



## **Lesson Nine: The Legacy of Plural Marriage**

### **Inquiry Questions:**

- What does “legacy” mean?
- What makes a legacy important?

### **Historical Context: Two other groups that explored marriage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:**

The Oneida Perfectionists vowed that there would be no “special love,” such as romantic, exclusive relationships, family ties, or best friends. They employed a special form of birth control which was very successful when used properly. In 1846, they began practicing “complex marriage.” Without attachment or favorites to any person, this “selective breeding” was intended to pass along the best traits from the best people to achieve God’s will.

George Rapp’s Harmony Society had at one time more than 10,000 followers. Living communally, they believed Christ’s return was immediate in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. To purify themselves for His arrival, they quit using tobacco and became celibate. As time passed, some were not convinced celibacy was necessary. This led to internal problems, and schism. After a split with Count de Leon, Rapp continued to practice celibacy but now did not allow new members to join. The numbers predictably shrank to virtual nonexistence.

### **Pre-Class Reading:**

*Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet* by Roger Launius, Chapter Nine: The Legacy of Plural Marriage

### **Discussion Questions:**

Prominent church leader Sidney Rigdon wrote that plural marriage was the leading cause of Joseph Smith Jr.’s death. Rigdon believed plural marriage was completely wrong, and because of its introduction, “The Smiths have fallen into everlasting shame, and disgrace, until their very name is a reproach; and must remain so forever.” Rigdon wrote this in 1846.

- What affect, if any, do you think statements like this had a very young Joseph Smith III?
- Do you think they impacted him as he grew to manhood and eventual leadership of the church?

Joseph Smith III stated: “Plural marriage is not of God no matter whom the revelation, so called, came through or who taught or practiced it.”

- What does this statement reveal of Joseph’s focus on the plural marriage question?

He believed his father was not involved, but ultimately concluded that it was wrong, even if his father was responsible.

- How does this demonstrate his pragmatism?
- Which do you think Joseph considered more important: clearing his father’s name, or eliminating plural marriage? Discuss.



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Joseph loved his father and he was passionate about his father's reputation. For the majority of his life, all Joseph had were the memories of his father. Losing him at Carthage at such a young age had deprived the family of anything else. He sought to protect that memory for himself, his family and for future generations. One way to protect, he believed, was the battle against polygamy.

- How important is memory?
- How can someone's legacy serve as a help and/or hindrance to a cause, or a church in this specific case?

### **Class Activity:**

A great deal of the evidence used to substantiate the origin of plural marriage is interviews and writings done years, or decades, after the events themselves are supposed to have occurred. Think back to your last discussion about this book. Have each person who was there independently jot down a few notes about the discussion.

Who spoke first last time? Who followed? How long did the discussion last in total? Was there anything particularly unique? Compare memories and note differences and similarities.

We each remember different experiences in different ways. Were any of your memories different? What does that tell us about the way memory works? What can we learn from the different ways each person remembers an event?

If time permits, have the group/class practice the same scenario with an event several months back.

### **Reading Assignment:**

*Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, Chapter Ten: The Utah Mission

*Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* by Roger Launius and a variety of historical reprints are available at [www.RedBrickStore.com](http://www.RedBrickStore.com). All Red Brick Store purchases help preserve Community of Christ historic sites.

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