

By Elder
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Confidence Tests

From Fear to Faith in the Marriage Decision

After graduating from college in 1964, I was commissioned an officer in the United States Army. I volunteered for training as a U.S. Army Ranger. Ranger training is a grueling course in commando and elite infantry tactics. The goal is to produce highly skilled officers and noncommissioned officers.

My Ranger training included a series of “confidence tests,” as the Ranger cadre called them, which were intended as challenges to physical strength, stamina, and courage. Challenging obstacle courses, scaling and rappelling sheer ice-covered rock faces of 100 feet (30 m) or more, night swamp slogging amid alligators and poisonous snakes, and a night compass course across 10 miles (16 km) of rugged terrain—these are just some of the tests we endured. One purpose of these confidence tests was to teach Rangers that in the difficult and trying circumstances of combat, we were capable of doing more than we thought we could do. Our leaders taught us to have confidence in ourselves and in our own training. More than once during the fiery trials of my combat experience, I drew reassurance from the lessons of those Ranger confidence tests.

Throughout our lives, we face other, more significant confidence tests than those I endured in my training.

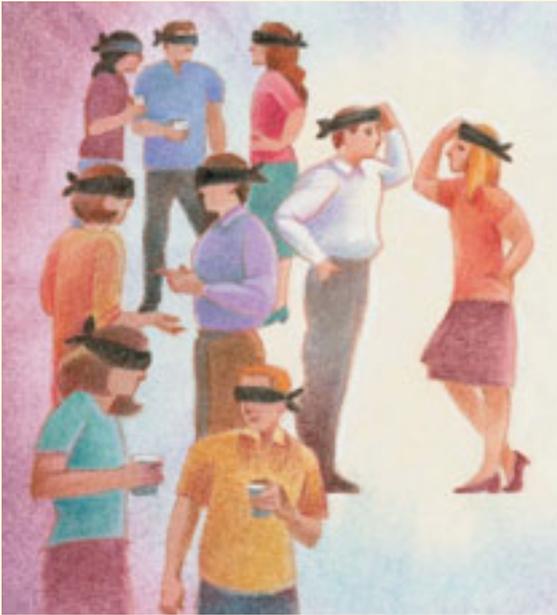
These are not so much tests of confidence in oneself but of confidence in what we receive by the Spirit of God. Prophet after prophet has counseled us to remember what we know—to maintain confidence in the Lord. As he attempted to rekindle faith in his people, Jacob repeatedly declared unto them, “*I know that ye know*” (2 Nephi 9:4, 5; emphasis added). Paul was even more direct: “*Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward*” (Hebrews 10:35; emphasis added). Each of us faces an uncertain future. But when we face it, remembering what we already know, we face it with faith. We face it with good cheer. We face it with *confidence*.

One of the most significant confidence tests of mortality is usually faced in the young-adult season of life. It is the decision to marry. No decision is approached with greater trepidation by this generation of young adults. It is a subject that provokes much anxiety.

Fears about Marriage

I’m not sure of all the reasons this is the case, but here, I believe, are some of them:

- **Ease of hanging out.** Many young people take themselves “out of the game” in finding the right companion



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by doing too much of their socializing in groups. Because this hanging out occurs in mixed groups with males and females, some mistakenly think that they are properly engaged in the sifting process so essential to finding one's eternal companion. But this is not so. Group socializing can deny a person the opportunity of the close examination of the character and personality of that special someone so vital to making a wise choice.

- **Fear of making a mistake.** Divorce statistics are well known. Some young people have lived through the heartache of seeing their parents' or friends' marriages fail or have been through divorce themselves. They have experienced exquisitely the trauma associated with such breakups. Sometimes, the effect is to make them afraid to approach marriage lest they choose the wrong person.
- **Adolescent recoiling from responsibility.** At least for a few, there is a reluctance to meld one's desires and interests to those of another. Such selfishness has a way of prompting some to postpone the marriage decision.

Fallacious Thinking

Whatever the reason for the fear of the marriage decision, it leads to some fallacious thinking, to a "casting away" of one's confidence. This, in turn, causes a person's failure to firmly grasp his or her own responsibility for making that decision. Even if such fear doesn't result in postponing or even avoiding marriage, it can lead to other errors. For instance, some are inclined to treat the decision as entirely a spiritual one. Shortchanging their own obligation to give due process to it, they wait for the functional equivalent of a divine finger writing an answer on the wall or for the seas to part or for some other metaphysical phenomenon that tells them without question that so-and-so is "the one."

Others look to someone else to decide for them. A Brigham Young University stake president told me that it is not uncommon for some women to defer to the opinion of a current boyfriend telling her that he is "the one." Others defer to the judgment of a parent—often a father—who has made decisions for them in the past. In either instance, there is an abdication of responsibility for the most significant choice that a person makes in this life.

Counsel from parents, bishops, and other worthy persons can be valuable. But at the end of the day, no one else can—or should—tell you what to do. The decision of whom to marry is an intensely personal one.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward!" Remember that we come into this life hard-wired, so to speak, to fall in love. Don't make it harder than it is! *Remember what you know*, and move forward with confidence in Heavenly Father and the standing you enjoy as His son or daughter.

Counsel for Courtship

Courtship is a time for two people to get acquainted. It is a time to get to know someone, his or her interests, habits, and perspective on life and the gospel. It is a time to share ambitions and dreams, hopes and fears. It is a time to test someone's commitment to gospel living.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles tells of a returned missionary who had been dating a special young woman. He cared for her a great deal and was seriously considering making a proposal of marriage to her. This was after President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) had counseled women to wear only one set of earrings. This young man waited patiently for a while, said Elder Bednar, for the young woman to remove the extra set of earrings she wore. But it did not happen. For this and other reasons, with heavy heart, he stopped dating her.

In relating this experience, Elder Bednar said: "I presume that some of you . . . may believe the young man was too judgmental or that basing an eternally important decision, even in part, upon such a supposedly minor issue is silly or fanatical. Perhaps you are bothered because the example focuses upon a young woman who failed to respond to prophetic counsel instead of upon a young man. [But may I just point out to you that] the issue was not earrings!"¹

Here is another tip. As a part of this courtship experience, be careful not to base your judgments merely on what could be described as superficial "ticket punching." By that, I mean do not base your decisions solely on whether someone has served a full-time mission or holds a particular calling in your ward. These things can be, should be, and usually are indications of devotion, faithfulness, and integrity. But not always. That is the reason you need to

get acquainted. Know someone well enough to learn his or her heart and character firsthand and not just his or her "gospel résumé."

A corollary is this: avoid being judgmental about someone until you get to know him or her. Snap negative judgments can be just as erroneous and misleading as snap positive ones. Be just as alert for a diamond in the rough as you are wary of fool's gold.

Praying about It

Only after applying your own judgment and good sense to the relationship after a sufficient period of time should you pray for a confirmation. Remember, like every other important decision, marriage is *your choice*. The Lord will expect *you* to exercise *your* judgment. As He said to Oliver Cowdery, "Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that



CHOOSING A COMPANION

In choosing a companion, it is necessary to study . . . the one with whom you are contemplating making life's journey. You see how necessary it is to look for the characteristics of honesty, of loyalty, of chastity, and of reverence."

President David O. McKay (1873–1970), *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (2003), 140.

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I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me” (D&C 9:7).

Once you do your part through an appropriate courtship and make a tentative decision, have confidence that Heavenly Father will respond to your supplication.

The Lord expects you to use your own good sense. He expects you to rely on your own natural feelings of man-woman attraction planted in you from birth. Once you have been drawn to a person of the opposite sex, enjoyed a significant period of friendship—courtship—with him or her, and satisfied yourself that he or she shares your values and is someone with whom you could happily share the most intimate of relationships—then put the matter to Heavenly Father. The lack of a contrary impression to your own feelings may be His way of telling you that He has no objection to your choice.

Have Confidence in the Lord

Years have passed now since that challenging season in my Ranger training. Mortality’s currents have swept me far downstream from the confidence tests of my soldiering days. But their memory and their lessons linger. We are capable of weathering the storms of life and doing so more effectively than we might have thought. It is just a matter of always remembering what we know.

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.” Have confidence in what you know! Then you will meet your own confidence tests with courage and grace, and the Lord will surely direct your paths. ■

From a Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional given on September 25, 2007.

NOTE

1. David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” *Liahona*, Dec. 2006, 17; *Ensign*, Dec. 2006, 33.