

Preparing Yourself for Marriage

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Regardless of your present dating prospects, you can develop qualities that will prepare you for marriage.

One of the alarming phenomena in our society today is the continuing decline of the traditional family—that is, a father and mother married with children. This is seen in the increase of divorce, the number of children being raised by one parent, the eagerness of many people to redefine

marriage to fit diverse lifestyles, and the hesitancy for a variety of reasons of many young people to enter into formal marriage. Each of these is an impediment and adversary to the family. They create confusion, heartbreak, and sorrow in ever-widening circles.

I would like to address the last of these

issues, the increasing number of young people who are of marriageable age but who may lack the faith or have not developed the personal qualities necessary for a wholesome, congenial marriage.

MARRIAGE IS ORDAINED OF GOD

I begin with the doctrinal foundation of marriage and family, which should go into our hearts like fire—even for those who are married but whose relationships have become cold or blasé and need more sparkle and romance.

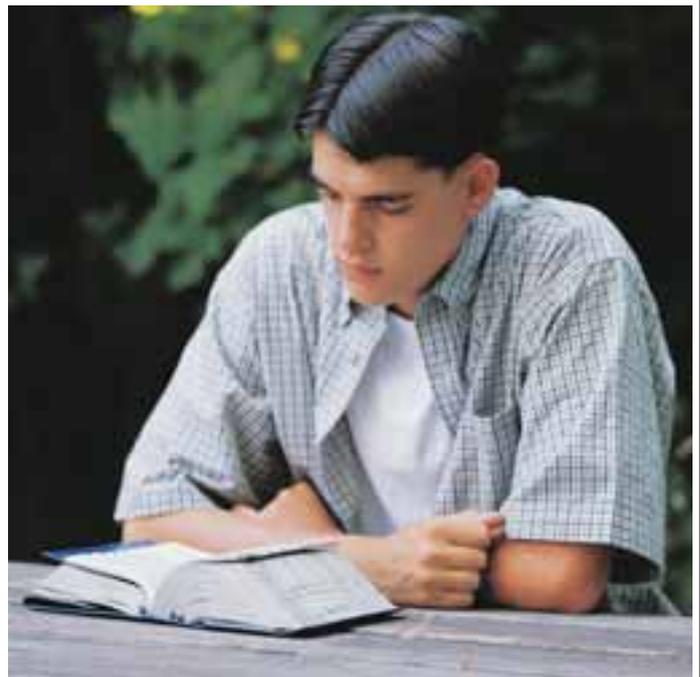
First, from “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”: “Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and . . . the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”¹ Ponder this statement. This single truth—that the cosmic purpose of this earth and the universe has as its central feature marriage and the family, with husband and wife at the core—should inspire our souls and our imaginations. Marriage and family are not human inventions or social constructs evolving from human necessity. They are part of a heavenly order that leads to eternal life and eternal happiness.

Consider the following comments from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Marriage brings greater possibilities for happiness than does any other human relationship. . . . [It] is the foundry for social order, the fountain of virtue, and the foundation for eternal exaltation. . . . [It] is sanctified when it is cherished and honored in holiness. . . . Marriage is both a commandment and an exalting principle of the gospel.”²

I would like to add that marriage and family offer the greatest opportunities for the growth of the character and soul of the individual. It is a vortex of learning how to become like Heavenly Father in all of His sacred roles.

NOW IS THE TIME TO PREPARE

Even when they know these things about marriage and family, many seem to slip through adolescence, teen years, and early adulthood naive and clueless about what a successful marriage entails. They are mature physically



PHOTOGRAPH BY LANA LEISHMAN

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to be sure, full of the chemistry of desire, but often are not prepared psychologically, emotionally, or spiritually for the realities of marriage and family life. You can’t do a crash course in marriage in a few weeks or months before you kneel at the altar and expect to establish a warm, lasting, nurturing relationship.

Regardless of your present dating prospects, you can spend this precious time of preparation developing qualities that will prepare you for marriage. This is a plea to sincerely prepare, to seek to acquire the personal attributes that will sustain a happy marriage.

Love the Lord

First, love God with all your heart, might, mind, and strength (see D&C 4:2). The more you can love God and Jesus Christ, the more you will be able to love your future spouse and children. Follow Christ and keep an eternal perspective; in other words, keep your eye and your heart on what is important eternally and lasts eternally. Even with all its joys and pleasure, our mortal existence is temporary and minuscule compared to heaven and the life beyond. As the Apostle Paul said: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Engage proactively in Church and community service and in social activities.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REIER

Become Productive

In looking forward to marriage, do not assume a wait-and-see posture. This is not just a period for marking time or treading water. Seek to become a happy, productive person in your own right. If you have been unsuccessful in love or hurt or betrayed or ignored, break away from complaining and self-pity. Fill your life with all the things that will improve the head, the heart, and the hand.

Read out of the best books, beginning with the scriptures. Get to know the great and noble human spirits in history and literature. Reading will open the world to you and make your mind a repository of things you can draw from later. Enjoy the beauties of the earth, of nature, and of the arts. Engage proactively in Church and community service and in social activities. Exercise to improve physical and mental health. Fill your life with journal writing, acquiring new job skills, creating through hobbies, composing music or

poetry, missionary work, and family history. I promise you that every gift you develop now will be a valuable asset when you have a family.

Be Happy

Cultivate a cheerful attitude and the ability to laugh, even at yourself. A sour face and grumpy disposition are truly a gruesome burden to impose on roommates and others. Get a handle on your moods. Learn how to act better than you feel. Some might ask, “Isn’t that hypocritical?” Certainly not. You might not be able to choose how you feel, but you can choose how you act.

To those who have not seen a lot of happiness in marriage around them, who perhaps come from dysfunctional situations, don’t despair. You can be a cycle breaker, the pioneer who, through faith in Jesus Christ and covenant keeping, cuts a new path of goodness and stability. You can create a legacy of righteousness for your posterity.

Develop Friendship

Learning to be a true friend is a perfect preface to a happy marriage. Become expert in friendship: respectful, loyal, and fun. Be quick to lift others and to forgive offenses.

Create Order

As you prepare for marriage, develop a sense, even a passion, for order in your life. Regardless of what else is going well or how patient your future spouse might be, a careless attitude toward order will weigh heavily on your relationship. For example, making your bed each morning is the beginning for order and peace in your universe. Taking



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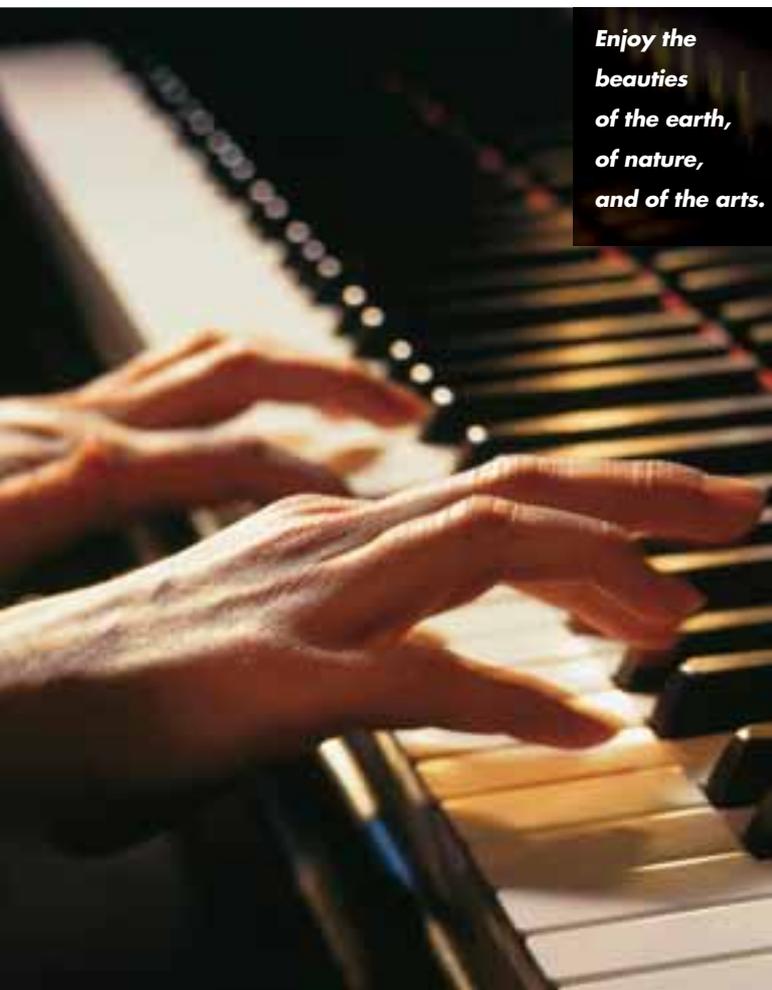
Exercise to improve physical and mental health.



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a mere 35 to 45 seconds to do this can help produce a whole day of tranquil benefit.

The temple in scripture is called a house of prayer, fasting, faith, learning, glory, order, and God (see D&C 88:119). The same should be said of our own homes.



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Serve

Practicing consistent acts of service and kindness toward your roommates and others is excellent preparation for marriage and family. Many of us serve, but are we willing when it is inconvenient? Serving in our families is seldom convenient.

Maintain Moral Purity

A most critical preparation for marriage is striving for moral purity, reserving sexual intimacy only for a

covenanted loved one in the sacred bonds of marriage. The law of chastity, I testify, is a law of happiness. It is a law that protects the sacred powers of procreation and magnifies the lyrical joys of romantic intimacy in a way that God created, ordained, and blessed.

However long you wait and prepare for marriage, be faithful to your future spouse. Know that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). While complete repentance can bring about a total forgiveness and restoration of chastity, unyielding obedience to the law of chastity from youth can be a source of tremendous gratitude and joy in marriage.

There is an added dimension of romance and excitement in a chaste person who waits for marriage for the full expression of his or her love. Total fidelity after marriage also ensures the quality and trust that magnifies the romance in marriage.

Attend the Temple

The temple ordinances focus on the rescue and the salvation of families. Live worthy of the temple’s promises. Go back to the temple regularly. I cannot think of anything that will better prepare a person for the wonderful adventures and prospects of a happy marriage than regular temple attendance.

Those of you who are endowed, the temple should be your haven, almost like a school of the prophets in which the Holy Ghost is the instructor. Those of you who are not yet endowed, let the temple be the focal point in your longing and preparation.

I pray that Heavenly Father will bless us all to be faithful and to cultivate sincerely the Christlike attributes that will bless and perpetuate a marriage and family into eternity. ■

Adapted from a devotional address given at BYU–Hawaii on September 7, 2006.

NOTES

1. *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign*, May 2006, 36–37.