

How to Keep Falling in Love

"It's very easy to fall in love, but it's much harder to stay falling."

There's an old saying that goes: "Guys fall in love through their eyes and girls through their ears," hence the reason why women obsess over their looks and mannerisms, while guys flip between deciding if they are the funny one or the musician. I recently finished a book called, *Keep Your Love On* by Danny Silk. (It's fantastic for anyone considering it on their book list!) In it, he talked about all the pre-marital counseling sessions during which he asked each one of the couples what they liked about the other. Sadly to say, many of their answers revolved around what the other person does for them. "She makes me feel good about myself." "He makes me laugh."

Driving on my way home tonight, I realized something that I may never have the ability to capture elegantly into words, but it hit something deep inside of my soul. I was thinking about what makes people connect? What creates soul ties, friendships and relationships that last a lifetime? Researchers have spent billions of dollars trying to find the answers to these questions, suggesting that we change our relationships every seven years. It hit me in a single moment; the difference between temporary and permanent relationships lie in the connection to character.

When you peel back all the layers of a human being, their responses to every circumstance completely hinge on their character. I've heard it said that every response that happens in life, stems from what happens on your insides between your collarbone and your waistline. Your character, whether good or bad, is unshakeable. It can be trained, molded and damaged, but when the storms come, that's where you see what's below all those layers. While some may argue me, I believe that after a certain age—your character is the same yesterday,

today and forever.

I realized, something shifts when we fall in love with someone's character. We devote ourselves to supporting that person's core, not just what they can bring to and for us. Looks, money, status and people—they change, leave or diminish in the ebb and flow of life. However, our response to those things, does not change. Connecting to that core is something so spiritual and nearly ineffable; you understand your partner past what they can explain to you. You can learn to work like a well-oiled machine as a team rather than two individuals walking in different directions at different paces, wanting different things.

Now for those of you who know me—my digging didn't stop there. Those words, "unchangeable ... the same, today, tomorrow and yesterday," they kept playing in an attempt to connect to other concepts until finally it landed on, "In the beginning, God" As you read through Scripture, you will never find a true description of what God looks like. He likens some of His quality to ours but guess what ... our understanding of God is based on what we see in His character. So in the beginning, God breathed His character into us, so that we might reflect His. I wanted to lay on the ground at this point.

I began to think about what God's character is, and some of the dots began to connect. John says that God is love, so naturally the next question would be: "What is love?" We've heard this a million times, but read the next few lines as if love is God and not a feeling": "God is patient and kind. He does not envy, boast, or act proudly. He does not dishonor people, act selfishly, keep track of screw ups or get riled into anger easily. He seeks truth, rather than anything that brings harm or disconnection. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and never gives up." I'd say that sounds about right.

I played over the story of the Garden of Eden in my mind. The

problem was never about them eating the fruit. It was about the fact that they hid, lied, broke trust and acted in the exact opposite of everything God stands for! Imagine how He would've responded if they owned what they did and asked for forgiveness; if they had protected His character and His honor? They produced the first trait of bad character into a creation that God had breathed Himself into and made perfect. How can such purity mix with something so destructive? So we left Him no choice but to break His Spirit from ours.

I wondered what that felt like? I can only liken it to losing a relationship with someone whom you trust completely and who protects and supports your character and honor while you protect theirs. They walk away from you, leaving you brokenhearted, only to fall into the arms of another. You watch them walk into a relationship with someone who does not value them and who always seeks to fulfill themselves—sucking any life they might have had, right out of them.

We walk throughout this life, trying to fill the void with things and people. Our choices are typically based on what will keep our hearts “safe” because since that moment in the garden, we have feared being lied to or deceived again. We're left with a hole where God's Spirit once was and no matter how hard try, it's never enough to fill up that emptiness.

It's kind of interesting ... this journey began for me when someone said, “I think when you've experienced love, you've experienced God.” Guess what ... true love (among every type of relationship), is unconditional—which means it's is unchanging yesterday, today and forever. You don't have to earn it; you just have to value it. Adam and Eve valued hiding their vulnerable selves in order to “look” like there was nothing wrong. They valued covering themselves with leaves doused with fear and shame, rather seeking to work through a tough situation and restoring their relationship. In the end, their

reflection of God's character, or lack thereof, is what destroyed their relationship with Him.

We must want to connect with something that is unchangeable. Find the courage to connect with His character, knowing He will never disappoint! When you fall in love, the way you keep falling is to love their core, and always protect their honor and character. If we seek to reflect His character, and restore that spiritual relationship with Him, while learning to love each other unconditionally, we build a kingdom that is unshakeable.

Halee Shults *has a degree in family science and currently resides in Kansas City, Missouri. She's loves studying how the physical and spiritual realms collide.*