AMERICA HAS BECOME tragically ignorant about something we once seemed to understand: marriage.  
  
Even in the church, we postpone marriage later and later, as if it were a particularly unpleasant dental appointment. There's so much to do first — we have to "find out who we are." We have to get our careers established. We have to prove we're successful.  
  
I had a taste of that myself when I got married back in 1977. I had sold my first novel and wanted to get it finished and delivered ... before I got married. So I was just a few minutes late getting to the temple because I had to finish photocopying that manuscript and get it into the mail.  
  
What was I thinking? That it would somehow be better if my wife knew for sure that she was *not* part of my career as a writer?  
  
That's such a silly mistake — that we must or even *can* "find ourselves" before we've made that lifelong (or longer) commitment.  
  
Here's why it's a mistake: We don't ever "find" ourselves. Instead, in marriage, we *make* ourselves.  
  
No, we make *each other* — as a joint project. We turn ourselves into a perfect fit. Our self *is* the marriage, and our part in it. There is no "I" without the "we."  
  
In the March 2008 Atlantic Monthly, Lori Gottlieb, a never-married woman who chose to have a child without ever meeting the donor, writes a plaintive lament called "Marry Him!" (See [TheAtlantic.com](http://TheAtlantic.com).)  
  
The article is worth reading in its entirety. But to sum it up, Gottlieb makes it plain that while she doesn't regret having her beloved child, she wishes she had done it the right way — as part of a marriage, with a partner.  
  
She talks about the advantages of marriage — even if you don't have a lot of romantic feelings for your partner. After all, she points out, you don't spend that much time together anyway, once you're married. Instead, you have a division of labor. Ideally, one earns the living while the other does the child care and maintenance of the house and home.  
  
And yet, even if you aren't often together, there's somebody who shares your goals and your problems, somebody to rely on, somebody to hear you out. You're not *alone*.  
  
She remembers, with regret, all the almost-good-enough men she refused to "settle for" because they didn't measure up to some romantically idealized list.  
  
Too bad she hadn't heard President Spencer W. Kimball's remarks on the subject back in 1976:  
  
"'Soul mates' are fiction and an illusion; and while every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price."  
  
Romance is nice. But it *is* biological in origin. That dizzy head-over-heels feeling is a species of losing your mind, and most of the time it lasts only as long as the chase.  
  
What we keep forgetting is that in *marriage*, as opposed to romances, you aren't marrying the thrilling wonderful perfect Someone you're looking at right now.  
  
You're marrying the man who decides not to have the dazzling career with the high salary, refusing promotions and transfers so the kids don't have to change schools. You're marrying the woman whose body doesn't bounce back after the third baby, so she's no longer slim and attractive by the standards of the magazines.  
  
You're marrying the migraines and the hemorrhoids and the heart attack and the cancer; you're marrying the irritable, forgetful, lazy, thoughtless, sarcastic, distracted, too-busy days as well as the Kodak-happy ones.  
  
You're marrying the one who works with you to raise the retarded or crippled child, or stands with you at the graveside of the child who dies.  
  
You're marrying the one who can't find work after the company folds or he's laid off; you're marrying the early Alzheimer's, the diabetes, the obesity, the pain of conflict and the struggle of forgiveness.  
  
The foundation of that isn't some ideal of romantic love. It's a commitment based on the goals you share. And real love, married love, is not what you start with — it's what you create together along the way.  
  
How foolish, when our young people wait to find love, or to have God show them their foreordained mate, instead of rationally looking at the eligible people and choosing someone who can and will live up to the commitment of marriage, someone with shared faith, someone with whom you can establish friendship and affection.  
  
All marriages are between strangers. And sometimes it's the boring man who'll make the best husband, the plain woman who'll make the best mother.  
  
It takes time to come to know the other person; it take time for each of you to become someone new and different and perfectly adapted to the other. You'll be there through the whole process, though, because your commitment is stronger than the bands of death.  
  
But as that knowledge grows, so does the real love, the deep love. Compared to the thick, strong fabric of married love, romantic love is a Kleenex. You can't make anything out of it. It's disposable — there's always another in the box.  
  
All the things you think you have to do before you get married are a waste of precious time. Start the marriage, then do the other things for and with each other.  
  
None of your plans will work out exactly as you hoped; but the partnership of a good man and a good woman who are "willing to pay the price" will outlast all such plans.  
  
My wife and I are only 30 years into this journey, so we're still working it out. But I imagined the end of the mortal portion of the trip, and wrote this:  
  
**Well Paired Team**  
By Orson Scott Card  
  
You don't *arrive* at marriage, lonely hearts.  
The wedding's where the lifelong journey *starts*,  
Forced to travel with a clumsy fool  
Or trot along behind a receding dream  
(You had to stop and help me when I tripped,  
While *you* would never stick to my passionate script),  
Using one another like an ill-made tool,  
Like ox and antelope yoked in a single team.  
And yet ... somehow, together, we managed to pull  
An empty cart straight uphill;  
And look — the creaking, rickety thing is full  
Of crockery, old rags, a child or two.  
  
At the start, knowing nothing, we said "I will,"  
And now look at all the things I made with you,  
All our baggage, all our breakage, art  
By unskilled artisans, yet beautiful,  
Yours and mine, no matter how peculiar;  
New and strange, no matter how familiar.  
Some passages were merely dutiful.  
Who could know, on our ignorant starting day  
That, pulling such a long and weary way,  
The man, the woman, strangers side by side,  
Would end the trek inside each other's heart,  
Trading forgiveness and repentances,  
Finishing each other's sentences,  
Only to be stranded,  
The team — for now at least — disbanded.  
Now we see how all the road maps lied:  
Our destination was the yoke we shared,  
Badly at first, but by the end well paired.  
And only when you died did I leave my home  
And pointlessly, empty-carted, roam.  
You don't *arrive* at marriage, lonely hearts.  
The wedding's where the lifelong journey *starts*.

Orson Scott Card is a writer of nonfiction and fiction