

## **Selecting a Spouse 101: How to Choose your Eternal Companion**

Many times DOPE Manual submissions are based on a lesson learned from a mistake someone has made. Undoubtedly, it is important to learn from our mistakes. However, a wise man once said, “he that learns from his good choices has the strength of 10 men.” It is in the spirit of trying to learn from one of the best decisions that I have ever made that I choose this topic.

During this Christmas season, I have reflected on how in the world I was blessed with the good fortune to have married Grace.<sup>1</sup> As I thought about the other spouses that have married into our family, I was even more impressed with the quality of people my brother and sisters decided to marry.<sup>2</sup> In my opinion, a lot of this “good fortune” is a result of listening to good advice from Mom and Dad, and trying to obey the commandments. In this submission, I will try to list some of this good advice and articulate some of the other criteria that I have observed my brother and sisters use in selecting their spouses.<sup>3</sup>

**NOTE:** At this point some of you may be thinking, “what the heck?”<sup>4</sup> “I’m already married!” “Why do I care about Selecting a Spouse 101?” To answer this question I refer you to Alma, who said, “... If ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?”<sup>5</sup> In other words, each of our spouses took a big chance on us. They believed what we “advertised” while we were dating. Your spouse decided to marry you, and fell in love with you because you were a dedicated scripture reader, faithful journal keeper, good listener, ambitious, fun to be around, etc., etc., etc. I would ask (now that you are married) can they still love you for these qualities? Have you continued to dedicate effort toward these qualities, and toward overcoming your weaknesses? I hope that this Dope submission will remind each of us married Stevensons<sup>6</sup> about what we “advertised” while we were dating, and inspire us to improve in areas where we may have gotten a little rusty.

**Selection Criterion # 1:** Does the prospective spouse (“PS”) have a strong testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ? This has always been the bottom line for Mom and Dad, and is reinforced by numerous general authorities and other church leaders.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I was going bald at the young age of 23, and let’s just say Grace had plenty of options. I’ll save my advice on how bald guys can make smart, spiritual and beautiful women fall in love with them for a different DOPE entry.

<sup>2</sup> We were all sure Michael’s wife had died in the war in heaven – and then, wa la – Mike goes to Africa and comes back with a beautiful, smart, spiritual, and loving wife that shares his passion for the Simpsons.

<sup>3</sup> Note: I don’t claim that this is a comprehensive list, but I think it will provide at least a strong starting point.

<sup>4</sup> For example, I bet right now Amanda has just spit the piece of straw she was chewing on out of her mouth and is thinking, “what the heck?”

<sup>5</sup> Alma 5:26

<sup>6</sup> And Roberts and Chandlers.

<sup>7</sup> I don’t have an exact citation for this off the top of my head, but a wise man once said, “he that

There is no other characteristic more important that you will have to gauge in choosing your eternal companion. This begs the question, how can you tell if the PS has a strong testimony? I don't think there is an easy answer to this, and I think it's important to remember that testimonies are dynamic. Just because someone has a strong testimony today, doesn't mean that the person will always have a strong testimony. Testimonies need to be nurtured and strengthened constantly.

With this in mind, here are a couple of questions to ask yourself: (a) what are the PS's personal scripture study habits? – does the PS ever talk about what he/she learned from the scriptures? – look at the PS's scriptures<sup>8</sup>; (b) what role does prayer play in the PS's life – how does the PS handled big decisions in his/her life?; (c) does the PS have a calling? – how does the PS magnify his/her calling? – does the PS do his/her home or visiting teaching?; (d) did the PS serve a mission? – how does the PS feel about his/her mission?<sup>9</sup>; (e) how active is the PS in his/her ward? (f) does the PS attend the temple?<sup>10</sup>

**Selection Criterion # 2:** How does the PS feel about his/her family? The PS's family probably knows the PS better than anyone else (at least they've probably had the longest time to get to know the PS). This was one of the things that impressed me the most about Grace, I could tell by the way she talked and acted that her family was one of the most important things in her life. If this love for family carries over to the new family you form with the PS, you will be a lucky man/woman. If the PS hates his/her family, or the family hates the PS, this might not be a good sign. I recognize that every situation will have to be judged individually, but I think Chad Roberts is a good example. When Chad decided to join the Church, this wasn't exactly a popular decision with Chad's family. Yet, to Chad's credit, notwithstanding this very significant change in Chad's life,<sup>11</sup> Chad's family still loves him and you can tell that Chad loves his family.

**Selection Criterion # 3:** Is the PS a good listener? What a difference it makes to have a spouse that listens! Good communication is key to a strong marriage, and it is hard to communicate without listening. To determine if the PS is a good listener, I suggest making obscure comments<sup>12</sup> to the PS during a date and then presenting the PS with a

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can read a DOPE submission without being critical of the author's lack of accurate citations has the strength of 10 men.”

<sup>8</sup> If the PS can't find his/her scriptures, pretend like you forgot something in your car and run as fast as you can. Don't answer the phone for 2 weeks.

<sup>9</sup> I would be leery about the PS that had really bad luck and got bunch of lousy companions. On the other hand, I think it's a good sign when the PS got along with (or at least loved) all of his/her companions, even the difficult ones.

<sup>10</sup> Klave and Amanda leaving the ranch to go to the Idaho Falls temple is a good example of PSES that demonstrated an appreciation for the temple and the covenants we make there.

<sup>11</sup> I'll have to write another DOPE submission about my respect and appreciation for Chad and his decision to serve a mission. Chad is an *awesome* example of these first two criteria paying dividends.

<sup>12</sup> For example, mutter under your breath, “My sister got some new socks last year from her cousin, but she couldn't return them the next day because of Independence Day.” Corresponding Pop Quiz Question: On what day did my cousin give my sister news socks? Answer: July 3.

short pop quiz at the end of the date.<sup>13</sup> Seriously, this is a little easier to determine, but it shouldn't be underestimated. At Amanda and Klave's wedding, several people commented to me about what a good listener Klave is. I think this skill will go a long way toward helping Amanda and Klave to have a strong and fulfilling marriage.

**Selection Criterion # 4:** Is the PS honest and ambitious? These characteristics are also somewhat self-explanatory. They are also relatively easy to identify, but like a testimony are dynamic. None of us are perfect, but a PS that is dishonest should be quickly removed from the list of PSes. What are the PS's dreams and aspirations? Are these dreams and aspirations consistent with your own? How does the PS handle discouragement and set-backs? The answers to these questions will be telling about your natural compatibility. Ambition, and particularly honesty should not be underestimated.

**Selection Criterion # 5:** Do you and the PS have common interests? Do you enjoy being together?<sup>14</sup> I think this criterion naturally makes its way into the decision process, and I think it should. Even though it ultimately may be less important than some of the other criteria, I don't think its importance should be minimized. Michael and Megan are a good example of this. Megan is a great friend to Michael because she cares about the things that are important to Michael. I'm sure some of these interests just come naturally to her (that's why they're such a great couple), but I also suspect that she has put forth some effort to take an interest in some of the things that interest Michael. I think a PS that demonstrates this ability should stay on the list.<sup>15</sup>

**Selection Criterion # 6:** Is the PS unselfish? I think there will be signs of this in the dating process. I think Mom and Dad's unselfishness has been one of the greatest attributes of their marriage throughout the years. On many occasions, Mom and Dad's unselfishness has been evidenced by the sacrifices they have made for our family. Perhaps the best way to explain the importance of an unselfish spouse is to quote the wise man that once said, "he that is unselfish has the strength of 10 men."<sup>16</sup>

I know this submission is long, but I don't think there is a more important decision we make in our lives. I hope that thinking about these "Selection Criteria" will help the unmarried members of our family to successfully choose an eternal companion. I also hope that this helps the married members of our family to think about our potential and where our efforts should be focused. Through all of this, perhaps the best guide and help available to us is prayer. Families can be eternal, and I know that our Heavenly Father is willing and able to help each of us as we select a spouse and strive to be a better spouse.

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<sup>13</sup> If the PS doesn't get at least a 93% on the quiz, pretend that your cell phone is ringing and run from the PS's apartment as fast as you can. Don't answer the phone for 2 weeks.

<sup>14</sup> Physical attraction could also probably be addressed under this heading, but I don't think that needs too much developing.

<sup>15</sup> I also think it is a talent that all of us married folks should strive to emulate.

<sup>16</sup> I'm sure all of us can recognize selfishness in others (and hopefully in ourselves), so I won't insult your intelligence on this one. Plus, I'm trying to keep this to 3 pages.