The Message: More Than We Can Imagine
Marion D. Hanks

As I drove to the hospital last night to visit my sister, who was very ill, I had in the back of my mind the assignment given me by the New Era editors to prepare this article, and I realized that the deadline had arrived.

At the hospital I had a humbling spiritual adventure that gave dimension to what I would like to say to you. In a room there I found a wonderful family gathered around the bed of their very ill wife and mother, having their family home evening. A choice son, just returned from missionary experience abroad, was telling about his mission and showing some slides on the wall of the hospital room. I was privileged to join with the family.

When I arrived home, my own family gathered for the home evening we had postponed while I visited the hospital. We talked and sang together and read the scriptures, and then, having fasted for the occasion, we knelt in our home to join our faith in seeking the Lord’s blessings for our dear one who so desperately needed his help.

It had been my intention to express my convictions to you on the subject of marriage and the associations that lead to it, the character and qualities that are vital to it, and the love that must exist to make it what God and we want it to be. The experience in the hospital room and at my family home evening are so very importantly involved with that subject that I wish to offer my testimony to you about these two themes and their relationship. As I do, I wonder within myself if you who have begun to read have begun also to see the connection: what have the hospital experience and the family home evening to do with our love, or (if you’re already wed) with our marriage? Let me explain.

When young people begin to think of or experience the love that leads to marriage, they should also be thinking—and thinking with some detail—of the home and family of their future. Marriage means some kind of a home and some kind of a family. A good marriage means a good home and a happy family.

The message I find myself almost desperately eager to communicate to you is that such a marriage is supremely important (it would be difficult to imagine a more significant decision) and that it doesn’t just happen; it is brought about by two mature persons who really want a happy marriage, who are able and willing to learn how to build such a marriage, and who make the effort. Marriage, you see, is an enterprise for adults. Some who are already in the enterprise have not yet reached that stature. They, and all others who look ahead to true marital happiness, must learn the principles involved...
and apply them, if their dreams are to be fulfilled.

There is, of course, the “chemistry” that attracts two to each other, two who have come from a world apart, or from houses next door. This “chemistry” is a very important element in love, a beautiful and sweet and godly element, but it is anything but the whole meaning of love. It is a tender and beautiful flower that must be nurtured in a garden of such qualities as respect, loyalty, consideration, sensitivity, responsibility, and maturity. These must be nourished in the strong bonds of friendship—friendship that rules out the self-centered attitude and focuses the interests of both persons in a marriage union that is supremely important to them and without which there can be no happiness for either.

Daniel Webster spoke of liberty and union, a political ideal that has direct application in marriage. As two choice young persons are motivated by love to look toward marriage, a home, and a family, as they associate in the friendship and courtship that may lead to these holy blessings, they need to be thinking about liberty and union. Abraham Lincoln understood this combination with respect to the nation. He knew there could be no true liberty unless the union was preserved and strengthened.

So is it with marriage. In Ibsen’s play A Doll’s House, there is an exchange between husband and wife that illustrates the foundation of liberty in the union of marriage. The husband declares to his wife that “before all else you are a wife and mother.” Her response is, “I believe that before all else, I am a human being.”

Marriage is a companionship in which each undertakes to provide a joyful, considerate, compassionate climate in which the other can live and grow.

Marriage is a friendship that blows away the chaff and takes the grain; that says I accept you as a unique person, and I love you and respect you in your personality, and I will protect you, and I’ll listen.

Marriage is a love affair that is meant to get better all the time, growing from “being in love” to loving and creating and sustaining in all the ways there are.

Marriage is an ordinance, bringing together two children of God who come together in the way God ordained it and who, strengthened by his grace as they seek it and ask for it, honor under all conditions of stress or vicissitude the sacred promises they have made to him and each other.

The experience in the hospital room and the sorrow of it and the pain of it and the sweetness of it are part of what marriage is all about. Try to think of the large picture—love, home, family. Prepare for all three. Look for and seek to develop a love that listens patiently, that gives freely, that forgives generously. Learn what it means to “bridle all your passions that ye may be filled with love.” True love cares about the whole person and the whole life and the future of another. Believe that life’s most important treasure is, as a great man has said, “hidden beneath the hearth of our own home.” Believe, as another has taught us, that “in home, family, and love lie the spiritual resources that fulfill the life of the individual and the life of the home and the community, indeed the resources that would redeem our troubled world and bring it lasting peace.”
Prepare for and fashion that kind of marriage, home, and family.

Nothing is more important than being a wife and mother, but no woman can be one unless she is regarded and treated as a human being by her beloved. The personality and individuality and uniqueness of each partner in marriage must be accepted and protected and preserved if there is to be happiness; but this liberty must be enjoyed in the spirit of a deep commitment to the building of the union, the marriage, not chiefly in the spirit of self-concern and self-satisfaction. Someone has said that the partners in a marriage are like strings on a lute—made of different materials, stretched to different tensions, sounding at different pitches, but producing harmony together. The love that leads to a happy marriage and a good family will find each partner capable of full commitment in this most close and intimate relationship of life, while at the same time preserving the right and need of each to be and remain a person, cherished and protected and appreciated in his own unique way.

Wherever you are, then, with respect to marriage—years away from it, close to it, or committed in it—be wise, be careful in your choices, in your preparations, in your prayers, because this is the most intimate, the most total commitment one makes in his life. Being in love leads to marriage, and marriage means a home and family. With us marriage is an eternal covenant, involving promises that permanently bind us. Temple marriage is more than the experience of the temple, the sacred ceremony, the authority by which it is performed, the wonderful promises that are sealed upon us. It involves our attitude toward marriage, our preparations for it, our worthiness to enter it, and our ability to learn and mature in it.

This demands thoughtful, prayerful preparation and selection.

Marriage is a partnership in which each accepts great responsibilities as well as privileges.

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