

Series: "Single. Married" (Part 4)
"When the Honeymoon Is Over"

I want to talk about "being in love", and what that's all about, and also look at what happens when this first initial rush of romance passes and the honeymoon period is over. Before we do, let's listen to the wisdom of some youngsters as they give us some "Kids Advice On Love and Marriage".

How do you decide whom to marry? "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming." Alan, age 10

"No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with."
Kristen, age 10

What is the right age to get married? "Twenty-three is the best age because you know the person *forever* by then." Camille, age 10

"No age is good to get married at. You got to be a fool to get married."
Freddie, age 6

How can a stranger tell if two people are married? "You might have to guess, based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids." Derrick, age 8

What do most people do on a date? "On the first date they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date." Martin, age 10

When is it ok to kiss someone? "The law says you have to be eighteen, so I wouldn't want to mess with that." Curt, age 7

"The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do." Howard, age 8

Is it better to be single or married? "It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need someone to clean up after them." Anita, age 9

How would you make a marriage work? Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a truck." Ricky, age 10

Well, let's look at this experience we call being "in love", the first phase of a romantic relationship.

Most of us at some point have fallen in love, or at least had a crush on someone. It

can be one of the most exhilarating times of life: the kisses, holding hands, day-dreaming about the person with whom we're infatuated, the thrill of just being close to one another. The world's a wonderful place when we are in love!

However, a couple of things about this stage can be pointed out. First of all, *it isn't very reliable*. It's almost like a period of "temporary insanity", when we may do things that are strange and out of character, when we may make some very unwise choices. For instance, I had an uncle who, around the time he was getting married, said he'd be satisfied if he had to eat soup the rest of his life if he could marry Gerry! Well, that concession didn't last long!

The term, "falling in love" is an accurate description, because it's more like being swept in an emotional rush than it is operating by reason or choice. We may find ourselves *falling* for someone who may not be a very suitable partner. For example, the person may be immature, or very dysfunctional, or may already be married! This is why it's not a bad idea before we get too serious about a person if we ask friends or family members what *they* think of the person we're dating. They can often see the person in a much more realistic light than we do!

The other thing about this stage we call being "in love" is that *it does not last forever*. A psychologist by the name of Dr. Dorothy Tennov did long range studies on the "in-love" phenomenon and discovered that the average length of this romantic obsession is *2 years!* Imagine if it lasted forever – we'd never get anything done!

A while back *Time* magazine had a front page article entitled "The Chemistry of Love". It said, "Scientists are discovering that romance is a biological affair." They discovered that when we are attracted to another person and react romantically, our brain is flooded with certain chemicals that are natural amphetamines. They give us a natural high, and create feelings of elation and euphoria. However, these highs don't last forever. They last about 3-4 years, then we build up a tolerance to them. At that point, other chemicals called "endorphins" kick in. These chemicals are similar to morphine. They have a soothing effect, and give lovers a sense of security, a peace and a calm. So, the giddy feelings of romantic love have some basis in our body chemistry!

Perhaps you are familiar with the TV show, "The Bachelorette". A young lady chooses from among a whole host of guys vying for her love. It might show her zeroing in on one guy. It shows them hugging and kissing. Later she says she could just feel the "chemistry" between them. Actually, that may be more true than she probably imagined!

I've wondered at times: Why did God create us to fall in love, when sometimes

under the spell of the “love bug” we make bad choices for a mate? Perhaps God knew that there were going to be florists and poets and romance novelists - people who earn their living on our romantic inclinations – and God wanted to keep them in business! Well, in truth, this “urge to merge” is part of our animal instincts. It’s this romantic attraction that drives us to mate and reproduce. Without this, we humans would become extinct!

The initial romantic phase can be beautiful and a wonderful experience of life! I’m glad that the Bible contains a book called Song of Songs, or the Song of Solomon. It is Hebrew love poetry. It is romantic and even sensual, as it celebrates the exquisite romantic love between a new bride and groom. Listen to these selections from the Song of Songs. The woman says, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine.” The man says, “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.” And the woman replies, “How handsome you are, my beloved! Oh how charming!” (Song of Songs 1:2, 15-16). The guy continues, “Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women.” And the lady gushes with love, “Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.” Once again, the man expresses his passionate love, “My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely” (Song of Songs 2:2, 5-6, 14).

But what happens when this initial phase passes and when those intense euphoric feelings subside?

I myself had dated, been engaged and broke it off. I was 27 years old and still single. I noticed this very pretty young lady in the church I was serving. She was just out of high school, so I didn’t even think about asking her out. I invited her to help me with the youth group. Soon it became more than just working in ministry together. I asked my wife Nancy to tell a little bit about what that time was like for her.

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Good morning. As I'm standing here I'm feeling very humble, as I'm certainly no expert when it comes to marriage, but I can only share with you what I have learned.

I liked the children's quotes that Harry read, especially the one that said, "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry – God decides it all the way before and you get to find out later who you're stuck with." Well, I don't know about the "stuck with" part, but I do think God definitely has a part and place in my marriage.

Harry and I have been married for many years. Looking back those first couple of years were a little overwhelming, and I sometimes thought to myself, "What were you thinking!"

Believe it or not, we are just like other couples – we don't get along perfectly – we don't go without arguments, heartaches and pain, but I like to think with God in our lives, that our marriage consists of 3.

To give you a little background, I was only 18 years old, almost 19, when we got married. Harry was my pastor. In that first year I became a wife, a pastor's wife (which has a role of its own), and we also had our first son. Now, Harry is a little older than me, which has never been a problem. The big difference is the male verses female issue.

My mother, who was an active member of my home church, said to me as we were planning our wedding, "Are you sure you want to be a pastor's wife?" Well, being the naïve person I am, I said, "I just want to be Harry's wife", and I didn't think much about her question. What a rude awakening when I realized that I was actually a part of his ministry, with some high expectations put on me, and then I realized why my mom asked me that question.

I'll never forget the first experience I had was when the District Superintendent (equivalent to Harry's boss) would come to the church for a Charge Conference with his wife and the expectation was that they would have dinner in our home. Now if that isn't intimidating to a 19 year old who just got married, was pregnant with our first child, and could barely cook hot dogs let alone a decent meal! But somehow we got through it. Harry didn't lose his job and I don't think they got sick on the meal we served!

During our years together, we have moved many times as Harry would be asked to serve another church, raised 3 children and have been blessed with 5 grandsons. We've had our share of ups and downs, but one very important lesson I've learned about us is that he is a man and thinks differently than I do. I've learned that I need to tell him what I want and not assume he can read my mind, and that marriage is definitely give and take. Those wedding vows we took, "for better or worse" have certainly rung in my head many times, but they were our vows we took together in my home church before God, and with His help I'm sticking with him "till death do us part."

Looking back at my life, it was probably not the best decision to be married so young, but it was a great decision in choosing (with God's help) the person that I married and am "stuck with"! Thank you.

Most people enter marriage with great expectations. We fantasize about how wonderful it will be – but often experience a big letdown after a while. We discover flaws in the person we married that we never noticed during the dating days. After the wedding, we settle into the routine of going to work, paying the bills, trying to cope with our differences as a couple. Perhaps children come. Few couples are fully prepared for the impact that the first child has on the marriage. One researcher found

that 67% of couples reported a significant drop in marital satisfaction after the first child was born. All these things take their toll. The bewildered husband or wife may think, “What did I get myself into?” Or, “I made a mistake”. Or even think, “I’m not sure I love this person anymore.”

Are there ways we can build a satisfying marriage if we’ve experienced a letdown after that first initial glow? Can we fall in love again with our partner if the feelings are gone? The answer is “yes”!

We have to understand that almost every marriage (if not every marriage) goes through predictable passages and stages. Three Christian counselors from the Minirth-Meier Clinic have written a book *Passages of a Marriage*. In it they identify 5 stages that married couples go through, and the *developmental tasks* that need to be worked through at each stage.

The first stage is called ***Young love*** (first 2 years). The task at this stage is to overcome the idealistic notions of marriage, and to mold the two individuals into one unit, a family.

The second phase is ***Realistic love*** (3rd through 10th years). The question during this period is can you stay in love when reality sets in, and when you may become more aware of the subconscious reasons you married your spouse, and the hidden agendas and secret contracts.

The next stage is called ***Comfortable love*** (11th through 25th years). The goal here is to establish and maintain an individual identity along with your marriage identity, and to resist the now or never syndrome.

Then there is the period these counselors call ***Renewing love*** (26th through 35th years). The task during this time is to grieve and accept the inevitable losses of your marriage – the financial stresses, the lost youth, the unrealized dreams.

Finally, there is the time of ***Transcendent love*** (36th year and after). The challenge of this period is to unveil new reasons for existing after the major life tasks have been completed.

Dr. John Gottman, a psychologist at the University of Washington, has done extensive research on married couples. He has written books and produced videotapes. He has worked with hundreds of couples. He set up an apartment where he could watch couples interact, hooked up to electrodes. He now asserts that within 5 minutes he can predict whether they will stay married or get divorced, claiming a 91% accuracy. Dr. Gottman has written books on how to divorce-proof your

marriage, how to rekindle love once it has died.

Some of what he says goes against the grain of conventional wisdom. He's written a book titled *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*. Let's take a brief look at four of these principles.

First, he says, ***know your mate***. He says that the key to maintaining a good and lasting marriage is to develop a healthy friendship – and healthy friendships are formed when partners get to know the other person, his or her likes and dislikes.

It's not whether or not you fight (every couple fights). Or even *how you fight*. But what happens when you're not fighting, according to Gottman. He suggests that a couple make a "love map". We can do that by asking our partner a whole host of questions: What do you like? What do you think about this? As I recall the responses I received from the questionnaires, both women *and* men expressed the desire that their partner be a friend or companion. Often, friendship is built and based on having common interests. So, *know your mate*.

Secondly, Gottman says, ***nurture your fondness and admiration for your mate***. No matter how bad the relationship – even if the marriage is shaky and on the rocks – all of us can choose to bypass harping on the things wrong with our partner and cultivate an appreciation for the things that are good about our partner. He suggests that we write a letter to our partner, telling about why we fell in love, and what we admire most about him or her. Gottman speaks about a "magic ratio". He says that marriages succeed when for every 1 conflict there are 5 moments of positive affirmation.

Every one of us is capable of regularly nurturing fondness and admiration for our spouse – even if we don't *feel like* complimenting him or her. *Do it*. Offer feelings that are positive and appreciative will follow.

A third thing Gottman says is important is that a couple ***needs to turn toward one another (and not away from each other)***. Great marriages are formed in the *little interactions* – not the occasional big getaways for a weekend alone or that 10th anniversary trip to some exotic island. But in the little things – going to the grocery store together, calling each other or emailing each other through the day, sitting in the room reading the newspaper and making comments to each other. We don't need lengthy, in-depth conversations (he says that's unrealistic), but those regular exchanges where we listen and pay attention to each other.

A fourth key to a successful marriage is to ***let your partner influence you***. This is a word especially for the men! You men may not like to hear this, but listen up! In

our culture, women are well practiced at accepting influence from men. But, Gottman insists, it's vital that we men learn to let our partner influence us. I believe that in some ways women have instincts that we men lack – call it “women’s intuition”, or whatever. Many times in my ministry I’ve asked Nancy, “What do you think of this? What do you think I should do?” Over the years I have greatly valued her common sense and instinctual wisdom! Dr. Gottman maintains that there is a 81% chance that a marriage will self-destruct when men resist their wife’s influence. Interesting!

Well, what am I saying in all of this? I’m saying that *every marriage, in order to be healthy and lasting, needs to move beyond the falling-in-love” experience, and reach a place of mature love. In fact, genuine, mature, enduring love can’t begin until the “falling-in-love” stage runs its course!*

In the *Time* magazine article I referred to, it quoted a psychologist: “Early love is when you love the way the other person makes you feel. Mature love is when you love the person as he or she is.” God designed us so we are attracted to one another and fall in love. This can be wonderful! But God also wants us to do the long-term, serious work of building a Christian marriage, and fulfilling our calling to serve and minister to the needs of our partner. A big part of accomplishing this is to remember our wedding vows: “For better, for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.” This means *doing* the loving thing even if the *feelings* aren’t there. The good news is that if we hang in there, the loving feelings can return.

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