

**Love and Intimacy in
Family, Kinship, Friend-
ship, and Community**

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In addition to gospel principles, concepts from secular research can help us move closer to ideal relationships. Drawing on current research from the social sciences that is in harmony with gospel principles, this article, which is taken from a chapter of a new publication entitled *Eternal Values and Personal Growth: A Guide on your Journey to Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Wellness*, explores ways people can become more Christlike in marriage, in friendships, and across generations.

THE ECOLOGY OF INTIMACY

Our identities are part of a social ecology—a complex system of adaptation and accommodation that occurs in all living systems, including human relationships. Newly married couples, for example, experience a period of adjustment analogous to the way biological organisms in an ecosystem adjust to the introduction of a new species. As each partner becomes aware of elements in the relationship that do not coordinate, the bliss of courtship and early marriage is challenged. For example, a husband might discover that his idea of closeness requires that the couple spend much more time together than his wife’s idea of closeness does. She might find that he does not want to talk as much as she does. Both might realize they have different criteria for deciding how to spend money. Their new living system must be coordinated if it is to survive and thrive.

In nature the more powerful members of a living system defend their existence by brute force and compel others to adapt to them. In plant ecology, for example, some more powerful species overshadow and even

strangle their weaker host. The most fit survive while the less fit die. But in marriage, a power-based approach can be lethal to the entire system. At best it creates debilitating conflict. At worst it kills the marriage. In some power-based marriages, a coordinated interaction of dominance and submission does develop, but it is a sham intimacy. Even pathological relationship systems, such as violent marriages or families, can achieve a crude, adaptive ecology over time, just as some plant and animal ecosystems can survive by being parasitic and exploitive.

In healthy, godly intimacy, each partner makes a deliberate choice to consecrate himself or herself to the welfare of the marriage by caring for, celebrating, and enlarging each other. When both partners are able to make this commitment, they experience gradual development of a balanced marital ecology. This process entails coordination of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that in turn become a springboard for deeper intimacy.

Rebirth through Healthy Relationships: The Wellspring of Christlike Love and Intimacy

The experience of a healthy marital or family ecology can give birth to a stronger self that is increasingly able to sustain Christlike thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To understand this process, we must first review the basis of identity.

When you were born, your identity began to form in a developmental process that extends throughout your life. As a newborn infant, you were the world and the world was you. At first there was no distinction between your hand and your mother's breast or your father's caress. Within a few months, you began to discern your separateness and began to understand your bodily self as an autonomous identity. Physical boundary, then, is the initial marker of identity.

With further development, you perceived that you were not only physically separate from others but also mentally and spiritually separate. You became differentiated from others by how you processed information, by the choices you made, by how you used and shared your resources (such as talents, energy, possessions), and by what groups you chose to join. You experienced yourself as a unique identity through awareness of your and others' different thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, worldviews, and interpretation of events. During adolescence, you might have audaciously, maybe even rebelliously, asserted your uniqueness to ensure that everyone around you knew that you were an independent being.

You also experienced yourself as a unique identity in terms of autonomy and self-regulation. Things you had immediate control over comprised

your *self*, while things that acted independently of your will comprised *other*. As you grew, these boundary markers defined and expressed your identity.

As a developing identity, you also exercised agency to direct your own development. But you were not self-sufficient. You experienced need for connection, interaction, and interdependence with others. In time, these feelings and experiences aroused a desire for and attempts to secure close relationships. These attempts began in your family of origin. They continue their mortal expression in marriage, family, and close friendships. Their ultimate consummation is Christlike love and connection with all of creation.

When a person chooses marriage, experiences begin that have the potential to fulfill the ultimate formulation of identity—the dialectic of the *I* and *we*. The term *dialectic* refers to two entities that co-exist in tension with one another yet together form an integrated whole. If either entity is lost, the other and the whole are harmed. For example, joy co-exists in dialectic relationship with pain. We cannot have the joy of intimacy without taking the risk of being vulnerable to rejection and pain. In intimate relationships, without the *I* there is no *we*, although too dominant an *I* threatens the *we*, and too dominant a *we* threatens the *I*. *Self* must be subsumed, to one degree or another, to belong to something larger. In this act of self-sacrifice, the *I* is not destroyed; rather, paradoxically, it is enlarged.

It is within the crucible of this *I-we* dialectic that full intimacy develops. As a committed couple, we have experiences that blur the boundaries and markers of our autonomous self, which in our youth we so boldly affirmed. Marriage and family therapist Terry Hargrave, in a comment on his own marriage, captures the idea of true intimacy when he says, “*I* don’t like ballet, but *us* does.”

In “*us*” intimacy, experience becomes collaborative, not independent. We cope and manage our turmoil and torment; we magnify our euphoria and joy; we live and experience life as much through and with our partner as by ourselves. At times a wife may understand her husband’s experience more clearly than he does himself. A husband may at times empathetically articulate his wife’s concerns better than she does. Spouses increasingly experience things similarly. When they do not, they seek for convergence through dialogue. The common experience of one spouse finishing another’s sentences is an example of this convergence. Beliefs and worldview become more and more shared through innumerable conversations and experiences.¹ Shared belief systems, in turn, redefine the boundary of self.² *I* am no longer self-contained. My thinking, feeling, and knowing are interdependent with another.³

Our experience of autonomy and self-regulation also changes within the intimate borders of marriage. Decision making is shared; consensus is

sought; activities and schedules are negotiated rather than entirely self-determined. Self-mastery, too, including repentance and recovery from serious problems, is relationship based. We are not the maverick captains of our souls. Our surviving and thriving are interdependent.

The parameters of resource allocation shift as well. We learn that our own welfare and the welfare of our spouse are inseparable—to nourish our partner is to nourish ourselves. We have become functionally, ecologically, one. As the Savior has told us, “Give, and it shall be given unto you. . . . For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

Identity, Intimacy, and the Rebirth of Self

As interdependence matures in marriage and families, we may experience a new sense of self. We may view anew the hive, not the bee; the colony, not the ant. We may perceive a more socially vital self that lives, breathes, and has an existence that transcends our former individuality. This rebirth of self can profoundly alter our understanding of the distinction between self and other, as Bahr and Bahr have noted:

The assumption of a separate and separable self is not shared by all peoples of the world. In alternative conceptions, the self is seen as open and continuous with others. In this view, as one shows respect for another, she necessarily respects herself. If through her actions she injures or harms another, she also injures herself. And if she gives of self in appropriate interaction with others and with the intent of fostering the growth of another, her own growth is enhanced. Conversely, a refusal to sacrifice self-interest may impoverish the self.⁴

When self is reborn in this communal sense, self-sacrifice and altruism become second nature. Consecration of ourselves to the growth and well-being of another, together with our own, becomes the natural consummation of our own life and happiness. Understood in this manner, intimacy is the celestial behavior that arises from a celestial comprehension and expression of our true, relational identity.

As we approach this celestial intimacy, we discover that we have received a new heart constructed in the image of God. We are capable of promoting, nurturing, and sustaining eternal relationships that are joyful, fulfilling, and enlarging. This new heart is given as a gift of the Spirit (Moro. 7:47–48). It leads us to the kind of life that God lives (John 17:3), which includes eternal relationships, eternal progression, and eternal increase.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: PHASES AND STAGES

If marriages were static—a “snapshot” of two people in the perfect pose of affection, like an engagement photograph—there would be no need for covenant commitment and Christlike consecration. People could ensure marital success by searching carefully until they found “the one,” the perfect fit, the missing piece to their puzzle. Relationships would endure and thrive because of simple compatibility. Such a relationship would be easy indeed, as the work of marriage and intimacy would be completed during the searching stage.

But basing a marriage decision on an overly idealistic compatibility wish—that we can find “the one”—poses substantial risk. When difficulties in a marriage arise, the logical conclusion is that the selection process was faulty. The next step is either resignation to living with a mistake or divorce and a renewal of the search. Neither remedy is appealing. The resignation response leads to a lifeless marriage, a mere husk without the heart. The search-some-more response leads to unstable and soul-damaging serial monogamy.

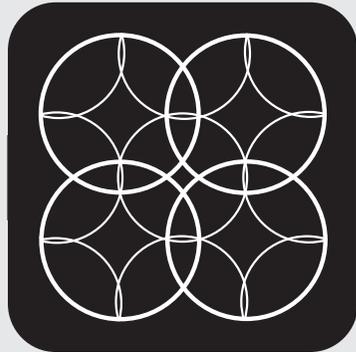
Covenant Relationships

by Mark Butler

Once, while in the temple, I was struck by the beautiful pattern of needlework on an altar and its symbolism of covenant relationships (a similar pattern is represented below).

View each circle as an identity. As your eye moves from identity to identity, you can see that each is whole, but at the same time each is formed in part through a shared connection. The portion of identity shared with another does not encroach on or diminish the other. Each identity remains complete and whole, both as a singularity and as an element of a larger pattern. Further, no identity is lost in the larger pattern, though by focusing on any given point you may “see” one element for the moment and not another.

So also are covenant relationships—marriages and families are bound together through time and eternity across generations, but individual identities are preserved. Independence, connection, and interdependence intermingle in perfect balance and harmony. None overshadows any other. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



The perfect compatibility ideal is therefore untenable. Marriages are not static but ever-changing. They are a living ecology of two people whose lives are intertwined in an intimate system maintained ultimately far more by covenant and consecration than by an easy fit of compatibility. It is not a matter of finding two puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly, but a matter of two people, full of Christlike love, under covenant and committed to puzzling through the various shapes and circumstances of their lives, creating and re-creating, fitting and refitting a loving and eternal union.

A *covenant-and-consecration model of marriage* is reflected in the temple marriage ceremony itself, where individuals signify in the presence of witnesses their free-will choice to receive their partner in marriage. They make a commitment that is unqualified in any way, including what the future may reveal about whether the chosen partner really was the “right person.” In marriages anchored this way, partners make a choice based on their best judgment. More importantly, they commit themselves to stand by their choice and *make* it the right choice through effort and throughout all the seasons of life. Then, when differences and disappointments arise, there is a basic anchor of commitment that sustains the marriage by problem-solving efforts.⁵

Marital Life Cycle

Researchers have found that most intimate, enduring relationships experience typical cycles. By carefully observing marriages over many years, researchers have identified four *seasons of love* (Eros, romantic love, friendship, and agape) and four *seasons of marriage* (visionary, adversarial, dormant, vital).⁶

Seasons (Stages) of Love

It appears that all enduring intimate relationships pass through the seasons of Eros, romantic love, friendship, and agape. However, the length of seasons varies from relationship to relationship. Young, sometimes newly married university students often ask, “Do all couples have to go through all these stages, or can they skip some?”—usually meaning themselves. The answer is that, like the seasons of the year, seasons of love are an inevitable part of life.

Eros. Eros is sexual attraction and desire. It is biological in origin and operation. Its primary function is to ensure perpetuation of the human family through both reproduction and strengthening the binding tie between husband and wife. As husbands and wives commit to and maintain fidelity in their sexual relationship, Eros draws them to each

other and encourages them to work diligently for a satisfying, enduring relationship where sexual desire remains strong and is regularly expressed.

As a form of love, Eros alone is highly conditional and self-oriented. While sexual expression between two people can and should include love, respect, and nurture, these are less self-focused than Eros. Consequently, by itself Eros is potentially dangerous because it does not consider the restraints on its expression that are essential for the full, multidimensional experience of love.

Romantic Love. Romantic love is psychological in origin and operation. It is characterized by infatuation and mutual ego-affirmation. One or both persons experience an obsession-like attraction based on an idealized image of the other person. When someone is attracted to us and “in love” (or “in worship”) with us, we feel euphoric. A romantic link is forged, a sort of quid pro quo connection: if you’ll be my perfect partner, I’ll affirm (worship) you, and vice versa. It is a tenuous link because idealized imagery always erodes. No two people can be brought into close quarters for very long before the idealized person fades and is replaced by the reality of flawed humanity.

Those addicted to the rush of romantic love often become serial romantics, hanging on to a relationship only until they have captured the object of their infatuation or have achieved the “token” they need from another’s infatuation with them. The token may be sex, clinging emotional dependency, or the experience of a conquest. As soon as that token is obtained, the adrenaline rush disappears. The relationship is cast off, and the headlong rush into the next romantic experience begins again. The word “experience” is critical here, because the serial romantic does not love people but rather is addicted to an experience that involves people. Thus romantic love, valuable as it is, if untempered by other types of love, can lead to instability and emotional devastation.

Serial romances can arise during the difficult middle years of marriage, when the buildup of stresses begins to wrinkle and gray one partner’s view of the other, and some wonder if they could have chosen better. Those who succumb often go through multiple brief relationships, leaving behind broken hearts and shattered lives, all the while telling themselves that the next one will be the “right one.” But they will never find someone who will remain eternally infatuated with them or with whom they will be eternally infatuated. True intimacy is about choosing, covenanting, and then becoming.

Couples should be forewarned against building a marriage relationship on either Eros or romantic love alone. These stages of love may get things going and heat things up, but they are not sustainable. Nevertheless,

Eros and romantic feelings can both survive and thrive in marriages that are anchored in *friendship* and *agape*.

Friendship. Friendship love is social in origin and operation. It is based on compatibility. Unlike Eros love and romantic love, friendship love thrives in an atmosphere of security, commitment, and safety. It is not awakened or intensified by the uncertainty of “the chase.” In the day-to-day interaction of marriage, friendship plays a vital role. It ensures complete safety and is a sound basis for healthy interaction. Friendship love can include similar beliefs and values, shared interests and activities, and the shared stewardship of a family.

Friendship love is strikingly different from Eros and romantic love in at least two respects. First, friendship love is less conditional on what we are “getting” from the relationship. Second, friendship love is more other-oriented. In its highest expression, friendship can be completely unconditional and other-consecrated. The pinnacle example of such friendship is Jesus Christ. At the last supper, Jesus invited his disciples to be his friends and foreshadowed that he would lay down his life for his friends (John 15:12–14). He then invited them to love one another in the same way he loved them. This ultimate willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others merges into godly love.

Agape. Agape love is God’s love. In all its expressions, the mark of agape love is a fundamental regard for the welfare of all creation. Agape expresses itself as “I love you simply because you are, and because you are, I desire to help you become.” Agape is pure in its intent, uncompromising in its motives, and singular in its purpose. It acts for the growth of all things, that all things might fill the measure of their creation and find joy. Our Father in Heaven expresses this love to us, his spirit sons and daughters, in the covenantal assertion, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Agape is love and kindness without ulterior motive. It is not fawning adoration and naive worship but fully informed, I-love-you-anyway caring, helping, and generosity. Agape is experienced less as an intense feeling than as an abiding yearning for the other. It consumes one’s life and actions in service. Agape is altruism in action. It is charity, the pure love of Christ (Moro. 7:47).

As with most things of great value, agape love is difficult to achieve. This holy love can be nurtured by effort but cannot be earned, for it is a gift of God by the ministration of the Holy Spirit. We must “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moro. 7:48). Without agape, our lives and loves are mere “sounding

brass” and a “tinkling cymbal” (Moro. 7:46; 1 Cor. 13:1). Relationships cannot thrive and abide, mortally or eternally, without agape, because it includes the necessary ingredients to enduring connection and commitment: repentance, forgiveness, healing, redemption, patience, long-suffering, service, self-sacrifice, and devotion beyond recompense. In marriage and family, such charity is the ultimate and unbreakable binding tie, for it places off limits all thoughts, expressions, and actions that could hurt or harm and seeks in every way the growth and happiness of one’s partner, one’s family, and all others in one’s domain of care and concern.

We see agape love commonly in the self-sacrificing, nurturing relationships between parents and their children. Human history is replete with unassuming accounts of mothers and fathers who have laid down their lives for their loved ones. Some have done so in one desperate, heroic moment, but most lay down their lives one day at a time, wearing out their bodies and their hearts in yearning and acting for the welfare of their beloved ones. One day at a time, this love takes its bearer on a journey to a new place and a new way of being, where, paradoxically, the body may be spent but the soul is enlivened.

Reflections on the Four Stages of Marital Love

Eros love and romantic love are kindling to the fire of relationships—that important spark. They may get things going, but they burn hot, burn fast, and burn out. For the relationship to endure, Eros love and romantic love must very soon be merged into and integrated with friendship love and agape love. Friendship love is the large, heavy log that fuels the fire of a marriage relationship. This log, once lit, can abide occasional inclement weather without being extinguished.

Agape love might be represented by the rocks that encircle the fire. These rocks enclose passion within safe boundaries, preventing a stray spark from igniting a fire outside the circle. These rocks also soak up the heat and energy of the fire, retaining it and radiating it back as needed. As anyone who has doused a campfire knows, rocks heat up to their core and can still be warm to the touch even after a thorough drenching. Like children at a campfire, we may enjoy watching sparks fly up as kindling is added from time to time. But the adults standing around are well aware that the heat needed for cooking, warmth, and protection from storms comes from the less spectacular coals forming beneath and from the rocks that radiate all night long. Agape love is like these rocks that keep couples and families warm through storms and the changing seasons of life.

Seasons (Stages) of Marriage

The four seasons or stages of marriage are the visionary, adversarial, dormant, and vital. As with the seasons of love, these stages follow predictable patterns in every marriage, although the dormant stage may not occur if the couple resolves conflicts well. The degree of distress during the adversarial stage and the degree of isolation during the dormant stage can be intensified or diminished by each partner's measure or lack of Christlike love, compassion, commitment, patience, and longsuffering. These stages of marriage were originally developed by S. Miller and others.⁷ We have adapted their work for our purposes here.

Visionary Stage. During the visionary stage, a married couple idealizes their relationship. They expect a blissful future together, and the focus is on "us" and what "we" will do and become together. On the positive side, the visionary stage gets the relationship off to a good start and with high energy. On the negative side, the couple discounts or ignores traits of each partner and of the relationship that are incongruent with the idealized image. Conflict and differences are stowed away rather than acknowledged and resolved. This stage is illustrated in the following report from a student:

We have been married for almost six months. For every day that goes by, I love him more and more. I feel that nothing can break us apart as long as we adhere to the covenants we promised in the temple and the covenants we renew every Sunday. My love for my husband is real. I feel that his happiness is my happiness and vice versa. Not in a total loss of ego boundaries, but in that I want to give him everything that is in my power to give. Our marriage is a union between us and God, which no man can destroy as long as we do our part in keeping the commandments. We are a total union of our hearts, our hopes, our lives, our love, our future, and our everything. . . .

What seems to make the difference between my infatuation with John and my true love with George is that with George I am real. I am myself. We included Christ and our Heavenly Father in our courting. We love our Heavenly Father and trust him to help us in need. I believe that is a big strength in our relationship. . . .

Our marriage is based on commitment to the Lord, each other, and the family. . . . The reward of one hundred percent commitment is a healthy family that will branch and give birth to other healthy families.

As tranquil and beautiful as the above relationship sounds, inevitable pressures will build in the background. Eventually this pressure, like water behind a dam, compels some degree of acknowledgment of problems, either to oneself or within the relationship.

Adversarial Stage. As the spouses encounter real-life challenges, they usually experience disillusionment, disagreement, and conflict. Concealed, unacknowledged conflict breeds resentment and prevents the relationship from growing. Partners often fear that their negative feelings signal possible failure of the marriage, so they let disagreements build like water behind a dam. When the dam bursts, as it inevitably does, the ensuing discord becomes confirmation of their worst fears. They may conclude to try even harder to hold back conflict, not recognizing that this “solution” is part of the problem. The repetition of such a pattern can lead to the serious marital distress they had feared. Overt conflict, too, if not handled carefully, can be damaging. But if disagreements are handled with maturity and commitment and without pretense, greater intimacy can develop over time.

When the idealized image of marriage begins to erode, partners often begin attempting to change one another. Internal dialogue might go something like this: “Well, I see now that he’s not perfect, but that’s okay. I can rebuild him.” This common approach damages the relationship because the other person feels unaccepted. Resentment typically follows. The relationship can be at great risk at this stage unless both partners dedicate themselves to working through problems. In some cases, one or both partners cannot endure the shattered ideal image, and they may pursue the ideal in a new relationship where reality is again obscured by the dynamics of the idealized visionary stage.

Such dire consequences can be avoided if marital partners understand that disagreements should be expected, acknowledged, and approached. Gospel perspectives (for example, Matt. 5:23–24; D&C 42:88), clinical wisdom, and empirical research⁸ all clearly confirm that conflict is inevitable and can be handled successfully by applying proven skills. Numerous communication skills and conflict resolution strategies, guidelines, and assessments are available.⁹ Therapists can offer recommendations, and local libraries have many resources. Becoming skilled at intimate communication helps couples maintain and strengthen their intimate connection.

A BYU student wrote about how his parents weathered storms and forged an even stronger commitment:

My parents are not perfect, and neither is their marriage. But that is what makes them the ultimate example of the ideal. Without rough times, they would not be as strong today. Victor Brown said that time is the ultimate test of commitment. Ten years ago things were extremely stormy. My dad was between jobs and my mom was dissatisfied with who knows how many things. At one point my dad asked my mom if she

wanted a divorce. As Brown said, “Family living is not for emotional weaklings,” but because of their commitment to God and their covenants, today, despite arguments, they boast that they’ve never been happier and more content with life and with one another. They are not content because they have done everything right, but because they did the *most important things* right: working unselfishly toward improving their whole relationship (no fragmentation). Both were willing to sacrifice, exercise self control, and risk everything, and now they are enjoying the fruits of their efforts.

Dormant Stage. If healthy problem-solving does not occur and the couple remains together, exasperation and exhaustion set in. Spouses can become frustrated that their efforts do not produce change—“It seems he can’t be changed. Maybe he is just defective.” Partners may surrender in an uneasy truce and live more quietly together, though there is no true peace. Conflict diminishes, and the dormant stage of the relationship begins.

Partners in this stage withdraw from one another emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Outsiders may observe a loss of vitality, energy, and life in the relationship. Lacking are the living marrow and sinew that make an intimate relationship joyful. Hobbies, civic service, children, church service, and work may be used as substitutes for lost intimacy.¹⁰ The focus shifts from the relationship to me—my interests—and allowing freedom for my partner to do the same.

In some cases, during this stage partners renew their individual development and growth, reducing pressure on the marriage to meet all needs. But in most cases, partners simply avoid issues with each other and go their own way, shutting out the other. “Living under the gradually accumulating layers of hurt and pain over the years,” families petrify and hearts turn to stone.¹¹ When partners give up on each other in this way, the relationship is at greatest risk.¹²

Stonewalling—the refusal of one or both spouses to talk or relate in any meaningful way—is an important sign that the relationship has reached this critical point. In some instances, one or both partners may indulge in extramarital emotional or sexual substitutes for lost intimacy. Relationships that reach the nadir of the dormant stage likely will disintegrate in time.

Dormant relationships are in need of healing that moves them toward a reborn, vital relationship. If couples are faithful to their covenants, faithful to the Lord, and prayerful, they will be able to renew their relationship.¹³ Marital therapy research has identified *softening*, *forgiveness*, and *acceptance* as important components in this process. It requires a couple’s best efforts and divine assistance. “Without the kind of forgiveness that

stems from the Atonement—that pays the demands of justice and fully heals all family members—there is no eternal family. . . . The Atonement of Christ redeems us—redeems us individually, and redeems our relationships.”¹⁴

Vital Stage. In the vital stage, both partners consciously recommit energies to the relationship, eventually forming a stronger bond than in any of the previous stages. The begrudging resignation of the dormant stage yields to acceptance and genuine care. Partners seek to actively nurture each other’s welfare within the framework of their partner’s goals and definition of growth, not their own. High value is placed on blending as a pair and balancing similarities and differences. The goal becomes to forge a lasting and powerful relationship that creates a synergy—a whole greater than the parts—from the unique contributions of two individuals.

As these changes take root, the relationship experiences wholeness and radiates vitality. The couple typically maintains strong boundaries and for the sake of the relationship contains resources, information, and decision making within the relationship. The report of a married student reflects these principles:

As our relationship continued to grow, we shared more and more experiences with one another. He saw me at what I still consider my worst. I saw him when he was not his best. We never put up a front, and we were entirely open with one another. He shared experiences and feelings that, had I been using him or the relationship for my own gratification, I would have ended it because of the discomfort they brought to me. He suffered with me through some of my greatest miseries. Yet neither of us ever felt fear of rejection or any desire to end the relationship because we had developed a true love for each other and our relationship was based on a real intimacy. We chose to invest ourselves for the relationship. We backed this investment with the commitment of a marriage we consider eternal.

I shared my innermost self with him in a way that left me vulnerable to rejection and heartbreak. He did the same. Without this risk, we never could have gotten to know each other so completely and experienced the joy of true intimacy. . . . My total acceptance of his self, faults and all, was essential to my learning about him. Had I rejected him for his flaws, he would have stopped risking exposing them to me, and I would have known only the man he wanted me to know. This is why so many marriages fail: the partners feel cheated at not receiving the whole other person instead of just the rosy side they knew about before the marriage.

Because we have been exposed to one another’s flaws and know that we cannot change those flaws in the other person, we realize that there will be difficult times ahead. We have seen times when we may not have particularly liked a side of the other person, and we know that will continue until both are perfect, so we need to make the conscious decision to actively work on ourselves and our relationship to keep it alive.

Faithful, Christlike intimacy is fully realized by a husband and wife who have stayed the course until they bring to fruition the vital stage of their marriage. Stability, commitment, and satisfaction typically are at their highest point during this stage. The partners fully accept each other with genuinely unconditional, Christlike love. They are grateful for one another. They regard the other's well-being and happiness as their highest aspiration. They regularly ask what the other wants and needs from them. They are not simply revisiting their first honeymoon but have created a second honeymoon. Their reward now is a relationship that is fully knowing and fully loving. Their relationship is deeper, more complete, and more intimate than at any other time.

Reflections on the Four Seasons of Marriage

This model is potentially a powerful tool for couples. Understanding each stage can temper its challenges. For example, couples can see the Eden-like visionary stage as satisfying to a degree but lacking in the experience, depth, and satisfaction that come only with knowledge and experience. They can perceive the work and struggle of the adversarial and dormant stages as necessary to attaining the exalting pinnacle of the vital stage. The vital stage is a very real redemption of the relationship, but it is not a return to the pristine, ignorant bliss of the visionary Eden. It is mature, stable, committed, nurturing, and loving, with full knowledge and without illusions. It is fully realized intimacy.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON THE MARITAL LIFE CYCLE

Marital success requires learning how to manage the adversarial and dormant stages, which means learning how to communicate and how to resolve conflict, according to research spanning twenty years by Notarius and Markman. They tracked 135 engaged couples yearly for two decades and found that *couple communication and conflict management patterns are the best predictors of marital success*. "What predicts the future of a relationship is . . . how couples handle differences, conflicts, and disagreements,"¹⁵ not the existence of conflicts per se. They found that poor communication and conflict management reliably predict divorce.

Two of the danger signs Notarius and Markman looked for were *escalation* and *husband withdrawal with wife pursuing*.¹⁶ Escalation patterns, where negative feelings about differences intensify, signal an acute and destructive symptom of the adversarial stage. Withdrawal and stonewalling, symptoms of the dormant stage, often follow. The husband's withdrawal or stonewalling coupled with the wife's pursuing is highly predictive of

divorce.¹⁷ In other words, the wife pursues interaction in an attempt to reengage the husband, but the result is often further hostility. This quiet stage in a relationship might look more peaceful to outsiders than the conflict of the adversarial stage, but the relationship is actually at greatest risk, either for legal divorce or emotional divorce.

Notarius and Markman note that awareness of threats most couples experience can help couples reduce their risk, because with awareness they can take preemptive measures. For example:

1. Disagreements in relationships are natural, even inevitable, and how they are handled determines how much of a threat they are. If they are not handled well, they gradually erode intimacy, love, affection, and attraction. “Happy couples have a way of controlling . . . negative behaviors and not letting them get out of hand. Unhappy couples tend to go into a pattern of escalation or withdrawal in the face of those negative behaviors. Over time, that takes a tremendous toll on relationships.”¹⁸

A preemptive measure is to learn principles of conflict management, as mentioned above. Couples who take the time to do this show a 50 percent lower rate of separation and divorce.

2. Reciprocating a negative comment or behavior threatens marriages. Gottman found that domestically violent couples, not surprisingly, have excessive negative exchanges.¹⁹ Once one partner initiates negative interaction, the other tends to respond in kind, creating a feedback loop that can escalate to emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical violence.

Conversely, Gottman found among nonviolent couples that both partners have the ability to resist reciprocating a negative behavior or comment from the other. In gospel terms, we might say they “[put] off the natural man [or woman] and [become] a Saint through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19), turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39) for the sake of their relationship. *A preemptive measure, therefore, is to return good for evil—a hallmark principle of Christian relationships* (Matt. 5:38–48) and of Christlike charity (1 Cor. 13; Moro. 7:45–48).

A recent informal observation of couples in therapy found that one partner often was able to meet a negative comment from the other with a conciliatory, nonescalating response at least once and often twice. But a third negative comment typically began a tit-for-tat cycle. Thus, it seems reasonable to identify a “three strikes” principle as an important signal of danger to the relationship.²⁰

3. Failure to understand that men and women handle conflict somewhat differently can threaten a marriage—“Men and women fight using different weapons but suffer similar wounds.”²¹ Learning about these differences and becoming sensitive to them is characteristic of successful couples.

Men, for example, handle conflict better when there are rules to regulate the process. They also find the physiological arousal that accompanies conflict more painful than women, which in turn can make them more likely to avoid conflict in the future. They require more time to recover after conflict than do women.²² A preemptive measure is for couples to become aware of these differences and to set up rules to regulate their conflict.

4. Many couples experiencing problems in their marriages erroneously assume that monumental effort and changes are required to make a difference. They may become discouraged about even trying, further threatening the relationship. Research, however, indicates that “small changes make a big difference.”²³ The scriptures teach the same principle: “By small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6, 7; 1 Ne. 16:29). A preemptive action, therefore, is for each partner to focus on making small changes in his or her own behavior.

A Reservoir of Hope

No matter how bad things may look in a relationship, the potential for change, healing, growth, and happiness is almost always present. “Every relationship contains a reservoir of hope,” say Notarius and Markman.²⁴ During every stage of a marriage, but perhaps especially during the adversarial and dormant stages, hope is a powerful motivator to work on the relationship. Couples should do everything they can to search for evidence, past or present, that can keep the flickering flames of hope alive and then to express that hope through both words and concrete actions. As they approach their seasons of marriage with an abiding, eternal perspective (“This, too, shall pass”), they are more likely to be optimistic about their future together.

GENERALIZING THE MODEL: SEASONS OF ALL INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

The “seasons of a marriage” model provides a general guide for the stages we can expect for all our intimate relationships. With realistic expectations, we can better manage the pitfalls along the way and deepen our connection to parents, siblings, close friends, and even God. With more information about how we developed patterns in our families of origin, self-understanding and adaptability can grow.

Parent-Child Seasons of Intimacy

Visionary Stage. Both parents and children often experience a visionary stage in their relationship. Young children in particular, who are

developmentally and experientially naive, tend to idealize their parents. Some parents are also naive about their children, thinking they are incapable of the lapses considered normal for other people's children.

Adversarial Stage. Over time, the visionary stage breaks down. Children observe and become victims of their parents' mistakes and transgressions. Parents discover that their children are not the last remaining innocents but have as many weaknesses and imperfections as their peers.

Beginning at about age ten and continuing through adolescence, most children feel some degree of disillusionment, disappointment, resentment, and anger at what they view as their parents' betrayal: "You were supposed to be perfect, and you're not. You've hurt me and damaged me." Disagreements, tension, and conflict ensue. Parents, too, may feel disappointed in children who do not measure up to their idealized expectations. Some parents, especially in religious communities, may resent children who sabotage their attempts to project a perfect family image to the outside world.

Christlike acceptance of one another is essential for getting through this stage without serious rupture of relationships. This burden rests more heavily upon parents, since children are developmentally less capable of bearing it. Parents' acceptance and understanding of children's developmental stages can lead to interaction that is focused on gradual growth rather than on pressure to conform to unrealistic demands and expectations for immediate change.

Often, though, both parents and adolescents set about to change the other. As in the adversarial stage of marriage, resulting tension may sour the relationship. Perhaps a few parents and children are able to prevent the conflict typical of this stage, but most families experience enough friction to move them into the dormant stage.

Dormant Stage. As parents and children become exhausted by conflict, they may avoid one another or create emotional distance. Some families may give up on each other or even reject one another out of frustration or fatigue. As with marriages, parent-child intimacy is at risk during the dormant stage. Covenant families, however, remain committed to Christlike love for one another, a love that does not make the relationship contingent on the other person's coming around to "my" point of view. Parents and children in covenant families stand with open arms, ready to receive one another in love.

Even under the best circumstances, when children eventually leave home, both they and their parents typically confess to some measure of relief. Soon afterward, children and their parents stop trying to change one another and begin to show the acceptance that is easier to extend

from a distance. Reunions may bring renewed complaints and insistence on change, but they usually dissipate more quickly and with less conflict. A return to the idealized imagery of the family may even occur from a distance. Additionally, as adult children observe families more closely and talk with siblings about their own families, appreciation for their family of origin often increases. In time, these experiences may promote transition to the vital stage.

Vital Stage. In the vital stage, children see their parents as fallible human beings but accept them as brothers and sisters who were given a stewardship and are trying to do their best. When adult children become parents, their own mistakes and lapses further increase sensitivity to their parents' experience. Aging parents similarly accept their children's developmental struggles. Parents and children relate less in terms of expectation, entitlement, and demand and more in terms of support, nurture, and encouragement. Like married couples beginning the vital stage, parents and children increasingly focus on changing themselves, not others, and on helping one another in love.

Just as in marriage, critical to this process are softening, forgiveness, and the renewal of trust—all aided by the Atonement of Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit. With this sustenance, parents and children can heal, reconcile, and renew their relationships. They begin to cherish and celebrate one another, rejoicing in the uniqueness and individuality of the other.

Deity-Disciple Seasons of Intimacy

As developing disciples, our progression from conversion to reconciliation with our Father in Heaven also has its seasons. Our initial conversion may be *visionary*—idealized and naive. As the demands of discipleship press us to our limits and we experience the painful stretching of divine chastening, we may become disillusioned with God or angry with him, beginning the *adversarial* stage. The power of covenant commitments can compel us to forego retreat and resist temptations during this stage. As the stresses of this stage take their toll on our emotional and spiritual energy, we may retreat from discipleship's daunting demands and begin a *dormant* stage. And finally, when we accept anew the demands of discipleship as the unavoidable prerequisites to reconciliation with our Father, we enter the exalting *vital* stage. The Atonement of Christ, the gifts of the Spirit, and the Savior's grace are essential to the softening, forgiveness, and deepening of trust that are necessary to reach this stage.

LOVE AND INTIMACY IN FAMILY, KINSHIP, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

Intimacy is not reserved for husband and wife, nor is it only physical. Love and intimacy also occur in the broader realm of kinship and friendship. The social, emotional, and spiritual connectedness of extended family members and close friends can have a crucial influence as we face life's problems. The principles of Christlike love apply in these relationships just as they do in marriage, parent-child relationships, and our relationship with Deity. We can do justice here to only a few concepts that focus on the broad scope of love in human relationships. We have chosen to discuss two universal themes: *transitional persons* and *generativity*.

The Transitional Person

When we face particularly difficult problems created by imperfect parenting, even several generations back, it is helpful to examine our “emotional genealogy.” Researching personal and family histories from an emotional perspective can reveal past patterns that affect us currently. This research includes reviewing journals, reviewing family histories, and interviewing key living relatives who may have information or insights about maladjustments in our emotional family tree. Once we are aware of unhealthy family patterns, we are better equipped to reverse their effects in our own lives. When we do this, we can become “transitional persons.”

A transitional person is one who rejects the unhealthy or evil family patterns of previous generations and sets a new course for future generations by adopting healthy and godly patterns. Transitional persons are gifts to themselves and potentially to thousands of progeny, with effects rippling across time and social networks. The transitional person exemplifies Christlike love by becoming a participant with the Lord in helping to redeem others.

In the late 1970s, the BYU Values Institute Theory Group²⁵ explored the idea of the transitional person from social science, philosophical, and religious perspectives. The Theory Group concluded that a person can enact a “saving” or redemptive role in the mental and spiritual health of others, particularly family members. While we cannot atone for the sins of the human family in the same way the Savior did (Alma 34:10–12), we can become redeemers within our families by sacrificing personal need on behalf of others (John 15:4–5, 10–13; D&C 4; D&C 97:8–9) and by reversing sinful traditions to create a righteous heritage for succeeding generations. The Theory Group discussed the influence of many converts on their families as a specific example and applied the term “transitional figure” to their

experience. Speaking for the group at a BYU gathering, I described the therapist's role in helping clients become transitional figures:

Since many psychological problems are, in effect, the burden of sins laid upon the person due to generations of unrighteous acts and conditionings, the therapist teaches the individual to become a *transitional* [redemptive] figure in the history of his family. [The counselor] shows the person how to compensate for and overthrow the effects of generations of sins upon his [or her] psyche and behavior. [The client] thus begins to reverse the trends in his [or her] emotional genealogy, clears [his or her] consciousness of self-deceptions, and initiates a benevolent cycle in his [or her] functioning [in the family network and] as spouse and progenitor. . . . By accepting the role of making up both for [one's] own sins and those of [one's] parents (cf. D&C 98:47–48), the individual adopts . . . Christ-like behavior . . . [and] is then aided by the saving, healing power of Christ.²⁶

This psychological saving process parallels the effort to spiritually save forebears through genealogy and temple work, that is, to do for them what they could not do for themselves. It requires giving up the personal need to reject or retaliate against those, living or dead, who have contributed to our emotional problems by perpetrating offenses against us. Forgiveness is a first step, which may call for wrenching changes in attitude and behavior.

As innocent victims choose forgiveness and healing, they sacrifice themselves for the welfare of the extended family. This principle of sacrifice was first taught to Adam and Eve (Moses 5:6–8). It has been taught throughout scriptural history that our own sacrifices are symbolic of the sacrifice by the Son of God.²⁷ Sacrifice is an expression of love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). When we sacrifice, our capacity to love is expanded (Alma 7:11–12).

Family life is our first and most important laboratory for the development and practice of such intimate, Christlike regard for others. But over time, those touched by the spirit of our eternal family find that the definition of “who is my neighbor” (Luke 10:29) expands beyond familial, regional, national, racial, religious, and all other boundaries to include the entire family of God and all his creations (see Luke 10:30–37). Christ expressed this expansive scope of intimacy when he taught his disciples, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12–13).

Envisioning intimate relationships as including saving influence in one another's lives and across generations elevates intimacy to a truly celestial concept. Christlike intimacy makes sobering demands on us, but to reach so deeply, lovingly, and redemptively into one another's souls is the hallmark

of divine intimacy and the core of meaningful relationships. Surely one of the highest callings in life is to rise to the challenge of becoming transitional figures in the lives of friends and family.²⁸

Over the years, these ideas about transitional persons have been shared with professional audiences as an example of how spiritual approaches can aid in psychotherapy. For instance, in a gathering of mental health professionals, the Theory Group explained how the transitional person concept might help a client who had been abused:

The person is encouraged to see himself or herself as at a crossroads in his or her family history. . . . Although he or she has been the victim of pathologizing events in life, . . . it is important to adopt a forgiving attitude. . . . The release of aggression against the victimizing agents, although it may be important at certain therapeutic junctures, is not healing in a deep and lasting way.

We introduce . . . the concepts of sacrifice and redemption that are common to great religions, especially the Judeo-Christian tradition. . . . Sometimes it is important to absorb the pain that has been handed down across generations . . . to stop the process of transmitting pain from generation to generation. Instead of seeking retribution, one learns . . . to be forgiving, to try to reconcile with forebears, and then become a generator of positive change in the next generation . . . by resisting the disordered patterns of the past, exercising [a] . . . healing impact, and then transmitting . . . a healthier mode of functioning.²⁹

A member of the Theory Group, Victor L. Brown Jr., provided an example of a woman who had severe emotional problems because of abuse from her father and who decided to employ the transitional figure concept:

After learning about the transitional figure idea, she was encouraged to go back to visit her father and, instead of confronting him with the pain he had caused, to invite him to tell her about his history and to do a family history interview. She was not to ask him about his dynamics or disturbances and the consequences, but instead, about his identity, experiences, and so forth.

The result of doing this, including tape-recording and transcribing the interviews with her father, caused a dramatic reconciliation between the woman and her father and a merging of perceptions of painful [abusive] events that had occurred. It stimulated her father to face certain realities he had never faced. This was, however, a gentle experience occurring in a forgiving atmosphere. As a result, he was able to lower his defenses, apologize, and seek to make up for his past conduct. The changes in both client and father as a result of this encounter seemed to be dramatic and more profound than the changes that had been occurring through regular treatment. . . .

As in religious tradition, sacrifice was required on the part of the client; that is, she gave up the need for retribution and separation from the past family network. Furthermore, the sacrificial act, consisting of self-denial and forgiveness, yielded ultimate benefits to all parties that more than compensated for the sacrifice.³⁰

Case Studies of Transitional Characters

Roberta Magarrell examined from a Latter-day Saint perspective case studies of “transitional characters.” Her work began with a BYU doctoral dissertation in family science and continues in an ongoing research program. Her observations are based on in-depth interviews with six persons who grew up in abusive environments and became transitional persons, often without therapy. These individuals faced every kind of problem, including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, character assassination, mental cruelty, neglect, abandonment, emotional isolation, sexual promiscuity, adultery, incest, manipulation, and scapegoating. All six had in common the question, “How do I reject a family of origin lifestyle that is harming me and build a growth producing lifestyle for myself and for my future family?”³¹

Magarrell found that all six of her subjects developed a determination to discard the dysfunctional aspects of their families and to create a new way of life. This sense of mission provided motivation for both personal change and reform of their family situations. Through *enlightened understanding*, the sense of mission ultimately evolved into a *transitional leap* that yielded a new way of seeing things. This altered perspective occurred at differing ages, ranging from youth through young adulthood.

The six subjects began their journey toward becoming transitional characters in a general state of confusion. They asked painful questions such as “Why did my dad desert us?” “Why don’t we have more food?” “Why doesn’t my mother love me?” “Why can’t my parents get along?” “How can I get out of here?” “What needs to change?” This questioning eventually led them to see new options, such as “Life is going to be different for me, for us” and “I’m going to do the things that I need to make that happen.”³² Many realized after the questioning process that they wanted almost the opposite of what they had previously wanted. Where before they wanted almost any way to escape their pain, they now desired a close-knit family, caring, understanding, a strong and supportive father, fun, safety, respect, encouragement, and opportunities to work together and to develop talents.

As they attempted to achieve these new desires, they experienced painful trial and error and alternation between progress and backsliding. One participant described this process as follows:

It isn't just a [simple] change, it's moving up a hill, moving away from whatever's here, then you go over the hill and you can see things differently . . . a fresh view. . . . You can suddenly see things differently and then you can choose which direction you're going to go. But initially, you're just climbing out of it.³³

The process of coming out of confusion into enlightenment and eventually into the leap toward a transitional role was helped along by several influences. All six subjects reported that at least one and sometimes more than one significant person outside of their immediate family gave them steadiness, security, and a belief that they could move toward a new future. In five out of the six cases, a grandparent was one of these significant persons. Other influences included education, exposure to new environments, a questioning attitude, and a sense of responsibility to self and family members. In some cases, formal counseling or a self-help group were critical factors.

Another vital aspect of the change process was the ability to communicate, including conversation with significant others, self-talk, self-reflection, talking to God, talking to a pet, and journal writing. This self-expression helped the six subjects reinterpret their experiences, gave them new perspectives, and imparted comfort.

The growing sense of enlightenment was often accompanied by spiritual feelings and insights. Gradually a sense of mission emerged that they should and could make a difference. They began to believe that freedom from the past and new choices were truly possible. In some cases, this new belief came like a spiritual revelation that showed them a re-visioning of themselves as a person and as a new and different part of an old social system.

The next phase, *the transitional leap* from victim to healer, also was often accompanied by a powerful spiritual experience. It occurred gradually and ultimately yielded a liberating view of the problems in their family of origin.³⁴ One of the subjects said, "There is a freeing up to let go of the past and to look to the present and to the future. . . . [It was a time of profound alteration,] a critical juncture . . . [a major forward thrust] as if one is catapulted across a gulf that would be difficult for anyone . . . to cross back over."³⁵ The subjects also let go of anger, relinquished excessive responsibility for family problems, and forgave. One subject described a "healing power to transcend, absorb the . . . emotionally destructive

environment.”³⁶ The transitional leap experience also imparted a sense of being a person of great worth, of being in a place of safety and having feelings of substance.³⁷ *The six subjects perceived that God loved them, which was a particularly powerful insight.*

Finally, they saw themselves as individuals who could make a difference, not only for their own sakes, but also for the sake of their family members. They then were able to begin influencing their extended families and the next generation to shed dysfunctions and be open to new possibilities. Many of them used phrases that countered the negative, even evil, trends in their families, statements such as “I will never be a deadbeat dad”; “I cannot imagine being unfaithful to my spouse”; “I want my family to be close-knit and caring, and we will work together to make that happen”; “I will never abandon my children”; “I will not use alcohol or drugs”; “I will not use violence in disciplining my children”; and “I will encourage the development of my children.”

Magarrell notes that the sequence of events she outlined does not necessarily occur in a linear way. The transitional person may cycle through different phases at different times and, often, more than one time.

Reading Magarrell’s account of the transitional characters is an exhilarating experience. It shows that people can heal from even the worst environments and become integrated, loving individuals.

GENERATIVITY:

KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY VS. STAGNATION AND SELF-ABSORPTION

Generativity is influence for good across generations. Erikson defines it as “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation.”³⁸ It is the “antithesis of . . . *self-absorption and stagnation* . . . [and] . . . encompasses *procreativity, productivity, and creativity*, and thus the generation of new beings.”³⁹

McAdams and de St. Aubin describe generativity as “commitment to promoting the next generation, through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to benefit youth and foster the development and well-being of individuals and social systems that will outlive the self.” Adults who take on generative endeavors “serve as norm bearers and destiny shapers in families, schools, churches, neighborhoods and the workplace.”⁴⁰

Generativity research has shown that people who believe their influence can extend into the future feel a responsibility to love others far beyond immediate kin. As part of a larger society under God, they reach out from the nuclear family to the world community and from earthly time into

eternity. Intergenerational concern and care builds their personal identity and strengthens their bonds with others as they identify with a larger whole.

For Latter-day Saints, temple work for the deceased (who live on elsewhere) is a vivid example of this truth. Temple participation anchors us in a transcendent network of emotional and spiritual ties with other people who have meaning for our own existence. A professor recently reported the depth of personal change that occurred after an experience in the temple where he felt a vivid spiritual connection with individuals on the other side of the veil. His extensive research into personal and family history had already produced many emotional experiences as he discovered the identities and lives of his kin, both living and dead. As he pondered this experience in the temple, he felt love for and closeness to these people, and he realized that he was part of a much greater whole—a universal, caring, and eternal network that was invisible yet felt vibrantly real. His identity became shared. He felt a oneness with a benevolent system of related eternal identities who shared in his history, his genetics, and his future.

As this experience occurred, his sense of self was transformed. Old insecurities began to dissolve. His identification with a shared community reduced his anxiety and the secret internal loneliness he had felt. After this experience, he found that kinship commitment was healing and energizing to his life at home and at work. He decided that his personal history, family genealogy, and vicarious temple ordinance work⁴¹ were far more significant than he had ever realized. He began to believe that deeply felt familial connections are the most important thing, maybe the only thing, that matters, for they redefine “self,” extending it to the family of all God’s creations. (See D&C 110:13–15; 128:15–18.) Such peak intimacy demonstrates that the higher realization of self and identity involves “becoming one” with significant others.

Family closeness, unity, righteousness, and intimacy, endowed by the Lord’s spirit and covenant bonds, are our primary protection and salvation from the spiritual, moral, and social smog that surrounds us. McAdams and de St. Aubin explain generativity’s powerful impact on all those we influence:

I am what survives me. I am my children, in their manifold incarnations: my sons and daughters, students, and protégés; the babies I care for in the nursery where I work; the kids on the Little League team I coach; the parishioners in the church I serve; but also the business I started, the neighbors I helped (and hurt), the institutions I influenced (for good and for ill), the organizations for which I volunteered, the poems I wrote, the quilt I made, the jokes I told, the words of advice I gave, the examples I set for others, my reputations, how others think of me, how others will remember me. As adults, we all *generate* legacies, even unwittingly so.

We all find ourselves caring for and contributing to the next *generation*, even if the contributions are tiny, indirect, or negative, and even though we never know, and can never know, what impact our efforts will have in the long time that is ahead of us. As adults, we all come to know the challenges, rewards, and frustrations of *generativity*.⁴²

Stagnation, on the other hand, consists of giving in to ease and withdrawing from the effort required to care about and care for the succeeding generation. The dynamic energy of identity development becomes stuck in midlife and progresses no further. Sadly, stagnation usually breeds tendencies toward self-satisfaction, shallow intimacy, self-preoccupation, and rejection of those in need.

Examples of Generativity

Examples of generative kinship, family, and social influence are abundant in the scriptures and in the history of the restored Church. Family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, priesthood blessings, parent-child conversations, church service, community service, family traditions, and family reunions are all generative acts. Photographs, diaries, journals, biographies, letters, genealogy, and family history work anchor these efforts in documents, data, and personal experience of intergenerational connection. The Spirit of Elijah is a generative and transitional spirit (Mal. 4:5–6; D&C 110:13–15; D&C 128:15–18). It turns the hearts of the children to their fathers, forefathers, mothers, and foremothers; and it turns the hearts of forebears to their progeny.

“Generative parenting” is parenting enriched by special care in which members of the older generation extend themselves to transmit strength, wisdom, security, and opportunity to the rising generation. Generative mothering has always been a strong tradition, and increasingly society is recognizing that generative fathering is equally important.⁴³ As full commitment to fathering becomes the norm among righteous people, its effects prevent or cure many of society’s ills, defeating Satan’s plan to destroy the family and civilization. A student reported how the influence of his parents generated a model for his own ideal of marriage and family:

I recall at a very young age, probably age 7, hoping that someday I’d be able to raise a family in the same way my parents were raising us kids. I also recall hoping that I would be able to find someone to love and serve as my dad did with my mom. I think that they have an ideal marriage, one that I will take from and institute into mine when I have one. They demonstrated respect for each other, exemplified the sharing of roles, and provided support for mutual growth and personal identity development.

I also learned from them that love needs to be nourished, just as a flower needs attention to flourish. They taught me that when trials and disagreements occur in my own marriage, we will need to renew our commitment to each other. “Benevolent intimacy” will be the highest common denominator, as I put my loved ones first in my life.

Exceptional family patterns have been and are being set by latter-day prophets such as Joseph F. Smith, David O. McKay, Ezra Taft Benson, and their wives and families. Other leaders and millions of Saints have followed these modern models of kinship, fidelity, and generativity. The family and community influence of any of the recent or current First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve with their wives and families could be studied with benefit. In the autobiography *From Heart to Heart*,⁴⁴ we learn about the family of Elder Russell M. Nelson and Sister Dantzel White Nelson, where each person’s heart and core motivation is turned inward toward each other and then outward toward the larger world. The lives of Elder Neal A. Maxwell and Sister Colleen Hinckley Maxwell provide another exemplary pathway to generative influence.⁴⁵

The scriptures are also filled with powerful stories that set a standard for us and help us establish life goals. The pattern can be continued in our individual lives through personal adherence to the restored Church’s plan of youth activity and service, priesthood advancement, missions, temple marriage, and children born in or adopted into the covenant. Daily scripture study and regular study of the *Ensign* magazines will help the reader understand both ancient and modern applications of the concept of generativity within a gospel context.

Generative influence is not restricted to those who have children. Many great personalities throughout history have changed the world for the better, even though they did not have biological progeny. Many were women, such as Mary Magdalene, Joan of Arc, and Mother Teresa. Anna Freud, the renowned child psychoanalyst, was once asked how she could possibly understand and therapeutically help children when she had never been a wife or mother. Ms. Freud, however, had numerous children vicariously because of the great work she did to support and heal their mental disorders. Indeed, her clinic in London was a fertile center for generating positive change in the lives of thousands and, indirectly, even millions of children. Through her practice and teaching, generations of professionals learned to care for the welfare of future generations.

Intimate friendships are also an important generative influence. As older people reflect back upon their younger years, they often can identify a turning point in their lives that centered around an intimate friend. For instance, a successful middle-aged counselor reported that his life course

took an important turn in his late teens as the result of a conversation with a close high-school friend. He and his friend were both ambitious intellectuals with strong academic and political interests. During one of many long personal conversations, the friend, the son of a clergyman, made a statement that had a powerful impact upon the future counselor. He said, “Whatever I do in the future, I want to do something that will benefit the world and make a difference.” The future counselor realized that such an idea had never occurred to him before. He had previously been preoccupied with making a career choice that would be interesting and bring him an adequate income. His friend’s statement shook the foundations of his assumptions about what a career should be. A desire to do something good for the world—to consecrate his life and his work to the benefit of the community at large—seemed to erupt from some hidden reservoir within him. From then on, important decisions were informed by this newfound value. The counselor reported that these decisions led to a lifetime of deep satisfaction in work that might never have occurred otherwise.

Sometimes intimate relationships help heal a personal dysfunction. Such influence can reverberate throughout a person’s life and is part of the web of love that keeps individuals and society integrated rather than disintegrated. In the example below, a college professor becomes a pivotal person for one of his female students, who had become too intimate with a boyfriend and felt guilty and confused when the boyfriend left on a mission:

While he served his mission, I was enlightened by the wisdom of my professors concerning the true meaning of love. One of them helped me understand Christ’s love for us, which gave me more insight than I ever had before. Centered around developing this ultimate love, he explained that every relationship should be aimed at building the spirituality of both persons. I knew then, clearly, that we are the literal offspring of God and that he loves us with boundless love. This gave new direction and happiness to me and those I am close to.

When my friend returned from his mission, our reunion brought incredible change to my life and my understanding of love. I am more able to give selflessly without seeking physical or instant gratification, and this has brought about much happiness. My professor had a decisive influence in bringing about my changes and the consequences I now enjoy.

CONCLUSION

Christlike love extends intimacy to our social systems. All faithful Latter-day Saints are transitional persons in the sense that all come from imperfect families and social contexts and thus all have the opportunity

to reject dysfunctional or sinful patterns and pass on a healthier, more righteous heritage. All generations of the past and the future make a transition through each person, for each is an inheritor and a progenitor. Those who never procreate are progenitors in that their influence on past, present, and future may be felt just as strongly as those who physically produce progeny.

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, a transitional person is one who knows the doctrines of the Restoration, abides by its covenants, and follows the Savior by witnessing and living according to the gospel he taught and exemplified. Anyone who does these things brings out transitional dynamics automatically.

Generativity can become a valued life goal and lifestyle pattern. Such kinship ideals are based on interpersonal fidelity and personal integrity. From this orientation to life comes the power to affect the family and the larger world in a benevolent way.

We recommend the writings of Erik Erikson, the father of the modern social science concept of generativity, and those of his students who are carrying on this professional tradition that complements the principles and practices of the restored gospel and Latter-day Saint culture.⁴⁶ We conclude this section by again quoting from Erikson:

Generativity, we said, encompasses procreativity, productivity, and creativity, and thus the generation of new beings as well as of new products and new ideas, including a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development. A sense of stagnation, in turn, . . . can totally overwhelm those who find themselves inactivated in generative matters. The new “virtue” emerging from this antithesis, namely, Care, is a widening commitment to take care of the persons, the products, and the ideas one has learned to care for. All the strengths arising from earlier developments in the ascending order from infancy to young adulthood (hope and will, purpose and skill, fidelity and love) now prove, on closer study, to be essential for the generational task of cultivating strength in the next generation. For this is, indeed, the store of human life.⁴⁷

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1. Peter L. Berger and Hansfried Kellner, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality," *Diogenes* 46 (1964): 1–24.

2. See David Reiss, *The Family's Construction of Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 166.

3. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); K. S. Bahr and H. M. Bahr, "Another Voice, Another Lens: Making a Place for Sacrifice in Family Theory and Family Process," Thirty-third Annual Virginia F. Cutler Lecture, Provo, Utah, Center for Studies of the Family, Brigham Young University, November 13, 1997.

4. Bahr and Bahr, "Another Voice, Another Lens." See also Dorothy Lee, *Valuing the Self* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1986).

5. Scott Stanley, *The Heart of Commitment* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

6. Sherot Miller, Daniel Wackman, Elam Nunnally, and P. Miller, *Connecting with Self and Others* (Littleton, Colo.: Interpersonal Communications Programs, 1988).

7. Miller, Wackman, Nunnally, and Miller, *Connecting with Self and Others*.

8. Bonnie Burman, Gayla Margolin, and Richard S. John, "America's Angriest Home Videos: Contingencies Observed in Home Reenactments of Marital Conflict," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 1 (1993): 28–39; Clifford I. Notarius and Howard J. Markman, *We Can Work It Out: Making Sense of Marital Conflict* (New York: Putnam, 1993); John M. Gottman, "A Theory of Marital Dissolution and Stability," *Journal of Family Psychology* 7, no. 1 (1993): 57–75; John M. Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

9. See "Conflict Tactics Scale" in Murray A. Straus and Sherry L. Hamby, "Measuring Physical and Psychological Maltreatment of Children with the Conflict Tactics Scales," in *Out of Darkness: Contemporary Perspectives on Family Violence*, ed. Glenda Kaufman Kantor and Jana L. Jasinski (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997), 119–35.

10. Mark H. Butler and James M. Harper, "The Divine Triangle: God in the Marital System of Religious Couples," *Family Process* 33, no. 3 (1994): 277–86.

11. James M. Harper and Mark H. Butler, "Repentance, Forgiveness and Progression in Marriages and Families," in *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, ed. David C. Dollahite (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 155.

12. See Gottman, "Theory of Marital Dissolution and Stability," 65; Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*; and John M. Gottman, "Predicting the Longitudinal Course of Marriages," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 17, no. 1 (1991): 3–7.

13. M. H. Butler, B. C. Gardner, and M. H. Bird, "Not Just a Time-Out: Change Dynamics of Prayer for Religious Couples in Conflict Situations," *Family Process* 37, no. 4 (1998): 451–78; M. H. Butler, J. S. Stout, and B. C. Garder, "Prayer as a Conflict Resolution Tactic: Clinical Implications of Couples' Reports of Relationship Softening, Healing Perspective, and Change Responsibility," *American Journal of Family Therapy* (in press).

14. Harper and Butler, "Repentance, Forgiveness and Progression," 155.
15. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 9.
16. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 9.
17. Gottman, "Predicting the Longitudinal Course of Marriages," 5.
18. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 10.
19. Gottman, "Theory of Marital Dissolution and Stability," 64–65.
20. S. R. Woolley, "Enactments in Couple Therapy: A Process Study" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1995).
21. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 32.
22. Gottman, "Theory of Marital Dissolution and Stability"; Gottman, "Predicting the Longitudinal Course of Marriages," 6.
23. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 10.
24. Notarius and Markman, *We Can Work It Out*, 11.
25. The BYU Values Institute met in 1977 to discuss ideas and practices that might form a framework for a gospel-centered approach to human behavior. Among the members of the institute were Truman G. Madsen, C. Terry Warner, Victor L. Brown Jr., Stephen R. Covey, and Allen E. Bergin.
26. Allen E. Bergin, "A Religious Framework for Personality and Psychotherapy" (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1977), 8–9.
27. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 663–66.
28. See Carlfred Bartholomew Broderick, *One Flesh, One Heart: Putting Celestial Love into Your Temple Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986).
29. Allen E. Bergin, "Three Contributions of a Spiritual Perspective to Counseling, Psychotherapy, and Behavior Change," *Counseling and Values* 32 (1988): 29.
30. Victor L. Brown, personal communication, October 1977, in Bergin, "Three Contributions of a Spiritual Perspective," 29–30.
31. Roberta Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1994), 33.
32. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 49–50.
33. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 40.
34. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 62.
35. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 62.
36. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 63.
37. Magarrell, "Becoming a Transitional Character," 63–64.
38. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950/1963), 267.
39. Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 67, italics in original.
40. D. P. McAdams and Ed de St. Aubin, eds., *Generativity and Adult Development: How and Why We Care for the Next Generation* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1998), xx.
41. A unique documentation of how temple themes may be woven into inter-generational family life was presented at the Women's Conference held in 2000 at BYU. The printed and video versions are highly recommended resources for extending the discussion of principles in this chapter. See Ann N. Madsen in collaboration with Emily Madsen Reynolds, Mindy Madsen Davis, and Cindy Anderson Madsen, "And All Thy Children Shall Be Taught of the Lord: Bringing the Temple to Our Children," April 27, 2000.

42. McAdams and de St. Aubin, *Generativity and Adult Development*, xix, italics in original.

43. David C. Dollahite, Brent D. Slife, and Alan J. Hawkins, "Family Generativity and Generative Counseling: Helping Families Keep Faith with the Next Generation," in *Generativity and Adult Development*, ed. McAdams and de St. Aubin, 449–81; Alan J. Hawkins and David C. Dollahite, *Generative Fathering: Beyond Deficit Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997).

44. Russell M. Nelson, *From Heart to Heart* (Salt Lake City: Quality, 1979).

45. Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

46. See Erikson, *Childhood and Society*; Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*; Robert Coles, *Erik H. Erikson: The Growth of His Work* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1970); and McAdams and de St. Aubin, *Generativity and Adult Development*.

47. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 67.

Errata

We wish to correct an editorial error that appeared in *BYU Studies* volume 4, number 1. On page 161, this sentence appears in Paul H. Peterson's review of *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*:

Bagley faults Brooks for her overly sympathetic treatment of Lee (most historians would agree that Brooks's corrective was in order), her shallow treatment of the background of the emigrants, and her acceptance of some of the slanderous tales implicating both the emigrants and the Paiutes.

The sentence should read as follows:

Bagley faults Brooks for her overly sympathetic treatment of Lee (most historians would agree that Bagley's corrective was in order), her shallow treatment of the background of the emigrants, and her acceptance of some of the slanderous tales implicating both the emigrants and the Paiutes.

We apologize for any confusion this error may have caused.

—Editors, *BYU Studies*