

## **Falling in Love**

### **By David Feddes**

*You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)*  
*Marriage should be honored by all. (Hebrews 13:4)*

Sandra and Philip are falling in love. Sandra is 26; Philip is 28. They're both single, and they met at work. They felt attracted to each other right away. Neither was a virgin by the time they met, but they wouldn't consider themselves loose. Philip and Sandra don't believe in sleeping around with just anybody. They both believe you shouldn't go bed with someone unless you're in love.

They've both been in love before, and now they're in love again. They don't feel ready to make a permanent commitment like marriage—Sandra's parents went through a nasty divorce, and she doesn't want to be tied down until she's sure she's got the right man—but both she and Philip agree that they're serious enough to move in together. If it works out, who knows? Eventually they might get married. In the meantime, they plan to enjoy their love one day at a time.

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Amber and Jeremy are falling in love. Amber is in grade 12, and Jeremy is in his first year at the local community college. They met at a restaurant where Amber liked to hang out with her friends. Jeremy worked there three nights a week, waiting on tables. Sometimes Jeremy would serve Amber and her friends, and when he wasn't too busy, he'd hang around their table and joke around. One Friday night, he told Amber that he had Saturday night off, and he wondered if she'd like to go see a movie with him. That sounded good to her, and they had a great time. Now they're falling in love.

There's just one problem. Amber grew up in a family that takes faith very seriously, but not Jeremy. He has little interest in going to church, and he has no strong beliefs. When Amber's parents ask why she's dating someone who's not a committed Christian, she replies, "We're just dating. It's not like we're getting married or something. And besides, even if we would get married, I think that for a marriage to be happy, companionship is more important than having the same religion." Amber still believes most of what her parents and her brother believe—she believes that God exists and that Jesus is his Son—but she's not about to let her family's Christianity ruin her love life or keep her from happiness. Amber loves Jeremy. He's good-looking, he's smart, he's funny—and Amber can't imagine meeting someone who's more right for her.

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Mark and Julie are falling in love. Mark is in his late thirties. He's divorced, with two kids that he sees every other weekend. He met Julie at a ball game. He was there to watch his kids play, and Julie was there to watch hers. Julie is married, but her husband wasn't with her that night. He was too busy with his work, as it seemed he always was. Somehow Mark and Julie got to talking while they were watching the game, and they hit it off right away. After seeing each other at a few more games, Mark and Julie started planning how they could spend more time together with just the two of them.

They're falling in love, but they're uneasy about it. Mark is divorced, but he doesn't really believe in divorce, and he's never thought much of a man who would steal

someone else's wife and break up their marriage. But how can he let go of Julie? She makes him feel so alive.

Julie's misgivings are even more serious than Mark's. She's in love with Mark, but she also cares about her family. She adores her three kids, and she also has at least some feeling left for her husband. Still, no matter how much Julie cares about her family, she's never felt about anyone the way she feels about Mark. How can she possibly stop seeing him? Doesn't she have a right to be happy?

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Falling in love is mysterious. It can happen in a variety of places in a variety of ways, but no matter how it happens, once you fall in love, it can feel like the most important thing in the world. Nothing can stand in the way. It seems your only choice is to do whatever you think love is telling you to do.

Sandra and Philip are falling in love, so they're living together. They can't let old-fashioned ideas about marriage get in the way of love. Amber and Jeremy are falling in love, so they keep their relationship going. They can't let the fact that they have different religious beliefs get in the way of love. Mark and Julie are falling in love, so they carry on an affair that threatens to break up Julie's marriage. They can't let moral qualms about adultery get in the way of love.

What should we make of all this? Maybe you're falling in love with someone. Maybe you're in a situation like one of those I've described, and you're wondering where to go from here. We could look at it from a number of angles, but I invite you to focus with me on one simple question: What does God say?

## **Honoring Marriage**

God created us male and female, so it's fair to say that falling in love is his invention. The question is, what does he say about how we should handle this mysterious invention of his, this powerful attraction between male and female? What does God say about unmarried couples living together? What does God say about falling in love with someone without a living faith? What does God say about leaving your spouse to be with someone who makes you happier? God says in the Bible, "Marriage should be honored by all" (Hebrews 13:4). That's the most basic thing to keep in mind when it comes to falling in love.

Why is marriage so important? My denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, has a form for weddings which says:

In putting his blessing on a marriage, God intended that it would provide: a context within which husband and wife can help and comfort each other and find companionship; a setting in which we may give loving and tender expression to the desires God gave us; a secure environment within which children may be born and taught to know and serve the Lord; and a structure that enriches society and contributes to its orderly function.

In God's plan, when marriage flourishes, so do men and women and children and the entire society. We can't make light of marriage or pretend it doesn't matter. There's too much at stake.

In schools, the workplace, and the military, there's concern about sexual harassment, and there are efforts to define sexual consent. Now, I agree that we need a good definition of consent, but we need a definition that's a lot older and a lot better than any modern list of rules. You have legitimate, God-approved consent to sexual intimacy

only if both of you have said, "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live." Marriage is the only sex policy that works. Any other approach means trouble.

Casual sex is one way of dishonoring marriage, but it's not the only way. What about couples who fall in love and live together without getting married? They say it's okay as long as you love each other and you're both willing. But what does God say? He says, "Marriage should be honored by all." Unmarried couples living together dishonor marriage.

Why is it that so many people think that "living together" is a good idea? Some couples live together because they think marriage doesn't mean much. "Who needs a piece of paper or a wedding ring? We love each other. That's all that matters."

But not all who live together feel that way. Some see marriage as a serious commitment, and they don't want to make promises they can't keep. They don't want their marriage to fall apart like so many others they know, so living together makes sense to them. They can enjoy each other for the time being, and they can also use it as an experiment to find out if they're compatible. If it works out, they can always get married later. If it doesn't work out—well, no harm done.

The irony of this is that, according to every study that's ever been done, people who live together before marriage are much more likely to get divorced than those who don't live together first. And besides, it's not true that when people live together and then go their separate ways, there's no harm done. The Bible teaches that when two people are physically joined, they become one flesh. You become vulnerable to each other, and your lives become intertwined with each other. If you then split up and go your separate ways, you lose part of yourself.

And what about children? Millions of children are born to live-in lovers. What about them? Kids whose parents are living in a disposable relationship don't have much security. Is there anything they can really count on?

Also, a disproportionate amount of child abuse is at the hands of live-in lovers, and the kids most likely to join gangs are those whose parents don't bother getting married. When marriage crumbles, so does society. Just look around.

God says, "Marriage should be honored by all." When you decide that you know better than God, that it's okay to live together without being married, you betray yourself, you betray the person you love, you betray your children and your society, and you betray the God who created you for something better. To really honor marriage, you must seek to remain pure before marriage and faithful within marriage. The Bible says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Hebrews 13:4). So on top of all the other trouble that comes with dishonoring marriage, you face the judgment of God.

### **Unequal Yoke**

Let's look now at decisions on whom to date and whom to marry. A girl may think it's okay to fall in love with a boy even though she claims to be a Christian, and he's not interested. But what does God say? In the Bible he says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). He says that a Christian woman is "free to marry anyone she chooses, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).

In Malachi chapter 2, the Bible says that some of God's people broke faith and did something detestable. What had they done? They had married persons who

worshiped other gods, who didn't have a commitment to the one true God. This breaking of faith was so serious that the prophet Malachi said, "May the Lord cut off from his people those who choose such marriages, even if they try to keep being religious by bringing offerings to God."

God prohibits marriage outside the faith, and that means you shouldn't even be dating outside the faith. After all, if you can't say no to the offer of a date with a non-Christian, how are you going to break it off once you're deeply in love? God wants you to be one in body and also one in spirit with the person you marry. If you serve Jesus, how can you ever be one in spirit with someone who ignores Jesus? It's a question of loyalty. If you claim to be a Christian, but you marry a person from another religion, or you marry a person who has a church background but whose faith means very little, you're taking a giant step away from Jesus Christ. You may think you'll win the person over to Christ, but far more often, it works the other way. God becomes less and less important to you. You're under constant pressure to put the will of your husband or wife ahead of God's will, and the fact that you married that person in the first place is proof that when push comes to shove, Jesus does not come first in your life.

And there's more. When you marry outside the faith, you're risking not only your own soul but also the souls of any children you might have. What's going to happen to your kids? You can try to show them God's way, but your spouse lives another way. You may be tempted to resent your spouse for jeopardizing the children's souls. But you've got nobody but yourself to blame. You're the one who knew the way of Christ but chose someone who didn't share your convictions. You're the one who chose to risk the souls of your children for the sake of your own happiness. If you're a Christian, God calls you to marry someone who makes your commitment to Christ stronger instead of weaker, and who has the kind of faith you'd like your children to have.

## **Adultery**

Let's move on to still another aspect of falling in love. What if you're married to one person, but you're in love with another? You can't imagine how you can be happy unless you leave your spouse for this other person. That's how it feels to you, but what does God say?

In Malachi 2, the Bible talks to a number of divorced people who are upset because God won't bless them.

You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings... You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

"I hate divorce," says the Lord God... (2:13-16).

When you're madly in love with someone who excites you more than the person you married, you might wonder, "How can it be wrong when it feels so right?" But the real question is, "How can it be right when God says it's so wrong?"

I know, some people find themselves in situations where separation and divorce are forced upon them, but right now I'm talking to those who have decided to break their

promises just because the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence. For God's sake, for your spouse's sake, for your children's sake, honor your marriage. Don't break faith.

It seems almost everybody these days is trying to make kids feel better about divorce, right down to children's television. A little bird lives with mommy bird in one part of the forest, while daddy bird lives in another part of the forest. The little bird sings, "Over there is daddy's tree, and here is mommy's tree. They don't live together, but they both love me." Adults expect kids to adapt themselves to cope with divorce, but the adults refuse to adapt themselves to prevent divorce. Grownups stop loving each other, and then wonder why their kids are worried their parents will stop loving them. Is it fair to expect four-year-olds and fourteen-year-olds to be more mature and flexible than forty-year-olds? We should do all we can to support children of divorce and reassure them of their parents' love, but if you want to help children the most, don't get divorced in the first place.

### **Following God's Plan**

We can't dishonor marriage and then say it's okay because we live in changing times. No change can improve on God's plan of two people committed to each other for life and committed to him, the Lord of life.

When you're single, keep yourself sexually pure, and when you're married, give yourself fully and joyfully to your spouse. Enjoy the miracle that happens every time two people give each other the gift of themselves, when you promise to love each other and walk with each other and be one with each other no matter what. Let your marriage serve as a picture of the amazing love between Jesus and his church (Ephesians 5:21-31).

The Lord is faithful, and he expects his people to be faithful. God keeps his promises, and he expects his people to keep theirs. He says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

Seek to obey God and shun evil. If you're not already in a live-in relationship, don't start. If you're not dating outside the faith, don't start. If you're not having an affair or considering divorce, make sure you never do. But what if you've already blown it, and you're getting this message too late? Well, in one sense it's never too late. God is not only the Creator who shows us what is right, but he's also the Savior who can forgive us and change us when we're wrong. This can happen only when Jesus' blood washes away your sins and his Holy Spirit renews your life. So stop pretending you're your own boss and bow before God. Stop pretending that the choices you've made are okay. Admit your sin, ask God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake, and then start obeying God from this point on.

If you've been living with someone, confess your sin to God. Then either get married or else end the relationship. Don't keep living in sin.

If you're dating a non-Christian, break it off before the relationship goes any further. It's hard, but you have to do it. You can't commit your life to someone with different loyalties.

If you've already married such a person, the situation is different. You've made your promises. You can't erase the past. Abandoning your husband or wife now would only make matters worse. Seek God's forgiveness for your past choice, and then pray

for his help. Pray that God in his mercy will yet win your spouse and children, and dedicate yourself to becoming an example of love and godliness that may help win them to Christ (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

If you're having an affair, end it *now*. Then seek God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of your husband or wife.

If you've already divorced your husband or wife to marry someone else, ask God to forgive you and cleanse you. Then confess to the person you abandoned that you were wrong. You're bound to someone else now; you can't undo the damage to all the people you hurt. But at least you can admit that you did wrong and seek their forgiveness.

To sum it all up, God says we must obey his will for marriage, and if we fail to obey, we must repent, ask forgiveness from the Lord and from others, and honor God's will for marriage from this point on.

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