

THE SPLENDOR OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Good morning! Today is a special day, an exciting day. Many of you are wearing red. Why? Because it's Super Bowl Sunday! That red is the color of the Kansas City Chiefs who are playing against the Philadelphia Eagles tonight. Go Giants!

Well, of course, I'm joking. We're excited because in two days, we're celebrating Valentine's Day and it's just fitting that we take a break from our series on the Book of Romans and talk about real Romance today. How to be romantic again. How to put back romance in your relationship.

Before I go on, I want to see all our couples sitting together.

I've entitled this message "The Splendor of Romantic Love". How many of you remember this message? No one? Good! Because actually I shared this message with you on February 13, 2011, during my first year of becoming a pastor here in our church. That was 12 years ago. It was part of a series I called "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing". I thought it'd be nice to revisit a message that is still relevant for us today. In fact, will always be relevant as long as you're married. Sort of a review, a refresher. Besides, many of you weren't coming to this church yet at the time and, therefore, you haven't heard this and at least one new couple here were still like in high school back then. I believe this will help all of you as it helped me as I was going through it again last night.

I understand we've got some young people here. But that's all right. You can learn some stuff here that you can apply later on in life.

So, this morning I'm talking about the splendor of romantic love because for some of you, maybe the splendor is gone. How you wish you could get it back. You ask, "How could I put that fire back into my marriage?"

Is this marriage all there is?” Reader's Digest reports that the number one question people ask marriage counselors is “Why don't we love each other the way we used to?”

I want to talk today about rekindling the romance in your marriage. The Bible teaches that your marriage is always either growing together or drifting apart. It does not stand still. What do you do when your marriage has gone flat? It's stable but there's no sparkle. What do you do when your marriage has lost its pizzazz? The romance has gone out of it. How do you rekindle that first love?

You do what Jesus told the church at Ephesus when the church had lost its first love. The same three things apply to marriage.

Revelation 2:4-5 “You have forsaken the love you had at first. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”

This says three things: remember, repent, redo.

First you Remember. You remember the good times. You relive the experiences, the happy feelings when you first fell in love. You remember those times.

Then you Repent. Repent means to deliberately change your attitude towards your mate. You choose to turn it around. You choose to act in a loving way. You choose to act in a romantic way even if you don't feel romantic.

Then it says “Do the things you did at first” or Redo. Do it again. Act the same way towards your mate that you used to. What you did to fall in love, you must continue to do to stay in love. It's easier to fall in love than stay in love. We get complacent. We stop doing the things we did when we first fell in love.

Today I want to give you five actions to get back romance, to put back romance into that marriage. They cause romance in the first place and they cause romance to re-blossom. If I were to summarize the message in a sentence today it would be this: Feelings follow actions.

If you act romantic you will begin to feel romantic. Not vice versa. You act your way into a feeling. It's easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action.

When you first fell in love you did five things. And to fall in love again you need to do the five things again. These five things start with the letter A.

If you'll do these five things, the romance will come back.

1. ATTENTION

Philippians 2:2&4 "Live together in love as though you had only one mind and spirit between you. Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Let me repeat the last sentence, "Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The very first sign you knew you were falling in love is when you noticed that somebody was paying attention to you and you began to pay attention to that somebody. The first step in falling in love again is to start paying attention again. Do you remember how much attention you paid your mate before they he or she was married to you? You wrote notes. You made phone calls. You spent hours talking together. You sent cards. You bought flowers. You brought gifts. Over and over. All of these things were saying, "You have my total undivided attention."

What happened after you got married? "Get it yourself!" The attention switched. We became complacent and take each other for granted. Have you noticed that after you buy something new it loses its attraction after a while? Familiarity loses our attention. "I've got to have it!" is the way you felt about your marriage. And after you got it, now you think, "I can't get rid of it!"

You see, men are goal-oriented. Men are destination, achievement, goal oriented. When you take that and apply it to marriage, the man has a goal, "I've got to get a wife." And men become very creative in reaching this goal.

They might do things they would not normally do. Stuff like poetry. But to RJ this is normal.

But once they have got the wedding over, men unconsciously think "Mission accomplished! Now let's go on to the next goal in life." That's usually providing for the woman. The goal shifts from the woman to providing for the woman. And the focus shifts to the career in order to provide for the woman. The result is that the wife in a few months is devastated. She's saying "What happened? I've been dumped for a career. It's a set up -- bait and switch. I feel cheated."

The point is you've got to make time for each other. You must show attention. The attention you showed before marriage you must continue in your marriage if you want the feelings to continue. If you don't you're headed for trouble.

You know what the enemy of romance is? A busy schedule. That's the enemy of romance. You're always in a hurry. The University of Nebraska did a study and found out that the common denominator of intimate marriages is the couples spend a lot of time together every week.

2. AFFIRMATION

The quickest way for you to put spark back into your marriage is for you to start affirming and appreciating and admiring again the strength of your spouse instead of focusing on their weaknesses. **I Thessalonians 5:11** *"So encourage each other and give each other strength."* Everybody wants to be admired, appreciated, looked up to. We fall in love with people who admire us. That's how you fell in love: somebody paid you attention and affirmed you and you fell in love with them.

Here's a classic statement: "Treat your wife like a queen and you automatically become a king." Simple but profound. We tend to become what others expect of us.

Romans 12:10 *"Take delight in honoring each other."* Verbalize your love every day. If you will verbalize your love you will start feeling loving. By saying, "I love you... I appreciate you ... I'm glad I married you ... I'm grateful for you" over and over you will actually begin to feel that way. That's the power of the spoken word. Why don't we apply that right now. Tell your spouse, "I love you". Be careful, just to your spouse, ok?

I read a national survey on the top ten terms of endearment: honey, baby, sweetheart, dear, lover, darling, sugar, pumpkin, angel pie, precious/beautiful. There is tremendous power in affirming.

What is your term of endearment for your spouse? My term of endearment for my wife is "Sweetheart." But when we quarrel, it is "Switik." Just kidding. Yes, we quarrel. I think that's quite normal. But we make it a point to not let the sun go down on our anger, as the Bible says. We kiss and make up soon after.

Now, my wife's term of endearment for me is "Honey" or "Honeybunch." I remember when Ally was two years old, she also called me "Honey" because that's what she often heard her mom called me.

Anyway, there is tremendous power in affirming.

A lady came to an attorney and said, "I want to divorce my husband. I don't just want to divorce him; I want to hurt him bad because he's ignored me for so long."

The attorney said, "Go back, and while I'm preparing the papers, compliment him every day. Tell him how great a person he is, how good he is and what you appreciate about him. Build him up. Then when I've got the papers finished, we'll serve notice, drop him like a hot potato. And it will devastate him because he will fall in love with you if you do all of these things." She called back a month later and said, "Cancel the divorce. We've both fallen in love again."

That is the power of affirmation. You begin to build each other up. Take delight in honoring one another.

3. AFFECTION

You know how affectionate you were during your courting days. In fact, you can always tell who the unmarried couples are. They can't keep their hands off each other. You see a couple walking hand in hand, do you assume they're married or dating? I think it's sad that after the marriage, after the wedding, the touching and tenderness stops in so many marriages. All marriages need large amounts of hugging and kissing and caressing and sitting close together in the car, holding hands, patting each other, snuggling. Non sexual affection is what I'm talking about here where you just enjoy each other's company.

Colossians 3:19 (Amplified) "Husbands, ... be affectionate." It is a commandment. Husbands, you must be affectionate to your wife. If you're not, you're sinning. **Ephesians 5:28 "The love a man has for his wife is the extending of his love for himself to enfold her."** Some say, "I'm just not naturally affectionate." So what? Change! It's not in your genes. It's behavior you learned from your background and you can change. You can learn to be affectionate. The Puritans considered this so important that they considered a lack of affection as a major sin. The book Worldly Saints: The Puritans as they Really Are says "The Puritans weren't anti-sex. They had a high value for it in marriage." An example was given:

"When a New England wife complained first to her pastor, and then to the whole church, that her husband was neglecting their sex life, the church proceeded to excommunicate the man."

Babies can die for the lack of touch. It's called skin deprivation. Babies that are not touched enough in the early days of infancy can actually die from the lack of touch and so can marriages.

UCLA did a study. They found out, ladies, if you will hug your husband three times a day, you will increase his life span up to three years. Ok, let's apply this now. (At this point, ask the married couples to stand up and then ask the ladies to hug their husbands three times. If the spouse is not around, ask them to do it later). And husbands, another study says that if you kiss your wife in the morning before you go to work or she goes to work, your marriage will likely last. Be affectionate, the Bible says. I know what you're thinking. Don't do it. I said do it in the morning, before you go to work, or she goes to work. Be seated.

Genesis 26:8 of the KJV says "*Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.*" RJ, do you know that? What does it mean? Are they actually engaged in sports? I checked other versions and they say they were "caressing or fondling" each other. In fact, the Hebrew word means "to fondle or caress playfully." Ok, this sport is for married couples only. If you're not married, you're banned from this sport. Be affectionate, the Bible says.

The Bible says if you want to turn to your first love you need to do the things you did at first. You gave Attention, Affirmation, Affection. If you start doing those things those feelings will return. You say, "I don't feel affectionate." And you won't until you start acting affectionate again. You can act your way into a feeling. It's up to you.

You know, appearance influences affection. Pretty babies get stroked a whole lot more than ugly babies. It's a fact of life. When you get married after a while you get complacent about your appearance and start letting it all hang out. When you dated you got all spruced up, your hair combed, the nicest clothes. You wanted to look the best you could look. What changed?

You still look the best you can when you go out in public, but what about at home? You ought to look the best you can for your wife, for your husband.

For some of you, the most spiritual thing you could do is go home and throw out some of those ratty clothes that your husband or wife has been complaining about for years. It may be comfortable but it is a dramatic turn off to your mate!

4. ADVENTURE

Most marriages are dull. **Eccl. 9:9 "Enjoy life with your wife."** I Timothy 6:17 **"God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."** Matthew 11:19 (Phillips) **"Jesus came enjoying life."** He had a good time. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being a party animal. They said he's a glutton and a drunk, He's always partying with sinners. How did he get that reputation? Because he came enjoying life.

McGinnis says the number one cause of affairs is boredom. Are you fun to live with? Or are you a bump on a log? When was the last time you did something just for the fun of it? Something unusual to break the monotony? Something crazy just for the fun of it with your husband or wife?

You had adventure when you were having romance. You've lost the adventure. Everything is predictable now. You see, predictability kills in a marriage. All work and no play makes a dull marriage. The family that plays together stays together. Learn to play together.

The problem is for most of us, the way we define fun is this: Fun is what you do after you've got all your work finished. The problem is you never get all your work finished. The work is never done. Even after you retire you still have got work to do. As a result, the fun in your marriage gets shoved out the window. The person who takes last place is your spouse. "She'll understand. We're busy right now. Besides, it's only temporary."

But then, a temporary, hectic schedule becomes a permanent lifestyle. You schedule the fun out of your marriage. And you wonder why the feelings have died.

I challenge you, I beg you to say, "In spite of our hectic schedule we're going to have fun together. We're going to have at least one date a week." You need to date your mate. You can date anytime. It doesn't have to be at night. It doesn't have to be expensive. But do something together. One rule: no kids. You've got to do it alone. Something that's mutually fun and enjoyable.

Do what the Bible says. Do the things you did at first. Don't just watch TV. Break out of a rut and do something crazy. Go spend the night at a hotel. Have a dinner at a really romantic place. Get on a cruise. Things like that wherein you just enjoy the company of each other.

5. ACCORDANCE

I'm talking about spiritual accord. Spiritual intimacy. Oneness of spirit. The Bible says at Pentecost, "*they were all of one accord.*" Their hearts, their spirits, were knit together. I John 1:7 "*If we are living in the light of God's presence then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other.*" The key to fellowship with your mate, joy with your mate, is that both of you live in God's presence. When I'm committed to Christ and my wife is committed to Christ, and we're both trying to live for the Lord, it naturally draws us together in a bonding that nothing else can take the place of. Spiritual harmony, spiritual oneness, brings about emotional oneness which brings about physical oneness. It joins you together. Spiritual unity enhances romance. I remember the story of a guy who ended up proposing to his girlfriend while they were praying together. Prayer joins you together. And then there is the natural desire to show physical affection, physical oneness when you are spiritually one.

If you haven't done it, you need to commit your life to Christ, commit your marriage to Christ. It's the most logical, helpful thing for your marriage. How can you be spiritually one when one of you isn't committed? You can't.

You're going in different directions. If you're not one in your spirit, how can you be one in your soul and one in your body like God intended for you to be?

The husband needs to be committed to Christ and the wife needs to be committed to Christ and together you have a glue that keeps you cemented together in the crises.

How do you develop spiritual oneness? Assuming that you both have made that commitment then:

1) Pray together. Hold hands when you pray together. Hold hands around the table at dinner time when you pray together. When was the last time you prayed for your wife? When was the last time you prayed for your husband in front of your husband? When was the last time the two of you prayed together for your children? If you're not doing that you're missing so much!

2) Share your life. Share your spiritual journey, what you're learning. You can take this outline I've shared with you and later on you can use it as a foundation to talk about spiritual matters. Developing spiritual oneness takes time and energy and the devil fights it. But it is worth it.

Conclusion:

Husbands and wives, God wants you to have oneness. The Bible says the two shall become one. That involves five areas:

1) Intellectual intimacy

2) Emotional intimacy

3) Physical intimacy

4) Recreational intimacy

5) Spiritual intimacy

When your engine is running only on three of those cylinders you're not fully what God wants your marriage to be.

But when you get all five cylinders going, then you develop real oneness in your marriages. When you cut one out, the potential for your happiness goes down. You need them all.

God believes in romance. God is romantic. He wrote an entire book of the Bible just on romance. Songs of Solomon. The whole purpose of the book is the beauty of romance and sexual love. That's what God wants for your marriage.

Some of you think you've married the wrong person. But you are dead wrong. You don't need a new mate. You need a new attitude. If you act romantic, you will become romantic. You'll feel those feelings. Remember how it used to be. Repent and choose to treat your husband/wife differently, the way you used to. Choose to change. Do the things you used to do.