

Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships

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Introduction

Few subjects in life ignite as much passion and longing within us as our desire for love, our interest in sex, and our hope for enduring relationships. Regardless of our backgrounds, race, values, intelligence, or experience, we all long to be loved. Every human being on this planet craves to be that “cherished person” to someone else. In like manner, the mystery and the power of human sexuality draw us like an invisible magnet into the world of relationships.

Put simply, we humans are relational beings. We were made by God to love and be loved. We crave the intimacy, acceptance, security, and significance that flow when we bond in mind, heart, and body with a member of the opposite sex.

If you think I’m overstating the case, stop and think about your first reaction to the title of this book. What caught your attention? Why were you drawn to the picture of the couple on the cover, rubbing noses on a windswept beach? Did you read romance in their gaze? Did you catch the sense of intimacy and shared richness of their awesome relationship? Did you want to change places with one of them?

If so, I'll tell you why. That picture represents our longing. You want what that couple has, and so do I. It doesn't matter if you're seventeen or seventy-seven, the words *love*, *sex*, and *lasting relationships* evoke immediate and powerful responses within each of us. Pictures that capture that hope also capture our attention.

Let's face it. After taking care of the necessities of life like food, clothing, and shelter, most of us spend the bulk of our waking hours pondering, pursuing, or solving problems related to this area of life. I mean, stop for a moment and consider the songs that we listen to every day, songs like:

- "Can't Live without Your Love, Babe"
- "Ain't Got No Lovin'"
- "If Loving You Is Wrong, I Don't Want to Be Right"
- "I Wanna Hold Your Hand"
- "What's Love Got to Do with It?"

Add to these almost any other song on the current Top Forty list.

Day after day, people all over the globe, representing every nationality and language, sing about their desires for or their disappointment with love.

Walk through your local bookstore, if you're not standing in one right now, and check out the romance novels, the self-help section,

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or the relational resources rack. Notice how many volumes focus in one way or another on sex, romantic love, or how to have a great relationship. Or the next time you go grocery shopping, examine the glossy and glamorous magazines in the racks by the checkouts. Has *Cosmo* ever had a cover without the word "sex" on it? Who's on the front of *People*, *Globe*, *The Inquirer*, and *Star*? Aren't those publications filled with photos

of who's together this week, who's rumored to have cheated on his or her mate, or what couples have joined the split list? Why

do these magazines sell? Like it or not, we live in a world where *love*, *sex*, and *relationships* get top billing in the hearts and minds of nearly all of us.

Advertisers figured out long ago that our preoccupation with emotional connectedness and sex provides a great way to sell merchandise. Whether it's using sex to sell beer and cars during the timeouts of televised games or showing scenes from loving relationships while they are trying to convince us to change long-distance carriers, the underlying message remains constant—the key to happiness and fulfillment in life is all about *love*, *sex*, and *lasting relationships*.

Unfortunately, despite all the hype in magazines, movies, seminars, and books, for the most part people aren't doing very well when it comes to this area of their lives. The words divorce, breakup, wounds, baggage, ex-mate, and abuse are all too common in our relational vocabulary. Even in surviving marriages, the atmosphere often reeks of unhappiness and disappointment. We long to love and we long to be loved, but we just don't seem to know how to do it very well. And for all the talk and openness there is about sex today, sexuality still ranks as one of the persistent points of conflict in most relationships. It appears as if the greater the hunger for enduring love and lasting relationships, the shorter their lifespan. To paraphrase a song, love seems to end before it has begun.

So what's wrong here? Are we all destined to be frustrated and become the products and perpetrators of dysfunctional relationships? Or is there a better way? Is there, in fact, a secret, a plan, or a different paradigm for genuine love, great sex, and an enduring relationship?

Well, as presumptuous as it may sound, this book promises to deliver exactly that, not because I'm particularly smart or have the market cornered on these issues but because the one who created you to be loved and the one who made sex for your enjoyment has an understandable game plan for how relationships can and do work. The one who designed you to love and be loved has also provided specific wisdom and instructions to make that possible

in your daily life. This book is about that wisdom—how it can and will work for you.

You might be thinking, *But why read this book? I'm single. Or, I'm divorced. Or even, I'm widowed. I'm not in a relationship right now. How in the world could these chapters be helpful for me?* Actually, this book is very much for singles, divorcees, and those who are widowed, as well as for those who are married. Regardless of your current relational status, if you don't understand romantic relationships from God's perspective, you are destined to a life of severe disappointment and significant frustration.

If you are in a significant relationship but not yet married, this book will help you assess your relationship's health, strength, and areas of need. You will learn how to build qualities into your relationship that will make it not only exciting but also able to last for the long haul. Wouldn't you like to arrive at the moment when you say, "I take you . . . until we are parted by death," and actually have a plan for how you will pull that off?

If you're single and not currently in a significant relationship, this book will save you boatloads of future heartache—and put some past hurts into perspective. It will help you avoid problems and habits that frequently sink relationships as well as show you how to construct and navigate your future relationship to sail with confidence and purpose. You'll learn to do relationships the way God intended.

In fact, this book's greatest value may be for people who are not yet in relationships. During a recent conference in the Midwest I taught the material in this book to several hundred college-age students. One student summed up what I heard from many: "Most of the time when people speak on relationships, you feel kind of 'out of it' if you're not dating someone. But this series was different. I'm not in a relationship right now, but these principles have been tremendously helpful for me as a single person who is considering what kind of relationship I want and how I want to go about it."

If you're married, this book will provide a reality check on your expectations. It will help direct your energy and focus toward the aspects of your relationship that will build increased joy and deeper intimacy. It will also help you address attitudes and

practices in your marriage that may be putting relational roadblocks between you and your mate. As one couple shared with me privately, "It's amazing how much our culture talks about sex but how little my wife and I have ever really discussed its impact on our relationship." They were surprised when they compared their culture-based expectations about sex with God's perspective and prescription for enhancing sexual intimacy. The differences were remarkable!

If you are divorced, you'll find hope in these pages. This book will help you discover what may have gone wrong in your marriage and how to prepare yourself now to build healthy, positive relationships in the future. Unfortunately, people desperate for relationships tend to keep doing the very things that destroy those relationships. They've never heard that there really is a better way. One man from Australia who had been divorced multiple times heard the material in this book over the Internet and wrote me a grateful E-mail in which he said, "Chip, I finally get it. Hearing you speak on love, sex, and lasting relationships opened my eyes and gave me new hope. I identified with the people in your stories. Now I see how I set up my previous relationships for absolute failure. Thank you for putting me straight. I was about to make the same mistakes again!"

Getting letters, calls, and E-mails from people in each category I just described convinced me I needed to explore every way possible to get these time-tested truths into people's lives. The book you're holding is part of that effort. It goes out with my prayer that a transformation and revolution will occur in your thinking about relationships as you read these chapters. I'm asking God to grant you insight and discernment to approach relationships as never before so that you can experience the awesome mystery of the lasting relationship that you deeply desire.

By the way, if you're already in a great marriage, congratulations! Read this book as a personal investment in your most important human relationship. Why? Three reasons. First, great marriages stay great with attention in the right places. Second,

This book fits
you, whoever and
wherever you are.

great marriages can get even better (that's one of the things that makes them great). Third, great marriages deserve to be copied. After you read this book, the next time someone asks you, "What's your secret? How do you have such a great relationship?" you will have something to give them to read.

So this book fits you, whoever and wherever you are. Thousands of people have heard what you are about to read, and those who have applied these timeless truths have discovered that they work. The testimonies in scores of E-mails, letters, and faxes from our radio audience confirm that there really is hope for relationships! People are hungry for an alternative. If the way that most people are building their marriages is failing, doesn't it make sense to consider another way? Frankly, I'd rather not read or hear any more about the wreckage of marriages and relationships. I'd much rather be a part of making things better. I've seen enough pain in people's lives to last me for a long time. I've cried with too many broken people. So much of it could be avoided. There is hope! There is a better way to find love, stay in love, and grow in intimacy for a lifetime.

I share the material in these chapters with confidence. As you will notice, I'm certainly working on applying these truths in my own marriage. My wife and I know how *not* to do relationships, and by God's grace we've learned how a relationship can be transformed from unhappy drifting to intimate joy. I promise that if you will trust and implement this way of thinking about and doing relationships, yours can be deeply satisfying and lasting. These principles work not because they come from me but because they come from the One who designed you. Love, sex, and lasting relationships were all God's idea. He made you for relationship. He created that longing for connection with others that is such a part of your life. And because you are the object of his love and affection, he wants to fulfill these longings in ways beyond your wildest dreams.