

A photograph of a young man and woman walking hand-in-hand on a beach at sunset. The woman is wearing a light green shirt and dark pants, and the man is wearing a plaid shirt and blue jeans. They are standing in the shallow water near the shore. In the background, there are palm trees, a rocky breakwater, and buildings on a hillside under a hazy sky.

# the ART of Courting

by Dana Braley

Whoever said courting is dead was onto something.

Outside of our Mormon culture, we see courting becoming a thing of the past, a thing found in history books or historical fiction. Even worse, this laissez faire date called the “hanging out” is on the rise. If anything the art of courting has a low-pulse, but is not entirely dead. Marriage counselors and the happily married that will tell you last-

ing relationships require work which includes a courtship both before and after the wedding day. Like earning a degree, courting is necessary for success and can be learned.

We have forgotten that love is a process, not something that pops up spontaneously. True love, lasting love is less like cupid's arrow that strikes your heart suddenly and powerfully, and more like this degree. This analogy is explained in the movie Fireproof:

"When a man is trying to win the heart of a woman he studies her. He learns her likes, dislikes, habits and hobbies...If the amount studied her before marriage was equal to a high school degree, he should continue to learn about her until he gains a college degree, a master's degree, and ultimately a doctorate degree."

Lindsay Curtis, M.D., co-author of *Living, Loving and Marrying*, says, "Love is something that is earned, step by step, stone upon stone, kindness upon kindness, throughout our entire lives. It cannot be purchased all at once, but must be paid for in continuing installments for a lifetime" (144). Whether we speak of the sweetening of a long-

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established marriage, or the heightening interest between acquaintances, the process of strengthening the bond of love unfolds in gradually. The challenge of working through this process is found in our ever-changing needs for love, the differences in the way men and women feel love, and learning how to express love.

Know that love changes

Vital in mastering the art of courting in an understanding that love, just as people and circumstances, changes over time. Challenges in relationships, particularly in marriage, change the needs, perspectives, and sometimes even the personalities of each partner. Differences arise, family dynamics change, and babies come—all to chal-

lenge the foundation of friendship which supports a loving relationship.

The kind of surprise, what-happened-to-the-man/woman-I-married type of changes is natural.

Kenneth W. Matheson, professor of social work at Brigham Young University and author of *Keeping Love Alive*, records that "the most common challenges pulling marriages and families apart are negative family relationships," related to in-laws, friends, etc., "broken

homes, financial pressures," either brought on by children, school, health problems, or otherwise, "eating disorders, substance abuse, pornography, lowering of values, immodest clothing, dishonoring the Sabbath day, and low self-esteem" (38). Many of these challenges are more than likely related to tragedy or challenges to self-worth, and can often change the way people feel about life, themselves—even God. Matheson records a husband's experience where his wife was involved in a serious car accident, and afterward "her physical and mental states...changed drastically" (37). He was confused and lost, having lost some of the essence of the one with which he fell in love. Change like this does not necessarily always have to be drastic. Often change is slow, gradual, and intermittent, but the fact is love changes because people change.

Because these challenges are so common, experts seldom bother with questions of whether or not change happens, but rather how to handle it when it comes.

Gary Chapman, author of the best-selling *Five Love Languages*, says "we must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love" (14). The change love incurs, whether gradually or suddenly, drastically or minutely,



requires consistent effort. Chapman sternly reminds couples, "Being sincere is not enough. We must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language" and subsequently love him or her therewith (15).

### Differences between men and women

In order to master the art of courting or work through the challenges of dating, couples must understand that each gender shows love in different ways. For example, during the date indirect compliments are the best to give men, and direct compliments are the best to give women (205). John Gray, author of *Mars and Venus On A Date*, explains, "On Venus they are most touched when a compliment is personally directed," because "a woman is most reassured in the way a man sees her and compliments her" (203-204). When a woman compliments the man indirectly by commenting on the activity or meal, he appreciates it because "he feels he provided it"—being the one who paid for the date (209). Notice that both the man and woman reciprocate communicated feelings differently. An understanding of this difference is crucial to strong courtship development.

### How to speak another "love language"

Success comes from tapping into a partner's primary "love language." Chapman's five love languages are: words of affirmation, physical touch, acts of service, gifts, and quality time. It's normal for couples to have different love languages. Chapman says, "Seldom do a husband and wife have the same primary emotional love language. We tend to speak our primary love language, and we become confused when our spouse does not understand what we are communicating. We are expressing our love, but the message does not come through because we are speaking what, to them, is a foreign language" (Chapman 18). The first step might be acknowledging that personal expressions of love are not successful, as is evident

from the negativity, and the next step is to find out what the partner's love language is.

After accepting that a loved one speaks another language, the challenge is overcoming the tendency to speak the one's own language. It's hard to adapt and start speaking the other language. It takes practice. Chapman says, "... when an action doesn't come naturally to you, it is a greater expression of love" (Chapman 151). Just by trying to do those things that you know your spouse would like, will make them feel loved and, as Chapman puts it, the "love tank" will be full.



Discovering each other's love language and speaking them takes time. It requires an investment prior to marriage and a continuing investment after marriage. In President Dieter F. Uchtdorf's 2010 Conference address, *Of Things That Matter Most*, he identifies time as the crux to family unity: "In family relationships love is really spelled t-i-m-e, time. Taking time for each other is the key for harmony at home. We talk with, rather than about, each other. We learn from each other, and we appreciate our differences as well as our commonalities" (Uchtdorf).

If love within an entire family unit requires time, then love between a couple, the frame of a solid family unit, must certainly require time. Love takes effort and "true, long-lasting emotional love is a choice" (Chapman 150). Nobody has to choose love. One could choose divorce, but there is great power in the choice to love and be loved.