

HOW TO
LOVE
&
BE LOVED

*establishing and
maintaining intimacy*



by Richard A. Osing

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my paternal grandmother, Annie Osing, and to my wife, Jo.

These are the two women who have enriched my life the most. Grandma truly ordained me to the ministry. Jo helped me to heal from some of the wounds of that ministry.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1



Too Much Love—
Not Many Lovers

Ask ten people on the street what they want out of life, what they want in the future, and eight out of ten will use some form of the word *happiness*. “Don’t Worry—Be Happy” was a popular novelty song in 1989.¹ The problem is discovering what ingredients one needs to have in one’s life in order to be happy. Happiness is really very elusive. We soon discover that a lot of things which we think will bring us happiness do not. The wisest minds, in fact, suggest that happiness is not so much *having* anything. Happiness is more like a by-product of living than the result of the direct search for something.

I believe that, at least in a general way, I can suggest two areas of life that seem to hold the keys to the experiencing of happiness. To be happy, you need to have satisfying experiences in two areas: First, you need to be doing something with your life that you believe is worthwhile. You need to experience the satisfaction of accomplishing something with your life. And second, you need to experience the satisfaction of a loving relationship with at least one person. It is to be hoped that you will have that relationship with more than one, but one is the minimum.

My attempt to delineate what makes for happiness is very minimal. I have said nothing about money. I don’t think money in itself brings happiness. Nor have I said anything about education. I don’t think knowledge in itself brings happiness. But the experience of a loving relationship and the accomplishment

1. Bobby McFarrin, “Don’t Worry—Be Happy,” 1988

of something worthwhile in themselves seem to be associated with happiness.

In this book I would like to elaborate on just one of these areas: loving relationships. I do so fully aware that the world is not particularly lacking in books on the subject. So why another book? Frankly, the answer is that while I have read many books on the subject and have been impressed with many of them, I haven't read some of the things that I have learned, both through my own personal struggle with love and in my counseling with couples. These ideas I would like to share in the hope that they will give you, the reader, another view that may be helpful in your own relationships.

Love is not a trivial pursuit in America. By my own rough estimate, eight of every ten songs we sing are about love—love celebrated, love gone wrong, love unrequited, etc. Loving relationships are the focus of most television programs, and not just the “soaps.” Danielle Steele has become a household name and Harlequin romances a part of every American drugstore. But the continuing appetite reveals that somehow we haven't uncovered the secret of love. We are still searching.

It is part of our American ethos that love and marriage are inexorably linked. The majority opinion is that the link is positive, that is, love leads to marriage and marriage is the natural arena for the sharing and the multiplying of love. We used to sing a song that went, “love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage” and, later in the verse, “you can't have one without the other.” So you can't have “love” without

getting married and you can't have "marriage" unless there is love. That's what we affirm in America.

Lots of folks would agree with the notion that you can't have love without marriage. There has been for some time a protesting minority that has believed that not only is love possible without marriage, but that something about marriage itself destroys love. So we have had several decades now when living together without marriage has been popular. The practice is now in decline because people have discovered that the rationale for living together without marriage was not true. Marriage does not destroy love.

But something certainly does seem to destroy love *and* marriage in the same process. At this writing (Summer, 1991) there are 3,000 divorces per day in America.² And since each divorce involves one husband, one wife, and an average of one child, that means 9,000 people per day are being painfully affected by divorce. And the numbers cited do not take into consideration grandparents and other extended family members.

The divorce figures also indicate that for all of our interest in love, for all our songs, our soaps, our movies, and our books, we are having trouble "finding" love, or having once "found" it, cannot seem to maintain it. The wonder is that we keep looking. It says something about human persistence that the overwhelming majority of people do not give up in the quest for love. There must be something quite funda-

2. Martin Textor, ed., *The Divorce and Divorce Therapy Handbook* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson Inc., 1989) preface viii.

mental about the make-up of human beings that will not allow us, except at great cost, to deny our need for love. The evidence is convincing that we do have, in the words of Bill Glasser, a “genetic instruction” to love and be loved.³

Another wonder is that, for all the cultural attention on love, the subject never seems to get priority concern in the American school system. I find it a curious anomaly that the majority of American youth graduate from high school (singing the songs, watching the TV programs, seeing the movies—all about love) without ever being exposed to some serious reflection about love. (I’ll explain why this anomaly exists later.)

I know that there are some courses in some high schools with titles such as “Marriage and Family Living.” A few of them are outstanding courses taught by creative and dedicated professionals. I also know that introductory psychology (or sociology) courses contain some chapters on marriage and child rearing. But my observation still stands: The majority of youth who are dating and experimenting with “love” and sometimes making choices of a husband or wife are not exposed to serious reflection about love and loving relationships.

Yet I can assure you they are interested in the subject. I know that they are because it is one of the great joys of my life to be invited to talk to high school people about love. I have experienced one hundred

3. William Glasser, *Control Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984)

high school students sitting still and being quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Some of their teachers were amazed. They flattered me with their compliments but, frankly, I knew it wasn't really I who got that attention—it was the subject. I was talking about something they were really interested in. The interest was already there. I did not have to motivate them at all. Young people have lots of questions about love. They experience much psychic pain, and even commit suicide over failed relationships.

Most college students are not exposed to serious reflection about love either. Leo Buscaglia's courses at the University of Southern California are the exception, not the rule.⁴ Again, perhaps some psychology majors or people taking counseling courses do delve into the subject, but we are talking about a minority. What most college students learn about love they learn in bull sessions, frequently centered around TV programs, some fraternity brother's break-up with his girlfriend, or a sorority group discussion about why men are so stupid when it comes to women.

My point? It's simple. Americans who believe that love is what makes a marriage work do not seem to take the time to seriously reflect on or teach people how to do *loving*. We can sing about it, dramatize it, and "humorize" it, and yet manage never really to confront head-on the question, "How do you love another person?"

Imagine the typical sixteen-year-old who walks into a drivers' licensing office and asks for a license on

4. Leo Buscaglia, *Love* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1972)

the grounds of having reached the appropriate age. “You do not get a license just because you are sixteen,” the youth will be told. “First, you must demonstrate that you have learned something about automobile operation. You must have taken a semester of Driver’s Ed, or at least have read your state’s version of the auto driver’s manual.” In either case, it does require some minimal intellectual effort. But not *just* that. Driving a car, after all, involves a set of skills, and before most states will give you a license, you will have to demonstrate that you have sufficiently mastered those skills. Only then will you be licensed to drive.

Now imagine two such youths, a male and female, just two years later. They are in the county clerk’s office requesting a marriage license. They are about to embark on an endeavor that involves a lot more skills than driving a car. But without ever having read a paragraph on the subject of love or parenthood, without being expected to demonstrate any of the skills involved in loving, communicating, problem solving, or any other related skills, they will be given a license. Assured of their undying love for each other, they will go off with their license totally unprepared for the task of loving and making a marriage work. And half of them will be divorced.

How about the premarital counseling done by clergy? Most clergy take their responsibility quite seriously. Some brave souls adamantly refuse to perform the ceremony if the couple will not attend counseling sessions. Many clergy are well trained for this work and use some good material. But at the risk

of offending some of my brothers and sisters of the cloth, I'm afraid the net results are often very minimal. The best that happens is that a relationship is established between the couple and the minister, priest, or rabbi, so the couple will come back when there is a problem. There are two problems with premarital counseling. The first problem is that it is too late. Choices have been made, the invitations have been ordered, the reception hall has been booked. The man and woman are "sure" of their undying love for each other, so the clergyman or clergywoman who is moved by conscience to confront some obvious obstacles risks judgments about his or her competence.

The second problem is that the couple is not really thinking "marriage," but instead thinking "wedding." These are not the same thing. Profound differences in the way two people look at life, at money, or at religion are seen only as obstacles that threaten to make the *wedding* difficult. A couple once came to me to inquire my "price" for performing a wedding. These young people were concerned that they could not afford a church wedding. I asked them how they could afford rent and groceries for the next month, and they looked at me in astonishment. "How can you afford marriage?" I asked. Another couple sought my counsel because each set of parents had vowed to boycott the wedding if it was held in the other's church. It never occurred to this couple that this significant religious antagonism would be a problem *after* the wedding.

So there you have it. Americans insist that a loving relationship is the necessary prerequisite to a happy,

fulfilling marriage, and that a continuing loving relationship is necessary for the marriage to endure. But strangely, we are doing too little too late, if anything at all, to teach people *how to do the kind of loving* that will sustain a marriage through all the stages of married life.

Now occasionally there are some legislators or jurists (or religious people) who also get upset at the frightful cost paid by men, women, and children because of the trauma of divorce and broken homes. And frequently, as these concerned people cast about for something or someone to blame, their glances fall on the divorce laws of the country. "It's too easy to get a divorce," they say. I categorically disagree with that point of view. It is *not* too easy to get a divorce. Nobody who has ever been through one (as I have) will tell you it is easy. It is, in fact, an agonizing, traumatic experience fraught with guilt, feelings of abandonment, despair, uncertainty, and pain that lasts for a long time. Judith Wallerstein has published the evidence that divorce has effects on adults and children that last much longer than we have assumed.⁵ Let no one say it is too easy to get a divorce. It isn't.

Nor is the problem a matter of people just thinking they are in love, not being mature enough, or having some romantic notions that blind them to reality. All of the above have happened. But the real truth is that most people at the time of their wedding

5. Judith Wallerstein, et al, *Surviving the Breakup* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1980)