Rock-solid relationships are those relationships that endure when the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (Hamlet III, i, 56-68) combine with the adversary’s storms (see Ephesians 6:12) and the world’s alluring sophistries in a relentless and sinister effort to undermine and ultimately destroy love.

Rock-solid relationships are built upon The Word, who is Christ, and His words, the scriptures. The prophet Nephi taught “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3; italics added). All things? Yes. All things.

- How to talk with my teenage son who is suddenly pulling away from us?
- How to show love to my wife, so that she really experiences the deep love I have for her?
- How to work with my brother on our parents’ estate so that our relationship is still alive at the end of the process?

• How to respond to my sister—who seems to twist everything I say to her—so that we can be closer?
• How to help my seemingly indifferent husband think about my needs sometimes?
• How to build a bridge from my heart to my father’s and put years of conflict behind us?
• How to link arms with my colleagues so that we can accomplish the important tasks at hand and stop wasting our energies in complaints and criticisms, fears, and jealousies?
• How to be a better wife and mother?

Yes. Absolutely. Certainly. All of these. As a marriage and family therapist for 30 years, I believe the scriptures are the very best “how to” books on relationships. The scriptures are the first and last word on how to be a better husband, father, wife, mother, parent, son, daughter, sibling, friend, in-law, friend, boss, employee, or any other relationship you can name. The scriptures contain the answers on how to build and strengthen any relationship.

When we don’t know the next step to take, when we can’t see any light at the end of our relationship tunnel, the scriptures—the word of God—are the “iron rod” that we can count on and hold onto. The wisdom contained in the scriptures will guide us over the mountains of misunderstandings, through the dark nights of betrayal, and around the mine fields of destructive traditions and lethal legacies of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. And all we have to do is be willing to seek their wisdom. “Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall ... lead the man (and woman) of Christ in a strait and narrow course across the everlasting gulf of misery” (Helaman 3:29; italics added)—even that gulf of misery which is created by unhappy and stressful relationships.

Wisdom from the Scriptures Strengthens Relationships

At the most difficult time in her life, namely, the dissolution of her marriage—because her husband ran off with their young woman boarder—one woman found her daily “to do” list right within the scriptures. Each and every day she took her question for that particular day to the Lord in prayer, opened her scriptures—absolutely expecting an answer—and received abundantly! The scriptures became her personal compass, her very own Liahona, pointing the way she should go through her unexpected wilderness experience (see 1 Nephi 16:10). She discovered in her exploration of the scriptures what Nephi and his family learned about the workings of the Liahona: the more “faith and diligence and heed which [she] did give unto them,” the clearer were the instructions she received (1 Nephi 16:28).
And she had other experiences that paralleled Nephi’s, namely, that what was written in her scriptures was “changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [she] gave unto [them]” (v. 29). At times a passage that she had read many times before suddenly seemed brand new. Other times she found passages that she’d never read; some, she’d never even noticed. It was as though the “scripture angels” were working overtime to insert words and phrases, counsel and advice meant just for her.

Day after day the scriptures told her how to deal with her husband, in the way the Lord wanted, so that her children would not be injured in the crossfire of the rancor of the divorce. She was tutored in how to heal the fractured relationship with her husband so that, although no longer spouses, they were able to be supportive friends to each other and continue to be great parents to their children.

Because of the marital breakup, this woman needed to seek employment. From her daily seeking in the scriptures, she learned how to present herself at a job interview for a very desirable position within her field. She got the position and then she proceeded, in a very matter-of-fact manner, to take any work related problem she was not able to solve right to her director—the scriptures—and again received her answers. She figured that since the words of the Lord had helped her get the job, they could now help her do it!

This woman prospered spiritually and temporally. And her relationships prospered. All because of the wisdom from the scriptures, which she diligently sought, found, and applied. This single-parent mother was able to testify to her sons, the truth of what Alma told his son: “For just as surely this director [the Liahona] did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45). Indeed, the words of Christ had consistently carried her beyond her vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise—a land complete with loving relationships.

A distinction needs to be drawn between simply reading the scriptures and regularly immersing ourselves in them. Joy comes through immersion. A little sprinkling of the scriptures in our lives will never bring us the fullness of joy that accompanies regular immersion.

Take a moment and think of how some of your relationships would be strengthened if, through your immersion in the scriptures, you found and heeded the wisdom in:

- **3 Nephi 17:5:** “When Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude.”
  WISDOM: Take time to notice people’s reactions to what you’ve said. Don’t be a “hit and run” talker. Be sensitive to how someone is doing after you’ve conversed with them.

- **1 John 4:19:** “We love him, because he first loved us.”
  WISDOM: Be willing to take the first step. You go first. If you want someone to love
you, show love to them first! If you want change in a relationship to happen, you make some change—first.

• **D&C 67: 10** “...strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, [then] the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual.”

WISDOM: Put jealousies and fears away and increase humility. Here the Lord sets forth clear instruction of how to get to know Him better. But could the same thing apply in our relationships with others? Are jealousies, fears, and pride blinding us? Imagine the good we might be able to see in others after we strip ourselves of jealousies and fears and humble ourselves.

## Seek Rock-Solid Relationships by Study and Also by Faith

Though we embrace truth wherever we can find it (Smith, *Teachings*, 313), when we’ve tried everything else and discovered that neither tears nor the wisdom of the world is enough to build loving, lifting relationships that will stand the test of time, it’s time to look elsewhere. We need to look where the Savior’s disciples looked—to Him and to His words. We need to echo Peter when he said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6: 68).

I believe you will receive all the wisdom you are seeking to help you and your loved ones if you:

• Take your relationship questions to your Heavenly Father in prayer. Confide in Him the one question you most need answered through the scriptures that day.

• Ask for the Spirit to be with you as you read the word of the Lord. Plead for the Holy Ghost to be with you. Imagine Him being right there by you.

• Open your scriptures and read until you find the answer. I believe you won’t have to read very far.

Now, let’s take an in-depth look at the relationship wisdom found in a couple of scriptures.

### Wisdom: Bury Your Weapons of War

**Scripture:**

“They buried their weapons . . . of war, for peace” Alma 24: 19

**CONCEPT:** If we have been hurt in a relationship, we often gather an “arsenal of weapons,” thinking they will protect our hearts from further damage. But, ironically, such weapons can injure us in addition to those we are defending against. These “weapons of war” are thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—such as harsh judgments, jealousies, and sarcasm—that keep us feeling separate, isolated, and lonely in our relationships. If you are unable to find love and peace and joy in your relationships, could it be you are carrying around thoughts that wounded love? Feelings that bruise peace? Actions that kill joy?

The only thing that these “relationship weapons of war” protect us from is loving, lasting relationships. The use of these defensive weapons can make it almost impossible for us to build open, close, caring, supportive relationships.

When we are weary of fighting with others and of not feeling loved and appreciated, perhaps it’s time to do as the converted Lamanites—the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—did. Alma 24 contains a stirring account of these remarkable people.
who so desired a permanent change in the way they related that they were willing to, and did, rid themselves of anything that might wound their brothers—brothers, who, by the way, were coming to kill them.

When we are finally ready to enjoy true love and peace and joy in our relationships, we need to be like the Anti-Nephi-Lehies who “buried their weapons ... of war, for peace.” We need to gather our sword-like thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and bury them “deep in the earth” (Alma 24:19, 16).

EXAMPLE:
Don, a married father of six grown children, wanted to establish a closer connection with them. His children were polite, but he didn't feel close to them and guessed that they felt the same way. “I’ve been busy with work all their lives, but that’s not the real reason for the distance. I’ve had a bad temper and have used it against them—against us all, really,” he admitted. Like the converted Lamanites, he had become “convinced concerning the wicked traditions of [his] fathers” (Alma 23:3) who had also ruled their families by coercion and fear.

Don was ready to build relationships of genuine love and trust with his children. He started by identifying his “weapons of war”—his impatience, anger, and harsh demands—that had damaged his family relationships. Don wondered about his eldest daughter, Jill, and asked himself, “What have I done that has hurt my daughter’s heart the most?”

- What thoughts of mine about Jill, about myself, about life, and so on, have bruised her?
- What festering feelings have built a barricade between us?
- What actions or inactions of mine have almost destroyed our relationship?

The task of identifying his weapons of war was more difficult to do than he initially thought. This wasn't some sanitized list of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that he could crank out in an hour, and then walk off into the glow of a loving father-daughter relationship with Jill. Time, sweat, and tears were involved. This was hard labor, as intense as the physical labor he was used to. He discovered that working to eliminate anguish and remorse...
takes a lot of energy. For days he reviewed the past, including missed opportunities to commend Jill, harsh words he regretted ever thinking, let alone saying to her—angry feelings toward her that he had chosen to nurture in his heart. The following are some highlights from Don’s soul-searching.

**Weapons I believe I’ve used against my daughter and our relationship:**

- I tell myself that she doesn’t like me and is embarrassed to have me as her father.
- I convince myself that I’m just not very loveable.
- I focus on how misunderstood, used, and abused I feel as a father.
- I rehearse in my mind past situations where I feel she didn’t respect my authority.
- I think how easy her life is compared to how difficult mine was at her age, and I choose to feel resentful about the difference.
- I look for ways to bring up situations from her youth in front of other people in order to embarrass her.
- I use sharp, cutting words when I talk with her.
- I don’t really “converse” with her. I’m always on my guard to defend my “correct” position, so I never really listen to her.
- I find fault with whatever gift she gives me.
- I insult her.
- I argue with her.
- I punish her for past mistakes she made as a child or teenager by poking fun at her—but it’s always “fun” with a barb attached.
- I make her beg me for financial assistance and then make her feel guilty about asking, even though my wife and I have “enough and to spare.”
- I point out times she has been a disappointment to me as a daughter—sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly.
- I don’t take an interest in her and what’s happening in her life right now.
- I never let her know how proud I am of her and all she has accomplished in her life.
- I never tell her that I love her.
- I never tell her that she can always count on me to stand by her as her father and to help her in whatever way I can.

Identifying the weapons he was accustomed to using changed Don. For one thing, it opened his eyes; he couldn’t believe he had done all these things, but there they were, right there in black and white and in his own handwriting. The phrase “broken heart and contrite spirit” suddenly had a new and very personal meaning for Don, and he was ready to bring both to the building of a new relationship with his daughter.

**Wisdom:**

**Do One Small Thing**

**Scripture:**

“out of small things proceedeth that which is great.” (D&C 64:33)

**CONCEPT:** When you have a seemingly overwhelming problem in a relationship, or a problem that has persisted for years, it’s natural to think that you need a big solution. However, your answer may be found in the wisdom of D&C 64:33: “out of small things proceedeth that which is great.” Several other scriptures echo this truth: “A very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm” (D&C 123: 16); and “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). (See also James 3:4; 1 Nephi 16:29).

A small adjustment in the way we think about something can often bring great changes in our feelings and behaviors. For example, viewing a particular food from the perspective of how it will increase our insulin resistance may help us manage our sugary cravings better than all the behavioral reward systems we’ve set up for ourselves in the past or all the disparaging words with which we’ve flogged ourselves. Likewise, a small change in our behavior can often make a huge difference in another person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, a man who turns off his favorite TV program and says to his wife: “I’d rather talk with you than watch this” may precipitate a very beneficial “heart attack” for his wife, and begin shoring up their marriage.

Consider the great effect of seven words spoken by Nephi had on his father. “Whither shall I go to...
obtain food?” (1 Nephi 16:23) Nephi asked, awakening Lehi’s memory of who he (Lehi) really was—a prophet of the Lord.

When we have lived for years with a problem in a relationship, it may be difficult to concede that the solution to our frustration can begin with one small change in the way we think, feel, or act. We might feel foolish for having struggled for so long with problems that could have been solved by small things. “You mean it’s as simple as that?” may be our initial protest, echoing Naaman’s indignation when Elisha prescribed something as easy as bathing seven times in the Jordan river as a cure for leprosy (see 2 Kings 5). But the truth is that small things can bring about great changes in our relationships, especially when the seemingly small things catch the attention of a child, parent, friend, sister, or spouse—signaling to them that something is different.

EXAMPLE:

Grant and Mary were a physically active couple in their 70s. Six months ago, Mary’s 74-year-old sister, Clara, moved in with the couple due to Clara’s failing health. Grant and Mary were glad to help. “It’s the right thing to do,” they said. At the same time, however, they felt a bit resentful because they noticed that the more help they gave Clara, the more assistance she requested and required, even though her health, according to the doctors, was steadily improving.

Our beliefs about others influence how we relate to them (Wright, Watson, & Bell, Beliefs). Mary believed that Clara would always need someone to take care of her. Both Grant and Mary believed that Clara had to be “babied” or she would become upset. The couple came to feel they were being held hostage in their own home. And they were—not by Clara—but by their belief that “caring equals doing for—and doing more and more.”

Grant and Mary were weary—bone-weary. Was this how their lives would be for the rest of their days? What could they do? The answer was in D&C 64: 33: “Be not weary in well doing, for out of small things proceedeth that which is great.”

That scripture is often quoted to encourage us to continue doing what we’re doing. However, the answer for Mary and Grant—and Clara—was to do something different, to make some small changes in what they were doing. And out of those “small things,” proceeded the “great” relief that Mary and Grant were seeking.

What did they do? What were the small things that helped them “be not weary in well doing,” and brought great relief to the couple while benefiting Clara?

Mary and Grant began to wonder if their helpfulness to Clara was unintentionally inviting her to be more helpless. They were literally doing everything for Clara. As a result, Clara was doing nothing for herself. And seeing that Clara did nothing for herself only reinforced for Mary and Grant that they needed to do everything for her. What a vicious cycle of helpfulness and helplessness!

The couple decided to make a small change. They decided that for one week they would stop pouring Clara’s glass of water for breakfast and see how she would respond. What did Clara do? She started to pour her own water. Encouraged by this, the next week, while making supper, Mary said wearily, out-loud to herself, “I’m so tired. I need some help cutting these vegetables.” Promptly, Clara got up out of her chair and started helping Mary. Noticing Clara’s response to these two situations, Mary and Grant invited Clara to take more responsibility for herself over the next several weeks. They encouraged her to be more helpful around the house by taking time to show her where clean bed sheets and the toaster were located. Within just three weeks, Clara was helping herself and Mary and Grant more—making her own bed, dusting the living room furniture, and making toast for breakfast.

The effect of these “small things” breathed life back into Mary, Grant, and Clara. Clara continued to make steady improvements in taking care of herself and helping with daily life around the home. Mary and Grant were even able to take a trip they had been looking forward to but believed they could never take because of Clara’s former dependency. And all three reclaimed the joy of being together. Several small things—that were different—interrupted the vicious cycle that had previously trapped them all. The wisdom of “out of small things proceedeth that
Rock-solid relationships are those relationships that endure when the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” combine with the adversary’s storms and the world’s alluring sophistries in a relentless and sinister effort to undermine and ultimately destroy love.