

The Dance of Marriage
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A few years after my wife and I moved to Cache Valley, we heard about Elite Dance Hall in Hyrum, Utah, which had a spring-loaded floor. We decided to try it out. While the hall itself was quaint and the live band enjoyable, the memorable part of the evening involved the patrons.

Couples of all ages and levels of dance experience were there. But there were five or six older couples who stood out. They clearly *loved* to dance. In their generation, dancing had been a major source of entertainment. And they certainly looked in their element as they exuded grace, rhythm, and style. They were Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers...that is, until they fell apart.

But they didn't fall apart together. They fell apart separately. The custom of that generation was to occasionally trade partners. That's when things got interesting. Having changed partners with another dancing duo, Fred and Ginger reverted into something quite ordinary. The confident feet that had been tripping the light fantastic, were unsure and halting. The flair was gone. Yet, when they returned to their partners, there were Fred and Ginger again, twirling, gliding, and lightly skipping across the floor. In each other's arms, they were free again. Having danced together for years, they knew each other's moves, signals, and patterns. They easily interpreted subtle signals knew what followed.

My wife and I were still learning to avoid each other's toes. We were focusing hard on figuring out each other's rhythms and quirks. It was an ongoing effort—mostly fun, occasionally painful.

All good dancers don't dance the same. Nor are all good marriages alike. But there are a few ingredients all good dancers and marriage partners have in common: a desire to improve, an ability to focus on the other partner, and a willingness to keep trying when something goes wrong.

In a study of 650 couples, Dr. John Gottman found that happily married couples tune into each other and are familiar with each others' worlds. They become well versed in each others' likes, dislikes, hopes and dreams. They express their fondness in big and small ways. They don't do this perfectly. In fact, some days they don't even do it well. But they keep trying. He asks how she fared with the dentist. She asks how his meeting with his boss went. Although he doesn't care for ballet, he goes with her because she loves it and doesn't like to go alone. While there are many hours that these couples are apart, their thoughts don't drift far from each other, at least not for long.

Investing in knowing your spouse's heart and mind keeps the embers burning in marriage. Couples that carve out time for each other and continue their courtship are more insulated from the inevitable stresses that would otherwise tear at their union.

Coming to really know one's spouse isn't easy. Bruised toes are inevitable. But it's not the number of bruises that count. It's whether, in the process, you're learning to pay attention to and adapt to your partner. Don't get discouraged and don't give up. If you need motivation, look for experts in your neighborhood. If you're watching, you'll see them gliding by occasionally. They may, occasionally, sport a bandaged toe. But they're relaxed in each other's arms and boy can they dance.