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I Wish I Had Known . . .

That being in love is not an
ADEQUATE FOUNDATION
for building a **SUCCESSFUL**
MARRIAGE

It should have been obvious, but I missed it. I had never read a book on marriage so my mind was not cluttered with reality. I just knew that I had feelings for Karolyn that I had never felt with any other girl. When we kissed, it was like a trip to heaven. When I saw her after an extended absence, I actually felt chill bumps. I liked everything about her. I liked the way she looked, the way she talked, the way she walked, and I was especially captivated by her brown eyes. I even liked her mother and volunteered to paint her house—anything to let this girl know how much I loved her. I could not imagine any other girl being more wonderful than she. I think she had the same thoughts and feelings about me.

With all of these thoughts and feelings, we fully intended

to make each other happy the rest of our lives. Yet, within six months after marriage, we were both more miserable than we had ever imagined. The euphoric feelings were gone, and instead, we felt hurt, anger, disappointment, and resentment. This, we never anticipated when we were “in love.” We thought that the positive perceptions and feelings we had for each other would be with us for a lifetime.

Over the past thirty years, I have done premarital counseling sessions with hundreds of couples. I have found that most of them have the same limited perspective about being in love. I have often asked couples in our first session this question: “Why do you want to get married?” Whatever else they say, they always give me the big reason. And the big reason is almost always the same: “Because we love each other.” Then I ask a very unfair question: “What do you mean by that?” Typically they are stunned by the question. Most say something about a deep feeling that they have for each other. It has persisted for some time and is in some way different from what they have felt for other dating partners. Often they look at each other, they look at the ceiling, they giggle, and then one of them says, “Well, ahh . . . oh, you know.” At this stage of my life, I think I do know—but I doubt that they know. I fear that they have the same perception of being in love that Carolyn and I had when we got married. And I know now that being in love is not a sufficient foundation on which to build a successful marriage.

Some time ago I had a call from a young man who asked if I would perform his wedding ceremony. I inquired as to when he wanted to get married and found that the wedding date was less than a week away. I explained that I usually have from six to eight counseling sessions with those who desire to be married.

His response was classic: “Well, to be honest with you, I don’t think we need any counseling. We really love each other and I don’t think we will have any problems.” I smiled and then wept inwardly—another victim of the “in love” illusion.

We often speak of “falling in love.” When I hear this phrase, I am reminded of the jungle animal hunt. A hole is dug in the midst of the animal’s path to the water hole, then camouflaged with branches and leaves. The poor animal runs along, minding his own business. Then all of a sudden it falls into the pit and is trapped.

This is the manner in which we speak of love. We are walking along doing our normal duties when all of a sudden, we look across the room or down the hall, and there she/he is—wham-o, “we fall in love.” There is nothing we can do about it. It is completely beyond our control. We know we are destined for marriage; the sooner the better. So, we tell our friends and because they operate on the same principle, they agree that if we are really in love, then it is time for marriage.

Often we fail to consider the fact that our social, spiritual, and intellectual interests are miles apart. Our value systems and goals are contradictory, but we are in love. The great tragedy stemming from this perception of love is that a year after the marriage, a couple sits in the counselor’s office and say, “We don’t love each other anymore.” Therefore, they are ready to separate. After all, if “love” is gone, then “surely you don’t expect us to stay together.”

When “the Tingles” Strike

I have a different word for the above-described emotional experience. I call it “the tingles.” We get warm, bubbly, tingly feelings for a member of the opposite sex. It is the tingles that motivate us to go out for a hamburger with him/her. Sometimes we lose

the tingles on the first date. We find out something about them that simply shuts our emotions down. The next time they invite us for a hamburger, we are not hungry. However, in other relationships, the more we are together, the tinglier the feeling. Before long, we find ourselves thinking about them day and night. Our thoughts are obsessive in nature. We see them as the most wonderful, exciting person we have ever known. We want to be together every possible moment. We dream of sharing the rest of our lives making each other happy.

Please do not misunderstand me. I think the tingles are important. They are real, and I am in favor of their survival. But they are not the basis for a satisfactory marriage. I am not suggesting that one should marry without the tingles. Those warm, excited feelings, the chill bumps, that sense of acceptance, the excitement of the touch that make up the tingles serve as the cherry on top of the sundae. But you cannot have a sundae with only the cherry. The many other factors that we discuss in this book must be a vital consideration in making a decision about marriage.

Being in love is an emotional and obsessive experience. However, emotions change and obsessions fade. Research indicates that the average life span of the “in love” obsession is two years.¹ For some it may last a bit longer; for some, a bit less. But the average is two years. Then we come down off the emotional high and those aspects of life that we disregarded in our euphoria begin to become important. Our differences begin to emerge and we often find ourselves arguing with the person whom we once thought to be perfect. We have now discovered for ourselves that being in love is not the foundation for a happy marriage.

For those of you who are currently in a dating relationship and are perhaps contemplating marriage, I would encourage you

to read the Appendix of this book, located on page 149. I believe that the primary purpose of dating is to get to know each other and to examine the intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical foundations for marriage. Only then are you able to make a wise decision—to marry or not to marry. The questions contained in the learning exercises in the Appendix will assist you in discussing these foundations.

Talking It Over

1. On a scale of 0–10, how strongly do you feel the “tingles” for the person you are dating?
2. If the average “life span” of the tingles is two years, how much longer can you expect to have the euphoric feelings?
3. To what degree have you explored the more important issues of compatibility in the following areas?
 - intellectual dialogue
 - emotional control
 - social interests
 - spiritual unity
 - common values
4. If you would like to explore these areas more fully, you may wish to use the questions found in the appendix, “Developing A Healthy Dating Relationship” on pages 149–161.