

The Joy of "One Flesh": Romantic ideas:

Key elements for Romance:

- a. A state of mind - it begins here
- b. Demonstrating how well you know each other in special ways
- c. Sharing feelings and concern for each other
- d. Escaping to "exotic places" or creating "atmospheres" with a romantic mood
- e. Play, fun, joy, desire, fantasy

As we read the *Song of Songs*, we find the conversations in a background climate charged with romance - romantic moments, settings, get-aways, etc. These perhaps more important in building romance in married life than they were in courtship.

"Either husband or wife can suggest short trips (even just overnight) that become very special. Researchers have found that shared emotional arousal is a catalyst in the development of romantic, passionate love....in providing the right emotional climate, do all you can to avoid boredom even though your life must of necessity consist of routine. Think of your relationship as a continuing love affair and look at every tender, generous romantic word or act that you bestow on your partner as an investment in pleasurable memories and emotional experiences that can grow and multiply into romantic love." Wheat, Love Life for Every Married Couple, p. 91

Ask yourself, When was the last time you bestowed the kind of romantic attention on your spouse that you bestowed during the days of your courtship? It's up to YOU to take the initiative.

The practical suggestions below are intended to stimulate YOUR imagination and creativity in romance. Sometimes the fun is in the planning of a special moment, sometimes the fun lies in responding to the crazy or spontaneous urges in a romantically inclined heart.

The key is finding uninterrupted quality time and a place with the right emotional atmosphere to get together to talk and share and love and enjoy each other. There is nothing unromantic about scheduling time together, in fact, the anticipation itself can be very stimulating.

"Romantic atmosphere" (whatever the form we seek out or create) helps us to "get away" from the ordinary preoccupations of life, away from children, phones, household or vocational concerns and in a new "environment" concentrate instead on loving each other. Home can be a very unromantic and unsexy place. While sharing entertainment and attending social gatherings together can be nice, care must be taken that time is included for personal interaction and shared appreciation. And while "romance" sometimes is treated as a prelude to physical lovemaking, that need not be the goal at all. The goal is increased "oneness" - experiencing the joy of being "One flesh". Dr. Wheat suggests we ought to have as our goal the outdoing of each other in pleasing the other.

"The best atmospheres include: dim lights; a cozy winter evening before an open fire; sitting out on a porch or patio in spring or summer moonlight; times spent on or near the water, especially at night; strolls through a beautiful garden; walks on mountain trails or in the woods; drives in the hills; a peaceful, homey setting; romantic, intimate restaurants; picnic lunches in a quiet park. Whatever you do, keep it just for the two of you. Men seldom become romantic when other people are around."

Ed Wheat, Love Life for Every Married Couple, p. 90-91

Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- ♥ Unexpected appreciation: unexpected "thank you" notes.
- ♥ Faking meeting in a public place! Pretending to be strangers
- ♥ "Spouse-napping" -whether for a few hours or overnight. Even the plotting and planning of such is fun.
- ♥ "Treasure hunt" - Planting/following clues to a surprise gift, getaway or romantic moment. Don't make it easy!
- ♥ Faking a first date.
- ♥ "Spontaneous combustion" - going some place or doing something zany or romantic on the spur of the moment.
- ♥ Penny walk - Flip a coin at every corner.
- ♥ Dramatic weather is very romantic: A walk in the rain, watching the fury of a storm from a shelter, walks on the beach in fog and heavy surf, etc.
- ♥ "Picnicing". Brown bagging his or her lunch hour together.
- ♥ "Four seasons Walks". Enjoying the differing moods of early morning, noontime, sunset, or nighttime and Springtime, Summer, Winter and Fall as they change, with repeated walks together in the same park, on the same trail or beach.
- ♥ Reading Romantic novels together. Perhaps even finishing the book.
- ♥ "Sunrise" on a chilly morning, with a thermos of coffee at a local Vista.
- ♥ Making love on every piece of furniture in the house (be careful the stove is not on and wear warm pajamas doing it in the fridge.)
- ♥ Sharing a latenight, candlelit, pot of herbal tea.
- ♥ Daydreaming together - We don't have to be practical all the time!
- ♥ Good clean fun: Taking showers together.
- ♥ "Garage sale" getaway - turn the living room into a "getaway environment" with makeshift decor, special lighting and music, etc with perhaps an appropriate dinner as well.
- ♥ "Fashion show" - Her trying on dresses at a nice dept store, and getting his complimentary opinions on them (and her).
- ♥ Swap homes for a night with another couple.
- ♥ Hot tubbing. Some are available by the hour.
- ♥ Just necking! Couch? Car? anywhere?

- ♥ "Meteor-shower watching." A dark place with clear skies and sleeping bags - up & coming m. showers are often noted in the newspaper or on the radio. Note: requires kissing with eyes open - cause that's when the "fireball" always seems to fall.
- ♥ Taking a class together on something different.
- ♥ Making a Fake appointment with his secretary, then showing up to "keep it" with a special treat.
- ♥ Practical jokes - Who says living together can't be fun too. Getting even can be too.
- ♥ "Queen for a day". Taking over the household so she can go out and do whatever she wants.
- ♥ Watching an old romantic movie together on the couch late at night.
- ♥ Celebrating a nearly forgotten "anniversary" - first kiss, Day He proposed, whatever . . . even make one up!!
- ♥ The light "fantastics": Alone together appreciating firelight, moonlight, starlight, sunlight, city lights, candlelight, Christmas Tree lights, etc.
- ♥ Treating your spouse to a Candlelite Bubblebath and massage.
- ♥ A cruise on the Sound - Via Wa. St. Ferry system - perhaps including window shopping and dinner in a "foreign port".
- ♥ Going shopping together without money.
- ♥ Sunset and then starshine, greeting each star as it comes out with a hug or kiss.
- ♥ "Snowy woods" walk - especially nice during or right after snowfall (or at night around your own neighborhood.)
- ♥ Going to the Park or playground together with the children and playing with them. (The best part about having children is the "excuse" to be one again and enjoy life as they do. If you have none or yours are too old, borrow some from another "romantic" couple for the day.)
- ♥ Going for a drive together somewhere you've never been - if you get lost so much the better!

These romantic suggestions were contributed by members of a
Sunday School Class. Your additions are most welcome!!

The Joy of One Flesh:

Romance...heart throbbing, pulse pounding, tear jerking romance. It pervades our lives, appeals to our pocket books, and tugs at our hearts. It dominates our recreation whether we are readers, moviegoers or television watchers. From teen years on into adulthood, we yearn for the emotions and excitement of romance. But what is it that we desire so much to experience both vicariously and in reality? Is it simply entertainment for our idle moments, an essential element in our psychological well-being; a spark-plug of our love relationships or a disguised form of lust?

And then there are fantasies? Unreal dreams of fairyland? Lustful reflections in idle moments? Hidden desires for the kinky or unusual? Innocent daydreams used to overcome our anxieties? What is Romance? We all immediately assume we know what it is and that it is very desirable. What are fantasies? Are they simply romantic scenarios, day-dreams or something pornographic? Romance and fantasy actually share several basic elements in common, in that they draw from within us. Both connect the inner world of our ideals, feelings and desires and the outer world of our love relationships. What part does romance and fantasy play in a Christian couple's love life? Do they pose good or bad?

There are a number of ways define these terms. The first stop was the dictionary, where besides describing things related to countries where "romance" languages are spoken, we find:

- "Romance":
1. a love affair. [Men tend to read this as sexual, women as emotional]
 2. A kind of love between the sexes, usu. youthful and nonmarital, characterized by high ideals of purity and devotion, strong ardor, etc.
 3. Adventurous, heroic, or picturesque settings.
 4. A tendency towards the mysterious or adventurous.
- Definitions 5 & 6 refer to literary forms.

"Romantic"

2. characterized by or given to feelings of love or romance.
3. suitable for or conducive to love or amorousness.
5. Not based on fact; imaginary, fictitious. Funk & Wagnalls

The term "fantasy" also has a broad meaning in our modern culture. Novels describing magical kingdoms and worlds real only in the imagination and daydreams are called fantasies. Most of our movies and novels are actually a form of fantasy where we vicariously experience thrills, adventure, horror, passion, etc.

- "Fantasy"
1. Imagination unrestrained by reality; wild fancy.
 2. An odd, unreal or grotesque mental image
 4. A capricious mood
 6. A sequence of more or less pleasant mental images, usu. fulfilling a need not gratified in the real world.

Looking at our modern culture we find a number of "definitions" of romance, some of which border into the realms of fantasy. In a book on designing erotic interior spaces, Sivan Reznikoff says: "*Romance and fantasy are synonymous. We clothe our erotic desires in romantic idealization and sublimation while disguising unconscious wishes in ancient symbols. Fantasies offer a means of wish fulfillment and promise a solution to personal conflicts....*" Reznikoff goes on to say: "*Romantic spaces provide...a cocoon-like suspension from reality... that allows two people to get to know each other and to measure their new love against their idealized image of love. Romantic spaces encourage relationships to deepen and mature, thus allowing lovers to release long-hidden fantasies, hopes, dreams. "Romantic settings are shaped by the yearning to find the ideal partner. That search leads us into closer contact with nature. We can further suspend reality by escaping to faraway times and places....exotic spaces, usually combining nostalgia for another era with the mystery of another culture...reclaiming lost romance appears to have become an urgent national preoccupation of the 80's.... very few successful restaurants in America lack a touch of fantasy."*

Another prolific view of romance resides on store book racks and T.V. screens everywhere. There has been a veritable publishing boom in recent years of "Romances". Not to be confused with the Romantic literature studied in High School English, these novels usually written by women for women vary from the Harlequin Romance to historical "bodice rippers" to much more sensual novels portraying modern women. They all are built around seeking and finding true love. Nearly all are churned out according to formulas set by the publishers. The prominent theme is "love conquers all" - but before this happy ending is achieved, there is a constant struggle with obstacles (emotional and circumstantial) and the "tension" that keeps the pages turning. (See How to Write a Romance, edited by Kathryn Falk; or Writing Romance Fiction For Love and Money, by Helene Barnhart for more on this literary form).

A similar concept of what romance is appears daily on daytime and prime time "Soaps". Romantic relationships are characterized by high emotional passions and tensions and the constant internal struggle between self-interests and relational demands. And unfortunately, marriage is usually pictured as a romance killer. Seldom do we see portrayed a married couple happily in love. New romances create the further conflicts of choosing between one's spouse and one's lovers.

The clinical definition of this view is described by Masters and Johnson, noted sex therapists, in their book On Sex and Human Loving. After citing several psychologists who define romantic love basically as an intense pre-occupation with another person as the source of personal satisfaction, they define romance as a emotional cycle of longing for and falling in love, (triggered by the excitement of getting to know someone intimately and or the excitement of sex), then a period of being in love which with time enters a transitional phase where it either changes to companionate love or dissolves because of conflicts, boredom, or lack of interest. "Lovers begin to notice imperfections in each other that were previously unobserved or ignored, and boredom or impatience begins to set in. Frustration occurs when love does not measure up to our fantasies, when we realize that all our problems are not "cured," or when we discover that the ecstasy cannot go on forever without intermissions." The Lovers then begin to "test" each other and their relationship in various ways. Power struggles, competition, jealousies, anger and conflicts are "almost unavoidable". Either renewed love and trust arises or they fall out of love until the next romance begins the cycle all over again.

Several things should be noted about these clinical observations. Obviously the Masters & Johnson cycle is hardly any different than the Romance novel-Soap opera definition. Romance is a strong emotional (and usually sexual) interest in another person often shaped by our desire for intimacy. Relationships are defined by the duration of those feelings, and for a person to fall out of love, test a relationship, enter into extra-marital affairs or go through a string of romances with different lovers is considered quite normal. Romance seems to be a process by which we seek to make our desire for a "true love" experience come true. Unfortunately, these "scientific clinical observations" of what actually takes place in a sinful world are being used to justify as "normal" what are gross aberrations of God's will for our marital and sexual lives.

Gordon MacDonald observes: *"The great ethical generalization of today is "individuality" at all costs....when a person surrenders relationship for what I like to call "pseudo-individuality", he begins to grow increasingly shallow in his character and capacity to taste the deepest meanings of life. His individuality is something that has to be asserted he must do more, have more, sound louder, assert greater power, go more places, possess more lovers, and increase the opportunity for sexual variety.... the common tragedy is the quest is too great to bear....The very absence of satisfaction, resulting in the quest for more lovers and varieties of experience, is testimony to the fact that one-flesh means communion between persons is not only physical but also mental, emotional and spiritual."* Magnificent Marriage, p. xxi,7,8

Clearly we must take a stand on the romantic concept developed in God's Word in the Song of Songs. The Song is a very "romantic book". The Song of Solomon is not a modern romance - though it has the sensual elements, it is filled with rich expressions of Love, as the Bible defines it and Commitment, rather than fluxuating emotional feelings. The Song has definite romantic elements, for us, it has an "escape to exotic places" theme; and the beauty and sensual atmosphere of this oriental love poem creates "fantasies" in our minds. However The Song stands apart because it is about real people and a real love, not an ideal or imaginary love- its "drama" is from real life. Rather than testing love against ideals and self-satisfaction, it sees falling in love, and staying in love (marriage) through the eyes of the Creator as a process of commitment: giving and serving and accepting and building up.

"...The romantic experience appears to be a kindling for a deeper blaze of relationship. It provides the initial heat that may make it possible for a relational conflagration to begin in the deeper areas of sharing and serving. ...however kindling cannot sustain the long range effects of a fire... the on-going deepening experiences are necessary....Romance performs two services for us: first, it draws us together with people with whom there is reasonable personality compatibility. Second, romance appears to be a renewable experience that weaves its way through a lasting relationship of commitment....In a healthy marriage, the walk of two people together is laced by a constant flow of stimuli to the emotions. We inject romance into our relationship, and we get romance out of the relationship." Gordon MacDonald, Magnificent Marriage p.18, 19, 20

The visualization of particular kinds of sexual behavior is called fantasizing. Master and Johnson discuss the sexual fantasy life of modern people in their new book On Sex and Human Loving. They say the content of our fantasy life is tremendously varied, and their list of common fantasies reveals a mixed bag of innocence and eroticism, both proper and highly improper. Master & Johnson include in their list of common fantasies: Sex in public places, Fear of discovery, the thrill of the forbidden, conquest and seduction, different partners, group sex, rape, watching and idyllic encounters. Many of these are unthinkable to a Christian in real life, and Scripture teaches us are quite improper even in our thought life. They go on to say that in their studies they have found men and women are more similar than different in their sexual fantasy patterns.

Few of us can deny that Christians have such thoughts, for we find ourselves sometimes toying with them, sometimes struggling with them. Living in a culture where we are constantly bombarded with a media filled with suggestive and sensual images, and having the appetites and desires God has created us with, we should not be shocked or dismayed that fantasies do form in our minds, nor judgmental in regard to others. The issue is made even more confusing when we acknowledge that the sensual desires of husband and wife toward each other are quite good and proper in God's sight. These thoughts are good and acceptable in His sight, and we are encouraged to think them.

The important issue is not whether we have them or not, but how we handle them when they appear. The power of the inner world of our desires is not to be under-estimated. The Bible teaches us this clearly, calling it the "lusts of the flesh" or "the sinful nature" (1 Jn 2:15-16, Gal 5:13, Eph 2:3 Rom 7:18, Rom 1:26, 1 Thess 4:5, Jam 1:14-15. 1 Pet 2:11) Even Master and Johnson acknowledge this: *"Imagination, creativity and playfulness are part of the act of fantasizing. However if a fantasy becomes a controlling force in a person's live, the play element may be completely eliminated."* Our "fantasies" ought to be grounded in reality (loving our spouses and not a dream lover) and honoring to God (not lust-orientated, but love orientated). There is a definite need for controlling our fantasies, rather than being controlled by them. If lust is in control, we must not feed it.

Solomon's *The Song of Songs* has its fantasies too. The imagery of their language has already been commented upon in my paper on the *Language of the Lovers* - an imagery shaped around the plants and animals and foods and ornaments. Chapters 7 and 8 have a sequence of "fantasies" as the lovers are making love. The foreplay of verses 1-8 have roused powerful emotions and thoughts within her.

She visualizes pleasant and beautiful places to make love in the country villages. She visualizes a fantasy of being like brother and sister, free to show affection anywhere (Kings and Queens must be discreet). She visualizes the movements and methods of intense lovemaking. Fantasy has tremendous power to arouse. Significantly the third warning about pre- and extra-marital sex follows, as does a verse speaking to their contentment and satisfaction with their married love.

Charlie and Martha Shedd discuss fantasy during sex in their book Celebration in the Bedroom. *"For any couple wanting to help each other with fantasy, here's one possibility: 'Lets try letting our minds go while we are having intercourse. Since we can't control each other's thoughts anyway, we will extend each other the right of free floating fantasy. Then at the moment of climax we'll bring our minds into focus on each other and praise God."* p. 111. We have to note that the lovers in the Song are focused on each other, not themselves or sexual sensations.

Should we share our fantasies. Not always; but one way to control fantasies is to bring them out in the open. God already knows the secrets of our hearts. We begin by acknowledging they are there to Him. Healthy minds are those who can surface their thoughts to one other person. Praise God that in marriage we have someone who loves us, who we can trust to enter the deep corners of our hearts. Good, open communication is so important in our marriages. We ought to be able to say anything to our mates without fear of rejection or condemnation. When we cling to a fantasy and hide it secretly away, it controls us. Like defused bombs, shared fantasies usually lose their power to control and arouse. (See Master and Johnson, p. 274)

This is not to say that use of the imagination is wrong, in fact God gave this ability to us to be used in ways glorifying to Him. Wheat applies this to our romantic lives in Love Life: *"I am suggesting that both husband and wife must use their imagination to fall in love, renew romantic love, or keep alive the eros love they now have. Remember that love must grow or die. Imagination is perhaps the strongest natural power we possess. It furthers the emotions in the same way that illustrations enlarge the impact of a book. It's as if we have movie screens in our minds, and we own the ability to throw pictures on the screen - whatever sort of pictures we choose. We can visualize thrilling, beautiful situations with our mates whenever we want to."*

"Try it. Select a moment of romantic feeling with your partner from the past, present or hoped for future. As you begin to think about that feeling, your imagination goes to work with visual pictures. Your imagination feeds your thoughts, strengthening them immeasurably; then your thoughts intensify your feelings. This is how it works. Imagination is a gift from the Creator to be used for good, to help accomplish His will in a hundred different ways. So build romantic love on your side of the marriage by thinking about your partner, concentrating on positive experiences and pleasures out of the past and then daydreaming, anticipating future pleasure with your mate. The frequency and intensity of these warm, erotic, tender thoughts about your partner, strengthened by the imagination factor, will govern your success in falling in love."

"Of course this means that you may have to give up all outside attachments and daydreams about someone else if you have substituted another as the object of your affections. Many people who are not in love with their partner begin dreaming about someone else in an attempt to fill the emotional vacuum. Even if it is only in the fantasy stage, you need to forsake it and focus your thoughts on the one you married." Wheat, Love Life, p. 88

"Finally...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praise worthy - such as the love we have in our marriages - think on such things." (Phil 4:8)