



Dating

and the Eternal Perspective

*A battle rages against
the family, undermining
our attempts
to marry. But we have
reason to hope.*

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Susan and Jim hated the disco craze sweeping young adult dances in 1978. One night they both ended up at a dance anyway. At six and a half feet (2 m) tall, Jim scanned the room for a tall dancing partner and spotted Susan's red hair above the crowd.

"Would you like to dance?" he asked, flashing a gallant smile.

"Sure."

"Great. I'll see if I can find you a partner." My dad pretended to walk away while my mom laughed at his joke. They danced, exchanged phone numbers, and, nine months later, married in the Salt Lake Temple.

We've all heard stories of how couples met. Now it may be our chance to live such a story. But we face a different atmosphere than our parents did, and not just because disco has gone out of style. The adversary's battle rages against the family, undermining our attempts to marry. Obstacles like rejection, pressure, and distraction threaten to overwhelm us. Satan wants us to lose hope—but we don't have to. With the Lord's help, we can reject worldly attitudes and adopt eternal perspectives. Here are five examples.

THE WORLD'S WAY Marry according to my timetable.

THE LORD'S WAY Learn patience for His timetable.

As a graduate student, Angie worried that marriage was forever out of reach. "Almost all of my friends were married and raising families," she says. "I wondered if any guy was right for me." When Carl came along, Angie realized that she "was so happy to have waited for the right person." Angie is also grateful for the time she spent waiting. Her experiences strengthened and prepared her for marriage and motherhood.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has advised us to avoid fretting or forcing decisions too early. Instead, he counsels, we should "hold ourselves in readiness to act on the Lord's timing. He will tell us when the time is right to take the next step. For now, we simply concentrate on . . . what we have been asked to do today."¹

Sometimes we must cope with rejection, wait to meet a suitable marriage partner, or accept that the Lord presently

needs our talents applied in other areas. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1926–2004) said, "Patience . . . helps us to realize that while we may be ready to move on, having had enough of a particular learning experience, our continuing presence is often a needed part of the learning environment of others."²

Humility will help us accept the Lord's timetable when the opportunity for marriage comes sooner, as well as later, than anticipated. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "By divine design, men and women are intended to progress together toward perfection and a fulness of glory. . . . The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other."³ When the choice is within our control, unduly delaying temple marriage can hinder us from receiving these blessings.

Marriage is one of the first priorities in life, but not everyone can make it happen first in the sequence of important life goals. No matter when the blessing comes, whether on earth or in eternity, we can patiently discover the Lord's plan for us and feel peace in His care.

THE WORLD'S WAY Focus on physical attraction.

THE LORD'S WAY Discern lasting qualities.

"Looks are less important than a person's faith, testimony, and desire to serve," says Joseph as he considers the qualities of young women he has known. "Those are things that will keep a relationship strong and healthy, and those are the things that have an eternal impact." They are also the qualities that drew him to Aileen when they worked together as youth counselors.

We will date those to whom we are attracted in several different ways, and physical attraction is part of a healthy relationship. However, we live in a society that emphasizes the body and limits the definition of beauty. If we are not careful, we may adopt unrealistic standards. More than 65 years ago, writer C. S. Lewis observed that the adversary uses distorted body images in the media to direct "the desires of men to something which does not exist."⁴ That trend increases today.



PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK HELMRICH

The Holy Ghost can help us discern lasting qualities like faith, character, and personality in a prospective companion.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles addressed this issue when he said, “In too many cases too much is being done to the human body to meet . . . a fictional (to say nothing of superficial) standard. . . . This is more than social insanity; it is spiritually destructive, and it accounts for much . . . unhappiness.”⁵

As we seek an attractive companion, the Holy Ghost can help us discern lasting qualities like faith, character, and personality. Such qualities will keep the relationship strong when age and the tests of mortality change our appearance. President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught that amid “all of the deception” that may initially occur in dating—including always looking our best—we should remember that appearance and style “are essentially unessential.” We must ask ourselves, Would I want this person to be the parent of my children?⁶ Such priorities reflect an eternal perspective.

THE WORLD’S WAY Find someone who fills my needs.

THE LORD’S WAY Become selfless and service-oriented.

Years ago one of my friends wrote on an index card all the qualities she hoped to find in her future husband. If we’re not careful, mental “index cards” can turn into a hardbound volume. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles humorously reminds us, “You will likely not find [a] perfect person, and if you did, there

would certainly be no interest in you.”⁷ President Packer says, “How wise is the [person] who does not expect perfection, but looks for potential.”⁸

Sara learned to recognize potential when she met Ben. “Seeking perfection in a spouse sets you up for failure,” she says. She resisted dating Ben seriously at first because he didn’t meet all of her imagined “future husband requirements.” But after several months of dating, she realized that he met the most important ones: He was a worthy priesthood holder, and she loved him. “We’re all flawed,” Sara says. She admires Ben for “striving to be the best he can be. I married someone imperfect, and I couldn’t be happier.”

Instead of contemplating what qualities others have that might fill our needs, we can turn to the true source of fulfillment—the Savior. As we serve Him, our desire to serve others will increase, we’ll build genuine friendships, and we’ll experience the love often described by President Gordon B. Hinckley: “True love is not so much a matter of romance as it is a matter of anxious concern for the well being of one’s companion.”⁹

Brick learned to focus on Bree’s happiness by listening to her and finding small ways to brighten her day. As he did, his love for her grew. Service doesn’t have to be difficult, he says. “Cook dinner. Send a random love note in the mail. Everyday romance is more meaningful,” and it helps you develop a habit of being selfless.

THE WORLD’S WAY Avoid commitment.

THE LORD’S WAY Make sacrifices and covenants.

Some of us, fearing heartache or sacrifice, would like to find a spouse without taking any risks. But without effort, loving ties can’t grow. Elder W. Craig Zwick of the Seventy counseled young adults to take a risk in order to “invest in eternal happiness.” He emphasized, “The risk is necessary.”¹⁰ This could mean facing the possibility of rejection or of sacrificing some independence. Taking action demonstrates faith in the Savior—faith in His power to heal us from disappointments and to create a more selfless disposition in our hearts.

Mike was afraid to commit to Kristen, wondering if their love could last eternally. He worried that his fears were warnings from the Holy Ghost. “But we’re scared of speaking in sacrament meeting, and that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t do it,” he says. Finally he realized, “No fear I had was completely outside of my control. It was in my hands to bring those fears to reality or make them disappear.” He chose to make them disappear by committing to work diligently to build the relationship. “Marriage requires effort,” he says, “but so does being single. There is nothing more fulfilling than a successful relationship.”

Similarly, Hillary hesitated to date her long-time friend Ron seriously. “I was always impressed by Ron’s character,” she says, “but we also knew each other’s weaknesses, and I was tempted to keep looking.” After struggling for months, she counseled with her dad. “He told me that I needed to ‘jump in with both feet, or walk away and never look back.’” That was the turning point, she says. “I realized that I couldn’t walk away and not look back. I was happy with Ron. So I jumped in with both feet, and we got married.”

Elder Holland states: “No serious courtship or engagement or marriage is worth the name if we do not fully invest all that we have in it and in so doing trust ourselves totally to the one we love. You cannot succeed in love if you keep one foot out on the bank for safety’s sake. The very nature of the endeavor requires that you hold on to each other as tightly as you can and jump in the pool together.”¹¹

THE WORLD’S WAY Make decisions based on emotions or intellect.

THE LORD’S WAY Rely on the Spirit as impressed upon both the mind and heart.

Evan is thankful for spiritual guidance but also for the opportunity to choose. He says, “I used my agency to decide to marry Malinda, and then I needed extra help from the Holy Ghost to make sure the choice was right. There is definitely inspiration happening throughout the dating process, but without our agency involved, I don’t

think we would ever feel truly satisfied in our choice.”

His experience parallels principles taught by Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1915–85): “There’s a fine balance between agency and inspiration. We’re expected to do everything in our power and then to seek an answer from the Lord,” evidenced by “the calm, sweet surety that comes only from the Holy Spirit.” On the other hand, “If there’s anxiety and uncertainty in your heart, then you’d better start over, because . . . you’re not getting the ratifying seal that, as a member of the Church who has the gift of the Holy Ghost, you are entitled to receive.”¹²

This entitlement comes as we live worthy of the Spirit. Elder Scott cautions that trying to discern the Spirit while living unworthily “is like trying to savor the delicate flavor of a raspberry while chewing on a red hot jalapeño pepper.”¹³ As we live righteously and seek answers, we can rest assured that guidance will come.

In the Meantime

It doesn’t matter if we meet someone special at work, church, school, or a disco dance, as long as we strive to build relationships the Lord’s way. In the meantime, we can prepare for our own eternal love story. We can drown out worldly voices, adopt more spiritual perspectives, and draw closer to the sources of all love, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. They will guide us to be worthy and assured of the blessings They have in store. ■

NOTES

1. “Timing,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 12.
2. “Patience,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1980, 29.
3. “Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan,” *Ensign*, June 2006, 83–84.
4. *The Screwtape Letters*, (1942, 1996), 107.
5. “To Young Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 30.
6. See *Eternal Love* (1973), 11–12.
7. “Receive the Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 26.
8. *Eternal Love*, 12.
9. “Except the Lord Build the House . . .,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 71.
10. From a young single adult fireside, Sept. 16, 2004, Fiesch, Switzerland.
11. “How Do I Love Thee?” Brigham Young University devotional, Feb. 15, 2000, speeches.byu.edu.
12. “Agency or Inspiration?” *New Era*, Jan. 1975, 41, 42.
13. “Making the Right Choices,” CES fireside for young adults, Jan. 13, 2002, www.lds.org/broadcast.

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