

A photograph of a young man and woman lying on their backs on a light-colored wooden plank floor. The woman is on the left, wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt, with her head tilted back and a wide smile. The man is on the right, wearing a teal t-shirt, with a beard and a smile. They are holding hands, and the man's hand is visible on the left side of the frame. The background is the wooden floor.

LOVE'S MOTIVATION LOVING GOD'S WAY

A 7-DAY COUPLES DEVOTIONAL
MARK BEAIRD

COVENANT 
COUNSELING & CONSULTING

EMPOWERING PEOPLE. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS. CHANGING LIVES.

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Introduction

Why do we bring Christ into the wedding ceremony? Because if we would only bring Christ into our marriages, we would have better marriages! A few years back psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers was quoted as saying that for about half of all American couples, marriage is a “quiet hell.” Many other marriages have degenerated into a “tired friendship,” as someone put it. I submit to you that this is a tragedy, and in order to prevent such tragedies, we ought to take the traditional marriage ritual seriously and invite Christ to be a guest at our weddings, just as He was invited to the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Above all, in this quaint and lovely little story, John is proclaiming the Good News that Jesus Christ is the Life of every party, that He is the one who livens things up, brings life abundant for all, even to anonymous brides and bridegrooms in an out-of-the-way peasant village located somewhere (where, we are not sure) in Galilee. As William Barclay put it in his commentary on this passage: “...whenever Jesus comes into our lives there enters a quality which is like turning water into wine. The trouble with life is that we get bored with it. Pleasure loses its thrill. There is a vague dissatisfaction about everything. But when Jesus enters our lives there comes a new exhilaration!”

Donald B. Strobe, Collected Words

How to use

Love's Motivation devotional was designed to aid in the development of the love a couple shares. It is meant to be uplifting and beneficial, but is not filled with sweet sentimental ideas or thoughts. It is meant to challenge each person in the relationship to love deeper and more completely.

- **Devotional Thought:** This portion is meant to encourage the reader to reflect on the meaning of the portion of God's Word that has been cited as the designated scripture.
- **Raising Our Awareness:** This portion is a brief application of the scripture passage cited, but by no means an exhaustive application. The reader may draw many additional applications.
- **Personal Reflection:** Just as it implies, this is "personal" and not necessarily meant to be shared with others. Rather, focus on the question in light of your relationship with God.
- **Couple's Reflection:** Finally, this is the portion for joint discussion with the intent of inspiring conversations directed toward developing understanding and a closer bond.

Day One

Love is the Foundation for Healthy Relationships

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...” NIV

Devotional Thought

If we look at building a relationship like we might build a home, we know we need a secure foundation on which it can stand. It has to be solid, enduring and substantial. When building a relationship, the best foundation is love. Couples talk a great deal about love early on in the relationship. We speak of “falling in love,” or finding the “love of our lives.” Sometimes the excited couples will talk about “loving” the way the other person makes them laugh or feel. They “love spending time together,” and on and on it goes. We would say, “They’re in Love!” It’s a wonderful thing to be in love!

As wonderful as all that may be, love is more than a feeling evoked by another’s presence, words, or actions. What takes “love” between two people from being a feeling that could be explained as a chemical reaction in the brain as a result of favorable interaction between two people to real life-long love is the way we act upon these feelings. When we add our positive choices and behaviors and commitment to those feelings, we begin the process of strengthening the feelings of love into something concrete and lasting.

Listen to the Apostle Paul’s words. Think of the following phrases as building blocks being laid to build a foundation on which the whole relationship can stand. Starting in verse four and going through verse seven we have fifteen blocks for our foundation. They are as follows:

Love is patient - Love is kind - It does not envy - It does not boast

It is not proud - It does not dishonor others - It is not self-seeking

It is not easily angered - It keeps no record of wrongs - Love does not delight in evil

But rejoices with the truth - It [love] always protects - [Love] always trusts

[Love] always hopes - [Love] always perseveres

Block by block, step by step the foundation is laid and capped off with the guarantee that binds them all together found in verse eight, “Love never fails.” Notice that each of these building blocks are attributes or qualities which are not based in feelings. Most denote or

speaking of actions. This is because if the feelings of love are not solidified in actions, this feeling of love can easily be changed by a change in mood or emotion or by a change in one's attitude. This may explain why some "fall out of love" just like they "fell in love."

Raising our Awareness

At this point, go back to the previous list. On the line beside each, write down what that particular aspect of love *means to you*. Without criticism, but with the attitude of "*this will help me see your love for me*" take turns sharing your thoughts on each of these with the one you love. (One gives their thoughts on the "A" questions and one gives their thoughts on the "B" question. Both share on the last one. You choose who will start.)

- A. Love is patient: _____
- B. Love is kind: _____
- A. It does not envy: _____
- B. It does not boast: _____
- A. It is not proud: _____
- B. It does not dishonor others: _____
- A. It is not self-seeking: _____
- B. It is not easily angered: _____
- A. It keeps no record of wrongs: _____
- B. Love does not delight in evil: _____
- A. But [it] rejoices with the truth: _____
- B. It [love] always protects: _____
- A. [Love] always trusts: _____
- B. [Love] always hopes: _____
- Together: [Love] always perseveres: _____
- _____
- _____

Person Reflection:

- What foundational actions are you taking to build an enduring and loving relationship that resembles God's love?

- Referring back to the descriptive list of the traits of God's love, what areas can you strengthen?

- **In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?**

Couple's Reflection

- Share your personal commitment to building a strong love that benefits you both.
- How can the other help you in expressing Godly love to the other?

Day Two

Love Straight from the Heart

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4 NIV

“Love is patient, love is kind.”

Devotional Thought

In Paul’s listing of the characteristics of love he begins with, “Love is patient, love is kind.” The idea is that real love manifests itself in relationships by causing the person or persons to be easy-going and tolerant in regard to the words and actions of the one who is the object of our love. Sounds beautiful and sweet, doesn’t it? But note that *nowhere does Paul say*, “Loving others is easy if you really love them.” The very fact that he felt the need to point out that love is patient and kind may indicate that people who love one another have a problem at times being patient and kind.

We must be careful to not elevate love to an idealist extreme. The danger in doing so would be to make love such a lofty idea that any little slight becomes would-be evidence that the other person does not truly love us. God’s love that comes from Him is the only perfect love. People and their love are imperfect. What we want to look for or seek to attain is a love that can be seen as heartfelt and sincere. “Love is patient, love is kind,” Paul reminds us. In other words, love that comes from the heart is long-suffering and gentle. It can be seen that a person loving someone from the heart wants to do so even if he or she fails in his or her attempt. After all, Paul said, “Love never fails.” He never said people who love never fail.

Genuine love from the heart makes a big difference in relationships. For instance, isn’t it easier to forgive someone who you know genuinely loves you? We tend to excuse them more easily if we love them the same in return. “I know they didn’t mean it,” we say. We know genuine love doesn’t have an intentionally harsh edge to it. “Love is patient, love is kind.” Don’t the edges of that kind of love sound soft? That kind of love has an unspoken assurance to it even when we hurt the one we love. Have you ever been playing with your child or grandchild and tickled them too rough or accidentally pinched them zipping up their jacket? They will let you know you hurt them immediately, but they will also often reassure us in their tiny voice, “It’s okay. You didn’t mean to” and they are ready to play again! They do not shun us for these small infractions because they know our heart.

Raising our Awareness

What do I mean by the heart? Is it the seat of our emotions or the core of our intellect? I mean both. The kind of love Paul advocates is rooted in both intellect and feelings. It’s intentional and impulsive. It is cognitive and emotional. It is about how we think, act, and feel. It comes from the core of who we are.

Personal Reflection

- In what *ways* are you concerned that you might fail to show the love you feel toward the one you love?
- In what area might *the one you love* feel your love has a harsh edge to it?
- In regard to *the one you love*, how do you think they really see you?
- ***In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?***

Couple's Reflection

- Give examples of words or comments that convey love to you.
- Give examples of actions that convey love to you.

Day Three

The Humility of Love

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4

“It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”

Devotional Thought

“Envy” is such an unpleasant word. It conjures up ideas of jealousy and resentment and things done out of spite. It sounds as if it is the expression of a greedy heart that always wants more and cannot be satisfied. It goes well with boasting and pride in that an envious heart is ever preoccupied with asserting its right to something. It stakes its claim to what it wants or thinks it should have on every opportunity. It is never satisfied in itself. It finds motivation, but not satisfaction, in seeking its own gratification. No wonder Paul says that love, real love, “Does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” Real love would never allow itself to be envious of the object of its desire. Love is too humble in nature for such unsavory displays of greedy behavior.

On the contrary, love is unpretentious and modest in its character. It can wait to be served second. Love is willing, patient, and willing to be satisfied after another has first received what was needed or desired. Yes, love manifests itself in the humility we show toward the ones we love. This is the behavior Paul hopes to inspire in the reader of 1 Corinthians 13.

Raising our Awareness

Comparing the expressions of our own love to, or even placing our behavior and words in the spotlight of Paul’s words describing the love God advocates, can easily leave one feeling deficient in one’s assertions and expressions of love. But we need not feel an unreasonable standard has been set for us. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives will most assuredly inspire the best type of love. Out of His work in our heart grows a love that is pure and that can be expressed more naturally. The best expressions of love are just that—expressions of the love we have for another.

Personal Reflection

- What are the better expressions of your love that you see in your own actions?
- What are the unpleasant reminders of a self-seeking attitude that you see in your words or actions?

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- *In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?*

Couple's Reflection

- What are the better expressions of love that you see in the one you love?
- Being careful *not to unrealistically idealize* your relationship, if the expressions of love increased, how then would your relationship look different from the way it is today?

Day Four

Unselfish Love

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

“It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

Devotional Thought

Speaking of the love of God, the words of the old hymnal song, “Love Lifted Me” proclaims, “When nothing else could help, love lifted me.” God’s love has the power to do just that and if God’s love dwells in us, we in turn, have the ability to help emotionally lift others through the expression of our love. This is not to say that we are responsible for the way those we love feel; however, the way we love someone has the ability to help raise their self-concept and their overall perspective on themselves as well as life.

There can be obstacles to overcome in the form of the way people think about themselves and others. For instance, some may have difficulty receiving or accepting the love of another because they do not feel worthy. Some may have difficulty understanding the need to lift up another and feel it’s not their responsibility. Still some may see themselves and their needs as more important than anyone else’s. Here the Apostle Paul addresses the attitude and actions of those who would diminish the needs of others and exalt their own feelings above those of anyone else.

Allow me to paraphrase Paul’s words, “Love doesn’t dishonor or discredit others’ needs through self-centered behavior. It is not easily frustrated and annoyed and it does not hold a grudge.” We could say that a person who truly loves understands that everything said, done, felt, needed, etc., is not all about them.

Raising our Awareness

Anger and score-keeping over perceived slights or failed bids for attention create a barrier preventing us from stepping aside to put another first. They are useless, but for causing pain and cultivating selfish wants. They lead only to loneliness and emptiness. One of the primary truths we must accept in loving God’s way is that everything is not about us. When we remove ourselves from the center of our world, mistreating others and self-seeking behavior has a tendency to die away.

In loving God’s way, we are challenged to slow down and seek to understand the needs and nature of those we love. Compassionate understanding can often diffuse anger and prevent the holding of grudges.

Personal Reflection

- Privately consider the times you put your needs before those of the one you love. Did you really benefit?
- Privately consider the times you put the needs of the one you love before those of yourself? Did you have the right motivation?
- ***In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?***

Couples Reflection

- Explain what your spouse has done in the past that helped you feel special.
- Emotionally, what do each of you need from the other to help you feel close to the other?

*Rowe, James and Smith, Howard E. (1912) *Love Lifted Me*.

Day Five

Love's Motivation

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:6 NIV

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”

Devotional Thought

When's the last time you felt *delighted* about something? It feels good, doesn't it? To be thrilled or elated about something good that has happened can make a dull day exciting or erase a bad mood altogether! Now keep that delighted feeling in mind. Can you imagine being delighted by evil? I have actually met people who loved nothing more than to hear of someone's personal failure or misfortune. They were delighting in evil things. That's bad enough when it's the neighborhood gossip, but when it is one's spouse, and it is about their failure or misfortune that is just about intolerable.

Why, you might ask, would a spouse feel that way? All I can tell you is what I have seen. It often appears to give them power or control over the one they supposedly love. They feel they have the upper hand. They are the people who will *figuratively* beat their spouse to death with their mistakes and rejoice when their spouse fails at something in which they had no investment. It is the all-consuming need to be able to say, “I was right and you were wrong!” Either way, the supposed object of their affection always knows the score—they're losing. It is kind of an ugly picture, isn't it?

What Paul is trying to tell us here is clear, love rejoices not in the iniquity or failures of others but in their virtues. Love motivates us to see the best in others, to expect the best, to foster the best in others. It is motivated by virtues—not vices. It never wants to hear the sordid details or see the rags of failure worn by the object of its affection. *It is love inspired by its own nature; consequently, it does not have to have constant justification for loving another.*

Raising our Awareness

Learning to delight oneself in our most important relationships is an important discipline because it is a part of fallen human nature to find delight in other's unhealthy or dysfunctional behavior. It is one reason “reality shows” are so popular in our society—some people delight in watching and discussing the messed up lives of others. Far too many focus on the “evil” or wrongs of the one they love. This inspires a mindset of contempt (*i.e., disrespect or disapproval*) for the other and contempt is often referred to as the “*kiss of death*” for a relationship.

Person Reflection

- Thinking back over the last two weeks, in what aspects of your relationship or the other person have you delighted yourself?
- What are a few good replacement thoughts in which you could find loving delight?
- **In light of God's Word, how could you *better* demonstrate your love?**

Couple's Reflection

- Share with one another your appreciation for their best traits.
- How can you both continue to express appreciation for the words and actions of the other?

Day Six
Love's Intention

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:7 NIV

“It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

Devotional Thought

How can love achieve its purpose if we are purposeless in our love? What I mean by purposeless is that too often, as a therapist, I see couples living a sort of vague or empty type of existence with one another. When I ask about shared dreams or goals—I often get a blank stare. When I ask about when the last time they had fun together—again, a blank stare. When I ask why one did not come to the emotional defense of the other in certain situations—it is often explained that is/was “their business.” When I ask, if each believes the other will always *at least try* to act in his or her best interest, far too often I see only a doubtful expression. Love is always active! As verse seven tells us, “It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” That is love with intention! Those words are filled with purpose and passion!

So, what is missing? Perhaps a clearly understood intent and purpose.

Purposeless love is just cohabitation that leads to feeling as if the other is a roommate or stranger. Consequently, if the other is “like a roommate” or stranger, why should we adjust our words or actions to in any big way to accommodate the feelings of the other? I have asked men, “What if I talked to your wife the way you just did?” They always assure me they would not tolerate it. Then, I ask, “Why do you talk to her that way?” The same goes for the wife.

If we love with purpose and intent, we do so with the mindset of a sentry standing guard, *always protecting, always trusting, always hoping, always persevering*. This is our purpose and intent in every loving relationship.

Raising our Awareness

Have you been together long enough that being together is good, but still, “No big deal?” Do you feel more like roommates? Ask yourself, “What is shared other than a home, chores, bills, and the parental responsibilities of the children?” Ask yourself, “Is my idea about love just co-existing with someone I care about?” The passion and the bond between two people comes alive when there is clear purpose and intent in the relationship. Renewing your purpose and loving with intentionality is the answer.

Person Reflection

- What is your relational purpose or intent in your relationship?
- In what ways have you drifted off course?
- ***In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?***

Couple's Reflection

- Get back on the same page, so to speak, define your mission or purpose for your relationship.
- Now, develop a strategy for making it happen.

Day Seven

Building a Love that will Last

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:8a NIV

“Love never fails.”

Devotional Thought

“Love never fails.” What a powerful truth! God’s love will never fail us and if we love others in the manner God loves we will always see God’s work in our lives. We may fail in some way. Our actions may come up short. Our words may not always convey what we intend. Nevertheless, love will never fail. Expressing genuine love will always be helpful. Committing ourselves to loving passionately and genuinely will always bring out our better nature. Our challenge to create a relationship where love can grow and mature, to remain unburdened by human selfishness that inspires words and actions capable of wounding those we love.

The freedom to love selflessly and the freedom to live unburdened by selfish preoccupations is found, in part, when we step aside and love another first. What better opportunity is there to experience this than in the relationship you share with the one you have chosen to create a lasting bond. However, we must be willing to lay aside all that hinders and draw near one another with the best of intentions. It may seem difficult at times but God’s love will show us the way.

Raising our Awareness

Seeking out opportunities and ways to show one’s love to others is a key part of building a love that will last. Starting points can be consciously choosing to be second in every opportunity where we can put the needs of the other first. We can take a protective view of the other and consciously choose to not allow a word or deed to come from us that *might* hurt or wound the other. Some speak to, and behave toward, the one they love in ways they would never tolerate others speaking or behaving toward the one they love. An obvious question would be, if one would not allow another to interact with their loved one in that manner—why do they?

Personal Reflection

- What are the hindrances to building a love that will last that you alone can eliminate?
- Where and when can I put myself second in my relationship?

-
- ***In light of God's Word, how could you better demonstrate your love?***

Couple's Reflection

- Take time to teach the other about your needs by giving guidance on the expressions of love that are helpful and appreciated by completing the following thoughts: *(feel free to add your own)*
 - It helps me to feel loved when you _____.
 - I feel close to you when _____.
 - I am encouraged when you _____.
 - I feel more secure when you _____.
 - I feel more significant when you _____.
 - I admire you most when _____.