



*(This edition is especially for pre-maritals!)*

# Finding “Me” Without Losing “Us”

*Healthy Personhood Is Important to Both in a Strong Marriage*

## How do I find “me” with out losing “us”?

Some couples appear to change seamlessly across the decades of their marriages. Their subtle shifts occur with no signs of stress. *Yeah, but no one knows what goes on behind closed doors!* Until close friends come away from intimate conversations with one or the other and realize that this couple really DOES have a healthy marriage. But we also know that some couples struggle. One young woman reached out for help by asking for a counselor. Eventually, she voiced her anxiety around “moving from being a student to being a wife with responsibilities and a new identity to establish.” Another had an affair with a 17-year old, and then another later with someone their own age. The results of a delayed adolescence in that specific case. A developmental issue in marriage is constructively finding “me” without losing “us” over the years. That’s how Robert Herron, a counselor in North Carolina, expresses this. Please read on...

## The Answer is in Self-Awareness...and That Ain’t Easy!

A starting place is in your commitment level to “us.” Viewing your marriage as a partnership can be a powerful driver of how you self-maintain. In a healthy partnership, one somehow holds onto the value that no issue or challenge will be allowed to break down the partnership. When that value is in place, how you go about addressing problems is different. One spouse came to her partner. She had been suffering silently with some generalized anxiety that was not rooted in marital trouble. But, she valued her partnership enough to understand that her pain was beginning to affect the home. She gathered up the courage it took to express her problems, and then asked her partner to walk with her as she got help. Not only did he support her in counseling, but oddly their relationship emerged stronger for having weathered the crisis together. They’ll journey with those issues to some degree for the rest of their lives though. Which means ...

## ...You won’t be the same person at 45 as you were at 25

You just won’t be. Sure the basics of who you have become as an adult will be there. But life takes you different places. You achieve, you fail. You birth or you don’t. The meandering path of life takes you through gain and loss. Along the way, new insights come. Self-awareness increases, hopefully. You grieve some of what is and some of what is not. You celebrate what you’ve become, and revel in the serendipity of what you never expected. None of this leaves you unaffected. Add in some of the behaviors, thoughts or biases that you’ll develop along the way and you are altered in small ways and big as you live. A good marriage becomes something to be celebrated as two humans move along together. A healthy marriage will need open communication, lovingly practiced each day in order to stay a healthy marriage.

## Even You Don’t Know What You Don’t Know

An academic mentor warned me about all of my marriage and divorce work years ago. His caution was about burnout. Instinctively I knew that he could be right. But I now know that one season of that burnout has presented itself in an odd way: I am managing a growing pessimism about my pre-marital couples actually being ready to get married. Here’s the problem — many of us get married at an age when we don’t even know ourselves. Much less, can our spouses know us deeply. That scares me to even say out loud. I don’t

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want to suggest that young couples shouldn't marry. I do want to caution them to live and love together with sensitivity and openness. And, to choose wisely! Pay attention to relational warning signs. Your spouse deserves for you to have very few "secret" places in your lifetime. Work together, explore together, ask questions together! Support each other as you discover, and as you shape each other. If you're considering marriage to someone who won't do these things—think some more.

### **Heed These Warning Signs Carefully!**

Couples marry and almost immediately begin a transition from life together that is predominantly recreational to one that is more rooted in responsibility. So, I know that you love each other — now, take a good look at your partner. Look deep within them at what you know. That's all you can really work with. Is there something about them that would be a deal-breaker if you didn't want to get married so badly? Here are a few specific questions: Do I suspect my spouse has a serious "secret" kept from me — monetarily, relationally, morally or other? Is there what seems like a clinical personality disorder that I've so far just chosen to overlook? Does one or the other of us have frequent disinterest in what the other is saying/doing? Am I having a prolonged attraction to a friend, neighbor or co-worker? Is there sudden, un-explained anger toward my partner? Do I feel depressed? Am I disinterested in my partner touching me? Can I be married to this person, or stay married to this person, without some help with one or more of these issues? Is my partner struggling with one or more of these feelings toward me?

### **Hallmarks of a Healthy Relationship**

Well, no doubt you want to hear some good news. You're clear of the scary stuff listed above? Well, look for these among some factors that might indicate a healthy place for YOU to be YOU: Does your partner help you feel free to be you? Does your relationship empower you rather than hold you back? Do you and your partner communicate regularly, deeply and constructively? Does your relationship leave you both room to express your talents and personal callings in life? As challenges arrive, do you feel safe in expressing them to your partner? Can you ask your partner for help? Do you and your partner have healthy, balanced relational expectations that you have negotiated and shared? Does your partner, by being who they are, challenge you in some way to be a better person?

### **Isn't This a Lot to Worry About?**

The last thing I want to do is to cause couples to over think and over worry! On some level, I am not real concerned about that. Most couples probably could stand to do a little more introspection. A way to misuse these **Marriage Helps** resources would be to develop a passel of checklists. Or to begin to obsess over an issue that isn't yours! I don't want to suggest you toward some problem that isn't there. But I do want to move you toward healthy awareness that there is work to be done if you are to be a satisfied "you" within a thriving "us." Couples who need to do some work, but don't, get into trouble. Live and love as open partners. Don't over-think your love! But live in the awareness that help is out there. Get that help if you need it, and nurture your love.

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