

Mt Albert Baptist Church

Series: Quest

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Valentines Day: A Passionate Marriage

imarrriage clip # 1

Do you remember the day you first fell in love? Do you remember your first Valentine? Your heart pumped. The butterflies went crazy in your stomach. You had met Mr Right or Mrs Perfect.

I remember my first Valentine. I was 10 years old. Her name was Rebekkah. I remember the day she stepped into our school yard. She had moved to our school from Australia. My best friend and I thought she was the cutest. We were both became her boyfriends. We both went around to her place to walk in the woods. Though, I got eventually got dumped and their early romance developed further.

Thankfully, later, I met Robyn. The butterflies went crazy again and I fell head over heels in love with her. It didn't take me long before I was dreaming of wedding bliss. It would take Robyn a bit longer – but a year and a half after we met, we were married. If you're married or have been married, you've discovered a well-known experience:

It's easy to fall in love and dream of wedding bliss.

It's hard to stay in love and live in the realities of married life.

People fall in love all the time. Women fall in love with Jack or Sawyer from *Lost*. Guys meet someone in a chat room online. Our hearts flutter.

It's easy to fall in love. When you think about it, all you need is a heartbeat!

We fall for someone. Sometimes he loves her and she doesn't like him – maybe even doesn't know him! Or, she loves him and he's in love with someone else. But, sometimes, a couple meets and they fall in love with each other. Before long, they dream of wedding bliss.

When Robyn and I do pre-marriage counselling with couples, we have them draw pictures of what they expect their marriage to be. It's full of all the dreams of a happy future:

I've borrowed a few things from my son and daughter to demonstrate:

Props: dolls house; couple sitting by fire emotionally and physically connecting; garden outside; sunshine; kids come on the scene to complete the picture; adventure – Dora the Explorer board; Spiciness.

A couple walks down the aisle on their wedding day. Everyone stands as the bride walks in. She looks surprisingly stunning. He will never get as dressed up again. They look perfect. They have these dreams.

Then, along the way, the realities of married life start to kick in.

- The rent/mortgage needs to be paid
- There is house maintenance – you thought he would be able to fix anything like your dad did – but he can't. Or, worse – perhaps - he thinks he is able to fix everything like his dad did but everything he touches with a hammer and screwdriver ends up in worse shape than it was to begin with!
- There doesn't seem to be time to curl up by the fire hand in hand. Besides, who's going to light it!
- Kids might come along. While they bring lots of joy, they wake you up at night, demand everything under the sun and leave their toys for you to trip over everywhere.
- You dream of adventure...
- You dream of some 'spiciness' – but there seems to be a big difference between your dreams and reality.

You see, it's easy to fall in love and dream of wedding bliss.

It's hard to stay in love and live in the realities of married life

It's very easy for our marriage to become another one of 'those statistics' that we know too well, or a marriage that is closer to two roommates co-existing than two lovers who walk through all of life together.

When we walk the aisle on our wedding day, we never think that we will be one of the casualties. We assume that this love that we experience, and this feeling that we share, and these dreams that we hope for – that our marriage will last and thrive for the rest of our lives together.

But, our experience tells us that ...

It's easy to fall in love and dream of wedding bliss.

It's hard to stay in love and live in the realities of married life.

So, why is it that we fall out of love almost as quickly as we fall into love?

I think it's because we buy into an *I-marriage*; a marriage with a big 'I' in front of it.

It's like we go to the shops and buy this marriage product. When it doesn't satisfy our dreams and meet our expectations, we want a refund because "I am not happy and 'I' am not getting my needs met. This is not what I expected things to be like."

We saw the video clip earlier in the I-marriage store. I found these online. They're produced by *Northpoint* church by Andy Stanley. I need to give him the credit for producing them and some of the ideas for today.

In our clip before, we saw a couple come to the counter so happy and ready for the future. "No need for an extended warranty." They had fallen in love, dreaming of wedding bliss. But, it doesn't take long before they're back.

Let's watch... ***imarrriage # 2 CLIP***

He came to marriage with a whole bunch of expectations. For him, it was expectations that his wife would be . . .

- someone that would effectively mother him – an imum.
- someone that would meet sexual fantasies – an imistress.
- someone who clean and cook and keep everything tidy – an imaid.

Yet, his wife did not and could not meet all these expectations. I can relate to that last one and was aware of my expectation on this one before I got married. Something came up one day when Robyn and I were courting – I can't remember what it was. But, I called the minister who was going to

marry us to talk to him. As I rambled on about my fears of Robyn as a potential wife, he stopped and asked me, 'So, let me ask you a straight question. Do you want a marriage partner that you can journey through life with together or do you want a maid with some perks?' Ouch. Do you want to know my answer at the time? This is really embarrassing – but it's true. 'Can't I have both!' oh dear! You're looking at your husband now relieved that you got him rather than me, right? I had some real issues that I needed to work through. I still do. Thankfully, I was aware of the gravity of those issues going into marriage – but there are these expectations that I can still unfairly heap onto Robyn. You see, I don't want a room-mate. I want a marriage companion that works with me through life. What I love about Robyn is that we can journey through the highs and lows of life together and encourage each other through these as we go. I learn more and more about how selfish I am and how corrupt my underlying expectations are.

In today's western context, we have a heightened expectation of marriage. The rise of marriage seminars and books, though great in themselves, probably heighten these expectations even further. We now think that our spouse should meet my needs, speak my love language all the time, listen well, and understand everything about me. When they don't measure up to the standard we have, we demand a refund. This *imarrriage* is not what I was expecting.

Let's watch another clip – as she comes back for a refund. ***imarrriage # 3 CLIP***

As mentioned, our problem is that we develop:

- H.E.S. Syndrome: *High expectation syndrome*.
 - He's messy/ He's forgetful. He's inattentive.
- S.H.E.S: syndrome (*Super high expectation syndrome*). She's always late. She's not a cook. She's not in the mood.

We fall in love and dream of wedding bliss. But, behind these dreams are expectations that will never be fully met. Even if our spouse measures up in some of these expectations, they're actually just at the break even point. To be appreciated, they need to go 'beyond expectations.' It's like we are always putting our spouse through NZQA with a scorecard. How are they

going on listening? ... sex-life? ... cooking/cleaning/maintenance? spending money? Good with the kids? ...

When they fail to meet expectation, we cajole, pressure, nag, yell, sulk, threaten, bribe – all trying to ensure that they will change. “Unless they change, I am not going to be happy and our marriage is through.” If that goes on for long enough, if they still don’t meet your expectations, you back to the shop, demand a refund, and exchange for one that will work. A better model that you have fallen for that you just know will work out.

The glaring problem behind all this is we put a big “I” in front of marriage. What normally happens is that there are two big capital ‘I’s working against each other.

“I am not happy because you did not/ I won’t be happy until you... Since you can’t measure up to what I need, I will find someone else. Or, ‘because I couldn’t live up to her expectations, I’ll find someone else.’ Then, people get remarried only to discover that their second marriage is a lot like the first one! This big capital ‘I’ stands in the way of a healthy marriage.

Just as quickly as we fell in love, we fall out of love again because I am not happy with this marriage.

So, the question is, ‘how do we stay in love? Is it even possible to stay in love and live in the realities of married life?’

Jesus says, ‘yes.’ But, it’s not easy. If you want a quick fix, some pill, some 2-3 simple painless steps, you’re not going to find it. Falling in love is easy but staying in love is hard.

But, it is possible when we love like Jesus loved. Jesus said:

³⁴ *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.” – John 13:34*

That doesn’t sound new, does it? In fact, you might be feeling a little let down. That’s all?

But, I want us to explore this for a little bit. I think it is possible to stay in love when we love as Jesus loved.

I should probably point out that his love takes on action. We need to think of love as a verb, not a feeling. If we love like Jesus loved, we find that love is an action. Jesus says. Let me give you the model. I am the model. Love as I have loved. The apostle Paul goes on to explain in some detail what Jesus’ love looks like in the letter to the Philippians. Now, these words are true about any relationship so I want to apply these to marriage. But, these principles are true across the full spectrum of life.

He begins, *“your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”* Whatever he is about to show us about Jesus - he wants us to do. Again, these are principles true for all relationships. I want to apply them to marriage today in the belief that if we can stay in love if we love like Jesus.

There are three key participles or phrases that flow through this passage helping us identify what it means to love as Jesus loved. Loving as Jesus loved, first requires . . .

I. A decision to live for the best interests of my spouse.

In verse 6, we see that Jesus made a decision to live life for the well-being of others.

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.” (Phil 2:6, TNIV).

The passage says that Jesus was in very nature, or essence, God. He enjoyed equality with God. There was no position higher than the one he had. You can’t go any higher than God.

Yet the verse states that Jesus made a decision. He did not “consider,” or he did not “regard” or “think” of his position as something to be grasped, or clung to. Rather, Jesus made a choice to not use his position to his own advantage.

Jesus never played the God card for his own gain. He didn't use his power for his sake. That's what you are to do.

I know you're the man. I know what you deserve – but you can't play the deserve card. Yes, I know you're the woman. I know what he's done but you can't play the 'you had that coming to you card.' Jesus had every right to play the 'God' card, the superior card – but he doesn't do it. Rather, he made a decision for the benefit of others.

What that decision looks like is spelled out even more specifically just before this. In verses vv 3-4, we read:

“do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit”

So, no cynicism. No competing with each other as to who is the best or more worthy of attention.

“Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,”

So, this is a decision to treat your spouse as more important than you!

Have you ever been in a room where you were not the most important person? Everyone is looking around at the main person. I was at a breakfast for the Prime-minister a while back. I was wearing a suit – just like him. I was two arms and two legs just like him. But, I was not the centre of attention. Everyone was looking at him. Everyone knew where he was in the room. Though they were talking to each other, you could tell that everyone was very conscious that the Prime-Minister was just over to their left... They stood for him out of respect. He was the most important person in the room. I would all argue that we were all equal as human beings. There is no more intrinsic value in one person than another. But, we placed value on him because of the role he plays.

Paul says, if you want more than a roommate, if you want to stay in love and have a marriage that God designed, it requires a decision to value your spouse as the most important person in the room.

If we just stopped there and practiced that part for just a couple of days, things would be quite different in our marriages, right?

We continue . . .

⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

This is hard. The problem is that I am interested in what interests me! Other things are not interesting – to me. But Jesus says, 'think of his interests... think of her interests as more important than yours.'

To love like Jesus first of all requires a decision to do just that. A decision to value my spouse as more important than me. It's a decision to place her interests or his interests above mine.

Now, my guess is that if you are married, you have already expressed vows to each other that basically said that. I will stand beside you in sickness and in health... I will be there for you... I will place your interests ahead of my career, my health, my financial situation... I'll be there for you, fully present, thinking of your interests and valuing you even when things are not good.

The problem is that we forget the decision we made. If that initial decision has gone a little cloudy for you, if those vows need some reigniting, you can still say, 'I still do.'

Let me play a short clip, reminding you of what vows sound like... While it's playing, you might even want to lean over and hold your spouses hand as a way of saying, 'hey, remember. I still do.'

AUDIO CLIP: VOWS

So, to love like Jesus requires first of all, a decision. A decision to live for the well-being of your spouse. It is you valuing her more than you do yourself or anything else. It is placing his interests – not your interests.

Loving as Jesus loved, second requires . . .

2. An intentional move [incarnate] into the world of my spouse (incarnation)

How did that decision flow out into action?

We read, "Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

But, following his decision to live for the well-being of others, Jesus makes an intentional move into our world. We read that Christ "made himself nothing" – or "he emptied himself."

This does not mean that he was no longer God, or somehow in his essence less than God. Rather, it's the opposite of an expression we have in our culture. We say that someone is 'full of themselves.' They're conceited. They're thinking and acting as if they are the most important person.

Jesus does the reverse. He emptied himself. We're told how he did that by two statements that follow that tell us how Jesus emptied himself. You could almost place a 'by' in front of these statements to bring the meaning of the participles out. We read – "He made himself nothing, [by] taking the very nature of a servant, [and by] being made in human likeness."

So, Jesus left the comfort of the world he knew and experienced, to a world he had not experienced. He went from heaven to earth.

Christians have called that the incarnation. God becoming human. God descending himself to live in our world, to understand us, to enter into flesh and blood and truly understand us and experience life as us.

If I am to love like Jesus loved, I need to incarnate, move into the world of my spouse. I need to seek to understand her, her interests, what makes her tick.

Right now, some of you are going. Knowing what makes her tick? That's impossible!

We need to try – especially when conflict and disagreements comes up. Ensure that you first pause and ask questions in a way that you sincerely want to understand their hurt and why they think the way they do. Do this before you defend yourself and argue for your own point or interest.

Move into the world of your spouse. Understand what makes him/her tick. See things from their perspective. Be attuned to their interests and how the lens through which they see and feel and act.

That's what Jesus did. That's how Jesus loved.

To love like Jesus also requires . . .

3. Sacrificing the big "I" for the richness of relationship

Look at the end of verse 7 and through verse 8: "*When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*" (NLT)

Because of his love, Jesus sacrificed for us. What he wanted more than the honour and glory that he deserved is a relationship with you and me. He went all out to express that love through sacrifice. All for the richness of relationship with you and me.

So, to love your spouse like Jesus loves requires a sacrifice of the big 'I.'

If you're married, think about the last argument or disagreement you had – probably in the car on the way here! What would sacrifice your "I" – "I think/I want/I expect..." look like?

You say, how far do go in this whole sacrifice deal? How far did Jesus go – death, death on a cross!

We are so focused on "I" rather than on our spouse. We buy into an imarriage and think that all our needs and expectations can be met. But, it's a marriage that is all about me.

But, Jesus put his love into action by deciding first and foremost to choose what would benefit us. He said, “Even though I am worthy of it all the attention and fanfare, I choose to put their interests first. I will become like them and experience life as them. I will sacrifice everything I need for the richness of relationship with them.

That’s what it requires to stay in love.

You see, it’s easy to fall in love. It’s hard to stay in love. But, it can happen if we love like Jesus loved. Loving like Jesus requires . . .

- A decision to live for the best interests of my spouse.
- An intentional move [incarnate] into the world of my spouse
- Sacrificing the big “I” for the richness of relationship

Probably the most well read Scripture at weddings is 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter of the Bible. It is all about love. Love that is not just a feeling but action. A verb. That’s the type of love Jesus had.

In a moment, I’m going to give you some homework. Before I do, take a moment to hear those words about love again. Maybe you had them read at your wedding. Here they are with a kids interpretation of what it all means.

audio clip

This week, I’d like to encourage you, if you’re married, to do some homework.

First, at an appropriate time and way, I want you to take responsibility for turning your dreams into expectations. “I want to confess to you that I’ve had these expectations on you. It’s not fair to place these on you.”

You might want to do that face to face or through a card. For your spouse to hear that from you goes a long way – even if they know you’re doing it because it’s homework!

Second, I want you to ask your spouse : where do you feel pressure to live up to my expectations? “you might have a smiley face but I want to know

what’s underneath.” NOTE: Not asking them to share all the stuff in the box. You’re not promising that you can meet them. If Robyn has a dream of me as a billionaire actor’ – I’m going to fail. But, I want to hear where she feels pressure from me – rightly or wrongly. I want to take the “I” that I can impose on her and love her for who she is.

It’s easy to fall in love. It’s hard to stay in love. But, we can stay in love by getting rid of the big “I” and loving like Jesus.

SHOW PHOTOS OF MARRIED COUPLES FROM 2008 RE. MARRIAGE SERIES