I was the organist at a funeral I attended recently. As I sat there looking over the music I was to play next, I only half heard what the current speaker was saying. I don't know what he said, but an idea was planted in my head I couldn't shake. It was a question. Am I in love with the Savior, or am I only in love with the idea that someone is going to save me? The exploration of that idea is what this article is about. Before I talk directly about the Savior, let's look at a real world example of falling in love with an idea.

Loving an idea

My wife is my lifeline. When I get stuck in a train of thought she helps dig me out and sends me on my way. I asked her about this notion I had gotten about the Savior and she gave me a comparison. She said that many girls spend their whole young lives dreaming of being married. But it is the wedding they are in love with, not usually the actual marriage.

When a young girl thinks about growing up and becoming a bride, it is the gown, the honeymoon (whatever that is to a young mind), the flowers and the thought of that dashing young man who will sweep her off her feet, and how they will live happily ever after that enthralls her. How many eight year old girls are dreaming of the day they get to change dirty diapers, argue with their husband over finances, try to hold down a job, pay bills, go to school, and still be romantically inclined occasionally? See, it is the idea of marriage, not the daily grind they are thinking of.

I won't even try to put into words what a young man might be thinking of, since I'm sure it has nothing to do with tea sets, bridal veils, limousines, or giant cakes. This begs the question, does anyone really have any clear idea, founded in reality, about what it actually means to get married, before they do it? Small wonder there is a period of

shock following most weddings as the realities of life settle in and the happy couple begin to see what it truly means to face life together.

This is a classic case of someone falling in love with an idea, without having any real notion as to what the commitment of marriage really entails. Many of us don't really take the time to contemplate what goes into our own parent's marriage. What do they have to deal with every day? What compromises have they had to make in life in order for them to accomplish what they have to this point in time? Do they still love each other? How can I tell if they do? How many children do you know who are mature enough to ask detailed questions and ponder their significance in relation to their own upcoming nuptials?

So why do young people get married? What pushes them to make the needed commitments and tie the knot? I think part of it is the fantasy that surrounds the whole wedding. Part of it may be hormones. Part of it would be love. Social expectations or desires may also play some part in the sense of need to wed. There are many reasons why someone might want to get married.

The gospel ideals

Now let's look at the same phenomenon in a gospel setting. When someone learns about the gospel of Christ, and they have just felt the influence of the Holy Ghost for the first time, they are blown away by the feeling and the experience. Their mind has just been opened to new possibilities they had never before considered. What else might there be to learn and feel? The influence of the Spirit is transitory to those outside the covenants of Israel. They feel it for a while, but it soon begins to fade. If not acted upon it will disappear all together, and the person is left to wonder if what they thought they felt was real or imagined. Satan does his level best to convince them of the latter option.

The more the missionaries are around, the more often the person or family feels the sweet influence of the Spirit. This awakens in them a hunger for more of that feeling. They are promised by the missionaries that once they are baptized they can gave the gift of the Holy Ghost for themselves, whereas now He only visits them when the missionaries are around or they are at Church with the other Saints. Wanting what the Spirit brings us is a real and valid reason for wanting to join the Lord's Church. After

all, it is the gift of the Holy Ghost (and the priesthood that gives us that privilege) that sets us apart from the rest of the world, especially from the rest of the Christian world.

What else creates the desire for baptism into the Lord's Church? There is the lifestyle, the family values, hopefully the friendliness and the willingness to serve one another. Presumably there are friendships being forged with members of the Church, and the beginnings of a support group to help the investigating person or family along their path toward membership in the Lord's Church.

This is the way it is supposed to be. In a way it is like buying a little girl a princess dress and letting her play with unicorns. They all feed into the wedding fantasy. In the Church we aren't that bent on filling our up-and-coming new members with fantasies, except most of what we tell them and promise them are things they won't experience until after they are baptized. They are, to the investigator, fantasy promises as yet. They have the confirmation of the Holy Ghost to give them the strength to make the needed changes in their lives, but they haven't yet experienced the full meaning of what it means to have the gift of the Holy Ghost and the power of the priesthood in their lives. That is still a dream that will happen after baptism.

The difficulty of the transition

When a young couple gets married, people watch them, waiting for the day the "honeymoon is over." It is sometimes done with an almost cruel irony, depending on their own personal marriage experience. But "over" the honeymoon always becomes, sooner or later. As soon as the first overdue bills are opened and you find either you or your spouse has been spending a little too freely, or when you begin to feel cramped in your little apartment with the early American poverty décor. Sooner or later you begin to look around and wonder what happened to the fantasy. Where does the happily ever after part of the marriage come into play?

When new members join the Church everyone is happy for them. They are congratulated and slapped on the back, welcomed into the ward or branch, and enthusiastically shown from meeting to meeting. That lasts for a few weeks. Then they become gradually more invisible as the members grow accustomed to seeing them around. It is like waking up and seeing your new spouse every day of the week. Eventually, the novelty of it wears thin.

Please don't get me wrong, I'm not bashing members of the Church or new converts. I'm just telling it like it is for many who have joined the Church. At this point the new members start to look around and wonder what they got themselves into. They may not have learned yet how to tell when the Holy Ghost is speaking to them. His still small voice may still need to come in small shouts until they learn to hear him more clearly. They may still not have formed firm friendships in the gospel to sustain them socially. They may not yet understand what covenants are and how important they are, how sustaining they are.

This is where we lose many a new member. It is that painful transition from being newly wed in the gospel of Christ to becoming an "old married couple" in the gospel of Christ. Too many times there is no one there to take the new person by the hand and help them understand what it means to be a latter-day saint as individuals, as well as what it means to be a latter-day saint couple or family. Who is there to teach them how to study all these extra scriptures they didn't have before? Who is there to help them feel comfortable paying tithing and fast offerings? Who is available to help them feel confident in the service that is now expected of them in cleaning the chapel, moving people in and out of the ward/branch, or contributing to various service projects? The Church expects far more of its people than most other Christian faiths.

Drifting apart

In new marriages there is sometimes a period where the couple hasn't learned how much they really need each other yet. They don't understand how much then depend on the other's support. As a result they may become, for a time, almost like roommates with benefits. If they don't learn to get past this period and learn to pull together to conquer life's challenges, which is what marriage is really all about, they may drift apart enough that they wonder why they bothered to marry at all. They may take a year or two, but eventually they start to find fault with each other, and if they don't start to look past differences and realize that the only person they can change is themself, their marriage may fall apart completely.

In the Church this period of transition happens when a new member's old life begins to beckon them back. If they don't have a solid understanding of why they are in the new Church, what the covenants mean, and they aren't seeking the Holy Ghost on a regular basis, the new member may find it easier to return to their old life and ways. This is

where the idea of Jesus being their savior and actually being able to participate in the salvation of souls with him becomes the wedding fantasy that fades as the realities of life settle in.

It takes time for us to learn to listen to the Holy Ghost and to see the importance of the covenants that are available only in this Church. It takes time for us to begin to see that not only has the Savior done so much for us, but in this Church he wants us to work with him for the salvation of others. We actually get to become saviors on Mt. Zion as the scriptures tell us. We are covenant bound to participate in this work for the living and the dead. For God's work is for all His children, not just those in some undisclosed wealthy neighborhood somewhere. All of God's children become our responsibility when we make that baptismal covenant and those temple covenants.

Learning the true meaning

In real life there are many a married couple who just exist together. They don't know the joy and triumph of setting goals as a couple and achieving things in this life. They just live, work, and sleep in the same house together. This more or less becomes their definition of marriage.

In the gospel there are many who treat the gospel of Christ the same way. Yes, they acknowledge that all the promises of salvation are there, but for whatever reason, they are too busy to serve in a calling, too busy elsewhere to clean the chapel or serve within the neighborhood. They still give lip service to Christ being their savior, but don't understand that covenants have to be kept in order for this to happen.

At some point in a person's life, and this has to be an individual event before it can be a couple or family event, the person begins to realize that Christ cannot save someone who doesn't care about being saved. No amount of covenant making can save an individual. Covenants have to be honored and kept through diligent service and work before the covenants can do what they are meant to do, exalt us. That means each person has to come to know that Christ doesn't become real in our lives until we start studying the scriptures on a regular basis. We need to attend our meetings, fulfill our accepted obligations in the form of financial support to the kingdom, as well as the fulfilling of the callings we have said we would honor.

When we, as a married couple, for example, begin to see how valuable our spouse is to our personal welfare and happiness, and we begin to honor our spouse, support our spouse, exalt our spouse, and do all in our power to make them glad they married us, it is then that our marriage begins to blossom. It is then that we begin to experience what real love is. But it is a personal experience that has to happen to both members of the marriage. When both parties begin to sense the preciousness of the gift that is their spouse then they begin to grasp what old married couples find so valuable in having stayed together for so many years. It really is something that happens over a long period of time.

When we look at our lives in the Church, we have to come to recognize that we have blessings available to us found no where else on earth. But those blessings don't come easily or cheaply. We have to personally seek to change the kind of person we are today to become more like Christ. We have to change from believing in a savior to seeing Christ as THE savior, our exemplar, our standard, the goal for all our desires of happiness. He is the only one who can show us the way back to our Father in heaven.

Covenants make our life in the gospel of Christ come alive. If we don't study our covenants and try to understand what is required for us to live up to them then we will just drift along and not reap any of the real rewards they have to offer. Like the couple that finally recognizes the value of their spouse and starts to do something about it, so the member of the Church will blossom when they recognize the value of the covenants we make, the priesthood we wield, and the opportunities we are afforded to become more like our Savior, Jesus Christ. He must become real to us, and not just an ideal, like the fantasy wedding. Only then can we find our way home.

Ministering application

This is not a ministering application where a plate of anything will fix what ails someone. This problem requires someone who can recognize that the person needing help is truly lost in a daze of daily living. There are many members of the Church, not just new members, who haven't learned the importance and value of the covenants they have made. The Church is still not that important to them. Their own convenience is more important than is honoring their covenants.

One of the ways to help someone in this situation, whether in a marriage or in the Church, is to become someone they love and trust. In order to take them by the hand and help them through their rough patch they need to be willing to accept your example and your words of love. In a marriage you can show them by example the advantages and blessings of having a good marriage. In the Church you can offer to accompany them to the temple, sit with them in Church, answer their questions, be encouraging in suggesting doing good things. Go with them to service projects, or even elsewhere if that is what it takes to build the relationship so they will eventually go to the service projects with you.

Just like a good marital example is the best help we can give to someone struggling with their marriage, so too is a good example of what it means to live a Christlike life the best way to help someone feel encouraged to improve themselves in the gospel of Christ - all that and lots of love.

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The Savior - Is He Real to You or Just an Idea?