

Anxiously Engaged

Supplemental Lesson

The Soulmate Trap



Introduction

Girl meets boy and after spending time together, they “just know” they are “meant to be together.” This isn’t just a trite Hollywood plot line; this is the way many people believe they will make the decision about whom they will marry. In fact, 73% of Americans surveyed said they believe in the concept of soulmates – that there is a “special person waiting for you somewhere out there.”¹ While common, this kind of “soulmate thinking” can be a trap and can lead to rushed courtships and unrealistic expectations about the person we decide to marry.

Soulmate language

We might believe that we don’t buy into the idea of soulmates, but we should consider the language we use. For example, we often hear or use the phrases “supposed to be” or “meant to be” to describe the twists and turns in dating relationships (“She is a really great person but when she started talking to her old boyfriend again, I knew it wasn’t meant to be.”) We also tend to talk about the people we or others are dating in terms of “the one” or “the right one.” (“The two of you have been dating a long time, do you think he is the one?”) Even if unintentional, this kind of language can influence the way we view our decisions about who we date and marry.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

“I know this may be a disappointment for some of you, but I don’t believe there is only one right person for you. I think I fell in love with my wife, Harriet, from the first moment I saw her. Nevertheless, had she decided to marry someone else, I believe I would have met and fallen in love with someone else. I am eternally grateful that this didn’t happen, but I don’t believe she was my one chance at happiness in this life, nor was I hers.”²



Activity #1:

Discuss the following questions together:

1. What have been your honest views about soulmates?
2. Have we used soulmate language to talk to each other about our relationship? To talk to others about our relationship?
3. Do you think soulmate thinking has influenced the way we think about our relationship?

Problems with soulmate thinking:

Rushed courtships

If we believe in soulmates, then dating becomes the process of finding our “one and only” and matching up with the person who is meant to be the love of our life. And, if there really is only one person for us (as soulmate thinking teaches), then chances are that our souls will recognize each other pretty quickly and we will “just

know.” (“When you know, you know.”) This kind of soulmate thinking can cause us to quickly eliminate potential dating partners because we believe they aren’t “the one.” Or, we might rush into deciding to marry someone because we “just know.” In either case, soulmate thinking might cause us to rush a decision that should be more carefully considered.



Dating paralysis

In our faith, we recognize the importance of the decision to marry—it is a big decision with eternal consequences. If that obvious pressure isn’t enough, trying to find and recognize our soulmate can add to our stress: Am I doing the right things to find him/her? Did I already meet him/her and I didn’t know it? Putting pressure on ourselves to find our soulmate can increase our fear and anxiety and can lead us to dating paralysis or to just stop trying.

Unrealistic expectations

Soulmate thinking can lead to unrealistic expectations of our spouse and our marriage. If we believe that we have found “the one,” then

we may also believe that marriage to our soulmate should be easy and trouble-free. When our marriage isn’t trouble-free (of course) soulmate thinking might lead us to we think we’ve chosen “the wrong person.” These kinds of unrealistic expectations are pretty common. Therapists counseling newly-married Latter-day Saint couples say that this is the most common issue facing couples—71% of couples experience it.³

Activity #2:

Discuss the following questions together:

1. Do you picture our future marriage as fairly easy and trouble-free?
2. Do you anticipate that we will have challenges in our marriage? If so, in what areas?
3. How do you feel that we will handle challenges we aren't expecting? What could we do to be more prepared for these unexpected challenges?

Soulmates are created, not found

In his characteristically direct style, President Spencer W. Kimball said:

"Soul mates' are fiction and an illusion ... it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price."⁴

And in a continuation of his quote from above, President Uchtdorf said:

"Frankly, [marriage] takes work. For any relationship to survive, both parties bring their own magic with them and use that to sustain their love. Although I have said that I do not believe in a one-and-only soulmate for anyone, I do know this: once you commit to being married, your spouse becomes your soulmate, and it is your duty and responsibility to work every day to keep it that way. Once you have committed, the search for a soulmate is over. Our thoughts and actions turn from looking to creating."⁵

Activity #3:

Discuss the following questions together:

1. Why do Church leaders emphasize our responsibility in making a wise choice and then becoming each other's soulmate?
2. What can we do to make sure we "work every day" to be each other's soulmates?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Soulmates are created not found. Once we commit to marriage, our spouse becomes our soulmate and we must "work every day to keep it that way."

Endnotes

- 1 [Marist Poll, 2011](#)
- 2 ["Reflection in the Water" Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2009](#)
- 3 ["LDS Counselor Ratings of LDS Marital Couples" Travis R. Adams and Robert F. Stahmann, 2002](#)
- 4 ["Marriage and Divorce" Spencer W. Kimball, 1976](#)
- 5 ["Reflection in the Water" Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2009](#)