

Love is Patient Giving and Forgiving

Welcome to ***Exciting True Love: The Truth Will Set You Free***. We have spent the last 4 weeks studying God's design for sex. It certainly fits in the category of "exciting". We found out God created sex and all the pleasure that accompanies the sexual experience for a husband and wife to enjoy.

God created it for them without sin and without shame. God also desires a husband to bring happiness to his wife, and that is quite important to God. We also found last week that a husband and wife have great freedom in their sexual relationship together.

God's desire is that their sexual relationship be so great that a husband would rejoice in his wife and that he would always be satisfied by her body and love-making.

I have just read Chip Ingram's outstanding book *Love, Sex and Lasting Relationships* and I have found it brilliant. The first part of the lesson today is from his material. He teaches about how to have a meaningful relationship that does not end. Who doesn't want that? If you can get a copy of this book, I highly recommend you read it.

Lesson:

You are here today with Nancy Crane on ***Exciting True Love: The Truth Will Set You Free***. We are going to take a break from speaking about sex to talk a bit about love.

The first part of **Ephesians chapter 5** in the Bible says

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love

We are told to do two things here: [to] imitate God and to live a life of love. Literally, that means to walk in love. How do we imitate God and walk in love?

The word "therefore" in this verse tells us to look at what was written before this to understand what the Bible is referring to. The previous verses say

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

So that is how we can imitate God and walk in love? Forgive our spouse like God forgave us in Christ? And how did he forgive us?

at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly
[Romans Chapter 5, verse 6]

He didn't wait until we said we were sorry or even felt badly about it. So that is how we are to walk in love – we forgive even before the one we say we love has said they were sorry.

Along with that, we get rid of bitterness, rage and anger. We stop talking badly about them – we don't slander them. We get rid of all meanness towards them. We are kind and compassionate to them. We treat them gently and are thoughtful of them.

To be compassionate, we work to understand the world from our spouse's point of view. That causes us to appreciate them, and to tell them so. It causes us to say we are sorry when we have hurt them, been unkind or selfish.

Thomas wronged his wife earlier but now he is being kind and compassionate when he said to her, "I realize that having yelled at you when you burned the dinner only added to the problem. I know that you aren't trying to waste food, and I'm sorry to have spoken to you as if you do."

If saying you're sorry is very difficult for you now, think of giving your wife a significant gift, a kitenge, taking her to dinner. Come to her humbly and offer the gift. You want to reconcile with your wife.

In many cultures, people think saying sorry is a sign of weakness or a sign of being a failure. You may have made a mistake but being able to apologize is a sign of strength. It means you have learned one of the skills for a good marriage. Being able to reconcile with your spouse will bring wholeness and strength to your marriage. It will bless your marriage. An apology is opening the door for reconciliation. That's imitating God.

Walking in love isn't referring to the feelings we call love when we say "I just love Charlie." Walking in love is choosing to do loving actions and to have loving attitudes. These are tough things the Lord is calling us to do.

The Bible says "imitate God" and how can we do that? It says "as dearly loved children". God loves us, but not because of anything we've ever done. God cares for us, God delights in us, God is for us because that is his character. He simply loves us.

How much we know that we are loved, unconditionally, by our Lord: that is what will motivate us to love our spouse as God says to. That is what will motivate us to get rid of the bitterness, rage, anger and malice that are killing our marriage.

It is what will motivate us to speak well of our spouse when we could speak badly about them. Being forgiven, when we didn't deserve it and hadn't even apologized to God, motivates us to forgive even when our spouse doesn't deserve it. That's love.

I think that when we have trouble loving our spouse, we need to spend some time with God, to soak in his love. So we can

Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [New American Standard Bible]

Chip Ingram writes that walking in love means giving the other person what he needs the most when it is least deserved.

Our husband, our wife needs to feel loved. How can we accomplish that?

Gary Chapman has studied love, particularly how people show love and what is done so they feel loved. He says there are five different ways that people do this. Chapman calls these love languages – different ways of loving – kind of like different ways of speaking– different languages. So he calls them "love languages". I want to simply look at those five different ways to give you some new ways to walk in love, to give you some new ideas.

Let me explain the first love language with Esther who needs words of affirmation or praise. She feels very loved when her husband tells her any statements like these:

- “Esther, you look really good today in that dress.” or,
- “You are a great mom. Our children are doing well because of how you have loved and taught them.” or,
- “Wow, Esther! That meal you cooked was really tasty. You really work hard to make our home nice.”

Esther feels very loved when spoken to that way. Those are *words of affirmation*.

William also likes *words of affirmation*, statements like:

- “You are very thoughtful of our family’s needs. Thanks.”
- “Your solution to that problem was clever.”

A *word of affirmation* is saying something about your spouse that has an impact on you. An SMS that says “The way you praised our son today made me proud to be your wife” tells William that his wife loves him.

Say some *words of affirmation* to your husband, to your wife today and see how they react. If praising your spouse is new to you, think about what you will say. You can even make a list of the things that you admire about your husband or wife. If it helps you, plan your praise, even plan where and when you will say it. Do it every day for a week and see if it doesn’t make a difference in your marriage.

The second love language is *touch*. Naomi feels very loved when her husband puts his arm around her, or when he sits close by her so their knees touch, or when he reaches over and puts his hand on her arm. When he does these things, Naomi feels very loved. She likes it when her husband rubs her neck. And when he lies close to her in bed, she feels very, very loved.

Timothy’s love language is also touch and he loves it when his wife holds his hand or when she kisses him. Try gently touching your spouse in different ways and see if he or she doesn’t feel more loved.

So we have *words of affirmation* and *touch*.

Something that is interesting about love languages: some of them won’t mean “love” at all to us. Henry can’t imagine why anyone would have the love language *touch*. Oh, he doesn’t mind touching his wife during sex, but when they are sitting beside each other to reach out and put his hand on his wife’s seems very unnatural to him.

Holding hands with his wife while they are walking down the street or giving her a hug when he comes home, makes him feel like they are one of those couples he has seen standing outside of the discos. It feels very unnatural to him.

Let’s think about it though. Is it sinful for a husband and wife to touch? Absolutely not. And, many people need to be touched to feel loved. That reaching out to hold his wife’s hand, to put his arm around her, might be just the thing to melt the heart of Henry’s wife.

He needs to try touching her several times and in different ways and see, if after the initial reaction, it makes her feel special. If she doesn’t like it, we’d say then that touch is not her love language.

You can be creative with these love languages. Remember Esther, whose love language is *words of affirmation*. Her wise husband writes her notes that he puts in her purse that compliment her.

He also fixed her cell phone to read, “You are beautiful” every time it opened. Be creative. Our God is creative and you are made in his image so that means that you are creative too.

Afterword:

Many people have heard of the Scriptures that talk about sowing and reaping. It is the idea that if you plant a seed (that’s called sowing a seed), you will harvest (or reap) that same kind of seed. If you plant a maize seed, you’ll get maize. You don’t get a tomato. You get what you planted. Christians will often say that you reap what you sow.

If you plant hatred or bitterness, you will not get love, because we reap what we sow. If you want love, you plant love. Malaika says, “I’m not going to show my husband love until he starts being nice to me.” If Malaika wants love from her husband, she needs to start planting love now. She needs to start showing him love, even before her husband changes.

Romans chapter 12 verses 21 says

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Plant love, to later harvest love.

Imitate God, as dearly loved children and walk in love. Don’t wait until your spouse changes. Do it now. You be the one to take the first step. Because of how you are loved by God, you can show love, even when your spouse is difficult.

Once more, let’s read Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2

Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So let’s start showing love to our spouses, if we are married. Let’s walk in love. This week, try showing love through *words of affirmation* (praise) and through *touch*.

What if you aren’t married? If you ever plan on getting married, this material is important. We need to know how to love well. Learning to imitate God and walk in love is something you start now, at whatever age you are. You walk in love with your parents, your family and, if you are in a relationship, you imitate God and walk in love in that relationship.

This material on “love languages” is useful to show love to anyone important to you – certainly your husband/wife, but also your parents and your children.

This week, practice the two you learned today on your spouse– *words of affirmation* and *touch*. Then, next week on ***Exciting True Love***, join me, Nancy Crane, as we discuss the three remaining love languages.