



# MAKING THE MOST OF OUR SINGLE YEARS

BY RUSSELL STEVENSON

*These five principles can help make dating a rewarding process.*

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**F**rom time to time, single life makes me feel like a fish in a tank watching the married world go by. Occasionally, well-meaning acquaintances might tap on the glass with a not-so-subtle question about my dating status. Others offer kindhearted but remarkably vague encouragement: “Don’t worry. If you just keep moving forward, someday . . .”

I readily admit that dating can bring emotional gray hairs to some of the most vibrant young single adults. Many of us have been part of conversations in which the topic of dating—even when addressed seriously—is met with a chuckle, a sigh of weariness, or a cynical remark. But it does not need to be that way. I certainly don’t have all the answers to the challenges of dating in young single adulthood, but these five principles have helped me make the most of this stage of my life.

**Communicate clearly.** Clear, sincere communication is key in any quality relationship. Becoming aware of my communication style has helped me improve my interactions with other people. Straightforward communication might include good eye contact, real interest in the other person, courtesy, and genuine smiles.

**1** For instance, in addition to thanking a date at the end of an evening, an acquaintance of mine, Amanda, also thanks him the day *after* they go out. Because this is not a time when gratitude is socially obligatory, she clearly lets her date know she enjoyed their time together. I have found that when I make clear communication a priority, I can better

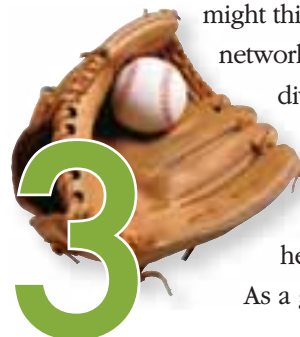
understand my date—or whomever I’m with—and more effectively build our relationship.

**2** **Don’t take yourself too seriously.** Early on in their relationship, my parents met at the library to study together. While they were there, my father fell asleep. My mother promptly left the library without waking him. Fortunately for my siblings and me, our mother didn’t believe that disastrous

dates are indicative of the future or that relationships need always resemble a sparkling Hollywood romance. Thank heavens for a patient mother and a determined father.

I’ve known some people who tend to believe that the first date is a forecast for eternity. If the date is less than heavenly, they think either that they have failed or that their date did. What I’ve learned, however, is that most dates come and go without incident. When a bad date *does* happen, a hearty laugh with close friends can be top-notch medicine for the 24-hour dating flu. I am grateful for friends and family members who have reminded me that a failed date—or even a series of them—does not undermine my value as a human being and child of God.

**3** **Pursue a variety of activities.** While some young adults might think that pursuing hobbies and networking in social circles merely divert attention from purposeful dating, these activities can be indispensable in striking a proper life balance as well as helping us meet other people. As a graduate student in history,



I have come to value variety in activities even more, given the intensity of study required. I have made an effort to attend as many ward activities as possible. In the past, I have played Frisbee weekly—not because I’m particularly good at it but because I enjoy good relationships with good people in wholesome activities.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled a group of young single adults to be a quality person “no matter what happened yesterday or what awaits . . . tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup> While developing hobbies and talents is not often a part of “active dating time,” these activities provide some of our best resources for increasing our social interactions and enhancing the qualities about us that could make us attractive as a potential marriage partner.



**Be patient.** Upon returning from my mission, I told myself that if I were not married within two years, I would at least be dating someone seriously. I might as well have picked a day on the calendar and drawn a broken heart on it! I soon realized that for me, setting a timetable for marriage meant setting a timetable for disappointment. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “The timing of marriage is perhaps the best example of an extremely important event in our lives that is almost impossible to plan.”<sup>2</sup>

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) explained: “Sometimes we pound on the vault door for something we want very much, in faith, in reasonable righteousness, and wonder why the door does not open. . . . Our rejected petitions tell us not only much about ourselves, but also much about our flawless Father.”<sup>3</sup>

Although having patience is sometimes difficult, I have found it helpful to look to the Lord as my adviser. He knows the parts to His grand design far better than I do.

**5 Rely on the Atonement.** Some episodes in the dating process are painful. When faced with these sometimes heart-wrenching realities, we might be tempted to succumb to cynicism. During one particularly acute moment of soul-searching, I wondered if I really had a place within the dating system. At the same time, I had been reading John 6:35, where Christ taught, “I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” The masses ridiculed this idea.



**By viewing our dating experiences—good and bad—through an optimistic lens and by maintaining hope in the Savior, we can find happiness regardless of our situation.**

Similarly, I scoffed at the idea of marriage because of some painful experiences I had recently faced.

As I continued reading, Christ’s question to the Twelve seemed to echo within me: “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). I soon discovered that my discouragement towards dating was not far removed from outright despair. I realized that my hope needed to be in the Savior, not in the dating system. The Lord, through His prophets, has promised that Latter-day Saints who remain faithful in all things—including in working toward an eternal family—will receive all the blessings of exaltation.

These five principles have given me guidance and helped me keep perspective throughout the inconveniences and ironies that often mark mortality. They have also helped me realize that even when a relationship doesn’t result in marriage, dating can still be a rewarding process that helps us grow. By viewing our

experiences through these lenses and by maintaining hope in the Savior, we can find happiness regardless of our situation. After all, we may say, as Peter did, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). ■

**NOTES**

1. Marvin J. Ashton, “Be a Quality Person,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1993, 65.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Timing,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 15.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Insights from My Life,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year* (1977), 200.