



Making the Marriage Decision

How faith helped these young adults overcome fear and make the choice to marry.

For many young adults, making the marriage decision is straightforward and simple. For others, it's not so easy. As children of what has been called the "divorce revolution," today's young adults have seen the consequences of failed marriages. Current social trends toward delaying and even avoiding marriage further complicate the matter. Some young adults become overly concerned with finding the right person, waiting for the perfect timing, or feeling fully prepared to commit for eternity. In fact, a recent study of Latter-day Saints in the United States showed that one-third of young adults ages 21 to 25 have some concerns or reservations about their readiness for marriage.¹

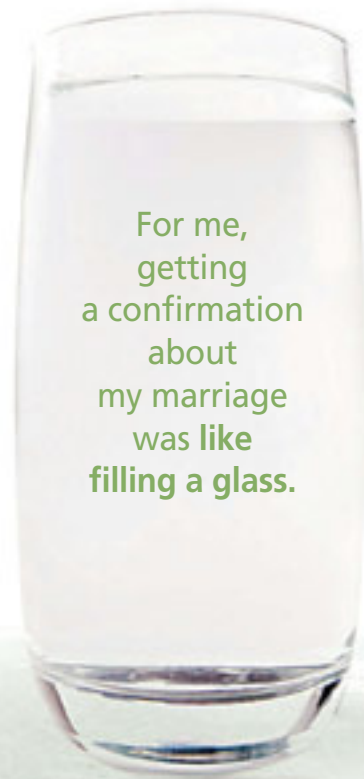
Despite these challenges, Church leaders have affirmed the command to marry and have assured young adults that eternal marriage is not only possible but also desirable. While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder Earl C. Tingey said at a Church Educational System (CES) fireside for young adults, “For some, [marriage and family] would appear impossible to obtain. But please have faith, and join that faith with works. The Lord is aware of you as individuals and of your particular circumstances. He will bless you. He will assist you in bringing to pass that which is right and which you righteously desire. Please have faith.”²

Here, young adults tell of the fears and setbacks they faced in making the marriage decision—and the faith they found to carry them through.

Trusting the Lord to Be My Guide

For me, getting a confirmation about my marriage was like filling a glass. Because I knew that dating and marriage were things to pray about, I pictured myself getting a “full glass” of an answer the first time I prayed. But I became confused when I went on a few dates with Karen and couldn’t figure out where to go from there. I liked her personality, but I didn’t know about her testimony or anything else. I was afraid of the relationship ending with broken hearts or anger. However, I realized I would know what to do only by spending time with her. I figured that in the end it would be a learning experience for both of us—whatever that end would be.

We eventually decided to date exclusively, but neither of us knew exactly what we wanted from the relationship and we broke up a few times because we weren’t on the



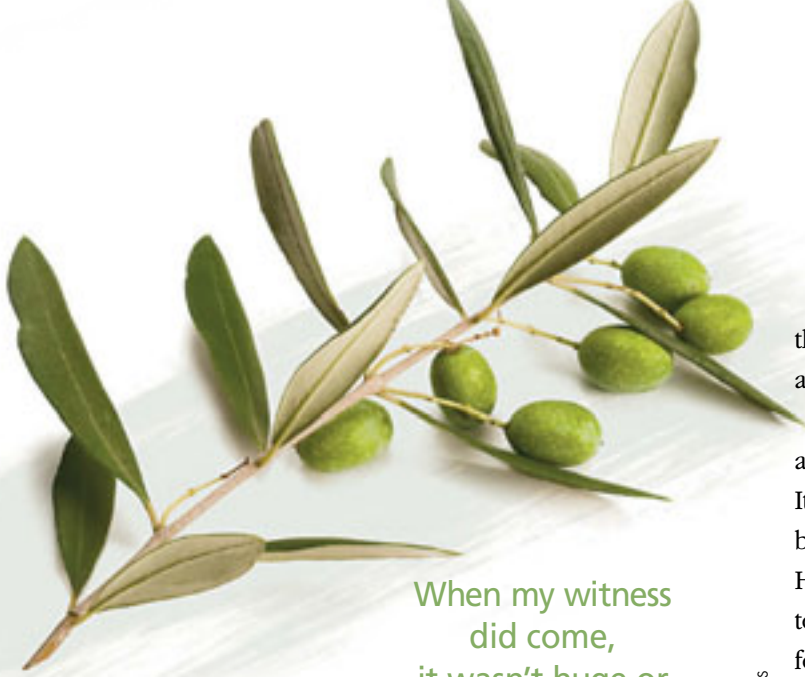
same page. She had strong desires to serve a mission, and I strongly wanted to be sure of whom I should date and marry. Plus, we were both afraid of making a mistake in choosing when and whom to marry.

As I sought priesthood blessings and counsel from priesthood leaders and continued to pray, the glass continued to fill. I learned more about Karen and me—what we could work through together, what our personal weaknesses and strengths were and how they affected us, what our fears were and how we would deal with them, and how to communicate with each other. We both saw from experience that we worked well together and complemented each other. We learned of each other’s faith, testimony, opinions, and quirks. As I prayed and as my glass filled, I felt added courage to keep dating her to see what would happen. I didn’t know “for sure,” but my faith that things would work between us increased.

Over time, I realized that I truly loved Karen and wanted to spend eternity with her. When she met my family and I saw how she fit in, my glass was full. It took me a year to get to that point, but when I did, the doubt dispersed and I could see clearly. I knew I should marry her and I knew that I knew.

I’ve wondered what would have happened had I not had the faith to let the Lord guide me through my relationship with Karen. I’m glad I had the courage to move forward, even in uncertainty. Because we learned so much in our dating and during our engagement, our adjustment to marriage has been smooth, and we are extremely happy.

Tyler Heasley, California, USA



When my witness did come, it wasn't huge or overwhelming, but I'll never forget it. It was sweet and personal and very peaceful.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JERRY GARNIS

Choosing to Take My Own Path

For many of my teenage years and into my first years of college, my parents struggled significantly in their marriage. Their relationship deteriorated so much that when I left on my mission, I wasn't sure they would still be married when I returned.

My parents did stay married and worked through their struggles, and I came home to find them closer to each other than I had ever seen them before. However, my grandparents, who had been married for more than 50 years, got divorced while I was on my mission. That devastated me, not only because they'd been together for so long, but also because they had "done it right"—they had been sealed in the temple and remained active in the Church.

My exposure to these situations left me wondering if it was all worth it and if I could expect to have a happy, successful marriage. Even when I began dating the young man I would eventually marry—someone I had known for years and whose family I adored—I still felt unsettled.

Over time I felt good about our growing relationship. The man I was dating was kind, thoughtful, and considerate, not just with me, but also with others. He was faithful in his Church callings, and, since we were both returned missionaries, we would often attend the temple together, all of which helped me to feel peace and gain confidence

that he was a worthy choice. Still, when he started talking about getting married, I wasn't sure.

I wish I could say that when I knelt down and prayed about it, peace and clarity came right away. They didn't. It took weeks and even months. It was frustrating for my boyfriend, who did not have the same fears that I did. He already felt peace about our relationship and wanted to move forward. I am grateful that he waited patiently for my witness to come.

When it did come, it wasn't huge or overwhelming, but I'll never forget it. It was sweet and personal and very peaceful. It didn't mean that my other doubts or concerns vanished, because they didn't. In fact, I think the closer we got to marriage and realized what a big decision we were making, the more worries popped up! But those feelings of peace fed my faith, and I was able to move forward. Marriage is hard at times, but because of the confirmation I worked and waited for, I never doubt the decision I made to marry my husband.

Name Withheld

Reaping the Rewards of Faith

I was almost done with my undergraduate education before I really believed marriage was for me. Before then, I didn't have a testimony of the doctrine of marriage and I felt no real need to date or seek a marriage partner. There were even a few times when I tried to commit to a life of solitude, but lessons from the scriptures and encouragement from my family were enough to nudge me into the dating scene.

My desire to be sealed had grown from a seed of faith into "a tree springing up unto everlasting life."



Eventually a testimony—vibrant and undeniable—came, and I was faced with a straightforward decision: I could accept eternal marriage along with all of the other gospel principles I knew to be true, or I could reject eternal marriage and knowingly rebel against Heavenly Father’s plan. In my mind I could clearly see the consequences of choosing to stay single and of choosing to marry. This understanding—a gift from the Holy Ghost—made it easy to choose the better path, to look for dates rather than for escapes, and to be obedient to the testimony I had received.

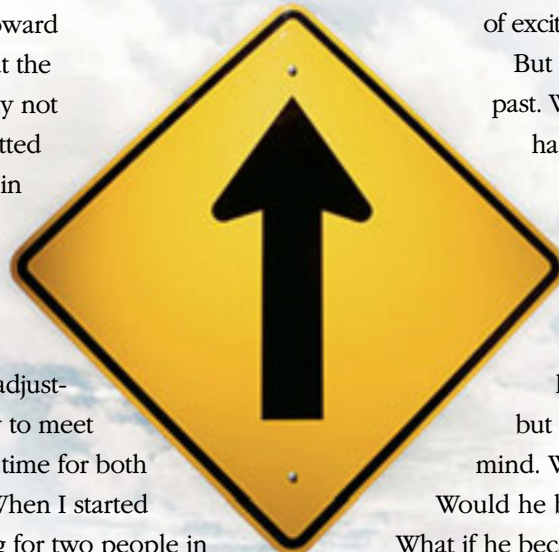
My decision to marry would have meant little if I had not actively worked toward securing the blessing. Knowing that the girl of my dreams would most likely not show up on my doorstep, I committed myself to doing what would result in a proper, happy temple marriage. I prayed, fasted, attended the temple, and exercised faith that I would find the young woman I wanted to marry. I made practical adjustments as well: I knew the best way to meet people was to socialize, so I made time for both formal dates and social activities. When I started dating Keisy, I had to start planning for two people in my schedule and not just one. I had to find things for us to do so we could get to know each other better.

Even after I had gained a testimony of eternal marriage, my desire to be married was still small. But as Keisy and I dated and the strength of our relationship increased, my desire for temple marriage increased too. It continued to grow after the proposal, the engagement pictures, the family parties, and each subsequent act that prepared us for our new life together. By the time we were seated in the temple waiting for the sealer to arrive, my desire to be sealed had grown from a seed of faith into “a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41).

My testimony of marriage has increased since our temple sealing; I have learned more fully the doctrine of marriage and family by doing His will (see John 7:17).

Jordan Pendergrass, Arizona, USA

I needed to look at where he was now and where he was going, not just at where he had been. I could trust Heavenly Father to help us as we followed Him.



Looking Ahead—Not Back

When I met the man who would become my husband, we had both recently returned from missions. He immediately impressed me; he was active in the Church, treated me like gold, and had a kind spirit. Friendship turned into love, and in what seemed like no time at all, we were talking about getting married. It was a whirlwind of excitement.

But then one day he told me about his past. With regret he explained to me that he had never graduated from high school.

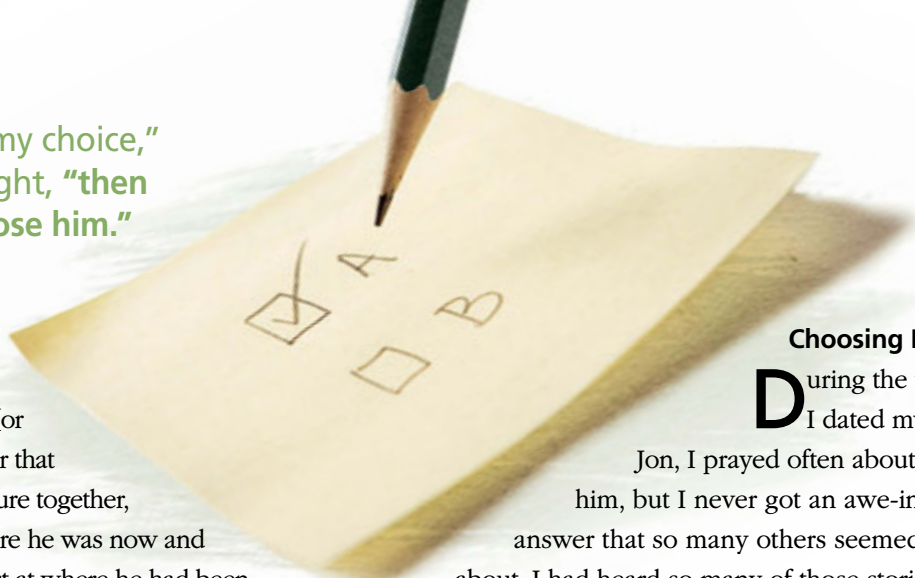
He also told me he hadn’t always been active in the Church.

I looked at the man I loved and couldn’t picture the person he was describing. I tried not to let this new information bother me, but it kept nagging me in the back of my mind. Would he always be a hard worker? Would he be able to provide for our family?

What if he became less active in the Church again? I felt that these concerns were valid, but I didn’t have answers to any of them.

Although I could not see what the future would hold if I were to marry this man, I could trust Heavenly Father to guide me in my decision. Over the course of several months, I prayed fervently and attended the temple regularly in seeking direction. The turning point came slowly as I realized that my boyfriend had many traits that were vital for me in a husband. He had a strong testimony of the gospel. He held a current temple recommend. He treated me with tremendous respect. And he loved me very much.

"If it's my choice,"
I thought, "then
I choose him."



There could be no way of knowing how things he had experienced (or things I had experienced, for that matter) would affect our future together, but I needed to look at where he was now and where he was going, not just at where he had been. Furthermore, I could trust Heavenly Father to help us as we followed Him. The answer I received may not be the one that everyone receives, but I know that as we go to Him in faith, Heavenly Father will guide each of us.

My husband and I have been married four years now. He has a great job, and we have meaningful opportunities to serve in our ward. We have discovered that when you have someone who is on your side and who loves you despite your weaknesses, you want to become better. Neither of us is perfect, but in doing what is right and staying close to the Lord, we have found great happiness.

Name Withheld

Choosing Love

During the two years I dated my husband, Jon, I prayed often about marrying him, but I never got an awe-inspiring answer that so many others seemed to talk about. I had heard so many of those stories that I was afraid marrying Jon wasn't right unless I had a miraculous confirmation experience too.

I was also weighing a decision about serving a mission. I proceeded with the process of putting in my papers and met with my bishop. He asked about my relationship with Jon. The bishop suggested that if I was OK with Jon marrying another girl, then I should move forward with serving a mission. If I was not OK with his being with someone else, then maybe I should reconsider.

I spent a lot of time thinking about that counsel. I knew I loved Jon, but I didn't want to give up other good opportunities. As I was praying over the matter one day, I received the distinct impression through a feeling: "It's your choice." As unromantic as it may sound, that answer was exactly what I needed. Of course it had always been my choice, but this prompting reminded me that I didn't need to wait for earth-shattering, divine intervention to tell me to marry Jon; I knew we were compatible, I knew I loved him, and I knew marrying him would be a good thing. All that was left was for me to make the choice.

"If it's my choice," I thought, "then I choose him." It was hard to give up the opportunity of a mission, but from that moment on, I was committed, and we started planning for marriage.

I still had occasional doubts and fears, but because I had made the choice to marry Jon, I also had made the choice to help things work out. (Imagine that—having to work at a relationship!) Choosing to work at our relationship has made all the difference because as I have done so, I have felt closer to and more in love with my husband.

Marriage isn't always easy—most worthwhile things have difficult moments. But when I come to those moments, I remember what I felt when I received that simple but powerful answer to my prayer: we choose our



CAST NOT AWAY THEREFORE YOUR CONFIDENCE

I am not saying you shouldn't be very careful about something as significant and serious as marriage. . . . Yes, there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been genuine illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don't give up when the pressure mounts. You can find an apartment. You can win over your mother-in-law. You can sell your harmonica and therein fund one more meal. It's been done before. Don't give in. *Certainly don't give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness.* He wants everyone to be miserable like unto himself. Face your doubts. Master your fears. 'Cast not away therefore your confidence.' Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you."

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence," Brigham Young University devotional address, March 2, 1999.

companions and then go to work to make those relationships meaningful throughout our lives.

Marie Cottle, Utah, USA

Relying on Faith, Not Fear

My relationship with Nathan had progressed—rather quickly—as far as any of my previous dating relationships had, but the others had ended with painful breakups. Because that had been my only experience with dating, I assumed my relationship with Nathan would end the same way. Besides, he had just accepted a job more than 2,000 miles away. I was a first-year law student and wasn't sure that transferring was feasible—let alone desirable.

One night I realized how much fear was holding me back. I remembered something I had heard a few months before in Sunday School. The teacher had reminded us that the Savior can heal all hurts—even the ones that happen in dating. I decided that Nathan had come into my life for a reason and I needed to let that reason play out, whatever the outcome turned out to be. If I did end up getting hurt, I could have faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ to get me through it.

Just a few days later, Nathan proposed—and I accepted. But

almost as soon as we started making plans for our life together, fear set in again. What if I didn't complete my degree? What would it be like living so far away from family and friends? Marrying Nathan would bring many major changes to my life plans and add a lot of unknowns to the future.


Again, I received a feeling of assurance. After attending the temple, I was reading my scriptures and contemplating my decision to marry Nathan when I came across this sentence in Moroni 8:16: "Perfect love casteth out all fear."

It struck me that the love of two righteous people moving toward the Savior could cast out the fear of all the world's unknowns. This experience gave me the peace I needed to move forward with the decision to marry Nathan and the courage to make changes to my educational and career path. I know that the love Nathan and I have is not perfect, but through Jesus Christ, it can be made so. ■

Julianne Taylor Zollinger, Virginia, USA

NOTES

1. Jason S. Carroll, Project READY, Brigham Young University, 2009. For national statistics, see Jason S. Carroll, et al., "Ready or Not? Criteria for Marriage Readiness among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24, 2009, 366–67.
2. Elder Earl C. Tingey, "The Simple Truths from Heaven—the Lord's Pattern," CES Fireside for Young Adults, Jan. 13, 2008.



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