

TEACHING NOTES (underlined words indicate answers for the handout)

Where Are You in Marriage?

INTRODUCTION

Let's begin with a prayer of request that God will do four things during our time together at this seminar;

- 1.) Strengthen the weak relationships,
- 2.) Lift up the discouraged couples,
- 3.) Reconfirm and enrich the strong marriages, and
- 4.) Provide a wall of protections for all the marriages.

If Satan can destroy our marriages and homes then our country goes easily.

PRAY!

1. All marriages have a beginning. All courtships have a beginning.

I wish I had the time to ask you some basic questions about your marriage; like the beginning, the good times, bad times, and growing times, etc.

Too often we fail to talk about the past and that can dramatically affect the present.

2. How many can remember when you first saw the person you are now married to?
3. The beginning for most of us married here today took place at a very romantic moment.

How many have found your marriage has maintained continued romance and has grown and developed on a continual 45% angel upward growth?

4. Some strange marriages do that!!
5. Now if you think that everyone who can remember those early romantic moments and then got married have had nothing but steadily growing flames from those early sparks then you are not thinking correctly.
6. Most marriages statistically go through several stages. Some, you may not even know that you went through.

7. Our marriage has gone through several stages before it has gotten to this stage where it is now. And it still needs check ups every so often.

8. My purpose in this session is to cause us to focus on our marriage in much more detail than we normally do.

9. This lesson can help us determine where we are and where we need to be and then how to get there.

The first stage is:

I. The ROMANCE Stage.

I know this may be hard for some, but let your mind wander a bit, back to those good old days.

This begins in the courtship stage and continues in the marriage for awhile.

Sometimes it is over when the wedding is over.

Sometimes it is over before you get through the honeymoon period.

Most couples were smitten with love sickness in the beginning of the romance stage which is complete with:

1. Love letters.

I heard the other day that President Harry Truman wrote his wife every day that he was gone from her. When his wife dies back in I think 1983, they found over 1,200 such letters.

2. Walks in the rain.

3. ½ hour kisses. Remember those? Think!

4. \$100.00 phone bills.

5. Absentmindedness at school/work.

6. Ridiculous attempts at poetry.

7. All those activities that lead up to the wedding.

a. Anticipation

b. Free flowing advice from in-laws

c. Problem with the flowers arriving on time and in the right condition.

- d. The friend of the bride that slaughters the wedding song.
- e. Endless picture taking.
- f. Eternal receptions.
- g. It is a wonder that anyone survives the wedding day.

8. But it is those highly charged romantic feelings that keeps things moving.

Look at Jacob's commitment in Genesis to Laban to work 7 years for Rachel's hand. But then he ends up with her sister. That was one disappointed patriarch.

It is romantic love that gets us to walk the runner down the aisle, to light the candle, to kiss the bride, and take her home.

A. What is romance? Temporary insanity.

Romantic love temporarily renders us insane enough to do what we would never have the courage to do if we were sane. And that is get married.

Permanent romance is done on purpose!!

It seems all couples go through romantic love.

This is the stage that short circuits our brains enough to get us married.

B. What are some of the romantic things you like from your companion?

How many women like romance? How many men?

Before marriage: _____

After marriage: _____

(It would be nice to stay here but we need to move on.)

The second stage is:

II. The REALITY Stage.

This is the stage that usually comes right after the honeymoon.

It is called reality!

A. This particular stage strikes couples at different times in their marriage.

Sometimes it is 3 days into the honeymoon, or after months or even years into a marriage.

But sooner or later one or both of the partners realize that the object of their pursuit, the person of their dreams, the fantasy's of the person they feared they could never obtain is now someone who cannot be gotten rid of.

The novocain of the romance begins to wear off. What you thought you could never obtain can now not be gotten rid of.

This begins to change the way we look at each other.

This can cause a mild state of panic.

It is kind of like the dog that chases after passing cars and one day catches one. Now what does he do?

B. What happens now is you begin to feel the pain and the discomfort of the flip side of the CHARACTER TRAITS that you once found so appealing in the life of your partner.

For instance:

During the romance stage the gal looks at the guy and says, "I love him. He is so goal oriented."

But then reality strikes – then she says, "I hate it. All it is is work, work, work. He's driven. He's driven. He's driven."

Romance turns to reality.

He says, "I love her. She is such a neat person."

Reality strikes – "She's compulsive. She irons the dishtowels, socks, and all that. What's wrong with this woman?"

She says, "I love him. He has so many male friends. That means he is relational."

Reality strikes - he would rather be out with the boys. He is not just interested in just me.

He says, "I love her. She's quiet."

Reality strikes - he scratches his head and says, "What am I going to do? She just sits there like a bump on a log all the time."

Romance to Reality.

She says, "Oh, I love him. He is so disciplined and self-controlled."

Reality strikes - I hate it. He is so rigid and inflexible.

He says, "Finally, I have found someone who is refreshingly naive."

Reality strikes and he says - I have married someone whose porch light is flickering.

Listen very carefully:

C. The REALITY stage clarifies what romance conceals.

All of a sudden you come to grips with what you are dealing with. This is not a two year contract that happens to have an option here.

This is a contract for life. As a matter of fact, calling it a contract can insinuate that under certain conditions you can break the contract.

That is why you must understand that you do not have a contract but you have a commitment to each other that will last for a lifetime.

D. Marriage is a COMMITMENT to each other for life.

Let's review where we are to this point: We have gone from ROMANCE to the sudden terror of REALITY and now to the third stage called:

III. The RESENTMENT Stage.

* There are basically two kinds of RESENTMENT:

1. The free floating kind of resentment where one spouse just feels ripped.

This is not focused resentment but just all around old fashioned anger.

Sometimes a little bit of anger at God – God why didn't you stop me from marrying this person.

Or at each other – why didn't you stop me?

It's just a feeling of being had.

2. The second kind of resentment is the focused kind of resentment.

It is focused at our marriage partner who is no longer the object of our affections but now becomes the target of our frustration.

We have a bad day at work so we go home and yell at our spouse.

We are having financial problems and it is either because you don't make enough or spend too much.

Then boredom sets in and Martha says, "Even the garbage gets taken out once a week, Harold."

And you can begin to feel the resentment!

But it doesn't stop there. We go ROMANCE, to REALITY, to RESENTMENT, and now to REBELLION:

IV. The REBELLION Stage.

* Now it is getting serious.

You see in the resentment stage anger is slowly but steadily filling our closet.

In the rebellion stage marriage partners begin to dream of ways to empty their closets of all the accumulated weeks, months, and years of anger, hurt and frustration, and unfulfilled expectations.

* There are two types of REBELLION.

When we hit the rebellion stage it is where the man says in counseling, "I just can't live like this the rest of my life, Pastor Heath. I CAN'T." Then he says, "I won't."

It's the woman that says quietly in counseling, "He's hurt me. He has hurt me too badly. You see now I am just numb emotionally. I can't feel anything anymore. I can't express anything anymore. He touches me and I cringe. I can't live like this anymore. I can't live like this anymore. I won't live like this anymore."

* Up until now we have just been on this slow inevitable slide.

But when you hit the rebellion stage you have to begin making concrete choices. There is no place to slide to anymore.

So you begin to make the hard choices.

Some make the concrete choice to ignore their spouse, to ignore the frustration and then pour themselves into their job or into child raising, into recreation or into church related activities.

1. This is PASSIVE REBELLION.

But the poison just continues to spread and fester in the marriage and someday something is going to happen and it is going to be very ugly.

2. Then there are those who take the more ACTIVE REBELLION track and deliberately hurt one another.

They deliberately hurl insults that they know will really hurt their spouse.

We know the term that can send our spouse into orbit and we know just how to use it.

The verbal shots, the put downs in public, and then the talks of separation and divorce.

I was in a home where the couple had been having trouble for several years and he finally called for help. They are not ones to avail themselves like you have to enrich your marriage but both of them come from good stock families. The shocking part of our conversation (husband only) was to find out that they had used the expression of getting a divorce. Since then she has tried to commit suicide.

Listen to me: don't ever talk divorce.

Some even make a decision to fantasize about being hooked up with somebody else.

Being hooked up with someone they really need and that leads to flirtation and that leads to sure trouble. It is just a matter of time.

Then there are others who make a concrete calculated decision to begin to seek help and to rebuild.

They look to God. They look to Scriptures. And they look to marriage counselors. They look to friends. They look to teachers and pastors.

They decide they do not want to live this way anymore.

Then they go to the next stage. They want to rebuild.

When you stop and look at this it is amazing that the raging fire of romance could shrink down now to a little pile of smoldering embers.

The \$64,000 question begs to be asked, "Why does that have to happen?"

Why? Why is there this seemingly inevitable slide?

Why is it when someone talks about a marriage seminar there are so many lumps in our throats because of what we do not do any longer? No longer any more flowers.

In our culture you will certainly find someone that would say it is God's fault for creating such a faulty institution called marriage. It worked in the cave man age. It just does not work in such a sophisticated society.

It is not God's fault. It's not the institution of marriage that's bad. He gave us marriage, the best institution that we have ever had.

The problem is the people. The individuals, me & you.

B. Let me give you three reasons why so many marriages end up in a heap of ashes.

1. Most of us enter marriage with severely underdeveloped RELATIONAL SKILLS.

So often most of us enter marriage with many other skills such as preaching, teaching, science, music, mechanics, business, finance, and so forth.

Most of us have graduated from high school or college and some even from graduate school.

But even with all that formal training there still remains that embarrassing inadequacy in the area of relating to other people effectively.

Most of us entered marriage without even a clue as to what level of communication skill is needed to make a marriage work.

Some communicate to our spouses like Clinton communicated to the American people when he was being impeached.

Some think that we do not need any different skills in relating to our spouse than we do to our fellow workers.

This is so different than what we find out we need when we come into marriage and realize our great need of inter-personal relational skills.

Most of us enter marriage without any knowledge about conflict resolution. How to solve problems.

When we are engaged we tell the world that we will have no conflict in this marriage. We will defy all the odds. We will redefine the word bliss.

But when reality strikes. And when resentment and rebellion sets in and when serious conflict sets in we don't even know where to begin.

So some of us handle it eskimo style. We just freeze each other out. We just back off, seal up, stop touching, stop talking, and just freeze each other into detachment.

Some of us handle it cowboy style. We shoot from the hip and we see who is left standing when the dust clears. And usually both people are left heavily damaged.

The point is we enter the most relationally intensive union in society with severely underdeveloped relational skills.

It is kind of like leaping out of an airplane without any prior knowledge on how to use a parachute. By the time you figure out how to pull the rip cord it is too late.

Sadly, by the time many marriage partners understand how much skill is required to learn how to communicate and solve conflict, in their mind so much damage has been done, it seems like it is too late now.

So I still say the first reason why the fires burn low in our relationships is because most of us enter marriage with severely underdeveloped relational skills and most of us do not seem to grow along the way.

2. The second reason why romance in marriage seem to burn all the way down to that small pile of smoldering embers is because we tend to enter marriage with an improper understanding of the GOAL of marriage.

It's like the old standard question, "Why are you getting married?" The answer, "Because we want to be together all the time." Three years later the question is "Why do you want to get a divorce?" The answer "Because we can't stand being together all the time."

What's happened here. Too many people have gotten married but they have never established specific goals for their marriage.

We have different kinds of marriages today, where both partners are working. If you want to kill the meeting talk about working moms.

Couples look at each other and say are we just supposed to be business partners?

We walk to the altar and perform some kind of merger agreement and if it does not work we perform a divorce. Where we get an attorney and divide up the things and start over.

What is the goal? The Bible tells us in the early part of the book.
Genesis 2:18-24

The goal of marriage is that the two become one. The goal is intimacy – or developing soul companionship.

It takes years to build this.

It takes self disclosure, transparency, listening for what seems to be an eternity to one another, trying to understand when understanding does not come easily, serving one another, giving, trusting, compromising, forgiving, praying, experiencing triumph and tragedy together and that slow and painstaking process to learn to understand and to worship God for the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of our partners.

3. The final reason why the fires of marriage tend to burn low is because we tend to enter marriage with a naive belief that marriage will not require WORK.

There are a lot of things that we knew before we were married.

I am sure there are many skills and training represented in this room today.

Some may even pride themselves over street smarts like understanding the fast lane in society.

Such as ‘the checks in the mail’, money doesn’t grow on trees, opportunity rarely knocks twice, you never go broke taking a profit, pigs get fat, hogs get butchered, if you fail to plan you plan to fail, if there’s no pain there is no gain.

I saw a new one the other day, “A penny saved is not much.”

But how many of us knew how much work is required to make a marriage all that God wants a marriage to be.

How many of you thought that LOVE was enough?

How many thought your FEELINGS would just grow on their own?

How many have heard if you had to WORK at it then it wasn’t real?

How many of us marvel at our naiveness?

It is like our walk with God, YOU have to work at it. When you find yourself growing spiritually you say it is worth it.

When you want to get in shape physically you run, pump iron, your work at it. Then when you begin to feel better you say this is great. It was worth the investment.

We do the same thing for our vocation and career, you work at it. You stretch, you grow, you take on some new challenges.

But why is it when you want a great marriage you just sit back in your chair and decide to be patient saying maybe eventually the music will begin mysteriously and somebody will fan the smoldering embers in my marriage and it will fire up again.

But listen, that is only in your dreams.

Listen. It is like everything else in life. It works the same way in our marital relationship.

IT WILL TAKE WORK!

IT WILL TAKE WORK!

IT WILL TAKE WORK!

It will require the best that you can give it.

It will require character work on your part like you never thought it would.

It will require prayer work, scheduling work, communication work, conflict resolution work, creativity work, spiritual work.

More work than I ever could have thought.

BUT, I am happy to say – IT IS WORTH THE WORK.

WHEN YOU HAVE WORKED HARD THEN YOU HAVE SOMETHING.

We have something money can't buy.

I have a soul mate. Someone I can trust.

I have what all the country music singers sing about. I have it. And Arleen has ME!

The last stage is the Rebuilding Stage:

V. The REBUILDING Stage.

* This is where we want to continue in the rest of the seminar.

CONCLUSION

* Let me give you an assignment: spend one meal a week together outside the home and discuss together where are you in marriage?

Are you in The ROMANCE Stage?

Are you in The REALITY Stage?

Are you in The RESENTMENT Stage?

Are you in The REBELLION Stage?

Are you in The REBUILDING Stage?

* Discuss this honestly and then use what you learn in this marriage enrichment seminar to rebuild from where you are.

Let's stand together. You have been sitting awhile. Take hold of your companion's hand. Squeeze it. Let her know you love her.

Now let's pray.