

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

“Love dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings” (Anais Nin).

“Love at first sight is easy to understand; it’s when two people have been looking at each other for a lifetime that it becomes a miracle” (Amy Bloom).

“Marriage love is ofttime a secret worke of God, pitching the heart of one party upon another for no known cause; and therefore when this strong lodestone attracts each to the other, no further questions need to be made but such a man and such a woman’s match were made in heaven, and God hath brought them together” (Daniel Rogers).

“In choosing a spouse one should look, not necessarily for one whom one does love, here and now, but for one whom one can love with steady affection on a permanent basis” (J. I. Packer).

WHERE IS THE LOVE?

1. The Love Drought

- a. Many things we call love aren’t really love.
- b. We lack a clear definition of what love is and what love does.

2. Markers of a Love Drought

- a. Disunity

“I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me” (John 17:22–23).

“If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:1–4).

Question: Is the unity of your marriage growing?

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b. Misunderstanding

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Question: Do you live together in the joy of true understanding?

c. Separation

“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him. . . . 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called “woman,” for she was taken from man. 24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:18, 22–24).

“The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (Matthew Henry).

Question: Is your marriage more a picture of cohabitation than it is of relationship?

d. Physical Dysfunction

“Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25).

“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4).

Question: Is your sexual relationship a picture of patient, self-sacrificing love?

e. Conflict

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:16–18).

Question: In your marriage, do you hate conflict and work in whatever way you can to create peace?

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3. Watch Out for Faux Love

- a. Physical Attraction
- b. Emotional Connection
- c. Spiritual Unity
- d. Cultural Unity

WHAT IS LOVE?

Are the following statements true or false?

1. It is possible to experience “love at first sight.” TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. The closest biblical case for “love at first sight” occurs when Jacob meets Rachel in Genesis 29. Immediately after he makes her acquaintance, we learn that “Jacob loved Rachel” (v. 18), but this Hebrew word for “love” applies to more than just romantic love between a man and a woman. Jesus helps us gain a better understanding of true love in John 15:13, “No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.” Love is sacrificial and self-giving in nature, so it is difficult to envision a situation where a person would give up his or her own life upon first sight of a potential spouse. A powerful initial attraction may indeed be a seed that grows into lasting, covenantal love, but we must reject the notions that every instance of instant chemistry is true love or that every example of true love will necessarily start with shooting stars.

2. Love is a random, overwhelming, and uncontrollable force. Love is something that we fall into (and out of) inexplicably and irresistibly. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “There must be a better way. Love must be more than the myth [that it is an uncontrollable force]. The myth won’t endure hardship, overcome adversity, or triumph over disaster. The myth brings no comfort to the woman whose beauty has faded, as she must live in constant fear that her husband will be zapped by this random, uncontrollable, sensual force as he looks upon the beauty of a younger woman. Nor can it assuage the fears of the man who loses his job, his confidence, and his wife’s adoration. This love also offers nothing to the young couple trying to navigate the peaks and valleys of the early years of marriage . . . Fortunately, there is a better way. God has given us a definition of love that transcends the myth . . . Love is an act of the will accompanied by emotion that leads to action on behalf of its object” (Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 54–57).

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3. Love is what happens to us when we meet the right person—when we find our soul mate—and it helps us to discern whom we should marry. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “You always marry the wrong person. It is as important to note, of course . . . that the reverse of the law is also true: namely, that you also always marry the right person. The point of the law is to suggest the inadequacy of the current assumption that the success or failure of a marriage can be determined by marrying the ‘right person.’ Even if you have married the ‘right person,’ there is no guarantee that he or she will remain such, for people have a disturbing tendency to change. Indeed, it seems that many so-called ‘happy marriages’ are such because of the partners’ efforts to preserve ‘love’ by preventing either from changing” (Stanley Hauerwas, “Sex and Politics: Bertrand Russell and ‘Human Sexuality,’” *Christian Century* [April 19, 1978], 417–422).

4. The feeling of love is what sustains a marriage. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “God is guiding your marriage. Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God’s holy ordinance, through which He wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time . . . As high as God is above man, so high are the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of marriage above the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of love. It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell,” *Letters and Papers from Prison*).

5. Marriages will inevitably become loveless or end in divorce. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “Biblical love says, ‘I choose to love you and I’m not going anywhere.’ Biblical love knows nothing of backing out when things get tough. Biblical love gives without expecting, goes the extra mile, sacrifices for others, and views divorce as a tragic and unnecessary plague visited upon a culture that has settled for a lie. Biblical love is not constantly seeking the emotional high that often characterizes immature relationships but instead is content with the depth and breadth that only the love of a maturing, godly relationship can provide. Biblical love is not constantly looking for a *better* deal; it is busy thanking God for the *real* deal” (Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 64).

What is biblical love?

“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way,

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we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:7–12).

“Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 188).

1. Love is willing.

“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (John 10:18).

2. Love is willing self-sacrifice.

“No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

3. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another.

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6–8).

4. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

5. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving.

MARITAL LOVE IN ACTION

Five Love Languages or Lust Languages?

Five Love Languages: words of affirmation, quality time, gift-giving, acts of service, and physical touch.

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“Love can be expressed and received in all five languages. However, if you don't speak a person's primary love language, that person will not feel loved, even though you may be speaking the other four. Once you are speaking his or her primary love language fluently, then you can sprinkle in the other four and they will be like icing on the cake” (Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*).

“Love languages are part of the story of human relations. But speaking love languages is surely not the whole story. In fact, it is practical, *immoral* wisdom—manipulation or pandering or both—when it becomes the whole story. Part of considering the interests of others is to do them tangible good. But then to really love them, you usually need to help them see their itch as idolatrous, and to awaken in them a far more serious itch. That's basic Christianity. . .

The love of Christ speaks a “love language”—mercy to hellishly self-centered people—that no person can hear or understand unless God gives ears to hear. It is a language we cannot speak to others unless God makes us fluent in an essentially foreign language. We might say that the itch itself (an ear for God's language) has to be created, because we live in such a stupor of self-centered itchiness. The love language model does not highlight those exquisite forms of love that do not “speak your language.” You and I need to learn a new language if we are to become fit to live with each other and with God. The greatest love ever shown does not speak the instinctively self-centered language of the recipients of such love. In fundamental ways, the love of Christ speaks contrary to your “love language” and “felt needs.” Does anyone naturally say, “I need You to rule me so I'm no longer ruled by what I want”? Does anyone naturally say, “For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity for it is great” (Psalm 25:11)? Does anyone naturally say, “My greatest need is for mercy, and then for the wisdom to give mercy. I long for redemption. May Your kingdom come. Deliver us from evil?” God's grace aims to destroy the lordship of the five love languages, even while teaching us to speak the countless love languages with greater fluency. . .

The love of Christ controls us in that one died for all, and therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Grow fluent in the love of Christ, the love language that no one naturally speaks or hears, but everyone needs” (David Powlison, “Love Speaks Many Languages Fluently,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Fall 2002, 4–5, 9–10).

Personality Types?

“God makes people with wide variations of temperament, personality, interest, and motivation (overlying the core commonalities of human nature). He arranges and governs wide variations in life experience, opportunities, socialization, and enculturation (also adding coloration to core commonalities). These variations on the human theme find expression in our often marked individual differences. Furthermore, the Lord of all the earth often seems to put people together in marriage who are wired differently. As a result, either we grow to complement each other by

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learning to give intelligent love, or we incinerate the marriage on the battlefield of insistently different demands” (David Powlison, “Love Speaks Many Languages Fluently,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Fall 2002, 3).

1. *Love is being willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of your husband or wife without impatience or anger.*
2. *Love is actively fighting the temptation to be critical and judgmental toward your spouse, while looking for ways to encourage and praise.*
3. *Love is the daily commitment to resist the needless moments of conflict that come from pointing out and responding to minor offenses.*
4. *Love is being lovingly honest and humbly approachable in times of misunderstanding, and being more committed to unity and love than you are to winning, accusing, or being right.*
5. *Love is the daily commitment to admit your sin, weakness, and failure and to resist the temptation to offer an excuse or shift the blame.*
6. *Love means being willing, when confronted by your spouse, to examine your heart rather than rising to your defense or shifting the focus.*
7. *Love is the daily commitment to grow in love so that the love you offer to your husband or wife is increasingly selfless, mature, and patient.*
8. *Love is being unwilling to do what is wrong when you have been wronged, but to look for concrete and specific ways to overcome evil with good.*
9. *Love is being a good student of your spouse, looking for his physical, emotional, and spiritual needs so that in some way you can remove the burden, support him as he carries it, or encourage him along the way.*
10. *Love means being willing to invest the time necessary to discuss, examine and understand the problems that you face as a couple, staying on task until the problem is removed or you have agreed upon a strategy of response.*

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- 11. Love is being willing to ask for forgiveness and always being committed to grant forgiveness when it is requested.*
- 12. Love is recognizing the high value of trust in a marriage and being faithful to your promises and true to your word.*
- 13. Love is speaking kindly and gently, even in moments of disagreement, refusing to attack your spouse's character or assault his or her intelligence.*
- 14. Love is being unwilling to flatter, lie, manipulate, or deceive in any way in order to co-opt your spouse into giving you what you want or doing something your way.*
- 15. Love is being unwilling to ask your spouse to be the source of your identity, meaning, and purpose, or inner sense of well-being, while refusing to be the source of his or hers.*
- 16. Love is the willingness to have less free time, less sleep, and a busier schedule in order to be faithful to what God has called you to be and do as a husband or wife.*
- 17. Love is a commitment to say no to selfish instincts and to do everything that is within your ability to promote real unity, functional understanding, and active love in your marriage.*
- 18. Love is staying faithful to your commitment to treat your spouse with appreciation, respect, and grace, even in moments when he or she doesn't seem to deserve it or is unwilling to reciprocate.*
- 19. Love is the willingness to make regular and costly sacrifices for the sake of your marriage without asking anything in return or using your sacrifices to place your spouse in debt.*
- 20. Love is being unwilling to make any personal decision or choice that would harm your marriage, hurt your husband or wife, or weaken the bond of trust between you.*
- 21. Love is refusing to be self-focused or demanding, but instead looking for specific ways to serve, support, and encourage, even when you are busy or tired.*
- 22. Love is daily admitting to yourself, your spouse, and God that you are not able to love this way without God's protecting, providing, forgiving, rescuing, and delivering grace.*

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CONCLUSION

“Jesus suffered in love so that in your struggle to love, you would never, ever be alone... So don’t let regret paralyze you. Don’t be overwhelmed by love’s call. Don’t be discouraged by the size or number of things you are facing. Don’t let the failures of the past rob you of hope for the future. No, left to yourself you don’t have what it takes, but he is with you, in you, and for you. Walk forward in hope and courage, and commit yourself to real, active, and specific cruciform love, knowing that his grace really does have the power to make you ready, willing, and waiting” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 202–203).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “The Key to Christian Contentment” by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/the-key-to-christian-contentment