LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LIVING OUT LOVE IN MARRIAGE: LEARNING AND APPLYING FOUR TYPES OF LOVE TO SUSTAIN MARRIAGE

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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By

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Dedicated to the women who showed me love, and showed me how to love:

Pinky, Diara, Kaila, Arria,

Estella, Erica,

Mrs. Lillie Reid, and The Reid Sisters.
LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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Erroyl McGinty, Jr.

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013

Mentor: Dr. Homer Massey

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis project is to show married couples, and those who want to be married how to live out God’s love in their marriage. We will examine and explain four components of love; Feelings and Physical Love (Eros), Action and Service (Philia), Commitment and Covenant (Storge), and God’s Love (Agape). We will show the biblical foundation for each of the four parts. The material used will come from the life experiences from couples of all types of marriages (new, successful, troubled, failing, divorced, separated, recovering, etc.). Much of the research will come from surveys of couples. Other research will come from authors, counselors, and researchers who have written on love, relationships, and marriages, etc. The practical use for this thesis is in a couples’ ministry, a distressed marriage, premarital and marital counseling, or a couple looking to tune-up their marriage through understanding the principles of living out love in their marriage.

Abstract Length: 155
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“Sarah, I just can’t do this anymore! I want out.” Mike confessed. He was exasperated, and beaten after an hour of intense arguing over finances, or his mother, or was it about sex? “I love you, and I believe you love me too, but it’s just not working. Maybe we aren’t meant for each other” he finished.

They had been married for three years, and this evening of arguing, quips, verbal jousting, and silent treatments was just one in a string of many that had become more frequent since the honeymoon ended and the marriage had begun.

“I wish you would just tell me how to make you happy”, Sarah replied through frustrated tears. “I can’t figure it out on my own, you know?!” She too was defeated and deflated by this point. She sat on the edge of the bed, her face hidden from Mike, and sobbed as silently as she could.

“I don’t know how to tell you to love me, Sarah. You should know!

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In this day’s fast-paced, instantly gratifying, microwaved world an alarming number of married couples find themselves at the same point as the couple in the opening story. They find themselves on the verge of separating or divorcing, arguments are the norm in their homes, their worlds in disarray, and turmoil abides within what should be a safe haven. They cannot pinpoint where it all went wrong. They have known for some time that things are not quite right. They argue and fight over the smallest, insignificant things, and they can go for days at a time barely
speaking to one another, let alone physically touching each other. The good days and times seem to be choked out by the bad ones. The pressure created by careers, school, children, in-laws, family, and, selfishness, even ministry only exacerbates these issues.

This is not the way a Christian marriage should be. God did not intend for us to spend our life in the doldrums waiting for the sweet release of death, or worse divorce. His intent in our married lives, as with life in general is joy! We have allowed the weaknesses of flesh to steal the joy from our marriages. We have suffered violence, and the violent must take it back by force!

Why write this?

As a pastor, I frequently counsel distressed spouses. Too often, I am counseling only one of the spouses. For a four-year period, I did the vast majority of this counseling on a military base in an overseas location. The number of couples in distress astounded, and quite honestly shook me. My heart ached for the hurting couples, and dying marriages. I saw so many children ill affected, so many thoroughly confused wives, bewildered husbands, and saddest of all many relationships with Christ shattered. There were countless affairs, emotional and physical abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, financial disasters, separations, arrests and police reports, fights, etc. The list goes on further. I was lead to write a book on what is the only true remedy for it all; the panacea that is God’s love. This thesis project is the start of that book.

Benefits-

This thesis has a broad range of potential applications. The potential benefits are numerous. The immediate benefit will be to couples reading, learning, and applying lessons and ideas from this thesis project. Subsequently, the families of said couples will benefit and then their communities, and society at large. If our couples are stronger, and are able to actually live the love they feel and profess then our families will be stronger. If our families are stronger then
the entirety of the individuals touched through schools, workplaces, and general relationships is potentially immeasurable.

In a ministry setting the content here can be the staple of a couples’ ministry, but would probably be best used to supplement a marital curriculum that is already in place. It can be used as a tool in premarital and marital counseling. A couple looking to get married can avoid many of the conflicts that arise by learning and applying the principles of living love. Many of the frustrations that typically go along with marriage may be viewed from the perspective of love, and as such create understanding instead of strife. The information is timeless, and as such can be used for newlywed classes, marriage seminars, or for well-seasoned couples looking to fine-tune, or re-tune the relationship that they have with their spouses. The main purpose for these pages is as an aid, or tool for married Christian couples to learn methods of love in order to experience a greater existence in their marriages.

STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

In the process of creating this thesis, writing its’ content, and conducting the corresponding research for it questions arose that could not be answered within its’ pages; whether due to time constraints, or the tangent being to far off course. There are several areas that could not be covered in these pages. These areas may be looked upon for further and/or future study. They are: blended families, non-Christian marriages, non-Americans, and the potential maturation process of a person (including the hindsight of a divorced person).

The phenomenon of blended families occurs when at least one of the spouses has children from a relationship other than the current spouse; “a family consisting of a couple and their
children from this and all previous relationships.”¹ This was an area that came to my attention during the creation of the survey. It was unforeseen, but with divorce rates being what they are, is obviously a big part of today’s marriages. While the discussion of raising children is a part of this thesis, the particular issues that may occur as a result of raising someone else’s child with a spouse are not covered.

This thesis was particularly done with Christian couples in mind as the target audience. The love that God has for all of creation is not limited to Christians, however those who have accepted Christ, and who follow His teachings and the unction of the Holy Spirit should be held to different standards than those who have not, and who do not. A person who has come into the knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior should be different than, and is expected to act differently than a non-Christian in the same situation, and circumstances including marriage. Therefore, advice given to Christian couples should, at times, differ from advice given to non-Christians, because a non-Christian or a person following God’s statutes loosely cannot comprehend the path of light that God has ordained for those couples who have joined Him in a marital covenant.

Much of the information here is applicable to any married Christian. However, some of the assumptions are about those who live in an American society, and the vast majority of the historical data was gathered in America. Therefore, while the principles discussed here are certainly valid in any Christian’s life, the background information used to construct the problem may be different in another part of the world. Any person reading these pages should be aware of these cultural peculiarities. By in large, the general assumptions, and presented statistical data refer to the American culture and society, and presumably may not be accurate in other places.

¹ New Oxford American Dictionary, Version 2.2.3 (118.5) for Apple Inc., “Blended Family.”
Another area that could not be adequately addressed here is the change that a person undergoes with time. A person is often more mature with age, and tends to view situations differently at a more advanced age than in youth. A wiser person may understand forgiveness better, or may have learned to be more disciplined and self-controlled. This maturing is of course true for couples as well. For instance, a typical couple will have different types of arguments, with different sources of frustrations from year-one to year-five. In many cases, money becomes less of, or a non-issue as yearly career raises or promotions, and advancements occur. Naturally, a young financially struggling couple may have disagreements about budgets, spending habits, and funds allocation, whereas that may not be the case with regards to a couple ten years married. This may also be true of couples who married at an older age where their salaries were somewhat substantial to begin with, and their discipline level in regards to spending were mature.

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR PROJECT

The topic of applying God’s love to sustain marriage certainly has relationship with the Bible. Biblically speaking, and in general, Christians are expected to love. This expectation is clearly spelled out in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 13. Paul gives us a litany of behaviors and gifts that Christians should do and may have, but juxtaposed with love.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 1 Cor 13:1–3 NKJV
In fact, in his comparison here, he uses *agape* love. This makes clear that we are to place learning *God’s* love, and applying His love in our relationships as paramount. Two of the other three forms of love could have been used here. He could have used *Phila* or *Storge*. They both show deep affection, they are both relational, and appropriate to use in a general setting. But he chose God’s love, *Agape*, because of the enormity of the command and the importance of comparison.

Moreover, in marriage this should be the rule. In Ephesians 5:25 it reads, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church…” This statement is foundational for a *healthy* marriage. If the husband’s command is to love as Christ loved then the begged question must be, “How did Christ love?” Again, Paul uses agape. However, this is an obvious place to use it because he is referring to Christ after all. Christ loved the church unconditionally. The latter part of that scripture says that Christ gave himself for her. Many times this is taught only as; Christ loved the church so much that He was willing to die for the church. While that is certainly the case, here the word *gave* is used. This is because Christ lived for the church. He gave, or sacrificed not only is life (as in death), but also His *life* (as in living). Loving a spouse enough to live for them, is much more difficult than dying. Living *for* our spouses is the mandate that Christians are called to; it is how we are called to love.

Another arena is where relationship with the topic of this thesis is socially. If marriages are better and stronger, then families will be as well. If families are better, then communities, and then society at large will also be affected in a like manner. Unfortunately the process, this line of thinking, works for the negative as well, and I am convinced that we see this in our societies today. Marriages and families are not strong, and therefore we have turmoil in our societies at large. The general mindset of society in America is that of disposing of things that we’ve
outgrown, overused, misused, and broken. Sadly, it appears that spouses are no different. It is common knowledge that divorce rates have climbed over the last few decades. If asked, the average person could tell you that the divorce rate is at or over 50%. This indicates that the current view on marriage in society appears to be that of running away when there are signs of serious trouble. There seems to be a lack of stick-to-it-iveness.

STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

The problem as stated is the deteriorating institution of marriage. The main issue starts with the fact that a marriage consists of two individuals. A modern marriage typically consists of two individuals who have grown up separately, who most likely have been reared differently, who have had marital roles modeled for them by their parents, who have lived with different rules placed upon them, and who have come together to all of a sudden live as one. Simply put, a selfish, self-serving individual has been joined in Holy Matrimony and is now expected to be selfless, and have the knowledge and skills to please another selfish, self-serving individual. Those are just the endogenous pressures upon every person. When extraneous pressures and influences are added into this mixture, it becomes volatile. It should not be a surprise that so many marriages fail, when looked upon this way.

To answer the question of how to fix the stated problem we must determine how to love our spouse the best way that we can love, and determine how to accept his/her love the way that he/she gives it. We determine these by studying the biblical examples of love as in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Chapter 1 of this thesis consists of five main components. They are: The Statement of the Problem, the Statement of Limitations, The Theoretical basis for the project, the Statement of
Methodology, and a Review of the Literature. These are elements that are essential to most theses. They each give specific information to the reader, as well as the researcher/writer, and act as a guide for the remainder of the thesis project. These elements also set perimeters, and goals for the researcher/writer of the thesis and create a focal point.

Chapter 2 **STORGE** is the love of covenant and commitment. The first part of this chapter will be used to define and explain this connotation. In the second part of this chapter the discussion will focus on the decision to be resolved in marriage. To understand why that is so important, we must have some idea how God views the relationship between husband and wife. We then will discuss how to recognize where we are in our commitment to marriage. Next is how to communicate to our spouse, or express how we see our level of commitment and theirs. The next division of the chapter details how to apply Storge in our marriages consistently, in times of peace, and in times of trouble in our marriage. The final portion gives five ways to express Storge to our spouse.

Chapter 3 **PHILIA** is the love of doing and service. The first part of this chapter will be spent defining the term Philia and the connotation presented here in this thesis. The second part of this chapter will be centered on recognizing our level of selflessness, and selfishness. These are the catalysts for serving our spouse, or serving ourselves respectively. The third section deals with communicating how we feel about where the marriage is in regards to this love. The next portion is on applying Philia love through service to our spouse, and the last division gives five examples of how to express this type of love.

Chapter 4 **EROS** is the love of emotions/feelings and physical love. The first part of this chapter is a comprehensive definition of Eros and the connotation presented here. It will explain that Eros has two parts: Emotions and Physical Love. The second part is recognition of the level
importance that we have placed on the two parts of *Eros*. The next part is about expressing our feelings about our needs in this type of love. The next part of this chapter describes how to apply the two parts of *Eros*, in marriage. The final portion gives five ways to express Eros to our spouses.

Chapter 5 *AGAPE* is the love of God. It is the unconditional love of acceptance, forgiveness, and it is the goal for every relationship that we have. This is especially true for marriage. The first part of this chapter is defining what *Agape* is, and the connotation for this thesis. The second part of this chapter is recognizing that we cannot love *like* God, without God. The third part of this chapter will focus on communicating how we see the marriage through the lens of *Agape* love. The next part of this chapter is explaining how to apply God’s love in marriage with forgiveness, moving beyond our pasts, and acceptance. The last part of this chapter gives five ways that *Agape* love can be expressed in marriage.

Chapter 6 will present a summary of the main points of the thesis. This includes a recapitulation of the previous four chapters. This includes a representing of the data collected from research conducted in conjunction with the thesis. In this case a survey consisting of 50 questions was administered, and taken anonymously. Also, and finally, we will again present how to apply the four types of love discussed in this thesis.
LITERATURE REVIEW

BOOKS/RESOURCES

Bait of Satan: John Bevere

This book is about how being offended places us in bondage, and how we as Christians should do our best not to carry offense. As we strive to forgive in all of our relationships, we should certainly forgive those closest to us. This book points out that those closest to us hurt us the most, and have been given the right (by us) to hurt us more deeply. This of course means that we have that right as well. This book will be used as a resource when discussing spousal hurts (which leads to being offended and vice versa), apologies, and acceptance. We must be more apt to forgive, and this book is a resource in learning to do so.

The Bible Exposition Commentary: Warren W. Wiersbe

This commentary will be used as a resource for definitions, translations, and as a reference to different connotations of scriptural interpretations. It is important to have many points of view from which to pull, and form ideas The Bible Expositional Commentary offers solid interpretation and explanation of the books of the bible. This book offers its’ reader a viewpoint of the Holy Bible that has great depth and breadth of study. It will be used as a resource for definitions, translations, and as a reference to different connotations of scriptural interpretations. This book will be used also as a check against other sources, my own biblical interpretations, and interpretations of various Greek translations.
Competent Christian Counseling: Tim Clinton

This resource book will be used to illustrate methods for counseling couples. This book will primarily be used in the counseling capacity, as it contains various successful methods for counseling with Christian values as the foundation for the desired outcomes. There will also be definitions and descriptions used from this resource as well.

Connecting: Larry Crabb

This book was written on the premise that communication goes beyond speaking, hearing, and understanding. Crabb articulates here that connecting beyond communicating is key to establishing truly meaningful relationships. This book will be used to show the importance of introspection in marriage, and depth of its importance in the marital relationship. The book suggests healing for one’s self and one’s relationships, and connecting through experiences. Connecting through experiences is the virtue of this book that will be useful in this thesis.

Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: John Maxwell

This book will be used to illustrate the need for better communication within marriages. This book will be used to show that we must go beyond merely expressing our thoughts and making sure that we are understood. We must, in fact, connect with our spouses on a deeper level if we want a deeper relationship. The book itself is written to incite in the reader that to express ideas (i.e. communicate) is not enough, but rather a genuine connection is needed for a deeper relationship. Marriages must have that deeper relationship, and genuine connection.
\textit{The Five Languages of Apology}: Gary Chapman

One of the follow-up books to the very popular \textit{The Five Love Languages} this book details, as its name suggests, the best ways with which to apologize. The book gives us the tools with which we can recognize how and why we apologize the way we do, and how to recognize how our spouse best receives apologies. This information is helpful for marriage sustenance, and though I will use the book to illustrate the importance of recognizing how best to apologize, I will not use the language of this book, or any form the ideas in this book and present them as my own.

\textit{The Five Love Languages}: Gary Chapman

\textit{The Five Love Languages} is one of the most popular books written on the subject of love and relationships and therefore could not be left out of any literature review on those matters. The book centers on the recognition of how one communicates, and/or demonstrates love best, and how one receives love best as well. I will use the language/jargon of this book, but the information will not be presented as my ideas. Rather, I will use the terminology of the five languages only. This I will do, because Chapman’s five love languages are now commonplace, and universally understood, and recognized.

\textit{His Needs, Her Needs}: Willard Harvey

From 1986 through present day this book has been one of the most widely ready books on sustaining marriage. The book’s focus is staying in love, or rekindling a lost love depending upon a couple’s current situation. The book is referring to romantic and emotional love more than any other. It will be used when delving into the chapter that focuses on \textit{Eros}, which is romantic love, the love of feelings and emotions and physical love. The emotional needs of a
person are paramount to their overall happiness. This book helps to identify those emotional needs.

*Hope Focused Marriage Counseling: A guide to Brief Therapy: Everett L. Worthington*

This book is respected among Christian counselors, secular counselors, and pastors alike. It is a staple in many libraries of those seeking to help struggling marriages. This book will be used here to establish what a Christian marital covenant is. It will also be used to explain what hope is in regards to marriage.

*I Just Wanted to Say I Forgive You: Pamela Malcolm.*

This is a book containing the real-life stories of 22 women who have learned how to forgive despite terrible tragedies in their lives. The book is not partially well written because the book’s author has gathered these stories and has not altered or edited them at all. The stories are, in fact, actually written by the women who went through the ordeals. This book will aid me in understanding the perspective of women and their forgiveness of betrayal, and how they may process and deal with pain. The stories themselves may be referenced as well as examples.

*The Integrative Family Therapy Supervisor: Robert Lee, and Craig Everett*

This book is one that is used to train family and relational counselors in methods of counseling. The book will be used as a counseling reference as ideas are shared in this thesis. It offers steps to take, and parameters to stay within when counseling families.
*Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage*: Mark Gungor

This is a book that attempts to provide the skills to maintain a marriage. The book focuses on scenarios that at times add levity to what can be an intense subject matter. There are tools and techniques provided in this book for the “work” of making marriage work. This book, and the live seminar from which it was spawn, have helped many couples to sustain their marriage. The information in it will be used as a reference for some of the tools and techniques. Any and all information will be cited as such.

*The Love Dare*: Stephen Kendrick, and Alex Kendrick

The Love Dare is a 40-day journal that was mass-produced in conjunction with the Christian-written and produced movie, *Fireproof*. The crux of the book is a challenge everyday that involves introspective looks, and selflessness, and ultimately self-assessment. The purpose is to make the participant (person performing the acts) more aware of his/her own actions, spark a change that is long-lasting, and bring spouses closer to God and one-another. The use of this book will be to demonstrate the selflessness that is needed to engage one’s spouse.

*Listening*: Madelyn Burney-Allen

This book was written for self-assessment and self-realization pertaining to how well, and effectively one listens, and interprets what they have heard. This book will be used when describing the importance of communication, conflict resolution, and turmoil avoidance. The book is written as a workbook, but the exercises will not be used. Some of the terminology may be used in this thesis.
Opening Up 1 Corinthians: Derek Prime

*Opening Up*… is a series of commentaries presented by various noted theologians, on the books of the Bible. The books offer a conservative, well-studied viewpoint of the Holy Bible. This commentary will be used as a resource for definitions, translations, and as a reference to different connotations of scriptural interpretations. It is important to have many points of view from which to pull, and forms ideas. This book will be used also as a check against other sources, my own biblical interpretations, and interpretations of various Greek translations.

Opening Up 1 Thessalonians: Tim Shenton

*Opening Up*… is a series of commentaries presented by various noted theologians, on the books of the Bible. The books offer a conservative, well-studied viewpoint of the Holy Bible. This commentary will be used as a resource for definitions, translations, and as a reference to different connotations of scriptural interpretations. It is important to have many points of view from which to pull, and forms ideas. This book will be used also as a check against other sources, my own biblical interpretations, and interpretations of various Greek translations.

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Les and Leslie Parrott

*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* is a resource for counseling and can be used as a premarital counseling tool in addition to being used by troubled couples. This book will be used as a counseling resource for examples and connotations of terms and generally held opinions. Specifically, the “unspoken rules” and “predetermined roles” presented in this book will be used when describing the problems created by having different backgrounds, and being raised in different ways.
*Spiritual Leadership*: Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby

The Blackabys are well renowned, well liked, and much respected giants in Christian leadership circles. While this book may not have been written with the idea of marriage in mind, the husband/father of a household is the leader of that household according to scripture. Having a good understanding of what it takes to lead people easily translates to a family situation. The many topics of this book ranging from conflict resolution to communication and prayer may be used in this thesis as tools for improving marital relations.

*Surviving an Affair*: Willard Harvey and Jennifer Chalmers

The book is, as its name suggests, about getting through an affair and rebuilding, and fortifying a marriage. The book takes a look at the spouses on both sides of the affair. This book will be used as a resource for understanding the reconciliation process. We will not use the techniques that the authors use, but some of the information may be cited in this thesis. The terminology of “wayward spouse” and “victim spouse” used by these authors may be referenced as well.

*A Quick Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling*: Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins

This resource book will be used to illustrate methods for counseling couples. This book will primarily be used in the counseling capacity, as it contains various successful methods for counseling with Christian values as the foundation for the desired outcomes. There may also be definitions and descriptions used from this resource as well.
SCRIPTURES

Colossians 3:19

The command given to husbands here in the book of Colossians is very clear in its meaning. Husbands are to love their wives with an unconditional love; this is Agape love. The importance of this scripture, and the way that it will be utilized is accountability. There are many passages in the Bible that may be open for interpretation. People may read a passage in the Bible and based upon their own filters, may understand a meaning that is not what the writer intended. It may or may not be valid and/or applicable for living. However, this passage is not one of said passages. It is short, direct, and absolutely clear in its’ meaning.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 & 9

In this scripture we learn that Marriage is God-ordained safe guard against immoral behavior. Paul tells us that once we are married that our bodies are now property of our spouses. Sexually, “the husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband”. It is a duty, and so as opposed to looking at this from the perspective of “I have needs that you must meet”, it will be discussed from the standpoint of “it’s about my mate, not me”. In other words the giving to, rather than receiving from, should be the focus of each partner. This scripture is important for a few more reasons. In addition, it tells us that when we deny our spouses sex that the door for temptation is opened. While this will be presented here, it also explains that the temptation arises because of a lack of self-control.
1 Corinthians 7:10-11

This scripture is one that shows how God feels about divorce. It illustrates that God does not like divorce and has placed stringency upon the conditions by which a believer is allowed to leave their spouse. This scripture will be used to support and show God’s love of marriage, and His desire that we do not divorce.

1 Corinthians 13

This portion of scripture is used to show what is expected of Christians in relationships. The list of spiritual gifts and blessings that God endows on Christians is amazing. Paul writes to the Corinthians with this in mind. Saying that all of these gifts are great, but then he says that love, Agape love, is essential. He repeats the pattern of mentioning a gift and how wonderful it is to have that gift, but then reminds the recipient of said gift that it has no value if love is not at his/her core. While Paul is not directly referring to marriage in this passage, he is referring to relationships. Other than our relationship with God, there is no more important relationship than that with our spouses. We are expected to show this Agape love to others, it should start with our spouses.

2 Corinthians 3:14-17

Where the Spirit is, there is liberty. This scripture will be used in the chapter on Agape Love to discuss a life of liberty free from the burdens of our pasts. The scripture is often taken out of context and taught only as a means to show that God gives us freedom. Here the veil and blindness to the scriptures will be addressed, as well as, the much quoted portion involving the Spirit and liberty.
Ephesians 5:25

This portion of scripture will be used to discuss the relationship that Paul chose when describing how Christ loves the church, and how husbands should love wives. Therein, Paul gives the order that husbands should love wives just as Christ loves the church. This statement is enormous, even before we realize that the love used here is God’s love of agape. To love someone in the same manner as Christ did illustrates to us just how important it is to God. My attempt here is to show Christ not only died for the church, but also that He lived for the church; which can be infinitely more difficult to do.

Galatians 5:13-14

I will use this passage of scripture to further illustrate that God has given us the command to love with the greatest love that we have. I will discuss the methods that we use in loving someone. The passage will help the reader to identify if the love that they love with is the love that God wants them to love with. We will know by an examination of ourselves, through the filter that is this passage, if our method of loving our spouse is effective.

Genesis 1

The passages in Genesis will be used to show how God feels about marriage and family. It was the institution that He created. He could have chosen to create a people, or nation, or even His beloved church first, but He chose to create the holy union of man and wife first. This is the establishment that He chose to populate the Earth with. Within itself, that shows how important matrimony is to God. To place the entire lineage of the human race within the confines of marriage demonstrates the amount of significance that it holds with God.
Genesis 2:24

This passage of scripture details the establishment of the marital union. It is the joining of two souls, and the combining of flesh in Holy Matrimony. I will use this scripture to teach about how God feels about marriage, and commitment. It will be used in the storage section of this thesis, which is the section detailing commitment and decision.

Hebrews 13:4

This scripture tells us that marriage is to be held in honor, and that the bedroom should remain pure. This scripture is often misunderstood and used as carte blanche for justification for anything goes in the bedroom. We will clarify this for understanding. This scripture will be used in this thesis in the section dedicated to physical love to illustrate purity of the bedroom, and honoring of marriage.

John 1

This passage, John 1:1-3 illustrates the very high level of love and intimacy that God used to make the world. He, the Father, used the spoken (living-word) who is Jesus, to bring all things into existence. Because God is all-powerful, He could have merely thought creation into being. The belief here is that by creating all things through Jesus, God the Father was showing a love that would not and could not be matched until the sacrifice at Calvary.

1 John 1:9-10

The subject of forgiveness is one of the most important topics that can be discussed in marriage. This scripture talks about God’s character concerning forgiveness. It states that
confession, admission of guilt and acknowledgement of sin in our lives is essential to God forgiving us. This scripture will be used in the section dedicated to Agape love to teach on the principle of forgiveness.

1 John 4:7-10

God is love. These three words should resonate deeply with every Christian, because we are striving to be Christ-like. If we are in fact trying to be closer to His character, and less of who our flesh wants us to be, then we should be attempting to be love. We must strive to live love since we cannot actually be love like God is. The passage will be used in this thesis to demonstrate this idea.

Luke 7:40-47

In the section of this thesis dedicated to Agape love, there is a division that explains and instructs on forgiveness of others and unforgiveness toward others. This passage of scripture shows Jesus teaching that one, who has been forgiven a large debt, loves more than one who has been forgiven a small debt. This passage will be used to illustrate the importance of, and the freeing power of forgiveness in marriage.


In this scripture Jesus is teaching about the greatest command. Naturally, because God is love, the greatest command is to love Him. Jesus teaches that if we love God with all that we are, and love one another just as you love yourself then everything else will take care of itself. These lessons will be used to teach about priorities in marriage, and the importance of loving your
spouse (who is your neighbor), and how it is almost as important as loving God. It is second on Jesus’ list.

Luke 17:3-4

This portion of scripture deals with rebuking and forgiveness. Here, Jesus is giving instructions to the disciples in the art of relationship building. He explains rebuking is important when you have been sinned against, but also explains that if the person asks for forgiveness that we must give it. In fact, He says that we must forgive as many times as the person asks for forgiveness. This is how this scripture will be used in this thesis. We will show that marriage, being the closest of relationships, will often have many times when one partner will sin against the other, and forgiveness will be needed. Also, though, we will discuss that it may be necessary to rebuke as well. Jesus said that if you are sinned against seven times in a day you must forgive if they ask it of you!

Mark 2:19

In this verse Jesus makes a metaphor, and compares Himself to a bridegroom and the church as His bride. This verse will be used to illustrate the simple fact that marriage is very important to God. I believe that Jesus chose this comparison not only to drive the point home that He had to leave the disciples, but also to make two other points. The first point made, was to show how much He loved the church. By using that imagery there would be no doubt of His affections toward the church. The second point was to show the importance of marriage. He could have chosen the metaphor of fishing, which He had had used before, to make this point. He
chose marriage because the importance of His mission needed a metaphor of tremendous value to be effective.

Mark 3:25-27

Here Jesus tells us that a house that is divided against itself will not stand. He is defending who He is, and explaining that why He could not be Beelzebub as some supposed. He is not referring to marriage in this instance, but it can be applied to many situations including a marital house divided.

This passage will also be used to teach about distractions, temptations, and the spiritual alignment of the family using the portion that says, “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man.” This portion is key to relationships. It tells us that problems come into our marriage either because we are not strong, or we are tied up. Either way, the outcome is not good.

Mark 10:9

This phrase has most likely been proclaimed at nearly every Christian wedding. “What God has joined, let no man put asunder.” This scripture is a command from the Lord to stay married, because He has joined the couple together. This scripture will be used to reinforce how God feels about commitment. It will be used in the Storge portion of this thesis, which is based on commitment, covenant, and a decision to love.
Mark 10:21

This scripture will be used to show that even in rejection we should express love. Here is the story of the rich young ruler. The man with many possessions who could not sell them in order that he might truly follow Jesus. Mark writes that, prior to telling the man that he was insufficient, Jesus loves him. Even in a situation in which we must deny our spouses there must be a way to do it with love. The man in this passage goes away sad, but not without love.

Matthew 5:9

Here, Jesus says that those people who make peace shall be called children of God. We will use this scripture to discuss the importance of conflict resolution in the section of this thesis on commitment. We will explain the difference between keeping peace and making peace.

Matthew 6:12

The Model Prayer has many lessons to teach us. The portion that will be focused on is the embedded lesson on forgiveness. This scripture will be used in the same manner that Jesus taught it. Further, it will be used to illustrate how we should forgive others, and how the Father looks at our forgiveness and determines from that, how He will in turn forgive us.

Matthew 6:19-21

This passage of scripture refers to the place in each of us that holds our treasure. Jesus states that place is our hearts. He teaches us that where we invest what we love there are the things that posses our hearts. This scripture will be used to illustrate this point, in a discussion about selfishness in the sections on Philia love.

In these two scriptures the writers talk about how God provides for the animals of the world. They place emphasis on that fact that humans are important to God, and that we should reason that if He provides for them He will provide our needs as well. They continue to explain that we ought not worry, because we must trust in Him. This scripture will be used to teach about prioritizing and God being a supplier of our needs in conjunction with a bigger lesson on trusting God first, then others.

Matthew 18:21-22

Nowhere is the practice of forgiveness more important than in the relationship between a man and wife. This passage illustrates the principle of forgiveness very well. Here Peter asks a question of Jesus that is rather peculiar in that he also offers an answer that he believes is more than sufficient. Jesus, in the way that only Jesus can, then tells him that forgives is a never-ending event and process. I will use the scripture just as Jesus did, to illustrate that in marriage we must forgive as many times as it is necessary. Forgiveness is essential if a marriage is to survive, and thrive.

Matthew 19:3-9

This, more than any other verse tell us that as much as God loves marriage, He does not like divorce. Jesus says here that God allowed divorce because of the “hardness of hearts”, BUT that in the beginning this was not the case. We know that God is the one constant in all of existence, and as such His ideas about what He loves do not change. Therefore when Jesus says,
that “in the beginning this was not so”, means that God made a concession, but it does not mean that He feels any differently about marriage or divorce.

1 Peter 4:8-9

In this passage Peter is reminding the churches to whom he writes, of the power of love. He is encouraging the church to keep a priority of loving one another, as love will cover many sins. This scripture will be used to explain forgiveness in the Agape section of this thesis. Love is the thing that allows us to forgive those closest to us even after multiple offenses.

Philippians 4:10-13

This scripture, though it is not referring to martial affairs, will be applied as such because it is applicable. Paul is speaking about the support that he used to receive that either slowed or stopped, and has presently been reestablished. His situation perfectly mirrors the typical sex-life of a married couple. The intended use of this scripture is while discussing Eros, the love of feelings and physical love.

There is a natural progression in the sex-life of a person. In every marriage there is a time of abundance, a time of lack, and a time of declination; also with peaks and valleys along the way. Therefore there must be an understanding of the seasons that the marriage is in sexually. A person must find contentment in times of sexual surplus, and sexual lack, with the understanding that Christ is the strength behind the confidence in the contentment.

Another use for this scripture will occur in the section of this thesis that refers to Agape. It will be used to illustrate that the only possible way to love our spouses, as God would have us to love them, is through Christ.
Psalms 37:4

Delighting in the Lord is akin to submission to God’s will. The notion is to willingly and joyfully submit to what He desires. This scripture will be used when teaching about submission to God’s will in the Agape section of this Thesis. The covenantal aspects of this scripture will be highlighted, as well as, its cyclical nature.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

This passage will be used in the portion of this thesis that discusses sexual issues in marriage. I will use this scripture to show that we ought to be self-controlled, with an emphasis places on sexual matters. This scripture explicitly says that we should not fornicate and that we should be in control of our “vessels”. This is a major cause for arguments in marriage. Whether some feel that they do not have enough sex and pressure their partner, or another decides to go outside of their marriage for sexual gratification, self-control may be the answer for the former, and is certainly is the solution for the latter.

1 Timothy 6:6-11

The thrust of this passage of scripture is about priorities, and contentment with what God has blessed us with. We will use it not only to emphasize this point, but we will also use it to express how spouses should be as selfless as possible. In explaining this latter point, we will show how if we are working to accumulate worldly possessions, (not just money), that we cannot be where God wants us to be in marriage because of the “snares, lusts, and sorrows” mentioned here as warnings. Also, verse 11 of this scripture gives instructions of what we should pursue. In these six verses love is used twice. There is a significance of prioritizing here. The first time,
Philia is used in regards to money. This statement is a negative one; meaning we ought not do it. The second time is a positive statement in which *Agape* is used. It is one of the pursuits that Paul urges us to have.

**Titus 2:4-6**

In this scripture, the Apostle Paul writes an instruction that older women should teach the younger women to love their husbands. In fact, the word admonish is used. This indicates that it is an obligation for women to love their husbands just as it is a command for men to do so in Ephesians 5. This scripture will be used to show that God expects for spouses to love each other, but also to indicate some of the qualities that a Godly wife and husband should have. Namely: chaste, sound minded, submissive, self-controlled, and having sound speech. Having and applying these attributes can help in the avoidance of many marital issues, and can help diffuse many arguments that couples may have.

**ARTICLES**

“Applying Hope-Focused Marriage Therapy to Conflict Resolution in Marriage”: Patrice Turner and Jennifer Ripley

This article features research on the biblical approach to marriage counseling, called Hope-Focused. The article itself incorporates the growing research on beneficial and destructive processes in marriage. The article is written to therapists and counselors as an alternative to other methods of treatment. As the method is biblically based it is of interest to this thesis. It will be used in the section dedicated to *Agape*.
“Commitment to One's Spouse as a Predictor of Marital Quality among Older Couples”: Richard Clements and Clifford H. Swenson

Commitment is one of the strongest elements of any relationship, and as such is paramount in marriage. This article researched 72 older couples and found that out of several factors, commitment was the strongest indicator of martial quality. This article’s information will be used in the section of this thesis dedicated to Storge, the love of commitment and covenant. It will be used to emphasize the importance of commitment to one’s spouse, and support those assertions.

“The Differences In Role Division Between Partners In Long-Term Marriages And Their Well-Being”: Ron Pnina

This article was written as an examination of couples married over 45 years, and how their roles in the home change over time. The article raises the question of how the couples view their relationships in the present versus the first three years of their marriage as well. This article will be used to show that change is a part of marriage, and is emanate with age. It will be used in the section of this thesis dedicated to serving, Philia.

“Differentiating Dispositional Self-Forgiveness from Other-Forgiveness”: Associations with Mental Health and Life Satisfaction: Ann Macaskill

The article focuses on the difference between the processes of forgiving one’s self versus forgiving another. The writer also engages unforgiveness, revenge, and anger as alternatives to forgiving. The article even takes a look at the health implications that unforgiveness has. This article will be used in the Agape section, which deals with forgiveness of self and other.
“Dyadic Processes In Early Marriage: Attributions, Behavior, And Marital Quality”: Jared A. Durtschi, Frank D. Fincham, Ming Cui, Frederick O. Lorenz, and Rand D. Conger

This article will be used in the section of this thesis that deals with serving, *Philia* to explain how changing negative, and selfish behaviors have a positive affect on marriages. The opposite is true as well, that selfish behaviors have a detrimental affect on relationships. The article looks at marital quality in light of personal attributes, both negative and positive. It suggests interventions and behavioral changes as counters to the negative attributes.

“Forgiveness in Marriage: Research Findings and Therapeutic Applications”: Everett L. Worthington

Worthington has long offered great marital counseling. In this article he address ways of reconciling spouses after a transgression. We will use the article first, as a standard for defining forgiveness, and secondly in the teachings of forgiveness. We will specifically use the terms Emotional Forgiveness and Decisional Forgiveness as used by Everett L. Worthington. The section of this thesis that deals with forgiveness is *Agape*.

“Gender Difference of Emotional Bias in Sharing Love”:

This article has its’ focus on a computational model for the examination of the different emotional responses of men and women to the same stimuli. The article looks at why men and women value the perception of love differently. The data from this article will be used to support the assertions made in this thesis about the importance of emotional satisfaction, and emotional health in the chapter that focuses on *Eros*.
“Marital Satisfaction: An Examination Of Its Relationship To Spouse Support And Congruence Of Commitment Among Runners”: Julia H. Baldwin, Gary D. Ellis, and Bret M. Baldwin

This article will be used to support the idea that spending time together doing a shared activity increases marital satisfaction and therefore longevity. The article was written in response to the high percentage of divorces, and the researchers deemed as high dissatisfaction among surviving marriages.

“Multifunctional Coding of Conflict Resolution Strategies is Marital Dyads”: Mary Ann Fitzpatrick, Susan Fallis, and Leslie Vance

This article will be used to discuss the why we feel the need to lie to our spouses in a misguided attempt to save them from hurt. The article was written with the premise that interpersonal communication with persons in intimate relationships has innate fallacies. One of these would be the need to protect a loved from hurt, even if that hurt is beneficial in the long term. We have tendencies to want to shelter our loved ones from any pain that they may incur; self-inflicted pain included.

“Perceived Forgiveness from God and Self-Forgiveness”: John M. McConnell and David N. Dixon

The focus of this article is on the hypothesis that people who feel that God has forgiven them, are more likely to be able to forgive themselves. It looks at the difference between general forgiveness versus personalized measures of God’s forgiveness. This article will be useful in explaining the forgiveness portion of Agape love. It will be used in support of assertions that forgiveness is important in relationship maintenance, and to explain how to experience
forgiveness.

“Relational Maintenance, Satisfaction, and Commitment in Marriages”: Daniel J. Weigel and Deborah S. Ballard-Reisch

This article looks at research involving the sustaining of satisfying, stable marriages. The research centered on what the article calls “relationship maintenance behaviors”. It also looks at the differences in the way men and women perceive these behaviors, and how effective the behaviors were in the sample group studied. The information from this article will be used in this paper when explaining how to apply Storge, the love of commitment.

The Role of Conflict Resolution Styles in Mediating the Relationship Between Enduring

“Vulnerabilities and Marital Quality”: Alesia Hanzal and Chris Segrin

This article was written behind the stretch of an examination of conflict styles of newly wedded couples to gauge relationship and marital satisfaction in regards to enduring vulnerabilities. The article found that all of the couples in the study had lower marital satisfaction when engaging in dysfunctional conflict styles. Here this article will be used when discussing the importance of resolving conflicts.

“Romantic love: What’s emotional intelligence (EI) got to do with it?”: Moshe Zeidner, Iris Kaluda

The study examined the role of EI in romantic love among newlywed couples. The article presents a study of how well a person who is aware of his or her emotional indicators can contribute to romantic love in a marriage. The article intended to determine whether emotional
intelligence, or lack thereof, would contribute positively or negatively to marital success, respectively. The use of this article will be in the section of this thesis on *Eros*, when discussing the application of the emotions side of *Eros*.

“Sexual Transformations and Intimate Behaviors in Romantic Relationships”: Tricia Burke and Valerie Young

This article does a study on the association between sexual transformations (changes in sexual behavior for the partner) intimate behaviors, and relationship quality. The study found that the quality of an intimate relationship is positively affected by sexual transformations. It will be used in the section of this thesis that is dedicated to *Eros*, the love of emotions and physical love, to encourage couples to seek to satisfy their spouses to improve the overall quality of their relationship.

“Transgressions, Guilt, and Forgiveness: A Model for Seeking Forgiveness”: Blake M. Riek

This article takes a look at the process of forgiveness. The article intends to look at forgiveness from the position and perspective of the transgressor and not the victim. Specifically it focuses on the situational factors that cause the transgressor to seek forgiveness. The article will be used in the section of this thesis dedicated to *Agape* as it is in this section where forgiveness will be discussed.

“When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages: No Marriage, No Matter How Good, Is Immune to Bad Things”: Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott

We will use this article in the section of this thesis that discusses forgiveness. That is the
chapter on \textit{Agape} Love. Also the article will be used in the chapter of \textit{Storge}, as it pertains to commitment. The article was written to give the reader advice on counseling couples when they are experiencing hardships. It gives the counselor a list of five practices that good couples do in spite of bad things occurring. The article was written as a precursor to the book of the same name.

\textbf{PROLOGUE}

Step 1: Get understanding. Wisdom \textit{is} the principal thing;
\begin{quote}
\textit{Therefore} get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. ~ Proverbs 4:7 NKJV
\end{quote}

Step 2: Recognize where you are. \textquote{One who conceals his disease cannot hope to be cured.} ~ African Proverb.

Step 3: Apply what you’ve learned. Man's greatness consists in his ability to do and the proper application of his powers to things needed to be done. ~Frederick Douglass

Step 4: Express yourself. The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives. ~Tony Robbins

\textbf{Introducing Love}

\textit{Agape, Philia, Storge,} and \textit{Eros} are four Greek words indicating different types of love. Each one of these different types of love has unique properties, and a particular purpose. Two of these are mentioned in the New Testament of the Bible, with \textit{Storge} and \textit{Eros} being omitted, but certainly implied in many instances. I believe that unlocking, learning, and applying these different types of love is one the keys to creating, fortifying, and sustaining a healthy marriage.
You might be thinking, “Love is love, right? Why do we need to know these Greek words, and why are there so many different types of love?” Each of these types has a place in the spousal relationship. The Greek words are not tremendously important for our understanding of how we should live, and how we should act towards our spouses. However, they are important when certain scripture is referenced, and an understanding of context is needed.

Even though we do not have different words for multiple types of love in our English, we do have different types of love. One might recall having said, “I love you, I’m just not in love with you”, and “I love you like a brother”. Or perhaps you’ve comforted one of you children with, “I know it hurts now but, later you’ll realize it’s only puppy love”. We have these different connotations, and adjective-laden loves to express different levels of the depth or seriousness of our feelings.

A healthy marriage must have all four of these types of love. With the same importance all four must be in proper balance. That is not to say that there must be equal amounts of each type. Only that a marriage should have all four types of love being exhibited by each partner to the other. The proper balance of each type will depend greatly on the individuals in the marriage.

There are many books written on the boundaries to set within marriage, understanding our presuppositions and how they affect marriage, and the psychology of individuals. While this book may reference these subjects, the purpose here is to look at love. They are: Storge, the love of commitment and decision, Philia, the love of action and serving, Eros, physical love and the love of feelings/emotions, and Agape, the love of God.
CHAPTER II:

Storge, Family Love: The Love of Commitment and Covenant

Definition

A love based on commitment is important to sustaining a marriage. There should be no
doubt that every marriage has to have commitment. “… Storge (pronounced STOR-gay), refers
to family love, the love of parents for their children.”

This is a love that is covenantal and
decisional at its’ roots. “…the commitment in marriage is a particularly important type of
commitment, a covenant lasting until death.”

It is the love of commitment. This love, Storge,
applied is certainly very powerful and every marriage must have a healthy dose of commitment.
Commitment aids the couple in getting through times of doubt, hurt, and problems. One has to
decide to be committed. There must be a decision made that regardless of what happens, there is
a sense of stick-to-itiveness that both spouses will have. It must be understood that when one
enters Holy Matrimony, that one enters covenant with God, and their spouse.

The vows of marriage state conditions that are rooted in Storge love. Conditions like “for
richer or poorer, in sickness and health, for better or worse” require a commitment beyond what
an individual might be accustomed to in regards to someone other than the immediate family in
which they were raised. Two people coming together as husband and wife will not immediately
have a Storge love. This love grows in us, as we grow and learn one another. It is based on trust
but hinged on faith.

When we love our spouses there has to be more than just feelings, and the emotions of
the honeymoon period. Infatuation can pass just as quickly as it comes, and often comes and

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3 Everett L. Worthington, Hope Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy, 46
goes in marriage. In Proverbs 31:30 it says, “beauty is fleeting” reminding us of this fact; a lasting marriage must be built upon something quite substantial. Physical love will fade with time and age, but a decision to be committed for life should lie at in the heart of every marriage.

There must also be more than just the actions that we use to show we care. There must be a decision to love. There must be a conscious intent to love even when we do not feel loved ourselves, when we do not feel like loving our spouse, and when we do not feel like our spouse is lovable. This type of love, *Storge*, is a conscious decision to be committed and it is based on trust, and faith within the particular relationship. True depth in storge shown to a spouse, can only be gauged by our trust and faith in God.

It has been said that the relationships that you have with your parents affect every other close relationship that you might have. This is especially true when we think about a Christian’s relationship with God, the Father. If a Christian does not fully trust God, it will be difficult for him or her to truly trust another person. Each Christian must seek God and His righteousness first, then trusting another becomes easier, because you are really trusting that God has joined you to this person, and that He has your best interest at heart.

The above referenced scripture, Matthew 6:25-34, is one that many Christians use to remind themselves that God will supply their needs. Will God not also supply the spouse that we need? ”Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” Mt 6:32 NKJV This scripture is not traditionally linked to marriage, but it is applicable here, because it involves God supplying the needs of His children. If having a spouse is a need, then we should let God supply that need. Then loving that person becomes easier. Subsequently, trusting that person becomes easier as well. It may not necessarily
be *easy* mind you, but easier. If we supply this need ourselves by marring whom we *want*, then can we truly say that our *needs* have been met as God promised? It is easier to love the person that God has supplied for us, than the ones we have chosen.

**Recognition**

Before learning to apply this love of *Storge* we must first recognize how God sees the relationship between husband and wife, and then recognize where we are in our level of commitment to our spouse, and if we have made a conscious decision to love them, honoring the covenant through whatever comes against the marriage. There has to be an attitude to honor the covenant and remain committed to it. A covenant is “an agreement that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and his people.” With this understanding, when we read the Bible we see that God, is a God of covenant. Marriage is a covenant.

To get an idea of the gravity of the spousal relationship in the eyes of God, we can look to Jesus as a role model. Christ compared himself to a groom and the church as His bride in Mark 2:19. This is one of the illustrations that show how God sees marriage. He expects for the bond to be so strong that it was chosen to be the metaphor for His son’s relationship to *His* church. This comparison is based on the love that God has for the church. *Storge*.

Jesus loves His bride. His commitment to her was His incarnate life, and bitter death. Why did Jesus do what He did? Why did He suffer the indignations, why did He humble Himself to the point of a death on the cross? Why did He teach them knowing that He would be

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4 *New Oxford American Dictionary*, Version 2.2.3 (118.5) for Apple Inc., “Covenant.”
scoffed at? Why? He did it for His wife. The similarities of a typical marriage and Jesus life and interactions with the Church are many. At times the church rejected Him, tested Him, trapped Him, believed not in Him, berated Him, would not accept Him, and would not trust Him. There were times of great love and accomplishment, joy and wonder as well. He prayed for her, and she betrayed Him.

Is that not what happens in our marriages at times? We have times when we reject our spouses. We trap them, fight and argue with them for pride’s sake, we test and berate them, will not accept them, don’t believe them, and don’t believe in them; in short we dishonor them. We also, pray with and for them, revel in their successes and triumphs, support and care for them, and love them. We teach them and are taught by them. There are times when joy abounds and our hearts are alight. And times in which we are hurt, and we betray, and face betrayal.

But do we have His commitment? His life was dedicated to her, and He was not separated from her until the time of His death on the cross. He stayed committed through richer and poorer, sicknesses and health, better and worse, beatings, being spat upon, crowned with thorns, crowds gathered to welcome Him and sing hosanna to Him, and crowds gathered to shout crucify Him. Through that, He stayed. That is the perfect picture of what a marriage should be. Total dedication. It is covenant!

The next part of recognition is self-assessment. We need to have an understanding of where we are, and what we believe in regards to commitment. A good way to assess this commitment is to determine whether we really believe in the part of the marital vow that says, “for better or worse”. Or rather we can ask the most dangerous question in the world, “what does worse mean in marriage?” If you knew that your spouse was going to be addicted to pornography prior to marrying them, would you have said, “I do?” What if worse means being
married to an abusive alcoholic? What if worse means a serial cheater, or maybe it means a spouse who repeatedly gamblers away the mortgage money.

The mindset with which we come into marriage must be focused on commitment, and a true desire to overcome adversity and fight through problems that may arise. Research shows that not all Christians believe that marriage is forever. In fact, almost 25% do not believe that any problem can be overcome in marriage (See Chart 1).

![Chart 1](chart1.png)

Even more telling, and possibly disturbing, is that 26.4% of that 25% categorized themselves as mature Christians (See Chart 2).

![Chart 2](chart2.png)
How can a mature Christian have this perception of the covenant and commitment of marriage? This is an ungodly way of thinking. If God hates divorce as Malachi 2:16 says, then we as His people should as well. Some of the persons who responded in the negative to this question were, without doubt, jaded due to previously failed marriages. Some perhaps, may have, at the time of the survey, been in a seemingly hopeless marriage. The fact remains that not all Christians have the right mindset when it comes to commitment within a marriage.

Do we really understand how God feels about marriage and the commitment that He expects for us to carry out? God actually issues a decree in the matter. In Mark 10:9 Jesus says, “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” These words have been proclaimed at many weddings, Christian Weddings, which ended in failure. This is an actual command from God, spoken through Jesus. How can there be failure where this is concerned? “I affixed you two together, and you’d better not allow any person to break what I made. Including you two!” God expects us to be committed to our spouses forever. It does not read like a suggestion at all, and even sounds a bit like a warning!

Genesis 2:24 holds the very first marriage. Again the level of commitment expected of us is obviously life-long. God explains what takes place in a marriage. He uses the combining of flesh to really show how permanent the act is. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” He describes the process of grafting one spouse’s flesh unto that of the other’s. A pastor was once heard describing this passage as such: “When a person leaves their parent’s home, and comes together with a spouse, and it’s God’s doing, it has permanency that most Christians just don’t get. The world certainly hasn’t a clue. The closet thing that we have in our understanding for that word ‘cleave’ is welding.” Yes, that’s how committed God wants us to be! We are to be so committed that we are welded to our
spouse. Hallelujah! We are not to be so committed that it is like being welded. When we are joined together by God we are welded to our spouses. The scriptures make this clear with syntax saying that a man “shall cleave” to his wife. This is not written as an option or a choice in marriage, but as a condition of marriage. In Adam says, “This is now [emphasis added] bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” Gen 2:23 NASB There is no stronger language that can be used to illustrate commitment than to speak in terms of oneness. Adam refers to Eve and himself as presently sharing the same bones, and body.

Commitment is obviously a very important part of the quality of a marriage, but it is also an element that adds to the quality of life; which is overall satisfaction. An article written in Current Psychology details a study in which couples over the age of 50 indicated that commitment was the strongest factor in the quality of their marriages. The study found that, “Commitment to the spouse was the strongest and most consistent predictor of marital quality; commitment was negatively related to marriage problems and positively related to expression of love…” The couples from this study being older is a very important thing to note. While every marriage is different, and has its own strengths and weaknesses, those that stand the test of time are worthy of a closer look as the values in older individuals tend to be less easily expunged. In laymen’s terms, younger couples may be motivated by things such as physical features, money, station or rank in life, etc.; things that matter little when one realizes mortality. An old hymn says to, “build your hope on things eternal…” The commitment that we have toward our spouses, and the covenant that we share with them and God should be in that number.

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Application

Once we have a clearer picture of where we are in terms of our commitment we should take steps to improve. There is always room for improvement. A person who thinks that perfection has been attained, or that retooling is unnecessary in a relationship is thinking foolishly. Improving upon one’s commitment level is what leads to application. Applying Storge, that is commitment, entails a few different aspects. There is application of commitment that must exist in peace times, and then an applying of commitment in times of trouble. There is also that which needs to be consistently applied throughout marriage. We will start here with the latter.

Apply evenly:

Throughout our married lives there are things that should consistently happen in order to build our level of commitment and get more resolve in it. This consistency is important because, “Research on relationship maintenance has shown that the more often partners use specific maintenance behaviors, the more likely they are to be happier and satisfied with, as well as committed to, their relationships and the more stable their relationships.”

Two such tools for maintenance can be found in the book of Matthew 6:33. In this verse Jesus is teaching us not to worry, but His words can be applied in so many other areas. He says, “…seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you…” Mt 6:33 NIV He tells us prior to this statement that God the Father supplies our needs and that we should not worry, because there is no benefit in it. Let us focus on the value of seeking His Kingdom and His Righteousness first.

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Seeking God’s Kingdom and His Righteousness must always be a priority for a Christian. This should be the priority of priorities. If seeking God were made the top of priority of every Christian’s life and every ministry and church the world would look much differently that it does. What does it look like to seek the kingdom of God? Simply put, it is establishing a relationship with Him. Seeking His Kingdom is looking for ways to be closer to Him. It is praying and conversing with God.

Research shows that nearly half of Christians pray less than 30 minutes a day (See Chart 3). Can a relationship, a meaningful one, be established or prolonged with inconsistent and minimal communication? Think about it in these terms. How would our relationships with our spouses be if we spoke with them for less than 30 minutes a day? The truth is, there wouldn’t be a relationship. God should not be merely an acquaintance of ours.

Establishing and deepening this relationship also involves consistently reading His word and exercising the lessons therein, and those that come from His mouth and the Holy Spirit. If we consistently seek Him, then we are more likely to act like He acts. We would have fewer dilemmas in life, because we would see things from His perspective. The truth is, we do not spend the time with God needed to really have a deep relationship either in prayer or in studying His word. 50% of Christians who took this survey indicated that they study the Bible for less than an hour a week! (See Chart 4) That is an incredible figure. Not even ten minutes a day. How
can we get to know Him if we are not talking with Him, or reading His word? If our commitment to God is this poor, how then do we treat our spouses? It is pretty safe to say that we would not be married if we spent less than ten minutes a day with our spouses.

We as humans struggle with things that are of no consequence beyond the next ten minutes of our lives, but God is eternal, and so His perspective is unimaginably different from, and infinitely greater than ours. We must seek Him, constantly and consistently if we mean to have a meaningful relationship with him. If we are seeking Him, our perspective begins to widen and deepen. Our thoughts begin to shift from fleshly to more spiritual, and subsequently our actions become different. We can treat our spouses differently, because we can see them in a different light. We can love them more deeply, because we can understand them more deeply. And, we can be more committed to them, because we can see beyond the carnality of the situation.

In seeking His Righteousness we look to determine what is right in God’s eyes, versus, what is right in our own eyes, the eyes of man, and the world. Many times we find ourselves seeking to please man, or to find acceptance from the world. What looks right to man will often be quite the opposite of what God deems as right. We should consistently seek to please the Lord by being obedient to Him, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. Pleasing any person has to be
secondary to pleasing God. In pleasing God, and being righteous in His eyes we most likely will, as Jesus did, grow in favor with God and man.


Apply in times of peace:

So what does it look like to show commitment when there is nothing challenging your commitment? In all honesty, that question is misleading. In fact, there is always something challenging your commitment. If nothing else, complacency threatens and may berth the potential to neglect our spouses. We show commitment in times of peace by properly preparing for the attacks and, fortifying our marriage against them.

One of the major ways that we prepare for an attack is by guarding against complacency, resisting the tendency to allow our schedules to reduce our marriages to mundanity, and creating a sense of newness. In short, we guard against a break in our commitment by keeping the reasons for the initial commitment alive. When we first fall in love, and decide to marry our spouse there is reason for this decision to enter the covenant of monogamy. We make a decision to forsake all others for commitment to one special person. Why is this? In the dating process we became infatuated and enamored with our spouses. They possessed that certain “it”, and produced feelings in us that sparked a decision to focus all of our energy onto them. Research showed that the major reason for marriage among Christians was continued infatuation (See Chart 5).
The key to fighting monotony lies in this infatuation. This will obviously be different for every couple. If an interest in art, or music was a source of connectedness in the beginning, then art and music should be an integral part of the marriage in regular, yet also spontaneous intervals. What this means is we should plan regularly to attend these types of events as they become available, but also be open to the spur-of-the-moment opportunity that arises in the area of interest. It has been, “found that happily married couples tend to agree on recreation needs and on the value of spending time together. Subsequent research has supported this position, providing evidence that couples who agree on use of leisure time report higher marital satisfaction and better adjustment to their marriages.”  

An article in the *Journal of Family and Communication* lists sharing tasks, and common social affiliations as two of its’ five relational maintenance behaviors that improve commitment. By enacting these types of events we combine two of these noted, researched, and proven maintenance behaviors, and increase satisfaction, and subsequently commitment by doing so. Remember the feelings that being at those concerts with him evoked? Remember how it was


something that you both loved to do? Those feelings generate a response of commitment, and they should be intentional applied as a staple as marital sustenance; viewed as a part of the life-blood of our relationships.

Apply in troubled times:

Expressing love, any kind of love, when a marriage is under duress can be quite difficult. A person’s resolve is normally not tested until there is more than one stressor involved at that same time. In marriage, “troubled times” typically start with disagreements, that blossom into arguments. Married couples argue about an array of topics ranging from alcohol usage, to how to raise children. They all have the same effect if the conflict is not dealt with. They cause division. In Mark 3:25-27 Jesus says, “… a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” We must prevent division so that our marriages to not fall. All arguments are temporary; though at the time they seem quite enormous. If we think about the last two weeks of our lives we most likely cannot remember the topics of any disagreements that we took part in.

So what are we fighting about? What issues are so pressings that we allow the conflict to create chasms and wedges in our homes? Research shows that the majority of arguments that occur revolve around money, with disagreements about children and sexual issues close behind. (See Chart 6) As stated above, these are temporary, but can have long-lasting effects on the quality of married life. We must look towards Godly resolutions to these, and any conflicts we have.
Regardless of the cause of the argument there should be resolutions to conflicts. They should be healthy Christ-like resolutions. The conflicts should not be allowed to remain untended and eventually divide us. According to *The Role of Conflict Resolution Styles in Mediating the Relationship Between Enduring Vulnerabilities and Marital Quality*, in a study done on 194 couples who had been married for less than five years conflict avoidance resulted in lower marital satisfaction. The study focused on everyday problems, or what the writers termed enduring vulnerabilities. They concluded that, “For all spouses, negative affectivity was associated with a tendency to engage in more dysfunctional conflict styles.” 9 So avoiding the problem was detrimental in the long term. There are times when temporary avoidance is certainly necessary. According to Fitzpatrick, Fallis, and Vance, “It has often been suggested that couples should postpone the discussion of a difficult or conflict ridden subject until the have the time and energy to handle such conversations. The idea is that avoidance can serve as a short-term postponement until the time when the conflict can be addressed with a high probability of

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It may start as a small division on a small matter, but even small cracks in a foundation can cause serious damage during a storm. In some cases a person may say that it is better to let her have her way than to fight about it. This is an unhealthy approach if the situation needs addressing. We do not want to “…discover the hard way that conflicts, left unattended, can fester or eventually erupt…” The issue is that we fight about it, instead of looking at it from the perspective of love. When we see things the lens of Storge love we understand that our commitment takes precedence over the principle that we feel so strongly about in the argument. In that sense, we can compromise when needed and we will not feel as though we had lost.

This is not to say that there should not be times in which we stand firm, and fast. Those times must only be when there is a clear line of moral, ethical, or biblical boundary being broken. Matthew 5:9 reads thusly, “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” Mt 5:9 NKJV Matthew does not say blessed are the peacekeepers. Sometimes peacekeeping involves avoidance, bending and/or compromising biblical principles; peacemaking, on the other hand means that we confront problems.

The suggestion here is about realizing that marriage is a life-long commitment and no decision that is made in the will of God will go against a marriage that God has ordained. So a disagreement becomes less of an issue when we do not draw lines in the sand. Resolutions to disagreements should start with prayer (together) and be like the negotiations of two equals and not like a head-of-state giving concession to the commoners. We must also understand what and when to compromise while not compromising Biblical principles. But again, when decisions are

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11 Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*, (B&H Publishing Group 2011-04-12), 341.
made when both parties are earnestly seeking God’s right, and not our own, conflicts are less volatile and resolutions are real.

At times a professional counselor may be needed. When our Storge is challenged we must be strong enough to admit, and perceptive enough to realize that we need counseling. Though counseling has a negative stigma it has been shown that 79% of Christians who received marital counseling indicated that it was helpful to them. (See Chart 7)

Getting professional help when needed is very important, and can save a marriage. An outsider’s perspective is objective and offers a view of the situation that those involved may not be able to see. We must not allow pride to hinder us from seeking help either. 60% of those surveyed have never had marital counseling from any source. (See Chart 7)

Having a true Christian friend, in whom we can confide in, when times are troubled is very important. “At times, justice and fairness take precedence (over forgiveness, indicating troubled times). When differences arise and conflict occurs, iron sharpens iron.”12 Worthington suggests sharing with another Christian by quoting Proverbs 27:17. The importance of this is substantiated by research (See Chart 8). Even though the majority of persons indicated that they

had a confidant, the percentage of a negative response is still quite high. It is also important that the friend be a true Christian. If not the friend’s values may be different from biblical values. Their advice may sound good, and feel good to flesh, but be damning to a Christian Marriage.

We must be resolute in our commitment to the covenant of marriage. The defense against any attacks that come against it starts with us. Each individual must accept responsibility for the protection of marital boundaries, both physical and spiritual. In the previously referenced scripture of Matthew 12 where Jesus is teaching that a house divided against itself cannot stand, He follows that with, “Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” Mt 12:29 NKJV

This statement tells us that we are to be prepared at all times to defend our houses. Our marriages are under attack! The attacks may take the form of arguments, stress, temptations, affairs, bills, mistrust, financial struggles, or jealousy, but they certainly exist. Regardless of the form of the attack, Jesus tells us here that our houses could not be plundered unless our strong man is bound. In other words if we are not prepared by building our spouses with affirming words, assuring them, and spending quality time with them we have shackled the feet of our strong man. We have bound the hands of our strong man, if we are not setting and adhering to boundaries in marriage. Or, in some cases, we may think that we are the strong men. That fallacy
is rooted in pride and precedes a certain failure. A Godly covenant can only be kept with Godly strength. Our strong man is our spirit-man.

Expression

5 Ways to Express Storge-Commitment

1. We should continue to date our spouses for the duration of our lives. We should learn, and relearn them as they (and we) grow, change, and mature over time.

2. We should pray and study with our spouses regularly and often. Seeking God with our spouses is just as important as individual time. The Lord is the great sustainer, healer, comforter, and supplier. Seeking Him as a couple should be a top priority in the covenant.

3. We should take an interest in our spouses’ hobbies. This may, or may not mean taking up the hobby. At least, it should include supporting events, and genuinely trying to understand the content that excites our spouses.

4. We should attend marriage seminars, retreats, and conferences for regular maintenance; attending those designed for couples, and those that are gender specific.

5. We should verbally assure our spouses of our commitment to them and live up to what we say. This is done in several subtle or even non-verbal ways, but it is important also to verbally say, “I am committed to you and this marriage. I will do what it takes to make it last.”
CHAPTER III

*Philia, Brotherly Love: The Love of Acting and Serving*

*Definition:*

This love is one of acting, doing, and serving. *Philia* love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage.\[^{13}\] This is the love that makes a man want to work 18-hour days, or multiple jobs in order to provide for his family. This is the love that makes a mother cook a meal for her family even after she herself has had a particularly rough day. It is the love that makes a Pastor pray for those in his parish at three o’clock in the morning. It is the love that makes a friend bring you a container of gasoline in the middle of the night when you are stranded on a highway. Every marriage must have a large amount of *Philia* love; the “show me” love.

This is the love that Peter had for our Lord, Jesus. It was this *Philia* that made Peter walk toward Jesus even though He was standing on water. This love compelled Peter to violently defend Jesus in the garden at the time of His arrest, and this love made Peter want to answer the question, “But who do you say I am?” Peter was a doer, and a man of action. He could best show his love in this manner. In John 25:15-17 is where this is best seen. This scene is often called the restoration of Peter. In this passage Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him. This may seem an odd thing to do until we look at this passage more closely, and with a lexicon handy. This is certainly one of those situations in which the difference in languages makes a difference in really understanding the conversation. When we substitute the Greek words for love, where they should be, for the English word, the actual conversation would have been more like this:

Jesus: “Peter, do you Agape love me? More than anyone, or anything else in the world?”

Peter: “Lord, I *Philia* love you, just as much as I love my brother Andrew.

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Jesus: “Peter, Do you Agape love me? That is, do you love me unconditionally, with The Father’s love?”

Peter: “Jesus, I Philia love you, enough to do whatever you ask.”

Jesus: “Peter do you Philia love me, like a family member?

This conversation is very descriptive in what Philia is, and is not. Peter could not, at that time, say that he loved Jesus with an Agape love. This may be because Peter had denied even knowing Jesus after He was arrested, and perhaps felt guilty. He denied knowing Him three times in fact; the exact number of times that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. On the third time Jesus changed the type of love from Agape to Philia. He changed the type of love to the type that Peter knew the most about, and had the most of. Peter showed his love by acting, doing, and serving. Jesus restored Peter by allowing him to love by doing, by serving. His replies to Peter were always with “doing”. i.e. “feed my lambs, tend to my sheep, and feed my sheep. He was saying, show me that you love me Peter. Show me in the way that you do so well.

Having this type of love is not a bad thing. It was not a bad thing that Peter had this type of love for Christ. In fact, like all of the types of love, it is essential to married life. God used Peter’s willingness to act, do, and serve to advance the gospel. How this translates into marriage is like so. Each spouse must be willing to serve the other spouse. We should always be willing to do for our spouses, and put their needs above our own desires. We are told that we are to love one another as we love ourselves. In Luke 10:26-28, Jesus, after telling us to love God the Father with all that we have, He told us to love each other as we love ourselves. We should, of course, apply what Jesus said to our spouses. Are they not our neighbors, our closest neighbors? Serving our spouse is a great way to love them.
Recognition

A huge part of serving our spouses is self-denial, and the foregoing of personal desires. It takes away from our individual time, and what we want to do as individuals. It is sacrifice. Recognizing *Philia* means that we have to gauge just how selfish we are. This is a very difficult thing to do for most people. The sinful nature of our flesh does not like to be exposed. There is nothing that leads to more revelation than introspection. Taking a hard look at one of the most negative parts of our personas can be quite an eye-opening experience. Selfishness is rooted in greed, and greed is rooted in the sin of idolatry: self-idolatry. We are to have no other gods before Jehovah, and that includes us!

We, as Christians, must be honest with ourselves, and gauge if we are truly living for Christ. Or are we living for ourselves? It is important for us to really look to see where we are in this regard. An article in *Family Relations Journal* states that, “attributions that accentuate the impact of negative relationship events and minimize the impact of positive relationship events are associated with lower relationship quality. Thus, for example, attributing responsibility for a negative partner behavior (e.g., coming home late) so that it is seen as intentional, blameworthy, and reflecting selfish motivation” ¹⁴ In other words, selfish behavior although overlooked as a person’s negative attributes, lower relationship quality, and marital satisfaction. This same article notes the benefits of changing behaviors as a way of increasing relationship quality. ¹⁵

When we are selfish we are placing value on ourselves greater than the value that we have placed on our spouses. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Mt 6:21 NKJV We may consider this *treasure*, to be about money only. That is an erroneous way of

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¹⁵ Ibid, 421
thinking. Consider if we value our time above all else. Is time, in this case, not our treasure? Giving of our treasure, whatever it may be, to our spouses in love is the second step in applying *Philia*; the first is figuring out just what our treasure is.

**Application**

Where is our treasure?

*Philia* is probably the hardest love to admit we lack because in general we do not like to admit that we are selfish, or that we often put our happiness above others’ happiness. With that said, *Philia* is most likely the easiest one to apply. Most people find it easy to help complete strangers. A person’s whose car is broken down on the side of the road may encounter several men who pull over to help and give assistance. One of these same men notices a woman leaving the grocery store ahead of him struggling with her bags would quite chivalrously sprint to assist her. He is applying *Philia* in these relationships. But, the same man might have an argument with his wife because he will not help her around the house. She asks him to mow the lawn or take out the trash, and he gives her opposition. How many people tirelessly serve at church, school and in the community but have suffering marriages? If you ask them why they serve they would tell you it’s because they love it. Because they don’t apply that same philosophy of love to their spouses, their home life suffers.

It is quite sobering to confess that we are selfish, that we do not *do* for our spouses what we ought to, and that we do not serve our spouses as often as we should. Even more disturbing, is that we often find it easier to serve people outside of our homes more than those within. Always considering the needs of our spouses, *doing* for our spouses, protecting our spouses, and serving our spouses is how we apply this *Philia* love.
5 Ways to Express Philia-Serving

1. We should **have a joyful heart** when our spouses ask us to do something. If we serve our spouses with a bad attitude it really isn’t serving them; it’s more like indentured servitude. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and so do most people.

2. We should **offer to help** our spouses in whatever they do. Making ourselves available shows not only caring, but a willingness to sacrifice time as well. Who knows? Depending upon the situation we might actually be able to help.

3. We should seek to **perform unexpected niceties** for our spouses. There are several ways to do this, but there’s no greater way to ease stress than performing their chores for them, and lightening their load.

4. We should **sacrifice our likes** for our spouses’ likes. When it comes down to an “either/or” situation, say due to time or money, we should defer to our spouses’ desires over our own. Being selfless is a great way to show emotional love.

5. We should **be dependable and follow through**. Having trust in marriage is very important. There is an old saying that we are only as good as our word. Our spouses should be able to count on us to do what we say.
CHAPTER IV:

Eros: The love of Emotions/Feelings and Physical Love

Definition

_Eros_ refers to physical love; it gives us our English word _erotic_. It is the love that causes those indescribable emotions that we have, and those very strong physical feelings that we have. A pastor friend has been quoted as saying “Love is that eternal—internal itch that cannot be scratched.” For our purposes and understanding, _Eros_ is the love of emotions, and/or feelings, and of physical love.

Here, the words “emotions” and “feelings” will be used synonymously unless a specific emotion is being referred to. There are too many emotions to discuss them all here. We will speak of emotions and feelings as an all-encompassing item. We recognize the complexity of emotions and feelings, but it is due to this complexity and the required depth that we will remain general. It is also very important to note that _Eros_ is one type of love that has two sides that intertwine greatly. There are distinct times where emotions may have nothing to do with physical love, but the opposite is not true of physical love. There are times when physical lusts may have very little emotion attached, but physical love always has an emotional tether.

When we think of what emotions are, many different definitions come to mind. Naturally, the emotional side of love can have many connotations as well. The gamut ranges from the day-to-day emotions that we all face, a person’s sensitivity to a given subject, to the overall emotional well being of a person. Either way, the emotional health of a person is very important to the health of a marriage. If either spouse is emotionally distracted, withdrawn, or imbalanced that marriage will have unique circumstance to deal with. In the book _His Needs_,

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Her Needs psychologist and author Willard Harvey asked couples, “What could your spouse do for you that would make you the happiest?” I’ve been able to classify most of their responses into ten emotional needs—admiration, affection, conversation, domestic support, family commitment, financial support, honesty and openness, physical attractiveness, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment.” He found that the emotional side of love was key to happiness in marriage. It sounds like an obvious conclusion at which to arrive, but often meeting a spouse’s emotional needs is not a priority.

Physical love has a great range of meanings. It can be anything from holding hands, a hug or kiss, to sexual intercourse, and everything in between. Physical love is one of the greatest gifts from God to us as married people. It is not only physical, as it is a communing of the spirits, and a tying of the souls of the spouses.

Unfortunately, many treat it as if there are no spiritual implications. Many are overwhelmed by the strength of the pull on the physical. Because of this strength, the potential for sin is ever-present. The Bible teaches us that the keys to overcoming this pull lie with prayer, discipline and self-control. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;” 1 Th 4:3–5 NKJV The motivation here is to please God. The desires of the flesh are very strong and can feel overwhelmingly difficult to control, but we must know how to posses, that is control, our vessels. We do this to be holy and honor God, because we know Him. In other words our relationship with God is our strength. We must cultivate that relationship so that it is stronger than any temptation could ever be.

The greatest thing about the emotional side of *Eros*, and the Physical side of *Eros* is that they often come together. Emotions may not always be about physical love, but physical love always has an emotional connection. Whether that connection is strong or weak, positive or negative is singular, but it is always there.

**Recognition: Emotion**

We must recognize the importance of the emotional side of *Eros* love, and how big of a part it has in marriage. Emotions can be a tricky subject to broach in marriage. Emotions are apart of the foundation of our personalities. Therefore, in our marriages, in which two personalities have come together emotions are a part of the foundation of our marriages. Therefore particular attention should constantly be given to meeting the emotional needs of our spouses. The importance of tending to the emotional need of our spouse cannot be overstated. In *His Needs, Her Needs* the author writes, “…when you meet each other’s most important emotional needs, you create and sustain a feeling of love for each other that is essential in a successful marriage.” 18 This is a very thought provoking statement. It feels as if we should already know and have a grasp on it. But this is not always the case.

The impact of an emotionally void relationship can be astounding. Emotional satisfaction plays the largest part of marital happiness. In research done for this project, it was discovered that nearly 38% of married Christians have had an emotional affair. (See Chart 9)

That number is surprisingly high, and saddening as well. An emotional affair is one in which, at least one of the persons involved in the exchange is in a committed relationship and engages in inappropriate, non-physical acts with another person. These inappropriate acts can include, but are not limited to phone calls, emails, text-messages (including pictures), camera or web-chats, and letters. Why is this number so high? It was revealed that 75% percent of those same persons had not been involved in a sexual affair with actual sexual intercourse taking place. It is worth noting that 50% of those who had an emotional affair also had at least one sexual affair. (See Chart 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever had an emotional affair? (Emails, texting, internet, etc. without any actual sexual intercourse)?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Response Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>90.80%</td>
<td>75.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once (may include multiple occurrences, but with only one person)</td>
<td>21.20%</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>11.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice (two separate persons)</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more times (three or more separate persons)</td>
<td>19.20%</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Incredibly, 40% of persons who had previously had an affair indicated that it was due to lack of emotional attention from their spouse (See Chart 11). This tells us that we should pay more attention to the emotional needs of our spouses, and that the emotional satisfaction of our spouses cannot be overstated.

![Chart 11](image)

This is noteworthy, in that, it indicates that the need not being met in most cases of an affair is an emotional one. When we consider the previous two charts together we understand that the lack of emotional attention has a very strong correlation to infidelity.

This should tell us that we must invest in the emotional satisfaction of our spouses if we want a lasting, and happy marriage. Often divorced couples, or couples near divorce will say things like, “We grew apart”, or “He really doesn’t understand me”. These terms and others like them are indicators of emotional dissatisfaction. Over time spouses may disassociate themselves from rejection, pain, and hurt by emotionally withdrawing. In these cases the spouse has been emotionally neglected. We must determine where our relationships lie in terms of an emotionally satisfied spouse.
Believe it or not, assessing the emotional satisfaction of our spouses can be as easy as it was prior to marriage. In his book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, Willard Harvey explains the importance of emotional satisfaction with this:

I asked them, “What do you think it would take for you to be happily married again?” The answer that came back to me was almost too simple to believe. Couple after couple explained to me that they married each other because they found each other irresistible—they were in love. But by the time they came to my office, they had lost that *feeling* [emphasis added] for each other. …when I persisted and couples were able to reflect on my question, the answer I heard repeated over and over was, “for us to be in love again.”

Notice that the couples said they wished to be in love again. Harvey noted that the couples “had lost that feeling for each other.” So, the assessment can be as simple as these questions. What made us fall in love in the first place? What feelings did our spouses generate in us that caused us to fall in love with them, and how did they do it?

The hard part is now remembering what *we* did to cause those feelings in our spouses. How did we make them fall in love with us? It was not just dumb luck. If we remember honestly and correctly, it involved hard work at times. We would make sure that our clothes were just right, that our hair was in place, and that we wore the perfect perfume or cologne. We would listen intently to the things that they said. We must take a long and honest look, and determine if we are still doing those same things. If not, we must be willing to reconnect on that emotional level if our marriage is to be sustained.

*Recognition: Physical love*

When was the last time that we really looked at our spouses? The way we did in the beginning? What about holding hands and walking, how long has it been? How long has it been since we’ve had a discussion other than involving the rigors of life, the kids, work, schedules,

\[19\] Ibid, 11.
and ministry? The biggest parts of physical love are time and proximity. We cannot meet the physical needs of our spouses if we are not spending time with them. One of the five love languages presented by bestselling author Gary Chapman is “Quality Time.” He differentiates quality time from physical touch. We will not do so here. As we see it, it is difficult to have one without the other. Research showed that more than half of people surveyed believe that the best way to show love to their spouse is by spending time with them, and physically pleasing them was the third largest answer given. (See Chart 12)

![Chart 12]

In addition, the reverse of this is true, that 55% percent of Christian best receive love by having time spent with them. When we answer a question like that, we typically answer how we best receive love. So we answer with how we receive best, and unconsciously assume that how we receive love is also the best way to show love.

One of the benefits of marriage is lovemaking. While sex should not be the primary reason for getting married, it should certainly be an important part of a healthy marriage (age appropriate of course). While we do not like to admit it people, yes—even Christians, submit to fleshly desires from time to time. As such, we must also recognize where we are in regards to this aspect of physical love. Today’s method of dating greatly lends itself to the potential for
premarital sex. The Bible says in I Corinthians 7:9, “But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” 1 Co 7:9 NIV The point here from Paul is that the desires of the flesh can be strong enough to tempt a Christian to sin. He uses the term *burn with passion*, and rightly so, to describe the strength of the temptation. “Marriage is a God-intended safeguard against immorality” 20 We must realize that meeting the physical needs of our spouse is of great significance and should be tended to like every other priority in our lives.

In an article on sex and the correlation with relationship happiness from the *Journal of Sex Research* the authors found positive gains for higher sexual activity. In fact, they found that, “physically affectionate couples report greater relationship satisfaction than less physically affectionate couples. Additionally, couples who engage in more frequent sexual relations experience more relational stability compared to couples who engage in less frequent sexual relations” 21

**Application of Emotions**

Applying emotional love requires patience and communication. This area has been well studied by relationship experts and sociologists alike. The term Emotional Intelligence was created to add clarity in the discussion for persons who could effectively communicate, within the confines of relationship, their true feelings. In an article about the importance of emotional intellect, from the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Emotions, it was found that, “…emotionally intelligent couples may communicate more effectively, may handle conflicts


21 Ibid, 62.
effectively, and regulate their emotions better, thus facilitating adaptive solutions and outcomes.”

We apply emotional love by seeking to communicate our feelings honestly and effectively, and earnestly attempting to understand those of our spouse.

Self-awareness and communication are the cornerstones of emotional intelligence. If we cannot conclude how we feel then we cannot communicate this to our spouse. This is demonstrating low emotional intelligence. In that same article, we see that not understanding how to interpret one’s own feelings can lead to major fights and long term issues. It implies that those with “…low emotional understanding appear more prone to attack partners and interpret partner hurt and distress as hostility.” This is just the tip of the iceberg. The article also sites that issues such as conflict resolution and forgiveness are dealt with more easily in couples with higher emotional IQs.

The first step of raising one’s emotional intelligence is an honest self-assessment. We must have an honest look at ourselves in order to determine how we really feel, before we can begin to communicate to our spouses how we feel. This is something that cannot be done in the heat of an argument. It must occur in a time of reflection so that emotions do not cloud judgment. In our personal prayer time we should ask the Lord to reveal the root of our feelings to us so that we can properly handle, and communicate them.

The second step is having the tact to deliver our thoughts in a way that ensures it is received the way we intended it to be. It does no good to know what to say, if we do not know how to say it. We have all heard the saying, “It’s not what you said, but how you said it.” This statement certainly rings true.

The third step is really the second half of step two—listening. We are always

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communicating, whether effectively or ineffectively. Even if we get our point across and we are understood, if we do not understand the person with whom we are communicating we have been ineffective. John Maxwell suggests that this is because we need to attempt to connect and not merely attempt communication. In *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* he emphasizes the importance of connecting with commonness and vocabulary that we create. “Before we can communicate effectively, we must establish our commonness—the better we do that, the greater the potential for effective communication.”  

The goal is to reach beyond our own sphere and into those with whom we are communicating.

By listening we gain common ground, and subsequently a better connection with our spouses. Listening is a skill, and one that needs to be developed if a marriage is going to have longevity. Listening itself is, “taking in information from speakers, other people or ourselves, while remaining non-judgmental and empathetic…” according to the book, *Listening: The Forgotten Skill*. The author, Madelyn Burley, stresses that the key component in listening is truly paying attention. When our spouse is talking we must be really engaged. Our minds should not wander to the kids, work, or even the latter part of the current conversation. In conversations with our spouses we must ask ourselves, “Are we thinking of our next point, are we thinking about our next rebut, are our minds even in the conversation, or are we really listening to them?” Burley warns against this behavior, and suggests that attention be paid to awareness. Being self-aware of our listening patterns is very important to applying emotional satisfaction. Naturally, this works best if both spouses are engaged this way. If each spouse is emotionally aware, and attempting to emotionally satisfy the other, it goes without saying that the marital relationship

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has a great chance to be emotionally healthy as a whole.

Application of Physical love

Sex is a very important part of a marriage. With that said, physical love should not automatically be synonymous with sexual intercourse. The touch is a very powerful thing all by itself. In the Five Love Languages, Gary Chapman emphasizes the importance of touch with this. “Babies who are held, hugged, and kissed develop a healthier emotional life than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact.”25 This translates easily to adults and marriage. Chapman continues, “…lovingly touching your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love.”26 Understanding that a touch can say I love you can as loudly as the words, and even louder to those who love best in Eros, is an important step in the application process. These touches can range from a morning hug or kiss, holding hands while driving, to rubbing against one another while watching a movie on the couch. The touches do not necessarily have to be colossal efforts to have colossal effects.

“It is God’s will for us to be self-controlled in sexual matters. Each man must learn to live with his own wife, and each woman must learn to live with her own husband, and fornication is to be shunned as contrary to God’s holy will.”27 This passage has obvious implications concerning unfaithfulness, but also this statement uses a very apt phrase that should speak volumes to us in regards to living physical love. This passage of scripture says that we “must learn” to live with our spouses. Many times there exists a fairytale view of marriage that


26 Ibid, 110.

causes various serious problems to arise in a marriage. The view is that our spouses will somehow automatically know how to meet our physical needs. This is, of course, absurd. Only we as individuals know what is exactly right, and if we are not bold enough to share what is right with our spouse, then we will remain the sole possessor of that knowledge.

Learning to physically satisfy one’s own spouse is a process that happens over time. It is not an event, or epiphany. This process involves honesty and communication, and trial and error. It involves being quite vulnerable and brave as well. Being naked in the company of another person, even a spouse, can cause angst for many people. This feeling comes and goes throughout marriage. It exists and is true of newlyweds (however brief the awkwardness may be at that given time), the wife whose body has changed because she has carried and birth children, the middle-aged man who is no longer as physically fit as when younger, to any of us who have walked by a mirror and noticed that shifting has occurred. There is anxiety. Naturally, sexual relations can have the same feeling. We must create an atmosphere of acceptance with intimacy. We all, at one point or another, may feel embarrassed, inadequate, and/or self-conscious about our bodies. It is our responsibility to make our spouse feel at ease, accepted, and loved in this most vulnerable state.

We apply physical love first by understanding that we are not the objects of the application. That honor belongs to our spouses. We should always seek to please them before seeking self-gratification. Remember, the scripture that we must learn them. This puts the responsibility of pleasing our spouse squarely on us. We must ask questions of our spouses in regards to what pleases them.

In addition, we should be willing to change and evolve our sexuality as our relationships deepen, more trust is established, and we become more open, and vulnerable to one-another. By
this it is meant that we need a willingness to undergo a sexual transformation from time-to-time. Sexual transformations are simply “changes in sexual behavior for the partner”.\(^{28}\) *(This does not, in any way, refer to sexual orientation or gender preference.)* In pleasing our spouses the knowledge of what pleases them, may be an adjustment (transformation) for us. This may be something as simple as longer, more intimate kisses prior to sexual intercourse. Simple if you are a person who enjoys kissing. What if you do not like to kiss? If you are not naturally built that way, then a sexual transformation must occur in order to meet the desire of your spouse. There are probably a thousand transformations that a couple can experience throughout the lifetime of a marriage. Everything from frequency, positions, locations, planned encounters, to spontaneity and many more should be up for discussion.

In some cases the transformation may be more difficult than others, and may be a source of contention within marriage. For example, sexual frequency is often a source of frustration for many couples. By studying sexual frequency rates in a week against age and sex (see charts 13 and 14) we see vastly different results. In fact, just by looking at the two charts we can instantly see sharp contrasts. Women in the youngest age group (18-24 years old) indicated having sex at least four times in a week, while no men in the same age range indicated a response. The opposite is true later in life. The indicators for sexual intercourse from 1-4 times a week were higher for men ages 45+ than they were for women in the same age range. No women indicated having sex four or more times a week after age 39.

What this says it that there may be times in a marriage where the sexual appetites of the spouses may be very different. There are different sexual seasons in a marriage in regards to frequency. (It should be noted that the charts are not vastly dissimilar from ages 24-39 in most frequencies). Each marriage will have times of peaks and valleys in which the number of sexual instances will rise or fall. This is made even more complicated by the differences of each mate. Consistently compromising in the area of frequency, rather increasing or decreasing, would be an example of a transformation. If it is not a consistent compromise, then it is not a transformation, but merely a concession. A concession may work for a while for physical appeasement, but over time both parties may feel adversely about the disingenuous act.
In Philippians 4:10-13, Paul writes,

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content; 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phil 4:10–13 NKJV

Paul is writing in regards to financial giving, but we can take his meaning and apply it to the sexual seasons of a marriage. Just as Paul wrote, we must learn to be content in whatever state we are in. There were times when the Philippians were contributing to Paul and times where the contributions stopped, then again restarted. There will be times when one spouse desires more sex than the other. This will change between the two persons several times throughout the marriage. Paul says that he knows how to make himself lower if needed, and higher if needed. A key point here is that he said he learned to be whatever is needed for the situation. We too should learn to give more when needed, and take less in those applicable times.

The main point of this scripture is that it was not in his strength that he depended, but wholly through Christ. We should take the same approach in our marriages. The point is to change for our spouses’ satisfaction; in order to show them physical love in the season in which they desire it more, or less than do we. This may be a difficult thing for many people. The key is realizing strength in contentment. Our strength comes through Christ.

When undergoing a transformation it is important not to transform into something of the fallen world. The scripture passage of Hebrews 13:4 is often misunderstood to mean that anything goes as long as it is in the confines of marriage. Somehow, we have misunderstood this scripture to give us carte blanche if our spouse is in agreement. This is a great fallacy. Our spouses are made of sinful flesh just as we are, and they are predisposed to sin just as we are.
Therefore our guide in these matters should be the Holy Spirit and the Bible. That scripture in Hebrews says, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled;” Heb 13:4 NASB Our desires should not be images formed from previous sin, such as pornography, but should, as the scripture says, be held in honor and keep the marriage bed undefiled. In other words a sinful imagination, while it may bring physical pleasure, does not bring honor to a marriage.

Rebuilding your mind, and your desires to match that which is pleasurable to your spouse may not be such as easy thing. Whenever we speak in terms of self-sacrifice for the betterment of the unit, reciprocity is always nigh in our minds. It is natural for flesh to behave this way. The goal should be to please our spouses, and they should have the same intent. However, this is not always the case. When one spouse is not willing to change or attempt to meet the needs of the other, does that give us the right to withhold physical love? The answer is no. Our mindset should be to please them, regardless of their action or inaction towards our needs and us. This is counter-intuitive and counter-cultural, and certainly counter to what our selfish flesh desires, but it is God’s way. While it may not remove any frustrations at first, as mature Christians, we must focus on our responsibility to God and spouse, and not what we deem as our marital rights.

“THE EMPHASIS IN MARRIAGE is to be on performing one’s duties to one’s partner rather than demanding one’s rights. In a fallen world, we tend to major on our rights and, therefore, within marriage our marital rights. The special perspective the Christian faith gives to human relationships is that it teaches us to emphasize rather our duties. A secret of successful marriage is not to insist upon what our partner owes us but to focus on our duty to our marriage partner.”

29 Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians, Opening Up Commentary (Leominister: Day One Publications, 2005), 63.
A Word About Rejection

Though at times it may not seem as such, physical love and emotional love go hand-in-hand. One aspect of applying them together has to do with facing rejection. “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack:’” Mk 10:21 NKJV This is an excerpt from a very familiar passage; widely known as “The Rich Young Ruler”. For the sake of learning within our topic, here we will deviate from the normal teachings garnered from this passage, and from its’ intended point as well. Typically we teach this from the perspective of the young man’s possessions being so great, and their grip on him so strong, that they have become a god to him, and kept him from being a disciple of Jesus’.

Our focus will be on Jesus’ actions in the story. Reread the above passage from Mark 10:21. It starts with Jesus looking at him, and loving him. We must learn that even in rejection there can be love; if we so choose. We know that Jesus knew the rich young ruler was not really ready to be His follower. He had too much that was of greater significance in his life than it should have been. Jesus had to reject the young man. Even in rejecting him, Jesus did things that we should learn and practice.

First, Jesus looked at him; He made a connection with the man. Connecting means that He understood what the man’s desire was, what his heart was trying to say. Then, Jesus loved him. He showed a deep concern and sympathy for the man. He saw the conflict between his flesh and his spirit. He did these things prior to rejecting the young man. Can we not do this with/for our spouses? Would we not want this sort of treatment when we are rejected? Jesus did not speak first, or even second. It was His final action. We tend to do more talking than connecting, and loving. This is especially the case when reject someone. We should follow what Christ did. We should connect, love, and then speak.
This principle must be practiced in marriage. We should always strive to love our spouses in every way possible. There are many times in marriage in which we must reject our spouses from monetary purchases to budget restrictions, but there is none more potentially hurtful, and long lasting than a sexual rejection. When a spouse is turned away in the bedroom the rejection tends to be very deeply felt. This is due to not only the sensitive nature of the rejection, but also the fact that most rejections are not delivered with love, in love, or through love. If we take the time to connect with, and love before the rejection as Christ does in the above passage of scripture, the rejected party might be sad, and hurt, but they will feel understood, and loved, nonetheless.

5 Ways to Express Eros- Emotions and Physical Love

1. We must always be willing to listen to our spouses. Whether it is the daily unwinding, a sounding board for life’s stressors, or a serious issue within the marriage a listening ear goes a long way in emotional satisfaction.

2. We should always have and show empathy and sympathy to the things that our spouses are going through. We are joined to them, and therefore we should feel what they feel. We should celebrate their mountaintops and bemoan their valleys.

3. There cannot be an expression of physical love without giving time. We should seek to spend time with our spouses to continuously cultivate a loving relationship.

4. We should openly share our feelings with our spouses. Gaging our spouses’ emotions can be a tricky thing at times. Therefore, we should save them the headache of trying to read our minds. Being open and honest about our own emotions promotes connectedness.

5. We should touch our spouses often. Specifically, we should be intentional in physically connecting with our mates throughout each day. The power of touch is well documented and studied, and should be a daily practice in marriage.
CHAPTER V:

Agape: The Love of God… Forgiveness and Hope

Every marriage is subject to pitfalls. There are many distractions and temptations that are forces against a strong, love-centered marriage. These vary in range, but mostly center on sin. Everything from differences in culture, and upbringing to extramarital affairs and emotional neglect or abuse can be factors. However there is one factor that is prevalent and is not necessarily associated with sin; the ignorance of how to love with God’s Love. The three other loves, though one may not have heard of them or how they were presented in this thesis, can easily be understood. It may be difficult to follow through with them for some, but they can be understood. After reading these pages a person might have learned how important emotions and feelings, and physical proximity are, we may understand that marriage should be about serious, faith-driven commitment, and we should have gained an idea that we ought to do for, act on the behalf of, and serve our spouses. So what is Agape?

Definition

The accepted definition for Agape in non-religious circles is selfless love. One resource’s definition lists Agape as, “Christian love, esp. as distinct from erotic love or emotional affection.”30 Here in this thesis, Agape is referred to as God’s love. Some refer to Agape as unconditional, untainted, and unselfish. It is certainly all of those things, but the depth of God’s love is much more than words can really describe. This is because it is alive. Yes, God’s Love lives! We learn in 1 John 4:7-10 that God is love. 1 John 4:8 NIV This is not a metaphor. God is

30 New Oxford American Dictionary, Version 2.2.3 (118.5) for Apple Inc., “Agape.”
not like love…He literally is love. This is, and should be taken as a literal fact. Though we cannot really wrap our finite minds around this notion, we must start from this fact in order to even begin to define, understand, and apply Agape love in our marriages.

It is because we cannot truly fathom the depth and breadth of God’s love, we cannot completely describe it. In attempting to do so, we would have to name all of the characteristics of God. This, of course, is impossible. God—Himself, and His characteristics make up love. His very essence is loving. In order that we might have a working definition with which to use here, we will look at several scriptures that show His characteristics.

"4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.” 1 Co 13:4–8 NIV

This very popular scripture is from 1 Corinthians 13 and gives a litany of characteristics that most people find merely as poetic beauty. Many people use it as a poem to a loved one, or perhaps in a wedding ceremony as a reminder of how the newlyweds are expected to act. The issue with this is that most of us know that we do not measure up to this description of what love is. We may very well have some of these characteristics, but to possess all of these traits is beyond what would normally be considered possible. We are overwhelmed by the expectations set forth in this scripture. We seem to be only able to master one or two of these traits together at any given time. God is all of these, and more, simultaneously, and it is upon His strength that we must rely.

God’s love is present and shown throughout the Bible. Wiersbe, writer of The Bible Exposition Commentary explains that, “Agape love is the love God shows toward us. It is not
simply a love based on feeling; it is expressed in our wills. *Agape* love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences". \(^3\) This is shown from the very beginning of creation. In John 1, we learn that God created everything. An interesting note that may be overlooked if we do not pay close attention is that He created everything *through* Jesus, who is the “Word”. This is significant, because not only was everything made *by* Him, but also *through* Him showing an unfathomable intimacy. The closest feeling that can be mirrored by us would be a woman giving birth. Even in this case conception is unknown, the outcome of life is uncertain, and the process is fraught with sicknesses, displacement, and discomfort. The Father made everything Himself, *through* Himself in the person of the Son. This is pure and complete love.

**Recognition**

This component of love is by far the most important. It is the love that sowed the fabric of reality together, and sent Jesus to the cross to die for our sins. It is this love. So how can we show God’s love, unconditional love to our spouses? A better question might be, “Is it possible for us to show unconditional love to our spouses?” Is it even possible for finite creatures, such as we are, to achieve such a feat? The answer is yes, and no. We are instructed by Peter to be Holy like God is Holy. He quotes the passage from Leviticus, “For I *am* the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy.” *Lev 11:44* NKJV In our striving to be like God we can attain great heights. One of those heights is a greater love. Yes we can love with the love of God, with the caveat that it is *through Him*. But no, we cannot constantly and consistently love in the same manner that God loves, because we are still wrapped in flesh. That should not deter us from constantly and consistently attempting to do so.

The answer to the question, “Can we show unconditional love to our spouses?” is not without Christ. Philippians says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Phil 4:13 NKJV Notice the intimacy in that statement. It does not read with Christ, it reads through Christ. As with the scripture in John 1, ‘through’ is used here as well to illustrate the connectedness that we must have. Christ has to be the center of our love, because our flesh is too weak and too selfish to do much else than please itself. Jesus is always the perfect role model. We love our spouses like Christ loved the church. He lived (a life of sacrifice), and died (a humble death), and He rose (in victory) for the church. He studied for the church, He stood up for the church, and He provided for the church. These are all things that we should be doing for our spouses. Everything that Christ did was for someone else. There is only one time in the Bible that He says to do something for Him. That was communion, the last supper. Are our proportions that skewed towards service and selflessness?

To live a life of sacrifice is one the greatest things that Christ did for His church, and it is the greatest thing that we can do to show His love to our spouses. As we are wrapped in flesh, our thoughts are predicated on fulfilling the desires of our flesh. Sacrificing a meal, coffee, Internet, television, or some other form of entertainment is highly contested by our bodies. We literally have physical withdrawal symptoms when we forego these things. How much more difficult is it to sacrifice an entire life for someone else? The key is submission to God and His will; allowing one’s self to be used for His purposes. In that submission the person that you are, begins to change. The you that you are begins to look different, and becomes more of the you that God desires for you to be. Scripture says, “Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart” Ps 37:4 NASB. There is a nature of covenantal reciprocity that exists in this scripture. We learn that first we must delight ourselves in God. Once we have
delighted ourselves in Him, the desires of our heart become His desires. He desires that we delight ourselves in Him. Submission to God’s will may not be easy, but it becomes easier when we see it from this perspective.

Application

Forgiveness:

One of the biggest parts of God’s character is forgiveness. We have many examples from which to glean understanding about how God instructs us to forgive. What exactly is forgiveness though? According to Everett Worthington, writer of the article Forgiveness on Marriage, there are two types of forgiveness: decisional and emotional. “Decisional Forgiveness involves committing not to exact revenge on the partner, not to avoid the partner, but to release the partner from the debt and act like one did before the transgression. Emotional Forgiveness involves replacing negative emotions with positive emotions towards the partner. 32

God’s love is shown through His patience and forgiveness throughout the Old Testament and it is evident; though many people chose only to see God’s wrath and judgment after the transgressions of the Israelites. However, His wrath is mostly after a long period of patient love on God’s part, and disobedience on the part of His people.

We forgive, because God forgave us first. In the model prayer (may also be known as “The Lord’s Prayer”) Jesus says, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Mt 6:12 NKJV The indication here is that the Father forgives us in a like manner to how we forgive others. If we are not forgiving, then God will forgive us just as much. Another condition is confession. 1 John 1:9-10 reads thusly, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we

32 Everett L. Worthington, “Forgiveness in Marriage: Research Findings and Therapeutic Applications”, 60.
make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.” 1 Jn 1:9–10 NKJV When we confess our sins to God, He forgives us. He already knows the committed transgression, so confession is for the transgressor. It is a defeat of bondage. The truth will make us free.

He is a forgiving God, and as we strive to be like Him, we should be forgiving people. This cannot be overstated in the relationship between a husband and wife. So, how to do it? Forgiveness is a three-way street. We must accept it from God, we must forgive ourselves, and then give forgiveness to others. This approach indicates that responsibility must be shared. Most of us find it hard to forgive others, because we have a self-centered view. We tend to focus on our own pain, hurts, and needs. But we do not focus on our own sins, and how God forgave us. Once we have truly accepted the forgiveness of the Lord, then we can forgive ourselves. Once our focus is no longer on our own hurt and how we have been affected, then we can see how to give forgiveness more freely.

Empathy is probably the most powerful tool towards forgiving our spouses when they have wronged us. From big transgressions to small debts, understanding the other’s perspective can be key in unlocking patience and grace. In an article written for Christian Counseling Today, Parrotts say that, “Good couples walk in each others shoes. They know the power of empathy. They work to accurately understand the other’s perspective.” 33

According to an article written in Journal of Psychology and Theology about forgiveness viewing ourselves in a positive light may be a reason for unforgiveness. “While we are often motivated to relieve ourselves of guilt, admitting our faults and wrongdoings goes against our

motivations to view ourselves in a positive light." For this reason some us find it even more difficult to accept forgiveness from God, and ourselves. We feel that our sins are too egregious; too hurtful to those we love to be instantly and readily forgiven as the Bible teaches. After all, we live with the unforgiveness and grudges that others may hold against us. When we live with the guilt of our sins, we know that we have not forgiven ourselves, nor have we truly accepted God’s forgiveness. One reason for unforgiveness towards ourselves may be the realization that we have hurt those whom we love. “Forgiving the transgression usually isn’t the main problem. When we harm our partners, we damage our entire self-concept…Accepting our new flawed self can take months or years.” In other words, we can forgive ourselves more quickly for what we’ve done, than we can for whom we have hurt.

Those who are closest to us have the uncanny ability to hurt us the most. They give us many opportunities to practice forgiveness. In his book, *The Bait of Satan*, John Bevere asserts that, “Only those you care about can hurt you. You expect more from them—after all, you’ve given more of yourself to them.” We allow those we love the most access to our circle of comfort. This gives them chances to love us, and also chances to injure us as well.

In Luke 17:3-4 Jesus is describing a situation of a “brother” potentially sinning against you seven times in one day. Jesus’ point is obviously hyperbole here. The likelihood that anyone would sin against another person seven times in one day (or that one would remain in the presence of someone sinning against them seven times in a day) is minimal; it is unlikely in any relationship except marriage that is. Our spouses have more access to us than anyone else, and

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35 Everett L. Worthington, “Forgiveness In Marriage,” 61

they are armed with the most personal knowledge of us. Simply put exposure and opportunity is why it is easier for them to offend us multiple times in a single day. We live with them, and they know our buttons. We have a tendency to focus on the why. “Why did my husband curse at me? How could someone who says that they love me, hurt me?” “Why does she not trust me?” Jesus does not address this; He only says that we must forgive them. Riek, the writer of the article Transgressions, Guilt, and Forgiveness, indicates that we seek forgiveness based on the closeness of the relationship. In other words, if our relationship with our spouses is to be close, then we must seek forgiveness, as well as, give it.

When we do not forgive we are not forgiven, and we live in a state of unforgiveness. According to Drs. Clinton and Hawkins in the book A Quick Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling, “Unforgiveness is a state of resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, anger, fear, and stress toward an individual who has transgressed against another in some way. Unforgiveness is a cancer that eats away at the very soul of a person.” In everyday language, unforgiveness is a held grudge, but in addition it is a state of being. There is power in forgiving others, and it frees them to be more loving. The opposite is true when we live in a state of unforgiveness. When we choose not to forgive others we give away power and strength, and we remain in bondage to someone who may not even know that they have wronged us.

There are also cases in which unforgiveness is holding another hostage. When someone knows that they have injured us, purposefully or not, we find it most difficult to forgive him or her for whatever crime has been committed against us. This is of course true in marriage. It is logical that we should be more apt to forgive our spouses for transgressing against us, and this

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may be the case during the early years of marriage. However, a repeat offender gets little leniency. When a grudge is held in marriage the manifestation may range from the silent treatment, withholding of marital benefits, vengeful actions, to an all out fight. We should always forgive, and always be ready to forgive—even the repeat offender.

The release of a guilty conscience is a very powerful thing. In Luke 7:40-47, Jesus teaches about the direct proportion of forgiveness to love. He teaches that the larger the forgiven debt, the more the person is free to love. He continues and explains “But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” Lk 7:47 NKJV In our marriages, we need as much love as possible. Jesus is teaching us here that when we forgive we set a person free to love more; to love us more. The larger the offense that one is forgiven of, the more love in turn he or she is free to give, but the heart that has received little forgiveness, loves little. Imagine the heart of a spouse who has received little forgiveness over many years. “Perceived forgiveness may allow transgressors to remit their guilty and/or shameful feelings associated with their transgressions because their victims have freely chosen to abandon seeing them in negative ways.”39 In other words, if we believe that those whom we have injured have forgiven us then we might find it easier to forgive ourselves for injuring them. This is why we seek forgiveness from others.

It is commanded in 1 Peter 4:8 that, “above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” 1 Pet 4:8 NKJV We are told to love each other with a fervent love. This is a love that is intense. Many of the sins, mistakes, and offenses committed against us by our spouses can be covered by the love we have for them. It must be a fervent love for our spouses, because they offend us often. In other words, the amount of sin against us needs to be proportionally countered with love. To be clear, a person who loves forgives. So while we

are not equating forgiveness with love, we are asserting that if love exists forgiveness can as well.

Moving pass the past:

We’ve all heard it said in one way or another, “Don’t let your past hurt your future.” Loving with God’s love opens one up, and makes us transparent. It is the most exposed that you could ever be. This is how marriage should be. We should not be guarded, but be completely trusting of our spouses. Completely trusting them with our hearts, and having complete trust in them as well. Research shows that not all Christians trust their spouses completely. Just over one quarter of those surveyed indicated that they do not trust their spouses completely. (See Chart 15)

The problem that many of us will have with this is something that deeply rooted in us. It is our upbringing, our attitude, and our personality—in short our past. The biggest part of our past is our rearing, or how we were raised. In their book, “Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts” Parrott and Parrott teach that we each bring certain things into a marriage based upon ideas and
ideals sown into us from a very young age. The Parrotts refer to them as “unspoken rules and unconscious roles.”

Typically, only one of the spouses knows the unspoken rule. The other spouse does not find out about a rule until they inadvertently break it. These can be a great distress for marriages. These rules can be as simple as where in the house to keep the bread. One spouse may have grown up in a large family in which the loaves were kept at the ready in a breadbox on the kitchen counter. A loaf may not have lasted past a couple of days. The other spouse’s family, being smaller, may have kept the bread in the refrigerator for preservation. Something as simple as where to keep the bread may cause small disagreements that, if not discussed, can grow into big arguments.

A more complex rule, such as always speak when entering a room, may seem like good manners to some. This is typical of persons raised in the southern United States. However, if a spouse was raised in a home in which an Eastern philosophy was embraced (one in which children are taught to speak only when spoken to) they may find speaking upon entering a room disrespectful or obnoxious. This may be a difficult thing to overcome, and may create issues within marriage and child rearing.

We must recognize that these unspoken rules exist, attempt to identify them, share them with our spouses, and come to a compromise about them if they differ greatly from our spouse’s rules about the very same thing.

Recognizing the unconscious roles that we all have can help to avoid many arguments and marital discord. “If you are like most couples, you will try to follow a script that was written by

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the role models you grew up with.” In other words, what we saw our parents do in their relationships, we tend to do. If a woman saw her father raking the leaves every fall, she may unconsciously accept that it is “a man’s job” to rake leaves. That is a great assumption until we realize that her new husband’s mother had a green thumb, and handled all of the home’s landscaping needs. Imagine the possible consternation they each feel every fall. They may each find that the other is slacking in this area of responsibility. The list of unconscious roles can be exhaustive. As with the unspoken rules they can cause mix-matched expectations. The key again is recognizing that they exist, and working through them when they arise.

Our past experiences dictate many of our present responses. This is true in general circumstances, and it is certainly true in marriage. This means if persons close to us have hurt us in the past, we may be reluctant to be open with others in our present. In plain language, if a woman was cheated on in a past relationship she is less likely to be completely trusting from that point forward. If she witnessed her mother being abused by a man she may have a fear that her husband will strike her if ever he is angered, or they have a disagreement. Maybe as a child, she and her family were poor and often lacked food. This could manifest as an eating disorder, or even a shopping addiction. What if she herself was once promiscuous? She may now project her past onto her husband by accusing him of being unfaithful. Or perhaps she had an abortion and finds it difficult to praise God, because of guilt. This list could go on. The point is our past can have a way of keeping us bound. But, aren’t we as Christians supposed to live lives free from bondage? There is a teaching in II Corinthians 3:14-17 that is perfect for explaining this.

“But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” Nevertheless

41 Ibid, 24
when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Co 3:14–17 NKJV

We see here the scripture that teaches us that where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty. Not, where the spirit is, there should be liberty. We have to ask ourselves if our refusal to let go of our past is a hindrance to what God has ordained for us. We must ask if our refusal to accept His forgiveness is sinful? We are to have liberty! Yes, even from our past sins, transgressions, and iniquities. In fact, if we look at the earlier part of that scripture we find that the people of that time were living in the past. It is when they have turned “to the Lord the veil is taken away.” Learning to turn from the past starts with turning to the Lord.

The whole truth, and nothing but the truth:

The seven most dreaded words in the English language from a husband’s perspective might very well be: “Does this outfit make me look fat?” This statement of jest has been a source of anything but laughter for many. The scenario has been played out in books, television shows, and movies. A husband or boyfriend has been spotlighted, and caught off guard. The reader or audience knows how he really feels, but he dare not answer with the truth. How do we handle this conundrum?

Do you love your spouse enough to tell them the truth? Even about the hurtful things? Many times we are so afraid of hurting feelings that we forego expressing the truth. This lack of truth is done many times in critical areas of relationships. Sadly, when true feelings are exposed it is in an unhealthy situation, such as in the heat of an argument. Naturally, this can be damaging, and sometimes detrimental to the relationship. The person who has just received the true feelings may feel hurt, betrayed, attacked, and deceived. The person who has just shared the information
may have decided not to share prior to then in order to keep peace. It seems that many of us have
subconsciously adopted a way of thinking that more closely resembles, “I love my spouse
even to lie to and deceive them.” It is clear that, “individuals in intimate relationships seek an
equilibrium point between the need to be open in their relationship and the need to protect the
mate or family member from the consequences of such openness.” 42 This is due, according to an
article in Family Relations to the nature of interpersonal communication between individual in
intimate relationships.

When asked if they would confess thinking of having an affair, 57% of Christians said they
would not share this with their spouse. (See Chart 16)

There must be underlying issues in a scenario like this that should be discussed. If a person is
tinking of having an affair there is a reason. If that reason is not discussed (regardless of the
outcome) it, the reason for thinking about the affair, probably will not get better. In fact, if left
unresolved it most likely will get worse. In his book, Surviving an Affair, Willard Harvey tells
the story of a woman who became involved with another man. The husband had started a new
job that required him to work longer hours. The wife became romantically unattached to the
husband. She never shared this with him, and in fact went out of her way to give the appearance

42 Fitzpatrick, “Multifunctional Coding of Conflict Resolution Strategies is Marital Dyads,” 61.
that all was well. But she was unfulfilled, and allowed boundaries to become blurred, and soon crossed. Soon she found herself actually in the act of adultery.\footnote{Willard F. Harley, Jr., Jennifer Harley Chalmers, \textit{Surviving an Affair} (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Group. Kindle Edition 1998), Kindle Location 164.} In the story the wife had the opportunity to tell the husband how she felt about him romantically. She thought about it. She chose not to share this with him in order to keep peace, because she was fulfilled in every other area of her life. Had she confessed the truth to him at least he would have had the opportunity to attempt to fill the need. She chose to hide the truth and regardless of how inadvertent her actions were, they still led to an affair. She did not love her husband enough to tell him the truth, and the cost was their family.

Unfortunately this is an all too common occurrence. It starts with trying to protect the spouse from hurt feelings, but often ends up being a life (of the marriage) long lie, or some sort of mental justification. Another common example occurs with regard to physical appearances. A wife puts on weight and is no longer the “type” that the husband fell in love with. (The change in “type” could be anything from dressing differently or less attractively, a change in hairstyle or color, or a change in personality, etc. Gaining weight is not the only way this happens, but it is a common enough occurrence to use an example that most can relate to.) She knows that she has gained weight, and may even feel unattractive to herself. She decides to ask her husband a “loaded” question. “Honey do you still find me attractive?” If his response is no, then he is labeled shallow, and may feel shallow himself for feeling as he does. If his response is yes, then he’s a liar. In an attempt to spare her feelings, he lies to her. The question is loaded, because regardless of his answer, he cannot be right. A negative answer comes with the consequence of hurting his wife’s feelings, and having her to think that he is selfish, immature, and shallow. A positive response to the question could lead to his wife becoming less attractive to him. His eye
begins to wander, and his mind begins to wonder. That certainly could lead to sin. What should he do? In this situation the recommendation is truth with tenderness, and a focus on what is *most* important. A person’s physical attributes are important, but they are not the *only* things that attract two people to one another. There are other pieces to the whole that makes a person appealing. To answer her question solely based on her physical attributes, even if that is was she asked, is not correct. The truth is always the best route. Deliver it the correct way; that is with love.

It should be noted that a spouse should attempt to remain attractive to their mate physically as well as mentally, and spiritually. There are virtues that go far beyond physical features, the clothes we wear and our waistlines for sure, but be ye not naïve. The outside does matter. We should want to be physically attractive to our spouses. It is unfair and unrealistic to simply let (or make) one’s appearance change drastically (when it’s not nature’s doing) and expect for our spouse to have the same attraction to us before the appearance change. It is also unrealistic to expect a 35-year-old mother of two to have a 25-year-old’s body. Beauty is fleeting, but there is no reason not to chase it for a time.

*Hope*

Despite all of the negativity facing marriages, all of the attacks on the family from various external sources, and every attempt of the enemy to uproot the family there should remain the power of hope. Every marriage should have hope at the core. The hope that through everything that is experienced and endured, good and bad, that there exists the hope of marital longevity. It is the same hope that we have in the many areas of our spiritual lives. In an article written for the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, The Hope-Focused Marriage method of counseling was
applied to a study. The focus of this therapy is summed up in the following three tenants; they are Faith, Work, and Love.

• Faith: trust in each other and in your ability to resolve differences in mutually satisfying ways
• Work: putting energy into maintaining and improving your relationship
• Love: being willing to value and refusing to devalue each other

We must consider, and ask ourselves if we have hope in our marriages. Do we believe that each decision made has both spouses’ (the family unit’s) best interest at heart? That is a test of faith in resolving differences. Are we willing to be consistent in our efforts to improve ourselves, and our marriages? Or will we allow slothfulness to settle us into the typical hurting relationships of the world? Can we bridle our tongues and only utter affirming words to our spouses? Or are we more interested in self-validation, even at the expense of a devaluing of our spouses? Can we renew our minds, and really open our hearts to God and our spouses?

All of these questions should be answered honestly. They should add up to hope.

Expression

5 Ways to Express Agape

1. We should always be willing to forgive our spouses. As God has forgiven us for our many sins, and transgressions we also should be willing to forgive. After all, we have made mistakes as well, and love covers a multitude of sin.

2. We should be accepting of our spouses. Each person has a right to be who he or she is. We all should strive to be better people, but while in the process having an understanding spouse can be a great comfort. We should all strive be that understanding spouse.

3. We should be willing to change for our spouses. We must be willing to better ourselves so that our marriages are better. Change habits, change mindsets, and change perspectives!

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4. We should **be ready to endure** for our spouses. There are certainly trying times in marriage. The Bible calls this enduring of trying times, longsuffering. Love gives us the ability to stand with, and withstand.

5. We should **always have hope**. Seeing the best in our spouses is probably one of the greatest ways to express love to them. Many times we cannot see what those who love us can see in us.
CHAPTER VI:

Summary and Conclusion

The common thread of learning to apply love, all of the types of love, is selflessness. There is no greater way, easier way, or correct way to show love to a spouse than by thinking of them and their wellbeing before we think of ourselves.

A spouse becomes a roommate without love. With that said, there is even a level of love that we typically have for anyone who lives under that same roof as do we. There is at least an understanding that communication and cooperation must take place in order to cohabitate. But still, we Christians are supposed to love our neighbors. Our goal should be to love our neighbors (spouses), as we love ourselves. This is so important that Jesus said that it was like the greatest commandment, which is to love God. This lesson is taught in Matthew, Mark, and Luke of the New Testament. Jesus says that we are supposed to love God with all that we are. He then gives the command to love our neighbors, as we love ourselves. Next He ups the ante even higher by adding that the second greatest command is like the first. Meaning that it has special significance just like the greatest command. We should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Of course this also refers to the closest neighbor that we could ever have; that is our spouse.

We can only truly love someone else if we have the Love of Christ. If we have His love then we can all but remove selfishness from our convoluted way of thinking. The social, economic, and environmental factors of life make removing our way of thinking and feeling very difficult. These are the things that we argue about with spouses. They cause strife and stress, and then other issues as we seek to rid ourselves of the strife and stress. These are the scenarios that create the possessiveness and selfishness that eventually chokes the life out of marriages. With
Christ’s love, we began to value relationships and people differently. We don’t see a spouse just as a spouse. They become “God’s precious baby girl”, and “God’s cherished son”. Their value increases in our eyes, and serving them becomes more important to us; more than gratifying our own fleshly desires. Commitment to them becomes synonymous with commitment to God.

The one and only way to really solve this puzzle is with love. Not a husband’s love for his wife, or vise versa, for if that were possible Mike and Sarah (from the introduction), and countless other couples, would not be in the precarious situations in which they find themselves. They are looking to a world that embraces divorce for advice on marriage. No, only applying God’s love in our relationships can truly join, heal, and sustain a truly meaningful marriage.

However, the key is more than merely possessing the knowledge that God loves us, and that we should love others (especially our spouses). We must, in fact, apply and express this knowledge of love; we must Live Out Love. We must attempt to love our spouses as closely to how He loves us as we can.

There is no formula that one can follow save this: Agape, God’s love, must reign supreme. All else does not fall into place without Agape. The other three types of love have to be encapsulated by Agape. However, because feelings can change with circumstances and as we get older, we have moments when we are selfish and do not care to serve others, and there are events in our lives that shake our commitment we must be aware of the attacks and safeguard our marriages. In a sin-free, non-fallen world this certainly would not be a discussion. In our world however, we have jigsaw pieces that must be fitted together to make wholeness in our marriages. We do that by living love.

This thesis is a biblical explanation of four types of love with the backdrop of the Greek words for love: Eros, Philia, Storge, and Agape. The purpose is to show that the living-out of
each of these types of love in the correct balance can create and sustain a healthy marriage.

Herein lies how these four types of love are relevant in marriage, and how they are Godly and/or biblical. We have learned what the four types of love are, we have learned how to recognize where we are in regards to the four types of love, we have learned how to apply them in our marriage, and we have learned five ways to express each of them to our spouses.

Suggestions here have shown how we can use love to prevent some of the tribulations that couples go through. We have shown how applying brotherly love (the love of action, doing, and service), family love (the love of covenant and commitment), romantic love (the love of feelings/emotions and physical love), and the Love of God (unconditional, and 1 Corinthians: 13 love) in marriage will strengthen and sustain our covenant, and draw us nearer to our spouses and the Lord.

So what does it mean to “Live Out Love”? It means that we stop talking about it, and be it. It means that we take the theoretical and make it practical. It means sometimes we go back to the drawing board, we ask for and give forgiveness, we think less of ourselves and more of our spouses. We earnestly seek to know more of Jesus Christ. We use the tools that God has given us, to live how He has called us to live. The self-created struggles, self-imposed tribulations that we have in life are a direct reflection of our lack of understanding of, or failure to apply living life as a Christian. This is certainly the case in marriage. If we are not living truly and completely, as Christ would have, then we should expect turmoil. This is difficult enough for one person to do. When two individuals are involved it literally becomes twice as difficult. This is why God said that two should become one! We live out love through Christ. “Marriage is a
shadow of the relationship that we are expected to have with Jesus—permanent, loving, and committed.”

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45 Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 17
APPENDICES

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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IRB

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

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Sincerely,

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LEARNING AND APPLYING FOUR TYPES OF LOVE TO SUSTAIN MARRIAGE

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis project is to show married couples, and those who want to be married how to live out God’s love in their marriage. We will examine and explain four components of love; Feelings and Physical Love (Eros), Action and Service (Philia), Commitment and Covenant (Storge), and God’s Love (Agape). We will show the biblical foundation for each of the four parts. The material used will come from the life experiences from couples of all types of marriages (new, successful, troubled, failing, divorced, separated, recovering, etc.). Much of the research will come from surveys of couples. Other research will come from authors, counselors, and researchers who have written on love, relationships, and marriages, etc. The practical use for this thesis is in a couples’ ministry, a distressed marriage, premarital and marital counseling, or a couple looking to tune-up their marriage through understanding the principles of living out love in their marriage.
The Planned Use...

There are three main ways that I plan to use this thesis and the principles therein. They are:

1. I plan to use this thesis as the foundation and start of a book.
   1. The book, in turn, can be used in various couples’ ministries.

2. The principals in this thesis will be used as I counsel married couples as pastor.

3. The principles in this thesis will be used as I conduct pre-marital counseling for engaged couples.
Why this project was written:
The Problem

In this day’s fast-paced, instantly gratifying, microwaved world an alarming number of married couples find themselves on the verge of separating or divorcing, arguments are the norm in their homes, their worlds in disarray, and turmoil abides within what should be a safe haven. They cannot pinpoint where it all went wrong. They have known for some time that things are not quite right. They argue and fight over the smallest, insignificant things, and they can go for days at a time barely speaking to one another. The good days and times seem to be choked out by the bad ones. The pressure created by careers, school, children, in-laws, family, and, selfishness, even ministry only exacerbates these issues.
The Solution:

The panacea that is God’s love is the only true counter to the ills of this world that attack our marriages.

Learning and applying four types of love to sustain marriage:

I. Storge: The Love of Covenant and Commitment
II. Philia: The Love of Action and Service
III. Eros: The Love of Emotion and Physical Love
IV. Agape: The Love of Acceptance and Forgiveness
The Steps to take...

- Step 1: Get understanding. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. ~ Proverbs 4:7 NKJV

- Step 2: Recognize where you are. “One who conceals his disease cannot hope to be cured.” ~ African Proverb.

- Step 3: Apply what you’ve learned. Man’s greatness consists in his ability to do and the proper application of his powers to things needed to be done. ~Frederick Douglass

- Step 4: Express yourself. The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives. ~Tony Robbins
Storge, Family Love:
The Love of Commitment
and Covenant
Storge Defined:
The Love of Covenant and Commitment

- “... Storge (pronounced STOR-gay), refers to family love, the love of parents for their children.” This is a love that is covenantal and decisional at its roots. “...the commitment in marriage is a particularly important type of commitment, a covenant lasting until death.” Storge is the love of commitment.


The vows of marriage state conditions that are rooted in Storge love. Conditions like “for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, for better or worse” require a commitment beyond what an individual might be accustomed to in regards to someone other than the immediate family in which they were raised. Two people coming together as husband and wife will not immediately have a Storge love. This love grows in us, as we grow and learn one another. It is based on trust but hinged on faith.
Storge Recognized:
How does God see marriage?

- We must recognize how God sees the relationship between husband and wife, and then recognize where we are in our level of commitment to our spouse, and if we have made a conscious decision to love them, honoring the covenant through whatever comes against the marriage.

- Christ compared himself to a groom and the church as His bride in Mark 2:19.

- He expects for the bond between husband and wife to be so strong that it was chosen to be the metaphor for His son’s relationship to His church.
Christ’s relationship with the church is the perfect example of the commitment one needs for marriage. Do we have His commitment? His life was dedicated to her, and He was not separated from her until the time of His death on the cross. He stayed committed through richer and poorer, sicknesses and health, better and worse, beatings, being spat upon, crowned with thorns, crowds gathered to welcome Him and sing hosanna to Him, and crowds gathered to shout crucify Him. Through that, He stayed. That is the perfect picture of what a marriage should be. Total dedication. It is covenant!

We must self-assess!
Applying Storge

- **Apply Evenly**
  - Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Cultivate a relationship with God, be consistent.
  - A commitment to God shows a commitment to our spouse.

- **Apply in Times of Peace**
  - We guard against a break in our commitment by keeping the reasons for the initial commitment alive.
  - Happily married couples tend to agree on recreation needs and on the value of spending time together.

- **Apply in Troubled Times**
  - There should be resolutions to conflicts. Conflicts should not be allowed to remain untended and eventually divide us.
  - We must realize that marriage is a life-long commitment and no decision that is made in the will of God will go against a marriage that God has ordained.
Five Ways of Expressing Storge

1. We should continue to **date our spouses** for the duration of our lives. We should learn, and relearn them as they (and we) grow, change, and mature over time.

2. We should **pray and study with our spouses** regularly and often. Seeking God with our spouses is just as important as individual time. The Lord is the great sustainer, healer, comforter, and supplier. Seeking Him as a couple should be a top priority in the covenant.

3. We **should take an interest in our spouses’ hobbies**. This may, or may not mean taking up the hobby. At least, it should include supporting events, and genuinely trying to understand the content that excites our spouses.

4. We **should attend marriage seminars, retreats, and conferences** for regular maintenance; attending those designed for couples, and those that are gender specific.

5. We should **verbally assure** our spouses of our commitment to them and live up to what we say. This is done in several subtle or non-verbal ways, but it is important also to verbally say, “I am committed to you and this marriage. I will do what it takes to make it last.”
Philia, Brotherly Love:
The Love of Acting and Serving
Philia Defined

This love is one of acting, doing, and serving. "Philia love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage."

Philia love is the "show me" love.

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- This is the love that Peter had for our Lord, Jesus.
- Peter was always quick to "show" his love by performing some act. He was a doer, and a man of action.
- Whether it was walking on water toward Jesus, cutting the ear from the arresting guard, or answering "who do men say I am?", Peter could best show his love through action and service.
- Each spouse must be willing to serve the other spouse. We should always be willing to do for our spouses, and put their needs above our own desires.
Recognizing Philia

- Recognizing Philia means that we have to gauge just how selfish we are.
- This can be a very difficult thing to do. The sinful nature of our flesh does not like to be exposed.
- A huge part of serving our spouses is self-denial, and the foregoing of personal desires.
- When we are selfish we are placing value on ourselves greater than the value that we have placed on our spouses.
- “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Mt 6:21 NKJV
Applying Philia

- Most people find it easy to help complete strangers.
- We find it easier to serve and be selfless in public, than at home.
  - Many people tirelessly serve at church, school and in the community, but have suffering marriages because they do not serve their spouse.
- It is quite sobering to confess that we are selfish, that we do not do for our spouses what we ought to, and that we do not serve our spouses as often as we should.

- Always considering the needs of our spouses,
  - doing for our spouses,
  - protecting our spouses, and
- serving our spouses is how we apply this *Philia* love.
Five Ways of Expressing Philia

1. We should **have a joyful heart** when our spouses ask us to do something. If we serve our spouses with a bad attitude it really isn’t serving them; it’s more like indentured servitude. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and so do most people.

2. We should **offer to help** our spouses in whatever they do. Making ourselves available shows not only caring, but a willingness to sacrifice time as well. Who knows? Depending upon the situation we might actually be able to help.

3. We should seek to **perform unexpected niceties** for our spouses. There are several ways to do this, but there’s no greater way to ease stress than performing their chores for them, and lightening their load.

4. We should **sacrifice our likes** for our spouses’ likes. When it comes down to an “either/or” situation, say due to time or money, we should defer to our spouses’ desires over our own. Being selfless is a great way to show emotional love.

5. We should **be dependable and follow through**. Having trust in marriage is very important. There is an old saying that we are only as good as our word. Our spouses should be able to count on us to do what we say.
The love of Emotions/Feelings and Physical Love - Eros
Eros Defined

- "Eros refers to physical love; it gives us our English word erotic."
- It is the love that causes those indescribable emotions that we have, and those very strong physical feelings that we have.
- Eros is the love of emotions, and/or feelings, and of physical love.

Eros is one type of love that has two sides that intertwine greatly. There are distinct times where emotions may have nothing to do with physical love, but the opposite is not true of physical love. There are times when physical lusts may have very little emotion attached, but physical love always has an emotional tether.

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The emotional health of a person is very important to the health of a marriage. If either spouse is emotionally distracted, withdrawn, or imbalanced that marriage will have unique circumstance to deal with. It sounds like an obvious conclusion at which to arrive. Meeting a spouse’s emotional needs is should be a priority.

Physical love has a great range of meanings. It can be anything from holding hands, a hug or kiss, to sexual intercourse, and everything in between. Physical love is one of the greatest gifts from God to us as married people. It is not only physical, as it is a communing of the spirits, and a tying of the souls of the spouses.
Recognizing Eros: Emotions

- We must determine where our relationships lie in terms of an emotionally satisfied spouse.
- This assessment can be as simple as these questions.
  - What made us fall in love in the first place?
  - What feelings did our spouses generate in us that caused us to fall in love with them, and how did they do it?
  - How did we make them fall in love with us?
Recognizing Eros: Physical Love

The biggest parts of physical love are time and proximity. We cannot meet the physical needs of our spouses if we are not spending time with them.

One of the benefits of marriage is lovemaking. While sex should not be the primary reason for getting married, it should certainly be an important part of a healthy marriage.

We must realize that meeting the physical needs of our spouse is of great significance and should be tended to like every other priority in our lives.
Applying Eros: Emotions

- We apply emotional love by seeking to communicate our feelings honestly and effectively, and earnestly attempting to understand those of our spouse.
- Self-awareness and communication are key. If we cannot conclude how we feel then we cannot communicate this to our spouse.
  - We must have the tact to deliver our thoughts in a way that ensures it is received the way we intended it to be.
  - By listening we gain common ground, and subsequently a better connection with our spouses.
Applying Physical Love

Sex is a very important part of a marriage. With that said, physical love should not automatically be synonymous with sexual intercourse.

The touch is a very powerful thing all by itself.

“...lovingly touching your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love.”

Learning to physically satisfy one’s own spouse is a process that happens over time.

Only we as individuals know what is exactly right, and if we are not bold enough to share what is right with our spouse, then we will remain the sole possessor of that knowledge.

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Five Ways of Expressing Eros

1. We must always be willing to listen to our spouses. Whether it is the daily unwinding, a sounding board for life’s stressors, or a serious issue within the marriage a listening ear goes a long way in emotional satisfaction.

2. We should always have and show empathy and sympathy to the things that our spouses are going through. We are joined to them, and therefore we should feel what they feel. We should celebrate their mountaintops and bemoan their valleys.

3. There cannot be an expression of physical love without giving time. We should seek to spend time with our spouses to continuously cultivate a loving relationship.

4. We should openly share our feelings with our spouses. Gaging our spouses’ emotions can be a tricky thing at times. Therefore, we should save them the headache of trying to read our minds. Being open and honest about our own emotions promotes connectedness.

5. We should touch our spouses often. Specifically, we should be intentional in physically connecting with our mates throughout each day. The power of touch is well documented and studied, and should be a daily practice in marriage.
Agape

The Love of God... Forgiveness and Hope
Agape Defined:

- Agape is, “Christian love, especially as distinct from erotic love or emotional affection.”
- Agape is God’s love. It is unconditional, untainted, and unselfish.
- “Agape love is the love God shows toward us. It is not simply a love based on feeling; it is expressed in our wills. Agape love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences”.

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*New Oxford American Dictionary, Version 2.2.3 (118.5) for Apple Inc., “Agape.”*

Recognizing Agape

Is it possible for us to show unconditional love to our spouses?

The answer is yes, and no.

Yes we can love with the love of God, with the caveat that it is through Him. This is not at all possible without Christ.

But no, we cannot constantly and consistently love in the same manner that God loves, because we are still wrapped in flesh.

That should not deter us from constantly and consistently attempting to do so.
Applying Agape

- We apply Agape in Marriage through forgiveness and hope.

- One of the biggest parts of God’s character is forgiveness.
  - Forgiveness involves committing not to exact revenge on the partner, not to avoid the partner, but to release the partner from the debt and act like one did before the transgression.

- Every marriage should have hope at the core.
  - Despite all of the negativity facing marriages, all of the attacks on the family from various external sources, and every attempt of the enemy to uproot the family there should remain the power of hope.
Five Ways of Expressing Agape

1. We should always be willing to forgive our spouses. As God has forgiven us for our many sins, and transgressions we also should be willing to forgive. After all, we have made mistakes as well, and love covers a multitude of sin.

2. We should be accepting of our spouses. Each person has a right to be who he or she is. We all should strive to be better people, but while in the process having an understanding spouse can be a great comfort. We should all strive be that understanding spouse.

3. We should be willing to change for our spouses. We must be willing to better ourselves so that our marriages are better. Change habits, change mindsets, and change perspectives!

4. We should be ready to endure for our spouses. There are certainly trying times in marriage. The Bible calls this enduring of trying times, longsuffering. Love gives us the ability to stand with, and withstand.

5. We should always have hope. Seeing the best in our spouses is probably one of the greatest ways to express love to them. Many times we cannot see what those who love us can see in us.
The purpose of this thesis and its practical application lies in aiding relationship building. The goal was to identify and understand how using God’s love, when properly applied, can sustain the marital relationship.

The common thread of learning to apply love, all of the types of love, is selflessness. There is no greater way, easier way, or correct way to show love to a spouse than by thinking of them and their wellbeing before we think of ourselves.

Summary:
The Big Picture