A Personal History

Shirley and I met when we were attending a private college in downtown Philadelphia in 1977. We spent countless hours talking and growing together during the next two years and married in the summer of 1979. I graduated with a B.S. in Biblical and Pastoral Studies and was honored to be selected to be the lead pastor in a church plant in northern Ohio.

What a wonderful way to begin our marriage! During those very active seven years, Shirley gave birth to our two daughters, the church grew to be able to purchase and renovate a permanent campus, and I earned two Masters degrees from seminary: one in Pastoral Psychology and another in Church History.

That season of life came to a close when I felt called to full-time counseling and entered into a Ph.D. program in Psychology. I left the pastorate to become a counselor and for the next 30 years, I engaged in a private practice in northern Ohio.

It was early in my doctoral program that I developed a practical and visual interactive model—the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM)-- which captures five universal bonds that exist in all relationships. I used it regularly in my counseling with clients who seemed to instantly understand their relationships with greater clarity and intentionality.

In latter half of the 1990's, I was teaching Marriage and Family Advanced Studies in a graduate program in addition to my counseling practice and had become convinced that many of the struggles that brought clients into counseling were actually preventable. This led me to develop instructor-led relationship courses within a Biblical framework that integrated the research and theory I had gleaned from the psycho-social sciences along with the counseling interventions and skills which had definitely improved clients. These courses, organized around the RAM, included an intentional dating course for youth, emerging adults, and singles-again (PICK), a course for committed and married couples (Couple LINKS), and a set of family and parenting courses (Our Home Runs).

By 2010, I had closed my practice and was providing certification trainings in my courses to relationship educators in the military, churches, secondary and post-secondary educational settings, social agencies, community marriage and fatherhood non-profits, incarceration facilities, and counseling practices. A couple of years later, our oldest daughter, Morgan, graduated with her Ph.D. in Psychology and joined me full time in our organization, Love Thinks, LLC.

In 2015, we expanded the instructor-led model of our flagship courses by developing two additional versions: 1) an online version with workbooks for at-home users (www.MyLoveThinks.com); and 2) the RAM series for churches (www.RAMseries.com).

Dr. Morgan Cutlip has also multiplied the reach of Love Thinks with her amazing relationship content on social media (Instagram), while both of us have had the privilege of writing books and providing keynotes, seminars, retreats, and workshops all around the world.

Shirley and I thank God for this remarkable and undeserving journey of providing so many with support in their most significant relationships. But our deepest gratitude is for our 45 years together in marriage, and that we get to live in the same town as both of our daughters, their husbands, and our five grandkids.

John Van Epp, PhD, President and Founder of Love Thinks, LLC is the author of *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk (or Jerkette)*-top choice for singles by Christianity Today; *Becoming Better Together: the RAM plan for growing together when life is pulling you apart*; and *Endgame: The Church's Strategic Move to Save Faith and Family in America* (co-authored with JP DeGance).

- He has previous experience as
  - a founding church pastor,
  - an adjunct seminary professor in marriage and family with extensive research in premarital, marital, and family relations,
  - a clinical counselor for 25-years in his private counseling practice.
  - and for over 20 years, he has trained military personnel and contracted with the military as a subject matter expert (SME) in relationship health, psychology, religion, suicide, and resilience.
- For the past 25 years, he has developed relationship programs that have been taught by over 40,000 certified instructors to over one million participants in every branch of the military, social agencies, marriage and family coalitions, high schools, and universities, and in all fifty states and eleven countries.
- Van Epp and his innovative Relationship Attachment Model, and his relationship courses were awarded the Smart Marriage Impact Award, the National Association of Relationship & Marriage Education Impact Award, and have been featured in The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Psychology Today, O Magazine, and Cosmopolitan; he has appeared on the CBS Early Show, Good Morning America, Fox News, and Focus on the Family.
- Van Epp has a B.S. in Biblical and Pastoral Studies; a M.A. in Pastoral Psychology and Counseling; a M.A. in Church History; and a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology.
- He has been happily married for over 45 years and is the proud father of two daughters and five grandkids.

Love Thinks Programs are all about relationships—dating, marriage, parenting, and family relationships. All flagship programs are based on Dr. Van Epp's Relationship Attachment Model (RAM).

- Love Thinks programs have been taught to over one million participants by community nonprofits, churches, singles organizations, social agencies, and in educational and military settings all fifty states and eleven countries (www.LoveThinks.com).
- These programs come in Christian and Community versions & in several formats.
  - Instructor-led Certification Versions so that you can teach the courses.
  - Online Relationship Courses (www.MyLoveThinks.com) for at-home learning.
  - Church series: plug-n-play versions for church use (www.RAMseries.com).
- Gain free relationship resources—blogs, daily Instagram posts, videos (MyLoveThinks.com).

RAM Series for Churches (www.RAMseries.com)

- The RAM Series is a unique, 6-week churchwide experience that is built around the RAM and involves the entire church learning how to build healthy relationships first with God, and then with others.
- It includes sermon manuscripts, two small-group video-based studies, one for singles and the other for couples, video-based lessons for 1st through 12th grades, and a Parent Guide for parents to engage in dynamic conversations with their own children at home. The entire church learns the RAM with every message addressing relationships with God and with others (dating, marriage, parenting and within the church family).

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