

When you are tired and your thoughts feel cold where does your mind roam? Does it wander to warmer days? Maybe you dream of someone you used to know who made you smile. But as you close your eyes you remember how it all slipped away. Earth’s old and weary cry for love is one of mankind’s strongest drives. And its loss has caused us the most gripping pain.

Emotions are a wonderful part of our humanity. But they can deceive, warp reality, be difficult to interpret, and bias our responses in ways that confuse and leave us empty years later. This fire of desire has the capacity to inspire just as easily as it can mislead. The most insane and destructive actions are often veiled under the guise of love.

Leah was an Arab woman who lived in a time when, if a man fell in love and desired to marry a woman, he was required to pay a sum of money for her. If he had no money or anything of value, he could work for a stated length of time for the father before he obtained her as his wife. This was intended as a safeguard to the marriage. A father protected his daughter in this way. The payment was a sign to the father that he could safely entrust his daughter’s happiness to this man’s care. When the suitor proved he was capable, faithful, and worthy, he then obtained his bride.

Leah had fallen in love with Jacob, who had eyes only for her younger sister, Rachel. Rachel was very beautiful. Next to her younger sister, Leah didn’t have a chance. Because Jacob was a man of deep and ardent affection, the seven years he had to work for Rachel seemed to him as but a day.

Tragically, after those seven years, at the end of his wedding night, he realized that his father-in-law and his well-veiled bride had played a cruel trick on him. Rather than finding Rachel in his arms the next morning, it was her older sister Leah. Leah’s father Laban had entered into the trickery to monetarily advantage himself, and Leah to obtain the man of her dreams. Although Jacob would marry Rachel a week later, at the cost of working for Laban seven more years, he was never completely happy in his marriage relations. Neither was Leah, for when Jacob realized that he had been deceived and that Leah had acted her part in the deception, he could not love her.

What Leah really longed for, she never possessed. How could a man place his confidence, trust, and respect in a woman who had deceived him? How could he love a woman who loved herself more than she loved him?

The Leah in all of us yearns for love and attempts to fulfill this yearning in various dysfunctional ways. Pretending to be someone we aren’t, breaking down



protective walls of virtue and honor, selfishly seeking gratification at the expense of others, we impulsively do whatever it takes to feel what we want to feel. A temporary fix will do. For Leah she had what felt like true love for one night. But sex doesn’t mean anything when a knowing, trusting, enduring relationship is not a part of the experience.

There once lived a man in power who sought to quench his insatiable thirst for love by marrying hundreds of women. While some of these women were married for political reasons, what of the rest? Was he looking for the one who could fully satisfy his desire? Maybe he just became addicted to the emotional high of falling in love—the hunt and then the conquest of a woman. Regarding mankind’s emotional need for love, he wrote that in this quest for fulfillment we have one of two paths we can take. There is the way of wisdom and there is the way that lacks understanding.

We find his synopsis of both ways in Proverbs 7. There we find a “strange,” seductive woman seeking out a secret sexual liaison with a young man. When viewed as a metaphor she becomes the personification of this second path. She becomes a characterization of the way that lacks understanding, which applies to women just as significantly as it does to men.

Her intent is clear: “Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us console and delight ourselves with love” (Proverbs 7:18, The Amplified Bible). Well, isn’t that exactly what we all want—our fill of love? The hope of fulfillment and satisfaction is why this path is well-worn. But the experienced wise man says this path “is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:27). It encompasses innumerable corridors of deviant behavior and in the end we see the object of our desire slipping away.

Understanding the *red flags* of this path can help us be wise and give understanding.

**Red flag 1** This strange woman “flatters with her words. . . . With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him” (Proverbs 7:5, 21, NKJV).

All the words of approval, admiration, devotion, and seduction can be heard here. Not only is flattery provocative for a man, it has a powerful effect upon a woman as well. While men in general are primarily visually aroused, women become emotionally aroused by what they hear. Flattery is deceptive though. It gives us false illusions of self, of the flatterer, and of our relationship. Eventually, “The morsel which *you have eaten you shall vomit up, and lose the sweet words*” (Proverbs 23:8, adapted). Rather than a delicious delicacy, let flattery be a signal that you are on the wrong path.

**Red flag 2** “He went the way to her house in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night” (Proverbs 7:8-9). In the dark, things and people appear different than they really are. Leah could pretend she was Rachel only because she was hidden behind a veil in the blackness of night. Pretense—hiding the real you—is another feature of this downward path. The individual steeped in internet affairs and sexual fantasies says, “I can pretend to be anyone I want to be.” The same can be said for one-night stands and weekend flings, which cannot possibly be focused on truth or reality. Just because it looks like love and feels like love doesn’t mean it is love.

How many false illusions of love have you sifted through? How often we partially hide behind a mask, avoiding the possibility of rejection of who we really are. Deceit takes many forms. Sure, living out a fantasy of who you want to be and who you want the other person to be can give the illusion of love, but it’s not the real thing. “Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17).

**Red flag 3** “And behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot and subtil of heart . . . so she caught him and kissed him” (Proverbs 7:10, 13). While her seductive appearance and immodest attire deliver the pleasurable message of availability, openness, and personal validation of manliness, her heart is not open. The word “subtil” means concealed. Behind her apparent sexual freedom and giving of herself, she is hiding. Don’t mistake passionate intensity for intimacy.

**Red flag 4** “I came out to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you” (Proverbs 7:15, NKJV). Coinciding with the most powerful force in life—the desire to experience joy in loving relationships—is the need to be the “sparkle in someone’s eye.” A child looks into their parents’ eyes hoping to see only delight at being in their presence. Here we were intended to experience the first and

underlying fulfillment of this inborn desire. Seeing ourselves reflected in the sparkle of another’s eyes elicits a sense of belonging and emotional security. But we need to beware of where we see this sparkle. It can spring forth from pure, unselfish regard and love for you as a person, but it can also come from base self-centeredness. “I like you because of how you make me feel or what you do for me. You belong as long as you do what I want. I’ll love you as long as you take care of me. I want you for myself in spite of how it affects you.” Unfortunately, we stay where we see the sparkle, even if it is temporary, even though it may not be genuine or in spite of the accompanying abuse. We stay for fear that we won’t find it anywhere else.

**Red flag 5** “My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey” (Proverbs 7:19, NKJV). There is no one else right now but you. Her words may claim her devotion but she is not really yours. “Love” without commitment is like a swimming pool without water in it. There’s not much there. Like the young man in this analogy, who “goes after her straightway,” our experience can become so intensely sensuous that we lose the ability to make the best decisions. The impulse to satisfy our desires takes over. It feels good until the dagger strikes.

“Listen to me now therefore...and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not *your* heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she *has* cast down many wounded: yes, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:24-27, KJV, adapted).

## There’s a stereotype of teens:

They don’t manage their emotions, their emotions manage them. However, studies show that teens can become adept at identifying their emotions. They can learn how emotions manifest themselves in dysfunctional ways and then understand not only how to control them but how to direct them in beneficial paths. All can do the same. Becoming aware of what is driving us, and the red flags of Proverbs 7, will help us make better decisions. The good we choose in spite of our internal emotional state is what makes us stronger and happier. In addition, the more experience we have in making the right decisions and following the path of wisdom and honor, the easier and more enjoyable it gets.

The way of wisdom understands that love is more than a feeling. Love becomes a decision, a principle that uproots selfishness. Love is the bestowal of favor. It is a power to do good, that survives and grows even stronger through trial and testing. As it is dispensed, it increases. By giving of itself, it enlarges. It becomes powerful, rich and abiding as it leads us to make others happy. The way of true love encompasses enduring commitment and self-restraint. In its atmosphere we are at liberty to be our true selves.

Can you imagine what Leah’s life could have been like if she had made the decision to follow the path of wisdom? What if she had kept her love for Jacob a secret until after Rachel’s untimely death following the birth of their second son? Jacob, widowed and desirous of a mother for his two sons, might have looked to Leah who had faithfully stood by him as sister, friend and consoler to now be his wife. Then after giving birth to the remaining sons of Israel she could have lived the rest of her days in an atmosphere of happiness and security, knowing she was loved for who she was.

Think of the warmest, most incredible feelings you’ve ever had and then realize that love is even more than that. It embraces the indestructibility of law.

When this law of love becomes a more passionate force in our lives, our fears of abandonment, loneliness, self-awareness, honesty, not getting our way, and pain will be overcome. Law may sound out of place in the context of love, but in reality love cannot operate and thrive unless it exists within the bounds of law. Only there is it free. Without law, love finds itself held hostage while a vile, disappointing imposter tries to stand in its place.

Just as the natural law of relativity existed before Einstein could mathematically enumerate it, so love has existed before the dawn of time. But to some extent we’ve lost its true equation.

## God = love

(See 1 John 4:8.) And when we look at God we simultaneously see the strength, commitment and endurance of law as well as passionate desire and fiery emotions. God became man and as a man He hungered to be loved just as you and I do. “No one in the world ever longed more earnestly for appreciation and fellowship than did Christ. . . . His heart was filled with a longing desire that human beings might appreciate the gift of God to the world, and honor Him by believing His words and speaking His praise.”<sup>1</sup>

Our longing for love does not make evolutionary sense. Its very existence in our souls proves that we were created for a higher purpose than simply survival. We were created to experience the incredible fulfillment of this desire through a relationship with the only Being who knows how to love perfectly. In His presence there is no pretense. He is in love with the raw you. You are the sparkle in His eye. He has no secret agendas, no selfish motives.

He desires only what is best for you. In His love you are whole and strong. “He satisfies the longing soul . . .” with more than a feeling (Psalms 107:9).

1. White, Ellen G. *This Day with God*, p. 189. Review & Herald, 1979.



## In Pursuit of Intimacy



Risë Rafferty

more than  
a *feeling*