

# Yardsticks of Love

## By Howard Hendricks

Howard Hendricks:

Whenever I'm introduced as a seminary professor, I think I can almost hear the groan.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

Oh no, this is going to be dreadfully boring and this master mortician can do nothing but complicate the problem.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

And if that's your sentiment, perhaps you can identify with a public-school teacher who was home recovering from surgery and received a note from her class which said, "Your fourth-grade class wishes you a speedy recovery, by a vote of 15 to 14."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

Fortunately for me, you were not given a vote, and I was invited to come, and I assure you I come with great expectation. I'm going to talk to you this morning on the subject yardsticks of love. If you are single, you are always asking the question sometime in life, is this the genuine item? If you are married, you need to ask this question perpetually to make sure there is a

growing edge on your love life. Marriage today is a lot like flies on a windowpane, those out want in, and those in want out.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

Never more popular, never more perverted. Dr. James Peterson, distinguished professor at the University of Southern California, did a remarkable piece of research on married couples and discovered, to his amazement, that couples married for 20 years or longer were not that fulfilled. As a matter of fact, he could only find six out of every one hundred couples married for 20 years or longer who were fulfilled in the relationship. It so jarred him, that he decided to conduct another research study to find out why. What's defective? And he came up with three conclusions. First of all, most marriages are the product of improper choices. They're made too fast, they're made with too little exposure. And the result is it's almost comparable to Russian roulette. You know there's a bullet in that gun. The question is, are you going to pull the trigger of the right chamber? The second reason he discovered is unrealistic expectations. Expecting to marriage to do for you what only God can do. Coming into a marriage basically to change your partner. I tried that. For 10 years in my marriage. And finally, one day it dawned on me. God said, "Hendricks, your job is to love your partner. My job is to change her." And it revolutionized my experience in marriage.

But the third one many of you can identify with, and that is inadequate preparation. It's the most important relationship on the planet and it's the one for which we are least prepared. We spend more money, more time, more effort on the wedding than on the marriage. Little gal in my

church told me she was getting married, I said, "Wonderful! May I ask you a question? Have you taken any premarital preparation for your marriage?" "Oh," she said, "Prof. I know I should do that, but, I can't afford it." I said, "Look, I can get you the best marriage counselling, three sessions available in America for twenty-five dollars." She said, "I know, but, I can't afford it." I attended her wedding. Guess by experience when I discovered she had spent nineteen thousand dollars on flowers.

[Audience gasps]

Howard Hendricks:

Guess where they were the day after the marriage? I believe one of the great curses in our society, and we're really shafting guys and gals like you by not preparing you for the most important decision. You don't go into law, you don't go into medicine, you don't go into the ministry, you don't go into business without some kind of preparation. So I want to prepare you for it, at least in one area. The first characteristic of true love is that it involves a total response to the one loved. You do not marry a body, you marry a person. Bodies deteriorate, no exception. Persons develop. My wife and I were in the bedroom reading, my four teenagers were home from university at Christmas, and all of a sudden I heard this raucous laughter. I mean, the place was coming unglued. I couldn't figure out what's going on. So I rushed out, guess what? They were looking at my college annual.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

"Hey dad had hair!"

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

"And he even played baseball!" They think I showed up the morning after the earth's crust hardened.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

And my friend, if you marry a body, then every year goes by, you are further in trouble.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

But you marry a person, and after years of marriage, you will look back and-on your wedding, and wonder what in the world were we excited about compared with what we're experiencing now. See it is said of Jesus that he continued to grow in wisdom, that's intellectual development, and in stature, that's physical development, and in favor with God, that's spiritual development, and in favor with men, that's social and emotional development. He developed as a total person. And so does your partner. And the question you have to ask constantly in marriage is, am I helping my partner develop or am I contributing to their deterioration? The second characteristic is that it's not only a feeling of pleasure, but also of reverence. I had a wonderful experience recently with a young man who is a national AAU champion swimmer. Most beautiful body you have ever seen, I'm not sure the guy has 1 percent fat. He had been married, and we spent a lot of time preparing for that marriage. And I will never forget his words when he said to me, "Prof.

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This may sound strange, but every time I get close to my wife, I break out in a cold sweat. All of a sudden it dawns on me, God gave this woman to me. And I'm in debt up to my eyeballs. And I am constantly in prayer Lord, make me worthy of the individual."

There's an idiocy abroad, and that is that sex and love are coterminous. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a vast difference between the two. All love in marriage involves sex. But if it's only sex, you are going to end up in a cul-de-sac. The most disappointed individual on the planet. For eight years, it was my privilege to be the chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys during the Staubach years. Before I became involved, I had the privilege of leading one of the players to Christ. In those days, they used to go out, come out here to California for their training program. And he called me up and he said, "Doc, I'm going out to California for a training program. Give me an assignment." I said, "Okay, why don't you read and study the book of a Ephesians." He said, "The what?" I said, "Ephesians." He said, "Spell it."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

I said, "Have you found Matthew?" "Yeah. Yeah, it's right here in the beginning." I said, "Okay, find Matthew, go right. You'll run into it."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

I found out later the guy read the book of Ephesians five times every single day in camp. And when he came back, he called up and he said, "Hey, you got some time?" I said, "Sure, come on

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over." So he came over to the seminary. He said, "You know that assignment you gave me?"  
"Yeah." He said, "What a wipeout!" And then he opened the book of Ephesians. You ever work  
with people who have no idea what you know?

[Howard Hendricks and audience laugh]

Howard Hendricks:

"Here-here it is," as if I never read it. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the  
church." Woo! He said, "That's impossible."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

I said, "Fantastic, man, you're on verge of the greatest breakthrough in your life."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

"Oh," he said, "Really? What have I learned?" I said, "You learned that the Christian life is not  
difficult, it's impossible. It's a supernatural life. So what does your wife do that you appreciate?"  
Typical masculine answer. "Lots of things."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

So I sent him on an archaeological expedition.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

And finally he said, "My wife's a good cook." I said, "Okay, that's your assignment. I want you to go home and tell her how much you appreciate her cooking." "Oh," he said, "I can't do that." I said, "Why not?" He said, "It would take a miracle!" "Well," I said, "That's what God specializes in." Well he said, "We'd better pray about it." So this huge hulk gets down--

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

--On a rug in my office and says, "Oh, God, you've really got an assignment here!"

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

So typical of God. He goes home, his wife knocked out the best meal you'd ever seen in his life. Beautiful linen tablecloth, beautiful flower arrangement in the middle of the thing, five course meal, and I said, "How did you enjoy the meal?" He said, "It was horrible." I said, "What happened?" I said, "I just sat there and said, 'Lord, you-you're going to have to do it.'" "Well," I said, "What happened?" He said, "God gave me strength." He said, "I got up and I ran around the other side of the table, and I grabbed her." I said, "What happened?"

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

He said, "She went as white as the tablecloth!"

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

He said, "I really think she thought I was going to clip her!"

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

And he said, "I lifted her up so I could talk to her eyeball to eyeball."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

"And I said, woman that was wonderful!"

[Audience laughs and applauds]

Howard Hendricks:

"And I knew we were off the pad." I will never forget that man's testimony. Before two thousand businessmen in the city of Dallas, he said, "You need to know, I'll take anybody on in the lig." And everybody knew that, they usually double or triple teamed him. But he said, "Behind a closed door, you need to know I'm the most yellow man in America." And he said, "Since Jesus Christ has entered my life, He has radically changed it." He said, "All of my life, everything revolved around me. I'm the great big football hero. But when I became a Christian and Christ began to change my life, I discovered firsthand that he's the only one who can deliver you from yourself. And that's what He's in the process of doing. He's emancipating me, so that I can flow into the life of my wife." It was less than six months later, I had the privilege of leading his wife

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to Christ. And when we sat down to talk about her conversion, I said, "What led you to the Savior?" She said, "Prof, you need to know. God's so transformed my husband's life that I knew it had to be supernatural." Would you allow me to ask you a question? Is God in the process of delivering you from yourself? Or are you still wrapped up in this little picture that I'm the be all of everything. Because if you are, without the gift of prophecy, you're going to have one hard time in marriage.

Here's the third one, it has a quality. True love has a quality of self-giving. We ought to know that from the most familiar passage in the New Testament, "For God so loved the world that He, that He--"

Audience:

Gave.

Howard Hendricks:

Gave. He's a giving God. And when God comes into your life, your primary concern is not what am I going to get out of this marriage? But what am I giving to it? I had a man in my office some time ago, he said, "I'm not getting anything out of my marriage." I'm sure I jarred him when I said, "I couldn't care less what you're getting from your marriage. What I really want to know is what are you giving to your marriage." Had another man in counselling some time ago, he walked in the door and said, "You won't believe the woman I'm married to!" I said, "Well give me a shot." And man, he began to unload the truck. I took out a piece of paper eight and a half by

eleven, filled up one side, turned it over on the other, this guy goes 70 miles an hour with gusts up to 90.

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

Finally, he comes up for air and I said to him, "Hold it. You mean to tell me you married that kind of woman?" "Uh-uh, she wasn't that kind of woman when I married her." "Oh, you made her that way."

[Audience laughs]

Howard Hendricks:

See, I'll take the best marriage you have ever seen in your life, and I will shred it in a matter of weeks or months if I can get either one of the partners to focus on the negatives. There isn't a guy or gal in this room that doesn't accept the fact nobody's perfect. That's our line. Then why do you expect to marry a perfect person? You are marrying a human being. All human beings have one thing in common. We're sinners desperately in need of a Savior. And when Jesus Christ invades the life of an individual, watch the dramatic difference in terms of your perspective. Here's the fourth one. It is marked by unusual joy in the company of the other, and pain in separation. It's no question that I'm talking to some guy, some gal, who came to Biola University, you left your home and you left a guy or you left a gal, that you really are in love with. And it's the genuine item, and it's somewhat painful. I spent all four years in college and one year in graduate school before I was able to marry the incredible woman I live with. And people used to say, "Well, why

don't you get together?" Well, there were a number of reasons why we couldn't, not the least of which is we couldn't afford it.

But I've often look back on that period of time, as many of you will, and discover, you know, that was a part of God's plan. If you cannot live apart from the person you love, I seriously question the depth, the quality of the relationship. And you will find that God never brings anything into your life, but what it comes across the screen of His will. He knows what's best for you, wants what's best for you, will do what's best for you. And you will discover in that period of separation, there is a true magnetism that develops because it is always the product of the Spirit's fruit. Another one, it's marked by mutual enjoyment of each other. Without constant need for physical expression. And you better take that to the bank. Purity before marriage is the best guarantee of permanence in marriage. If I have seen this once, guys, I have seen it a thousand times. A guy and a gal they can't keep their hands off each other, they're always pawing over each other. They almost look like one rather than two individuals. They're so close. And six weeks after the honeymoon, they can't even stand each other. You see, marriage is not perpetual prostitution. Marriage is not an orgy of sexual relationship. And what you will discover in true love is just to be in the same room with a person is the most enriching part of your life. Because you have built a true relationship, not a false one, and your sexual relationship ought to be the product of your love for each other, not just the cause of it.

The last one I want to give you, is true love is dynamic in its growth. If your love is centered in Christ, then it will take on the characteristics of Christ. The great love chapter in First Corinthians 13, you ought to cut out and put on your wall. I want you to listen to just a portion of

it. "Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious. Never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish and rude. It's not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly ever notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out." If you love someone, you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, always stand your ground in defending them. And I'm here to suggest that is only found in Christ. You want an assignment? Get all kinds of assignments here at Biola. I'll give you one. The next time you read that passage, substitute your name every time love occurs. Howard is kind. Howard is thoughtful. You go through that passage and you will have the same experience I have. All too frequently it doesn't fit. Because I'm not that kind of person at this stage of my development. But that's my passion.

Go over the same passage, and for every time love occurs, insert Christ. Christ is patient. Christ is kind. And it always fits. One of the great challenges, I think those of us have who are Christians, is that we are living in a world that is weary of rhetoric. They've heard every rhetoric show that's come down the pike. But they're starving for reality. And I am finding in our generation, because marriage is so much in trouble, that whenever I find a person either in professional athletics, in business, in industry, in law, in medicine, you name it. The ones that have a good marriage are the ones that are irresistibly drawing people from the society to ask the penetration. How do you explain your marriage? And the only answer you have, "There's a person by the name of Jesus Christ. You are looking at the most self-centered human being on the planet. Until Jesus Christ invaded my life. And if you see anything that is attractive to you it's only because of Him."

C.S. Lewis said it, "Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobby's and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless. It will change. It will not be broken, it will become unbreakable. Impenetrable. Irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers and perturbations of love is hell." And my challenge to you is my daily challenge to myself. And that is, is Jesus Christ in control of my life? I can impress you. I can impress others. I've never found a way of impressing my wife, my four children. They live with me and know whether I have the real disease or not.

Father, we're weary. Not only of our society with its brokenness, but of our own lives and the superficiality. And I thank You for these my brothers and sisters in Christ, and pray that in the process of getting their education, that they may be personally transformed by the power of Your Word and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit. That they may go into a world broken at the wheel, and may so live Jesus Christ in the most intimate areas of their life, that He will be the only explanation for our reality. We give You thanks, in Christ's wonderful name, amen.

[Audience applauds]