



Achieving true Relationship Growth requires us to abandon the fairy tale of a static partner. Co-host Bill Courtright and psychotherapist Eddie Reece unpack what happens when the initial romantic fog clears and reality sets in. Many couples mistake individual evolution for growing apart, but the real challenge lies in how we manage our differences. We often treat our partners with an unspoken sense of ownership rather than staying curious about who they are becoming. By shifting from transaction to genuine contribution, you'll learn to build a connection that thrives long after the honeymoon ends.

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Navigating Differences After The Honeymoon Phase

The Honeymoon Reality Check

Welcome back to another episode of the show. Therapy for everyday life. That's our subject matter expert psychotherapist extraordinaire, Eddie Reece. My name's Bill Courtright, supposedly the voice of every person. I think I am well suited for our conversation because, like many of us, I am a married

man. I have been married to my wife since 2012. We're doing pretty well, but the subject of our episode is going to be beyond the honeymoon.

Eddie and I are going to talk a little bit about what happens to marriages. I'm sure we will address the first 12 to 24 months, what we call the honeymoon period, sunshine and rainbows, at least it was for me. Having now been married for fourteen years, I'm personally as much in love with my wife now as I have ever been, but the relationship is certainly different.

We now have two kids and we have had our series of seasons, challenges, worked through some things, and buried a parent. We've done some things that we just were never prepared to do. I would say that our marriage is pretty solid, but I would love to know from Eddie to the degree he is willing to share. What is the life cycle of a marriage? What can we expect or what might our readers and viewers have experienced in that first chapter? How does that progress to the middle chapters?

I'm sure there's going to be some of us reading that are not in the original marriage or have never been married or maybe have been married more than twice. I do not know, but Eddie, as the title of the episode is *Beyond the Honeymoon*. Talk to us a little bit about what is going on through the dynamics of a relationship beyond that 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, or 24 months when things get real.

The Illusion Of Growing Apart

My first thought was, if this is like any long-term romantic kind of relationship or many people do not get married, or they stay together for decades. I liked the word you used, the life cycle of it. A lot of couples come to therapy and there's some version of, we have grown apart, or things are different. The underlying thought that would create the idea that you had grown apart is that you should stay the same.

You haven't grown apart. You've just grown, and it's different. That is part of what would be an underlying issue with anything we might talk about in this realm. We get this idea in our head that we've met the right person. They're like, "This person is just great for me," without any thought of who they will be or who you will be 5 or 10 years from now. Most of us have the idea that, as of now, I am grown, meaning I don't have a lot more growing to do after this. That is the way most of us feel at just about every age.

Twenty-year-olds know it all. Fifteen-year-olds know it all. They're grown, but they're not. That would be the first different way to think about this idea of a long-term relationship. Who you are with is not going to be exactly who you're with 5 or 10 years from now. Think of your own life and what has changed in the last 5 years or 10 years of your life or the last 20 years of your life. If you've got 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, or 50 years ahead of you with this person, you're not going to be the same two people.

If nothing else changes, just aging changes you, and you're different. You're going to be married to an old person. If things go well, you're going to be old people married to each other. Get rid of the idea that, "I love you just the way you are," to quote Billy Joel. Don't change anything. That's not going to happen. You wouldn't want to be married to the same person if you got married when you were 25 or 50. You don't want to be married to that 25-year-old. That's the first thing that comes to mind. You don't grow apart. You just grow.

I have to believe that the couple's experience, endure, and grow from. Maybe, but they certainly have an effect. Whether you've grown or accelerated or however it alters the trajectory of who you are as

people, in my circumstance, there's an element of gratitude. We've shared these experiences together, and there's a level of relatability, commonality, and shared experience that brings us closer. It's like we've changed together. We've grown together. Not grown together meaning proximity. It's like we were on the same path.

Navigating Life Transitions Together

You experience something together. You experience buying a house and having a child. You go through those experiences together. What matters in terms of, if you're hoping for a long-term relationship, is when you go through those things. You go through them in a way that creates more closeness, more intimacy, and a tighter bond.

What often happens is, you go through the experiences together and you come out on the other side further apart because you see that experience differently. You react differently to it. You aren't too happy with how your partner reacted or what they did or didn't do. To make things worse, you don't talk about it in a way that's helpful. You may not talk about it at all or you may argue about it. It may become one of those things that quite often comes up in therapy. Once I get going with somebody, they will mention that experience that was 25 years ago, and it still eats at them. If you grow apart, it's that you didn't go through your life together in a way that brings you closer.

I have to believe that there are forks in the road and there are experiences where there's no way to predetermine how it's going to affect you or your partner.

All of them. You can't predetermine anything.

You can have some semblance of an idea. I was given the advice when I was engaged by a family member, like, "Have you traveled?" I'm like, "What do you mean?" They said, "Have you traveled anywhere?" I said, "Yes, we've traveled." They said, "How did that go?" I said, "It was great." They said, "It's very important that you travel anywhere with your partner because you can learn a lot through travel."

Things don't go according to plan, and you encounter fatigue and irritability. Can you respect each other through that process? Can you deal with adversity and when things don't go according to plan? It's like what we talked about. That was something I remember filing away. It's like, "You're going to face experiences and adversity. Things aren't going to go according to plan. How do you show up in those moments? Are you still respectful? Are you still enduring? Are you still, by all accounts, a decent person to your partner, or do you become selfish?"

Embracing Differences Over Compliance

If you don't go through it well, can you communicate in a way where you can still build a closer relationship? One of the things I'm probably saying is, if you're talking, "I want a long-term relationship. I want one to last until one of us dies." The things you have in common are great, but that's not going to sustain you for a long time. It's the differences that you have and how you navigate those differences that will sustain you.

In terms of growth, you're better off if your trip doesn't go well between the two of you and you learn how to navigate those differences. I want to approach the trip this way. You want to approach it that way. I'm not going to change. You're not going to change. How do we navigate those differences in a way that we feel closer to each other? Stay connected to each other instead of being mad at each other

because you're different from me. I don't want you to be different from me. Which is what most arguments are in relationships.

Tweet: We don't grow apart in relationships. We just grow, and we have to learn to love the person our partner is becoming.

You're not me. You're not like me. You think this way, I think that way, and I don't like that. Which is an interesting phenomenon. What I'll say to couples when I point that out is, "Let's turn this person into you. Do you want to be married to them? You will know everything they're going to do, say, feel, and think from now on. You're married to yourself, and you still need somebody else."

We want somebody who's different from us, and to be able to navigate those differences with somebody that enhances our relationship. That's how we grow. We grow from challenges. We grow from things that are tricky, difficult, and learning to navigate that in a way that works. That's how we grow as people or as a couple or as a family. If you're growing apart, it's because that's not happening.

Is it rewarding when you interact with a couple that, although struggling to communicate or struggling to make sense, truly wants the best for the relationship? I have to believe that it seems like it would be a cool place to be where you get to shepherd this couple back to a place where what they're looking for is a respectful, healthy, loving relationship. They reach an impasse because of that growth. They're just flummoxed a little bit. It would strike me as a very rewarding part of your profession to be able to knit that back together.

That's the whole big payoff for being a therapist. Especially with the amount of stigma of coming to therapy, in the first place, that's in the South. People, by the time they get to my office, they've lost all hope and they don't think that I'm going to be able to help them. Sometimes, within the first few minutes, they're saying, "I should have talked to you many years ago." To help people with something that feels so big to them, that they don't think you're going to be able to overcome it, and to walk them through the process of, "This isn't that complicated. Do this and do that." Seeing them get through it's incredibly rewarding.

The probably most dramatic story was a couple. The guy came in first and had been married for hours. It was really short. They had just gotten married. From his point of view, he just gotten her to move out because things were so bad right in the beginning. He was saying he wanted a divorce. I said, "Let's get her in here too, and have you guys lay out what's going on." She came in and she wanted a divorce.

There was something that I saw in them that made me say, "How about you guys give us three months and stop talking about divorce. Let's work on this." To shorten the story, several years later, they brought their firstborn to therapy and told me that they were so grateful because their child wouldn't exist if they had not come to therapy. They wound up having three children who exist because they came into my office. That's pretty rewarding. Watching people go, "I never thought about it that way," and then they're different.

I've heard it said, "You have to want to make it work." Is that saying true?

Unpacking Relationship Ambivalence

Everybody's ambivalent, even if they may not present as ambivalent. A lot of times, that is the typical way people come in. One person wants to stay, and the other one wants out. That's not really what's going on. Both people are ambivalent. They're just voicing the one side that they want to voice. There's a

psychological term for that called projective identification. I have a part of me that wants to stay and a part of me that wants to leave. You have a part who wants to stay and leave.

I feel more comfortable saying, "I want to stay." You feel more comfortable saying you want to leave. I'll project my other part onto you. You'll play that role. You'll do the same thing with me, and our arguments will be stay, go and stay, go. Once I get people to start talking, they discover that they are ambivalent. The argument is just the way to stay away from the inner argument that they have, so they can blame the other person for the problems and for the eventual breakup, if that happens, rather than saying, "I was ambivalent. I didn't know what I wanted." That's not a place people are comfortable.

Certainly, the opposite of ambivalence would be passion or fire.

It can be a false certainty, which is what people are displaying like, "I know I want to make this work." You really don't. You do, but you also don't. You also hope it falls apart because you don't know. We've covered this in a number of different episodes. This idea that we're striving for certainty, and that's the problem. I want people to sit in their ambivalence. This ambivalence of, "We've grown apart. I don't know what I want."

I want folks to sit in that and explore that rather than saying growing apart or being ambivalent is the problem to solve. That's not the problem to solve. That's how you're going to grow is by diving into that, going, "This is interesting. I don't know if I want to be with you or not. Part of me really does. Part of me doesn't. Part of me doesn't care. Part of me really cares," then explore that. That's how you grow. You'll also come to a better decision, whatever that decision might be because now you know a whole lot more about who you are and what you want.

I've also heard it recommended that engaged couples attend couples therapy.

It's too late by then. An engaged couple will come into therapy, and be like, "We want to do premarital counseling." I ask, "How far along in the engagement are you? Have you sent out all the invitations?" I say, "I'm not going to be able to help you as much as I would like to because the train's already left the station. If we did counseling that was about, 'Should we marry each other?' That would have had to have started after your second or third date to be successful."

For now, the forces are against us for you to come across anything that might indicate you might not marry each other. You're not going to want that at all. There's a lot I can help you with in terms of how to talk about things when they don't go well and help you with your communication. I can throw out some things for you to discuss. It's probably not discussed yet like your finances. Do you happen to know how much money each of you have, the debt you have, credit cards, or financial goals? Have you talked about it? That would be a good one. We could talk about that.

You can certainly get a lot of help. If nothing else, you can establish that therapy is helpful. When you get to that point, pretty much every couple I've ever known, professionally or unprofessionally, gets to, "What made me think I really wanted to marry this person?" When you get to that stage, then you have a place to go. You know that therapy can be helpful. That is worth its weight right there.

I agree. From the personal experience of having heard and witnessed it being recommended to an engaged couple, there was a nobility in the person who was recommending it. Not thinking that the train had left the station, but understanding that things are going to happen that you will not have the recipe, blueprint, or instructions for. To your point earlier, remove the stigma beforehand and just know that you're likely going to encounter things along the way that are going to, from my personal

experience, rock it to the core. You're not going to have a way forward with any level of confidence, and it's scary.

Nobody teaches us any of that. There's not a class in school about how to have a long-term romantic relationship. How do you do that? How do you navigate these differences? How do you even communicate with anybody that you disagree with? There's not a lot of training with that. We talked about this in the show before. The training that we get about romantic relationships, most of it's wrong. Somehow, you magically meet the right person, and you will somehow know it. You will realize it, and you will get married and live happily ever after. That's the training we get. It's still pretty much 50% of marriages that end in divorce, and the other 50% end in death. The odds are stacked against you.

Tweet: Arguments in relationships are often just us demanding that our partner thinks and acts exactly like we do.

Throughout social media, I'm sure everyone reading or viewing this has come across an article, usually poking fun at or comical in nature. Whether it was written in the '50s or '60s. I can think of one. I think it was Better Homes and Gardens or McCall's or something. It was instructions to a woman on how to care for her husband. It talked about how to make yourself up, prepare the house, have dinner ready, and treat him when he comes home. It's so foreign in 2026 to think that this is how women got their instruction or advice 50 or 60 years ago. There was a sense that there was decorum and a path that could be traveled. Clearly, women then said, "Screw this. I have a life. I have an identity."

If you think about it, that was cutting-edge technology. I always bring this back to medicine. Any era is cutting-edge technology in medicine, like leeches, bloodletting. Now, what we're learning, what we're being taught, what we think is true or successful. A lot of it's going to be wrong. It's difficult to ferret that out because you could not see it.

In the '50s, when you were reading those articles, you didn't go like, "That does not seem right because I'm my own person. I do not have to be subservient." There weren't a lot of them around. Keep in mind. I cannot say with any certainty that the advice I'm giving people is right on. I have seen it work, but things will be different 10 years from now or 20 years from now. Will it work then? Maybe not.

Philosophically, though, you certainly have a perspective around kindness, compassion, curiosity, and communication. Those seem to be pretty centered to who you are. I do not know how much of that's going to change.

The kindness, curiosity, and compassion part of it has been around for recorded history. Most religions taught that. Most philosophies teach that. That is pretty tried and true stuff. How you implement it, how you think about it, how you incorporate it into your life is different. How do you do it with today's technology as compared to 20 years, 30 years, or 40 years ago?

Everything is different now. Whether your individual lives, your married lives, your family lives, so much of it is what is fit to print, what is fit to publish, what is fit to share. Again, the masks we wear, the personas we amplify, whether they're true or not, I think drives a lot. I said to you off air, we have an interesting circumstance within our family. My wife and I, when we moved to Georgia back in '17 and met with married couples and had friends that were married couples.

A lot of those married couples are no longer married. So much of our friend circle and our family couple circle has changed. I get a little anxious about the friends in our particular relationship. I have

lost touch with a lot of guys who I liked a lot, but my wife is still very close with the women. It's like no one ever taught me how to navigate that.

You're also working with that underlying belief that things shouldn't change. If you know for a fact that things change and things are going to be different, it's not a surprise. It's not out of the norm for all these folks to be divorced. It's not out of the norm for you to lose touch with people because that's part of what happens in life. We change. They change. Circumstances change. It's always changing. The nervousness that I hear from you is the nervousness of, "If those things change, what if I change? What if we change?" You're going to.

You're going to change. Again, you're working from that basic belief that it's supposed to stay the same. The idea that the ultimate goal is to be married to somebody and committed to somebody until one of you dies. That's a lot of wishful thinking, especially if you marry in your twenties, because you're going to change a great deal. It might be a better idea to have the notion that we get together. We decide to make a legal commitment to each other with no expectations that it's going to last forever.

It would be an interesting experiment to marry for 3 to 5-year contracts. You write out the contract that way. You have to understand that we all sign a prenup agreement. Generally, the state that wrote it. That's how you get a marriage license. You sign a prenup agreement which says, "If you divorce, this is what happens." Go ahead and write your own. Write up a contract for 3 to 5 years. How different might your relationship be as you move through that three-year period? You have to re-up. Do you want to? I think you might be on a little better behavior if you want to re-up, and you're going to play your best.

If you're a major league pitcher and your contract is coming up. You want to throw as well as you can so you can get the most out of the next contract. Do it that way. It keeps you from falling into what a lot of couples fall into, which is a good deal of complacency. It's the old thing of, "I don't even believe you love me anymore." "Of course, I love you. I married you, didn't I?" It was like, that says, "I did this thing on that particular day, and now I don't have to do it anymore."

That's interesting because marriage and a contract, you're using an athletic analogy. It could be the title of a book.

Athletic marriage.

It's interesting. When you said that, I thought to myself, "My wife could certainly bolt whenever she wanted." I don't take it for granted. The fact that we're married, therefore, I'm entitled to any behavior that I choose. There are people out there that certainly think there's something.

Feeling taken for granted and taking people for granted is incredibly common. Most of the time, we have no idea we're doing it. It's routine. We've talked about that in the show, the importance of routine. Not so much the importance of the fact that we're routine-based people. If you go through the same routine with the same person, over and over, it would be easy to feel taken for granted and to take for granted that they're going to be there. They're going to do this. They're going to do that, which goes back to that idea that things don't change. Now, people are going to change. That's the way they're behaving now. The things they do now, they might not do. They might not be that way at some point. You're not going to be that way.

The Trap Of Ownership

This is a couple of times now in our conversation that you've brought up change. I think of another colloquialism or saying, which is, "Women marry men hoping they'll change, and men marry women hoping they won't."

It's a little trite, but we all marry people hoping they will turn into the people we want. That's typically what it is. I tell people that an honest wedding vow would be, "I vow to do everything in my power to turn you into who I want you to be. I vow just as strongly to resist any and every attempt you make to turn me into anything other than what I want to be." That would be a more honest wedding vow because that's what most people do.

That's what most arguments are about. It's like, "You are not the person I want you to be." To be more technically correct, I am demanding that you be. We don't give people the room to change. We don't give people the room to be who they are, even though we don't like that. A long-term relationship has to have an element of that in it. Most of us have that with any friend that we've had for decades.



There are things about those people, like those good friends, that we don't particularly like. That doesn't stop us from being good friends. It should be the same way in a long-term romantic relationship. There are things about that person you don't like. If you had the power to change it, and everybody in the world, including them, was okay with it changing. You'd vote for that. We do want people to be different.

I think there's permissible or expected evolution but when you think of values.

Let's go with permissible evolution. Who put you in charge to give permission?

I don't know how to describe it other than to say, "If you change who you are."

That underlying belief is one of ownership. This is a whole other thing. Your romantic relationships are very different from your platonic relationships for one reason. There is a sense of ownership in the romantic relationship that is not in the friendship.

Says you. Commitment is not ownership.

Yes, it is. That's the way we treat people. It's like, "Why is what I'm doing so upsetting?" "It's because we're married." It's like, "I don't want a husband that does that. I don't want a wife that does that. I don't want a partner that acts that way." Your friends act worse than that. They're my friends. This idea of ownership is not only in romantic relationships. It cuts across all sorts of things. It's in our language. I was talking to my accountant. They're not your accountant. "My baseball team." That's not your baseball team.

Semantics though, isn't it?

It's very important semantics because if we say mine so much, that was, who was that? The ducks or geese, some birds in Ice Age, "Mine, mine, mine." It's okay for us to be demanding of how the other behaves because you're married to me.

I don't think that's fair. The intent matters. If every time I said my wife, that was somehow a mischaracterization.

The woman whom I was fortunate enough to marry.

I can promise you that's not how I introduce her.

Let me try that. It's a very different neurological experience to say my wife, because neurologically, that says, I own her. If I own her, then I can make certain demands of her.

I'm uncomfortable even hearing that because I don't ever want to be perceived by my wife.

You don't want to be perceived that way because we all want to be that way. We all want to change the people that we're deeply involved with. We want them to be different. That, I think, is important to admit and to live with because it gives you a good starting point as to why I feel like we've grown apart. I think we've grown apart because you're not behaving the way I want you to behave. I think I have the right to get you to behave that way because I own you.

That's where that comes from, in my opinion. Rather than thinking, "This is interesting. You act this way." It's interesting to me that I would be married to somebody who acts that way because I wouldn't have thought that before. I wonder how we're going to be able to incorporate that into our relationship. How am I going to rearrange my way of being and thinking so that's not so irritating to me, or not causing me to think, "I don't know if I should be married to you or not." There's also another thing that most of us carry around in our relationships. If we're different, we can't be married. You're going to be nothing but different.

If there's a big difference, I don't think we can be married. Maybe. Maybe not, but you have to explore that rather than following this all-or-nothing way of looking at how you're supposed to be and how they're supposed to be. Otherwise, you're going to grow apart because you're going to argue and be upset that they won't be the person you want them to be.

Tweet: You can't have a successful premarital counseling session if the invitations are already sent. The train has left the station.

Fair enough. I can relate. No doubt about it. As I sit here, I'm always trying to demonstrate behaviorally what I feel is inside, which is grateful. I'm not saying I'm every guy. I'm not saying I'm you or I'm most married guys, but personally, it's important. I will adapt on occasion because I'll likely slip at times, but I will adapt to the woman I'm fortunate enough to be married to. That sounds wonderful. It would likely put a smile on my wife's face. There, I did it again, but I'm not doing it with some intent in mind like some Cro-Magnon type evolution.

I don't mean it's to that degree. I'm just saying it's there enough that it supports all of these other things that I can be demanding of you. I can say that you must behave this way.

I can promise you that's not going to work.

It's because you're my wife. I can promise you it won't work either, but we still do it.

Indirectly.

If you're mad at your partner, it's because they're not behaving the way you want them to. It's always that simple.

Typically, when I'm angry, it's because, in my opinion, I know I'm probably not behaving very well, and I feel bad about it.

If you're mad at her?

I don't get mad at her. I get angry, but I get angry at the circumstance.

You're mad at her.

To harken back to our last conversation. If I was attached to a specific outcome, I could see myself being disappointed but I'm being as honest as I can call it.

Call it whatever you want. It's, you're not behaving the way I want you to behave. That's the only reason, in my opinion, any of us are ever irritated about anything. The world is not behaving according to the way I wanted to behave. Somebody cuts off in traffic. It's not because they cut you off in traffic. It's because they're not driving the way you believe they should drive around you. It's the same thing if your partner does something and you get like that way. It's because they're not behaving the way you think they should behave.

Fair enough. Let me bring this back to something that is at the root, in my view, of this topic. You've mentioned a couple of things that I want to get clarification on. I'm both in my business and in my personal life. As a father, as a friend, I'm very aware of values. I'm very aware of what I would consider to be uncompromisables, where this is what makes me, me. I just can't imagine a scenario in which my values would change as I age, but is it possible? Can people change on that level?

Sure. Growing up in the South, I had a conversation with the guy that was out working on my lawn. This was mentioned, what the South was like. He had just moved here and how it's changed. I think of the racial issues that were the way they were when I was a kid. Values change. There aren't white-only or colored only water fountains anymore. Values can change.

Do you think they've changed by the person who put the White-only sign on?

Somebody who was in charge of that had to change enough to make it happen.



There's a lot of Black folks out there that would challenge that.

I didn't say change and become perfect. It changed enough. Even in my conversations with John Lewis. He said the same thing, "Things are really different. Things are much better than they were." Sure, they are. They absolutely are. Does that mean they're great? No. Does it mean they're even good in some

instances? No. Does it mean that it's still horrible in some instances? Sure. Your values can change and will change as you grow. When I was sixteen, I valued my car. Now, not that big of a deal. It's a small part of my life.

Those aren't the kind of values I'm talking about.

Not only can they change. I hope that most of us could learn to, at least from time to time, question those values and look at those. Believing that your way is the only right way with some things can cause you to not explore the other parts of yourself. Go back to what we were saying earlier. A couple comes in, and one person is arguing, "I want to make this work." The other one is arguing, "I want to get out." You aren't exploring all the other parts of yourself in that instance.

If you say, "I value honesty." You're not going to explore all the different ways you lie, and I guarantee you lie. If you have this image of, "I am an honest person," and you are doing that in a way where it's always, "Forever, no way in the world am I ever dishonest in any way, shape, or form," You're not exploring that. What does honesty mean to you? Honest in what way? Honest about what things? What ways are you not honest? What things are you not honest about? We're all not honest about a whole lot of things that have to do with our own selves because we don't even know they're there until somebody helps us find them. That's why I'm bristling at your values or anybody's values.

It's great to have values, but explore what they truly are. It's like writing a dating profile. If you say, "I want someone attractive, honest, and successful." Are there people putting, "I want ugly, dishonest losers?" No. You're not really saying anything. You're attractive in what way? It looks like what? Honest in what way? Successful in what way? You've got to get specific with pretty much everything that runs through your brain in order to know yourself as well as you can know yourself.

That's fair. I get it. I don't think we're disagreeing. In your experience, would you say that there are some characteristics, traits, or things that you're able to witness, encourage, or develop in couples that are more prevalent in the couples that make it?

The couples that make it long term, they're just that. They make it. The other people didn't make it. Why do we have this thing about the ultimate goal being to be married until you die? The ultimate goal should be to have the best relationship you can have in terms of how you grow and develop as a person and a person in a relationship. Your best outcome may be that the romantic boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, or boyfriend/boyfriend, part of it, whatever it is, comes to an end. That would be a successful relationship, especially if you can realize that and bring it to an end in a way that is kind and compassionate.

That wasn't the question.

I know, but I'm a stifter for those sorts of things because, again, it's exploring what's underneath and then considering the couples who make it. Rather than, there are couples who do stay together until one of them dies. What would be some of the differences between those couples and the couples that don't stay together? Now, there's not a judgment about good, bad, right, or wrong. That's how we get so brainwashed. It's in our language like the language of ownership. The couples that stay together longer, or until one of them dies, and are satisfied. That's even another point.

Tweet: Treating love as a contract where you give only to get is not love. That's just a transaction.

Most people don't study long-term relationships that are marriages for some reason. The vast majority of those 50% aren't what you would call really satisfied with their marriage. You have to look at couples who have stayed together and are satisfied. What's different? The difference is that they have learned to navigate those differences. They have learned to release themselves from this sense of ownership that my partner needs to be a certain way or act a certain way.

They need to treat me this way or that way. You let those sorts of things go. You stay curious and compassionate about this person. I want to know who you really are and stop thinking that this is who you are, so this is who you will always be. Actively explore how you and your partner are changing in a relationship. That's rarely a topic of conversation. Also, how your ideas and things you like and don't like change. Share and explore those things with each other.

The sense of real satisfaction comes from, "Here is a person about whom I can stay curious, I feel kindly toward, who is fascinating in some way to me. Hold my attention. Shows up and we do share enough in terms of our own values. We want to stay together." It's almost one of those Zen things. If you want to stay with somebody until one of you dies, you have to not make that the goal. As soon as you make that the goal, then you start seeing things that need to be explored that you're going to push away.

If you explored it, it might mean you aren't going to meet your goal. That's why premarital counseling with an engaged couple is not going to be as effective. They've already set their goal, "We're going to be married until one of us dies." I don't want to know anything that's going to take me away from that goal." That shouldn't be your goal.

Moving From Transaction To True Love

I'm going to tell you my opinion on this. You may not like it, but I'm going to say it anyway.

I'm not going to dislike it. I'm just going to sort of agree.

My goal is to be chosen. It's to continue to have Danielle choose me day in and day out, month in and month out.

There's years of therapy there.

Probably.

Your goal should be going that way.

That's the way I'm going.

No. You're saying, "My goal is for me to be chosen."

I have to behave in a manner that would be so.

Which is where I would say a lot of the problems would come from because love is something you can only give. Being chosen is something you can only do. If you do anything to be loved, to be chosen, to be picked, to be the most important person, however, somebody is going to say that. If you're doing things in order for it to come this way, you're not being loving. You're being controlling, manipulative, and codependent because love is a gift. I give it to you with no regard to what you do with it.

If I give you a gift of \$100, you can go blow it on the worst thing I would choose for you to blow it on, and I don't say anything about that because it was a gift. You can do what you want with it. There's no sense of, "I'm going to love you so that you will love me." That's not love. That's a contract. That's not a gift. That is a central piece of why so many relationships don't work well, because we're there to get love and not give love. You cannot get love. There's no way. I've explored this for decades to try to figure out how the logic works. Somehow, there must be something about getting love or I want to be loved.

Tweet: A long-term relationship requires you to release the sense of ownership and stay genuinely curious about your partner.

Wanting to be loved is wonderful. Don't do anything to get somebody to love you, though, because it won't be love. It will be a transaction. Go be the most loving person you can be in that true sense of a gift. That is what you want. It's not getting love. That's not what you want. Although, it seems to be. You hear stories of like, "When I started volunteering, when I did something for other people, I found what I really wanted to do. It's being of service." Doing it without that sense of, what am I going to get back. You're only going to get the feelings that you get when you do that.

That was brilliant. Truer words have never been spoken. Serve, love, encourage, and give. Let the chips fall where they may. That was perfect and very eloquent, I might add. I choose you, Eddie. There's no other host partner out there for me.

You can have as many show partners as you will.

I am not poly. I am monogamous in the podcast world. Ladies and gentlemen, this has been another awesome episode, in my opinion, of the show. The subject of Beyond the Honeymoon was brought to you for a little over an hour. I hope you enjoyed it. Eddie, final words before we tap out?

If you want something, go give it.

Put it on a T-shirt, Eddie. We're going to be rich. Talk to you, folks. Bye for now.

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