

# FIVE WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR MARRIAGE

- 1) NURTURE FONDNESS & ADMIRATION.** How you tell your story is important. Learn to put a positive spin on your marital history, and you are more likely to have a happy future. When happy memories are distorted into negative ones, it's a sign that the marriage needs help.
- 2) LEARN TO MANAGE CONFLICT.** All couples have some differences that are not immediately solvable. At times you may have to agree to disagree. However, many items can and should be resolved. Learn to communicate and problem-solve in ways that invite closeness with your partner. Here are five suggestions that may help:
  - a) Soften your startup. How you begin to discuss an issue can make all the difference. Try to avoid making critical comments and be careful about your tone of voice.
  - b) Learn to make and receive repair attempts. A sincere apology goes a long way in resolving differences. Be quick to forgive when your partner attempts to apologize.
  - c) Compromise. The beauty of marriage is that you don't see everything the same! Appreciate differences and learn to incorporate those into solutions.
  - d) Be tolerant of each other's faults. We all have weaknesses, and most of us are keenly aware of what those are. Sometimes it's better to leave some things unsaid. Elder Holland has indicated that, "'At least one difference between a tolerable marriage and a great one may be that willingness in the latter to allow some things to pass without comment, without response.'"
  - e) Avoid these harmful forms of communication: Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling. These can slowly choke the life out of any relationship.
- 3) HAVE SHARED SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES.** A covenant marriage is different than a contractual marriage. Engage in spiritual activities that help strengthen that covenant. Attending the temple, praying together, and sharing personal spiritual insights will help to solidify your marital commitment.
- 4) ESTABLISH TRADITIONS AND RITUALS.** It's never too early to establish traditions and rituals as a couple. A ritual is defined as a repeated and coordinated activity that has significance for the couple. Examples could include being together at mealtimes, family home evening, an annual vacation, a weekly date night, or visiting sites that relate to your story. Traditions and rituals serve to create a sense of couple identity.
- 5) KEEP THE ROMANCE ALIVE.** We are busy people, and we must prioritize the marriage if it is important. Carve out time each week for just the two of you. Have a date night, find time alone to talk, go for a walk, or just be together. This can be even more difficult after the children arrive. Find ways to protect the couple once children arrive.

Sources: John Gottman, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown, 1999).  
Judith Wallerstein, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (New York: Warner, 1995).