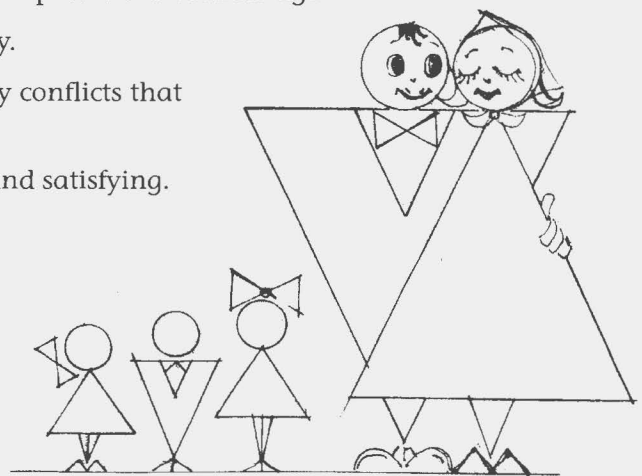


CHAPTER 48

Preparation for Marriage

Most young people have high expectations of marriage—

- ✗ that they will be happy.
- ✗ that there won't be any conflicts that they can't manage.
- ✗ that sex will be good and satisfying.
- ✗ that if they have children, they will grow up and cause few problems.
- ✗ that their love for each other will never change.



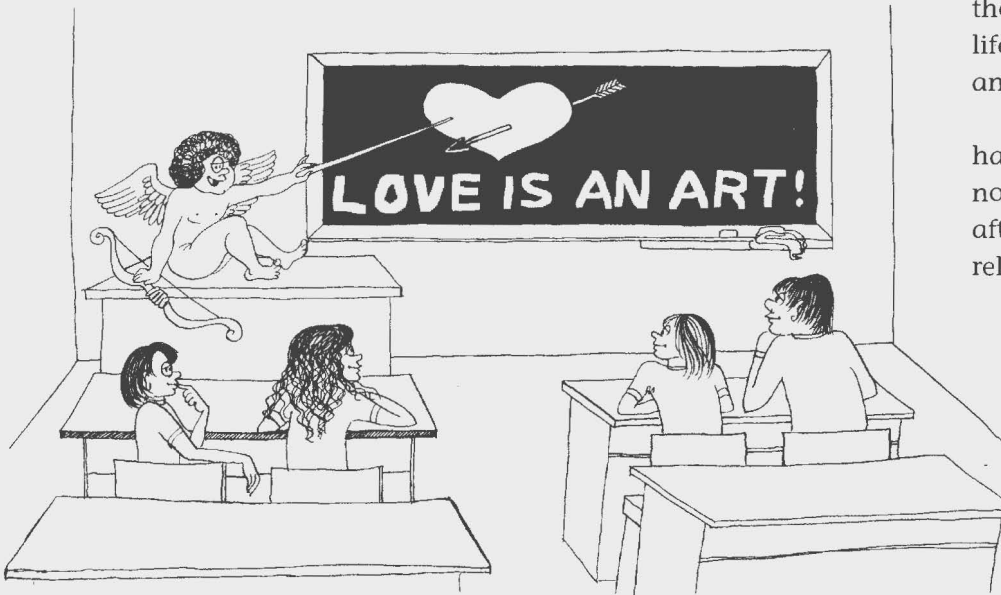
It is good to have high expectations, but we also need to look at the reality of marriage.

It may seem a little early to talk seriously about marriage, but it is relevant for your life even now. We can say that this period in your life is the training period to qualify you for marriage. There is a special time for acquiring knowledge and training in every profession and field, such as medicine, engineering, architecture, typing, teaching, art, cooking, physics, etc. Are any of these professions more important than

marriage and family life? They, too, require special skills, knowledge and training.

Many couples jump into marriage wrapped in a romantic haze that can hardly be penetrated. They are walking on clouds and feeling no need for counsel, advice or preparation. "Happily ever after" seems guaranteed from their point of view. It is impossible for them to believe that their emotional euphoria could ever be eroded by daily routine, growing irritations, competing attractions, financial pressures and





the tensions of daily family life. After all, they are in love, and isn't that all that matters?

Some people think that the happiness they experience now will be so much better after marriage. They are relying on marriage to provide them with something it can never deliver. In reality, marriage will magnify whatever problems they are trying to overlook in their present relationship or even in themselves. Instead of asking what our

marriage can do for us, we should be asking, what can we do for our marriage?

Others hurry through premarital preparations, confident that their marriage can succeed without any instruction on love. Their high expectations are invariably based on their hope that their partner will be able to meet all of their wants, needs, wishes, and desires for the next 50 years. They think that their happiness will depend on how well their partner performs for them.

Luckily, some couples are fortunate and eager to learn everything they can about developing a positive, loving relationship that will endure. They are ready to put conscious, intelligent effort and careful planning into the development of the intimacy that can sustain their love for a lifetime.

Marriage requires fertile soil

It is unfortunate that there is no real training or education for people who want to marry. Because of this, there is a lack of focus on the realities of married life. People do not expect to go through difficulties, and when difficulties do arise, they imagine that there is something wrong with them, with their partner or with the relationship. We have little guidance about how to use real difficulties in a constructive way—as an opportunity to open one's heart and become more loving and as a result a better human being.

Marriage is very much like a plant. Both need good, fertile soil in order to grow. We get that fertile soil from the work we do on ourselves *before* we marry. Most marriages start out as a physical attraction or an emotional relationship rather than a spiritual relationship. Marriages based on such foundations can be the cause of much disappointment and confusion once the emotional or physical attraction wears off. If love is only emotional, if it is unconscious, it has no real depth. People often become disillusioned: "Why did I ever marry this person? This isn't the person I married."

In cultures where parents are no longer responsible for matching the necessary attributes of young people in order to have a successful marriage, the couple themselves have to do so in a process called courtship. This process involves various phases of greater intimacy. If, in this interaction, liking progresses to the desire to want to be with this person for life, the relationship may lead to marriage. Courtship often lasts one or two years. During this time there is a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of values, suitability, and complementarities. It is a vital time, because the quality of



courtship is intimately linked with the outcome of the marriage. Although love may blossom during courtship, it is only in a committed marriage that love comes into full bloom through the total investment of the two partners in the relationship. Only then do couples grow to really know and understand one another and completely harmonize together.

Courtship exists for the purpose of selecting a future spouse. It isn't advisable to begin courting until we are seriously considering marriage. Studies from all over the world have shown that marriages under the age of 20 carry a high risk of divorce. Although people at this age have reached physical and intellectual maturity, they usually have not reached an equivalent level emotionally and spiritually.

For one human being to love another is very difficult. For this reason young people must learn to love. Take time to ask questions and reflect about the answers.

If you want to learn to love, you should learn what qualities are present in a loving person and how these are developed. Look for the qualities of people whom you respect and admire. What are the qualities that you would like your beloved to have as a spouse and as a parent? Then focus on developing these qualities within yourself and in your relationships. Every person has the potential for love, but potential is never realized without work. With love as a stimulus, you as an individual can develop, ripen and become mature. Then, when you finally join with your soul mate, you will know how to make the relationship grow.

Practical ways to prepare for marriage

Develop control over your body

By serving your spouse and living to give another joy, you sometimes will make sacrifices. Physical work or sports can help you to become able to discipline your body. Developing control over your body also means keeping it as healthy as you can, through eating the proper foods, exercising, and refraining from tobacco, alcohol and other bad habits.

Don't be in a hurry

There are several problems with early marriages. First, an individual changes greatly between the ages of 16 and 25. If you are in a hurry to get married, you may marry the wrong person for all the wrong reasons. You may overlook very severe difficulties. If you are not sure, it is better to wait. If the person is really the right one, he or she won't mind waiting, and the love won't change.

Keep commitments

Commitment means giving 100 percent in order to keep a promise. This takes much effort and practice. Therefore, before marriage, it is good practice to keep your word.

Be financially responsible

It is important to learn how to account for the money you spend, and to learn the difference between spending on essentials and spending on wants. It is of great value to learn to control your desire for things so that you can use money for more important things.

Be open to advice

Often people become so involved in relationships that they cannot see what is really happening to them. Therefore it is good to ask advice from someone who is concerned about you and who knows you well. Your parents or other elders know you very well and can see the whole picture. Allow yourself to be open to their advice, and listen to what they have to say. If you can't see what they are trying to tell you, then perhaps you need to step back from the relationship and try to see things more objectively.

Learn to love

How you spend your time before marriage develops your character and personality. Before marriage, practice serving others, sacrificing for others, investing for the sake of your parents, brothers and sisters, friends and community. Develop your sensitivity to all kinds of people, not just those who are like you. Learn to love people of different ethnic or social backgrounds. Activities such as art, dance, music and sports are also important in building character.

Work through differences

Learn skills to resolve conflict. Don't avoid people who make you angry. Instead, learn to win their heart and work through differences. These skills will be invaluable not only in marriage but also in the relationship with your children.

Love your parents

To love your parents is to understand that they were not perfect but probably tried the best that they could under the circumstances. It is important to deal with your feelings toward them, so that any resentment can be liberated. When your resentments toward your parents are resolved, you can be free to love them with an open heart. This process will help to make you a better spouse and parent.

Spend time with children

If we spend time around young children and infants, we can begin to see just how much they need love, attention and time. Often we don't think about the reality of having children until after we are married. Being aware of this before we are married



helps us to prepare ourselves for the needs of children.

Take the future seriously

When you are young, having fun is a major preoccupation. The future seems far away. But before you know it, your future is here and you wonder why you didn't prepare better for it. This is certainly true about marriage. Consider and prepare seriously for your own future. No one else can do that for you.

If I truly love one person,
I love all persons,
I love the world,
I love life.
If I say to somebody else,
"I love you,"
I must be able to say,
"I love in you everybody,
I love through you the world,
I love in you also myself."

— Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*

For Your Journal



What do I want from marriage?

Exercise A: My Ideal Mate

Refer to the journal writing exercise from the chapter on *Marriage*. From your own description of an ideal marriage, what qualities and characteristics are desirable or necessary in the personality of your ideal mate in order to create such a marriage? Make a list. (Do not look at Exercise B until you have completed Exercise A.)

Exercise B: My Ideal Self

Referring to Exercise A, ask yourself if you think that your ideal mate would like you to have these same qualities in your own personality? Using the list from Exercise A, put a check mark near all those qualities that you feel that you personally possess at the present moment. Once you are married, do you think that you automatically will come to possess all of these qualities or do you think that you need time to develop and mature your character and personality toward your ideal self? How much time do you think your development will realistically take? One month? One year? A few years? Without these qualities, do you think that you can achieve your ideal marriage?

See the Appendix for the psychological test pertaining to this lesson.

Being in Love and Love

From Mere Christianity, by C.S. Lewis

What we call “being in love” is a glorious state. It helps to make us generous and courageous, it opens our eyes not only to the beauty of the beloved but to all beauty. But whatever people say, the state called “being in love” usually does not last. But, of course, ceasing to be “in love” need not mean ceasing to love.

People get from books the ideas that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on “being in love” forever. As a result, when they find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change — not realizing that, when they have changed, the glamour will presently go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one. In this department of life, as in every other, thrills come at the beginning and do not last. The sort of thrill a boy has at the first idea of flying will not go on when he has joined the Royal Air Force and is really learning to fly. The thrill you feel on first seeing some delightful place dies away when you really go to live there. Does it mean it would be better not to learn to fly and not to live in the beautiful place? By no means. In both cases, if you go through with it, the dying away of the first thrill will be compensated for by a quieter and more lasting kind of interest. What is more, it is just the people who are ready to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest, who are then more likely to meet new thrills in some quite different direction. The man who has learned to fly and becomes a good pilot will suddenly discover music; the man who has settled down to live in the beautiful spot will discover gardening.

It is simply no good trying to keep any thrill. Let the thrill go — let it die away — go on through that period of death into the quieter interest and happiness that follow — and you will find you are living in a world of new thrills all the time.