How To Restart The Spark

Introduction. A sad letter appeared in Dear Abby's column several years ago and gives a great insight to a major problem in marriage relationships. *Reader's Digest* once said the number one question people ask marriage counselors is, "Why don't we love each other like we used to?" Like every other living organism, a marriage is either growing or dying. Your marriage may be quite stable and there may be no talk or hint of divorce. But is the spark or the excitement gone out of your marriage?

Even though Revelation 2:4-5 is not talking directly about a mate, there are three principles which still apply. The first principle is remember from where you have fallen. Remember the good times, laughter, and happiness associated with the early years of marriage. The second principle is repent. Somebody says, "Boy, I have done that. I have repented of the fact that I ever got married." That is not what the word is talking about! "Repent" does not mean to be sorry; it means a change of heart and action. Choose to act in a loving way, even if you do not feel very loving. The third principle is take action. In other words, act the same way toward your mate that you did when you first married. It is easier to fall in love than it is to stay in love, and because of complacency, we stop doing what we did at first.

We are going to examine five items that sparked your relationship in the first place. If you want to restart the spark, then you have to start all over. Do what you did at first. Before we jump into the list, I want to go ahead and address the number one complaint always heard. Some of you will look at the list and say, "Oh, I don't feel like doing that." If that is your response, you need to learn the key lesson that all successful people learn: Feelings follow actions. It is a lot easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action. When the alarm goes off at 5:30 a.m., very few people want to get out of bed on a cold morning. But the people who are successful are the people who get out of bed and get ready! No athlete really wants to go to practice, but they go anyway. If you act romantic, you will feel romantic.

I. ***Interest***

A. Pay attention to your mate! The key idea is to have a knowledge or understanding of your mate's likes, dislikes, and needs (1 Peter 3:7). As you come to know them more, you will have a greater interest in them (Matthew 19:21; cf. Luke 20:46; 22:24). The first sign that you were falling in love with someone was that you began paying attention to them and vice versa. Do you remember how much interest you showed your mate before he or she married you? Do you remember

sending the notes, cards, gifts, and flowers? Remember all the phone calls and hours that you spent talking to one another?

1. How many of you have bought a new car and washed, waxed, parked it in the garage, and not let the kids get in it unless they have had a bath? Six months later they are getting in it after a muddy baseball practice, sloshing milk shakes everywhere.
2. Unfortunately, it is human nature for something to gradually lose its attractiveness over time. If familiarity does not breed contempt, it does at least breed apathy. How many times have you seen something new and thought, "I have got to have it!" That is probably the same thought you had about your mate. You looked at him or her and thought, "I have got to have it!" but after a while you say, "I can't get rid of it!"

B. The fact is God made men differently than women. A primary trait of man is the "conquer mentality." We are very goal-oriented. Have you ever noticed that men are that way about everything? For instance, a man's idea of going on vacation is, "We are going to get there and then we are going to have fun!" That is a sign of being goal-oriented. This orientation does not change when it comes to dating and marriage. A man has the goal, "I want this woman! Conquer! Conquer!" He will then become very creative and do what he would never do any other time to accomplish that goal.

C. However, when the wedding and honeymoon are over, men unconsciously think, "Mission accomplished!" Likewise, when a man sets the goal of providing for his wife, he will have a tendency to focus totally on his career, and his career will consume his life. After a while, the wife is devastated and begins to think, "He does not even look at me anymore. I have been tricked, cheated, and trapped." This exact scenario happens in 98% of all marriages. Men, we have to develop the mind set that the hunt is never over. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to romance your wife as long as you live. The interest that you showed before marriage is the interest you must show after marriage if you want those feelings to continue.

II. ***Encouragement***

A. The quickest way to put spark back into your marriage is to encourage and appreciate your spouse. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:7 that we are to "give honor" to our wives (1 Thessalonians 5:11; cf. Malachi 2:14). Everybody wants to be encouraged, appreciated, and honored. In fact, you fall in love with the people who encourage you.

B. A lady who had been married 50 years was once asked about the secret to a happy marriage. She said, "You treat your husband like a king and he will treat you like a queen." We tend to become what

others think of us (Acts 4:32; Romans 12:10). The best way to honor your mate is to verbalize your love every single day. Do you know that if you start verbalizing your love, you feel more loving? I don't mean simply saying, "Love ya" as you rush out the door! If you will look your mate in the eye and say, "I love you, I appreciate you, and I need you" several times a day, it will build those feelings within you. That is the power of the spoken word.

III. ***Intimacy***

A. Have you noticed when you go to the mall or a restaurant, you can always tell who the young married couples are? If you see a couple walking hand in hand, do you assume they are married or dating? It is so sad that after the wedding, the touching and tenderness stops in so many marriages. The fact of the matter is, all marriages need large amounts of hugging, kissing, holding hands, caressing, and sitting close to each other. The key to intimacy is that men need to understand that their wives need to be held and touched in a non-sexual way (Ephesians 5:33). There are a myriad of ways to obey that verse, and one is by giving your mate the physical touch and intimacy they need.

B. The word for "caressing" in Genesis 26:8 is the Hebrew word *sekah*, and it means that they were snuggling or playfully cuddling. Every marriage needs that! We have known for years that a baby will die if it is not hugged or touched enough. It is a condition called "Sonosensory Deprivation." Marriages can also die because of a lack of intimacy. A UCLA study once stated that if you hug your husband three times a day, you can increase his life span on the average of up to three years. Some of you are thinking, "I just do not feel intimate." If you want to return to your first love and restart the spark, you need to do what you did at first, and the feelings will return. You will never feel affectionate until you start acting affectionate again.

IV. ***Enjoy***

A. Enjoy your marriage (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:18-19). Frankly, most marriages are dull. Not long ago, one author suggested that the number one cause of most affairs is boredom. Let me ask you a really frank question. Are you fun to live with or are you a bump on a log? Have you taken the adventure out of your marriage? When was the last time you did something that broke the monotony, routine, and dullness? All work and no play makes for a mighty dull marriage.

B. The problem most of us have is that we only consider enjoyment with our spouse after all the work is finished. We say, "As soon as I get all of my work done and put in the extra time at the office, I will do it!" Of

course, the problem is we never get our work finished and as a result, the fun in a marriage is thrown out the window and the spouse finishes in last place (Deuteronomy 24:5; 2 Samuel 12:3). We all think, "Oh, but she will understand," "He will understand," "You know it is just temporary, I am going through a hard time right now, but when I catch up, we will do something fun." But the cycle goes on and on (Ecclesiastes 2:11; 5:10). You schedule the enjoyment right out of your marriage and then you wonder why the feelings have died. You need to go and have fun with your mate. Enjoy the wife (or husband) of your youth!

V. ***Interdependence***

A. If the two halves that become one are pulling in opposite directions, eventually there will be a big problem (Matthew 19:4-6). However, when my spouse and I are obedient to Christ, we pull together as "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7; cf. Romans 8:17; Ephesians 3:6; Hebrews 11:9). Instead of pulling us apart, agreement in godly devotion draws us together in a bond that has no substitute. Spirituality has everything to do with romance because spiritual bonding brings about emotional unity, and emotional unity brings about physical unity.

B. Please do not misunderstand me. Physical unity should not be your prime motivation for obedience to God; it is a by-product. We have been fed the humanistic lie on television that to be romantic, you must be worldly; you have got to go out there and know the ropes. If you really want to feel closer and more attracted to your mate, pray together. When you get through praying together, your hearts will be so unified that you will naturally want to be more intimate. When a husband and wife have an interdependence with each other and with Christ, they will have a unity that will keep the marriage fresh.

Conclusion. Proverbs 18:22 says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." If you want to restart the spark, all you have to do is show the same interest, encouragement, intimacy, enjoyment, and interdependence that you showed at first. It is sad to say, but a lot of people are like the 1964 song, "You've Lost that Lovin' Feeling." But it does not have to stay lost. I know that some of you are thinking, "I have married the wrong person!" However, I want you to know that there were reasons that led you to marry that person in the first place. You do not need a new mate, you need a new disposition. You can have a new disposition if you remember, repent, and do what you did at first.