

HOW TO LOVE YOUR SPOUSE

How do you know if you truly love someone or if someone truly loves you? How do you show your love for someone else? We can learn much about love from the Holy Bible. God and Jesus set the perfect example for us. Many verses in the Bible talk about love.

From the very beginning of man's existence, God has loved mankind and each individual person who has ever lived. Like us, God wants love in return from those whom He loves. But God knows that for love to be true it has to be each person's personal decision to love Him. So God has given each person "free will" to be able to decide on their own, whether they want to love or not. No one can be forced to love someone else, for this would not be true love. Therefore you cannot force anyone to love you and no one can force you to love them either. We must all decide on our own who we want to love.

True love is unconditional. Although God may dislike what we do - our sinful acts and thoughts - He still loves us for who we are. Unconditional love is often seen between a parent and their child, but how often is it seen between a spouse and their spouse? Can you forgive your spouse like you can your child? Can you forgive their past? Will you be able to forgive their future? Remember your wedding vows "...for better or for worse..." This was a promise you made to your spouse unconditionally.

True love is sacrificial. John 3:16 states "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus willingly gave His life on the cross so all who believed in Him could have their sins forgiven so they could have eternal life in heaven. While alive on earth, Jesus constantly, unselfishly, and generously did many things for others. He expected nothing in return. How often do you sacrifice yourself for others especially for your spouse? How often do you not do something you enjoy just so you can spend time with your spouse (or kids) or so you can do what they enjoy doing? How often does your spouse miss doing what he/she enjoys doing just so you (or your kids) can do what you (or they) enjoy doing?

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians in the Bible has been called "The Love Chapter." It explains how important love is, what it is, and what it is not. Love is very important to God. It has been stated that "God is Love." My understanding is that we were put on this earth to do one thing and that is "To Prepare For Eternity" by doing two things. First we must learn to love and respect our Creator God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Second we must learn to love and respect our neighbors which includes all other people but most importantly our spouse. The marriage between a man and a woman was an institution designed and created by God beginning with the very first couple - Adam and Eve. It was God's intention for man to eventually leave his parents and cleave to his wife to become one in union with each other. God designed and created men and women to be very different and each lacking in certain characteristics and abilities so they would need each other to make each person complete. They need to depend on each other until death do they part. Children need to depend on their parents until they themselves are married. It is very important for spouses to **demonstrate true love** (not sex) **in front of their children.** If spouses show true love for each other, children feel more comfortable, protected and loved themselves. When spouses demonstrate true love for one another and for their children, this promotes a healthier, more secure family. Once your children are married they develop their own union and can develop their own healthy family. I have heard it said that marrying the right person will determine 90% of your happiness throughout the rest of your life. So show your children how to love and teach them to look for a mate who has had a similar upbringing. Although Christians still have problems, disagree, argue and occasionally get divorced, a Christian should marry another Christian who has similar moral and ethical values. Even the Bible says not to yoke a believer with a non-believer.

Verses 4 - 7 of 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 says "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." For true love to survive and grow it takes work and sacrifice from each person. True love has to have time to grow. You will go through several stages (ups and downs) in your relationship before you develop the joy of mature love. **Your spouse should be your best friend,** someone you can trust to share your concerns. **Spend quality time with each other.** What you do with your time together is more important than the amount of time you spend together.

Find out what each other likes and enjoys doing. Regularly find time to do these things together and occasionally to free up time for your spouse to enjoy time by themselves (away from stressful situations and maybe even you). Each person should make a list of "**What I Would Like.**" List small gifts you would like as types of candy, cologne/perfume, flowers, drinks, clothing (with sizes and maybe colors), collectables, etc. Also list holidays and special days and dates which you would like to get a card &/or gift. Also list where you would like to go for a night out, a day trip, a weekend trip, and vacations. List activities you would like to do by yourself, with your spouse, with friends, and with your family, such as a day spa, movies, certain restaurants, bowling, dancing, skating, hunting, fishing, shopping, etc. Update this list periodically and use it as a gift idea list (very helpful for men) and to make plans together.

Good communication with each other is the key to any relationship. **Do not assume your spouse knows** what you want or you know what they want. Many men are clueless to what their wives need and desire even after many subtle hints throughout the year. Women often see this as their husband being unthoughtful and uncaring. But remember that men and women are different and spouses are different. You cannot expect each person to have the same abilities and thought processes. Women, especially those who raise children, are often very aware of what their family's needs are. Often men do not realize how important their wives feel it is that their husbands know what they want and that they remember. If one of you has difficulty remembering certain things, decide together

how to be reminded without either person getting upset. Figure out ways to remind yourself as with notes, calendars, a friend, string on your finger, rubber band on your wrist, alarms, list on door knob or car seat, etc. whatever works.

Don't expect your spouse to know what you are thinking. Realize that no one can read minds and don't assume that you know what others are thinking either. Making wrong assumptions causes problems and hurt feelings. Also **respect the views of others**. Others are not necessarily wrong if their way is not your way. There is often more than one way to take care of a problem. Before or when you present a complaint to your spouse, **try to see their point of view** and be ready to calmly discuss possible solutions. When you discuss things with your spouse, **avoid distractions** as TV, radio, and kids. Do not yell and avoid hurtful words. Remember "**The Golden Rule**" - treat others as you want to be treated. Get used to apologizing and saying "**I'm sorry**" when you have done something wrong. We all make mistakes and we should take responsibility for them. On the other hand it makes it easier for your spouse to apologize if you will listen and try to accept their apology. Although it may be embarrassing to you, your spouse and kids will appreciate you admitting to your mistakes and apologizing for them and your making an effort to correct the problem and making an effort to avoid making the same mistake in the future. This can improve trust and respect for you and open communications between you and your family members.

Learn to appreciate your spouse. Put yourself in your spouses shoes for a day or more. Let your spouse take a day, weekend, or week long trip while you do their household chores. Could you do all that they do for you? What would your life be like if your spouse were no longer with you? What does your spouse do to make your life easier and more enjoyable? Stop and really think about these questions. Begin helping each other out around the house and share more chores.

We often begin to take our spouse for granted and fail to appreciate what they do for us. Show appreciation for even the little things your spouse does for you. It is much easier to complain and find fault in others than to look for the good in people and compliment them. **Thank your spouse** often and find ways to **compliment them every day** -how they look, the meal they prepared, how the house or yard looks, etc. Don't wait for your spouse to make the first move. Start showing appreciation to your spouse and thank them and see how they begin to react. Something will eventually change. Either this marriage will grow or you will be better prepared for the next if it doesn't. Unless it is physically dangerous for you to stay, it is often better to try to fix the marriage you are in now than to have to deal with all the complications and heartache of a divorce, then have to try and see if another marriage will work later.

Treat your spouse like you did when you first started dating. If this were a new friend you cared for and they did things for you, wouldn't you be thankful and want to show them your appreciation. This is why many marriages end in a divorce. A spouse no longer feels appreciated or loved, then someone else begins to treat them with respect, compliments them, makes them feel appreciated and loved. The next thing you know that person is the person they now want to be with instead of their spouse. But if they do not learn how to show their love, the cycle will continue. Don't let coworkers or friends of the opposite sex get too personal with you especially if you are having problems with your spouse since this may lead to romantic temptations. So learn to love the spouse you have now and avoid unnecessary heartaches. Relationships are like plants, if you take time and feed them they can grow but if you neglect them they will die. Although it may seem silly to you, spouses who truly love each other will want to **touch each other** (hold hands, hug and kiss) and **tell each other** "I love you" (and mean it).

Sex is an important part of the marriage relationship. It was designed and created by God to be a special way for a husband and his wife to bond. Respect your spouses concerns about sex. **Discuss likes and dislikes.** Make it enjoyable for both of you. Make it something you both look forward to. If a woman does not feel loved, she probably will not want or enjoy sex. So practice loving each other out of bed before making love in bed. Sexual urges are normal and if unfulfilled by one spouse the other spouse will be tempted to fulfill it another way. So try to fulfill each others needs. Sex outside marriage destroys that special bond and damages the marital relationship. Once married, your body belongs to each other. Neither of you has the right to give your body to anyone else. A few minutes of lustful fulfillment can cause a lifetime of heartache, pain, suffering, and grief. Think of all the painful consequences infidelity can cause to you, your spouse, your family, your friendships and lifestyle. How would you feel if your spouse shared their body with someone else? Could that special bond you once shared ever be the same?

What you put in your mind influences what you think, say and do. **Trash In - Trash Out!** Change your attitude and point of view by changing what you view and listen to. So, get rid of all pornography in your life such as magazines, internet, movies, and even TV shows, discussions with your friends and romance novels. Stop thinking sexual or romantic thoughts about any other person than your spouse. Get rid of anything that causes sexual desires for another person and wrong expectations (as how someone should look or perform). Do this and watch your attraction and desire for your spouse grow. Also look for inspirational and encouraging **music, movies, books and tapes** that teach such things as the differences in how men and women think such as "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus", by John Gray, Ph.D. (get the short 90 minute cassette-tape version and listen to it together). Such information will help each of you realize and appreciate many differences between the two of you and help you understand why your spouse may be acting and thinking the way they do. Watch the 2008 movie "FIREPROOF" with Kirk Cameron. It is an excellent movie which deals with several common marital problems as discussed in this handout. You can also look for information on how to **be more romantic**. This does not come naturally especially for many men; they have to really work at it and their spouse needs to realize this and show appreciation for their often bumbled efforts.

The old sayings - "If you don't use it, you'll lose it" and "We learn by repetition" suggest that you should review such information as this from time to time to refresh your memory so you can strengthen your relationships. **Make a list of ideas to try.** Begin practicing one or two ideas, review your list every week to check your progress, then add more ideas. To see change it takes time, desire and effort. It is easy to go back to the same old habits if you do not work hard to develop good healthy habits. **Pray often** by yourself and/or with your spouse for God to strengthen your relationship and teach you how to love your spouse.