

REVISED AND UPDATED

# LOVE, SEX, AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR  
ENHANCING YOUR LOVE LIFE

## CHIP INGRAM



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I dedicate this book  
to Dave and Polly Marshall,  
who taught me by their lives and words  
how to do relationships God's way.

Thank you, Dave, for modeling personal purity  
and integrity.

Thank you for letting me watch you date your wife,  
even after you had four children.

And thank you for listening to my struggles  
and even sharing a few of your own.

My marriage and family are a part  
of your spiritual legacy for the glory of God.



# Contents

Acknowledgments 9

Introduction 11

1. Hollywood’s Formula for Lasting, Loving Relationships 21
2. Two Models for Lasting Relationships 43
3. God’s Prescription for Lasting Relationships 61
4. Before You “Fall in Love” 83
5. How to Know If You’re in Love: *Twelve Tests* 107
6. Love and Sex: *Knowing the Difference Makes All the Difference* 135
7. Why Only One? 159
8. How to Say Yes to Love and No to Second-Rate Sex 179

9. The Romance of Purity 205
10. Answering God’s Wake-Up Call to the “Second Sexual Revolution” 225

Conclusion: *Welcome to the Revolution* 259

Appendix: *Common Questions about Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships* 265

Notes 275

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## Introduction

**F**ew subjects in life ignite as much passion and longing within us as our desire for love, our interest in sex, and our hope for enduring relationships. Regardless of our background, race, values, intelligence, or experience, we all long to be loved. Every human being on this planet craves to be that “cherished person” to someone else. In like manner, the mystery and the power of human sexuality draw us like an invisible magnet into the world of relationships.

Put simply, we humans are relational beings. We were made by God to love and be loved. We crave the intimacy, acceptance, security, and significance that flow when we bond in mind, heart, and body with a member of the opposite sex.

If you think I’m overstating the case, stop and think about your first reaction to the title of this book. What caught your attention? What picture did it create in your mind?

It doesn't matter if you're seventeen or seventy-seven, the words *love*, *sex*, and *lasting relationships* evoke immediate and powerful responses within each of us.

Let's face it. After taking care of the necessities of life like food, clothing, and shelter, most of us spend the bulk of our waking hours pondering, pursuing, or solving problems related to this area of life. I mean, stop for a moment and consider the songs of the last several decades. Whether it's hip hop, R&B, country, rock, or pop, the words reverberate with our longing for love, our loss of love, and our desire to make love. The style and beats may change, but the themes are universal.

- “Can't live without your love”
- “Ain't got no lovin'”
- “If loving you is wrong, I don't wanna be right”
- “I wanna hold your hand”
- “What's love got to do with it?”
- “Where would I be without you?”
- “You are my everything”
- “Love is the answer”
- “Love will find a way”
- “Love never has to say you're sorry”
- “Don't leave me . . . She left me . . . found her . . . I lost him”

- “You broke my heart . . . You fill my heart . . . Your cheatin’ heart”

Day after day, people all over the globe, representing every nationality and language, sing about their desires for or their disappointment with love.

Walk through your local bookstore and check out the romance novels, the self-help section, or the relational resources rack. Notice how many volumes focus in one way or another on sex, romantic love, or how to have a great relationship. Or the next time you go grocery shopping, examine the glossy and glamorous magazines in the racks by the checkouts. Has *Cosmo* ever had a cover without the word *sex* on it? Who’s on the front of *People*, *Globe*, *The Enquirer*, and *Star*? Aren’t those publications filled with photos of who’s together this week, who’s rumored to have cheated on his or her mate, or what couples have joined the split list? Why do these magazines sell? Like it or not, we live in a world where *love*, *sex*, and *relationships* get top billing in the hearts and minds of nearly all of us.

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Advertisers figured out long ago that our preoccupation with emotional connectedness and sex provides a great way to sell merchandise. Whether it’s using sex to sell beer and cars during the timeouts of televised games or showing scenes from loving

relationships while they are trying to convince us to try a new prescription, the underlying message remains constant—the key to happiness and fulfillment in life is all about *love, sex, and lasting relationships*.

Unfortunately, despite all the hype in magazines, movies, seminars, and books, for the most part people aren't doing very well when it comes to this area of their lives. The words *divorce, breakup, wounds, baggage, ex-mate, and abuse* are all too common in our relational vocabulary. Even in surviving marriages, the atmosphere often reeks of unhappiness and disappointment. We long to love and we long to be loved, but we just don't seem to know how to do it very well. And for all the talk and openness there is about sex today, sexuality still ranks as one of the persistent points of conflict in most relationships. It appears as if the greater the hunger for enduring love and lasting relationships, the shorter their lifespan. To paraphrase a song, love seems to end before it has begun.

So what's wrong here? Are we all destined to be frustrated and become the products and perpetrators of dysfunctional relationships? Or is there a better way? Is there, in fact, a plan or a different paradigm for genuine love, great sex, and an enduring relationship?

Well, as presumptuous as it may sound, this book promises to deliver exactly that, not because I'm particularly smart or have the market cornered on these issues but because the One who created you to be loved and the One who made sex for your enjoyment has an understandable game plan for how relationships can and do work. The One who designed you to love and

be loved has also provided specific wisdom and instructions to make that possible in your daily life. This book is about that wisdom—how it can and will work for you.

You might be thinking, *But why read this book? I'm single. Or, I'm divorced. Or even, I'm widowed. I'm not in a relationship right now. How in the world could these chapters be helpful for me?* Actually, this book is very much for singles, divorcees, and those who are widowed, as well as for those who are married. Regardless of your current relational status, if you don't understand romantic relationships from God's perspective, you are destined to a life of severe disappointment and significant frustration.

**If you are in a significant relationship but not yet married, this book will help you assess your relationship's health, strength, and areas of need.**

You will learn how to build qualities into your relationship that will make it not only exciting but also able to last for the long haul. Wouldn't you like to arrive at the moment when you say, "I take you . . . until we are parted by death," and actually have a plan for how you will pull that off?

**If you're single and not currently in a significant relationship, this book will save you boatloads of future heartache—and put some past hurts into perspective.**

It will help you avoid problems and habits that frequently sink relationships as well as show you how to construct and navigate your future relationship to sail with confidence and purpose. You'll learn to do relationships the way God intended.

In fact, this book's greatest value may be for people who are not yet in relationships. During a recent conference in the Midwest I taught the material in this book to several hundred college-age students. One student summed up what I heard from many: "Most of the time when people speak on relationships, you feel kind of 'out of it' if you're not dating someone. But this series was different. I'm not in a relationship right now, but these principles have been tremendously helpful for me as a single person who is considering what kind of relationship I want and how I want to go about it."

**If you're married, this book will provide a reality check on your expectations. It will help direct your energy and focus toward the aspects of your relationship that will build increased joy and deeper intimacy.**

It will also help you address attitudes and practices in your marriage that may be putting relational roadblocks between you and your mate. As one husband shared with me privately, "It's amazing how much our culture talks about sex but how little my wife and I have ever really discussed its impact on our relationship." They were surprised when they compared their culture-based expectations about sex with God's perspective and prescription for enhancing sexual intimacy. The differences were remarkable!

**If you are divorced, you'll find hope in these pages.**

This book will help you discover what may have gone wrong in your marriage and how to prepare yourself now to build healthy, positive relationships in the future. Unfortunately, people desperate for relationships tend to keep doing the very things that

destroy those relationships. They've never heard that there really is a better way. One man from Australia who had been divorced multiple times heard the material in this book over the internet and wrote me a grateful email in which he said, "Chip, I finally get it. Hearing you speak on love, sex, and lasting relationships opened my eyes and gave me new hope. I identified with the people in your stories. Now I see how I set up my previous relationships for absolute failure. Thank you for putting me straight. I was about to make the same mistakes again!"

In the last ten years, this material has been taught around the world and I've received letters, calls, and emails from people in each category I just described. The response has been profoundly encouraging, as I've read story after story of restored marriages, healing after divorce, and singles choosing a completely different and successful approach to doing relationships and meeting the love of their life. The book you're holding is God's prescription for your love life. It's been tested and proven across all ages and cultures to bring a transformation and revolution in your thinking. I'm asking God to grant you insight and discernment to approach relationships as never before so that you can experience the awesome mystery of the lasting relationship you deeply desire.

**By the way, if you're already in a great marriage, congratulations! Read this book as a personal investment in your most important human relationship.**

Why? Three reasons. First, great marriages stay great with attention in the right places. Second, great marriages can get even

better (that's one of the things that makes them great). Third, great marriages deserve to be copied. After you read this book, the next time someone asks you, "What's your secret? How do you have such a great relationship?" you will have something to give them to read.

**So this book fits you, whoever and wherever you are.**

Millions of people have heard what you are about to read, and those who have applied these timeless truths have discovered that they work. The testimonies in scores of emails, letters, and faxes

*This book  
fits you,  
whoever  
and  
wherever  
you are.*

from around the world confirm that there really is hope for relationships! People are hungry for an alternative. If the way most people are building their marriages is failing, doesn't it make sense to consider another way? Frankly, I'd rather not read or hear any more about the wreckage of marriages and relationships. I'd much rather be a part of making things better. I've seen enough pain in people's lives to last me for a long time. I've cried with too

many broken people. So much of it could be avoided. There is hope! There is a better way to find love, stay in love, and grow in intimacy for a lifetime.

I share the material in these chapters with confidence. As you will notice, I'm certainly working on applying these truths in my own marriage. My wife and I know how *not* to do relationships, and by God's grace we've learned how a relationship can be transformed from unhappy drifting to intimate joy. I promise

that if you will trust and implement this way of thinking about and doing relationships, yours can be deeply satisfying and lasting. These principles work not because they come from me but because they come from the One who designed you. Love, sex, and lasting relationships were all God's idea. He made you for relationship. He created that longing for connection with others that is such a part of your life. And because you are the object of his love and affection, he wants to fulfill these longings in ways beyond your wildest dreams.



# 1



## Hollywood's Formula for Lasting, Loving Relationships

I hope you read the introduction. Personally, I often skip them, but I have taken some extra time in this one to help you get the most out of this book.

We've made the point that love, sex, and lasting relationships are among the most passionate desires of people's hearts. We've also noted that most people are simply not experiencing love and sexual intimacy to the degree or to the extent they desire. Despite all the songs about love, people don't seem to be getting much of it. Despite all the movies that glorify sex, it remains one of the most common points of frustration and the spark that sets off arguments and fights in relationships. The vivid and passionate scenes on the screen or in romance novels rarely resemble the actual relationships people experience. But we've said there is hope. God has provided specific instructions for

how to nurture your love life, find the right mate, and develop a mutually satisfying and powerfully bonding sexual relationship. God knows the longings of your heart and wants to teach you how to build a relationship that actually gets better and better, and deeper and deeper, as the decades go by.

### **How's Your Love Life?**

Let me ask you some questions.

- How's your love life?
- Where are you frustrated?
- What are you looking for but can't find?
- What's going well and what has you desperately confused?

Take a moment and think about these questions. Let down those defenses that you've used to block the pain of your past or the frustrations of your present. Conduct a brief inventory of your relational world. The purpose for pausing now, before you continue to read, has nothing to do with morbid introspection. I simply want you to stop and ponder your relationships. Take this opportunity to see, as clearly as possible, the present condition of your love life. I know I'm asking you to do something that isn't easy. Sometimes our most difficult struggle in a sensitive area like this comes when we try to really understand where we are in relation to others. Perhaps I can offer you some help in your personal reflection.

If I passed you on the street, what look would I see on your face and in your eyes? Would I see someone who is fearful, frantic, angry, or even disappointed? If I observed you for a few hours, would I note a remarkable lack of joy, contentment, or peace in your life? Would I sense that you feel like you're moving along through life but don't seem to be getting where you want to go? Would your daily routine, private conversations, and journal entries offer abundant clues that you are longing for love but you haven't found it yet?

Are you one of those young (or not-so-young) people who have been wounded deeply? Do you find yourself limping through life from the pain in your past? If so, please don't feel ashamed; you're not alone. In fact, as a result of counseling hundreds of people over the years, I'm no longer surprised when a majority of them sadly admit that their quest for love has left them wounded and scarred. Are you one of them? Unfortunately, most of us have grown up in families where love was poorly modeled and rarely discussed. Well over half of us have grown up in homes where we watched our parents seethe, fight, separate, and divorce, leaving us as emotional orphans. Now, as badly as we yearn for love, we are deeply afraid that it will simply bring more pain. Many admit to me privately that they are torn between their longing for love and their fear of the pain and rejection it might bring. If we talked quietly over a cup of coffee, would you share these same fears and hurts?

*Now, as badly  
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For others, it's not a matter of finding someone to love; it's more a matter of severe disappointment in the quality of the present relationship. Perhaps you find yourself in one of those marriages—traveling down the road of life together but rarely holding hands or talking to each other. Maybe you are a wife who looks with aggravation at your husband while he seems to stare at every woman on the road except you. Maybe you've spent years expecting your husband to become someone else. Perhaps you're a husband who secretly has been looking for something newer, better, and more exciting in your relationship. In this kind of relational pattern, both partners report dissatisfaction with each other. Neither seems to live up to the other's expectations. Does this sound all too familiar to you? Does this describe your relationship right now? You can be honest. My desire is in no way to open a wound or to drag you down but simply to help you clearly understand your starting point so that we can make real progress together in the pages ahead.

Or maybe what I've described so far doesn't fit you at all. Perhaps you are reasonably satisfied with the relationship you are in and all seems to be going well, at least on the surface. People often assume that you're married, but when they press the issue, you report, "No, we're deeply in love but simply living together." And though the relationship seems to be going well right now, a closer look would reveal some secret fears that you have shared with almost no one. You live with a deep sense of uncertainty. It's expressed in those cautious glances at one another that calculate how much time you still have on the clock before the good feelings run out. It's the constant question that runs through the back of your mind: "If he really loves me, why would he avoid

a long-term, exclusive commitment?” It’s living with the reality that any day, at any moment, the other person can walk out because neither of you has made a permanent commitment to the other. The missing sense of security and permanence creates a void beneath your feet. Much of your energy goes into pleasing and appeasing your partner because of deep-seated fears that he or she will one day find someone else or grow tired of you. Those fears continually plague your emotional psyche. There are certain things you simply can’t share. Certain protective inner walls always remain in place because, despite some very positive aspects to your relationship, you both know in your heart of hearts that this can end at any time. In most cases, such a relationship will run its course, and either the couple will choose to marry or they will drift apart. Does this describe you? Do you have nagging fears about where the relationship is going and where it will land? Is it possible that this “easy living arrangement” may feel good for the short term but fail to offer fertile soil for the enduring relationship you secretly desire?

Some of you reading this book have no need for a relational inventory. Your emotional and relational world is a raw, gaping wound. In fact, you still bear the tan line on your ring finger that shows you were married but now you walk alone. You’ve entered a new world—the world of “single again.” It’s strange, different, and uncomfortable. You look at other people, afraid they will notice the mixture of desperation and disappointment on your face. You try hard to find out what others are really like while carefully protecting and hiding your own real identity. You don’t want to reveal too much too soon. You are still wounded by your broken relationship, yet you are driven by your need

for love to find a special person whom you can cherish and who will cherish you.

Whichever of these people you identify with the most, you probably noticed that they share one characteristic. They're all looking for love in a particular way. Although we rarely think about it in this way, almost all of us follow a certain set of unwritten rules and make certain assumptions about relationships. But most of us have never really questioned where these rules or assumptions came from or why they are worth following. We move from relationship to relationship and often heartache to heartache with certain widely shared presuppositions about what love is, how to find it, and what to do when we don't have it. Unfortunately, our ideas about love and our methods for finding the love of our lives have rarely been thoroughly examined or evaluated. The rules about relationships are such a part of our culture that we hardly ever ask ourselves these important questions:

- “Am I going about finding love in a way that works?”
- “Am I going about developing this relationship in a way that builds intimacy, depth, endurance, and joy?”

To the contrary, most of us simply follow the rules as we go through life looking, seeking, and experimenting in our attempts to find love, sex, and lasting relationships.

What I'm about to share in this next section may be the most important ideas you will read in this book. I'm going to propose

that the paradigm (the set of unwritten rules) about love that we have accepted is dysfunctional. In fact, I'm going to suggest that we've been unknowingly brainwashed into believing a number of false premises about how true love, fulfilling sex, and lasting relationships develop. I'm not suggesting there has been some sinister attempt to ruin our lives, but I am emphatically saying a way of thinking about relationships has developed in our culture that, when examined, turns out to be incapable of producing the kind of relationships we're seeking.

Isn't it time that we reevaluate our view of love and how it grows? Doesn't it seem logical with so much relational fallout, chaos, and pain that we stop and ask ourselves, "Where did we get our ideas about how relationships work? Could it be that we are trying to find something that doesn't exist, or are we simply looking for it in the wrong places and in the wrong ways?"

Where do you get most of your ideas about love? What are your sources of information about love, sex, or lasting relationships? Before we move forward, let's go back to the starting point and take a closer look at the unwritten rules we have unconsciously accepted as true. Let's examine together where we get our ideas about love.

*A way of thinking about relationships has developed in our culture that, when examined, turns out to be incapable of producing the kind of relationships we're seeking.*

## **Where Do We Get Our Ideas about Love?**

I can certainly imagine a world in which children grow up surrounded by good examples of loving relationships. I can see mothers and fathers openly sharing affection, keeping love alive, and talking with their kids about every aspect of relationships. I can picture father-son and mother-daughter moments when they gradually share age-appropriate insights about love and sexuality. But did anything like that ever happen to you? Did your mom or dad ever sit down with you and say, “This is how to build a healthy relationship with the opposite sex”? Did wise and trusted adults ever tell you, “This is what sex is really all about” beyond the physical details you got in a ninth-grade health class? Were you ever in a warm, positive, family conversation in which you heard, “This is why and how sex can be beautiful, good, and wonderful, but be careful, because this is how sex can be distorted and destructive”? Did your parents ever have a discussion with you about how to build intimacy in a relationship through communication, commitment, and clear, shared goals?

The answer for most of us is no. No one ever gave us reliable guidelines for these personal areas of our lives. Most of us learned about love, sex, and relationships through our culture. Our teachers, sadly, have been older teens who themselves came from dysfunctional homes. If that isn’t enough, the media have sold us a false bill of goods with regard to the entire notion of love, sex, and relationships. After listening to thousands of songs and getting a daily dose of television, movies, and romance novels, our hearts and minds have been filled with false ideas about what love, sex, and relationships are all about.

Taken together, all these songs, TV programs, movies, and books have instilled in us a definite prescription about how love, sex, and relationships are supposed to work. You and I have spent countless hours singing along with popular songs, following television programs, and anticipating the next sequel with our favorite movie hero. In the process we have become unconsciously convinced that if we follow a simple, four-step approach to relationships, it will work out for us just like it works in the movies or like it says in the songs. Now don't get me wrong. I don't mean that all the writers of songs, movies, and books got together to come up with a specific four-step approach. But I do mean that if you analyze the songs, movies, and books that fill our lives, you will see emerging from them a clear-cut and consistent set of assumptions about relationships. Whether intended or not, Hollywood has a formula for love, sex, and lasting relationships. However, once we carefully examine this formula, we may decide it could be better described as "Hollywood's Formula for Sex, Love, and Losing Relationships." If you think I'm overstating the case, keep your own views of love and sex in mind as I give you an overview of Hollywood's formula. Ask yourself if this formula doesn't in fact promise that you can be deeply loved, have awesome sex, and walk into the sunset with another person for life if you simply do what happens in the movies.

## **The Hollywood Formula**

Let's look at what Hollywood says makes a successful relationship. I've eliminated the lighting, the warm scenes, walking on

the beach hand in hand, the slow-motion moments, and the rising and falling of background music. I've just cut to the chase.

There are basically four steps, according to Hollywood, that lead to deep, intimate, sizzling relationships that will last forever.

### ***Step 1: Find the Right Person***

That's right. The key to love is finding that one special person who was made just for you. She's out there; you just have to find her. Drive around. Hang out. Be on the lookout. The moment will come. Do you remember how in the classic chick flick *While You Were Sleeping* Sandra Bullock finds her "right one" when he steps up to her token booth in Chicago? Then he gets mugged and pushed onto the train tracks, and after she saves him, she's visiting him in the hospital where she just happens to meet his brother, who turns out to be her real "right one." James Bond usually meets his "right ones" when they are trying to kill him. Jennifer Lopez meets one Mr. Right when he saves her from being run over by a dumpster in one movie, then finds the love of her life when she's the maid cleaning up another Mr. Right's hotel room in her next film.

Do you get the picture? Whether it's the movies and stars of today or the Clark Gables, Cary Grants, Marilyn Monroes, or Raquel Welches of the past, the message is always the same. Finding the right person just happens! It's wild, accidental, and you're helpless in the process. Eventually you're going to meet the "right one." When you least expect it, expect it. Right around the next corner you will find someone much better than anyone

you have ever known. True love is mystical and magical. It's all about finding the right person. If it can happen to J. Lo, it can happen to you. Just keep looking.

### **Step 2: Fall in Love**

When you find that person, something will snap and you'll just know. No one knows how, but you'll just know. Something about the way she walks or talks. A brief look or gesture may be enough. You may not know her name or much about her, but you will know that you have fallen in love. In *Sleepless in Seattle* Tom Hanks just needs his little boy to get on the radio and tell the nation the sad story of his father's life, and Meg Ryan soon knows she loves this man. When they finally meet against all odds at the top of the Empire State Building, all it takes is one look and two strangers instantly fall in love. Is it the music? The altitude? Or just the script? Or, as they say, is it just that old magic called love?

In the movies you can fall in love with strangers and it's the real thing. In the Hollywood formula, love is based on chemistry, not knowledge or character. According to our pop culture's concept of love, you can sing, "Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name?" with a straight face. You'll be sure you're in love because you'll have "ooey gooey" feelings and electrical pulses will surge all over your body. Unfortunately, your IQ will drop about thirty points immediately. You'll spend money you don't have. You'll spend time doing things that are ridiculous. This amazing, much-sought-after experience of "falling in love" is

equated with overwhelming feelings that discount reason, background, shared interests, or compatibility. Love, says Hollywood, “makes you crazy.” You’ll make decisions about which everyone who knows you would say, “That’s the dumbest thing you’ve ever done.” But you’re in love. And love is all that matters. And you know it because emotions this strong, this sudden, and this overwhelming must be the real thing. The only choice seems to be to take the next step.

### ***Step 3: Fix Your Hopes and Dreams on This Person for Your Future Fulfillment***

In the movies love vetoes every other decision. Brides and grooms are regularly left at the altar because their future mates have decided to run off with someone else with whom they are “really in love.” Once you fall in love, in the Hollywood version, every other promise you have made is null and void. You can’t be held to any previous commitment. The person with whom you “fall in love” will become the object of your life, your future, your dreams, and your satisfaction. You have suddenly realized that he and he alone will make you complete. He will make you whole. Life will have meaning like it never has before (except for all the other times you’ve been in love). In fact, you will find yourself living and thinking the lines from your favorite songs: “I don’t know what I’d do without you” and “I can’t go on without you, baby.” You begin to believe you can’t make it without him or her. You constantly daydream about this person, writing perfect, romantic scripts about your future life together. You

fully expect that this person will be able to meet your deepest longings and needs and come through for you 100 percent of the time. Though we all intellectually know it is impossible, we have been subtly taught to base our future happiness on the unconscious expectation that finding the right person will solve all our problems.

Hollywood equates infatuation with love. This period of intense infatuation and supercharged emotions can last anywhere from six weeks to eighteen months.

And when the feelings start to subside (as they always do), we've been brainwashed to conclude that our love is dying. The perfect partner turns out to have a flaw or two. She can't quite live up to our imagination. Relational conflict begins to raise its ugly head. Dissatisfaction gradually erodes those once euphoric feelings. Disillusioned and discouraged, we begin to change our focus. As emotions wane and irritations arise, we start to blame our problems on the other person's inability to measure up.

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Hollywood provides a convenient "Plan B" when "true love" falters. Clichés abound to describe how we've "drifted apart" or are "falling out of love" or how good it once was, but it's "just not the same anymore." We're led to believe that "falling out of love" is an expected and natural risk in relationships. We either chose the wrong person or we were right for each other for a season but that season has now passed. Our lack of love has nothing to do with us; it is simply the result of discovering

that we no longer have the right person in our life. And, since this happens all too often, the Hollywood formula has a fourth step that has become the norm in American life.

***Step 4: If Failure Occurs, Repeat Steps 1, 2, and 3***

Step 3 usually leads to failure, eventually. When relational breakdown occurs, the Hollywood formula offers a quick and supposedly painless solution: Take step 4; go back to the beginning. Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3. It's time once again to (1) **find the right person**, (2) **fall in love**, and (3) **fix your hopes and dreams on this new, improved person you have found**. This time maybe it will work. Just go on to the next partner, repeating steps 1–3.

You see, here is the premise behind the Hollywood formula: **The key to love is finding the right person**. If your current relationship isn't working, if for some reason this person doesn't fulfill all your dreams and desires, if you're not exhilarated, then you must have the wrong person. He may have seemed to be the right one at the start, but the fact that the feelings have faded means he wasn't actually the right person for you. Throw that one away and find a new one. When you do, repeat the same formula until you get it right.

I know what I've shared sounds blunt and includes more than a little satire. But the fact remains: The books, movies, songs, and television programs that have become a common part of our thinking and vocabulary are consistently telling you and me that the way to love, sex, and lasting relationships is found

through the four steps I've outlined. It may sound harsh and burst a few romantic bubbles, but this Hollywood four-step formula is what most of us now unconsciously believe about how relationships work. It's the basis on which we approach our sexuality. It's how we evaluate whether or not our relationship is working. And if this formula is flawed and dysfunctional, as I will suggest, our basic thinking about relationships must change if we are ever to discover and enjoy the kind of love, sex, and lasting relationships that God has in mind for us.

Before you conclude that I've been a bit too harsh with Hollywood's formula, let's do a quick review of how the Hollywood formula is working in America today.

### **Report Card on the Hollywood Formula**

I know it may threaten some of our most cherished assumptions about love, but let's take a candid look at the success rate of the Hollywood formula. How is it playing out in the lives of those who are putting it to the test?

The divorced population has been the fastest growing marital category in the United States. Since 1960, the divorce rate has more than doubled. Statistics tell us about half of all marriages end in divorce.<sup>1</sup>

If we were talking about a virus or infection, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) would be calling this a catastrophic epidemic. But this is far more serious than simply the miserable

failures of “consenting adults.” Not only is the Hollywood formula spectacularly unsuccessful, it also causes almost immeasurable pain, fallout, and damage.

Sadly, we not only deny the rampant presence of divorce in our society, we also work hard to cover up the devastating effects. What we hear, despite all the violence, anger, and bitter

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talk that echoes from divorce court, is, “We’re still friends; it was just a mistake” or “Our kids know that we love them and still care for each other (even though we can’t stand to live together anymore).” That’s how divorce is treated in public. Unfortunately, the louder we shout “no-fault” or “friendly” divorce, the longer we cover up the damages. Research in the United States indicates that the pain, fallout, and damage go beyond the children. After a divorce, one-third of all women find themselves living at or below the poverty level at

some time in their lives. Fractured relationships between in-laws and friends affect ever-widening circles and continue throughout life.<sup>2</sup>

Judith Wallerstein wrote an article in *USA Weekend* titled “Children of Divorce, Twenty-Five Years Later.”<sup>3</sup> In it she described a landmark study that tracked children of divorce for twenty-five years. The study found that the negative impact of family breakup continues well into adulthood. One such grown child

of divorce reported, “Part of me is always waiting for disaster to strike. I live in dread that some terrible loss will change my life.” That is what divorce sounds like twenty-five years later among those it hits hardest.

The article went on to quote Mavis Hetherington, a divorce researcher and now professor of marital psychology at the University of Virginia: “In the short term, divorce is always troublesome for children.” She had videotaped and scrutinized the workings of fourteen hundred divorced families since the early 1970s. She pinpoints a crisis period of about two years in the immediate aftermath of separation when adults, preoccupied with their own lives, typically take their eyes off their parenting duties at the very time when their children are reeling from their loss. Is it surprising that people are not emotionally attached in our day? Could this be the reason that in the last ten to fifteen years instead of men marrying at about age 23 and women at about age 21, men are now marrying at about age 29 and women at about age 23? Does it surprise us that 40 percent of college graduates cohabitate before marriage?<sup>4</sup>

Do you hear what this generation is saying by their actions and sometimes admitting by their words?

- “I don’t know if I believe in marriage.”
- “I get close to someone, then the same thing always happens. I’m scared to death to make a commitment.”
- “I don’t know how marriage is supposed to work, but I know I grew up in a family where it didn’t.”

- “I’ve got unresolved issues and unresolved pain and a lot of fear about relationships.”
- “I want intimacy and I long to be connected with someone else, but my heart got ripped out and no one helped me cope with the pain. They said I’d get over it. Well, I’m not over it. I’m afraid to go into new relationships.”
- “The models that I had didn’t work, and I’ve got mixed feelings about Mom and Dad. I was two days with one parent and two weeks with the other, summers in one house and school years in another. They kept asking me to choose who I wanted to stay with. Why couldn’t they choose to stay together?”

And the pain goes on and on and on.

Yet Hollywood continues to promote its promise: Find the right person, fall in love, and put your hopes and dreams in him or her. If it doesn’t work, it’s not a big deal. Just find someone else. In fact, in some movies and songs, the message appeals directly to those already in relationships. If you find someone else and you’re still married, you say, “If loving you is wrong, well, I don’t wanna be right.” Yet hidden beneath the catchy words and tune you will discover a philosophy that promises new love but only delivers destruction. What starts out “feeling so right” ends up being so wrong.

Unless we consciously seek an alternative, we simply end up following the prevailing culture around us. That culture is saturated with Hollywood’s formula. We sing along with the formula hits. We read about it; we watch it, and unconsciously

almost all of us have bought into it to one degree or another. I find the Hollywood formula just as prevalent among Christians as among non-Christians. And the results are equally disastrous. We keep doing the same thing in relationship after relationship, and it keeps producing the same tragic results. We wouldn't accept the same results in other areas of life, so why do we accept them in this most important area of our lives? For example, if you place your thumb on a hard surface, grab a hammer, and hit your thumbnail firmly, it'll hurt badly. If you've never done that before, you may wonder if there is a correlation between the pain and the hammer hitting your thumb. So to verify your findings, you raise the hammer and smash your thumb again. That's probably more than enough to reach a lasting conclusion.

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But when it comes to the Hollywood formula, we seem to refuse common sense. It's like taking a hammer and smashing relationships one after another and saying, "I guess I just had the wrong finger. Let's try another." Over and over we bring upon ourselves unbelievable pain. Do you know how God feels when a marriage disintegrates? Do you know how God feels as kids are torn apart when moms and dads split? Do you know how God feels when he sees the pain, rejection, and loneliness people experience following broken relationships? God weeps with compassion. But God doesn't simply stand idly by; he wants to help. He wants people to know that he has a better

way and a better plan for them and their relationships. Far from the cookie-cutter formula of Hollywood that promises love and delivers pain, God has a prescription for love, sex, and lasting relationships. God created a plan especially designed for us to enjoy the highest and best with the opposite sex. Hollywood's formula is a poor Plan B. God has a Plan A that really works.

So where are you in your love life? How much of Hollywood's formula have you unconsciously bought into in your pursuit of love? Are you satisfied with the results of Hollywood's Plan B formula, or are you ready for Plan A?

Although we are not going to forget about Plan B throughout the rest of this book, our intention is to focus on Plan A. I believe with all my heart that if you understand God's original plan for relationships and have a clear idea of how that plan can work in your life, the superficial appeal of Hollywood's Plan B will evaporate. Hollywood's formula is broken! It does not deliver! It's time to stop, evaluate, and chart a new course toward meaningful love, intimate sex, and lasting relationships.

## **Personal Evaluation**

Please take a moment, before you continue reading this book, to consider the following questions. They have been designed to allow you to personalize the truth we have been considering in this chapter.

1. How would you describe the effects of the Hollywood formula on your own life and relationships?
  
2. Which step of Hollywood's formula has produced the most significant area of hidden struggle in your life? Why? Following are the four steps with the effect that each is likely to produce:
  - a. *Find the right person.* You're always "on the lookout."
  
  - b. *Fall in love.* You find yourself strongly attracted to people who are practically strangers.
  
  - c. *Fix your hopes and dreams on that person.* You spend hours in fantasies, imagining a perfect life with someone you hardly know but are sure would be everything you need in a partner.
  
  - d. *Start over.* You can see a pattern of failed dreams or even failed relationships that indicates you have accepted the assumption that problems, struggles, and waning emotions mean you no longer have the right person in your life.
  
3. What in your relational life causes you the most concern or dissatisfaction? Explain. Following is a list of some potential areas of concern:
  - a. Lack of prospects—you want a deep loving relationship but don't seem to be meeting the kind of person who could fulfill that desire.

- b. Lack of depth in communication—your current relationship is superficial; times of in-depth and honest sharing are infrequent or nonexistent.
  - c. Lack of passion—the sexual and affectionate aspects of your relationship seem stale, boring, infrequent, or nonexistent.
  - d. Lack of commitment—you do not hear, sense, or feel that your partner has made an irrevocable commitment to you and the relationship. Jealousy, fears, and insecurities frequently characterize your private thought life.
4. How would you describe your level of interest in finding an alternative to Hollywood’s formula and getting specific, practical help with what you identified as your greatest concern in question 3?