



KNOWING THE REAL ME

Overview

February

Year 1 Topic 1

Copies per COUPLE:

MC ONLY x 1

What is REAL?

There was once a Velveteen Rabbit and in the beginning he was really splendid. He was fat and bunchy as a rabbit should be: his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink satin. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.

For at least two hours the Boy loved him, then, in the excitement of looking at all the new presents, the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten. For a long time he lived in the toy cupboard, or on the nursery floor, and no one thought very much about him. He was naturally shy, and being only made of velveteen, some of the more expensive toys quite snubbed him. The mechanical toys were very superior, and looked down on everyone else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real.

Between them all, the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him was the Skin Horse. The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?

"Real isn't how you are made" said the Skin Horse. "Its a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes" said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once like being wound up?" he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once" said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

An excerpt from *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams

Becoming real, as the rabbit discovers, takes time. It involves being loved constantly over a long period in all sorts of circumstances, becoming quite shabby in the process and sometimes it hurts.

When newlyweds start their life together they are a bit like the brand new toy rabbit with its lovely spotted velveteen coat. I have come to think of the brand new coat as representing the image we had of ourselves at the time we married. We wanted to impress each other with our looks, our abilities and our capacity to cope with love and life. It was 'best foot forward' while the romantic glow lasted. And while some of that was very real, the glow hid a lot of who we were, as well as what we needed from each other and what we expected from each other. We had a lot of living together to do before we even started to know each other, let alone truly to love each other.

So what about the importance and the dangers of getting to know each other more truly as we move through the years together?

In a nutshell, for any relationship to have life, to be satisfying, to be worthwhile, the two parties need to share enough of their thoughts and feelings to make it work. That is true in all important relationships but especially in marriage. In fact there is great danger in staying safe, in not being real with the person you are married to. For one thing there is the danger of getting bored with your spouse and with

marriage itself. Too often the love which was so good in the early days gradually fades and turns to resentment if we avoid getting to know each other at a deeper level. There is also the danger of failing to deal with our differences and gradually withdrawing from each other to avoid the pain of conflict and repeated misunderstanding.

More importantly, we will eventually feel cheated, because most of us enter marriage with the hope that at long last we have found someone who is willing to understand and accept us, someone who will keep on loving us despite our shortcomings and our past. We also want someone who will reveal themselves to us, who will risk being honest, risk being “real” and trust us to keep loving them as they do this.

So why do we avoid what could be good for us and for our life together?

There are a number of reasons. At the most primitive level we are afraid. “If You Really Knew Me Would You Still Love Me?”¹ is still the burning question, especially as there are a number of things in me I don't like or approve of.

Can I risk acknowledging these? Will you turn away or tell me I shouldn't be like I am? Will you expect me to change some of the things I despair of changing, some of the things I don't want to change? Will you expect me to be like you? Altogether, “being real” seems too risky and may spoil the relationship we have now.

It is natural for us to have these fears, but in our marriage we need to go beyond the protections they can provide to allow our loved one to know all of us, even the parts with which we are uncomfortable. To grow in intimacy we must take the risk and become vulnerable, or else we may live a married life thinking only some of me is lovable and letting our spouse know only part of us.

If we have the privilege of many years together we will never get bored with each other or with our life together when we support each other in this process of becoming more “real”. As the Skin Horse said to the Velveteen Rabbit, “But once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.”²

‘Knowing the Real Me’ is the foundation of the program and establishes the tone for sharing.

1 John Powell: *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*

2 Gerlinde Spencer: *Couples for Marriage Enrichment Newsletter*, June 2008

Recommended reading:

Personality Plus by *Florence Littauer*.

Personality Plus looks at each one of us as an individual blend of the four basic temperaments and encourages us to get acquainted with the 'real me' underneath before trying to change what shows on the surface.

The Temperament God Gave You by Art & Laraine Bennett.

A Catholic understanding of the 4 temperaments and what they mean for you and your family.