

*first comes love,*  
then  
what



Kimberly Bear, MS LPC



*First Comes Love, Then What?*

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The majority of case examples presented in this book are fictional composites based on the author's clinical experience with hundreds of clients through the years. Any resemblance between these fictional characters and actual persons is coincidental. When clients' actual stories have been used, people's names and certain details of their stories have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

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“When choosing a spouse, learning to ask the right questions is essential to making a wise choice—and that’s exactly what Kimberly Bear helps readers do in *First Comes Love, Then What?*”

—Gary Thomas

“In this age when the message of movies, songs, and novels is that intense romance and passion are the foundation of lasting marriages, Christian therapist Kim Bear brings a solid, practical approach to help you determine whether your love relationship is based on love versus lust, or trust versus fantasy. *First Comes Love, Then What?* is an interactive book designed to deepen your understanding of yourself, your future mate, and most importantly, your relationship with God. This book crosses generations. Buy it if you are engaged or contemplating marriage, or buy it for someone close to you who is in a seriously committed relationship. I hope that Bible study groups across this country will use this book to guide people to lasting relationships so that Christians are once again known for their passion for Christ and passion for marriage and family.”

—Earl R. Henslin Psy.D., B.C.E.T.S.

MFT 14693

Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress

Diplomate in the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress

This book is dedicated to God and the people I love:

*Brian, for 25 amazing years of letting me be me; that is love.*

*Kara, my beautiful daughter and partner;  
none of my projects would exist without you.*

*Brian Lee, you are the bravest person I know;  
your courage inspires me.*

*Mom and Dad, my models of wisdom and discernment.*

*Todd and Kurt, brothers like no other;  
your friendships are more precious than gold.*



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# Introduction

What happens when you contemplate being in a romantic relationship? Do you get a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach as you daydream about that *someone* you are certain is out there? When you think about spending your life with one person, do you feel excitement, confusion, fear—or possibly all three? Do you think about your past relationships and wonder if there is a spouse in your future?

No matter which of these thoughts and feelings the words “romantic relationship” evoke, this is the book for you.

It’s no secret that the vast majority of Americans choose to marry. Sadly, however, society today is plagued by more abusive, unhappy, and failed marriages than ever before. Every generation wants desperately to break the cycle of serious marital problems and divorce, but most people don’t know where to begin. Let your study of this book be a first step in launching healthy new habits for the sake of your future *successful* relationships.

First, I need to burst a bubble of mythology that says good marriages “just happen.” Not true. All relationships are complicated, and maintaining a successful one requires a great deal of work on the part of both individuals involved. This remains true for every stage of the relationship.

This book is truly for anyone interested in pursuing a positive marital relationship. Perhaps you have had your share of interesting relationships, and you believe they served a purpose (though you may not be *exactly* certain what that purpose was). Maybe you’ve also watched some of your nearest and dearest friends get themselves into messy relationships. You might be worried that you’ll find yourself in the same situation. Be assured, you can find some-

one with whom you can enjoy a happy and healthy life, but finding the right life mate will not happen through luck or chance.

View this book as a wise friend in your search for a healthy relationship. As you read, you will obtain information vital to having a happy and long-lasting marriage. Having this information prior to beginning a relationship puts you way ahead of the game. As you work through the material at the end of each chapter, you'll be able to evaluate and apply these key concepts in your own life. Employing these principles during your dating years and later married life should greatly improve your relationships and potentially save you (and others) pain, disappointment, and perhaps some hefty legal and therapy fees.

If you are currently involved in a serious relationship, this book will help you determine if you should continue moving forward. If you've been in relationships that have failed, perhaps you need to reevaluate your strategies. Some of your past experiences may have led you to question whether Mr. or Ms. Right is even out there. Make it a goal to identify where you've gone wrong in the past so you can make wise choices for your upcoming dating relationships. Have confidence that you can start anew and develop a positive, meaningful, and lasting relationship for the future.

In the following chapters, you will discover what motivates people in relationships—consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously. You will be guided to take a closer look at yourself. You can get started right now by considering the following questions:

- Do you consciously know what type of person you hope to share your life with?
- Do you know which values are most important in your life?
- Do you know your personality type?
- Do you know which personality types are most compatible with yours?
- Do you know as much about yourself as you think?
- Do you know as much about yourself as you want to know?

I hope you will always be willing to learn more about who you are, what makes you tick, and where you are going in life. This book will teach you a lot about yourself! Why is that important? Because you can't find a compatible mate or work on your current relationship without first knowing who *you* are. Another major element of successful relationships involves how you interact with other people, and this will be examined in detail as well. Just remember, most people make the mistake of thinking their relationship issues are unique, but in reality, they are not. Take comfort in the fact that you are not alone.

This book was written with *you* in mind and is intended to help you be miles ahead when you ultimately walk down the aisle. A strong foundation is the basis of a successful marriage, and this book will help you build it.

One great way to understand how various factors each play a role in relationships and why many people pair up with partners who are not good matches is to examine a variety of real relationships. In each highlighted relationship in this book, we will study individuals and learn from their mistakes as well as their good choices. Note how the unhealthy decisions made by some and the healthy decisions made by others impacted their relationships in both the short term and long term.

To make the most of your experience with this book, pay particular attention to the Reality Check at the end of each chapter. This checkpoint section was designed to help you reflect on each chapter's content and relate it to your own personal dating relationships. If you have a dating partner, have him or her read the book and answer the questions as well. This will be helpful, because couples often fail to share their thoughts as well as future expectations about a long-term relationship.

As you compare answers with your partner, don't focus on whether your answers are alike or different. Focus instead on healthy, nonjudgmental conversation, and really get to know each other



while building healthy communication skills. With the right attitude, you will grow in knowledge about yourself, your partner, and the relationship as a whole.

Check out the “words of wisdom” quotes throughout each chapter, evaluate them, and ask yourself how you respond to them.

Compare your experiences with our group of two hundred singles surveyed for the Singles Say... sections.

Remember that no matter who you are or where you come from, having a successful relationship is no easy feat. It takes a well-stocked toolbox, two dedicated and committed partners, and lots of hard, yet rewarding, work. By absorbing the information here, you are putting one more tool in your toolbox. You will begin to understand and debunk relationship myths perpetuated by society and unlock secrets to success so your job becomes a little easier. You will learn a lot about yourself, your friends, and your relatives, and you'll hopefully improve the way you approach this adventure of a lifetime.

## Challenging Your Assumptions

How many of us take the time to develop a logical approach to love and marriage? All too often we rush in and base our decisions on the prevailing wisdom. Often the assumptions we make—assumptions based on what we've learned from friends, family, experience, and every form of media—are faulty to begin with. Every decision flowing from a wrong assumption will be distorted.

You may be able to come up with your personal list of false assumptions, but here are five common misconceptions we can look at as we begin *First Comes Love, Then What?*

### FALSE ASSUMPTION #1:

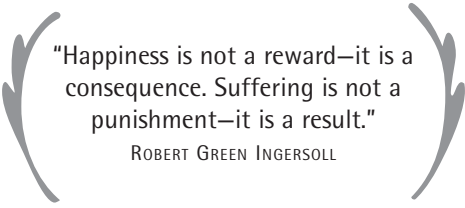
#### THERE IS ONE PERFECT SOUL MATE FOR EACH PERSON

Let's start off with the soul-mate question since it's one that generates debate, discussion, and controversy among a large number of young men and women.

Jessica, a pastor in the Midwest, tells the story of finding her "soul mate." At a young age, she found Mr. Right, who also happened to be a pastor. They seemed "destined to be together" prior to

the marriage, but shortly after they said “I do,” her pastor husband became abusive. For years, she said, they lived the lie of the perfect family while behind closed doors their marriage was a shambles, and they were both distanced from God.

When Jessica got married, she still believed there was one “right person” for her. When the marriage failed, she said, “I married the



“Happiness is not a reward—it is a consequence. Suffering is not a punishment—it is a result.”

ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL

wrong man. This was not the man God had planned for me.” She credited her mistake to youth, lack of wisdom, discernment, judgment, and plain ignoring the warning signs all

around her. She had told herself he was her soul mate and moved forward without doing her homework (the things this book suggests).

Jessica now admits that if she had done her homework, perhaps she and her husband could have worked out some healthy boundaries and expectations before they wed, potentially alleviating the problems they encountered.

Jessica is learning from her mistakes. She no longer believes that God has “one right person” for her—that was just her romanticized ideal. She also says, “Look at it this way—we meet many friends in life, and if we work on those relationships, they grow, mature, and last over time. So doesn’t it stand to reason we could literally choose just about anyone who is compatible, put time and energy into the relationship, and find a spouse who feels like a soul mate?”

Ask a number of teenagers or young adults what they think about the concept of a soul mate, and you will likely find a high number of them believe in predestined love. Ask people over 50, and you will find far fewer who believe in the concept 100 percent. Instead they believe wise choices and hard work have everything to do with relationship success.

Harry and Fern have been married 50 years and believe they are soul mates, but their definition of that term has changed over time. They tell stories about having been on the brink of divorce years earlier, with conflict during their first 20 years. This couple took advantage of counseling and resources before they were commonplace and now state, “A good marriage is a lot of hard work.”

Fern believes couples buying into the soul-mate concept use it as an excuse to neither do their homework on the front end nor tend to the relationship once they marry—a mistake she and Harry made for years. She believes couples give way to intense loving feelings that fade over time and leave relationships in shambles. She tells of asking herself how things could go so wrong if she and Harry were truly meant for each other. Now she thinks of the term *soul mate* differently. She still believes she and Harry were destined to be together but admits they could have easily broken up and moved on in their lives separately. Today, when she uses the term *soul mate*, she thinks of the energy, time, and hard work they put into their relationship to turn lemons into lemonade.

Harry says, “Just because people think they were meant to be together doesn’t mean it will last!”

There’s good news about letting go of the soul-mate theory. You do have the freedom to choose your life mate from among lots of candidates. You also have the potential to make the right marriage for you happen—along with the agreement of the man or woman you select, of course.

Falling in love can be both frightening and exhilarating at the same time. In the swirl of the strong feelings falling in love generates, many people wonder how to *know* they have found their marriage partner, and what a great marriage with that person will look and feel like. While some people, and perhaps you too, still hold to the “one person out there waiting for me” theory, remember that making a marriage takes two people using their free will to come to

the same conclusion. Even if you think God has predestined you to be together, each of you still has free will to accept or reject the other's thoughts, feelings, and expectations.

Free will is a gift of God. We read in the Bible about King Solomon, who was blessed and ordained to be a great king. He also asked God for wisdom, and this request seemed pleasing to God. If God ordained and predestined Solomon to be a great king, why would he need to ask God for wisdom? Wouldn't it stand to reason that God would just wave His omnipotent hand and supply everything Solomon would need to be great? We see in Solomon's story (told in 1 Kings 4–5; 11) examples of great wisdom but also of great mistakes. It is clear he loved women and blatantly went against God's plan by allowing pagan women to permeate his life and home, to his detriment.

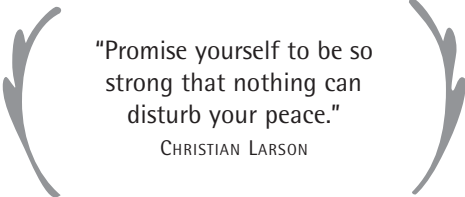
God has great things in store for all of us, but He will never force us to obey. Remember that in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve ate from the tree in the center of the garden. They were told not to, but the tree wasn't fenced off. It was their decision whether to obey God and have the good life designed for them. Unfortunately, they became deceived and gave up the freedom and innocence intended for the human race.

Speaking of Adam and Eve, their story is the only one in the Bible where you will find a woman specifically created for her man. Perhaps the creation story of man and woman prompts the idea there is a special mate intended for each person. I personally would love to buy into this idea and believe there is one right person for everyone destined to be married. What counters that concept, however, is the rest of the Bible, which gives detailed information on the kinds of people we are to be wary of, the kinds of behaviors that kill and thrill in relationships, and most of all, it admonishes us to use wisdom and discernment in decisions of all kinds.

Whether or not there is one person chosen for you, will you do what *you* need to do on the front end to find that right person, then

ensure you nurture yourself, your partner, and the relationship? Or do you just want to wait for the one you believe has been predestined, imagine him or her falling into your lap, and then do nothing to make this special relationship grow and mature into something wonderful?

If there is no “one person” out there, should you just look around for someone, anyone, using a wish list of characteristics you find appealing? (Do the exercise under Write It Down at the end of the chapter to compile your wish list.) If you follow this method, remember you have the power to



“Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace.”

CHRISTIAN LARSON

choose, so choose well. If the number of available partners with most or all your wish-list characteristics seems slim, should you throw out your wish list? Absolutely not. Your historical pattern might have been to delete certain items from the wish list because a potential date was having difficulty meeting that criteria. You may have ended up saying to yourself, *This guy is halfway decent, so why shouldn't I form a long-term relationship with him?* Make no mistake: in this situation, your prescription is to stick to your list. Of course, you may feel that sticking to the list might cause it to take longer to find a mate than compromising right now.

If you have compromised in the past, where has it taken you? Probably not to your desired destination of “happily ever after.” Commit to give the next search some time, be patient, and wait for the mate who fits your list. With sharper vision, skills, and dedication, you might discover that finding your mate takes less time than you thought it would, and you won't have to compromise your relationship, yourself, or your future.

What happens if you marry the “wrong mate”? All hope is not lost. As with any of our best-laid plans, we can all be deceived or

overlook something, either intentionally or unintentionally. Whatever the case, when we have not chosen as wisely as possible, we can still hope to make a difficult relationship work, especially if we have already eliminated as many roadblocks as we could from the beginning. It still takes work on the part of *both* people in the relationship, but it is possible to be successful.

In actuality, millions of people do find their true life mates and enjoy great lives together. Yet history will often show how these people took the time and effort to choose wisely, then worked the kinks out together as problems came along. So the definition of the “right” or “wrong” person is only as good as the work put in ahead of time and throughout the duration of the relationship.

Even problematic relationships can be worked out between two people with healthy attitudes and the goal of relationship success. Ultimately, the popular myth of a soul mate is just that—a myth.

#### FALSE ASSUMPTION #2:

#### YOUR LIFE MATE COMPLETES WHO YOU ARE

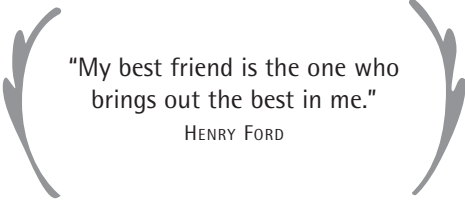
Your life is a journey with an intended purpose bigger than any relationship. Do you put your life in Park once you're in a relationship? Many people go through life thinking that finding the perfect mate is their ultimate destination. Such a person finds the love of her life and then quits growing. Even if she goes to work or starts a family, she really expects the relationship to create all her happiness. Once people like this have been “parked” there for a while, the scenery becomes boring, especially when the initial feelings of burning love begin to fade. These people are left with disappointment, wondering, “Is that all there is?”

If you were taking a road-trip vacation, you would plan the trip, see lots of sights along the way, spend a few days at the Grand Canyon, have all the fun you could, then return home. Parking in a relationship is like heading out on that trip, but upon getting to the

Grand Canyon, you park the car at one of the overlook sites and keep gazing at the one view. After a while, you begin to get bored with the beautiful view and regret not doing all the other things you had planned for your journey.

In a similar way, your *life* is a journey, and relationships should flow with you in that journey, not keep you from God's bigger purpose for your life.

The people you allow to join your journey need to fit into your purpose and complement it. Don't park in a relationship thinking *that* is your ultimate purpose. Decide on your purpose in life and expect your relationships to fit in to it. When you do that, you will likely discover you don't make many of the mistakes you made in previous relationships. In turn, you will be happier and more balanced in every area of your life, including your relationships—a true win/win situation.



"My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me."

HENRY FORD

Many of you are asking, "How do I know what my purpose is?" This is not a mystical question involving great soul searching. God has created you with unique and special gifts. He knows just who you will be and what purposes He has for you. Read Psalm 139:1-16. Trust that the right path is laid out before you, and ask God to direct your steps. You may not feel that you can see where the path ends, but sometimes the important thing is staying on the right path, and you will get where you are supposed to be.

Your purpose in life doesn't even have to be anything out of the ordinary. Check out the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31. She's described as a wife of noble character who sews, cooks, farms, buys and sells, cares for the poor, works out at the gym (see verse 17), and generally manages her household and her family.

The Scriptures are stocked with people of great and mighty faith



and power, yet in reading about the wife of noble character, we see that she is *only* (ha!) *a working mom*. These verses basically describe many hardworking women (and men) then and now. Most people don't see the daily grind as anything wonderful or amazing, but these verses remind us about the purpose and value of the regular activities of daily life lived with integrity.

So what is the right path for you?

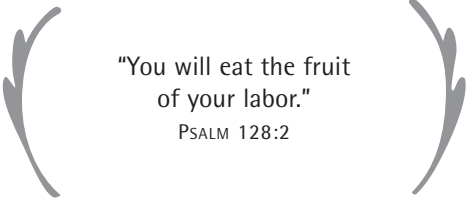
- Toni is a 26-year-old single female working full time and attending law school at night. For the moment, she needs to focus on being the best student and employee she can be, while keeping herself healthy with exercise and good nutrition so she can combat stress and illness.
- Duane is a 32-year-old single dad with two active boys. He works full time, gets the boys to all their activities, and volunteers at the church four hours each week to help with their computer issues.
- Brent is a 20-year-old full-time college student attempting to graduate and go into the air force.
- Shel is a 37-year-old single mother recuperating from a car accident and is off work until she is healed. While at home, she is taking a few online classes to increase her skills and make good use of her time.
- Shanna is a 28-year-old single female working every day. She has decided to work out four times each week and take a cooking class.

Toni, Duane, Brent, Shel, and Shanna are all dating; they just make sure their dates don't take time away from their present priorities. And those priorities are different for each person depending on his or her goals and responsibilities. What are your priorities today?

Your priorities are often determined by your life's purpose, though it might seem as if they are actually driven by your immediate "to do" list. Have you taken the time to consider why you were

put on this earth? Does God have a specific role for you to play or a plan for you to fulfill? Or have you always just done the next thing on your list, without really wondering about the bigger picture of your life's plan?

The process of fulfilling your purpose does not require you to become the next Oprah Winfrey or Bill Gates. In the case of the people described on the previous page, the main purpose for each is to stay on track with current responsibilities



"You will eat the fruit  
of your labor."

PSALM 128:2

and not be distracted by making dating relationships the first priority. In some cases, the people described are dealing with unexpected curves in life's road or added responsibilities or activities. The important thing is that we must take care of our priorities first, including our minds, bodies, spirits, souls, and dependent family members. Outside relationships should follow naturally.

Discovering how to be the best possible "you" will result in wonderful, healthy relationships coming into your life, rather than people who would attempt to drain you. Be a healthy, whole person first, and then add a great relationship on top.

"You complete me" is one of the most popular, romanticized movie lines of our time, as well as one of the most damaging. One person "completing" another implies a person was not "whole" prior to a relationship. We were not created missing anything for the good of our lives, and we have the capability to be complete while standing alone, outside of a romantic relationship. "You complete me" doesn't roll off the tongue or inspire romance as easily, but it is a more healthy way of looking at relationships. Actually, the more a person develops his or her own life, the more respect, interest, and romance can be brought into a couple's relationship.

### FALSE ASSUMPTION #3: LOVE CONQUERS ALL

Divorce rates are staggering, and many divorced people ultimately remarry and divorce again. The people who stay in unhappy marriages do so for a variety of reasons: children, money, spiritual beliefs, reputation, career advancement, and so on. As you can imagine, unhappy marriages make for unhappy families, which can lead to more dysfunction over time. Yet most of these troubled marriages started out well, with a couple believing they could endure difficulties because they began with true love.

The belief that love conquers all is a faulty assumption. Love may start out as the foundation of the relationship, just as the Grand Canyon was once a flat piece of hard rock divided by the Colorado River. Despite the rock's solid makeup, erosion over time created huge cracks, crevices, and craters. In the same way, love can be eroded by life's circumstances, creating a "canyon" that seems impossible to cross.

One problem with believing that love conquers all is that there are so many different definitions of love. Some people define love as a feeling, but feelings are fickle, often changing with the latest mood, and they cannot be relied upon as consistent gauges for sound decision making. This is especially true for those people who have never learned how to control their feelings. Generally, people who define love as a feeling are less likely to understand the need to stop, calm down, and reevaluate a situation when their feelings are more stable. If this sounds like you, you may be unaware that you actually have power over your feelings and that they can be tempered with practice.

Others have a more in-depth and reality-based understanding of love that includes patience, kindness, selflessness, consistent boundary setting, commitment, and so on. They might define love as it is described in this passage from the Bible:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

While some people believe that commitment, stability, and doing all the right things can conquer a problem, they may ignore feelings altogether. Unfortunately, “doing the right thing” and loving the other person will not always change the thoughts and feelings of the other person within the relationship. In fact, you and your partner may experience the relationship in completely different ways. Unexplored differences between two people can lead to feelings of hurt and confusion. As a result, relationships may break up, regardless of how often a partner practices “doing the right thing.” Love doesn’t always conquer the differences between two people.

FALSE ASSUMPTION #4:  
SHORTCUTS WORK (JUST LOOK AT REALITY TV)

Reality dating shows seem to imply that all you need is a nice pool of choices and a little time to spend together, and you’ll find the love of your life. They demonstrate the shortcut method to choosing a mate for life. These shows aren’t too different from the concept of “speed dating” where prospective daters get three minutes to interrogate each other before deciding if they want to go further. Decisions are made on the most superficial aspects—appearance especially.

Too often people neglect to consider all aspects of their lives, including family and friend relationships, career goals, worldview differences, and other factors that influence a long-lasting relationship. Relationships move so quickly these days that couples neglect

important considerations for a successful marriage. Or they don't foresee problems that can arise from longer-term relationships and therefore can't effectively resolve them. Frankly, some couples put more thought into what kind of car they want to buy than which person they ought to marry.

Unfortunately, we *all* have faulty and unhealthy beliefs about marriage influenced by our own romanticized thoughts, the media,

"By wisdom a house is built,  
and through understanding it is  
established; through knowledge  
its rooms are filled with rare  
and beautiful treasures."  
PROVERBS 24:3-4

well-meaning friends, and even our own family systems. Young people spend years training for certain careers, but when it comes to finding a mate, they receive either no training

at all or misguided training. Some people make unwise choices because they are insecure—and guess what? Their insecurity only worsens.

Remember, when you're seeking a long-term relationship, your faulty beliefs will cause you to go for the shortcut 100 percent of the time. Begin identifying your shortcut approaches to relationships today, and purposely choose to take the long-range, tried-and-true way in these areas. Slow down and think clearly in order to increase your happiness and relationship success.

#### FALSE ASSUMPTION #5:

#### THE LAWS OF ATTRACTION DON'T APPLY TO YOU

Just as salt brings out the flavor of food, relationships should bring out the best in each partner. Do your relationships enhance your strengths, or do they totally smother you? Maybe your relationships don't smother you, but they contribute to bringing out your most negative qualities. If your relationships do not enhance your

strengths while balancing out your weaknesses, examine why you continue selecting partners who don't complement you.

You cannot fault your dates for this problem. After all, *you* chose to allow the other person into your life. What's going on here? The laws of attraction are very likely in play.

When you are choosing a dating partner, two very powerful laws are working for and against you at the same time. The law of "opposites attract" inclines you toward a balanced life—to an extent. It is important, as you move forward in life, to surround yourself with people who bring new perspectives and keep you sharp. If, however, you are attempting to partner with a person who has an *extreme* difference in his or her background, values, beliefs, and interests from you, you are treading on dangerous ground. These relationships rarely work in the end.

The law of "likes attract" (or birds of a feather flock together) also works in your life and can have a positive or negative impact. It is good to connect with people who have similar values, backgrounds, beliefs, and interests as you, since this helps to keep you on your journey rather than pull you off course.

A problem occurs when you connect with people with whom you share common hurts and pains. You get stuck in your hurting histories, which serves to keep both of you down rather than lifted up.

Optimally, you will choose dating partners who bring commonality and diversity, utilizing both the laws of "likes attract" and "opposites attract."

Remember this important factor: you have the power to choose and choose wisely. But no amount of strategies, guidelines, or list making will help you find the man or woman of your dreams unless you decide you deserve it. You *will* attract exactly what you *believe* you want, need, or desire. Nothing will change until you search deep inside, and possibly get some help from an established counselor, to determine why you draw the wrong people into your life.

## GETTING HELP

There is help out there for combating the false assumptions we make. For some reason, many of us think we can figure out relationship issues ourselves and we fail to take advantage of the tools available to help us make healthy relationship choices. True, we have the ability to reason, but if we'll just access resources such as relationship and marriage books, classes, seminars, and professionals, we'll find help for areas where we may be lacking expertise.

The person with whom you decide to spend your life hugely impacts your level of happiness, contentment, and success. It's almost impossible to truly be happy if you are unhappy in your marriage. How many married people have learned to put on smiling faces and act happy, but when the outer layers are peeled away, they are filled with loneliness and resentment?

Getting help with relationships offers many rewards and payoffs. Unhappily married and single people on the average suffer more physical ailments, more frequent periods of loneliness, and lower self-esteem, which leads to higher incidents of depression, anxiety, insomnia, suicide, and drug addiction. These people also tend to harbor more anger and resentment. Happily married people report more satisfaction in life. Overall they experience better physical health and on average outlive those who are not happily married.

A December 15, 2004 WebMD Medical News article cited a news release by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999-2002). The CDC examined over 127,000 adults between 1999 and 2000. The study indicated married people are healthier than those who are divorced, widowed, never-married, or living with a partner. Here are some of the findings:

- Across the board, married persons were healthier for nearly every measure of health. That was true for all ages, ethnicities, and levels of income and education.

- The connection between marriage and health was strongest in the youngest group, ages 18-44.
- Married people were less likely to suffer from health conditions like back pain, headaches, and serious psychological distress.
- Married people were also less likely to smoke, drink heavily, and be physically inactive. For instance, married men and women under age 44 were about half as likely to be current smokers.

Living with someone did not confer the same benefits as being married. People with live-in partners didn't match the health of married adults. Instead, they were more like divorced or separated people in terms of health.



### *Reality Check*

What healthy decisions have you made in relationships, and how have they positively affected your life?

What unhealthy decisions have you made in relationships, and how have they negatively affected your life?

### *Write It Down*

Make your wish list of *every* positive quality you *want* in a mate, including physical, emotional, behavioral, cultural/geographical, financial, occupational, educational, familial, recreational, age, and previous-relationship status (married, kids, and so forth).



Make your list of *every* negative quality you have experienced (or hope not to experience) in a relationship, including physical, emotional, behavioral, cultural/geographical, financial, occupational, educational, familial, recreational, age, and previous-relationship status (married, kids, and so forth).

Where do you picture your life in the following areas in five, ten, twenty years?

- Family
- Work
- Leisure

What is your definition of love?

Do your goals as a couple match or at least complement each other's? How do you intend to reach those goals?

If your goals are different, how can you support each other's goals without compromising a future marital relationship?