
C O N N E C T E D · T A L K 2

Home Builders

Love, Marriage and Mental Health

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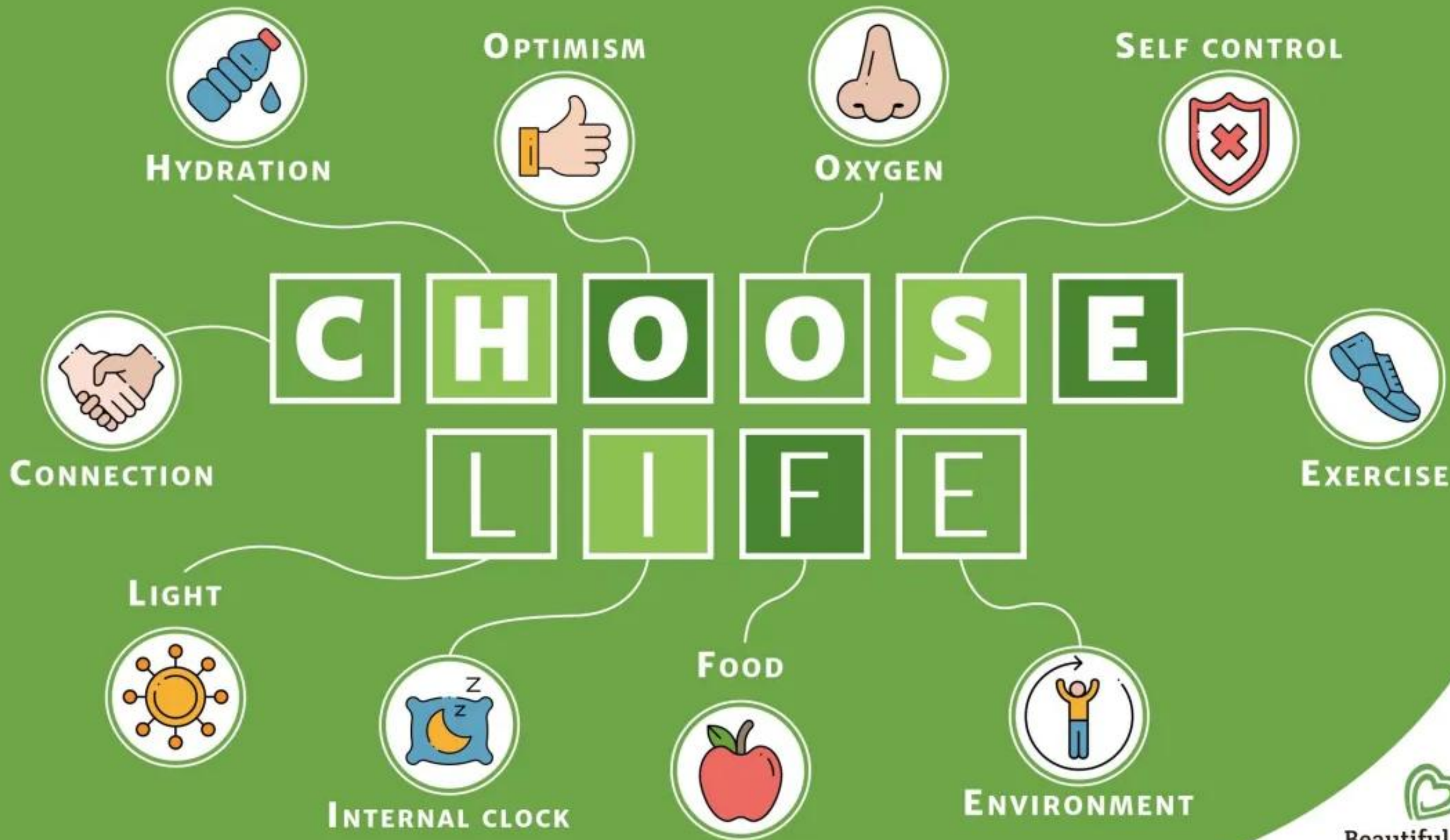


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YOUR MIND IS
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“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Genesis 2:24

The first institution God established was a marriage. Before church, before nation — a home.

Why this talk matters

In every patient who walks into my clinic, I have learned to ask about home.

Mental health and marital health are inseparable.

Depression worsens marriages — and unhappy marriages cause depression. The arrow runs both ways. (*Whisman & Uebelacker, 2009*)

Today: what the neuroscience tells us about love, what the data say about marriage, and what Scripture and Ellen White have been saying all along about how love is actually built.



Today's Roadmap

I.

The Neurobiology of Love

What is actually happening in the brain when we fall — and stay — in love.

II.

The Benefits of Marriage

What 126 studies of 72,000+ people tell us about marriage and health.

III.

How to Love

Seven practical pathways — grounded in research, anchored in Scripture.

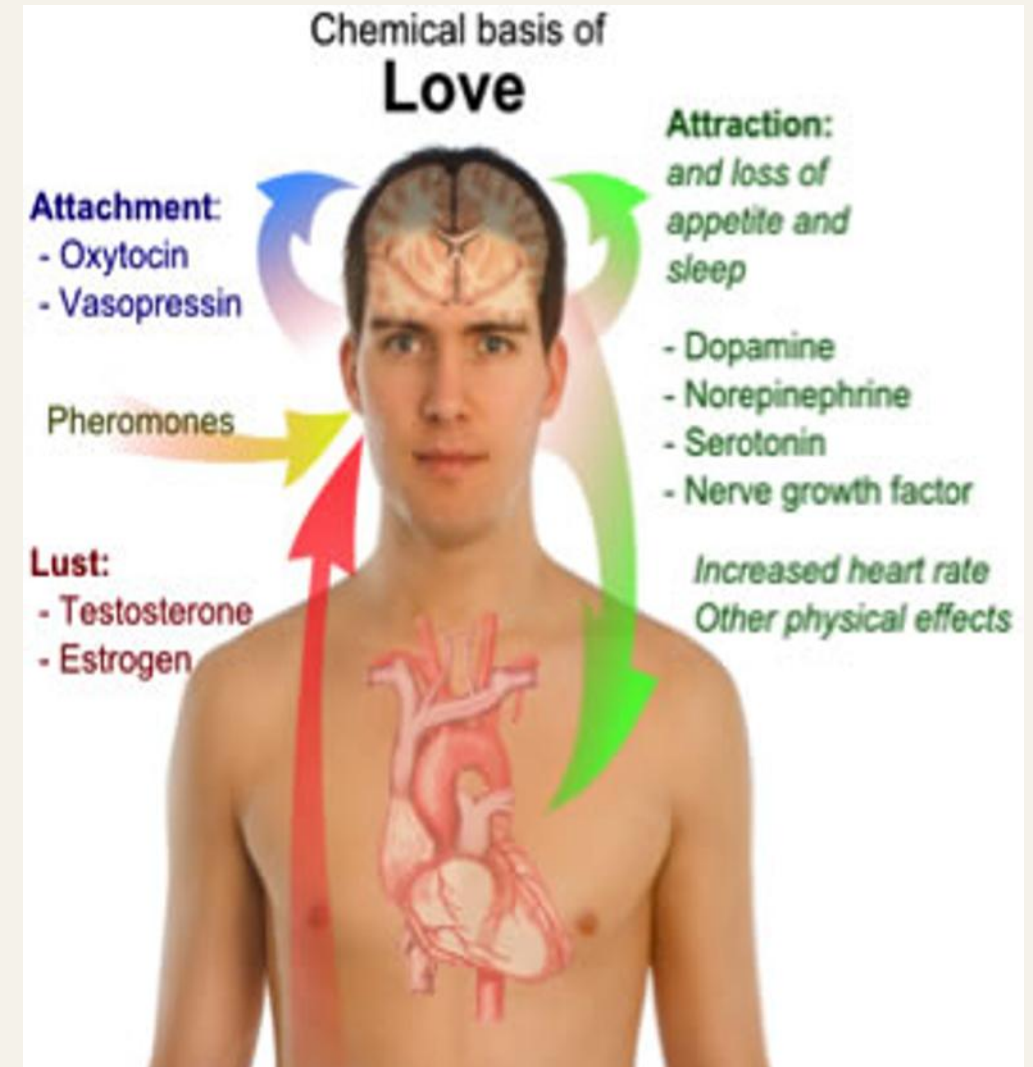
P a r t I

The Neurobiology of Love

Falling in Love

THE EXPERIENCE

- Euphoria and excitement
- Highly stressful
- Relatively short — typically peaks within the first year
- Obsessive thinking about the beloved



Two Hormones at the Center

Oxytocin and vasopressin are the two neuropeptides most consistently implicated in human pair-bonding. They are close cousins — but they do very different things in the amygdala.

OXYTOCIN

Decreases amygdala activity — *decreases fear*

Increases trust, bonding, and pair-formation

Modulates the dopamine reward system — makes the beloved feel rewarding

VASOPRESSIN

Increases amygdala activity — *increases vigilance and fear*

Drives mate-guarding and protective behavior

More implicated in long-term pair-bond maintenance (prairie vole research)

Endogenous opioids (“morphine”) form a common signal between love, pleasure, and attachment.

Love Deepens

After several months to a year, the chemistry changes:

Cortisol

returns to baseline

the stress lifts

Serotonin

normalizes

obsessive thinking fades

NGF

returns to baseline

the urgency cools

What rises in its place: **oxytocin** — the bonding hormone. Couples report feeling safe, calm, balanced. Intimacy and commitment grow steadily.

Long-term romantic love still activates dopamine reward areas — it doesn't have to fade. (Acevedo et al., 2012; 17 couples, married avg. 21 years)

*“And the Lord God said,
It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him an help meet for him.”*

Genesis 2:18

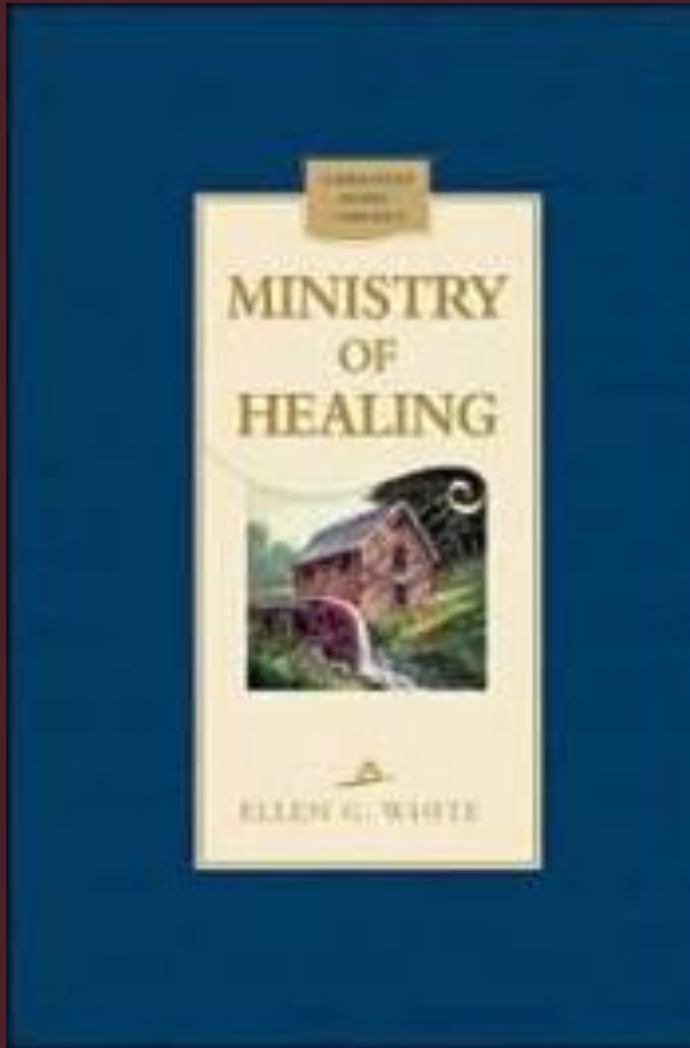
*The chemistry described above is, in fact, the biology of a verse written 3,500 years ago.
God designed us to bond. The neuroscience just describes how.*

SPECIAL **TIME** EDITION

The Science of Marriage

All About Attraction • What Keeps Love Strong • Making the Union Last





P a r t I I

The Benefits of Marriage

What Marriage Does for Health

126 studies. 72,000+ individuals. The most comprehensive meta-analysis on marital quality and health concluded:

Better mental health

Lower depression, anxiety, and suicide rates in stable, high-quality marriages.

Better physical health

Lower cardiovascular events; better immune function; faster wound healing.

Greater financial well-being

Higher household income; more savings; greater wealth accumulation over time.

Greater longevity

Lower all-cause mortality — comparable to quitting smoking.

But Not Just Any Marriage

An honest word to my single, widowed, and divorced friends:

Marriage quality matters more than marriage status. A high-conflict, contemptuous marriage can be *worse* for health than being single. The research is honest about this — and so should we be.

So we are not preaching that everyone must be married. We are saying: if you are in a marriage, build it well — because the marriage you build will build, or break, your health.

Your Spouse as a Stress Buffer

The experiment: 16 happily married women in an fMRI scanner. Told they might receive a mild electric shock. Three conditions: holding *husband's hand*, a *stranger's hand*, or *no hand*.

THE FINDING

Holding the husband's hand significantly reduced threat-related activation in the **right anterior insula, superior frontal gyrus, and hypothalamus**. The effect scaled with *marital quality* — the happier the marriage, the larger the calming effect.

A loving spouse may function as a kind of analgesic.

It Gets Better with Age

Cornell's Legacy Project: Karl Pillemer interviewed **700+ Americans** over 65 — average age 77, married an average of 43–44 years. He asked them what they had learned about love.

“One-hundred percent of the elders described a sensation of rightness” when they chose their spouse.

Karl Pillemer, 30 Lessons for Loving (2015)

Looking back from the finish line of a half-century, the elders described their long marriages as “almost indescribable — a profound source of joy.”

“The surprising thing is that the longer people are together, the more the sense of kindness returns.”

“Our research is starting to reveal that later in life, your relationship becomes very much like it was during courtship.”

John Gottman, PhD — Harvard Business Review (Dec 2007)



How to Love

Part III



Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

(Benjamin Franklin)

Seven Pathways

1.

Source of Love

Where love is supplied from

2.

Work of Love

Love as principle, not feeling

3.

Thoughts of Love

What you choose to see

4.

Words of Love

What you choose to say

5.

Acts of Love

What you choose to do

6.

Protection of Love

What you keep out

7.

Ministry of Love

What you give together

**Grounded in Research,
*Anchored in Scripture.***

P A T H W A Y 1

Source of Love

Where will your love come from?

The Modern Promise

“Matrimony used to be an institution people entered out of custom, duty, or a need to procreate.

Now... more of us think this one relationship should — and could — provide the full buffet of satisfaction: intimacy, support, stability, happiness, and sexual exhilaration.

And if it’s not up to the task, it’s quicker and cheaper than ever to unsubscribe.

It’s not clear any relationship can overcome that challenge.”

— The cultural script of modern marriage

A Deeper Source

If marriage must be the sole source of all my love needs — the burden will crush it.

“Human love should draw its closest bonds from Divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection.”

MH 358.3

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus.”

MH 358.4

“Let each give love rather than exact it.”

MH 361.2

Love that draws on Christ does not deplete. Love that depends on your spouse alone, eventually will.

P A T H W A Y 2

Work of Love

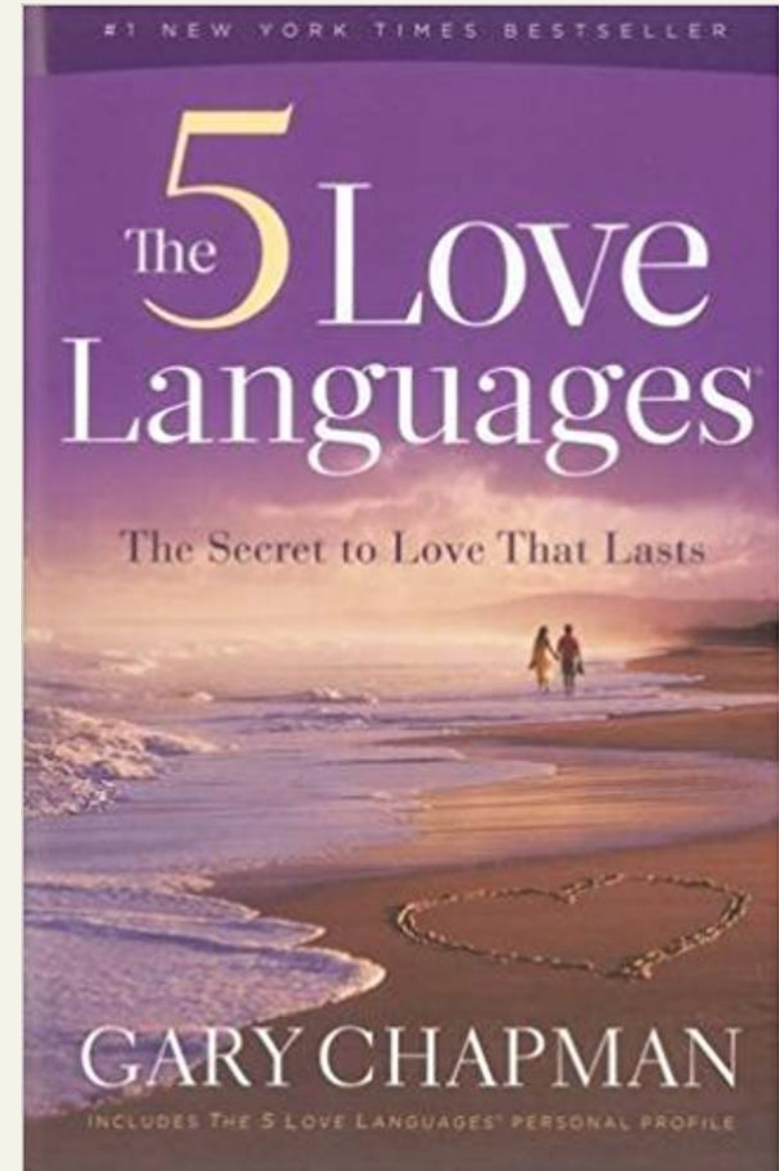
Soul mates are crafted, not found

Give Up Finding a Soul Mate

“We have been led to believe that if we are really in love, it will last forever... Unfortunately, the eternality of the in-love experience is fiction, not fact.”

Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* (1992), ch. 2

Soul mates are not discovered. They are made — over years of work, patience, and choice. The neurobiology of “falling in love” was always meant to launch the marriage, not sustain it.



Love Is a Principle, Not a Feeling

“Pure... affection is not a feeling, but a principle.”

MH 358

“Study to advance the happiness of each other.”

MH 360

“Few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed.”

MH 359

Good work requires time, planning, and execution.

Do you work as hard on your marriage as you do on _____?

P A T H W A Y 3

Thoughts of Love

What you look for is what you will find

Masters vs. Disasters

Gottman has spent **40+ years** studying what separates couples who thrive (“Masters”) from couples who fail (“Disasters”). The single biggest difference:

Masters scan for the good. Disasters scan for the bad.

“Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude... which determines what will be revealed to us in another.”

Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 360

Compassionate Thoughts

Goddard et al. studied **1,513 married individuals** across three U.S. states. Two qualities of character predicted marital satisfaction more strongly than any other:

Humility

The strongest single predictor of marital well-being. Spousal humility was twice as protective as compassion.

Compassion

Concern and sympathy for the other's misfortune — with a desire to lend a hand.

And: be compassionate toward yourself. Talk to yourself the way you would talk to a friend.

P A T H W A Y 4

Words of Love

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue” — Proverbs 18:21



To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

(Ogden Nash)

izquotes.com

The Four Horsemen

Gottman's research identifies four communication patterns that predict the end of a relationship. He calls them "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

Criticism

Attacking the person's character, not the behavior.

"You never care."

Contempt

Disdain — sarcasm, mockery, eye-rolling, name-calling.

"What is wrong with you?"

Defensiveness

Counterattack, excuses, playing the victim.

"Why do you always do this to me?"

Stonewalling

Shutting down, walking out, going silent.

(silence)

CONTEMPT

The single best predictor of divorce.

OBVIOUS

*Fighting from a position of superiority. Sneering in disgust.
Name-calling, eye-rolling, mocking with sarcasm.*

SUBTLE

*Constant interruption. Dismissal of concerns. Withdrawal
from conversation. The slow eye-roll the audience doesn't see.*

Antidotes to Contempt

“I’m sorry.”

Apologize humbly. Pride is the seed-bed of contempt.

“I forgive you.”

Forgive compassionately. Unresolved resentment grows into contempt.

Conflict skills

Learn how to fight — we will get to that in a moment.

Love-language application

Proactively figure out what makes your partner feel loved — then do that.

“Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance.” — Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 360

Three Conflict Styles

Avoiders

*Change the subject. Withdraw.
Suppress feelings. Outwardly
peaceful, inwardly resentful.*

Volatiles

*Argue loud, make up fast. High highs,
low lows. Burnout risk.*

Validators

*Speak feelings calmly. Listen actively.
Find common ground. Validate before
disagreeing.*

Three different default responses to conflict — and only one keeps couples healthy long-term.

From John & Julie Gottman, Fight Right (2024)

Which Style Has the Worst Outcome?

The Avoiders.

- Conflict avoidance prevents couples from working through real differences.
- Suppressed feelings curdle into emotional distance and dissatisfaction.
- Over time, avoiders accumulate resentment, disconnection, and breakdown.

Peace bought by silence is not peace.

Fight Fair

1

Is it the right time and place?

Hungry, tired, in front of the kids — not now.

2

Attitude is everything.

Are you trying to win? Or trying to understand?

3

Watch for fight-or-flight.

Gottman: “Disaster” couples’ bodies go into full fight-or-flight during conflict — +34% adrenaline.

4

Take a 30-minute timeout — then pray.

Focus on something else first. Calm down. THEN reconvene. Don’t skip the reconvening.

Turn Toward, Not Away

Gottman: “In long-lasting relationships, when one person makes a ***bid for connection***, the other person indicates that they’re paying attention and that they’re interested.”

86%

*Couples still together at 6 years
turned toward bids 86% of the time*

33%

*Couples divorced within 6 years
turned toward bids just 33% of the time*

“Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for want of kindness and sympathy.” — MH 360

Talk to Connect, Not to Coordinate

“Many couples think they’re communicating, but they’re really doing household maintenance.”

— Terri Orbuch, PhD · Early Years of Marriage Project (35+ years), University of Michigan

Conversations should mirror the early stages of the relationship: **asking questions, sharing aspirations, talking about anything but logistics.**

“Continue the early attentions.” — Ellen G. White, MH 360

How Much Talking Is Enough?

“It’s not that you can’t first talk about work or kids or your mother who’s in the hospital.”

“But for a long-lasting marriage, you also need to talk about other things — at least 10 minutes, at least a few times a week.”

**10 minutes
3–4 times / week**

— Terri Orbuch

Appreciate and Affirm

5 : 1

In the most successful marriages, positive interactions outnumber negative ones FIVE to ONE during conflict.

- Regular appreciation and affirmation — not just at anniversaries.
- Men actually need MORE affirmation than women, not less.
- Orbuch: “Women have a broader network of affirmations — friends, family, coworkers. Husbands often have only their wife.”

P A T H W A Y 5

Acts of Love

“Let us not love in word... but in deed and in truth.” — 1 John 3:18

Acts of Love

Be kind — deliberately.

Go out of your way. Make a cup of tea. Send a text. Small kindnesses are not small.

Have fun together.

Couples who play together stay together. Joy is data, not decoration.

Try novel activities together.

Novelty stimulates dopamine and re-bonding. Ride bikes. Cook something new. Snake-hunt, if that's your thing.

Touch each other.

Non-sexual touch — hand-holding, hugs, sitting close — releases oxytocin and reduces cortisol.

P A T H W A Y 6

Protection of Love

Marriage needs boundaries

The Sacred Circle

“Around every family there is a sacred circle that should be kept unbroken.”

“Let not the husband or the wife permit another to share the confidences that belong solely to themselves.”

Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 361

Think of a “priority circle” — your spouse is inside it. Confidences, complaints, and intimate trust belong inside the circle, not outside it. Not even to your best friend.

Boundaries Within Marriage

Two becoming one does not mean one becoming none.

“When people have their own friends and hobbies, they’re able to define themselves beyond their relationship — and that makes them happier.”

— Terri Orbuch, University of Michigan

“Neither the husband nor the wife should merge his or her individuality in that of the other.”

— Ellen G. White, MH 361

Love Flourishes in Freedom

“Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control.

Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other’s love.”

Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 361

Love only flourishes in FREEDOM.

Watch for the Wedges

What gets in the way of the marriage — even good things — if they take the place of the marriage?

Media

Phones, social media, streaming — the eternal third party in the bedroom.

Kids

Yes, even the kids. A strong marriage is the best gift you can give them.

Family of origin

In-laws, siblings — outside the sacred circle.

Hobbies

Even good ones. Anything that pushes the marriage to the margins.

Work / ministry

Even God's work. The marriage is also God's work.

Other people

Emotional intimacy with someone else is the seed of every affair.

P A T H W A Y 7

Ministry of Love

A marriage turned outward grows inward

Find Things to Love Together

“The most successful couples began to embrace one another’s interests.”

“We try to find everything we can think of that we really like to do together.”

Jimmy Carter — after 70+ years of marriage to Rosalynn

Birding. Fly-fishing. Building Habitat houses. Teaching Sabbath School. Whatever — together.

Serve Together

“Happiness will not be found in shutting yourselves up to yourselves, satisfied to pour out all your affection upon each other.

Seize upon every opportunity for contributing to the happiness of those around you.

True joy can be found only in unselfish service.”

Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 362

C l o s i n g

Putting It All Together

The Seven Pathways

- 1** Connect with the SOURCE of love — Christ.
- 2** Commit to the WORK of love — soul mates are crafted.
- 3** Choose the THOUGHTS of love — look for the good.
- 4** Watch the WORDS of love — 5 positive for every 1 negative.
- 5** Practice the ACTS of love — kindness, play, touch.
- 6** Build the PROTECTION of love — boundaries and the sacred circle.
- 7** Live the MINISTRY of love — turn outward, serve together.

“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Colossians 3:14

*Love is the binding agent. Without it, the house comes apart.
With it — even the simplest home is a sanctuary.*

Thank you

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