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REL 200 — The Eternal Family, Section ____

Essential Characteristics of an Eternal Marriage

For this assignment, I spoke with my uncle and aunt, Richard and Nancy Maynes, who have been married for more than fifty years. I chose them because I have had the opportunity to observe their marriage throughout my life, and I have always respected the friendship and commitment they share. Their marriage has included raising four children, professional responsibilities, and many years of demanding Church service. Together, they have spent much of their lives serving, teaching the gospel, and representing Jesus Christ. I spent more than 45 minutes talking with them about what they believe has made their marriage strong and what they have learned along the way.

Their marriage has been centered in Jesus Christ, and I came away from our conversation believing that this foundation gives meaning and strength to everything else they described. Uncle Rick has taught, “We understand and believe in the eternal nature of the family. This understanding and belief should inspire us to do everything in our power to establish a Christ-centered home” (Richard J. Maynes, “Establishing a Christ-Centered Home,” April 2011 General Conference). Their faith in Jesus Christ, commitment to their covenants, service to others, and reliance on the Holy Ghost have shaped their marriage. I do not see faith in Christ as simply one more characteristic on a list. It is the foundation that gives the other characteristics their eternal purpose.

I was also struck by how practical their answers were. They did not describe a successful marriage as one without disagreements, differences, or difficult seasons. They talked about spending time together, making intimacy a priority, communicating honestly, supporting each

other, respecting individual differences, and putting their marriage and family first. Aunt Nancy described them as best friends, and both were candid that they are still imperfect and still trying. From our conversation, I identified four characteristics that I believe are especially important for creating a happy and effective eternal family: friendship and intentional connection, trust and honest communication, mutual support and respect, and commitment to marriage and family.

Characteristic: Friendship and intentional connection are essential in marriage because closeness must continue to be developed and protected throughout life.

Analysis: One of the first things Aunt Nancy said about their marriage was, “We really are best friends.” That friendship is visible in the way they have chosen to spend their time. They golf together, travel together, share common interests, and have intentionally made time alone and intimacy a priority throughout their marriage. She also emphasized that they give each other time and space individually. I appreciated that distinction. Closeness does not require being together constantly or giving up individuality. It does require making the relationship important enough to give it deliberate time and attention.

Elder Joe J. Christensen taught, “Keep your courtship alive. Make time to do things together—just the two of you” (Joe J. Christensen, “Marriage and the Great Plan of Happiness,” April 1995 General Conference). Intentional time together strengthens a marriage because it creates opportunities for positive interaction that are separate from the responsibilities and problems of everyday family life. Children, work, finances, Church callings, and schedules can consume enormous amounts of time. A husband and wife can become very good at managing a family while gradually giving less attention to the relationship that helped create it.

The Lord gives this relationship an eternal dimension in Doctrine and Covenants 42:22: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.” To me,

cleave suggests more than simply remaining married. It means deliberately turning toward and holding close to another person. Time together allows spouses to talk, laugh, maintain affection, share experiences, and continue knowing one another as they change. Physical and emotional intimacy are also part of that connection because marriage involves the mind, heart, and body.

I can see how easily this principle can be overlooked in my own marriage. Being in the same house, raising a family, and handling responsibilities together do not necessarily mean that we are intentionally connecting. Time together still has to be a priority. Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy reminded me that friendship in marriage is not established during courtship and then permanently secured. It grows as spouses continue making room for each other throughout their lives.

Characteristic: Trust and honest communication create emotional safety and allow spouses to work through differences without damaging the relationship.

Analysis: Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy were clear that a good marriage does not mean always having the same opinion. Aunt Nancy explained, “We might not always agree but in the end we respect each other’s opinions and always come together on important decisions.” She described marriage as requiring “lots of give and take.” They also talked about stating needs calmly and clearly, listening to really hear the other person, avoiding passive-aggressive communication, compromising, and accepting that some differences may never completely disappear.

Uncle Rick has publicly taught a principle that closely matches what they described to me. He said, “Men who have ‘integrity of heart’ are men to be trusted—because trust is built on integrity” (Richard J. Maynes, “Earning the Trust of the Lord and Your Family,” October 2017 General Conference). Trust creates emotional safety because spouses can express concerns,

needs, weaknesses, and differences without constantly protecting themselves from each other. Integrity also makes communication more dependable because words and actions are consistent. Honesty still requires kindness. Saying something truthfully does not automatically mean it has been communicated well.

Elder Alfred Kyungu taught, “Let us pray for peaceful communication among us, regardless of the difference in our opinions” (Alfred Kyungu, “Using the Language of Peacemakers,” October 2026 General Conference). He also encouraged using language that uplifts, comforts, edifies, and brings people together. His counsel applies especially well to marriage because disagreement is unavoidable when two people share a life. Healthy communication does not eliminate differences; it changes how those differences are handled. Listening communicates respect, while apologizing and repairing protect the relationship from resentment.

The guidance of the Holy Ghost is especially important during conflict. I may feel completely justified in being hurt or frustrated and still need spiritual help deciding how to respond. The Holy Ghost can help me recognize when my desire to be understood has become more important than understanding the other person. He can prompt an apology, soften defensiveness, or help me stop and listen. Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy talked about repairing problems even in the middle of an argument instead of continuing simply because one person wants to prove a point.

I have learned in my own family relationships that being heard and understood can matter more than determining who was right. An apology, a willingness to listen, or an effort to repair what was hurt often accomplishes more than winning an argument. Trust makes that kind of honesty possible, while humility and the influence of the Holy Ghost make repair possible.

Characteristic: Mutual support and respect allow spouses to develop their individual gifts and abilities while strengthening their marriage and family together.

Analysis: This characteristic was especially apparent as Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy talked about the different responsibilities they have carried during their marriage. Uncle Rick's years of Church service required significant time and sacrifice, and those responsibilities affected Aunt Nancy and their family as well. She talked about being glad to see him use his talents and serve, even when his responsibilities required more from her at home. Their example also showed me that support includes respecting different interests, abilities, needs, and goals.

Elder Ronald A. Rasband recently taught, "Love is being interested in their lives, their successes, and their challenges. Love is being there with arms outstretched and a cheerful countenance" (Ronald A. Rasband, "Love Like Jesus," October 2026 General Conference). Supporting someone is more than celebrating when things are going well. It means caring about the challenges as well as the successes and remaining present through both. Elder Rasband also taught that love does not mean sanctioning every decision another person makes. That distinction matters because respect does not require two people to think alike or approve of everything the other person does.

Sister Barbara B. Smith taught, "A strong marriage takes strong individuals equally committed to calling forth the best in themselves as well as in their eternal partner" (Barbara B. Smith, "A Safe Place for Marriages and Families," October 1981 General Conference). I especially appreciate the word equally. Mutual support cannot consistently require one person's gifts, goals, or needs to disappear so the other person can succeed. Both spouses have individual abilities and potential worth developing. A spouse's success does not diminish the other person's

value. When each person encourages the other to develop worthwhile gifts, that growth can strengthen the entire family.

A Christ-centered understanding of support gives it greater purpose. Supporting a spouse includes helping another child of God become the person the Lord knows that person can become. That can require sacrifice, encouragement, patience, and sometimes giving another person room to do something difficult.

I have experienced this kind of support in returning to BYU. My education requires time and sacrifice from more than just me, and my family's willingness to support a goal that matters deeply to me has shown me how one person's growth can strengthen the family. Their support has given me room to develop abilities and pursue something I could not have accomplished alone.

Characteristic: Commitment to marriage and family provides stability because spouses continue honoring their covenants through changing circumstances, sacrifices, and imperfections.

Analysis: Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy repeatedly returned to the importance of putting each other and their family first. They have made important decisions together, compromised, supported each other through demanding responsibilities, and remained committed through very different stages of life. Aunt Nancy summarized the reality of a long marriage in a way I especially appreciated: "We are not perfect that is for sure but we keep trying!!!!" Her statement makes commitment sound less like a single decision made on a wedding day and more like a decision that continues throughout a marriage.

For an eternal marriage, commitment also has a covenant dimension. Uncle Rick taught, "The most important thing we can do in this life is to keep the promises or covenants we have

made with the Lord” (Richard J. Maynes, “Keeping Our Covenants,” October 2004 General Conference). A temple marriage involves more than a commitment between two people.

Husband and wife have also made covenants with God. Those covenants give marriage a source of stability that reaches beyond changing circumstances or emotions. Looking to Christ gives spouses a reason to repent, forgive, serve, and change when relying only on their own strength may not be enough.

Elder Neil L. Andersen described eternal marriage as “not a short-term experiment but a journey, an eternal journey of becoming who God desires us to become” (Neil L. Andersen, “Eternal Marriage Is an Eternal Journey,” April 2026 General Conference). I think the word becoming is important. Marriage joins two imperfect people who are still learning and changing. Commitment creates stability because both people can know that mistakes, disagreements, or difficult seasons do not automatically threaten the relationship itself. There is room for repentance, forgiveness, patience, and growth.

After many years of marriage, I understand commitment differently than I did when I first married. People change, circumstances change, and families pass through seasons they could not have anticipated at the beginning. Commitment is expressed through ordinary choices to keep turning toward each other and toward the Savior. Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy’s example has reinforced for me that a lasting marriage is not evidence that two people never struggled. It shows what can happen when two people continue honoring their covenants through those changes.

Talking with Uncle Rick and Aunt Nancy gave me a more realistic understanding of what sustains an eternal marriage. Friendship and intentional connection create closeness. Trust and honest communication create emotional safety. Mutual support and respect encourage growth.

Commitment provides stability. More important, I saw how each characteristic becomes stronger and has greater purpose when a marriage is centered in Jesus Christ. An eternal marriage does not require two people who have already reached perfection. It requires two people who continue turning to Christ and to each other, honoring their covenants and allowing His grace to help them become better together.