



L. Tom Perry and Family First Weddings

by Paul Barker | Sep 30, 2015 | Featured, Temple | 11 comments

FAMILY FIRST *Weddings*

Everyone seems to have their favorite apostle, some might even have a story of “the one time I met Elder so and so”. I don’t know if I had a favorite at this particular time in my life, but I do have three moments I have shared with Elder L. Tom Perry. These are the stories. I hope you enjoy them!

The first has no real meaning. I was in at an art show on the top floor of Zions Bank in downtown Salt Lake. I was to meet a client there. While I was waiting and looking at the different art pieces I noticed a rather tall elderly man. I recognized him as soon as I saw his face, it was Elder Perry. Some people were stopping to say hi. I quickly thought to myself should I ask him a question? I decided it wasn’t the place to press him with any questions. So I decided just to say hi. He shook my hand and said “It is good to see you”. I said something stupid like, “it’s good to be seen”. It was dumb, but I doubt he heard me.



Elder Perry my shoulder angel
whispering in my ear "Han Solo shot
first"

The second time I came across Elder L. Tom Perry I was flipping through the channels late one night and settled for Sixteen Candles while I brushed my teeth and got ready for bed. While brushing and I couldn't believe my eyes! There he was in the movie! I never knew he was an actor. But alas when I told my friends about it, they quickly told me that it wasn't him, but an actor named Max Showalter.



Not Elder Perry

The third time, had much more meaning. This story requires a little more background...

Family First Weddings was started by my brother Mike and I about 2 years ago with a mission to separate the temple sealing ceremony from the civil wedding. The civil wedding and sealing are combined in only a few countries like the USA and Canada, but in the majority of the Mormon world these two things are separated. The reason we wanted these two things separated was because many part member families were being excluded from a huge life event of their daughter, son, brother or sister. Even fully active, worthy family members were being excluded simply because they were not endowed yet. To participate in the LDS temple sealing, you must be endowed and carry a current temple recommend. A couple could choose a civil wedding first to include all of their friends and family but church policy states that the couple must wait a year penalty period to enter into the temple to be sealed. Again, this is only in a few countries. In Mexico, a couple will have a civil wedding and then the next day go to the temple to be sealed. But cross the border into the USA, that same couple would have to wait a year to be sealed if they tried the same thing.

The following are some examples showing how various scenarios would play out under the current LDS church policies:

Scenario 1: A man marries a woman who already has three children from a previous marriage, ages 20, 17 and 15. When the children are sealed to this man, they are all in attendance in the temple. Two months later, the 20-year-old daughter is sealed to her husband in the temple. Unfortunately, the 17- and 15-year-old siblings will have to wait outside.

Solution: The daughter could have the option of having a civil ceremony where all of her family could be in attendance if the year wait penalty was dissolved.

Scenario 2: A 19-year-old girl is going to be married in the temple. Her twin sister will not be allowed to attend the sealing because she is not yet endowed.

Solution: The sister could have the option of having a civil ceremony where all of her family could be in attendance if the year wait penalty was dissolved.

Scenario 3: A temple-worthy, temple recommend carrying couple decides to have a civil marriage to include all of their family (many non-members on both sides). Because of their civil union, according to church policy they would have to wait one year before they are allowed to be sealed to each other. However, this does not invalidate their temple recommends so they may attend the temple and perform all temple ordinances *including* marriage sealings for the dead, but may not receive this ordinance for themselves.

Solution: Dissolve the one-year wait policy.

Any rational person could see that there are issues with the current policy. (It is just that: a policy, not doctrine). All you have to do is put yourself in the shoes of any loving mother or father that is not a member of the church to realize there will be much pain on their child's wedding day. Having a civil wedding first (as done already in about 90% of the Mormon world) would cure all of these issues.

So Mike and I decided to work from within the church. We didn't want to embarrass the church in any way, so we didn't reach out to any media. We gathered story after story of members and non-members that were excluded from the temple wedding. We also gathered stories from brides and grooms. Their stories were all painful.

As we shared the letters on the Family First Weddings website, we got some pushback from traditional believing members. "It is fine the way it is." "It is the true way of being married." "The non-members could be baptized so that they could attend the wedding." "I support the brethren," etc. But most saw it as common sense because the separation of the sealing and civil were already being practiced around the world.

Once we had enough stories, we gathered them into a packet with a letter from us to be sent up the chain. Mike approached his Stake President, who gave us an address to the office of the Presidency of the Seventy. Before we sent the letter and stories up the chain I had a chance to sit down with my stake president to talk about this subject. In the meeting with him he read the letter. (You can read the letter here). My stake president completely agreed with the letter. He didn't know why this was church policy and he personally had seen many stories of exclusion. He saw this policy as an issue that could be fixed, although he would not endorse the letter – (which I was not asking


for him to do).

I asked him if he could send the letter up the chain of command. He told me that he could better than that. His father-in-law was Elder L. Tom Perry and every year he vacations with the whole Perry family on the 4th of July at Bear Lake. So he would take my letter at that time and ask him directly about this policy. My stake president would have his secretary contact me to set up a follow-up meeting.

I waited patiently for our next meeting. I got the call and excitedly went into my stake president's office. After some small talk, he told me he brought the letter to the attention of Elder Perry. Elder Perry read the letter and completely agreed with it. Elder Perry also did not know why this policy was only practiced in a few countries. He also agreed that many family members were being excluded and hurt because of this policy. I thanked him for his time and left the meeting with a smile on my face.

AAAAAH - Validation. After the meeting, I called Mike and told him the good news. We were both excited. He later sent his packet to the office of the Presidency of the Seventy. We got a response from the offices of the First Presidency, stating that they received the package, which means the letter moved up the chain of command.

So now we wait. We have heard rumor after rumor about this policy change. But as more and more apostles have become ill and old, I don't think much has moved since we first sent our letter in. And as we wait, I want to personally thank Elder Perry for giving us a little bit of hope that things could change within the church. As three new apostles are chosen this weekend, I hope that they will have the same rational thoughts towards this policy as did Elder Perry. And who knows, maybe they will make an announcement regarding this topic!

In the meantime if you would like to submit your story of your wedding day, or if you were excluded from that  we would love to hear from you! Head over to the familyfirstweddings.com website and submit your story. A special thanks to all that have already submitted their story.

271 2 2

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