

WILL I LOSE MYSELF IF I'M INVOLVED WITH YOU?

FACTS AND FALLACIES OF INTIMACY: PART 1

By Dr. Kevin Downing

FALLACY

If I become emotionally, spiritually and romantically involved in a courting relationship, or in marriage - it will always lead to me losing myself and becoming someone I don't really want to be. I will have to live a false life.

FACT

Healthy dating relationships and healthy marriages enhance the person you were created to be. These relationships will champion your causes and provide support for your life dreams.

I Knew You'd Be My Therapist!

Many years ago a couple came to see me for marriage counseling. The wife crumpled down into my couch and whispered out a mumbled word or two. I'm not sure she could have been more depressed. The husband sat stiff and upright in his chair and pontificated in authoritative detail the multitude of flaws his wife possessed. He diagnosed the source of their marital problem – namely his wife's failure to comply with his wishes. I let this go on for a few minutes and also discovered that he was involved with what appeared to be some shady business deals.

In the midst of the husbands barrage of criticism I turned to him and said, "I have no idea what you are talking about." He fell back in his chair as if he had been found out for committing some secret crime. The wind in his sails had suddenly vanished. Perhaps he was hoping that I would help him beat his wife up. I wasn't about to do that. He dropped out of counseling and abandoned his wife in short order.

Apparently he was convinced that his wife was the problem and if only he got rid of her his life would be better. (Unfortunately he will take himself into his next relationship!) I began to work with the wife. In the weeks that followed she came alive! She turned into a delightful and cheerful extrovert. Her friends told her that she "was back" – after ten years of depression and oppression.

At one time she apparently had been their bubbly, exuberant friend. She made great progress very quickly and before too long she was ready to graduate from counseling. In our last session we reviewed her goals and accomplishments. At one point she asked me, "Do you remember that time you confronted my husband and told him you didn't know what he was talking about?" I told her that I did indeed remember that moment. She then she raised her voice and loudly proclaimed, "At that moment I knew you'd be my therapist!" My heart went out to her. She had lost herself, her voice, her faith and she had needed someone to come to her side. I was glad that I could.

You might argue that this story proves that relationships can be dangerous and losing "me" to be with "you" is a real concern. Well, it is in unhealthy relationships.

If the person you are dating is possessive, jealous or tells you that they were the victim in all their past relationships you need to watch out. This may not be a healthy relationship you are getting into.

I Did Something Right with My College Girlfriend

I dated a very lovely young lady when I was in college. Although I adored her I didn't marry her. I just didn't have a way to support her and I really wasn't sure where I was going with my life. I didn't feel that it was fair to marry her. Years later she paid me the nicest complement. She said to me, "If it wasn't for you I never would have married Bill (her husband)." Somehow I had laid some ground work that helped her marry a truly great guy. Perhaps it was the respect I showed her. Or maybe I gave her some of the "Five Freedoms" listed below.

THE FIVE FREEDOMS

Many years ago a famous family therapist by the name of Virginia Satir said that Five Freedoms mark the traits of a healthy relationship. Here they are...

The Freedom to See and Hear What is Here - instead of what should be, was, or will be.

The Freedom to Say What One Feels and Thinks - instead of what one should feel or think.

The Freedom to Feel what One Feels - instead of what one ought to feel.

The Freedom to Ask for What One Wants - instead of always waiting for permission.

The Freedom to Take Risks in One's Own Behalf - instead of choosing to be only 'secure' and not rocking the boat."

The 'Love of Your Life' Helps Support Your Identity

Having a strong personal identity means that you are aware of and take seriously your God given perceptions. It means that you have a deep and intimate relationship with your heavenly Creator.

When you keenly listen, see, think, and feel what is going on around you are not in denial. You are dealing in a responsible way with reality. You are in touch. When you are intimately aware of a power greater than yourself and know that He has the ability to guide and empower you, you are in touch with the spiritual realities of being one of God's created ones.

We might say that at this point you are - earthly aware and spiritually connected.

The healthiest relationships support and encourage you towards these goals and dreams.

Give Me a Blueprint...Please

Perhaps the best place to look for a role model is to God himself. He spoke to the children of Israel about leading them out of the 70 year captivity they endured in Babylon. He said the following...

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:11-13

That sounds like some real connection there – good direction and intention with good listening and communication, among other things.

Jesus said it this way...

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.

“This is my command: Love each other.” John 15: 12-17

Fears start to vanish when we pattern our relationships after these role models - it's hard to go wrong when we treat each other this way - or even close to it. The focus is not about how we will be treated, but how we will love.

But I Have Lost Myself in Relationship I Am Now In!!

People often come into counseling asking the thumbs up or thumbs down question regarding their marriage. “Should I stay married or should I get a divorce?” I find the real question is, “What can I do to be like Jesus in this marriage?”

If you have lost yourself in your current relationship here are some things that I'd like for you to consider doing...

Don't isolate yourself with your mate or significant other. If their voice is pretty much the only voice you hear you are in trouble. Reach out and get some professional help and re-connect with trustworthy friends.

In counseling, develop a game plan to deal with your dominating partner. If you have conceded to just “caving in” to the pressures at home you are on dangerous ground.

Don't allow yourself to be the recipient of monologues from your partner. Healthy relationships have dialogue – which two people talk back and forth to each other in a respectful way. Monologues occur when someone is talking at you. They are verbally evacuating or flushing on you. This does no good for you or for them.

Get safe. If you are the target of someone's physical violence you need to get safe right away. Verbal violence includes swearing and name calling of all types as well as character assignments or making you the scapegoat.

Jesus commanded respect and if we are to follow in his footsteps we need to as well. To love and be loved has nothing to do with making yourself a doormat or the target of someone's rage. Servanthood leadership and servanthood (see Fact flier on “IS IT PEOPLE PLEASING OR SERVANTHOOD?”)

Giving are a deliberate choice on your part not something that is forced upon you.

Take Us Out Virginia

Virginia Satir was a lover of people and perhaps that's why she was such a success. She summed up her goal for having a healthy relationship in this way...

I WANT TO...

Love you without clutching,

Appreciate you without judging,

Join you without invading,

Invite you without demanding,

Criticize you without blaming, and

Help you without insulting.

Dr. Downing is available to see clients at the Fullerton office. Call 1-800-998-6329 today to schedule an appointment! www.turningpoint.counseling.org