

Inquire Well to Marry Well

**Points to ponder
as you make the
decision to marry.**

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As Latter-day Saints, many of us have heard a version of the following thought: There is no decision—other than whether to come unto Christ—that will have a more profound impact on your life than whom you choose to marry. Statements like this can strike terror in the hearts of young and old alike. Is it any wonder that many members of the Church are anxious and fearful regarding dating, courtship, and marriage? Add to this the increased prevalence of broken hearts and marriages, and it is clear why so many struggle. Far too often I hear such comments as this: “What if I marry Dr. Jekyll and he turns out to be Mr. Hyde? My sister married a man who seemed wonderful—a returned missionary, a temple-recommend holder. He treated her so well. But within only three years, they were divorced.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “The best way to avoid *divorce* from an unfaithful, abusive, or unsupportive spouse is to avoid *marriage* to such a person. If you wish to marry well, inquire well.”¹

Through understanding correct principles and heeding prophetic guidance, our ability to “inquire well” increases and the chance of making a serious mistake lessens. It is also important to remember that even if we “inquire well” and receive the Lord’s confirmation of our choice, God does not take away our, nor our future spouse’s, agency. For the “happy ending” and the desired blessings to come to pass, both people have to continue to exercise their agency righteously. This is why it’s so important to know the true nature of the person you are going to marry.

So what does it mean to “inquire well”? The booklet *For the Strength of Youth* counsels:

“Choose to date only those who have high moral standards and in whose company you can maintain your standards. . . .

“ . . . Seek a companion who is worthy to go to the temple to be sealed to you for time and all eternity.”²

With this counsel as a baseline, let’s consider some other principles that can help lead us to an eternal companion.

Outward Personality versus Inward Character

To make wise dating and marriage decisions, we need to develop the ability to differentiate between an individual’s outward personality and their deeper, inward character. Outward traits, such as a sense of humor, are not unimportant, but they can be used for good or ill, based on the inward character of the person. That sense of humor that can be used to build you up can also be used to tear you down. With this in mind, consider the following couplets:

*He married her because she seemed so pretty and petite;
He divorced her because she was so weak and helpless.*

She married him because he was fun and romantic;

She divorced him because he was irresponsible and lazy.

*He married her because she was passionate and affectionate;
He divorced her because she was so clingy and possessive.*

*She married him because he was so intelligent and witty;
She divorced him because he was so critical and sarcastic.*³

The examples above illustrate the danger of relying solely on outward personality traits when considering your compatibility with another individual. Such traits don’t always tell you about a person’s deeper character, which is what you need to know before deciding to spend eternity together.

Look for Essential Character Qualities

What are the essential character qualities we should look for as we date and court? It can seem that there are as many qualities to develop and discern as there are commandments to keep. To help us understand what is most important, perhaps we can draw a lesson from the Savior’s counsel:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37–39).

Through focusing on the two great commandments, we can better discern the character of those we are dating. To love the Lord with all our heart speaks of a person’s relationship with God. To love your neighbor as yourself speaks of a person’s relationship with other people. Focusing on these two key relationships will tell us much about those we date.

Relationship with God

You don't want to marry someone who is complying with the commandments just to please you—you want to marry someone who deeply loves God and His commandments and who is determined to always live them.

The key to judging character in relation to God lies in private more than public spiritual behavior. Consider private religious behaviors such as personal scripture study, personal and family prayer, and temple attendance. These behaviors tell you much more about the person's private motivations (love of God, a desire to renew covenants) than public behaviors would.

Relationship with Others

The key to judging character in relation to our fellowmen lies in how we treat others we are not trying to impress. The fact that a potential date is kind toward you is not sufficient to tell you that the individual is a kind person. If you want to know if people are charitable, observe how they treat others whom they are not so invested in pleasing. If they are kind to their families, to their roommates, to strangers, and even to those they are not pleased with, that will tell you much more about their character than whether they are kind to you.

You Marry Potential, Not Perfection

Clearly, no one will have a perfect relationship with God or others. With the help of the Spirit, and through understanding the principles presented here, we can learn to differentiate between someone who truly loves God and the gospel and someone who is simply publicly religious. We can differentiate between a kind person who is having an occasional bad day and someone who is kind toward us but not kind by nature. We can more clearly differentiate between outward personality and inward character. We can be led to someone we will truly love and want to spend eternity with. This end is worth every ounce of effort it takes to achieve it.

Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015)

of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that there are certain essential attributes we all need to develop to find happiness: “There is more to a foundation of eternal marriage than a pretty face or an attractive figure. There is more to consider than popularity or charisma. As you seek an eternal companion, look for someone who is developing the essential attributes that bring happiness: a deep love of the Lord and of His commandments, a determination to live them, one that is kindly understanding, forgiving of others, and willing to give of self, with the desire to have a family crowned with beautiful children and a commitment to teach them the principles of truth in the home.”⁴

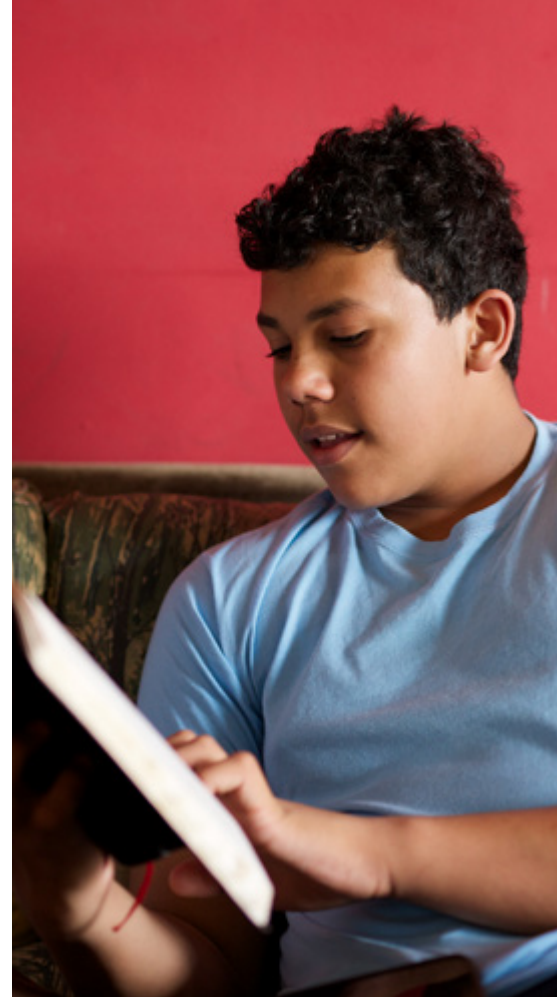
These attributes are essential exactly because they allow for the

kind of happiness that every married couple seeks. It is, of course, important to remember that ultimately “these attributes are best polished together as husband and wife.”⁵

By understanding these basic principles taken from the scriptures and the words of living prophets, we can date and court with much greater confidence. Then with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our ability to “inquire well” can help us move forward with faith instead of fear. ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Divorce,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 73.
2. *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 4, 5.
3. Based on material in Douglas E. Brinley, *Strengthening Your Marriage and Family* (1994), 103.
4. Richard G. Scott, “Receive the Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 26.
5. Richard G. Scott, “Receive the Temple Blessings,” 26.





QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU “INQUIRE WELL”

1. Is the person worthy to go with me to the temple?
2. Have I paid attention to the person’s inward character, or have I been focusing solely on the outward personality?
3. How does the person treat the Sabbath day?
4. How does the person publicly and privately observe the commandments?
5. How does the person treat family members, roommates, and strangers?



LEARN MORE

Lynn G. Robbins, “Finding Your Sweetheart” (Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional, Feb. 12, 2002), byui.edu.

Thomas B. Holman, “Choosing and Being the Right Spouse,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2002, 62–67.

Robert D. Hales, “Meeting the Challenges of Today’s World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 44–47.

Face to Face with Elder Holland, Sister Stephens, and Elder Hallstrom (worldwide young single adult broadcast, Mar. 8, 2016), facetoface.lds.org.

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