



Chapter 3

The Myth of the Marriage

INFATUATION CAN LAST FOREVER

Let me take you back in time to the early days of your relationship. Can you picture those days? You meet, and you both know there's a spark of mutual interest and desire. You're clicking as you've never clicked with anyone before. The spark is leaping into a flame of supercharged emotions, and you're falling in love.

Excitement that sets your hearts racing. Passion off the charts. A wonderful feeling of closeness. Music in the air. Candlelight dinners. Long talks. Laughter. The two of you are riding the crest of a massive wave of feel-good vibes and intense love.

Falling in love is hormonal. It's a biochemical reaction. It's just like what happens at the zoo during mating season. The animals stir in their cages and are driven to mate and procreate by instinctive forces they don't understand. The male orangutan sidles over on his knuckles to a female and says in ape talk, "Hey, baby, new here at the zoo? You're looking good today." She replies, "I've been here in this

same cage with you for ten years, Sparky. But I have to tell you, big boy, I like what I see. Come and get me.”

You two orangutans—I mean, humans—are ecstatic. Exhilarated. Intoxicated with happiness. Everything is perfect. Your partner is perfect. Your relationship is perfect. You feel all your needs are met in this person. Totally and completely. You have no complaints at all. You have found your soul mate. You marvel at how well you get along and how much you have in common. You agree on everything. You have no conflicts. You have no problems of any kind. Nothing can go wrong.

Your partner can slam the car door on your hand, and it’s okay. It’s all good. “It’s fine, sweetheart. Really. Now whenever I look at my crippled hand, I’ll think of you.”

Your physical relationship is out of this world. Your touch is charged with electricity. You have trouble keeping your hands off of each other. Each kiss is unbelievable. Long, wet, and delicious. Even potato chip breath smells good. When your lips meet, fireworks go off, birds sing, and world peace is a little closer.

You think your communication as a couple is terrific. You can talk for hours and not get tired of each other. You believe you’re reaching deep levels of emotional connection and understanding. Everything your partner says seems profound and personal and revealing:

“I like that dress.”

“I had a lousy day at work.”

“I think there’s a rock in my shoe.”

“Bugs Bunny is my favorite cartoon character.”

These statements are fascinating, stimulating, and devastatingly insightful to you. Actually, they aren't, but in the fiery glow of infatuation, they seem to be.

WHEN INFATUATION IS OVER, IT'S OVER

There's a term for these incredibly happy, cloud-nine days. It's *infatuation*. Oh, what a marvelous stage in a relationship! And it's a God-designed stage. He wants you to have it. It's part of His plan for bringing two people together and getting them married. God knows that without infatuation, no one would ever get married.

Notice I used the word *stage*. That's because infatuation is designed to be only temporary. After one to three years, it ends. With a thud! Never to return. Infatuation gets you to the wedding, but it's not going to carry you for fifty or sixty years of marital bliss. Within the first few years of most marriages, the infatuation stage ends. And when it's over, it's over.

In infatuation's place comes real life—two unbelievably different individuals trying to live together without killing each other or driving each other crazy. You notice flaws in your once-perfect partner. Quite a few, actually. You're still perfect, of course, but your spouse definitely isn't. You don't see eye to eye on everything. You disagree. You're right, and your spouse is wrong. The bloom is clearly off the rose, and things start to get messy and difficult. Welcome to marriage.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE MARRIAGE

Just a few years (and sometimes only a few months) into your marriage, your view of your partner changes. Infatuation has evaporated, and you can now see all of his or her frustrating, disgusting, and terribly disappointing weaknesses. Suddenly, the knot you tied looks more like a ball and chain.

I'll illustrate this before-and-after-marriage change by using a newly married couple: Marv and Marge.

Before Marriage: "Marge is kind of disorganized. It's cute. She has trouble finding her keys."

After Marriage: "The woman is a slob! You would not believe the filth and clutter she creates. How can a grown woman live that way? Every square inch of the top of our tables, bureaus, and kitchen counters is filled with stacks of her stuff. And, so help me, I don't know what I'm going to do if I have to keep waiting while she roots through her mountain of debris looking for those stupid keys!"

Before Marriage: "Marv is very affectionate. He likes to touch me. I know it's an expression of his love. It feels great to be wanted. He makes me feel beautiful and desirable."

After Marriage: "All he thinks about is sex! He's an animal! Does he have some kind of glandular problem? Every day is like mating season. He's always pawing at me!"

Before Marriage: "Marge can't cook. It's funny how she

can't even boil water. I'm not marrying her for her cooking ability."

After Marriage: "If I'm not starving to death, I'm struggling not to spit up what she's cooked. The health department would shut down her kitchen if they knew what was going on in there. Is she trying to poison me?"

Before Marriage: "Marv is so helpful and does so many things for me. He goes grocery shopping with me, goes to the mall with me, runs errands for me, washes my car, and is always asking what he can do to make my life easier."

After Marriage: "You have never seen a lazier man in your life! I'm surprised he can hold a job. He has energy only for sex. He'd rather face a firing squad than go the mall. He sits on the couch clicking that stupid remote or plays those silly computer games. It takes a court order or the business end of a shotgun to get him to do a household chore. He tells me he pulls his weight around the house. I tell him he *puts* his weight—on the couch."

Before Marriage: "Marge is bubbly and is *so* expressive. She's never at a loss for words. I love her stories. There's never a lull in our conversations."

After Marriage: "I pray every day for one lull in a conversation. Just one! The woman never stops talking! She doesn't even take a breath. She beats her gums all day long, and I can't take it much longer. Every thought and feeling she has is spoken. Please! Make her stop!"

Before Marriage: “Marv is the strong, silent type. He doesn’t talk that much, but that’s okay. He’s a good listener. I feel safe and secure with him. We can just be together without talking, and it’s beautiful.”

After Marriage: “He talks to the dog more than he talks to me! The man is a stick! The only sound he makes is when he clears his throat. What he’s thinking and feeling is the world’s greatest mystery. I am seriously considering getting him checked for brain damage.”

These scenarios sound familiar? I’ll bet they do. Before marriage we’re in Fantasyland. After marriage we enter Realityland. We slowly realize with horror who we’ve really married.

Every married couple goes through this rude transition from infatuation to the reality of married life. No one warns us that this is going to happen! Even if someone did, we wouldn’t listen. We’re convinced that we’ll be the exception. Unfortunately, there are no exceptions.

Now, it’s bad enough at this point with just the two of you living together. But it’s about to get worse. Much worse. When you add another human being to the equation, the breakdown of your perfect love life accelerates.

GAIN A CHILD, LOSE EVERYTHING ELSE

Your beautiful bouncing baby has arrived. Your new child is an exciting addition to the family and a precious gift from God. But it dawns on you fairly quickly that

when you have a child, you lose many things.

You lose your *money*. The thousands of dollars it costs just to bring a baby into the world is only the beginning of the emptying of your bank account. Clothes, blankets, crib, bumper pads, onesies, booties, tiny caps, baby shampoo, baby soap, lotion for the frequent diaper rashes, changing table, diapers by the hundreds, diaper bag, stroller, car seat, walker, pacifiers, spit-up rags, one thousand toys, mobiles, a lifetime supply of cereal and crackers, formula, a baby book, a college fund, and on and on and on the list goes.

You lose your *sleep*. Babies scream unpredictably throughout the day and night. Babies scream when hungry. When thirsty. When their diapers are loaded. When Mommy leaves the room. When the slightest bit of discomfort occurs. When the blanket shifts. When the all-important pacifier is spit out and gets wedged between the crib and the wall where a team of CSIs couldn't find it. When the room is dark. When their tummies are upset. When they want company and a warm chest to snuggle against. When happy. When sad. When frustrated. When you've just dropped off to sleep after the last episode of screaming.

You lose your *personal time* and your *couple time*. That screaming, pooping, belching, and spitting-up little bundle of neediness is always around! Even when you're together, the baby is there and in the spotlight.

You lose your *sex*. It's just about impossible to have

regular sex when you're exhausted, irritable, and spending every waking minute taking care of a baby. How ironic that your baby is both the product of your sex life and the reason for its demise.

You lose your *ability to be a rational, caring, unselfish person*. Especially at night. When the lights go out and the baby is in the crib, it's survival time. It's every parent for himself or herself. You become sleep commandos who will do anything—and I mean anything—for a few extra winks. The baby cries, and you lie perfectly still, pretending to be asleep. You feel no guilt, only a dogged determination to outlast your spouse. In this high-stakes game of cat and mouse, whoever moves first loses and has to deal with the screaming tyrant. Sure, your spouse will hate your guts, but it's only temporary, and it's a price you're willing to pay to take care of yourself.

You lose your *sports car*. This one really hurts the men. Like anyone else cares. Driving a minivan that your wife picked out strips you of your manhood. You become an automotive eunuch. As people on foot and kids on bikes go faster than your minivan, you endure the looks of pity from men in Corvettes, BMWs, and Porsches.

But what you really lose is your *marriage*. When the baby arrives, your marriage goes. At least temporarily. Your relationship is suspended because the child becomes the center of your lives. It happens to every couple. The second your first child is born, you go from being marriage-centered to child-centered.

The wife becomes a mom and is obsessed with nurturing and caring for her baby. *You* were once her baby! Her attention shifts from husband to child. It has to! She's not wrong in doing this. It's natural and God-directed. Unfortunately, husbands often feel left out, neglected, and not a priority. The marriage suffers.

By the way, if you have another child, the losses and disruption to your marriage are doubled, at least at first. A third child? Triple it. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Sandy and I have four children. You do the math.

NOW, FOR THE TRUTH

The truth is, infatuation doesn't last. It's wonderful, but it's only a phase. It *never* lasts. It *can't* last. At least not the way it is at the beginning of a marriage. Making a marriage successful and intimate is hard work, and you must keep up the hard work to maintain your love. But here's a promise: After your Marriage Makeover, those same wonderful feelings of infatuation—but deeper now and based on experience—will return, and will last a lifetime.

The truth is that children bring tremendous challenges to a marriage. Kids are wonderful, and they're gifts from God, but the relentless pressure they apply forces a husband and wife to make adjustments they don't know how to make.

The truth is that our American culture is clueless about what it takes to make a marriage work. But God

isn't. God created marriage, and He knows exactly what it takes to make it work. Not just work—*thrive*.

What do you do when your infatuation has run out, your differences and habits are driving you crazy, and your children have taken over your lives? You do a Marriage Makeover. A makeover based on God's Word, the Bible.

You've waited long enough for a great marriage. Let's get started on your makeover.

SNAPSHOT CAROLYN AND RICH

Realization:

“It’s time for us to love each other the way God says to love.” —Carolyn

What went wrong?

- Bought into the myth of perpetual infatuation.
- Blending two families was “brutally hard.”

Current challenges:

- “The kids have come between us.”
- Individual approach to problems has marriage on brink of divorce.

Next steps:

- Acknowledge primary interest in repairing marriage.
- Agree to pursue changes in God’s biblical way.

MAKEOVER STEPS

1. Talk with your spouse about your infatuation stage. Recall how God brought you together. Describe the feelings you had and some specific memories from that wonderful stage.
2. When did your infatuation end? Which of the before-and-after marriage scenarios sounds most familiar? Discuss the weaknesses you began to see in your spouse.
3. If you have children, talk about how they have affected your marriage. Be honest and specific about how having a child—or more than one—has negatively affected your marriage relationship.
4. What cultural myths about marriage have you believed? What has been the effect of believing these myths?