

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 5: “REKINDLING THE ROMANCE”

“You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you’ve fallen. Repent and repeat the things you did at first.” Revelation 2: 4-5

Recently a letter to Dear Abby: “Do all marriages go stale after 5 years? Ours has. My husband and I don’t seem to have much to talk about any more. We used to talk about our kids, but now they’re grown and gone and we really don’t have anything to converse about. I have no major complaints with my husband. But the old excitement is gone. We watch a lot of Television. And we read. And we have friends. But when we’re alone together it’s pretty dull. We even sleep in separate bedrooms now. Is there some way to recapture the old magic?” Signed; “The Song has ended.” How sad is that? Reader’s Digest reports that the number one question people ask marriage counselors is: “Why don’t we love each other the way we used to?”

This morning I want to address that very important question of ‘how can we rekindle the romance in our Marriage?’ The Bible teaches that what often happens in a person’s spiritual life can also happen in a person’s marriage. The Bible teaches that a person’s spiritual life is either growing closer to God or drifting away from God. That is what I often see in marriages today. They don’t stand still. They are always a work in progress, progressing one direction or another, closer, or farther apart. What do you do when your marriage has gone flat? How can you prevent your marriage from going flat? How do you rekindle that first love?

You do what Jesus (through John) told the Church at Ephesus to do, when the church had lost its first love. Notice first, how relationships often deteriorate: **ROMANCE** fades into **REALITY**, which soon becomes a **RUT**, which then produces **RESENTMENT**, which finally triggers **REGRET**. If you want to keep this from happening in your marriage, here’s what to do:

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The verse tells us to do three things: **REMEMBER, REPENT, REPEAT**. Today I want to share with you five actions that spring from these 3 commands that will cause a rekindling of the romance in your marriage. They cause romance in the first place, and they can cause romance to re-blossom. If I were to summarize the message in a short phrase today it would be this: "**FEELINGS FOLLOW ACTION**." If you act romantic you will begin to feel romantic. Not vice versa. You act your way into a feeling. It's easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action. This is an important principle! Here are the 5 ingredients necessary to Rekindle your First Love:

1. ATTENTION (Intellectual Intimacy)

"...Live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you...Look to each other's interests, not merely your own." Phil. 2: 2-4

The very first sign you knew you were falling in love is when you noticed that somebody was paying attention to you and you began to pay attention back! The first step in re-falling in love is to start paying attention again. You used to write notes, spend hours on the phone, hours just talking together. You bought flowers and cute dumb little gifts. Over and over all those things say: You have my undivided attention. What happened after you got married? "Get it yourself!" The attention switched. We become complacent and take each other for granted. Men are most prone to fall into this trap, though women can be just as guilty.

Men are goal oriented. When the goal is; "I've got to get a wife!", men can be very creative in reaching that goal. But once they have got the wedding goal met, they unconsciously think: 'Mission Accomplished!' Now let's get on to the next goal in life. That usually becomes providing for the woman, and eventually a family. Not a bad goal, mind you, but watch what happens.

Subtly the goal shifts from the woman to providing for the woman. And the focus shifts to the career. The result is that the wife in a few months is devastated. She's saying, "What happened? I've been dumped for a career. I feel cheated." The point is you have to make time for each other; you must pay attention to each other. Not like the couple that went to the counselor and the wife complained repeatedly that her husband never told her that he loved her any more. When asked if that were true the husband replied: "I told her at our wedding that I loved her...when I change my mind, she'll be the first to know." That's not going to cut it for most women, men either! We have to pay better attention.

2. AFFIRMATION (Emotional Intimacy)

The quickest way for you to put spark back into your marriage is for you to start affirming and appreciating and admiring again the strengths of your spouse, instead of always focusing on their weaknesses.

"Give encouragement to each other and keep strengthening each other." I Thess. 5:11

Everybody wants (needs) to be admired appreciated looked up to. We fall in love with people who admire us, somebody pays attention, and affirms us, and we fall in love with them. We have probably all heard the classic statement: "Treat you husband like a king and he will treat you like a queen." It's simple, but profound. We tend to become what others expect of us. *"...take delight in honoring each other."* Proverbs 12:1 If you will verbalize your love, each day, you will soon begin to feel loving again. A lady came to an attorney demanding a divorce. "I want to divorce my husband. In fact, I don't just want to divorce him; I want to hurt him bad because he's ignored me for so long." She and the attorney then devised a devious plan to really hurt the husband. "It will take a few weeks for me to draw up the papers," said the attorney.

“In the mean time, go home and begin to compliment and affirm your husband everyday. Tell him how great a person he is; really lay on the charm. Tell him how good he is, and how much you ‘appreciate’ him. Build him up. Then when I’ve got the papers finished, we’ll serve notice, and drop him like a rock. It will devastate him. Because he will fall in love with you “thinking” that you really mean all those things.” She called back a month later and said. “Cancel the divorce. We’ve both fallen in love again.” That’s the power of affirmation. When you begin to build each other up, and take delight in honoring one another again, just watch the romance re-ignite!

3. AFFECTION (Physical Intimacy)

Do you remember how affectionate you were during your courting days? What happened? When you walk in the mall and you see a couple holding hands, what is your first reaction? “Oh they must be engaged, or newly in love, or do you say, they must be married 20 years?” I think it’s sad that after the marriage, after the wedding, the touching and tenderness stops in so many marriages. All marriages need large amounts of hugging and kissing and caressing and sitting close together in the car, holding hands is still ok, snuggling, fine. Non-sexual affection is what I’m talking about here, where you are just enjoying each other’s company.

“Husbands...be affectionate!” Eph. 5:19 says. This is a command! Husbands, if you are not being affectionate to your wives, you are committing sin! *“The love a man gives his wife is the extending of his love for himself to enfold her.”* Eph. 5:28. Some say, ‘but I’m just not the affectionate type.’ So what? Were you faking it when you were dating? It’s not in any one’s genes to be affectionate or not affectionate, it’s a learned behavior, and some of us need to go back to school! The best way to learn it is by practice. I want to have you look at a fascinating verse from Genesis 26:8 today:

“But sometime later, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah. Abimelech called for Isaac and exclaimed, ‘She is obviously your wife...’”

The Hebrew word is “Tsachaq” and it means, “to fondle or caress playfully.” The Living Bible translates this word “Petting.” The KJV says: “*Isaac was sporting with Rebekkah his wife.*” We tend to think of petting as something ‘naughty’ done by teenagers, and it is, when done by teenagers who aren’t married! But here we see Isaac and Rebekkah, a married couple, playfully teasing and touching, and having fun at it, and it caused the king to determine they were married! Is this element missing in your marriage? It’s time to find it again, no matter your age; playfulness is still appropriate, even Biblical! Ha!

Now, a gentle reminder for both husbands and wives. Did you know that appearance influences affection? When you dated, you got all spruced up, your hair combed, the nicest clothes. You wanted to look your best for your prospective mate. What changed? You still look your best when you go out in public, but what about at home. I’m not saying that you have to always be made up, and dressed to the nines at home, but maybe once in awhile your spouse might like to see you at your best, when you are not going out! For some of you, the most spiritual thing you could do; would be to go home today and throw away those 14-year-old gym shorts and discard that flannel ‘nightie’ you got for 8th grade graduation!

Men, we have a special challenge here. We have to learn how to give nonsexual affection. We need to learn the art of being affectionate without it leading to making love. For most of us men, non-sexual affection is an oxymoron. And for most of us who assume all affection leads to sex, we are morons!

4. ADVENTURE (Recreational Intimacy)

Many marriages are dull because the joy has gone out of them. Think about “joy” when you hear these verses: “*Enjoy life with your wife you love...*” Eccl. 9:9 “...God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” I Tim. 6:17 “Jesus came enjoying life...” Mt. 11:19

Jesus obviously enjoyed life; his first miracle was making more wine for a wedding party. He was accused of being a glutton; eating and drinking with sinners. He knew how to have fun. What happened to us?

An author I read stated that the number one cause of affairs is boredom. Are you fun to live with? When was the last time you made your wife laugh? Your husband? Predictability kills relationships! The problem for most of us is the way we define fun. "Fun is what you do when you've got all your work finished." The problem is obvious isn't it? We never get our work done. Even after you retire. I've heard more retirees complaining about being busier after they retire than before! What! As a result, the fun in your marriage gets put on the shelf. The person who takes last place is usually your spouse. "We're busy right now, but it's only temporary!" Really? A temporary, hectic schedule becomes a permanent miserable lifestyle. You schedule the fun out of your marriage, and you wonder why the feelings have died!

You don't have to go cliff diving, or bungee jumping, but you must take the time in your relationship for fun, enjoyment, relaxation, even adventure. Go on a date, at least once a week. Take turns planning them and surprise each other. Take turns planning anniversary get away's and do everything your budget will allow.

5. ACCORDANCE (Spiritual Intimacy)

Spiritual accord, oneness in Spirit. The Bible says at Pentecost, "*they were all of one accord.*" Their hearts, their spirits, were knit together. John the apostle describes accord this way: "*if we are living in the light of God's presence...then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other.*" I John 1:7

The key to fellowship with your mate, joy with your spouse, is that both of you live in God's presence. When I'm fully committed to Christ, and my wife is fully committed to Christ, and we're both trying to live for the Lord, it naturally draws us together in a bonding that nothing else can take the place of. There is nothing sweeter than seeing couples in trouble fall in love with God, and soon begin to fall in love with each other, again!

Spiritual harmony, spiritual oneness, brings about emotion oneness, which eventually brings physical oneness. Have you ever noticed that the longer people are married, the more they begin to look alike? (Sorry honey.) Spiritual unity joins you, and it enhances romance. If you have not committed your life, and your marriage to Christ, that's where you must begin today! It doesn't make a lot of sense to try to work on all these other factors, if you have not yet committed your life to Jesus. And let me just say this. If one of you is committed and the other is not yet, don't focus on that person's lack of commitment. It is not your job to convert your unbelieving spouse, that is God's job. Your job is to make sure your life is right with God, your attitudes are loving and your actions are caring. I'm not advocating a marital martyrdom, but genuine affection and kindness while God works out your spouse's salvation. All right, let me say one more thing. (Like you have a choice) Some of you might be thinking you married the wrong person. You are dead wrong! You don't need a new mate; you need a new attitude. If you will begin to act romantically, you will become romantic! Remember, actions produce feelings, not the other way around!

Remember how it used to be, remember the fun things you used to do together? Remember the joy you found in just being together? Then repent for your part in forgetting to do those things. Repent for allowing so much other stuff to interfere with the most important person in your world. Repent for relying on your wayward intentions to do better tomorrow. Repeat the things that brought you together in the first place.

Repeat the priorities you set while winning each other. Repeat the loving, kind, gentle, silly, funny, and even stupid things you used to do. You have to choose to change the spiral, but what fun!

Heavenly Father, I pray that this message will help struggling marriage restore the spark today. That many marriages would be revitalized and become the testimony of your love for us, that you desire them to be. Thank you for creating this whole idea of marriage, romance and intimacy. It's not your will that marriages be dull and boring. I pray that you would replace the lack of touching in many marriages with a new tenderness, the lack of appreciation with new affirmations and new admiration. Help us to discover some new adventure, to break us out of the mold. And most of all, help us to have spiritual accord, spiritual oneness, spiritual intimacy. Father, if there is one person here today who does not know you, I pray they would say. "Yes, I want God in my life. I want Jesus Christ to be number one." In His name. Amen

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How relationships often deteriorate:

_____ fades into _____, which soon becomes a _____, which then produces _____, which finally triggers _____.

What to do about it:

Three word Sermon Summary:

1. _____ (_____ Intimacy)
“...Live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you...Look to each other’s interests, not merely your own.” Phil. 2: 2-4
2. _____ (_____ Intimacy)
“Give encouragement to each other and keep strengthening each other.” I Thess. 5:11
3. _____ (_____ Intimacy)
“But sometime later, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah. Abimelech called for Isaac and exclaimed, ‘She is obviously your wife...’”
4. _____ (_____ Intimacy)
“Enjoy life with your wife you love...” Eccl. 9:9 “...God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” I Tim. 6:17 “Jesus came enjoying life...” Mt. 11:19
5. _____ (_____ Intimacy)
“if we are living in the light of God’s presence...then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other.” I John 1:7

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Study Guide

1. Look at how relationships deteriorate, and rank where your relationship is currently. Share with the group your analysis of your ranking.
2. Do you agree or disagree that Feelings Follow Action? Give an example or two.
3. Discuss the five ingredients necessary to rekindle the romance in your relationship. Share the one your spouse is excelling at, and the one your spouse might need to improve upon.
4. What “fun” things did you used to do, you’d like to begin doing again?
5. Are there things for which you need to repent, that you have failed to maintain in your relationship?