

Chapter 15: Experiencing Happiness in Marriage

"Chapter 15: Experiencing Happiness in Marriage," Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay, (2003)

Introduction

David O. McKay and Emma Ray Riggs were married in the Salt Lake Temple on 2 January 1901, the first couple sealed in that temple that year. Their union of 69 years exemplifies the continuing devotion of a husband and wife to each other. The strength of their marriage was noted by both friends and strangers. Sister McKay once related the following experience:

“I accompanied my husband to a dedication of a meetinghouse in Los Angeles. We stopped on Wilshire Boulevard to get our car washed. I sat on a bench and the President was standing over by the car. Suddenly at my elbow I heard a tiny voice say, ‘I guess that man over there loves you.’ Surprised, I turned and saw a beautiful boy about seven years of age with dark curly hair and large brown eyes. ‘What did you say?’

“‘I said, I guess that man over there loves you.’

“‘Why, yes, he loves me; he is my husband. Why do you ask?’

“‘Oh, ‘cuz, the way he smiled at you. Do you know, I’d give anything in the world if my Pop would smile at my Mom that way.’”²

Until President McKay was confined to a wheelchair, he always rose when his wife entered the room, held her chair, and opened the car door for her. He also always bade her hello and goodbye with an affectionate kiss. This practice continued when both President and Sister McKay used wheelchairs. Once when President McKay was being wheeled away for a meeting, he exclaimed: “We have to go back. I didn’t kiss Ray goodbye.” He was wheeled back for this loving ritual that had become a part of their relationship.³

A great tribute to the McKays' marriage was given by a young couple preparing to be married. One of President McKay's sons, David Lawrence McKay, related the experience as follows:

“When Father and Mother were living at 1037 East South Temple [in Salt Lake City], a young couple arrived in a car, got out, and then sat down on the front lawn. There, the young man proposed to the young lady. As he later related the story to a member of the family, it was because ‘I want our married life to be as ideal as that of President and Sister McKay.’”⁴

Teachings of David O. McKay

The covenant of eternal marriage brings joy and strengthens love.

In the teachings of the Church of [Jesus Christ](#), the family assumes supreme importance in the development of the individual and of society. “Happy and thrice happy are they who enjoy an uninterrupted union, and whose love, unbroken by any complaints, shall not dissolve until the last day.” It will not dissolve when sealed by the authority of the Holy Priesthood throughout all eternity. The marriage ceremony, when thus sealed, produces happiness and joy unsurpassed by any other experience in the world. “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” [[Mark 10:9](#).]⁵

The eternity of the marriage covenant is a glorious revelation, giving assurance to hearts bound by the golden clasp of love and sealed by authority of the Holy Priesthood that their union is eternal.⁶

A word about the eternity of the marriage covenant. ... Let's look at the principle of it. Will you name for me in your minds the most divine attribute of the human soul? ... Love is the most divine attribute of the human soul, and if you accept the [immortality](#) of the soul, that is, if you believe that personality persists after death, then, you must believe that love also lives. Isn't that sound? And I ask you this: Whom shall we love when we recognize those personalities in the next world?

True, we are admonished to love everybody. Yes, we should love everybody now; but you and I know that we love those whom we know best. ... When we meet these personalities in the eternal realm, we shall recognize them, and know them because of these experiences in this life. And that union of loving hearts will be perpetuated after life. That is why we are married—sealed—for time and eternity. It isn't just a mere dogma of the Church—it is a truth fundamental to the life and happiness of all

humanity. It is the part of wisdom to choose the House of the Lord in which to [pledge] your love and to consecrate your vows.⁷

With the high ideal of marriage as revealed to the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#), members of the Church should have but one goal, and that is to keep in mind the fact that marriage, the foundation of society, is “ordained of God” [[D&C 49:15](#)] for the building of permanent homes in which children may be properly reared and taught the principles of the gospel.⁸

Let us substitute the present tendency toward a low view of marriage with the lofty view which God gives it. Yesterday I stood at the altar of the temple, as I have stood many a time, and saw two hearts—two souls—slipping into one, as two dewdrops on the stem of a rose when the sun comes out in the morning, one slipping into the other, the two becoming one. That high view of marriage in the mind of that young bridegroom, and the appreciation of the sacredness of marriage by the bride, I think is one of the sublimest things in all the world. They had the high view of marriage, not a low view of it as a means of gratifying passion. Let us look upon marriage as a sacred obligation and a covenant as possibly an eternal one.⁹

The marriage bond should be as eternal as love, the most divine attribute of the human soul. Most surely, then, that bond should continue as long as love is an attribute of the spirit.¹⁰

We must guard against the dangers that threaten marriage.

The signs of the times definitely indicate that the sacredness of the marriage covenant is dangerously threatened. There are places where the marriage ceremony may be performed at any hour of the day or night without any previous arrangement. The license is issued and the ceremony performed while the couple wait. Many couples who have been entrapped by such enticements have had their marriages end in disappointment and sorrow. In some instances these places are nothing more than opportunities for legalized immorality. Oh, how far they fall below the true ideal! As far as lies within our power, we must warn young couples against secret and hasty marriages.

It is vital also to counteract the insidious influences of printed literature that speaks of the “bankruptcy of marriage,” that advocates trial marriages, and that places extramarital relations on a par with extramarital friendships.¹¹

Marriage is a sacred relationship entered into for purposes that are well recognized—primarily for the rearing of a family. It is claimed by some careful observers that our present modern life tends to frustrate these purposes.¹²

Sometimes men and women with low ideals and weakened wills permit their passions, like unbridled steeds, to dash aside judgment and self-restraint, and to cause them to commit sin that may sear their conscience and leave in their hearts an everlasting regret.

In this day when modesty is thrust into the background, and chastity is considered an outmoded virtue, I appeal to you to keep your souls unmarred and unsullied from this sin, the consequence of which will smite and haunt you intimately until your conscience is seared and your character sordid. . . . Remember, too, the significance of the Savior's saying that if any shall commit adultery even in his or her heart, he shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear [see [D&C 63:16](#)].¹³

Twenty-four years ago when the steamship *Marama* dropped anchor outside the coral reef that surrounds the island of Rarotonga, a passenger desiring to go ashore asked the captain why he did not sail nearer to the wharf. In answer, the experienced seaman mentioned treacherous waters and pointed to an engine of one ship, the *Maitai*, and to the bow of another, still protruding out of the water—both carrying mute evidence of the danger of anchoring too close to the shore of this coral-bound island. “We anchor here,” said the captain, “because it is safer to avoid being dashed to pieces, as were those two vessels, hulls of which lie on those dangerous reefs.”

A flippant attitude toward marriage, the ill-advised suggestion of “companionate marriage,” the base, diabolical theory of “free sex experiment,” and the ready-made divorce courts are dangerous reefs upon which many a family bark [or ship] is wrecked.¹⁴

The more you keep in company with your wife, the happier you are. Business takes you away from home. She is there alone. Do not let companionship with other women divide your affection, and that applies to woman as well as to man. At one time I thought that it did not; that man was wholly to blame for the unrest, the disagreements and sorrows that are occurring too frequently, but I have had to modify my opinion. Companionship is the means of perpetuating that love which brought about your union.¹⁵

Another threat to our society is the increasing number of divorces and the tendency to look upon marriage as a mere contract that may be severed at the first difficulty or misunderstanding that may arise.

One of our most precious possessions is our families. The domestic relations precede, and, in our present existence, are worth more than all other social ties. They give the first throb to the heart and unseal the deep fountains of its love. Home is the chief

school of human virtues. Its responsibilities, joys, sorrows, smiles, tears, hopes, and solitudes form the chief interests of human life. ...

When one puts business or pleasure above his home, he that moment starts on the downgrade to soul-weakness. When the club becomes more attractive to any man than his home, it is time for him to confess in bitter shame that he has failed to measure up to the supreme opportunity of his life and flunked in the final test of true manhood. ... The poorest shack in which love prevails over a united family is of greater value to God and future humanity than any other riches. In such a home God can work miracles and will work miracles.¹⁶

A successful marriage requires continued courtship, effort, and commitment.

I should like to urge *continued courtship*, and apply this to grown people. Too many couples have come to the altar of marriage looking upon the marriage ceremony as the end of courtship instead of the beginning of an eternal courtship. Let us not forget that during the burdens of home life—and they come—that tender words of appreciation, courteous acts are even more appreciated than during those sweet days and months of courtship. It is after the ceremony and during the trials that daily arise in the home that a word of “thank you,” or “pardon me,” “if you please,” on the part of husband or wife contributes to that love which brought you to the altar. It is well to keep in mind that love can be starved to death as literally as the body that receives no sustenance. Love feeds upon kindness and courtesy. It is significant that the first sentence of what is now known throughout the Christian world as the Psalm of Love, is, “Love suffereth long, and is kind.” [See [1 Corinthians 13:4](#).] The wedding ring gives no man the right to be cruel or inconsiderate, and no woman the right to be slovenly, cross, or disagreeable.

The next contributing factor to your happy marriage I would name is *self-control*. Little things happen that annoy you, and you speak quickly, sharply, loudly, and wound the other’s heart. I know of no virtue that helps to contribute to the happiness and peace of the home more than that great quality of self-control in speech. Refrain from saying the sharp word that comes to your mind at once if you are wounded or if you see something in the other which offends you. It is said that during courtship we should keep our eyes wide open, but after marriage keep them half-shut. ...

“Marriage is a relationship that cannot survive selfishness, impatience, domineering, inequality, and lack of respect. Marriage is a relationship that thrives on acceptance,

equality, sharing, giving, helping, doing one's part, learning together, enjoying humor.”¹⁷

Minimize the faults, commend virtues. After the first thrill of the honeymoon is worn off, couples begin to see frailties, idiosyncrasies which they had not noticed before. Responsibilities of motherhood come to the woman. Difficulties in paying debts come. And so we become prone to find fault. Let us learn to control ourselves in that respect. ...

I regard it as an incontrovertible fact that in no marriage circle can true peace, love, purity, chastity, and happiness be found, in which is not present the spirit of Christ, and the daily, hourly striving after loving obedience to his divine commands, and especially, the nightly prayer expressing [gratitude](#) for blessings received.

God help us to build homes in which the spirit of heaven on earth may be experienced. You and I know that that is possible, it is not a dream, it is not a theory. We may have that sweet companionship between husband and wife which grows dearer and dearer as the troubles of life come on. We can have homes in which children will never hear father and mother wrangle or quarrel. God help us ... to build such homes, and to teach our young men and young women who are anticipating home life, to cherish such an ideal.¹⁸

Related Scriptures: [Matthew 19:3–8](#); [Ephesians 5:25](#); [D&C 25:14](#); [42:22](#); [49:15–17](#); [131:1–4](#)