



Family Times

Dating Doctrines and Principles

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Quotable:

President Kimball said that if members of the Church did not steady date, “our youth would immediately eliminate a majority of the sins of our young folks” (President Spencer W. Kimball, “Save the Youth of Zion,” *Improvement Era*, September 1965, p. 806).



Last month, we introduced some ideas about dating, and we’re able to plod through key principle number one, which was defining what a date actually is.

This month, we will continue our discussion by discussing two keys areas— steady dating and dating those not of our faith.

Key #2: Avoid steady dating and /or frequently dating the same person.

Too many of our Latter-day Saint youth are involved today in steady dating. They have found one person that they solely and exclusively date. What surprises me is how many parents think this is “cute” or acceptable. Even one of our own children recently was caught in this trap, and we had to teach, and re-teach what prophets have said about steady dating. Their counsel is unmistakably clear.

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Our current prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned, “When you are young, do not get involved in

steady dating. When you reach an age where you think of marriage, then is the time to become so involved. But you boys who are in high school don’t need this, and neither do the girls” (*Ensign*, November 1997, 51). Question? Should teens in High School be steady dating? The answer is “NO.” A prophet has made that clear. President Gordon B. Hinckley explained further when he said, “Steady dating at an early age leads so often to tragedy. Studies have shown that the longer a boy and girl date one another, the more likely they are to get into trouble. It is better, my friends, to date a variety of companions until you are ready to marry. Have a wonderful time, but stay away from familiarity. Keep your hands to yourself. It may not be easy, but it is possible” (*New Era*, January 2001, 13).

President Howard W. Hunter added his witness when he declared: “Steady dating presents a real problem to most young men and women...There is plenty of time after high school to go steady” (Howard W. Hunter, *Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, p. 124).

In a study done recently by friend and colleague, Bruce Monson he found in his doctoral dissertation that “While about 70 percent of those who did not date until they were 16 had avoided immoral behavior, more than 80 percent of those who reported dating before age 16 had become sexually involved enough to require a bishop’s help for repentance. The same kind of statistics held true for those teens who had steady dating partners. Of the 308 11th graders surveyed, 95 reported having a current boyfriend or girlfriend. Of those 95, only six had never been involved in making out (or kissing for a long time), and more than half of them had transgressed the laws of chastity. For all of the students polled, not dating until 16, avoiding steady dating, attending church weekly, and having close relationships with parents and family were important factors in keeping themselves morally clean” (Bruce Monson, “Speaking of Kissing,” *New Era*, June 2001, 32).

When I was young and learned to ride a bike, it was fun and exciting. However, I eventually learned after a while that riding a bike was really boring. I had to do

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They Said It!

A prophet warned, “Every boy should have been saving money for his mission and be free from any and all entanglements so he will be worthy. When he is returned from his mission...., he should feel free to begin to get acquainted and to date.” (President Spencer W. Kimball, “Marriage— the Proper Way,” *New Era*, Feb. 1976, p. 5).



If a young man is more obsessed with dating and falling in love than he is with his mission, then he needs to redirect his priorities and get focused.

things to make my bicycle riding more thrilling and exciting. At an early age, we put cards in the spokes to make that great and impressive “motorcycle sound.” Another group of friends and I tied short ropes to our handle bars, pretending to be riding horses rather than riding bikes.



As I got a little older, I learned to ride wheelies down the street, and take jumps. In one neighborhood, we tried to copy Evil Knievel and jumped over trashcans. At one point, my brother and I actually rode our bikes on a roof, and in a swimming pool. Looking back on it now, I couldn’t be content just gingerly riding a bike down the street. We did everything we could to keep bike riding exciting.

The same principles apply to steady dating. At first, dating someone exclusively is fun and exciting. After a while, however, the fun wears off, and young teens find they have to become more physical to make the romance more thrilling. Soon, even more physical contact becomes necessary to keep the relationship exhilarating. Each time these young teen couples get together, they begin their physical relationship right

where the last one ended. These couples begin to flirt with boundaries and play with fire. Often, they wait for the other person to say “stop.” Too often, youth who steady date break the law of chastity.

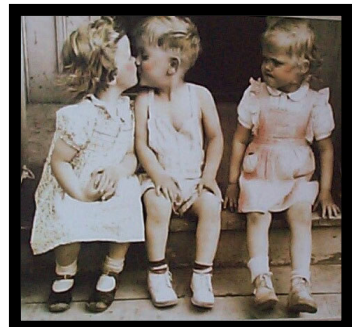
Not too long ago, a friend of mine told me that about eleven young men from his stake that had been sent home from their missions early, in one case, twenty-three and a half months early. My friend further related that there was a common denominator with each one of them—each one had a girl friend that was waiting for them to come home. Missionaries and girlfriends do not mix. If a missionary has a girl friend waiting for him, he hasn’t followed the prophet’s counsel on steady dating.

Randal Wright proposed the following consequences for steady dating.

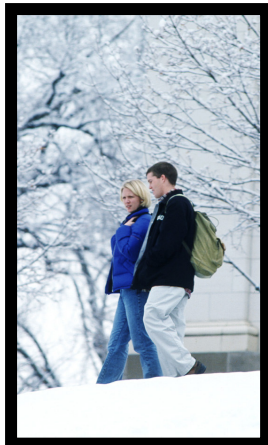
First, going steady prior to a mission can interfere with a young man’s decision to serve, and with his effectiveness in the mission field. I can only speak from my own mission experience, but I know that many missionaries on my mission twenty something years ago struggled with effectiveness because they had girlfriends back home. Young women, and well-intentioned mothers, please do not ever be the cause of a young man not wanting to go on a mission, or serving halfheartedly in the field because he is not focused on what he needs to be focused on. In the Book of Mormon, we can read, “come unto him, and offer your *whole souls* as an offering unto him... (Omni

1:26; emphasis added). We also learn of King Benjamin laboring “with all the might of his body and the faculty of his *whole soul*” (Words of Mormon 1:18). It will be difficult for a missionary, regardless of how good he is, to give his *whole soul* to the work if part of his day is spent thinking of a girl friend back home.

Second, “friendships are lessened when young people go steady. They usually limit their opportunities of meeting new people and developing new friendships. To develop our personalities we all need interaction with many people in social settings. Going steady limits this interaction...” (Randal A. Wright, “The Dating Years: Charting A Safe Course,” *Feeling Great, Doing Right, Hanging Tough* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], p. 103). No wonder President Spencer W. Kimball declared that “steady dating ... is most hazardous. It distorts the whole picture of life. It deprives the youth of worthwhile and rich experiences; it limits friendships; it reduces the acquaintance which can be so valuable in selecting a partner for time and eternity” (*Ensign*, November 1980, 96).



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“When you are young, do not get involved in steady dating. When you reach an age where you think of marriage, then is the time to become so involved. But you boys who are in high school don’t need this, and neither do the girls” (*Ensign*, November 1997, 51).



Third, jealousy and insecurity increase. Young couples become tied down and restricted. People become possessive. A little while ago, a young man was trying to steady date one of our daughters. At that time, I had a church assignment that required I attend many stake dances. It was almost hilarious to “observe” this young man “observe” my daughter.

He followed her around like a puppy dog, and anytime someone else asked her to dance; you could see his entire countenance just change. And, as soon as that dance was over, he was practically running over to my daughter to make sure no one else could get her. He became very possessive of her, telling the other young men in the stake that my daughter was “his,” and they were not to come near her. About that time, I intervened. What happened next is another story for another day.

Young women, we do not want to create a situation where young men are failing their classes at school because they are thinking of you all day. One father told me that his High School aged son was “whipped” over this particular girl. I found out that he called her about ten times each day. When a young man is calling a girl ten times a day, he has gone past “whipped.” He has now been “clubbed.” What do you think this young man is thinking about all day? I guarantee you that while in biology class, he’s planning the honeymoon. His dad told me recently that his grades have slipped drastically. At

this age, we hope our young men are thinking of Eagle Scout Awards, graduation from High School, colleges to attend, preparing for missions, and where they would love to spend “the greatest two years of their lives.” We worry about High School aged young men that doodle the names of their future children on their book covers and plan the colors for their wedding receptions.

Randal Wright explained it this way: “Most steadies become preoccupied. They think of their steady almost constantly during their waking hours. Schoolwork, seminary, scripture study, and even household chores often suffer. It often becomes difficult for some teens to even carry on a conversation without the boyfriend’s or girlfriend’s name coming up. At a time when youth should be thinking about school work, talent development, homemaking skills, and mission preparation, many our spending almost every waking hour thinking about love and marriage. It is not courtship but friendship that should be the relationship between teenagers” (Randal A. Wright, “The Dating Years: Charting A Safe Course,” *Feeling Great, Doing Right, Hanging Tough* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], p. 103-104).

Fourth, immorality and early marriage increase. “Going steady tends to give the young man a sense of familiarity or ownership, and to the young girl a feeling of belonging to someone—just as in marriage! This greatly increases the chances of their becoming immoral” (Randal

A. Wright, “The Dating Years: Charting A Safe Course,” *Feeling Great, Doing Right, Hanging Tough* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], p.104).

Several years ago I was made aware of an interesting situation. And young man and young woman began to date while in middle school. The girls parents promoted the whole thing in the name of “cuteness.” What began as “cute” escalated into a full-blow romance, complete with sneaking out of the house late at night and doing things that would make a sailor blush. Ironically, these type of parents are they same type I meet in my counseling office a few years later, saying things like, “we have no idea how this happened” as they learn their teenage daughter is pregnant.

Since many of our youth, and their parents, do not believe they are steady dating, see if you can pass the following test:

1. Do you talk to this person on the phone everyday?
2. Do you have the other person’s name everywhere you look? Notebooks, paper, scriptures, walls, clothes?
3. Do you ever go out on a date with any one else
4. Do you date this person weekly, or twice a month?
5. Do you hold hands, or kiss each other almost every time you’re together?
6. Do you spend much of your time thinking of the other person?



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7. Do you spend less time with your family because of him/her?
8. Has your school work suffered?

If you can answer yes to these questions, congratulations, you have a steady boy/girlfriend! For youth, I recommend that you talk to your parents and priesthood leaders and see how you can change the situation.

Key Principle #3: Date Only Those Who Have High Standards, and in whose company you can maintain your standards.

This may be the most difficult of all of the dating challenges for our youth, especially if they live in the mission field where there are few members. First, let's examine the principle taught by President Ezra Taft Benson:

"One of the best yardsticks for knowing whether a certain person may be best for you is to ask yourself what kind of an influence this person has on you. In their presence do you wish you were better than you are? Do you think some of your noblest thoughts? Are you encouraged to goodly deeds? If this is so, that person could be worthy of greater consideration. But if being in their company makes you tend in the opposite direction, you had best leave them.. Young women, you are not required to lower your standards to get a husband. Keep yourselves attractive, maintain high standards, place yourself in a position to meet worthy men, and be engaged in construc-

tive work" (Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, [Bookcraft: Salt Lake City, 1988], p. 532)

Moreover, President Spencer W. Kimball taught, "Clearly, right marriage begins with right dating.... Therefore, this warning comes with great emphasis. Do not take the chance of dating nonmembers, or members who are untrained and faithless. [You] may say, 'Oh, I do not intend to marry this person. It is just a "fun" date.' But one cannot afford to take a chance on falling in love with someone who may never accept the gospel" (President Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, pp. 241-242)

Understand that President Kimball taught that we do not date **members, or non-members** who are "untrained and faithless." Frankly, there are plenty of members of our own church that we would not allow our children dating if we have standards based on what our prophets have taught.

President Howard W. Hunter also taught that "Young people - we do marry our 'dates.' If our religion means anything to us, we will not be happy without a Mormon marriage, a Mormon family, prayer and harmony in the home. When the romance wears off, the unbelievers may become distasteful... Many have found this to be so. So date seriously only with Latter-day Saint young men and women. Let the others be friends, in their own place, but when it comes to

serious dating, let us date Latter-day Saints" (Howard W. Hunter, *Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, p. 125).

Finally, our current prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has stated that "Your chances for a happy and lasting marriage will be far greater if you will date those who are active and faithful in the Church. Such dating is most likely to lead to marriage in the House of the Lord" (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, [Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 1997], p. 711).

In the "For Strength of Youth" it says, "Date only those who have high standards and in whose company you can maintain your standards" (*For the Strength of Youth*, 24). I have watched many parents and teenagers interpret this as "open season" to date whoever you would like to. Remember, the "*For the Strength of Youth*" document is for a worldwide audience, and there may be some places where there simply are not many people to date. I cannot interpret this statement for your family, only for my own. However, I would give this one caution. Just remember that when our youth date those who have lower standards, they risk lowering their own. Many American youth are great kids; they have beliefs and values, they work hard; they make good grades, and have good families. Take my word for it. We live in the Bible Belt of North Texas.

Many of the youth that my children associate with are god-fearing people with strong family values. Nevertheless, many of these youth watch R-rated movies and view pornography, many of them fully expect, and some hope,

to give up their virginity before they graduate from High School, and most do not think there is anything wrong with pre-marital sex.

Now, if there was a "member" of your ward that had those beliefs, would you want to date them? The same standards should apply to non-members. Yes, there are exceptions. Sure, there is always that story of the one non-member young man, or less active young woman who joined the church because of their "faithful member" boy/girlfriend." But, understand those are exceptions and they happen much less than you realize.

Recently, a father confided in me that a non-member young man was interested in his daughter. This concerned him greatly, especially when the father learned that this young man had a reputation at his high school for being sexually active. The father gently invited the young man to his home and let him know that it was not anything personal about him, but that his daughter would not be dating him anymore. When the father explained why, the young man was very respectful of the family, the girl, and their religious beliefs. Most youth appreciate parents/adults who stand up for what they believe in. They even respect their peers who have rock solid values and beliefs.

So, what if you live in an area where there are few worthy members to date? Don't sell your soul for a mess of pottage. Understand, then, that you probably will not date that much.



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That's okay. It's not the end of the world if you cannot date someone different each week, or even each month.

Next, attend every *Especially for Youth*, Youth Conference, stake event, and Regional events that are offered in your area. This will increase your likelihood of meeting some young men or young women from other areas that you can really connect with. My wife grew up in the Houston area in the early 80s. There simply were very few young men to date in her ward. At a stake dance, she and her sisters met some really sharp young men, all brothers, that lived about 1 ½ hours east of Houston. During Janie's junior and senior year in High School, her parents would often drive her and her sisters over to these young men's stake, or they would come to their stake for activities. Sometimes parents must be willing to drive. Teaching that same principle to our own children, our children have learned to get out of their comfort zone, and their own ward and stake, and date young men and young women from different stakes in the Dallas area. That has helped them immensely.

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned a father who had told me how his daughter had decided to date a non-member. I also mentioned that we would come back to that story, so, here we are. Although this young man is as sharp as a tack, and involved in his own church, this couple began sleeping together. Now they have bro-

ken the law of chastity, and they think that she may be pregnant. Think, now, of the consequences of this decision. If they marry, which it looks like they will, this Mormon mother will most likely raise her children outside of the church to keep peace in her marriage. Her children may never know the blessings of nightly prayer or scripture reading. Her children will never have their father place his hands on their head and bless them before a school year. Her children will never know the Holy Ghost as their constant companion. Her children will not likely serve missions, become eagle scouts, and help bring other souls into the Church and kingdom. No, her children will never know any of that. Was it worth it? She will realize later that she sold her birthright for a mess of pottage.

This may not happen in every case, but there are the experiences our youth have, more often than not. Parents, I urge you to stay close to your children. Be involved in their lives, and know what they are doing. After their dates, talk to them and discuss their evenings. When there is that occasional quiet time in your home, go up to their rooms and talk to them. Listen and you will learn many great things. Sometimes, parents are the last ones to know what is going on. Several years ago, a mother related to me the following story. She was driving a group of youth home from the local high school. She thought this would be a great time to con-

nect, so she decided to talk to these good LDS kids about dating and standards. She made the comment that our youth should not have boy friends or girl friends. While she was giving this great lecture from the driver's seat, her daughter was in the back of the van, holding hands with her steady boy friend. The youth in the van were trying not to laugh; they all knew that this mother's daughter had a steady boyfriend, and that they often shared their affection in public. Here was the mother, giving a great lecture, not having a clue that her own daughter should have been her target audience. Later, when that mother learned, through the "grapevine" that her daughter was in the back of their van, holding hands with her boyfriend, she vowed that she would never be the last one to know anymore. That she would talk more to her children and be involved in their lives.

The Lord and his prophets love us. Their desire is to keep us safe and pure so that we can have peace in our lives, so that we can live each day by the Holy Ghost, so that we can eventually kneel at an altar in front of a person that we have come to love, even more than our own selves for time, and for all eternity—that's a long time—so that we can raise our children with the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ; so they we can ultimately return and live with him some day. For this very reason, he has given us standards—standards, that if we follow—we can stay on solid ground. Standards, that if heeded, can keep us out of the treacherous waters of temptation and sin, and free from the undercurrent of moral weakness and sin.

I would like to conclude with this experience shared by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone. In my mind, this is why chastity is so important.

"A few years ago, a father shared the following story with me. His oldest son had been attending Brigham Young University for approximately a year after his mission. During that year he had become engaged and was preparing to be married. About a week before his marriage, he went to Salt Lake City to spend an evening with his family. The father said, 'He seemed very serious. He had always been so buoyant and filled with excitement.

"He was an absolute joy to have around.' After about half an hour, the son went to his father and asked, 'Dad, can I speak to you in the study?' Usually, the father took his son to the study. The son waited until the father was inside, and then he closed the door (something the father usually did). The son went over and sat in the big easy chair, and the father was left to sit on a hard-backed chair. The father said that it was truly a role-reversal, and he wondered what he had done wrong. He said, 'I felt like I was under the grilling lamp.' Then the son said, 'Dad, you know I am getting married next week.' "The father thought tenderly about his son's wedding and responded, 'Yes, I know that, Son.'

"Then the son said, 'Dad, I thought you and Mom would like to know I am as clean and pure as the day you brought me into this life.' Tears glistened in his

eyes, then tears glistened in the father's eyes. He went to his son, hugged him, and kissed him on the cheek. He couldn't speak because his heart was full. The father later said, 'I would rather have heard those words than to have been called to the high place in which I now serve. I would rather know what my son told me than to have been given a promotion in my company.' Home is where the greatest blessings come. Home is where we learn purity of heart" (Vaughn J. Featherstone, *Purity of Heart*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982], pp. 42-43).

That is what the doctrine of dating is all about. These standards will help us stay on the straight and narrow path. They are there to protect us, to teach us the blessings of obedience, and to guide our children safely into the harbor that we call the temple.