

Romance in Marriage: Perspectives, Pitfalls, and Principles

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Introduction:

Romance is a popular topic in our society, in our communities, and in our relationships. In fact, the amount of romance in spouses' interactions is frequently portrayed as a critical barometer of the status and quality of their marriage relationship. Messages of how marriages "turn stale" or "lose their spark" abound in our society, more often than not coming from media and advertising sources that offer us a wide variety of ways to "keep the spark alive" in our marriage relationships. Other voices discount romance, regarding it as the fanciful yearnings of unrealistic and inexperienced individuals. Those who dismiss romance often encourage their spouse or other "starry-eyed romantics" to "get real" and accept the mundane and uneventful interactions of marriage and parenting. The contrast of these two positions presents married couples with an important question: *How important is romance in marriage?* And for couples with a knowledge of the restored gospel, the question deepens: *"Is romance a critical part of a celestial marriage?"*

How we answer these questions has a lot to do with the *perspectives* we use to frame and define romance and whether or not we are able to avoid some of the *pitfalls* or myths about romance that abound in our popular culture. The value and importance of romance in marriage is also determined by the *principles* that guide us as we make efforts to strengthen our relationship with our spouse. This presentation will use gospel teachings and insights from marital research to discuss the role of "divine romance" in marriage and give some general principles of how spouses can strengthen their marriages and deepen the level of romance in their relationships.

Perspectives on Romance

In Search of a Definition of Romance:

Dictionary: *Romance* = 1. A long medieval narrative in verse or prose, typically written in one of the Romance dialects, about adventures of knights and other chivalric heroes. 2. A fictitious tale of wonderful and extraordinary events, characterized by a nonrealistic or idealizing use of imagination. 3. Without a basis in fact; fanciful, not practical.

Internet/Popular Culture: *Romance* = Candles, flowers, dating services, gifts, chocolate, psychic and astrological readings, romance novels, poetry, physical intimacy

Spiritual Sources: *Romance* = “Romantic love is not only a part of life, but literally a dominating influence of it. It is deeply and significantly religious. There is no abundant life without it. Indeed, the highest degree of the celestial kingdom is unattainable in the absence of it.”

—President Boyd K. Packer, BYU Fireside, 1963

Contrasting Definitions of Romance:

An Inherently “Fuzzy” Concept

	Popular Romance	Divine Romance
Characteristics	Idealistic Intense [“ <i>falling in love</i> ”] Consuming Unpredictable Out of control [“ <i>falling out of love</i> ”] Material and commercial Physical and sexual Grand and demonstrative	Realistic and optimistic Constant [“ <i>choosing to love</i> ”] Abiding [agency and choice] Predictable Self-control [obedience and sacrifice] Emotional and personal Soulful – spirit and body Intimate and infinite
Type of Partnership	Spontaneous soul mates [“ <i>a priori</i> match or fit”]	Intentional companions [“ <i>created and adaptive fit</i> ”]
Contexts	Eden-like life: carefree, childfree, adversity-free [“ <i>Marriage on a desert island</i> ”] Premarital couples and newlyweds	Zion-like life: children, balancing multiple stewardships, adversity [“ <i>Marriage in the Lehi 23rd Ward</i> ”] Shared partnership across the marital life course
Purpose/Objective	Romance = An end in and of itself	Romance = A means to divine ends

Divine Romance and Divine Love

“*Divine love* is not like the association of the world which is misnamed love, which is mostly physical attraction . . . the love of which the Lord speaks is not only physical attraction, but also faith, confidence, understanding, and partnership. It is devotion and companionship, parenthood, common ideals and standards. It is cleanliness of life and sacrifice and unselfishness. This kind of love never tires nor wanes. It lives on through sickness and sorrow, through prosperity and privation, through accomplishment and disappointment, through time and eternity.”

—President Spencer W. Kimball

“Respect [for one’s spouse] comes of recognition that each of us is a son or daughter of God, endowed with something of His divine nature, that each is an individual entitled to expression and cultivation of individual talents and deserving of forbearance, of patience, of understanding, of courtesy, of thoughtful consideration. *True love* is not so much a matter of romance as it is a matter of *anxious concern* for the wellbeing of one’s companion.”

—President Gordon B. Hinckley, 1971

In an eternal perspective, *divine romance* is the symbolic communication of *divine love* between spouses.

Pitfalls or Myths of Popular Romance

1. Romance should be easy and spontaneous.
– *The “soul mate” myth*
2. Marriage and parenting are the antitheses of romance.
– *The “children smother romance” myth*
3. Romance is only a “once in a while” thing.
– *The “it’s gotta be big” myth*
4. Women desire romance, men do not.
– *The “Mars and Venus” myth*
5. Romance is expensive.
– *The “It’s gotta have a price tag” myth*
6. Romance can only happen when spouses are together.
– *The “hooked at the hip” myth*
7. Romance only happens when couples are alone.
– *The “vacation marriage” myth*
8. Romance feels better to receive than give.
– *The “my spouse isn’t romantic” myth*

“Many popular songs and films make reference to loving forever or to an everlasting love. For the world, these lyrics are simply poetic; for us, they are genuine expressions of our divine potential. We believe that eternal love, eternal marriages, and eternal families are ‘central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of his children’ (Proc. ¶ 1). However, every couple will encounter some struggles on their journey toward this glorious destiny. There are no perfect marriages in the world because there are no perfect people. *But our doctrine teaches us how to nurture our marriages toward perfection and how to keep the romance in them along the way.* No one need ever ‘fall out of love.’ Falling out of love is a cunning myth which causes many broken hearts and homes.”

—Elder Lynn G. Robbins, *Ensign*, 2000

Principles of Romance

- Prioritize Romance
 - Schedule priority
 - 5 magic hours
- Personalize Romance
 - Effective communication of love
 - Love styles – two ways to “short-circuit” love
- Ritualize Romance
 - Intentional marriages
 - Traditions and rituals
- Spiritualize Romance
 - Divine love = “An Endowed Gift”

“In a final injunction to us He [Christ] said, ‘A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you’ (John 13:34). Of course such Christlike staying power in romance and marriage requires more than we naturally have. It requires *an endowment from heaven*. Remember Mormon’s promise—that such love, the love we each yearn for and cling to, is bestowed upon true followers of Christ (see Moro. 7:48). You want capability and safety in dating and romance, in married life and eternity? Be a true disciple of Jesus. Be a genuine, committed, word-and-deed Latter-day Saint. *Believe that your faith has everything to do with your romance, because it does*. You separate dating from discipleship at your peril. Or to phrase that more positively, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, is the only lamp by which you can successfully see the true path of love and happiness for you and your sweetheart.”

—Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Devotional Address, BYU, 2000.

Recommended Readings:

Gospel Sources:

Dr. David C. Dollahite (Editor), *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, Deseret Book, 2000.

Elder Lynn G. Robbins, “Agency and Love in Marriage,” *Ensign*, October 2000, 16.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments,” BYU Publications, 1988.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, “Except the Lord Build the House . . .,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 71.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen, “The Gospel and Romantic Love,” *New Era*, February 2002, 10.

Elder Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen, *The Belonging Heart*, Deseret Book, 1994.

Non-Gospel Sources:

Dr. Blaine J. Fowers, *Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness*, Josey-Bass, 2000.

Dr. William J. Doherty, *Take Back Your Marriage*, Guilford Press, 2001.