

LOVE IN EVERY SEASON

DEBRA
FILETA
M.A., LPC



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked **ESV** are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked **NASB** are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked **NLV** are taken from The New Life Version, © 1969 and 2003. Used by permission of Barbour Publishing, Inc., Uhrichsville, Ohio, 44683. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Kara Klontz Design

Cover Photo © Irtsya, Elmiral, Geo Module / Shutterstock

Published in association with the literary agency of D.C. Jacobson & Associates LLC, an Author Management Company. www.dcjacobson.com.

This book contains stories in which the author has changed people's names and some details of their situations in order to protect their privacy.

Love in Every Season

Copyright © 2019 by Debra Fileta

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-7759-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7760-9 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fileta, Debra K. author.

Title: Love in every season / Debra Fileta, M.A., LPC.

Description: Eugene : Harvest House Publishers, 2020.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019027328 (print) | LCCN 2019027329 (ebook) | ISBN

9780736977593 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780736977609 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Interpersonal relations—Religious aspects—Christianity. |

Love—Religious aspects—Christianity—Anecdotes. |

Seasons—Miscellanea.

Classification: LCC BV4597.52 .F55 2020 (print) | LCC BV4597.52 (ebook) |

DDC 241/.676—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019027328>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019027329>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 / VP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Introduction 9

Section 1: Spring—New Life and New Love

Chapter 1: Spring Is in the Air—Planting Good Seeds 17
Chapter 2: What’s Bloomin’—The Laws of Attraction 35
Chapter 3: The Pattern of Growth Is Give-and-Take 53

Section 2: Summer—Things Get Hot

Chapter 4: Warmth—The Bond of Emotional Connection 73
Chapter 5: Heat—Sexual Connection 91
Chapter 6: Fire—Spiritual Intimacy 109

Section 3: Fall—Your True Colors

Chapter 7: Goodbye, Green—The Colors of Compatibility 125
Chapter 8: Vibrant Colors—Conflict Is Key 137
Chapter 9: Bare Branches—Dropping the Cover 153

Section 4: Winter—Long Days Ahead

Chapter 10: Frost—The Chill of Apathy 171
Chapter 11: Freeze—Stuck in Love 183
Chapter 12: The Thaw—Spring Will Come Again 197

Notes 207

Acknowledgments 211

Section 1:

SPRING—NEW LIFE AND NEW LOVE

Spring is the season of new beginnings.

It's a time of new life, new growth, and new experiences. It's a bright and beautiful season filled with the budding of interest and the blossoming of attraction. In this joyful season, the sun is shining brightly, and everything is seen through a filter of beauty.

Spring is also a time for planting. It's the season of sowing the seeds of a relationship, understanding that whatever we sow during this season will eventually take root. It's a time of being intentional to cultivate the faith and friendship we want to grow, while being deliberate to remove the weeds that might be harming our relationship. It's also a time of pruning, of trimming back the excess—of learning to let go of the things that are holding us back and stretching out our branches toward new heights of growth.

Spring is a magnificent season, and it's one that every healthy relationship must learn how to pass through with intentionality. The seeds of spring will eventually take root and one day bear fruit that will impact every other season of a relationship.

SPRING IS IN THE AIR— PLANTING GOOD SEEDS

It wasn't love at first sight. Not for me, anyway. When I met John for the first time, there were no bells or whistles, no butterflies in my stomach or palpitations in my chest, no voices from heaven or spotlight in the clouds shining down, no "signs" like we are typically told there will be when we meet the person with whom we will spend the rest of our lives. In reality, I wasn't even thinking of love at the time—at least, not love toward him.

I met John at a conference in Boston—one that I had hesitantly agreed to attend, and when he walked in the room, the first thing I thought to myself was, *Wow, that guy is tall*, followed by an extremely deep observation: *Who wears a pair of shorts coupled with a long-sleeve dress shirt?* And that's pretty much it. After the seminar was over each day, about 30 of us would spend the rest of the day mingling. It was a group in which we both had mutual friends. One day we all went mini golfing. The next day, we took a road trip to the beach. Each day, we somehow continued to end up in the same group, the same car, or on the same team. So, naturally, we had some time to get to know each other. And slowly but surely, I found the seeds of friendship beginning to take root in our interactions.

A few days into the conference, my friend pointed out our budding friendship, and I remember telling her, "He's the nicest guy I've

ever met...but there's about a 0.000000001 percent chance I'd marry someone like him." I wasn't really interested in getting into a relationship at that point in my life because a few months before that, I'd had my heart truly broken in a relationship with a guy who wasn't as into me as I was into him. My heart was in hibernation mode—I wasn't ready to hope again. Added to that, I was in the thick of graduate school *and* we lived thousands of miles apart. There were so many reasons to write off the idea of building a relationship. Yet, watching him interact with others, seeing his heart for Jesus, and listening to his absolutely hilarious stories made me want to be his friend. Little did I know then that this was the first step in building a relationship that would lead to a friendship, that would lead to a marriage, that would lead to the rest of my life. The seeds we planted in friendship would ultimately reap a harvest in our future marriage—a flourishing marriage more deep, intimate, and meaningful than I could have ever imagined.

On the Other Hand

John says he knew I was the girl he was going to marry just a few moments after we met. Everything inside of him “just knew.” It is not surprising, I suppose, considering he is the romantic one in our relationship. Even so, it seemed to go against everything he knew and believed about relationships to feel so strongly, so soon. The evening we met he called his best friend to help him debrief these strange feelings he was having:

“So, I think I met the woman I’m going to marry,” he said.

“John, you’re crazy,” his friend confirmed on the other end of the line and tried snapping him back to reality.

Maybe he *was* crazy, but something about our interactions seemed different to him. Something about our new friendship made him want to invest in getting to know me and see where our relationship would go.

When people ask us how we met, I love to listen to him tell his side of the story and compare all the differences between the thoughts and feelings we each had going into our relationship. But no matter how different our stories may sound at the outset, the next steps we

had to take were the same: In order for us to know if this relationship was built to last, we first had to navigate through the four seasons of a relationship.

But no matter how different our stories may sound at the outset, the next steps we had to take were the same: In order for us to know if this relationship was built to last, we first had to navigate through the four seasons of a relationship.

A Season for Everything

“When you met your husband, did you get a confirmation?”

I had just finished speaking to a group of 20- and 30-year-olds at a church in central Pennsylvania, when one of the young ladies came up to me with this very interesting question.

“Confirmation?” I asked, somewhat puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“From God. A confirmation from God,” she specified, surprised that I even needed clarification.

How unspiritual of me, I chuckled to myself, knowing that the only two things running through my mind at the word “confirmation” were my airline tickets and that class my Catholic friends had to take as kids to become part of their church.

“Umm, no,” I replied casually.

I could tell by the look on her face that this was not the answer she wanted. So, it was my turn to clarify. I explained that when I met my husband, nothing told me I’d met the man I was going to marry. Our relationship didn’t start as a one-time decision; it was a process—a process that was “confirmed” to me one step at a time by the interactions we had in each stage of our relationship.

The question presented by this sweet, well-intentioned young woman illustrates a problem with what we are taught in church culture about finding a lifelong relationship. We tend to view the process

of choosing a partner as a one-time revelation, a feeling, a thought, an experience, an interaction, or even a spotlight from heaven that screams, “Yes! This is the one you should marry!”

While such revelations do happen for some people sometimes, most of the Christian life doesn’t happen in one-time magical moments, but in the process of our day-to-day lives. Relationships are quite the same because great relationships take time to unfold, to take shape, and to grow into nourishing interactions that set the stage for a thriving, God-honoring marriage. With good intentions, we tend to overspiritualize love as a miraculous moment rather than seeing love as a series of seasons and stages. Just as in nature, love unfolds season by season—beginning with spring.

Most of the Christian life doesn’t happen
in one-time magical moments, but in
the process of our day-to-day lives.

Spring Is in the Air

Spring comes in the Northern Hemisphere when the earth tilts back toward the sun, allowing for more sunlight and warmth to cover God’s creation. It is the time of new life, new growth, and new experiences. The warmth of the sun awakens the plants and trees from hibernation, and new life begins to “spring forth,” breaking the ground with excitement and anticipation. It is a beautiful time of year as flowers are in full bloom, showing off their vibrant colors and sweet aromas. Spring is a time for a fresh start. It is a time for something new.

The season of spring in a relationship is also a time for new things. New feelings begin to bloom, calling our hearts out from hibernation. It is a time of awakening from the hibernation of sadness, of heartbreak, or of loneliness, and coming into the newness of love, healing, and relationships.

Spring is such an important first stage for a relationship to pass through because it is a time of rapid growth. It is always accompanied

by strong feelings of attraction and an anticipation for what's to come. Spring is a time when feelings might even be exaggerated since the relationship is viewed through a rose-colored lens.

I don't know about you, but I can personally relate to the idea of exaggerated feelings and wearing a rose-colored lens. A few months before our wedding, John and I were in premarital counseling in anticipation of the big day. The counselor asked us to take a compatibility inventory to get a sense of our respective feelings about each other and our relationship. Part of the inventory was to rate our personal level of satisfaction in the relationship as well as point out any issues or problem spots we were seeing in our partner. I'll never forget my rose-colored lens as I quickly and confidently gave our relationship the highest scores possible in every category. Every single aspect of it was "amazing," and John was pretty much perfect in my eyes. Looking back, it astonishes me how easy it was for me to see everything through the lens of spring. But even with my exaggerated perspective, the seeds I was seeing in spring were truly seeds that would last with us for a lifetime. After over a decade of marriage, I have to admit that my rose-colored lens is much more realistic today; yet even so, I clearly see the good seeds that were planted in spring evidenced in our marriage each day.

In spring, the seeds you plant begin to take root, shaping the landscape of how the relationship will look. What you see in spring will likely be evident in every season of the relationship. So, it is important to learn to plant the right seeds and recognize and remove the weeds.

You Reap What You Sow

Whether you are in the season of spring as a dating couple or as a married couple, you need to remember that the seeds you plant in the beginning of your relationship, when the soil is most fertile, are the seeds that will grow and bear fruit throughout the rest of your relationship. The seeds you plant have a direct impact on the health of your relationship. Scripture affirms this general principle: "The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:18 NASB). Again, Galatians 6:7 reminds us, "Whatever a man sows... he will also reap" (NASB).

Spring is a time of planting, a time of being deliberate and intentional about the things that will eventually take root and ultimately become the entire landscape of your relationship. When it comes to planting and sowing, there are two important components that can't be overlooked in spring: the seeds of faith and the seeds of friendship.

The Seeds of Faith

In Matthew 17, we find a story of faith. In this passage, a father whose son is in desperate need of healing approaches Jesus. The father kneels before Him, asking for mercy for his son, who is struggling with severe spiritual and physical ailments. Jesus lays hands on this boy, and in an instant, the boy receives freedom in his spirit and healing in his body. Then, Jesus turns to His disciples and quotes one of the most familiar passages of Scripture, “If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20 ESV).

In reading this passage, the concept that stuck out to me more than anything is that faith like a grain of mustard seed means faith that grows. It may start small, but in order for a mustard seed to have an impact, it has to be planted and tended to. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way:

“Faith as a grain of mustard seed” suggests not only size (God will honor even a little faith), but also *life* and *growth*. Faith like a mustard seed is a *living* faith that is nurtured and caused to grow. Faith must be cultivated so that it grows and does even greater exploits for God (1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3).¹

In order for us to have healthy relationships, our faith in Jesus and the work He is doing in our lives is the most important seed in our life. We must pay attention to it, cultivate it, and nurture it so that it grows, inviting God's supernatural work inside of us and impacting everyone around us. For the hope of healthy relationships, the seed of faith must be the most important element in our life.

If you are married, throughout every season and stage of a relationship, it is important to ask yourself what types of seeds you are planting in your relationship, and what kind of fruit is being produced as a result. Are you investing in your relationship with Jesus and allowing Him to cultivate and produce good traits in your life? Are you planting seeds of faith, of hope, of encouragement, of peace? Or are you planting seeds of bitterness, criticism, complaint, and discouragement? Learning to cultivate the right seeds—the seeds of faith—in your personal life and in your relationships is something we will talk about in more detail as we get deeper into the concepts of this book.

If you are single, faith must be a primary ingredient in your life as well as in your romantic relationships. Your relationship will only be as healthy as you are standing alone. When you start dating, keep in mind that what you see in dating, you'll also see in marriage. If, in the season of spring, you are not seeing the seeds of faith alive and active in the life of someone you are dating, you have to ask yourself what kind of fruit you expect to see in a few years. In nature, good fruit doesn't just magically appear on its own; it has to be planted and tended. The same is true of our relationships. In order for you to experience the "good fruit" of healthy relationships, you have to be planting the seeds of faith in your life and in your relationships.

Your relationship will only be as healthy as you are standing alone.

Got Fruit?

Meeting John felt different from meeting any other guy, the primary reason being that his character stood out above anything else. I watched as he interacted with others with kindness and love. I saw him serving others in many different ways and going out of his way to show love to those around him. I was struck by his sense of humor and his desire to make others laugh. I also noted his humility, how he always chose to ask questions first instead of talking about himself. He had a

distinct character that exuded from him to everyone he interacted with. Meeting him was different because it wasn't chemistry but *character* that led the way for our relationship to begin taking root.

I'll be the first to admit that in my past, I was typically drawn to men based on their appearance, and naively, I had a pretty narrow preference: blond haired, blue-eyed guys with a medium height and build, and artistic or musical tendencies. John was a good-looking guy, but the complete opposite of my cookie-cutter preferences: dark hair, dark eyes, extremely tall, with no artistic tendencies whatsoever, and not a musical bone in his body. Yet, slowly and consistently, my attraction to him grew and developed in a remarkable way. The chemistry began to catch up with the character as I got to know him from the "inside out," observing the seeds of faith in his life.

I saw the Spirit's work displayed in John's life: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). If you want to see good fruit in your relationships, you have to start with good seeds. Seeds will eventually become fruit, which is why this concept is so important to grasp in the season of spring. So much of the future success of a relationship hinges on this concept of sowing good seeds. The Bible reminds us that those who sow seeds of the Spirit, will reap the Spirit's reward of eternal life, but those who sow seeds of the flesh will reap destruction (Galatians 6:8).

If you want to see good fruit in your relationships,
you have to start with good seeds.

What types of seeds are you sowing in your life and in your relationships?

The Seeds of Friendship

You can learn a lot about a person in the early stages of friendship, and certainly enough to tell you whether or not this relationship

is worth taking the next step. Friendship is the most underestimated component of a relationship, but it is at the core of every meaningful relationship we have. Friendship connects people with shared interests, beliefs, experiences, qualities, and goals. Friendship is the coming together of two people who like each other and want to spend time together, who value and respect one another, and who have chosen to be together just because they want to be. Friendship gives people an opportunity to get to know what a person is made of when there are no strings of commitment attached. It provides a chance to get a good glimpse of what the future might hold.

Something I notice in working with clients in troubled romantic relationships is that many of them rushed into romantic relationships, skipping right over the friendship stage. They let romance lead the way in their relationship, but when the fires of romance began to wane, they had nothing left to sustain them because there was no friendship in the first place. I find it ironic that many people today giving relationship advice actually encourage people to *avoid* crossing the lines of friendship into dating. “You’ll get friend-zoned,” they tell you. “Don’t ruin your friendship by dating,” they warn. We live in a society that tends to value feelings over friendship — “Why be friends, when you can be lovers?” But the real question we should be asking is, “How can you be lovers without being friends?” Friendship is the relationship that will sustain you through the seasons of love. Some of the most incredible marriages I have witnessed are built between people who share a deep and lasting friendship. While romance may come and go throughout the life of a relationship, friendship always remains constant.

How can you be lovers without being friends?

The seeds of a relationship show up pretty quickly in the friendship stage. And they can teach you a lot if you know where to look. Even while John and I were in these extremely early stages of a friendship, the seeds of our relationship were quickly being exposed and coming to the surface.

Friends Before Lovers

I saw a funny picture the other day that said, “A good friend is like a good bra: hard to find, supportive, comfortable, always lifts you up, makes you look better, and is close to your heart.” Okay, so maybe there are better analogies out there, but it is true that great friendships are hard to come by! The ingredients in a friendship are the exact components that you will bring into a romantic relationship, so it is great to have an idea of what you’ll be building upon before your heart gets romantically involved.

When John and I met, our feelings may have been at different stages, but we both took the next natural step into friendship. In fact, our friendship progressed for five months and paved the way for us to move into a dating relationship. It was a great time of getting to know each other in a low-pressure environment, surrounded by our closest friends.

Because relationships are all so different, there are no hard-and-fast rules, but when asked, I always suggest a period of friendship of at least three months before you decide to take the next steps into a dating relationship. Here are some reasons why friendship builds a solid foundation for a romantic relationship.

Friendship teaches you what you need to know. Have you ever known a couple where just being around them gives you all the vibes that they are a great match? My friends Luke and Christy are one of those couples. They are such a great match because they really took their time to learn what they needed to know in their stage of friendship. They met in a ministry that they were both a part of, and with time, it was clear that their personalities really meshed. They had so much in common, and their differences just fit together so well.

But the main reason they figured out they were a good match is the time they spent together during friendship. Their singles community was a true community, so they had a lot of time to get to know one another as friends. They ate meals together, went to church together, served together, and hung out together. They spent a lot of their free time together in the context of their singles group with a range of activities including bowling, football games, ice-cream socials, and ministry opportunities. It was in the context of these many interactions that

they developed a deep friendship and got to know each other in a significant way. When you spend a lot of time with friends, you get to know everyone's quirks, see their different personalities, and get a really good sense of who you connect with and who you don't.

One of my favorite things about the stage of friendship that precedes a romantic relationship is that it gives you a chance to get a good idea of the person you are getting to know, before the cloud of romanticism gets in the way. It is the perfect opportunity to learn so many crucial things about a person, eliminating the element of surprise and decreasing the risk of heartbreak. Friendship is an opportunity to get a glimpse of a person's personality, spiritual life, hobbies and interests, communication skills, and social abilities without the pressure of commitment getting in the way.

Friendship offers a low-pressure environment. John and I developed a strong friendship through games of miniature golf, candlepin bowling, city exploration, and restaurant hopping. It was the no-pressure zone in which we began letting down our guard and testing the waters of compatibility. We had so much in common and genuinely enjoyed each other's company. Spending time in nonromantic settings and with groups of other friends were some of the most crucial moments in building this deep friendship that we still have today. We made each other laugh, encouraged each other, and had so much fun together long before the seeds of romance had been planted in our hearts (well, at least long before we had spoken them out loud!). When we started developing our friendship, we were almost always surrounded by people we loved and got an incredible glimpse into each other's lives and communities. Not only that, but the atmosphere of friendship gave us the opportunity to get to know each other without adding any physical affection to skew our emotions one way or the other.

The beauty about genuine friendship is that it tends to progress naturally. Oftentimes, a friendship will start in some sort of a social environment (church, work, school, sports, ministry, etc.), and as the friendship grows, it slowly progresses into a one-on-one relationship. The best romantic relationships are discovered when we approach them like we do all other friendships—as opportunities to invest in the

people that God has placed in our lives, while allowing them to invest in us. Get involved in the community that God has placed you in. If you are not involved in a community of people, ask God to lead you into a small group, a church environment, a service-based project, or even a social group, and get plugged in!

If you are single and looking, be deliberate about investing in a group of friends—even if that means stepping out of your comfort zone—and then watch and see what God begins to do within those natural relationships. Where we make the greatest mistake, and where hearts are most broken and confused, is when we prematurely take a relationship out of the safety of community and into the exclusivity of a romantic situation. Take off the pressure and get to know the people around you. You never know what might happen next.

Friendship has roots that run deep into marriage. One Christmas, our kids got a ball pit that we set up in their downstairs playroom. While they were playing in their ball pit one evening, I got the mischievous idea to crawl in with them and start chucking the soft plastic balls at my unsuspecting husband. What started as a playful gesture turned into a hilarious ball-throwing battle; we laughed so hard that I think I may have peed my pants—just a little.

Our kids had a blast, but most importantly, they got to see that beyond the role of “mom” and “dad,” their parents are really, truly friends. The roots that began in our friendship run deep, and to this day our friendship continues to fuel much of our love for one another.

From a hot date night to sitting at home watching reruns and folding laundry or laughing until our sides hurt, life together is fun—not because of what we are doing, but because of the friendship that we have. There’s no friend on earth with whom I’d rather spend time, and John says the same about me. And that’s a good thing because we get to be together for the rest of our lives. Ultimately, investing in friendship sets the stage for the four seasons of a relationship.

Finding Friendship Again

As a professional counselor, I find that many relationships may start with the right seeds but get caught up in the demands and distractions

of life. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a parable of a man who sowed good seeds—but his seeds fell into thorns, were choked out, and died. In this story, the seeds represent the seed of the Word of God, and the thorns represent the worries and demands of this world that choke out our ability to absorb God’s truth. But I think the same concept can apply to our relationships and marriages. If we’re not careful, there are so many thorns in this life that can choke out our good seeds—the stresses of work, extended family, raising a family, finances, and even physical and emotional health. Life is filled with so many distractions that can keep us from cultivating and nurturing the good seeds of our relationship.

For us, that distraction came with having children. We love our children, value the blessing and joy they bring into our lives, and wouldn’t trade them for anything in the world, but if we’re not careful, they can also suck the life out of our relationship. We quickly found out how difficult it can be to connect when all our energy was focused on them. From the baby stage of wiping, and feeding, and changing, and walking around like zombies because we have hardly gotten a wink of sleep in months, to the later stages of school, and schedules, and sports, and activities, and emotions, and conversations—we can find that the seeds of our love start getting choked out by life’s demands. But it doesn’t have to be that way. It is important to nurture our relationship no matter what season of life we’re in, taking the time to intentionally connect with one another and rekindle that deep friendship, even if that means saying “no” to things in our schedule so that we can say “yes” to one another.

For me and John, that means we take time to invest in our friendship. We love reading books together, watching movies together, and playing board games together. We love window shopping, traveling, drinking coffee, going to the beach, and trying new restaurants. We make it a point to get away by ourselves a couple times a year to enjoy the things we love, rekindle our friendship, and invest in having fun.

Find the things you have in common and make it a point to connect on those things. If you don’t feel like you have much in common, find something new that you can do together. Read books together. Join an activity together. Get involved in a hobby together. The key

is prioritizing togetherness when everything in this culture might be pushing you toward isolation and aloneness. We live in a “you do you” world that tells us that the road to happiness is found when you can do what you want, when you want, how you want. But God’s way gently reminds us that the road to happiness begins when we can learn to put the needs and wants of others before ourselves, when we can delight in their joy as our own (Philippians 2:3). It’s not about *me*; it’s about *we*.

I know a couple who took up bicycling (even though neither of them was previously interested in it) in order to find something to do together. It became such a point of connection and friendship for them and took their relationship to a new level. Take the time to remember what it feels like to have fun in your relationship, and be deliberate about planning outings and activities where you can rekindle your friendship and enjoy one another’s company.

The Sow-Sow Relationship

You may be reading this chapter as a married person and nodding your head in agreement at the importance of developing a friendship and the gift that it is to be best friends in marriage. But you may also be married and find yourself reading this section with a hint of disappointment and regret because your relationship is more of a “so-so” relationship, and you lack that sense of being married to your best friend. Maybe you rushed into a relationship and didn’t really take the time to see the seeds of friendship grow before it was too late. Or maybe you are grieving the realization that your spouse is not anywhere close to your best friend, and you are struggling with feelings of bitterness and disappointment. If that is where you find yourself today, I want to encourage you and offer you hope that seeds can *always* be planted in marriage.

If you find yourself struggling in a so-so relationship, there’s no better time to sow, sow, sow! Start planting good seeds right now, starting today. The moment you decide you want to commit to doing things differently is the moment you breathe hope and life into your future. The fact that you are reading this book tells me that you desire to have a healthy marriage. The choices you make today are going to bear fruit

eventually. It may not happen right away. No seed bears fruit overnight. But in time, the seeds you plant will have an impact.²

If you find yourself struggling in a so-so relationship,
there's no better time to sow, sow, sow!

When you learn to value yourself, understand your identity in Christ, recognize your limits, confess your sins, set boundaries, work on your weaknesses, increase your strengths, communicate your needs, and pursue healthy conflict, you begin to plant seeds of life and love in your marriage. Find yourself a Christian licensed counselor and get started on the process of healing. Your one and only job is to get yourself healthy, and then trust God with the other half of the equation, asking Him to do that same work in the life of your spouse.

Spring is a season of planting, a season of sowing. It is a time of filling our life and our relationship with the good seeds of both friendship and faith. Spring is an invitation to trust and believe that the God who called us to plant the good seeds will be the God who causes those seeds to grow—both in our life and in our love.

Spring is an invitation to trust and believe
that the God who called us to plant the good
seeds will be the God who causes those seeds
to grow—both in our life and in our love.

Now that we've set the stage for spring with the importance of planting seeds, let's dig a little deeper in this discussion because planting the right seeds is only the first step to making a healthy relationship grow.

Reflection Questions for Couples

1. What “fruits” are we seeing in our relationship, and what type of seeds are we planting?
2. What are some ways I can be deliberate in cultivating “seeds of faith” in my individual life? In my relationship?
3. Did we make time for the seeds of friendship in our relationship?
 - a. If yes, what was meaningful about that time? What did we learn about one another during the stage of friendship? What are some of the qualities of our friendship that have carried over into our current relationship?
 - b. If no, what are some things that are choking out our friendship? What are some ways that we can cultivate friendship in our relationship? What are some mutual hobbies, activities, and interests we can invest in as a couple?

Reflection Questions for Singles

1. In what ways am I cultivating seeds of faith in my life? What are some steps I can take to nurture and grow that faith?
2. “Where we make the greatest mistake, and where hearts are most broken and confused, is when we prematurely take a relationship out of the safety of community and into the exclusivity of a romantic situation.” Reflect on this statement. Have you ever prematurely taken a relationship out of the context of community and into the exclusivity of a romantic relationship? What were the results? How will you do things differently as you move forward?

3. Is there anyone in my current circle of friends that I would like to invest in getting to know more/deepening our friendship?
4. What are the qualities and traits that you would like to see in someone during the friendship stage that would encourage you to pursue a more exclusive dating relationship?