



Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

One of the most quoted scenes from the movies is seen in “The Princess Bride.”

“Mawwage. Mawwage is wot bwings us togever today. Mawwage, that bwessed awwangement, that dweem wivin a dweem...And wuv, twu wuv, wiw fowwow you foweve...So, tweasure your wuv.”

And isn't that what we all want? Don't we all want a blessed arrangement of a marriage, a dream within a dream? And haven't we become convinced that the key to this is true love. Some of us may remember what those great purveyors of societal wisdom, Van Halen, said about this topic in 1988.

Everybody's lookin' for somethin';
Somethin' to fill in the hole.
We think a lot, but don't talk much about it
'Til things get out of control.

We're all looking for it something to fill in that hole and we are certain that Van Halen got the answer right, love from another person is the answer. Not just any love, mind you...true love. And “how do I know when it's love?” As Van Halen answered, “I can't tell you but it lasts forever.” We have been convinced that real love lasts forever and is the key to all our relationships, especially marriage. But how? How do we know when it's love? How do we find that love? How can we have a lasting relationship and marriage?

Sadly, many of us are doing exactly what Johnny Lee said in 1980. We're “Lookin' for Love in All the Wrong Places.” In fact, we are learning about love from all the wrong sources. Instead of turning to God, we listen to our culture. What we hear on the radio and see in the movies becomes our standard. We feel left out because we haven't had our rapturous love story. Nothing happened to us that might make it into a movie or love song. A couple of years ago, my good friend, Terry Francis, preached a lesson at the East Shelby congregation examining these issues. Since he told me he got the idea from a book on marriage, I don't feel guilty for stealing the lesson and sharing what he said with you. Let's examine what we know about love and lasting relationships and then see if we've been working from God's formula or Hollywood's.

In this lesson, I'm speaking to two different people. First, I'm speaking to those who have never married. Hopefully, this will help you see reality about romance and marriage, preparing you to make wise decisions about your relationships and marriage. Second, I'm speaking to those who are already married. I have no idea where your marriage is right now. But if Hollywood is your guide, I can guess your marriage isn't going too well. Hopefully, a look at God's formula will help improve your life and your marriage.

Discussion:

I. Hollywood's formula for love.

A. Everywhere we turn, the media is teaching us about love and relationships. Sadly, as we watch these movies and programs and listen to these songs, our defenses are down. We are just being entertained and our logical mind is shut off. It is certainly not wrong to be entertained by fantasy stories. I like most of these songs and movies that I reference in this lesson. But we need to pay attention to them with discerning eyes and ears. We have no idea how their messages are affecting us when our defenses are down. Notice Hollywood's formula for love and see if you have been suckered by it.

B. **Step #1: Find the right person.**

1. According to Hollywood, the key to true love and a good marriage is successfully finding that one person who is your soul mate. Somehow in the cosmic scheme of things there is one person out of the 6.8 billion who is your perfect match. If you meet and marry them, you'll live happily ever after.
2. We start hearing this message early. As our daughters grow up to the sound of Snow White singing, “Some day my prince will come.” And whether their prince was born a prince, as in “Snow White” or “Cinderella,” or brought up a lowly street-rat, but is a diamond in the rough, as in “Alladin,” the certainty is if they find the right man, they'll live happily ever after. While most of these movies are directed toward the girls, the message is there for the boys as well. After all, what good is being Prince Charming if there is no Snow White or

being Prince Charmond if there is no Ella? The same message is given. Whether the girl is born a princess like Snow White or Jasmine, or she is a little cinder girl servant, like Cinderella, the right girl will make us happy for ever after. Even more, if we meet the right person, they will turn us into the right person. After all, Beauty can tame the Beast and turn him into a handsome prince. So sure, the person you found may be a ghastly person; abusive, lazy, immoral, disrespectful, ungrateful, but since you are right for each other, they'll change. At least that's what Hollywood says.

3. Of course, the question remains as one comedian put it, "What if my one person lives in China?" Or even better, what if they live a block away and we always just miss each other. In Hollywood, nothing is more tragic than to be star-crossed lovers who always pass in the night, but never actually get together. In Hollywood's formula, finding the right person is largely a matter of chance. Perhaps there is some force out there, like a Fairy Godmother, who is working to get you to your Prince, but then again, perhaps not.
4. You just have to be lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time. Like Sandra Bullock in "While You Were Sleeping." She met Mr. Right as he bought a ticket for the train from her ticket booth every day. She saw him mugged and knocked unconscious, pulled him from the tracks, got him to the hospital, only to discover she was wrong. He wasn't Mr. Right, but it sure is lucky that all this happened, because then she got to meet Mr. Right who was actually the first guy's brother. Or, maybe you'll be lucky enough to catch a late night nationally syndicated radio talk show and hear the voice of your one true love tell his life's story. That's what happened to Meg Ryan in "Sleepless in Seattle." Or maybe you'll wander into an internet chat room on a lark and strike up a conversation with Ms. Right. That's what happened to Tom Hanks in "You've Got Mail." Or maybe you'll have a chance meeting with that wonderful Ms. Right in a bookstore while on a vacation. That's what happened to Steve Carrell in "Dan in Real Life." If you're really lucky, the right girl might just drop out of a story-book world because of some kind of crazy magic, exactly like what happened to Patrick Dempsey in "Enchanted."
5. Do you get the point? As far as Hollywood is concerned, it all depends on meeting that right person. And that all depends on luck or fate. Maybe someone bigger than you is looking out for you on this one, but then again, maybe not. You have no control over it. It's just luck of the draw.

C. Step #2: Fall in love.

1. If you are lucky enough to find the right person, the next step is almost natural. You'll get to fall in love. You'll get that feeling in the pit of your stomach. "All at once am I, several stories high, when I walk on the street where you live," sang Jeremy Brett as Freddy Hill in "My Fair Lady." Of course, it may take you a while to realize you are in love, as it did in "You've Got Mail", or it may take less than three days, as it did in "Dan in Real Life," but if you meet the right person, it will happen.
2. Hollywood's formula is all chemistry—literally. They don't realize it, but that is exactly what it is. When you are physically aroused by someone, your body releases endorphins. Endorphins naturally produce a sense of well-being and they numb pain. In other words, they give you a chemically induced high (for lack of a better term). When you are around this person, this just happens naturally. When you come down from the high, you want it back and it is fixated on that person. So, you think, "I can't live without so-and-so. Just being around them makes me feel good." That's true. But it isn't some mystical, ethereal, emotional, magic of true love. It's body chemistry.
3. Please understand, this is an involuntary process just like your lungs breathing and your heart beating. You can't control it. You don't increase it or decrease it at will. Let me point out to those of you who are married, this doesn't just happen with one person in the world. You may be happily married and see a member of the opposite gender who for some reason or another excites you. Perhaps they are good looking. Perhaps they have some things in their life together you wish you had together or you wish your spouse did. Perhaps they have an attractive personality. Whatever the case, when you are around them or see them, your body produces those endorphins. We call it having a crush on them. Please recognize this for what it is. It is not some magical, cosmic sign that you married the wrong person and have now found the right person. It is an involuntary chemical process. It will pass.
4. I'm not saying this endorphin chemistry is bad. It's not. God made us that way for a reason. This does help make good connections between people. But only when we understand it. It has also produced a lot of bad connections. Because when we have these feelings of well-being from the endorphin rush, we tend to overlook a lot of really important issues. I'm not saying it never happens, but the reality is the meeting of star-crossed lovers doesn't usually change people into Prince Charming or Princess Buttercup. Certainly, people rise above their circumstances, but usually a street rat, thief like Alladin, doesn't usually turn into a charming prince who can hold down a job and provide for his family. Beauty rarely turns an abusive beast into a kind, gentle, loving soul. But in the midst of the endorphin rush, we overlook all those things and make some of the

most unwise decisions we possibly can. Every once in a while, someone in the entertainment industry does give us a little dose of reality. Consider Tracy Chapman's "You've Got a Fast Car." The singer had a crush on a young man because he had a fast car. Compared to life in her home with a lazy, drunk father and no mom, that was heaven. She was sure they could make it. She describes it this way in the chorus:

And remember we were driving, driving in your car
Speed so fast I felt like I was drunk.
City lights lay out before us,
And your arm felt nice wrapped round my shoulder.
And I had a feeling that I belonged.
And I had a feeling I could be someone, be someone, be someone.

That, is the endorphin crush. All it took was having a nice car and strong arms. She was sure everything was going to be okay. She finally belonged. She was going to be someone. Under the influence of this chemical romance, she made a bad decision. She married the guy with the fast car. He never got work. She ended up taking care of him like she did her father. The final verse says:

You got a fast car,
I got a job that pays all our bills.
You stay out drinking late at the bar;
See more of your friends than you do of your kids.
I'd always hoped for better.
Thought maybe together you and me would find it.
I got no plans, ain't going nowhere.
So take your fast car and keep on driving.

5. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying the unmarried should ignore attraction. I'm just saying let's keep it in its right place. Don't let Hollywood convince you this involuntary chemical high is the sign that you are entering a loving and lasting relationship, no matter how good it feels in the moment.

D. Step #3: Fix your hopes and dreams for fulfillment on this person.

1. According to Hollywood, falling in love trumps all other issues. It doesn't matter if you are already married or if the person is a bum or even completely immoral. You've fallen in love with this person and now the only option you have is to chase that love. As Tracy Chapman had said, it's the one place you feel like you belong and the only way you can be someone. You have a feeling in the pit of your stomach and that person is the key to all your hopes, dreams, and future happiness. Therefore, even "if loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right," as Luther Ingram sang in 1972, though Barbara Mandrell's 1978 version is the one I remember.
2. That's what happened to Nicolas Cage and Bridgette Fonda in "It Could Happen to You." Cage's character was married to a character played by Rosie Perez. But when he won the lottery and had promised half the proceeds to a waitress that he had not been able to leave a tip, he learned the Rosie wasn't Ms. Right after all, Bridgette was. The whole movie was about why this was all okay because these destined lovers had finally found each other.
3. I mean what can you do in this situation? You can either choose to follow your heart and be happy with this person or choose lifelong misery. The movies have explained that you only have once chance at true love and happiness. As Chris Sarandon playing Prince Humperdink told Wesley, "You truly love each other and so you might have been truly happy. Not one couple in a century has that chance, no matter what the story books say." Hollywood says, don't miss that chance just because you made a mistake about it earlier. Forget the fact that you got into your present marriage because when you did, you thought your spouse was "The One." Surely this time it will be different.
4. All your hopes and dreams rest on this person. The problem is it is a lie. No person is that powerful. There is no person out there who can grant you all your hopes and dreams. The Eagles said, "When we're hungry, love will keep us alive." And while that can be true if you are talking about biblical married love, if you are talking about the chemical romance high of the endorphin crush, it won't work. When you're hungry, that kind of love vanishes. When you find out that your hopes and dreams take work, you'll discover that just being married to that person who used to fill you with such rapturous highs won't pay the bills or get you through the day.

E. Step #4: If failure occurs, repeat steps one, two, and three.

1. Of course, Hollywood recognizes that we make mistakes. We get confused and get in a relationship with the wrong person sometimes. Things don't work out. We drift apart. Sometimes we just have to recognize that "You've Lost that Loving Feeling." Then what? Face it. Admit it. Move on and try to follow the formula again. Start searching for that right person again.
2. Perhaps you really do have the right person, you just need to be reminded of that initial love. Maybe, you'll attend your high school reunion, pass out, and be transported back to your senior year of high school deter-

mined to steer clear of the one you used to think was Mr. Right only to fall in love with him all over again (even if it leads to fornication). That's what happened to Kathleen Turner in "Peggy Sue Got Married." Maybe it could happen to you. Maybe something will get you back to that endorphin crush with your present spouse. But, the problem is just as it did the first time, the endorphin high never lasts.

3. So, what you'll more likely do is abandon the first relationship as a huge mistake and continue your search for Mr. or Ms. Right. I have no doubt this is why divorce has been skyrocketing for the last 50 years. No doubt, this is also the reason "shacking up" has become so normal. Young people are disillusioned with finding Mr. or Ms. Right. They want the relationship to be as close to marriage as possible and see if it will last before making the real commitment. The problem is part of what makes lasting marriages last is having a commitment.
4. Here is Hollywood's formula. Find the right person. Fall in love. Fix your hopes and dreams on them. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Amazingly enough, we who fix our hopes on God, have often let these messages infiltrate our minds and we have no idea that it is happening.

II. God's formula for love.

- A. Hollywood's formula sounds so dreamy. It is especially attractive because there is no work involved. Further, if it doesn't work, it has the built in excuse that it just wasn't my fault. I didn't find the right person. God's formula is a bit different. I will admit up front that it is not based on a chance encounter. It does take work. And if it doesn't work, you will have to take some of the responsibility. While we could probably go to numerous passages that are directly about marriage to piece together God's formula, I think we can turn to a passage that is about relationships in general and apply it to this greatest of relationships. Look at **Ephesians 5:1-2**: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (ESV). Notice the four steps to God's formula for love.

B. Step #1: Be the right person.

1. Paul's first statement is "Therefore be imitators of God" (**Ephesians 5:1**, ESV). As Paul talks about having good relationships, he doesn't say look for a person who will make it a good relationship. He says be the right person. Work on you. Amazingly enough, when you take this approach, even when your spouse is not "measuring up," you can have peace and serenity.
2. If you aren't married yet, don't fall in love with the idea of falling in love. Don't spend your time looking for Mr. or Ms. Right, work on you. Work on being the right person. Spend your time seeking God and striving to be more like Him. That will bring you into contact with others who are doing the same thing.
3. If you are already married, quit pointing the finger for your marriage problems at your spouse. Clean up your own side of the street. You can't make your spouse change anyway. You can only work on you.
4. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying just marry any old person and you'll have a great marriage. What I am saying is when you spend your time working on being the right person, you'll make wiser choices about who to marry than if you are following the whimsical will of your endorphins.

C. Step #2: Walk in love.

1. Paul's next step is, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (**Ephesians 5:2**, ESV). Hollywood encourages the chemical romance of the endorphin crush, calling it "falling in love." God's formula is while you are working on you, walk in love. Then he defines what that looks like. Walking in love means sacrifice. It means hard work.
2. I'm sure you already know where I'm going next. **I Corinthians 13:4-7** gives us a working definition of love. It has nothing to do with momentary chemical highs. It has nothing to do with fickle feelings. It has everything to do with steadiness, commitment, perseverance, hanging on.
3. As I said, every once in a while, Hollywood does give a good glimpse of reality. In "The Fiddler on the Roof," Tevye feels a bit jealous of his kids getting married for love, when he and his wife married because they had been matched up by their parents and matchmaker. In one of the best songs in the musical he asks Golde, "Do you love me?" Her answer is a bit more complex than, "Yes." She sings:
For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes,
Cooked your meals, cleaned your house,
Given you children, milked the cow...
For twenty-five years I've lived with him,
Fought with him, starved with him.
For twenty-five years my bed is his.
If that's not love what is?
4. And that is a good question. Is love a fickle feeling you can accidentally fall into or is it a commitment you work at and walk in. In God's formula, you have to walk in it.

D. Step #3: Fix your hopes and dreams for fulfillment on God.

1. Perhaps this is the most shocking part about having love and a lasting relationship with someone in this life. Paul continues to describe Jesus' love and sacrifice. That sacrifice wasn't actually a sacrifice to us. While He was sacrificing for us, he was sacrificing to God: "...a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (**Ephesians 5:2**, ESV). Jesus loved us properly because He was focused on pleasing God.
2. If you really want your marriage to last, then make your most important relationship be the one with God. If you really want serenity and peace in marriage, then don't put the burden of fulfilling your hopes and dreams, your sense of value and worth on your spouse. Find your meaning in God and serving Him. Find your sense of value in God's love for you.
3. **Romans 12:1** asks us to be a sacrifice to God as well. When we do that, following in the footsteps of our Savior, then we'll conduct ourselves in our marriage in a way that produces lasting love and commitment. Not because our spouse is doing something that causes us, but because our commitment to God produces proper action in us.

E. Step #4: If failure occurs, repeat steps one, two, and three.

1. At times, failure will occur. But that is not because we picked the wrong person. It is because we are all flawed. We all mess up. We all sin. Our spouses will sin. There are going to be times when you are disillusioned. There are going to be challenging times, even crushing times. How will you respond?
2. Don't respond by pointing the finger at your spouse. Go back to **Ephesians 5:1-2** and follow the steps God outlined there. Go back to working on you. How should you respond? How should you behave? Don't wait for them to get everything right before you start working on you. Consider **Romans 5:6-8**. When did God start treating you with grace? After you had fixed everything or while you were still a weak, ungodly, sinner? Start working on imitating God when things aren't going well in your marriage. Start treating your spouse the way you want God to treat you. No, I can't assure you that your spouse will change if you do that. But I can assure you that you will. I can assure you it will help get you through.
3. Certainly, I understand that God has provided lawful exception to this step. But that is for another sermon. Sadly, I fear we spend so much time trying to worry about the exception that we forget what the rule is. When there is failure, go back to working on you, walk in love, fix your hopes on God.

Conclusion:

Following Hollywood's formula, will likely lead you to be just another statistic. Follow God's formula instead. Start by working on you. Are you being the right person?