



Padre Island, Texas

# Family Times

## Dating Doctrines and Principles

Mark D. Ogletree, M.A., PhD,  
LPC

4829 Cedar Crest Dr.

McKinney, Texas 75070

214.868.6238

Doctree10@comcast.net

Specializing in Marriage and Family Therapy, Parenting Solutions, Depression, Anger, and Anxiety Issues, Sexual Addictions.

### Quotable:

“Transgression wears elegant gowns and sparkling apparel. It is highly perfumed, has attractive features, a soft voice” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p.



Several years ago, I was with a group of colleagues for training meetings on the Gulf Coast of Texas. One early morning before our meetings commenced; several of us decided body surfing at sunrise would be a great way to begin the day. Despite the fact that there were warning signs such as “danger-- undertow” and “swim at your own risk,” we were not to be denied the thrill of body surfing. About 6:00 a.m., we began to walk off the safe shores of Padre Island, into the murky waters of the Gulf of Mexico. I don’t know what it is about deep water, but even middle aged men are intrigued by it. The Texas shoreline consists of a series of sandbars—small underwater islands undetected from the shore line. Thus, you can actually walk out approximately fifty or sixty yards and the water will still be chest deep. Then, if you swim in deep water for another ten or twenty yards, you can find yourself on another sand bar. Literally, you can be ½ mile out in the ocean, and the water could be waist deep.

After attempting to body surf on two-foot tall waves, several of us decided to swim even further out. There was something enticing about going as far out as we could go. As I was swimming, I realized I was getting tired and the sandbar we were heading for wasn’t where we thought it was. I realized I wasn’t going to make it if I had to swim much farther, so I decided to swim back to the

shore. Before I knew it, I was caught in an undertow. For those of you not familiar with the term, undertow is the current under the water that actually runs parallel with the shore, or seaward—meaning—out to sea. Therefore, if caught in a strong undertow, you can be drug out to sea, or hundreds of yards down the beach from where you dropped your stuff. Many beach goers have had the experience of playing in the ocean, and then looking towards the beach and noticing your belongings or family members are about 100 feet to the left or right of where you thought they should be. That’s how far the undertow can take you in a very short period of time.

I believe the worst undertow to encounter is the seaward undertow—where you are literally being pulled out to sea. That was the current I was caught in. I was literally swimming as hard as I could towards the shore, but I wasn’t getting anywhere. I felt myself becoming tired, and I knew I could not touch the bottom. For the first time in my life, I was actually fighting to live. I had never been in a situation like that before. Thankfully, the current changed enough so that I could reach water where I could touch the ocean floor, take a break, and then swim in. I realized when I finally did make it to the shore that I could have easily drowned that day.

It wasn’t until a few years later that I was pondering my “undertow” experience and realized that there are many parallels to our Latter-day Saint youth and their dating experiences. Especially when I read another definition of *undertow*: “a current or force that is in opposition to what is apparent.” I couldn’t help but read that definition and think how well it describes Satan’s mode of operations. Satan’s temptations are enticing and lure us away from safe ground. On the surface, his enticements always appear to be harmless, fun, and exciting. But underneath the surface, those forces are more powerful than we ever imagined. President Spencer W. Kimball described temptation this way:

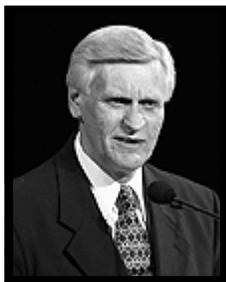
“Whoever said that sin was not fun? Whoever claimed that Lucifer was not handsome, persuasive, easy, friendly? Whoever said that sin was unattractive, undesirable, or nauseating ... Transgression wears elegant gowns and sparkling apparel. It is highly perfumed, has attractive features, a soft voice” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 152).

Our youth today are vulnerable to the undertows of life. Many activities appear on the surface to be harmless, but underneath, there is a subtle current pulling them out to sea. If parents and church leaders do not intervene, we are going to lose

## Dating Doctrines and Principles (Cont.)

### *They Said It!*

**“There are some of our members who practice selective obedience. A prophet is not one who displays a smorgasbord of truth from which we are free to pick and choose. However, some members become critical and suggest the prophet should change the menu. A prophet doesn’t take a poll to see which way the wind of public opinion is blowing. He reveals the will of the Lord to us. The world is full of deteriorating churches who have succumbed to public opinion and have become more dedicated to tickling the ears of their members than obeying the laws of God” (Glenn L. Pace, *Ensign*, May 1989, p. 26).**



**“What we need today is not more prophets. We have the prophets. But what we need is more people with listening ears. *That is the great need of our generation*” (J. Reuben Clark Jr., *CR*, October 1948, p. 82, emphasis added).**

many of them. Some of them are drowning in sin—sin, that at one time, that seemed harmless and non-threatening.

Just recently, I was visiting with a father who just found out his daughter has been dating a non-member. The daughter shared with her parents that she and her boyfriend had become sexually involved with each other. What may seem as an inconsequential situation at first really is just the opposite—a situation full of consequences that could have life time ramifications. We’ll come back to this in a minute.

Many youth fall to Satan’s powerful temptations and break the law of chastity, or make other unwise decisions. Moreover, many youth end up getting much more than they bargained for when it comes to consequences for disobedience to prophets and parents, not even to mention possible immorality, shattered dreams, and broken hearts.

### The Dating Undertow

One of the key methods that Satan uses to destroy our youth is through improper dating habits, which often lead to immorality. The consequences of sexual sin are too numerous to list. In my experience with the body surfing, you may remember that 1) I completely ignored the danger signs that were posted; 2) I could not detect the powerful currents under the surface of the water. Those currents could have been deadly; and 3) I felt like we needed to go further out to get more of a thrill and reach bigger waves.

In my adult experience, it has come to my attention that many of our prophets have declared warnings and admonitions for our safety, but many of those go unheeded, or, as is more common, completely unnoticed. For example, several years ago in general conference President

Hinckley declared that it was not a wise practice to have our youth out after 11:00 p.m. at night. How many parents put this counsel in place and followed? How many even heard it?

Next, most of our youth are completely unaware of the strong feelings that accompany dating and being close to someone of the opposite sex. In fact, most teenagers are not emotionally equipped to deal with such feelings. Moreover, many youth feel that they need to go further and further off course to get a needed thrill. Most often, such journeys lead our youth into treacherous situations.

This is not just a problem with our youth. Many well-intending parents promote early dating, steady dating, and dating those not of our faith because they think it’s “cute,” or they want their children to be popular, or, they simply do not see the reasons for not letting their children do such things.

### The Lord has not left us alone

Thankfully, the Lord has not left us to ourselves to deal with dating issues and other such problems. In my body surfing experience, there were warning signs regarding undertow and swimming at my own risk. Unfortunately, I did not pay heed or attention to such warnings. Maybe if a lifeguard had been there to warn me, I would have responded to his warnings. I do not know.

I would like for you to consider those warning signs on the beach as prophetic counsel, and imagine, instead of a big, brawny, tan, strapping lifeguard sitting up on one of those lifeguard towers, there was an older, white-haired gentleman, even a prophet of God. Would we heed his warnings? Will we obey his counsel?

Our modern prophets have

counseled and directed us on how to have successful dating experiences during the teenage years. If we follow their counsel, we can swim in safe areas, away from undertows and riptides. We can stay safe, have fun, and enjoy ourselves, instead of fighting for our lives.

### Dating Doctrines and Principles

In our family, we began teaching our children about dating before they were even baptized. Since their elementary school years, they have known that 1) you don’t date until you are sixteen, 2) you then only double or group date, 3) you can never date the same person twice in a row [this is a family rule, not a prophetic declaration], 4) you cannot steady date, and 5) you cannot date someone who is not of our faith. Despite the fact that our children have been taught these things repeatedly, we have learned that unless the person they are dating believes the same things, or their parents are teaching the same principles, there could be problems. We have also learned that if our children do not gain of testimony of living prophets, and have a desire to follow their counsel, you could be in even more trouble!

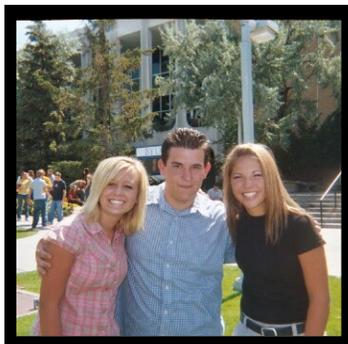
During the teen years, there is more pressure to follow the crowd rather than following prophets. And, as many of you know, at the age of seventeen, following peers often wins out—especially if some of those peers come from the so called “strong families” in the community.

It seems that too many parents do not follow our prophet’s counsel on dating because they either 1) want their children to be popular, 2) do not think there is anything wrong with having a steady boy/girl friend because, after all, they did when they were teens, and they turned out just fine, 3) battling their children on dating issues is not worth the contention it has

## Dating Doctrines and Principles (Cont).



***“The Lord has made us attractive one to another for a great purpose. But this very attraction becomes as a powder keg unless it is kept under control... It is for this reason that the Church counsels against early dating” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, For the Strength of Youth, p. 24).***



**Caution: This is not a “group date!”**

caused in the home, or 4) they have no clue that prophets have spoken on these subjects!

As my wife and I have had the experience of raising teenagers, we have learned that there seem to be three key dating issues that teenagers and parents struggle with : 1) What is an actual date, 2) going steady, and 3) dating those not of our faith or with lower standards.

The Lord, through his prophets has given timely counsel and direction on each of these topics that can help us if we will but follow it.

We have had to deal with each one of these issues in our family. I am grateful for the counsel and direction of modern-day prophets. If we follow their teachings, we will be on solid ground.

**Key Principle #1: What is a date?**

Not too long ago, I was talking to a father in my stake. He was a bit upset that some LDS parents had organized an activity for middle-school youth where the kids were paired up as couples, spending an afternoon at the movies. It was his feeling that those 12 and 13 year old kids were basically on dates, and he was uncomfortable pairing these kids together that early. Other parents did not see this as a date at all. This begs the question, “were these kids paired up two by two on dates?” What do you think?

President Spencer W. Kimball declared that “In order to avoid difficulty and possible temptation, I suggest again the following standard. Any dating or *pairing off* in social contacts should be postponed until at least the age of sixteen or older” (*Ensign*, November 1980, 96; emphasis).

A date is simply when you pair off with a person for an activity. If you are paired-up,

you are on a date. Consider also, that our young people should not be single-dating; they should be double or group dating. In the “For Strength of Youth” pamphlet, it says, “When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates” (*For the Strength of Youth*, 25). Further explanation is given in the Young Women’s Handbook, where it says: “Some youth who do pair off exclusively in their early teens are emotionally and socially immature. That is one reason why the church counsels youth to date only after age 16, and even then not to pair off exclusively with one partner” (*Young Women Handbook*, 1988, p. 20).

Several years ago, my oldest daughter was beginning to date more frequently another young man in our stake. One day, he came over for a visit, and when I drove home from work, they were out talking in our front yard. I greeted them and talked for a few minutes, then went into the house. A few minutes later, my daughter came in and said, “Dad, me and Brad\* are going to 7-11 to get a slurpee.” I said, “So, are you going on a single date with Brad?” She replied, “No, were not going on a date, we’re just going to get a slurpee.” I reminded my daughter that she was not to be alone in a car with another young man, and that she wasn’t allowed to single date.” To make a real long story short, about thirty minutes later, my daughter, Brad, and about five other kids under the age of eight from our family came back from 7-11, and they all had slurpees! It was a great lesson for her to learn that when you pair off with another guy for an activity, even if it’s for five minutes, or five miles,

you are on a date. And, if you’re on a date, you better be on a group date, even if that includes your five younger sisters!

President Spencer W. Kimball taught the principle behind group dating when he said, “Physical and moral safety is increased in the multiplicity of friends” (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 290). Amen to that. As a bishop, I have never once had a group of teenagers come to my office in a group of six or ten and say, “We all need to confess; we all have messed up.” That doesn’t happen, and it won’t. Surely, someone in that group will speak up and stand for the truth. There is certainly safety in numbers.

Today, we actually have cases of youth getting pregnant and breaking the law of chastity, yet, claiming still that they were not on a date. Guess what, if you go to a park, and make out with a guy, you’ve just been on a date!! Hello!!

I often have fun discussing with my children what a date actually is. My friend and colleague, Randal Wright, has helped me with the following examples:

1. A fourteen year-old young woman meets a fifteen-year-old young man at a stake dance. They are together all evening, not dancing with anyone else. Is this a date? What do you think?
2. A thirteen-year-old boy asks a girl of the same age to meet him at a high school homecoming game. Since he cannot drive, his parents not only take him, but buy a nice corsage for him to give to the lucky lady.

# Dating Doctrines and Principles (Cont.)

- Her mom also bought this little tiger a boutonniere. They are together for the duration of the game, and are seen holding hands and feeding each other corn dogs. Both say they are not on a date. What do you think?



3. A group of teenagers goes to play putt-putt golf. One couple has decided to pair off and play the back nine on their own. They are seen behind the windmill at the thirteenth hole holding hands, and trading colored balls. What do you think? Is this a date?

Many people would say that none of these scenarios described dates. However, focus on President Kimball’s idea of “pairing off,” and I think you will understand that each of these experiences describes at date just perfectly.

Several years ago, another child in our family was complaining about a young man in the stake that she was interested in. They were having some issues with each other, and my wife suggested that they go on a date or two, and see if they

really like each other. Our daughter replied, “We’ve been on many dates.” We then explained, “No, you have never been on a date with him. You have been with him while hanging out with peers, and you’ve been to other members homes and watched movies, but not once has he called you and said, ‘Would you like to go on a date with me.’” Not once has he planned something out, and not once has he formally picked you up for a date.”

What had happened was that these two “met” each other at friend’s homes in the stake, and just hung out.



Remember Church dances twenty years ago? Guys actually went over to a pack of girls, and asked one of them to dance. Then, hopefully, she would say, “yes,” and you would go dance for a little while. If you really enjoyed it, you would ask her to dance again. If you didn’t enjoy it, you would say “thank you” and go find someone else to dance with.

Every now and then, you would sit around with your friends and talk, and eat a few white cookies with red punch, but then you were ready to go again. Now days, dances are a little different. I’m not sure if adults even understand it. In one corner, there are girls dancing with each other; in

the other, you’ve got guys dancing with each other. At our last stake dance, I counted thirteen people out there, all jumping around, and 400 people sitting in chairs talking and just hanging out.

This will close out part 1 of a 2 part series. Part 2, in our October issue will focus on steady dating, and dating those not of our faith.

Dating Age	% Having Sex
12	91%
13	56%
14	53%
15	40%
16	20%

(Source: Church News, 10 September 1988, 16).

Number	% Willing
5 Rules	33%
4 Rules	43%
3 Rules	60%
2 Rules	60%
1 Rule	62%
No Rules	75%

(Source: 25 Mistakes LDS Parents Make and How to Avoid Them, Randal A. Wright, 210).

“I wasn’t supposed to date until I was 16, but when I was 14, I was voted one of the school princesses and allowed to go on a date. I think my mom cared more about me being popular with my friends than about underage dating. This proved to be very unwise” (Anonymous, from *25 Mistakes LDS Parents Make and How to Avoid Them*, Randal A. Wright, 203).

Parents, “are you willing to stand at the crossroads with your child and protect him or her from the temptation and degradation that usually accompanies early and steady dating? Are you willing to do for your child what the Lord asks you to do...?” (Mark E. Petersen, *Conference Report*, October 1959, 17).

