1999 movie What Dreams May Come, a character played by Robin Williams dies in an accident and then joyously finds his family in a dazzlingly colorful “heaven” but only after going through a very ugly “hell” to save his wife.

39. The concluding scene of the popular musical Les Misérables reinforces a similar hope. In a moving depiction of life and love after death, Fantine returns in a white dress from beyond the veil to welcome the dying Jean Val Jean to her heavenly presence.

40. Mitch Albom’s best-selling book The Five People You Meet in Heaven explores how death lets us find explanations for life’s mysteries from the people whose lives most deeply touched us in mortality including, above all, our families.

41. Others have also documented this modern hunger for a heaven where people live forever with those they love. For instance, two scholars writing a history about the idea

The Eternal Family Reading Packet
of heaven in Western society found that most Americans today believe not only in a life after death but that family life should continue beyond the grave. This popular belief persists, they said, even though churches other than the LDS Church offer little insight about the subject.22

42. For Latter-day Saints, of course, the dream of an eternal family is a natural as breathing. A few years ago our six-year-old granddaughter was with her family as they drove by an LDS temple one evening. The temple grounds were beautifully lit, symbolically and actually chasing away the dark night. As the car stopped, she looked at the shining temple and said, "When I get bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and BIGGER . . . I’m going to get married in the temple." Her dream makes us all want to stretch to be big enough for blessings so large.

43. At first it could seem contradictory that people today would yearn to take their family ties to heaven when so many of their own families are in disarray. In his book Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah reported that many Americans have shifted their view of marriage from that of a relatively permanent social institution to a temporary source of personal fulfillment. So when marriage commitments intrude on people’s preferences and convenience, they tend to walk away. Yet, ironically and significantly, Bellah also found that most of the people he interviewed still cling, perhaps in a hopelessly dreamy sense, to the nostalgic notion of marriage based upon loving and permanent commitments as "the dominant American ideal."23

44. Perhaps this modern "longing to belong"24 is not really in spite of today’s widespread family decay but because of the decay. Sometimes we don’t appreciate life’s sweetest gifts until we no longer have them or we seriously fear losing them. Nobody really wants to be lonely, but the lifestyles associated with today’s frenzied search for "individual freedom" often lead, unsurprisingly, to loneliness. And the search to transcend loneliness is a theme of modern life. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said that the laughter of the world is just a lonely crowd trying to reassure itself.25

45. Research on current American attitudes toward family life further illustrates the difference between what people accept and what they wish for. People today are more tolerant than previous generations about the lifestyle choices others make. Yet, in spite of this new tolerance, most people still don’t believe that everything they tolerate is a wise choice. One survey found that "while there were marked shifts toward permitting previously [socially prohibited] behavior, there were no significant shifts toward believing that remaining single, getting divorced, not having children, or reversing gender roles were positive goals to be achieved. . . . [T]he vast majority of Americans still value marriage, parenthood, and family life. . . . [W]hat has changed [is] an increased tolerance for behavior not previously accepted, but not an increase in the active embracement of such behavior.”26

46. James Q. Wilson said of such data: “Half [of] us approve of other people’s daughters having children out of wedlock, but hardly any of us approve of that for our daughters.” In today’s “widening tension between tolerance and belief,” we “don’t wish to be ‘judgmental,’ unless [we are judging] something we care about, [like] the well-being of the people we cherish.”27

47. Despite society’s increased tolerance for behavior once considered immoral, most people today—paradoxically—do still long deeply for permanent, loving marriages in their own lives. Yet despite those private hopes, the cultural changes of the last generation have also created a widespread pessimism about binding commitments. Such pessimism collides with the popular personal dream of family fulfillment, and that very pessimism is one of the biggest obstacles to fulfilling the dream.

48. In earlier years, most people worked hard to reach high ideals, such as stable marriage, even when they didn’t achieve their hopes “except at the high points of their lives.” And in those days, the ideals still served as “signposts pointing the way for man’s endless striving,”28 even in the presence of common human weaknesses.

49. Striving is a crucial word when the subject is marriage. Marriage, like religious faith, is no more satisfying than we are willing—striving—to make it. William James said: “Belief and doubt are living attitudes, and involve conduct on our part.” If you are climbing a mountain and must jump a chasm to survive, you must “have faith that you can successfully make [the leap. For if you do,] your feet are nerved to its accomplishment. But mistrust yourself . . . and you will hesitate so long that . . . all unstrung and trembling . . . you roll into the abyss. . . . Refuse to believe, and you shall indeed be right, for you shall . . . perish. But believe, and again you shall be right. . . . You make one . . . of two possible universes true by your trust or mistrust. [Thus] optimism and pessimism are definitions of the world, [and often we create the kind of world we live in because] our faith beforehand in an uncertified result is the only thing that makes the result come true.”29

50. This principle applies to marriage with uncommon force. Whether we “strive” to make the marriage work may be the most important ingredient in whether it does work. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, marriage is never easy:

51. “Happiness does not come by pressing a button. . . . It must be earned. . . .

52. “One comes to realize very soon after the marriage that the spouse has weaknesses not previously revealed or discovered. The virtues which were constantly magnified during courtship now grow relatively smaller, and the weaknesses that seemed so small and insignificant during courtship now
grow to sizeable proportions. . . . The habits of years now show themselves. . . .

53. “Often there is an unwillingness to settle down and to assume the heavy responsibilities that immediately are there. . . .”

54. “[Still,] while marriage is difficult, and discordant and frustrated marriages are common, yet real, lasting happiness is possible, and marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive. This is within the reach of every couple, every person . . . if both are willing to pay the price.”

55. Because this is a true principle, the survivability, the happiness, even the “exultant ecstasy” that is possible in a marriage may depend—more than it depends on any other single thing—on whether spouses (and their family and community) expect their marriage to succeed.

56. Most ordinary people, despite their disappointments, are still willing to believe that marriage can, or at least ought to, work. But as the pessimistic strains of modern culture stir their doubts, more and more people are losing the confidence they need to make their dream possible by their conduct. Then their own doubts will confirm that they were right.

57. As a silver lining to these modern clouds of confusion, the changing attitudes of the last thirty years may at least help us appreciate the clarity and power of the gospel’s teachings about marriage more than we did when society supported our assumptions. In this world of bewildering lifestyles and compromised commitments, the gospel is our surest hope for gaining the perspective and the discipline we need to fill our heart’s longing for the fullness that marriage can provide.

Notes
2. Tribe, American Constitutional Law, sections 988-89.
5. Quoted in Hafen and Hafen, “Abandoning Children to Their Autonomy,” 450.
7. Ib., 1570.
8. Ib., 1571. v
9. “The trend towards getting married later has helped reduce the nationwide [United States] divorce rate from 4.7 per 1,000 people in 1990 to 4 in 2001. However, the figure still dwarfs the European Union’s rate of 1.9.” Ward, “South Finds Families That Pray Together May Not Stay Together,” 3.
13. “Court Upholds Ban on Same-Sex Adoptions,” 23 July 2004, citing worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp. The United States Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from this decision. Biskupic, “Ban on Adoption by Gays Left Intact.”
14. Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community, 125, 137 39; italics added.
21. Saulny, “Here Comes the Bride, Again.”
22. McDannel and Lang, Heaven, 308.
23. Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, 86.
24. See Hafen and Hafen, Belonging Heart, 3-20.
27. Wilson, Marriage Problem, 4–5.
30. Kimball, Marriage and Divorce, 12–16; italics added; or “Marriage and Divorce” (address); see also Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 305. President Gordon B. Hinckley has similarly said, “There is no greater happiness than is found in the most meaningful of all human relationships the companionships of husband and wife and parents and children.” “Marriage That Endures,” 4.