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No Formulas in Marriage

By Elise L. Moore

WHEN you're in a happy marriage, it's easy to give advice to single people. But to be honest—I was clueless when I was single. I dated so many men, nice guys mind you, that my parents stopped trying to keep up. Although I was striving to be discerning, four engagements later I married a charming man with whom I was very much in love. Almost everyone but us thought it was a bad idea. I'll never forget calling my mom in tears and telling her I thought my marriage was in trouble. She laughed! So much for sympathy.

A divorce can leave one feeling that one's prayers and efforts to listen for God's direction have failed. In addition, it left me feeling that I didn't know what love was. Oh, I knew that God is Love. And I could quote from First Corinthians 13, the chapter on charity, or love: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not envious or boastful. It does not put on airs. It is not rude. It does not insist on its rights. It does not become angry. It is not resentful. It is not happy over injustice, it is only happy with truth. It will bear anything, believe anything, hope for anything, endure anything. Love will never die out" (The Complete Bible: An American Translation, verses 4-8). I strove to live this sacred counsel with everyone.

Love as a quality of God transcends personal attachment. More than physical attraction or a human emotion, it is a spiritual quality. But this was actually the problem for me. It seemed that since God's love is universal, not limited, one should love everyone equally. Mary Baker Eddy writes: "Happiness is spiritual, born of Truth and Love. It is unselfish; therefore it cannot exist alone, but requires all mankind to share it" (*Science and Health*, p. 57). To me, this was the joy of love, that it wasn't personal or possessive but unselfish and inclusive. Thus my propensity to fall in love somewhat easily.

How does universal love correlate with an exclusive interpersonal relationship lasting happily ever after—that is, marriage? The answers came gradually, and actually through marriage rather than before it, in my case.

I learned that love in a marriage is an expression of our Father-Mother God, divine Love. It does not preclude universal love. Rather, marital love demonstrates aspects of permanence, depth, and breadth that other relationships may not include. Just as the love of parents for children plumbs the depth and variety of God's love, so marriage provides opportunities to express unity and individuality simultaneously. The description of love in the fourth chapter of First John in the Bible comes closest to my sense of the progressive concept of love expressed in a marriage relationship. John writes: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (verses II and 12). Marriage is a great arena in which to consistently work and pray to perfect love for one another.

Certainly it is possible to perfect love when one is single. Jesus definitely did. He reflected God's universal love deeply and broadly. He radiated this love. It was so powerful that he was able to heal instantaneously and to forgive those who wanted to crucify him. Evidently, he had no sense that a companion was necessary to a complete expression of love. In fact, he foretold that "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30).

Marriage is certainly not a necessity for happiness. It is one of the moral provisions for family and the only moral site for sexual relations. Approached as a sacred uniting of male and female, marriage can also reflect in some degree the oneness of Father-Mother God.

Yet each union is as unique as the individuals joining in it. Affection, moral integrity, stability, and mutual appreciation are fundamental to my own marriage, but successful relationships can be built on an infinite variety of distinct moral and spiritual qualities derived from God.

Perhaps that is the lesson to be learned from my previous, unsuccessful attempt at marriage. There is no formula. When I tried to follow a human plan or was guided by what had worked or not worked for others, I was disappointed. No one else's experience could substitute for my own striving to perfect love and totally trust my communion with God. When I set aside personal criteria and preferences, however, divine Love brought about a marriage relationship in ways that I could never have imagined. Turning entirely to God for guidance, rather than to human logic or advice, allowed

both my fiancé and me to be receptive to divine Love's spontaneity, divine Life's variety, and divine Truth's unerring intuition.

Your experience of love will be equally unique. Keeping God primary and human views secondary—and being attracted to spiritual qualities more than to physical appearance—transform and prepare each one of us for whatever relationships may lie ahead. Divine Love is providing all of us with opportunities to perfect love.