

Should You Marry for Love?

"My first marriage, I married for love. My second marriage, I married for lust." There was a twinkle in her eye, and a sly smile when she added, "The next time, I'm marrying for money." As the woman continued, she admitted that she made poor choices in men, generally picking losers. She revealed the traits she looked for in a man, then she grew silent for a few moments, sighed, and we returned to our work.

I did not reply to the woman, but as I cordially listened to the brief outline of her relationships, I noticed something that was missing. Goodness, decency, or morality were nowhere in the list of traits that she admired. It never occurred to her to seek a good man first, and that love and even lust might naturally follow.

Like most young couples, she married her first husband because they were in love. While not everyone marries out of love, I would wager that most young people feel that love is necessary for a happy marriage.

Lust is another popular reason for marriage, although few would openly admit that it was a major factor. Physical attraction is important, especially when it comes to intimacy. Without physical attraction, intimacy becomes less regular. Without intimacy, either marriages will fail or the couple will feel unfulfilled.

Love is often inexplicable, and it sometimes makes little sense why we love one person over another. Perhaps the person possesses a trait that we admire. An introvert may admire someone who is the life of the party or a socialite. An organizer might be impressed with someone who is spontaneous. Sometimes the reasons seem silly in retrospect. She might have admired his dancing; he loved the way she laughed at his jokes. Whatever the reasons, love instills in us an enticing euphoria that is seldom matched in our lives. It is no wonder that so many of us attempt to marry that euphoria, in the hope that it endures.

Lust is fine as long as the spouse never physically changes. However, over time hair recedes in places where we want it, and appears in areas where we do not want it. The middle-age bulge is ubiquitous, skin does not stay young and smooth forever, and wrinkles appear and only deepen.

The problem with both love and lust is that they tend to delude us from reality. They make us gloss over fundamental problems with the

other person. For some reason, opposites do attract, and people often seek a spouse with personality traits very different from their own. Over time, though, those differences tend to put more of a strain on a marriage than complete us as a person.

In addition, I believe that if young people do seek relationship advice it will tend to be from a friend and not a parent. Unfortunately, friends and others their age might seek the same qualities that they desire.

It is little wonder then that historically so many marriages around the world were arranged. Assuming they are responsible, parents and older relatives look for traits in a spouse that younger people might overlook. The spouse that they choose might not be the best looking, the richest, or even someone their child loves. While there are no guarantees in any marriage, they would tend to pick a spouse that is more responsible, mature, hardworking, and even good and moral. Parents or guardians are older, experienced, and more mature. They understand that love and lust are sometimes fleeting, and the most important trait of a spouse is that they are foremost a good person. Consequently, they would tend to select a spouse that they believe would eventually lead to a long and happy marriage, knowing that love and physical attraction can always develop later.

I wonder how many divorced people today will acknowledge that an older friend or relative warned them about their spouse before their marriage. I wonder if they regret not taking that advice because the signs of a bad marriage were there all along. Or do some people just continue to make the same mistakes in subsequent marriages, because it is their life and no matter what anyone advises them, they are determined to decide for themselves and marry for love.

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