

# *Ten Keys to Successful Dating and Marriage Relationships*

HUGH W. PINNOCK

**I** come to you concerned and somewhat troubled. My comments this evening are directed to those of you who will dedicate an important part of your earthly lives to making your eventual eternal marriages succeed. The emotions I feel are the deepest love and respect for you and the excitement for your futures as someday you will sit where we now sit and speak where we now speak and lead in areas where we have led, but in many areas where we have not yet led. There is a tendency in life, brothers and sisters, to simplify problems and complicate solutions. Many challenges, however, are very complex. But I have learned that, when we utilize the teachings of the Master, the solutions to even the most difficult of life's challenges are usually basic and easy to implement.

## **Dedication to Successful Marriage**

Several years ago, while visiting in Florida, I talked with Frank Shorter, a world-class marathon athlete. He won the marathon in the 1972 Olympics, placed second in 1976, and has won literally hundreds of long-distance races. As we talked about his training schedule, I learned that he had dedicated a great part of his life to succeeding in that impressive area of athletics. He knows exactly what foods to eat, how many miles to run each day (which

incidentally is about 20), the frame of mind he needs to have if he expects to be victorious, and a number of other characteristics relating to success in his chosen field.

Well, while thinking of Frank Shorter and his goals and others who have succeeded in their chosen lines of work or hobbies or professions, I have asked myself, Why couldn't more of our husbands and wives have the same type of dedication to a successful marriage as do renowned athletes, physicians, educators, and governmental leaders as they excel in their professions?

Tonight I shall not address the mate-selection process except to say three things: First, obedience, brothers and sisters, is the sure cornerstone of happiness. A boyfriend or girlfriend who does not have a wholesome respect for regulations during the dating process will often continue to break the rules after the word *yes* at the altar is spoken. Seek out those who are willing to live the rules because if you do not, we will spend time with

---

*Hugh W. Pinnock was a member of the First Quorum of Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 3 May 1981.*

you in offices in whichever ward or stake you live, attempting to work out the difficulties that will surely come.

Second, there are not to be sexual experiences before marriage. Temporary pleasure in the backseat of an automobile is not worth the incredibly high price of heartache, self-doubt, and guilt, with always the question gnawing at one's spirit, "Is it true love that I feel or some sort of hormonal substitute?" One penalty that comes to those who participate when they should not is that the counterfeiting procedure begins that sometimes cannot be refined out of one's heart and mind. Don't let it be part of yours.

Third, you must realize that you had better marry the person who has the built-in characteristics you desire because marriage is not a place where you will be able to change another or to fit him/her into the mold of what you want. It must have happened before, and then two people can grow and progress together.

Brethren and sisters, I know of nothing worthwhile in life that comes easy. However, nothing in life is as valuable as a strong marriage and a secure family. I am speaking to all who want their future marriages to succeed. My comments are not for anyone looking for simple ideas or anyone who would be satisfied merely to tolerate an uncomfortable arrangement. Every strong marriage is severely tested. Husbands and wives who encounter and surmount suffering, pain, misunderstanding, and temptation can enjoy marriages that are beautiful and eternal. There is a principle that needs to be understood, and let me take just a moment to explain it to you. Many marriage experts who write articles are failures in their own marriages or have never married. Unfortunately, many of the books on how to have a successful marriage are less than helpful to Latter-day Saints. Our marriages and families are built upon heavenly concepts and principles, not upon worldly ideas or solutions. I

pray that I may be in the Spirit this evening as I communicate with you about marriage.

### **Belief in Eternal Marriage**

First of all, consider the concepts that we have that the world does not understand. One is the principle of eternal marriage itself, where we are able to look beyond the problems of today and this evening and tomorrow into a life beyond death, where as a family we will dwell forever together. Relationships are to be never ending, but the world does not comprehend this great truth.

### **Spirituality**

Second, the world does not understand spirituality or the fact that we can receive personal revelations that will assist us in any of the challenges that will come our way. We must bring, brothers and sisters, the Savior and his teachings into our homes and hearts, and when we do, he will guide us. To really succeed, your eternal marriage must be Christ centered. Let me tell you an experience I had several years ago. I was sitting in my office. I heard a commotion out in the reception area. My secretary picked up the telephone and buzzed me. She said, "There's a couple here, Elder Pinnock, that you have been assigned to talk with."

I could tell she was very nervous, and I said, "Have them in." A man and a woman came into my office. Her face was tearstained.

He began pounding on my desk, "Tell her I have the priesthood, and she's to do what I tell her to do."

The first thing I said was, "Stop pounding on my desk." The second thing I said was, "Brother, you do not have the priesthood."

"Oh, yes, I do. I was given the priesthood last June."

I said, "You don't have the priesthood," and I turned behind me to where my scriptures lay. I took the triple combination and turned quickly to section 121 of the Doctrine and

Covenants. We could have begun in a number of places, but let's begin with verse 36:

*That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.*

*That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.*

At that time, that good sister smiled briefly. I said, "Do you understand that you don't have the priesthood?"

He said, "I didn't understand that before now."

Then I said, "Let's begin reading the 41st verse":

*No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood [or any other position or title, I might add], only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;*

*By kindness and pure knowledge. . . .*

About this time, their hands joined as I read the next several verses:

*Which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.*

Jumping to the 45th verse:

*Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and*

*the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dew from heaven.*

Well, he was listening now. And we talked for the next few minutes about the importance of meekness and patience and love unfeigned. As they left, they walked out arm in arm, apparently after having learned a great lesson in life. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the priesthood that so many of us in this room bear can only be maintained and handled upon the principles of righteousness.

Just as a building must have a strong foundation, a family needs the sure foundation of the Savior and his teachings. We are a spiritual people, believing in spiritual principles: that first and foremost we are to use the Spirit in solving problems and receiving revelations that will guide our feet. Obviously this means to live righteous lives, to pray often, and to be kind one to another.

### **Communication**

Third, do not feel that an intense disagreement in your dating procedure or eventually in your marriage indicates that it cannot succeed. If we are to really communicate, we must be honest when we disagree. We must express hurts and let our feelings show. We can do this without becoming angry or inconsiderate. People who keep things bottled up inside are candidates for a variety of illnesses, but even more serious, that approach does not solve problems. A serious disagreement between partners does not mean the two are becoming allergic to one another or that the situation is hopeless. It merely means that they are human and not yet perfect individuals. If we can just acknowledge our differences in mature ways, then we will realize that our dating procedure is okay or our marriages eventually will be all right. Often what happens is that we have simply failed to communicate. And differences can be worked out without jeopardizing a relationship. As we communicate, brothers and

sisters—may I say this quickly—let us first communicate about feelings, those throbbings from within, and then we can be concerned with the historical aspects of communication, where we have been and what we have seen. But let us communicate our feelings first. And if something just doesn't feel quite right—leaves you with kind of an uncomfortable feeling—that needs to be said to your date or to your husband or wife.

### **Kindness**

Fourth, never make your date or mate the object of jokes, either in private or in public. Partners who poke fun at one another may think of it as good-natured humor. It is not. It is degrading and dangerous. To make a joke about private things a husband or wife or a boyfriend or girlfriend does is a form of ridicule and a way of putting him or her down. Too often the laughter conceals a spirit of malice or anger that causes hurt feelings and fractures in that delicate substance we define as spirit. Couples who respect each other do not resort to such procedures.

### **Trust**

Fifth, both during the dating period and after marriage, do not smother one another with excessive restrictions. Remember a kind and loving Father—and I guess it was a hundred years ago today that we were sitting around talking about that council in heaven and all those things that had happened thousands of years before, and we were getting ready to come here. As we looked to Father, we could see the trust in his eyes. And we knew that we would be operational here upon the earth in a great environment of freedom. Then why do we sometimes try to take that freedom away from those we love so much? A loving wife of many years shared with me one of the secrets of her beautiful marriage. She told me, "It is my duty to maintain an atmosphere in our home in which my husband can reach his

full potential. As you know, he is a busy businessman, a bishop, and a father. In turn, he helps me reach my potential." With her encouragement he was an outstanding bishop. She later served as a counselor in two auxiliary presidencies. She had a little place in their home where she could sew and where she painted lovely paintings and wrote beautiful poetry. He felt comfortable in going fishing, lowering his golf score, doing some painting himself, and growing in ways that interested him. Neither of these marriage partners was being smothered by a selfish mate. Each respected the other's needs and goals. And as you think about that eventual responsibility that you will have of raising children, keep that concept in mind. If you will give them gobs of freedom, almost beyond logic sometimes, they will grow in precious ways that will give them the confidence to do what needs to be done.

The most fulfilling of all marriages that I have observed seem to be those in which the husband and wife together commit their love to the Savior's keeping and to each other. They are interested in one another, and yet they set each other free to grow and mature—never free to flirt, but free to take on new challenges and to pursue new interests. Jealousy is a subtle form of bondage and is the most smothering of human passions. Dating couples or husbands and wives who fear the loss of a partner's love weaken their relationship by holding on too tightly. A husband who thinks to himself, "I won't let her out of my sight," is actually expressing a fear that might push her away. We must allow each other plenty of room for personal growth and expression. When both partners are able to develop their talents and interests, the marriage is less likely to suffer from boredom and narrowness.

### **Paying compliments**

Sixth, compliment each other sincerely and often, just as you do or will do during the dating period. A middle-aged wife once told me,

“Someone has to keep my husband humble. He gets so much attention from others that he needs to be brought down a peg or two. He gets too big for his britches.” How sad. Every husband needs a wife who will build him up, and every wife needs a husband to honor and to respect her. Building each other with sincere compliments is never a sign of weakness. It is the right thing to do. Anyone who can contemplate kneeling at an altar, participating in an eternal ordinance—or those who have—can certainly find lovely things to say about a partner.

So often in those stressful circumstances where divorce has occurred, I will hear comments such as this from a divorced man or woman: “John (or Mary) has been gone now for three years. How I wish he (or she) would come back. The loneliness is unbearable. I neglected to tell him (or her) so many things. Oh, if only I had let her (or him) know how good she (or he) was in so many ways. What a fool I was! I could never learn to compliment and to build. I was always pointing out her (or his) mistakes.”

“I see how some husbands and wives treat each other,” a young divorced lady said to me, “so coldly and with such indifference I want to scream at them, to wake them up before it is too late. I want to tell them to quit their sarcasm and instead to encourage each other.” And remember, dear friends, that that is part of the responsibility of dating, to handle that precious relationship as if it were fragile because it is. We all tend to become the persons described in the compliments that our spouses and friends pay us. We will do almost anything to live up to the compliments and encouragements of a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a proud wife or husband.

Let me tell you a story about a man who received his PhD from this institution. We had known this person for a number of years. He married later than many, and as we watched him relate with a young woman, we wondered

if she could keep up; we wondered if she had the capacity to understand life as he had learned it because he was more than several years older. Then, as we observed that couple at social functions and elsewhere, we saw that he would take time to carefully instruct her. As he returned from classwork, he would bring home books for her to read and to study. As they took long walks, they were constantly teaching each other. What a beautiful marriage and what a lovely family they now have because they have taken the time to compliment and to build each other! They are serving now in the mission field together, there because of his sensitivity and because of her sensitivity, there because they desire to build one another.

### **Talking Openly**

As a seventh recommendation, in dating or in marriage, never resort to the silent treatment. Always be open and straightforward with each other. Too often we may respond to tensions by clamming up or by taking a walk. A young wife in the southwest corner of Salt Lake County asked me to talk with her husband. “All he does is clam up when we disagree. He won’t communicate. He just walks out the door.” [Think of this maturity level!] “When he cools down, he comes home, but he is like ice until I make up with him. He can go on for days or even a week or two without saying a word.”

Well, I have learned that we are wrong even to say to our mates, “Just leave me alone. I’m going through a rough time. Let me work it out by myself. I just don’t want to be around anybody right now.” That not only is unfair and genuinely insulting, but it is stupid. What is marriage if it is not sharing and helping one another through crises? We will hear all of the excuses—“It’s that time, I’m not feeling well.” “Things are tough at the office.” “I’ve had a tough day at class.” “I lost a big case.” “My nerves are bad.” “Things are tough in the ward now.” None of these excuses gives the moral

right to shut out someone who loves you. Keep the door to your heart open. The times when we shut others out are often the times when we need their help the most. Of course we need times of privacy, to think alone. Of course we need time to pray and to meditate. And we should understand and respect these needs in others. However, we should never be inconsiderate or unappreciative of a concerned husband or wife who is trying to help at a time of trouble and discouragement.

### **Apologizing and Forgetting**

Eighth, resolve when necessary to say, "Hey, honey, I'm sorry," and really mean it. Contrary to a popular saying, love, in part, means learning how to say, "I'm sorry, sweetheart." So often when we make mistakes, sometimes innocently, damage has been done, and an apology is in order. Along with learning how to say, "I'm sorry," husbands and wives must learn to say, "I forgive." Jesus taught that our being forgiven by our Heavenly Father depends in part—and in great part—on our ability to forgive those who have trespassed against us. Even when cheating has occurred, we must be willing, under most circumstances, to accept their true repentance. Some of the strongest marriages of which I am aware have been between partners who could say, "I am sorry," and who could forgive.

In addition to saying they're sorry and really meaning it, husbands and wives must avoid bringing up the past. Thousands of marriages have survived the most critical problems and have been successful only because godly sorrow for sin was followed by Christlike forgiveness. A woman was referred to my office for a blessing for the restoration of her health. She had been ill for seven years. She had had exploratory surgery three times, had been in the hospital a number of times, and had switched doctors more often than annually. And I declined to give her a blessing when the Spirit said there was nothing wrong physically.

Brothers and sisters, you can imagine what an awkward position I found myself in, having to say no.

She said, "What do you mean?"

As we talked, she mentioned that several years earlier, during a very difficult time in life, her husband had not given her the attention that she needed, and he was sitting next to her. She had not been pleased with his behavior and had carried with her a scarred heart, emotions that had been disrupted and confused, and she was bitter. I asked, "When did this happen?"

She said, "Seven years ago. Now wait just a minute, Elder Pinnock. You don't mean to tell me that I have been sick for seven years because I can't forgive my husband." And there he sat.

I said, "I would be happy to give you a blessing for what is wrong."

Well, she was there; the moment was awkward. She said, "All right, go ahead."

I placed my hands upon her head and gave her a blessing that she could love and forgive, at that time not sure if it was her husband, but it seemed to be. As we walked the few steps to my door, I pointed to the door and said, "That door will always be open to you." And in a huff and with some discomfort, she left.

About ten days later the telephone rang. "Is that offer still good to come and see you?"

I said, "Yes."

She came in, "Do you mean to tell me that the reason I've been sick for so many years is because I can't forgive my husband for the way he treated me seven or eight years ago?"

I said, "Yes. I have thought a great deal about it since then, and I believe that is your problem." We talked for almost an hour. As she stood up to leave, I pointed to the door again and said, "The door is always open."

The phone rang several weeks later. "May I come and talk to you, Elder Pinnock?"

I said, "Certainly."

She walked in a changed woman. She didn't even look the same. She said, "I haven't felt this good for years. I can't remember having ever felt as good as I feel now, and I love my husband so much." Well, think about it, think about it, think about it.

### **Confiding Only in the Bishop (or Branch President)**

Ninth, remember never to turn to a third party in time of marital trouble except to your bishop or branch president. In sensitive and inspired ways he will direct you to a competent counselor if that is what is needed. Someone is always ready and eager to consult a hurting wife or husband, and when marriage partners have no one to talk with at home, unfortunately, too often they seek a friend elsewhere. And that, dear brothers and sisters, is where almost all adultery has its origin. It can happen in the neighborhood, in a ward choir, at the office, or anywhere else. Secret affairs begin innocently enough just by talking about mutual hurts, but then comes a dependency period that too often ends in transferring loyalty and affection, followed by adultery. Never ever, never ever, confide your marriage troubles to a third party, no, not even to your closest friend. He or she may be the first to tell your troubles to another, becoming the one to hurt you most severely. Lean on the Savior and rely upon your bishop and your stake president. Remember that because, as the years quickly come and go, there will be stressful times when you will need to talk to someone. Remember who it should be. The system which the Lord has given us is simple. It works.

### **Having Fun**

Tenth, have clean, wholesome fun during your dating years and retain the same joy in marriage. God intends for us to find joy in life. Man is that he might have joy. Most marriages begin with joy, and those that succeed retain it. Last Thanksgiving we went up to Bear Lake.

We have a little farm home there. My wife and I began a tickling contest. I am a world-class tickler. I am one of the greatest ticklers that has ever lived. Well, as we were laughing and giggling, in came the children. They couldn't believe what they were seeing. Soon they joined in and we had a great time. A microscopic bit of sadness attended that experience last Thanksgiving because I thought to myself, "Why haven't I introduced that type of joy into our home more often?" I hope that our home has been more joy filled since then. When a marriage loses its happiness, it becomes weak and vulnerable. Find a happy home, and you will find a joyful couple at the helm. Husbands and wives who no longer laugh and play together are losing their fondness for each other and perhaps even their capacity to stay together. True love includes a joyful, almost childlike quality. In other words, live it up—righteously.

### **In Conclusion**

Well, it's almost time to say good night. Let me read to you an article that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in October.

*It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. Not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension. Never has the future seemed so uncalculable as at this time. The domestic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. The political caldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. Russia hangs as usual like a cloud, dark and silent, upon the horizon. It is a solemn moment. Of our troubles, no man can see the end. [Harper's, October 1857]*

Much of life does not change, but let me testify to you that one area of life is good and will never change—that's when we live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I look to you marvelous missionaries, and, boy, do we love you! I've just come back from touring

two missions, and what a great time we had together! You are embarking upon a period when you will teach true principles to people who are struggling, are confused, don't have any idea what to do, and you will bring them the answer—that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what an honor it is to serve the Master in ways that you soon will do and that many here have already done.

May I take just a moment to thank my lovely wife Anne. No matter what problems I encounter in the world fighting dragons, she always responds with love and kindness and a patient listening ear.

Your futures depend on the present. Live life well today. Life passes quickly. Let us not be guilty of hoping that someday we will become happy and contented, after college or after this next semester or after this next test or

after this date tonight or after the bills are paid or after the kids are grown or when we are retired. The good will always outweigh the bad—let me say that again: The good *will* always outweigh the bad. There are far more lovely, fine, honest people in this world than those who are dishonest and injurious. May you learn at your age—and we at ours if we haven't—to recognize the good and to bring joy into the lives of others. May the Lord's choicest blessings be with each of us that we may do all within our power to do those things that are proper and right in our social interaction with each other as we date, that we may have, when that special sacred time comes, strong marriages and lives filled with joy. This I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.