

Tools for the Road – The Little Black Book Series (Week 8)

HOOK

On a whim, a young woman decided to plant a tomato garden. She loved fresh tomato in her salads, sauces, and sandwiches. She selected where her garden would be with lots of warm sunlight. She churned up the soil and went to a store that sold seed, but it was out of tomato seeds. The sales-rep informed her they would have a shipment in a couple weeks. The young woman wanted to plant now and felt she couldn't wait. Instead, she bought seeds for dandelions (yellow flowers), thistles (purple flowers), and clover (white flowers). These plants would be pretty and hold her over until she was ready to grow what she really wanted – plump, sweet tomatoes.

To her surprise, gardening seemed to come very easy to her. She must have a green thumb! All three plants grew abundantly, and although nothing was edible, she considered herself satisfied. Someday though, she would get serious about gardening.

During the fall, the young woman took a culinary course and found a passion for cooking. Her spark to grow her own fresh tomatoes was reborn. The following spring, she pulled out all the previous plants, dug up roots and rocks, mixed the soil with fertilizer, and bought tomato seeds. This time it was important to her and she wanted to do everything right. But, just as her tomatoes began to push above the soil, the earth sprouted up the plants from the previous year. She spent hours several times a week pulling them out, but they kept growing back. Tomato buds began to show on the vines, but not as big as they should have been. The plants growing around the vines were eating up the nutrients in the soil, and she lived in a constant battle against them.

After she “got serious,” why was it so hard to get rid of the previous plants? Because she planted **weeds** the year before!

Just like her purpose for gardening was to grow tomatoes, the purpose of dating is to pursue a marriage partner. Every romantic relationship you invest in which isn't your future spouse is not only a waste of your time, money, and heart but actually working against your future. You'll have baggage, scars, “soul-ties” (with other people than your spouse) which will take twice the effort to work through and heal from = be free from.

Galatians 6:7-8 - *Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.*

Are you willing to do whatever it takes to have the marriage you've always wanted?
Are you willing to begin investing now with the decisions you make?

BOOK

Hebrews 13:4 - *Let marriage be held in honor by all and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*

- Two halves: Give marriage the proper weight of being a God-honored institution (even sacrament). And, keep marriage holy, untainted by sexual sin.
- Tonight's purpose is to give God's gift of marriage the credit it's due and give you tools for investing in it now.

LOOK

One of the initial choices you can make to honor your future marriage and keep it holy is to not plant clover seeds in your garden. Yep, clover is cute, and you just might be lucky enough to discover that 1-in-a-million 4-leafer, but if you're honest with yourself, you're just dating for fun. Stop planting weeds in your future garden. If you've come to realize you are in an unhealthy relationship, or it's simply not with the person you're considering for "till death do us part," you may need to consider breakup. (Ex. Katie)

Reality is that even if you try to do everything right you may still experience a breakup someday.

6 Survival Tips for Dealing with Breakups

1. Step into your feelings. Whether you're the one being broken up with or the one doing the breaking, if you cared about them, it's going to hurt.
 - a. Pain will be proportional to the trust broken.
 - i. A commitment may have been broken
 - ii. Expectations crushed
 - iii. Experiencing a blast of insecurity
 - iv. Feel you've lost your identity (misplaced).
 - v. Personally attacked
 - vi. Confused
 - vii. Overwhelmed with "what ifs"
 - viii. Social status abruptly altered
 - ix. Hope challenged

- b. Your feelings are very real. It's OK to cry, to feel brokenhearted.
 - i. No matter how much it hurts or how impossible it is to see a future, you WILL NOT always feel like this. Your feelings can be real but still be wrong. The Holy Spirit and time are power healers, and they are on your side. Embrace those feelings and press into Jesus.
 - ii. **Ps.147:3** - *He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*
 - iii. You WILL see the other side.
2. Remember WHO and WHOSE you are! Who you are... who God has made you to be isn't based on who you're dating or whether or not you are dating at all.
 - a. **Ex.** Sky covered in clouds of pain/depression (by Becca Bourgeois)
 - i. **Isaiah 43:1b** - *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."*
 - ii. Who you and whose you are is independent of this breakup. You still have a future, purpose, and tons of joy in the future.
3. Gain perspective.
 - a. You have a long life left.
 - i. **Ex.** Rope of your life. There's more goodness ahead of you than there is pain in this temporary season.
 - b. This ended relationship should not have been the most important part of your life. A boy/girlfriend is NOT your anchor, your identity, your purpose, your happiness, or the place you find hope fulfillment. If you realize that's how you were treating your romance, reorient to what's most important.
 - i. Your relationship with Jesus.
 - ii. Family, mentors, mentees, friends.
 - iii. The direction your life is going.
 - c. There's more to life than romance. God hasn't stopped having a plan for your life. In fact, His kingdom and your mission are actually MORE important than happiness and romance (no, really). **Matt.6:33** - *"Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness..."*
4. Forgive and ask forgiveness.
 - a. **Matthew 6:14-15** - *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
 - i. THEN, your heavenly Father can be close to you and heal you.
 - b. Forgiveness does NOT equal trust.
 - c. It sets you free.

5. Learn to fail forward.

- a. This experience gives you the potential to be wiser.
- b. Were your priorities out of line? Did you commit too soon? Did you move too fast? Were you looking for something you now realize isn't important? Did you discover deal-breakers or must-haves that are now important to you? How can you grow from here?
- c. You can blame or you can grow, but you can't do both.
- d. You'll avoid most of this pain by following the wise steps in Remix Dating.

6. Wait! Don't rebound!

- a. This season of singleness is a blessing! Focus on your most important relationship – Jesus.
- b. When you put yourself out there again, begin at Step 1. If you catch yourself leaping back to the same level of commitment, it may indicate you have a hole the Holy Spirit needs to fill first.

We discussed honoring your future marriage ([Heb.13:4](#)) by not planting weeds (dating for fun or too quickly) or pulling out the current weeds (removing unhealthy relationships). How can you be planting seeds toward a healthy marriage today?

Give Up 3 Marriage Myths

1. Both of you have the same expectations of marriage.

- a. You'll enter married life with probably unspoken, even unconscious rules created by your upbringing, belief systems, and preferences. When they aren't verbalized or appeased, they create conflict.
- b. **Ex.** How you use free time. Stability vs. spontaneity. Gender roles or not.
- c. **INVEST:** Begin thinking through what you believe the role of a husband/wife is. What if they think differently than you?

2. Everything bad in life will disappear and everything good will get better.

- a. Marriage has been idealized by media and will be idealized by your own emotions, but you will have many instances where you make one step forward and two steps back. It will get harder before it gets easier.
- b. Remember, you're surrendering freedoms, operating in forgiveness often, uncovering their flaws, uncovering your flaws, and daily choosing to go against your feelings to be selfless.
- c. "Many people marry to avoid or escape unpleasantness. But no matter how glorious the institution of marriage, it is not a substitute for the difficult work of inner spiritual healing. Marriage does not erase personal

pain or eliminate loneliness. Why? Because people get married primarily to further their own wellbeing, not to take care of their partner's needs. The bad traits and feelings you carried around before you were married remain with you as you leave the wedding chapel. A marriage certificate is not a magical glass slipper. Marriage is, in actual fact, just a way of living." – **Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts**

d. **INVEST**: Relisten to Week 4: Being>Getting and grow in a weak area.

3. My spouse will make me whole. I'll feel complete.

a. "Marriage is a God-given way to improve and hone our beings. Marriage challenges us to new heights and calls us to be the best person possible, BUT neither marriage nor our partner will magically make us whole."

– **Saving your Marriage Before It Starts** by Dr. Parrott

b. Styles of a dating/marital relationship:

i. **A-frame**: The partners have low self-esteem, and their identity is found in being a unit. If one were removed, the other falls.

ii. **H-frame**: They stand self-sufficient, and hardly influenced by the other. If one were removed, the other would hardly feel a thing.

iii. **M-frame**: Each partner has self-esteem and is dedicated to helping the other grow. They are each self-sufficient, but they choose to rely on each other and emotionally support each other. If one were removed, the other feels the loss but would regain balance.

c. If you believe the myth that your spouse will make you whole, which style of relationship are you building?

d. **INVEST**: How do you grow in becoming a whole person?

Tips for Cultivating Health in Your Marriage

Marital Stages:

1. Romance – Passion and intimacy are emphasized. Both delight in each other and practice selflessness.
2. Power Struggle – Both are adjusting to each other's differences which seem insurmountable at times. There is friction and struggling to define roles and find compromises.
3. Cooperation – Because of healthy decisions, making room for and even embracing differences, and lots of forgiveness, they begin to operate in unity and with common interests.
 - a. They've begun to look inward for repairing and reinforcing the relationship instead of outward – blaming the other or circumstances for problems.
4. Mutuality – More of the old problems and fears fade and sharing/working together becomes the "fundamental way of being together."

5. Co-creativity – There’s a balance of passion, intimacy, and commitment. They have security in themselves, in each other, and in their love. They realize that they aren’t only living for each other but **turn outward to invest in others together**. This is the most rewarding stage. This takes a lifetime.

Hebrews 13:4 - *Let marriage be held in honor by all and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled.*

- Here are three areas to cultivate to honor your marriage and keep it holy.

Invest in These BIG 3 – Marriage Love Triangle (*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*)

1. Passion: (**Enjoyment of each other**)

- a. Practice meaningful touch.
- b. Amp up eye contact.
- c. Plan mutually enjoyable experiences.
- d. Make love often.
- e. Compliment them daily (“I love you because ____.”)
- f. Go out of your way to make them feel they are important to you.
- g. **Practice NOW**: Exercise the art of affirmation with everyone.

2. Intimacy: (**Connectedness and emotional safety**)

- a. Practice communication. Listen, don’t just hear.
- b. Be 100% transparent, honest, and even vulnerable.
 - i. “Honesty and vulnerability are the building blocks of intimacy.”
- c. Focus on commonalities. Adopt each other’s interests.
- d. Work hard to make them feel unguarded and emotionally safe.
- e. Grow together spiritually!
- f. **Practice NOW**: Grow in conflict resolution. Learn to win with people - not win against them.

3. Commitment: (**Conviction to make it work**)

- a. “There may be nothing more important in a marriage than a determination that it shall persist.”
- b. (paraphrasing C.S. Lewis) Your marriage vow is a pledge to something you can do. To promise you will always FEEL love is like promising to never have a headache. The commitment must be based on something you have control of. You CAN CHOOSE one another = Love
- c. Be selfless to meet their needs. **Fidelity is so much more than a promise to be faithful, but a moment-by-moment commitment to be present.**
- d. **Practice NOW**: Where are you slacking in your commitment?

Divorce is like abandoning a car because it ran out of gas. If your marriage is struggling on the side of the road, seek Jesus and ask Him to lead you in giving it the gasoline of passion, intimacy, and commitment.

We are the church. God's love for us is clearly expressed through the eyes of marital covenant. He is the husband, and we, the church, are His bride. In a few short sentences, we see God's complete and perfect love poured out to us.

Ephesians 5:25-27 - *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy & without blemish.*

RECAP

- Make decisions now which will promote health in your future marriage.
- Breakups suck... but, turn your attention and energy back to what's important.
- Give up marriage myths. Particularly, that marriage fixes all your problems.
- The three foundations of a healthy marriage (the love triangle) are passion, intimacy, and commitment. You can actually develop these NOW.
- The greatest example of love is Jesus. Follow Him.

TOOK

Are you willing to do whatever it takes to have the marriage you've always wanted?

- **Week 1 – Love Defined: Are you willing to redefine love?**
 - I love you = I choose you and I set myself apart for you. If love is a choice, then it empowers you to choose wisely (the basis of this whole series).
- **Week 2 – Waffles and Spaghetti: Are you willing to embrace their differences?**
 - In conversation, guys, it's your job to travel with her, and girls, it's your job to camp with him.
- **Week 3 – Love and Respect: Are you willing to love sacrificially?**
 - Women need love. Men need respect. You're responsible to break the crazy cycle because you're the only one you can change.
- **Week 4 – Being > Getting: Are you willing to grow first before dating?**
 - Allowing God to grow you is more important than finding Mr./Mrs. right.
- **Week 5 – Remix Dating: Are you willing to date differently?**
 - Take it slow. Only date someone if you think they may be the person you choose to marry. Other than that, you're wasting your time.

- **Week 6** – Who 2 Look 4: *Are you willing to trust God with your life?*
 - Don't be a seeker as if you're missing something. Be a discovering Christian who trusts God's plan for your life.
- **Week 7** – Fire in the Fireplace: *Are you willing to save sex for marriage?*
 - Biblical rules aren't boundaries from freedom but boundaries for freedom. Love is patient. Sex is awesome. Wait for it.
- **Week 8** – Tools for the Road: *Are you willing to begin investing now for your marriage in the future?*

Challenge 1: Go back and listen to the LBB podcasts. Take notes on what love is, and wise dating steps. Buy the book *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (link on website)

Challenge 2: ("I must decrease, and He must increase.") Shift your attention and energy to your 1st love, Jesus and trust Him with leading your life.

I want you to know I've have labored over this series in a way I haven't any other. You have been offered wisdom from life-experienced couples, marriage and family classes I've taken, couple's seminars I've attended, and a multitude of books from marriage therapists combined into 8 weeks. I'm sure it can be done better, but it CAN'T be done with more passion or care for you. We, the leaders at Elevate, want the very best for you – maybe even better than you've imagined for yourself.

I'll leave you with this thought. How many times have you heard the phrase, "I wish I would have been told"? To the very best of my ability, you have been told. Now *you* carry the responsibility. If you don't follow the wisdom put on display in this series, you cannot say, "I wish I would have been told." All that's left to you down the road is, "I wish I would have listened."