

The Four Phases

Making our way to love and faith

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Dear reader,

In a couple of places in his writings, this author speaks about “the four phases” through which a couple must pass in order to make it to a great and enduring relationship. These phases are attraction, preoccupation, insecurity, and security.

Attraction is easy to understand. Almost always it begins with looks. It gets deeper with the help of another person’s great smile. It is really driven if another person is interesting, and even more so if this other person seems interested in you.

If circumstances and clever planning permit continuing contact with this other person, you might begin to consider yourselves “friends”; or, perhaps, you might jump right into your first opportunity to “go out.” Either way, you are getting to know the other person better and better.

If you find that getting to know the other person better and better makes you only *more* attracted, you will begin to notice that this person is always on your mind. He or she is now present in all your plans and even in your dreams. Of course, you also keep talking. Eventually you get to a crucial moment, something is said, feelings are expressed, and now emotions are almost out of control. This is the stage of preoccupation.

Unfortunately, now things begin to get difficult. At first, having a new person in your life is fun. Now, as the relationship is getting more and more important to you, you begin to develop hopes and even needs that can cause trouble. Here we are actually talking about two related troubles.

The first comes from this fact of human nature: “We want our feelings to be returned.”

If we respect someone, we want this person to respect us. If he or she does not, we feel bad.

If we like someone, we want this person to like us. If he or she does not, we feel worse.

If we become preoccupied with another person, we want this other person to be preoccupied with us.

This is the origin of jealousy, which, in most cases, is not the fear that someone else will leave or cheat on me, but rather me being upset that the object of my preoccupation has someone else on his or her mind—even for a moment.

Preoccupation is the origin of that special jealousy that is bothered by the other person's past, real or imagined, which tortures some people with the desperation to do the impossible—to remove another person's memories or change his or her life story.

The fact that “we want our feelings to be returned” also makes us very touchy—very sensitive to everything the other person says or does, or doesn't say or do, and easily hurt by anything that we in any way take to be a criticism.

Meanwhile, we ourselves begin to hurt the other person. In part, this happens because if, indeed, our feelings *are* returned, the other person is becoming more sensitive to us. Besides this, we often make things worse because, as our idea of the other person is getting more and more glorious, our desire that he or she live up to our idea is also growing. Then, when real life disappoints us, we are disillusioned and angry, and, without knowing it, we will punish the other person for disappointing us, and we will try with our anger to make him or her live up to our idea.

All of this constitutes the stage of insecurity. Many relationships end here.

Those that don't, don't because people decide that they must get real about their love.

First, they face the question: Do I really love the other person... or do I love my idea of him or her?

Are my feelings really love for someone else... or is this really all about me and the attention I want for me?

Is my love real enough that I can forget what I want *for me*, and pay attention to the other person's point of view... and needs... and right to be a human being with limitations and flaws—just like me?

Interestingly, this question, Do I really love this other person? often comes down to the question, Do I really love me?

Do I really love me... or do I need the constant attention of someone else in order to feel good about myself?

Do I really love me... or, in reality, am I dependent on someone else's opinion of me?

Do I really love me for the person I am... or, in reality, are my feelings about me dependent on something that could change?

Do I really love me for the right reason—because God has made me who I am?

When the answer is yes, relationships become secure.

Most interestingly, all that we have just seen about the four phases that lead to a secure relationship have their parallel in the life of a person who arrives at a secure faith.

Once again we begin with attraction. A person goes to something. He or she hears a talk. Perhaps they read a book. Either way, faith's way of looking at things makes them feel a little better about life. They go or read again, and it happens again. They go or read again, and the feeling they get is even deeper.

Now they find the more they look the more they see. Soon enough, they cannot get enough. They go to everything they can get to. They read everything they can get their hands on. They join any group that will take them. Forgetting even the people at home, they have entered the stage of preoccupation.

Unfortunately, insecurity almost always follows, and for the same related reasons that insecurity happens in relationships.

Sensitivity to others is one reason. Now that faith is so important to me, it bothers me very much if others do not share it. It bothers me even more if others implicitly reject it by their lifestyles and seemingly sinful opinions. Now I find I am often offended by the sins of others, and by the state of society in general. Often I need to make clear that I am better than all that, a well-known condition that is called self-righteousness.

Sometimes faith, like love, also suffers disillusionment. The more it means to me, the more I expect from it. Then, when something hard happens I am shook up and confused. "I'm one of the good people," I say, "God is supposed to be good to me."

Sometimes faith, like relationships, end here.

When it doesn't, it doesn't because people decide that they must get real about their faith.

First, they face the question: Do I really believe... in God, that God *is* God, and He knows what He is doing whether I see it right now or not? Or did I confuse faith with the old idea that if I show respect for God's power by *really* believing He will give me what I want, He will give me what I want?

If I decide that I really believe in God, that He is God, and He knows what He is doing whether I see it right now or not, I get peace. More than that, I notice that this is a peace that does not depend on anything that can change. It is real peace, that also offers me peace with myself.

Perhaps for the first time I take seriously what I might have heard or read during my period of preoccupation, that "faith is its own reward."

Faith *is* its own reward. People of faith have so much more than anyone without it.

First of all, they know more. They know where they come from. They know why they are here. They know where they are going when they die.

People of faith know that they are not going to die. They know that they are going to live, to live with God forever. They know that they are going to have all that their hearts already desire—the only place where this can happen.

People of faith know that they are here to grow in the love that prepares them for life with God. Therefore, they have a reason to make a difference in this world, and to live the only kind of life that can make a person happy.

Finally, people of faith know that God is working with them, through everything that happens to them, to prepare them to become the people they were meant to be. Therefore, they have all the reason in the world to accept themselves for who they are, to accept their past for what it was, and to face their future without fear.

If all of this were not enough, faith is the deepest knowledge that we can have. It bespeaks the deepest person that we can be. And every experience of this deeper person is, to that extent, richer. The person with faith is more alive than anyone without it.

Interestingly, just as security in relationship requires people to decide whether they really love another person, WHICH IS REALLY THE QUESTION do they really love themselves, so too security in faith requires people to decide whether they really believe in God, WHICH IS REALLY THE QUESTION do they really believe in themselves. Here, by belief in ourselves, we are talking about the question of whether we trust our ability to know the truth.

Sometimes we are reluctant to decide about what we believe partly because we don't believe that we can know the truth. We know what we feel but we don't feel that we know. We don't feel sure about matters of faith. Still:

We feel, for sure, that the world has come from somewhere.

We cannot imagine that we were made for death.

We definitely feel that love is the way.

And we do feel that things happen for a reason. We can hardly feel otherwise.

What we do not realize is that these feelings *are* our knowledge of the truth. They are the response of our whole self to questions involving the whole of reality. This is how the truth of faith is supposed to be seen.

We can say this because these experiences are the best we have. They are the best that anyone has. They are surely telling us the truth. After all, God would not have put us here without the power to do what we are here for. We are here to grow in the love that prepares us for eternal life. We must have been given the ability to see the truth that makes this possible.

A secure faith is possible. So is a secure love. In the end, it all comes down to believing in yourself. And why not? Who is there to stop you? What would be a better choice? What would give a better life? And what, exactly, is the alternative?

If you would like to read a wonderful story about the four phases, just go back to thefaithkit.org/panorama, click on “Kirk,” and download “The Four Phases.”

If you would like to make it to a more secure faith, just go back to thefaithkit.org, click on either “Read About the Basics” or “The Fullness of Faith as Christians See It” and then click on either “The Five Steps to Faith” or “The Eight Images.”