

# Marital Unity

by Jean MacKenzie

*It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.* ~E.E. Cummings, poet

*The most exhausting thing in life is being insincere.* ~Anne Morrow Lindbergh, author

*Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.* ~Dr. Seuss, children's author

Quotes touting the wisdom of maintaining an individual identity abound. In fact the advice, “Just be yourself.” may be the most commonly used maxim in history. But what does it really mean to be yourself? The adage is vague. And, when you marry, how do you reconcile this idea of being yourself with the idea that in marriage two become one?

It has been proposed that people are the sum of their experiences. To some extent this is true, but, your personality also colours how your experiences affect you. In order to have a strong identity you must develop an awareness of your personality and experiences and how the two work together to make you who you are. As you get to know yourself you develop an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes, your skills, and what virtues you possess.

Of course you will continue to have new experiences throughout your life and thus your identity is constantly changing. You develop new strengths and discover weaknesses you didn't realize you had. Things you liked may lose their appeal and you may develop an attraction to something you never liked before. You may hone your skills and progress in virtue. Knowledge of self and a constant monitoring of these changes will lead to an ability to anticipate how you will react to new experiences and allow you to consciously choose your response to a given situation.

What does all this have to do with marriage? Contrary to popular belief, love is not just about romantic feelings for another person. Feelings come and go. Love requires that you make conscious choices to contribute to the good of the relationship. You must know what strengths you have to offer in order to give of yourself in a manner that builds the relationship. You must be aware of your tendencies and weaknesses in order to commit to working against them. A strong individual identity allows you to love while choosing not to be impelled by selfish motives. Without this knowledge of self there is a tendency to rely on the other person to make up for your weaknesses, causing harm to the relationship.

Does marital unity require sacrifice? Love requires you to make unselfish choices to give of yourself. Sacrifices freely made for the good of the other constitute love. Graciously choosing to turn off the TV to lend an ear to your spouse, deciding not to prove yourself right for the sake of your pride, or freely choosing to postpone a career move for the good of the relationship are all acts of love. Sacrifices made out of fear over how your spouse will react, concern over how others will perceive you, or with underlying selfish motives are not truly done out of love. If a person feels pressured to act in a certain manner, then there is no opportunity for love.

There are three factors necessary for establishing marital unity. First, you and your spouse must strive to have strong individual identities. Secondly, you each must strive to get to know your partner.

Finally, you each must generously support your spouse by accepting him or her and helping your husband or wife to be the best person he or she can be. Knowing who you are allows you to share yourself with your partner. The more you come to know each other the more you can contribute to the good of the relationship. All three steps must happen simultaneously and continually. Of course we are all human. None of us will ever be the perfect spouse but the important thing is that you give it your best effort.

Not only it is possible to maintain an individual identity while striving for marital unity, the two go hand in hand. So, I'll leave you with some quotes that express the wisdom of making your marriage a partnership where you support each other in being the best individuals you can be.

*I used to believe that marriage would diminish me, reduce my options. That you had to be someone less to live with someone else when, of course, you have to be someone more.* ~Candice Bergen, actress

*That is what marriage really means: helping one another to reach the full status of being persons, responsible and autonomous beings who do not run away from life.* ~Paul Tournier, physician & Author

*Women and men have to fight together to change society – and both will benefit. Partnership, not dependence, is the real romance in marriage.* ~Muriel Fox, feminist

## **About Jean**

Jean is a marriage and couples counsellor whose approach in working with couples involves the development of techniques for solving current problems and achieving unending growth in relationships. Jean strives to assist couples of various backgrounds in learning to solve their own challenges because a couple that knows how to problem solve can keep their love—and their marriage—alive forever.

Jean also offers Catholic counselling to couples wishing to incorporate the Catholic faith into the counselling process, helping couples to develop a relationship pleasing to each other and God. Jean has a Master of Arts in Counselling from the Franciscan University of Steubenville and has trained in marriage and family therapy.

So, if you think that your relationship could use a little help-- or even a lot of help,--give Jean a call today and take that important first step in turning your marriage into a “happily ever after” story.

## **Where do you start?**

Look no further.

1. Go to [www.jeanmackenzie.com](http://www.jeanmackenzie.com) and sign up for my free newsletter “Happily Ever After: A Guide to Healthy Relationships,” filled with helpful tips on how to nurture your relationship. You will also receive the free report, “10 Tips for Resolving Anger in Your Relationship.”
2. Call today for a free, no obligation, 20 minute phone consultation. We will discuss your problems and together decide how I might be able to help you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jean sees clients in her office in Fredericton, NB and offers telephone and online counselling. She can

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