

EXCERPT from Love At Last Sight

The Most Important Thing

Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival. — C. S. LEWIS

I don't wish to be everything to everyone, but I would like to be something to someone. — JAVAN

Right now, there are three relationships in your life that trouble you. Perhaps a good friend said something to you yesterday. It felt critical, but you're not sure what she meant. The two of you used to be so close, but lately you've been drifting apart. Something's not right. Oh, and your mother called. There's that. You know you should return her call, but you haven't. Why? You know there are things you should have said before, you avoided them, and now you feel it's too late. It's always so hard with her. Always messy.

And then...your son has been missing. Not missing physically, but he's been distant, quiet, silent. Missing emotionally. What's that about? What's going on in his life? You want to reach out, but he pushes you away. It worries you.

Maybe the relationships in your life aren't *exactly* like these, but I'm guessing these remind you of someone close to you, a problem relationship in your life right now. Maybe it's not your mother but your father, perhaps not your son but a daughter-in-law. It could be your best friend. Whoever it is, he or she is someone who matters to you—or else the relationship wouldn't trouble you, gnaw at you on the inside, make you question and grumble, or even bring you to tears.

I suggest you have at least three such relationships in your life right now that feel messy or troubling and make your heart ache a little. The number three isn't magic, of course. It could be just one or two, although it's likely to be more, not less. We all have relationships that aren't what we long for them to be. Now I'm not talking about business acquaintances, casual or distant friends, fourth or fifth cousins. We all have a lot of relationships in our lives—maybe too many (and we'll talk about that)—but, quite frankly, not all are created equal. All people are important, but not every connection in your life has equal value. The relationships we want to help you with in this book probably include your husband or wife, possibly a boyfriend or girlfriend. Your mother or father could be on this list, or maybe a son or daughter. And there could be a friend, someone close to you with whom you've shared deep things. It's these *meaningful, essential* people in your life—the *key* relationships you have right now—that we want to focus on.

So take a moment and think, who are these three key people in your life? Which meaningful relationships are troubling you? Relationships you wish were closer. Relationships you'd like to be deeper and richer. Relationships that trouble you, bother you, even make you a little crazy right now. Seriously, think about it. Who are they? And now take a moment to name these three key relationships out loud.

THE HIDDEN ADVENTURE

The journey you're about to take over the next thirty days will help you improve, grow, and deepen those three relationships you just named. I'm not saying it will fix everything

(relationships aren't machines—you can't replace a broken part and be good to go). But if you apply what you read over the next thirty days, your key relationships will grow and deepen. Something will change for the better.

Trust me, this is important for you. In fact, this may be the most significant thing you do in your life right now. Why? Because life is way too short. At the end of the day—at the end of The Day—in this all-too-short life we share, all that really matters is relationships.

Our relationships with the God who created us and with the people we love. Compared to these relationships, the job or career goals we set now aren't really so important, the ladders we try to climb don't matter so much, and the objects we long to own and possess seem utterly trivial. What really counts in the end is that special knowing look you share with your spouse, the arms of your child reaching up to you, or the quiet comfort of a friend who stands by your side in a difficult time. The award-winning animated movie *Up* contains some profound truths about relationships. In a breathtaking sequence early in the film, we see the entire arc of the life of Carl, a balloon salesman, as he meets Ellie, falls in love, and gets married. They share a dream to travel to South America and save every penny for their big trip. But there's something familiar about the way their savings are constantly being used for the urgencies and emergencies of daily life. Before Carl and Ellie know it, they're in their seventies, and although they have a beautiful marriage, they never realized their dream adventure. Ellie dies, and Carl is overwhelmed with regret about the trip they never took. In a desperate attempt to escape loneliness and recapture memories of Ellie, Carl attaches a bunch of balloons to his house and sets out for South America!

You begin to realize as the movie progresses that this dream trip they were saving for, this object of their future plan together, wasn't really that important after all. The *real* adventure was the life they shared along the way. The same is true for us: the adventure of a lifetime is right in front of us. It's just cleverly disguised as a familiar face.

Think about the possible loss of the relationship with one of those three people you named. You can't do anything about death and the physical departure of one of them from this earth. That's in God's hands. But you can do something about your relationship with them in life.

UPSIDE DOWN

Everything you've been told about relationships is upside down and wrong. Researchers tell us that a baby sees everything upside down for the first few days of life until the brain can adjust the visual picture to right side up. Most relationships today are stuck in this same infant stage; we tend to see relationships upside down, and our culture only reinforces this view. The concept of love at *first* sight permeates our music, movies, television, and books. What we learn as children and continue to believe as adults is that a fairy-tale relationship somehow just happens.

Now, I'm not bashing romance, but meaningful relationships depend on seeing other people as they are and looking at them right side up. Real love—whether romantic love, a close friendship, or a family relationship—happens long after first sight. It shows up as people get to know each other more deeply and often after they work through tough things together. Real love in relationships isn't a magic act; it's a journey. When people say, "It was love at first sight," what they really mean is "I was attracted to that person the first time I saw them." There is nothing wrong with being infatuated with someone at the start of a relationship. The real question, however, is, do you have a love that is growing stronger and deeper every day? I don't believe in love at first sight; I believe in love at last sight. *Each of my relationships has*

the potential to be better the next time we're together than it was the previous time so that the last time we see each other on this earth we're closer than ever before.

FRIEND ME

It's ironic that even though our society is more technologically connected than ever before, most people feel increasingly isolated and completely disconnected from deep and rewarding relationships. You can have hundreds of Facebook friends, but how many of them can you truly sit down with face to face and share your heart? It's more important to have one good friend than a thousand acquaintances.

Don't get me wrong: there's nothing wrong with social networking. Those sites can serve a useful purpose in connecting us to people. Technology is, after all, neutral. What matters is how you use it. A fire can burn you or warm you, and technology is no different. You can go online to research a medical question, pay your electric bill—or view pornography. The ability to connect with people online can be incredibly useful as long as you're smart about it, but it has its downside too.

The canary in the coal mine is this: social networking has changed our society's definition of *friend*. For instance, if I find someone named Joe online, all it takes is a simple right click, and my computer screen flashes a message assuring me that, yes, Joe and I are now friends.

Hmm...now that we're friends, I wonder if Joe would drive me to the doctor when I'm too sick to drive myself or hold my hair back from the toilet when I'm throwing up. Should I count on him to help me out on moving day? Can I call him when my loyal dog has to be put down and I just can't do it alone? Will he tell me when I have spinach in my teeth, dandruff on my shirt, or my foot in my mouth? We have bought into the false idea that if we're connected to huge numbers of people in cyberspace, we must be important and loved. There's nothing wrong with having lots of online friends as long as you realize that they're a random collection of people you might know or that someone you might know might know. A real friend is someone who is with you—present in your life— someone who gives you their time, shares your hurt, and feels your ache.

HOPE

Almost every day we hear about another high-profile marriage meltdown or a lifelong friendship falling apart. We look at the relational carnage around us and wonder, is it even *possible* to build a marriage that lasts? Is it *possible* to have a friendship that grows stronger through the inevitable misunderstandings and mistakes of two imperfect people? Is it *possible* to experience love at *last* sight?

The answer is a resounding yes! The Bible says, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). It doesn't say it's easy to build deep and rich relationships that stand the test of time, but we can say from personal experience that with God it's more than possible. The two of us have been married for more than twenty-five years, and we can honestly say we're more in love today than ever before. We're two imperfect people who don't have it all together or figured out, but we've learned some principles from God's Word that have helped us develop a rich, unshakeable love for each other and for the most important people in our lives. We want to share with you these last-sight principles that continually help us see life and the people we love right side up—from God's perspective.

FIRST GLANCE

All relationships, whether a marriage, a family, or a friendship, go through the same three stages. This First Glance stage is often called the honeymoon phase, that blissful time when everything is sunshine and rainbows. It's the time in a dating relationship when you think you've finally met the perfect person, and all you can see is how alike you are. The honeymoon happens in family relationships too. But when children become self-thinking teenagers, parents and kids usually see one another's shortcomings more clearly. In a friendship the honeymoon begins when you think you've finally found a friend who really "gets" you. There's nothing wrong with those first infatuated feelings unless you expect them to always be there. The First Glance stage is intense but fleeting, and trying to make it long-term isn't realistic or even desirable!

SECOND LOOK

At first everything seems beyond perfect, but then you take a second look. Suddenly you see reality staring back at you! In a friendship, as you get to the Second Look stage, you see your friend's annoying habits and negative qualities. In marriage, that second look makes you realize that the person you're married to is not so perfect after all. Suddenly you're able to see only your glaring differences, and you start to wonder what you saw in them in the first place. In the Second Look stage, you start asking, "What happened? Where did all the loving feelings go?" Nothing's actually wrong. Reality happened! And in a real way, it's good. Great relationships need to be based on reality—the true understanding and acceptance of another's faults, shortcomings, and weaknesses. This is also the stage where we admit we're not so hot either! It's in this honest acceptance of each other—acceptance of the real us, not the ideal first-glance us—that relationships begin to grow. The danger of the Second Look stage is that it's easy to give up because we no longer have the sense of awe and wonder we had in the First Glance stage. Of the three key relationships you've named, is one possibly in this Second Look stage?

LAST SIGHT

Our goal is to help you get beyond the First Glance stage, which is by definition a shallow relationship, to move through the Second Look stage and not get stuck there, and to enter the Last Sight stage, where the real work and reward of relationships occur. The Last Sight stage is the point at which you know each other's faults, fears, and true feelings, but your love is secure as you work to grow closer every day. Last sight relationships are what this book is all about, and they always involve two people being honest, vulnerable, and feeling safe with each other. The reason you chose those unique three key relationships is precisely because you long for them to be last sight relationships. Maybe they're in the Second Look stage, and you recognize the need to move them into the Last Sight stage. Possibly they're still in the First Glance stage, and now you're beginning to realize all that it will take to move them deeper. No matter what stage you're in or how long you've been there, the adventure of a lifetime awaits you in these pages.

LOVE AT LAST SIGHT CHALLENGE

Love at last sight is a whole new way of living. These are not principles to memorize but an art

form to learn and practice, and for each of the next four weeks, we'll focus on a new aspect.

Week 1: The Art of Being All There

Week 2: The Art of Acting Intentionally

Week 3: The Art of Risking Awkwardness

Week 4: The Art of Letting Go

I'd like you to join me in the Love at Last Sight Challenge. This book is the challenge, and you can do it on your own. Just read a chapter each day. There are thirty chapters, they're short, and you can probably read one a day pretty easily. At the end of each chapter you'll find the Love at Last Sight Challenge, which is designed to help you take the insights from that day and apply them to your key relationships. Also you can log on to lastsightchallenge.com each day to access our personal coaching and get extra encouragement and advice or share your story. Our goal is to come alongside you to help you create the very best relationships possible. Let's get started!

Challenge

1. Get a small blank book to use as your relationship journal. Every day you'll conclude your reading with personal action points to record in your journal.
2. The Challenge starts with what you did just moments ago: in your journal write today's date, and list the three key relationships you want to focus on.
3. For the next month, commit one day a week to a Facebook fast. That's when you go a whole day without using social networking sites, limiting your use of technology to essential work or school-related work. Take the time you save to handwrite a letter to a friend or to meet a friend face to face for coffee. For more ideas go to lastsightchallenge.com.
4. Think about inviting three or four friends to take the Love at Last Sight Challenge with you.

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