

FALLING IN LOVE

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31:10-12)

Finding the right person to marry can be one of the most foreboding tasks in all of life. In fact, it is such a difficult decision that many young people give up and settle for less than the best. The acceptable approach to marriage today is to try it for a short time and if the relationship fails, bail out and try someone else.

Fortunately, I was spared the difficult process of striving to locate the perfect mate. I sometimes wonder if God knew I did not have enough sense to make a good choice so He made it easy for me.

Sharon and I met at church. Although I was already a freshman in college, I still participated in the youth group. The youth program was led by Sharon's parents and was built around a musical group called the "Proclaimers." We traveled to churches around the state of Colorado and even a couple of trips to churches in Texas.

When Sharon graduated from High School she moved across the state to attend college. Although we were friends, we did not date nor did we consider any type of long-term relationship.

In the providence of God, Sharon and I both transferred to Wayland Baptist College in Plainview, Texas, at the beginning of the spring semester in 1973. We arrived at the Texas campus and neither of us knew anyone else.

During the first two weeks of school, we encountered each other occasionally but we did not spend a significant amount of time together. I was not seeking a girlfriend. My interest was focused on school and pursuing God's call on my life to become a preacher.

After we had been in school for several weeks, Sharon called the dorm one evening and said that she had something to talk about. She was hesitant to say anything on the phone so I invited her to come by the dorm that evening and we would talk.

When she arrived, we sat together in the lobby of my dorm, spending several minutes with small talk. After a short time, true to my nature, I asked her why she had called. I always like to get to the point.

She stammered around for a long time, unable to explain. I tried several ways to encourage her to talk openly but she was still unable to express herself. She was able to say that she felt God was telling her something but she could not muster the courage to share it with me.

Finally, almost to the point of exasperation, I said, "Perhaps God is telling you the same thing that He is telling me."

Her eyes lit up as she quickly said, "What is that?"

With some hesitation in my voice I replied, "I think God is telling me that you and I will spend the rest of our lives together."

Sharon did not hesitate to express her agreement, God was indeed telling her the same thing.

Now what?

What do you do when you find the person you are to marry but there is no emotional attachment. In many other societies this would not be a problem, but in the American culture, emotions normally precede commitment to marriage.

We set out on the only course of action that we could devise - we began the process of falling in love. It is not difficult to begin to love someone when you are committed to spending your life together.

Gradually over the next few months our emotions began to fall into place. We spent many hours together, discussing the past and the future. It did not take long for us to get

excited about the prospect of marriage. Because of our commitment to one another, we were able to openly discuss issues that must be faced by married couples.

Because of our commitment to one another, Sharon and I have not had to deal with some of the problems that destroy marriages. Neither of us has ever had a doubt about the faithfulness of the other. Whenever a problem arises, we always know we will find a solution because leaving the marriage is never an option.

I recognize that our situation is very unique. In fact, I have not met anyone who has told a similar story of courtship and marriage. There have been some who tried it but it was more their doing than God's so it backfired.

Perhaps the most important lesson learned from this experience is the importance of commitment before emotional investment. It is very tempting to give our emotions to another person before we give ourselves. The consequence is that most of these relationships fail, leaving broken hearts and bad experiences.

I do not expect the same process to happen for my sons or anyone else. However, I do hope that they will understand the necessity of commitment in marriage. Love does not make a marriage successful. Commitment makes a marriage and love is the result of this type of commitment.