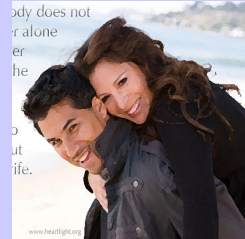




# 1 Love & Emotion

The following excerpts are taken from part one of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full message is available on [FoodForYourSoul.net](http://FoodForYourSoul.net)



## Love for God and love for people

When asked which is the single greatest commandment in Scripture Jesus deemed it necessary to respond with both the first and the second: love God and love people. (Mt.22:36-39) Both are necessary. You cannot love God without loving people .

**And the two will become one flesh**

**Matthew 25:45 Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.**

There can be no communion with God where there is no love for His people. And the closer the proximity God has placed someone in your life, the more egregious the sin if you fail to love them. That is why failure to love your spouse is pointed out in Scripture as being particularly damaging to your relationship to God.

**Malachi 2:13 You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.**

feelings can seem distasteful. But however difficult the task may seem, it is worth the greatest possible effort. There is so much at stake. Your joy, your spouse's joy, the health of your family, the health of this church, and the name and renown of the Lord. The next brochure focuses on how to restore the feelings of love that have been lost (or that never existed), but the starting point is to be honest about what love is, and where it is lacking, and repent of the sin of failing to properly love your spouse.

Many times we do not grow in love for our spouse because we are not truly repentant of our lack of love. If we even admit that love is absent or weak, we hardly even think of it as a sin. It seems reasonable. But if love is the greatest command then lack of love is the greatest sin. Failure to love your spouse is wickedness. It is evil. It is vile and defiling and offensive to God. It is disobedience. It is rebellion. And no matter what your spouse is doing to you, your lack of love is inexcusable.

So we need to repent of our lack of esteem, desire, and delight in our spouse – as well as of all the other sins that go along with that. Many other sins (such as unforgiveness) are symptoms of weak love. Maybe you have harbored unforgiveness in your heart for a long time, but you have not really taken it seriously. There is no real brokenness or contrition before God. No serious steps to find victory over that sin. You are not memorizing any Scriptures about forgiveness, you are not asking anyone in your small group for help, you are not in an accountability relationship, you are not reading books about forgiveness, listening to sermons about forgiveness, or studying passages of Scripture about forgiveness. True repentance does not mean you will have perfect success and you will never fall into that sin again. But it does mean you will take drastic measures.

For others maybe it is laziness or bitterness or selfishness or rudeness or insensitivity or lack of respect or dishonesty or discontent or failure to fulfill your God-ordained role in the marriage. For more examples of symptoms of weak love refer to p.101 in Three to Get Ready and fill out the lower half of the Trait Factor Inventory for yourself (ignore the last two items).

Draw the connection in your mind between the symptoms that exist in your life and lack of esteem, desire, and delight, and think through what earnest repentance would look like. And then fall on your face before God in deep and profound repentance. And then confess the sin to your spouse and seek his or her forgiveness. You will never be successful in attaining to the virtue of love until you repent of the sin of lack of love.

The problem in that context was divorce, but the principle applies to any kind of failure to love one's spouse.

**1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. <sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For...**

Peter is calling upon men to love their wives so nothing will hinder their prayers. Then he turns to the rest of us – married, single, male, female – everyone in the church and calls all of us to love. Then in v.10 he says "for" meaning "here's the reason for why I'm calling all of you to love one another and especially within marriage..."

**10 ...For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."**

The reason it is crucial for us to love one another – and especially your spouse, from the heart with profound compassion and deep affection is because if you do not, the eyes of the Lord will not be on you. His ears will not listen to your prayers and the Lord will turn His face against you.

## Definition of love

The primary duty of marriage is love (Eph.5:25, Tit.2:4). Obedience to that command is greatly hindered, however, because of wrong conceptions of what love is.

There are many who teach that love is not a feeling. It is a commitment – self-sacrificial service. Feelings aren't important, but if you want them just follow through on the commitment and emotions will come automatically like a caboose on a train.

Those ideas do not come from Scripture. Love is not only a function of the will; it involves one's entire being.

**Matthew 22:37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**

No part of you – including your emotions, is exempt from the command to love.

The prophets frequently use the most emotional kinds of metaphors possible in describing God's love, including the

feelings of compassion a father has for his children (Ps.103:13, Jer.31:20), rejoicing, great delight, and singing (Zeph.3:17, Jer.32:41), and the delight of a bridegroom over his bride (Isa.62:5). And that kind of emotional love; the love God has for His people is a model of the love we are to have for one another. (1 Jn.4:7-11) One of the clearest definitions of love in Scripture comes from Psalm 119, which is all about the psalmist's love for God's Word. The various references to love in that psalm show that there are three major components of love: esteem, desire, and delight.

**Esteem (to hold in high regard) - Psalm 119:163 I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law.**

**Desire - Psalm 119:131-132 I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands. <sup>132</sup> Turn to me ... as you always do to those who love your name.**

**Delight - Psalm 119:47 for I delight in your commands because I love them. (Love and delight are very often synonyms in Scripture (Mt.12:18, Pr.1:22).**

Those who claim *agape* is non-emotional commitment only, and has nothing to do with passion or desire are at odds with the fact that the word used throughout the Song of Songs for sexual love (in the Greek translation) is *agape*, not *eros*. That whole book describes marital love, and from beginning to end it is descriptions of esteem, desire, and delight.

**Esteem – they are constantly praising each other and going on and on about how wonderful the other one is.**

**Desire – 1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. <sup>7:10</sup> I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.**

**Delight - 2:3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.**

In the most famous chapter on love in all the Bible, 1 Cor.13, Paul begins by attacking the view that love is a mere action or decision of the will or act of self sacrifice. In the opening paragraph he warns that if you give so self-sacrificially that you give all you have to the poor, and you are so committed that you die as a martyr, it is still possible to do all that without love. That would be nonsense if love were merely commitment or self-sacrificial giving.

Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus would also be nonsense. First He commends them for their excellent

service and work and sacrifice and commitment, and then He rebukes them for having lost their love. How could they have commitment and service without love if love is nothing more than commitment and service?

Jesus connected genuine love with the emotion of gladness.

**John 14:28 If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father**

It is impossible to have love without having gladness when good things happen to the one you love.

### The Role of Commitment

This is not to downplay the importance of commitment in love. Genuine love includes emotion but it is not merely emotion. You must be committed to do what is in your spouse's best interests regardless of how you feel. That is absolutely essential to love. However if you are committed and the feelings are not there, that is not true love either.

When a man says, "Don't tell me I don't love my wife - I work my fingers to the bone to provide for her" - is that love? Money? You send a lot of money off to the IRS every year; does that mean you love your wife with the same kind of love you have for the IRS? Or is it possible that you don't love the IRS at all, and you only send them money out of sheer duty?

When you do not feel like doing what is in your spouse's best interests you should go ahead and do it anyway. That's the commitment side of love. *But do not be satisfied with that.* Do what is in his/her best interests, and then get on your knees and repent and beg God's forgiveness for not *desiring* what was in their best interests. God requires both that you desire it and do it. If you are falling into one sin by not desiring it, don't commit a second sin by not doing it. Committing just one sin is better than committing two. But the goal is to commit neither sin. So if the desire is not there then study and work and pray and seek counsel and pray some more and labor and strive until you find a way to generate that desire.

### Misunderstanding Love Destroys Marriages

The teaching that love is commitment and not emotion has caused a great deal of harm to many marriages. A wife pleads with her husband, "I just wish you would spend more time with me and listen to me once in a while." The husband responds by taking a day off work

or maybe a whole weekend with his wife. But all weekend they bicker and fight, and it is an utterly unsatisfying experience for both of them so the man concludes, "It's hopeless. She's never satisfied. I don't even know why I keep trying."

The reason she isn't satisfied is because what she is craving is not time or talk - it's *love*. What she wants is not for you to listen to her and spend time with her. What she wants is for you to *want* to listen to her and spend time with her. She wants you to desire her. She wants you not to just listen, but to listen because you are truly interested in what is on her mind (and the more you love her the more you really will be interested).

My wife and I used to have regular conflicts over how I spent my time. She wanted me to spend more time with her, and I felt like she resented my ministry and calling. All through our marriage I had been reading books and doing studies on how to be a better husband, and I was doing all the things in all those books the best I could, but there was still a lack of joy in our marriage. I concluded it was impossible to satisfy her without quitting my job.

But then I began to learn what love really is, and I began to genuinely delight in her and desire her company. And that changed everything. I really, truly wanted to be with her, and I began to enjoy it so thoroughly that it became obvious to her that it was out of desire, not mere duty. Your wife can tell the difference. When it is out of duty the only time you spend with her is time you have scheduled to spend with her. But when it is out of desire you find yourself coming up with creative ways to spend a couple extra minutes with her here and there. You have a few minutes before you have to leave, and instead of flipping on the TV, or sitting down at the computer, you sit down and talk to your wife. And when you spend time with her you find yourself planning to spend an hour, but then stretching it out to 1:15 and then finally tearing yourself away out of sheer self-discipline.

And I found an amazing thing. I was spending about the same amount of time with her as before, but there was a night and day difference in her joy. She was now happy and satisfied. What I have found is that for Tracy, if I am off doing something away from her but she knows I would much rather be with her, and that I can't wait to see her again, that is a lot more satisfying to her than me spending time with her out of duty when I don't really desire to spend time with her. And my guess is your wife is the same way.

And if you are thinking, "Does that mean she would be happy if I never spent any time with her at all as long as I had the desire to?" No, because if that desire is strong enough you will find a way to spend time with her. If you cannot manage to come up with some creative way that will enable you to spend time with her, then the desire just is not very strong compared to your desires for all the other things you are doing.

And wives, the same goes for you. Do you desire your husband? Or do you just desire someone to take you out to eat or out to some enjoyable activity on a date? Do you desire him, or do you just desire someone to take you away from the monotony or chaos of your home for a couple hours?

### **Desire/Delight Test**

If you love someone, you desire them until you have an experience of closeness with them, and then desire turns to delight. God's design for marriage is described in Pr.5:18-19.

**Proverbs 5:18-19 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup> A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.**

Read that passage again and ask yourself: *Does that describe me?* Do the five things in those verses describe your marriage? - fountain, rejoicing, love & grace, satisfaction, and being captivated. The fountain image means your spouse is delightful, satisfying, and refreshing, like cool spring water to a parched mouth. Is that what you are to your spouse? Is that the way you feel about your spouse? Is your life a life of rejoicing in your spouse - real rejoicing? Do you experiencing continual, wonderful satisfaction through your spouse? Are you captivated? That word is translated *intoxicated, ravished, exhilarated*. Is there any chance your spouse could be ravished and intoxicated and exhilarated and satisfied?

Keep in mind - this passage is not talking to newlyweds. **The wife of your youth** - that means the wife that you married way back when you used to be young. This is the way God expects our marriages to be; because this is the way we are to love God. Esteem, desire, and delight.

Here are a few questions you can use as a test to discern your level of love for your spouse.

Which way is your heart inclined when you have some spare time? If your wife is available, and the TV is available, and the Internet is available, and your hobby is available - which has the greatest tug on your desires?

When you are going to spend time alone with your spouse, do you look forward to it? And if so, is what you are looking forward to the company - or the activity?

When you allow yourself to just daydream and think about whatever is most pleasurable to think about, is it about your spouse?

How hard to you work to make it easier for your spouse to desire you? Is it obvious from your actions that the

driving desire of your heart is to make it easier for your spouse to desire you? Do most, if not all the decisions you make about how you look be driven by your desire to bring pleasure to your spouse - hair style, which clothes you wear, which clothes you avoid, cologne or perfume?

**1 Corinthians 7:33-34 A married man is concerned about ... how he can please his wife .... a married woman is concerned about how she can please her husband.**

If you are not especially concerned with how to please your spouse you are not even living as a married person.

### **The Bottom Line**

*If you do not have a passionate, deep, heartfelt, emotional, compelling, affectionate love for your wife or husband; if you do not strongly desire your spouse - desire to spend time together, desire talk together, desire to hear what is on her mind, desire to please your husband - if those desires are weak or absent altogether, but you are grinding it out and trying to be a committed spouse, you are cutting yourself from closeness to God, you are damaging yourself, damaging your family, damaging your spouse, damaging your church, and disobeying God.*

### The First Step

Discouraged? Don't be. If this pamphlet has led you to the conclusion that you have less love for your spouse than you thought you did, that is cause for hope, not despair. One of the greatest hindrances to growing in love is the failure to recognize where love is lacking. Many couples make no progress at all in improving their love because they can't bring themselves to admit that they currently have little or no love for one another. It's common for a man to say, "I love my wife, but for some reason I just yell at her all the time." Or "I love my husband, but I have no desire for intimacy with him." Everyone thinks they love their spouse. And so when the problem is caused by lack of love, they can never find the solution because they aren't willing to admit that they do not love their spouse. They think as long as they are committed, then that counts as love. It is only when lack of love is finally admitted that the doors leading to real joy in marriage are thrown open.

Where the emotions of love are lacking it always feels hopeless. It's hard to imagine loving a person you do not love right now. Even the thought of trying to generate those