

# **An Essay On Love**

*By John P. Splinter, Ph.D.*

One of the great scenes in the play, “Fiddler On The Roof,” finds the main character, Tevye, asking his wife Golda, “Do you love me?” She responds, “Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow.” Tevye responds, “Yes, but do you love me?” That question speaks to what may be the deepest hunger of the human soul ~ to love and be loved. In psychology we call it “being attached,” or “attachment.”

Social scientists tell us that our culture is undergoing significant changes at its core. They say we are now living in the “Post-Christian era.” They tell us the “traditional family” in which mother stays home with the kids, and dad provides the earned income, is rapidly fading in the rear view mirror. Some estimate that only 4% of today’s marriages fit with the “traditional” model of our parents’ and grandparents’ day.

One of the greatest changes of all is that the philosophy of Post Modernism has begun to redefine much of our culture’s value system. Things that used to be considered “truth” and “sacrosanct,” today are considered personal opinion. A philosophy of “do whatever works for you” has become dominant, replacing the previous generation’s philosophy of “do what is right.” And this is where the “rub” begins, because doing what seems right for each person can only lead to the conclusion of chaos and abuse of power.

These modern trends have created a lot of questions in regard to the definition and meaning of love. In the next few paragraphs we’ll look at a few questions regarding love, because they will set the stage for the answers provided later in this paper.

## Questions About Love

What is love? How is it built? What makes it strong or weak ~ deep or shallow ~ trustworthy or sketchy? Is emotional neediness the same thing as love? Do people really “fall” in love ~ and if so, can they “fall” out of love? Where does sex fit? Can one learn how to make and sustain deep and enduring emotional attachments, or are those just for the lucky few? Does love have costs, or is it free? Is morality needed to sustain love, or is morality an unnecessary “add-on?” Does religion make love stronger, or just more brittle?

Our culture is not good at defining love. The model provided on TV and in movies is consistent but basically amoral. Due to the consistent divorce rate of the last 20 years there are millions of emotionally wounded, attachment hungry men and women seeking love as redress to their childhood relational losses. And with the decimation of self-esteem that flows from high percentages of our culture’s wounded family systems, it is little wonder that both married and single people find themselves wondering if they are lovable ~ wondering if they may be “in love” ~ or wishing they were ~ perhaps fearing they may have “fallen out of love” ~ wondering if they married the wrong person. It is not surprising that marriages often drift apart when the heady experience of “falling in love” begins to require something deeper than was expected, and the scented bloom on the rose begins to smell like yesterday’s fish.

Consider current trends. Ponder the impact of a 50% sustained divorce rate on a culture. Ponder the fact that 40% of our children now grow up in single parent family systems, and nearly 30% of our culture’s children are now born out of wedlock. Ponder

the fact that suicide is our nations' teens' third leading killer. Psychologists have long known that attachment in adults is a product of attachment in children. If a child grows through his or her first few years without bonding and without steady support from mother and father, then that child is very likely going to have difficulty sustaining a marriage. Attachment disorders ~ abandonment issues ~ feelings of rejection ~ multi-generational in their effect.

Consider our modern definitions of love. Listen to your choice of pop or country music for a half day. You'll hear several definitions of love. Pop music has always reflected the issues of a culture. Today's pop music provides models of rapid emotional attachment, immediate sexual encounter, cheating (i.e., having affairs), multiple partners, homosexuality, physical abuse, pornography, gross disrespect for women, divorce, kinky sex, and so on.

Questions about love. Given these trends and definitions, it is not hard to understand why the word "commitment" has faded into the background. Is it even possible to commit to manufacturing a feeling of affection in order to remain attached? Is it worth the effort? Is it even possible to maintain sexual excitement in order to remain committed? Is it possible to remain committed to someone who is self-centered and immature? Is it possible to stay emotionally and sexually engaged with one partner when there are so many others available? If your parents divorced, why not just follow their lead ~ why bother with the struggles of commitment? Sometimes it's a lot easier to just walk away from a relationship ~ trade in your 40 for two 20s.

Questions. And what happens if the relationship is painful? Worse, what happens if it becomes deeply wounded? Most marriages face some element of wounding

along the way. Is it even possible, to rebuild love when it has been sorely damaged? Is it worth the effort? Can a profoundly wounded relationship be restored to health and sweetness again? Can a person ever really forget what happened to them at the hands of their spouse, a year ago ~ or ten years ago ~ or thirty?

More questions. Is the experience of love something that depends upon the *other person's* ability to create in us, as in, "You make me feel so loved!" What happens when the other person doesn't try hard enough, or tries but fails, or tries in ways that don't seem to connect – or worse, has significant needs of their own?

Is the experience of being in love some mystical thing that occurs between two fortunate "soul mates" if they are lucky enough to find one another? Does one finally *find* the "right one" to fall in love with, and *then* become able to live happily ever after? What if one finds the wrong person? What makes love, love? What makes it lasting? Is love worth the effort to build and nurture? If so, how does one do that? Or is it just as good to settle for a series of hot, serial monogamous relationships, dumping them when they lose their appeal?

This paper is a study on love. It will first consider a few things that do not constitute love. Next, it will consider a few characteristics of love. Finally, it will provide an historically accepted, stable, and well tested definition of love. In all of this discussion a most ancient and universally known document will be cited. This document is the Bible. Although there are many other opinions about the subject of love, the Bible still contains the world's most widely read, broadly accepted, and consistent teaching on the subject of love ~ specifically, the story of God's love for us.

## Things That Love Is Not

Each year the Federal Government of the United States publishes a “Statistical Abstract of the United States.” Each year for the past twenty, this numerical pictograph of our country has indicated that one out of every two marriages will eventually end in divorce. Our culture is clearly in need of understanding about what love is, and what it is not. How do half of the people who marry eventually end up not loving one another? Is it possible that half of all who married had a wrong definition of love? Did they just choose the wrong partners? Were they psychologically unable to love another person? If they just “drifted apart,” how did *that* happen, and if they loved each other why did they allow it? Were they too selfish to stay married, or did they just focus upon the wrong things in their marriages for too long a time? Did their quest for money replace their affection for each other? Did they trick one another into believing they were attentive caring and flexible, but then show their rigid, self-centered, manipulative side after marriage?

At a deeper level we might ask, did their clinical pathologies drive them together at first ~ interlocking pathologies based perhaps upon their own brokenness and need? If so, did those same pathologies then drive them apart? Within human dynamics there is indeed a sense in which broken people find other broken people, marry them and put all their eggs in each others’ baskets, only to discover that this approach to marriage doesn’t work. At some point one partner looks at the other and thinks, “You’re not meeting my needs very well. Here I am putting it all on the line for you, but you’re not doing a very good job for me.”

The thought that often follows is, “Damn you! You were supposed to be the one to rescue me.” When this happens, of course it’s always the *other person* who was unable to love. The *other person* was incredibly self-centered ~ super-controlling ~ dependent ~ hateful ~ spineless ~ immature ~ catty ~ ratty, etc.

In many cases the couple intended to make it “Till death do us part,” but they didn’t have the emotional reserves to get past the hard times ~ they lacked the depth of character required to maintain intimacy ~ they were at a loss when facing one another’s selfishness, or neediness, or goofed-up definitions of love.

In some cases, these couples actually started out with a covert agreement that said, “I’ll be true to you until I don’t feel like it any longer, or until someone else better or more attractive comes along. Then I’ll take my furniture and clothes and check out.”

So the question on the table is, What does it mean to love another person? Does love mean “never meaning to have to say you’re sorry,” as coined in the old “Love Story” movie? In order to better understand what love *is*, it can be helpful to first identify a few traits regarding what love is *not*.

### **Love is not Sex**

The message that love equals sex is eloquently presented on the silver screen. Boy meets girl, they have dinner together, find out each likes the same wine, discover that sailing is their favorite sport, and find that they both once had a pet named “Bumpo” ~ so then, naturally, the question emerges, “*Your place or mine?*” Observe that sequence enough times and one may begin to believe that there are no other issues involved in the decision. “*What do you mean, values? Of course I have values ~ and one of them is*

*having sex with my date after dinner if she likes Merlot, sailing, and had a pet named Bumpo.*” An old rock ‘n roll lyric said, “Girl, I love you, won’t you tell me your name?”

The process of physical attraction, sexual foreplay, and intercourse, sometimes called “making love” is not necessarily associated with love. When two people become sexually active with one another outside of marriage, their involvement often has little to do with commitment or values, and little to do with love. Dynamics which *are* part of the action include emotional need, sex drive, hormones, low impulse control, and passion.

To understand this let’s change the venue for a moment. When two horses are having intercourse one doesn’t say, “Hey, those two Clydesdales are making love.” But when two humans have intercourse, the term is used. This implies something different between humans and horses. The implication is that the two humans are emotionally (perhaps spiritually?) connecting in a deeper, more meaningful manner than the Clydesdales.

*Psychology Today* has never been known for its conservative values, but in the March/April 1994 issue it published this thought: “The intimacy in sex is never only physical. As we unveil our bodies, we also disclose our persons” (p. 29). That is to say, among human beings, sexual activity is a far deeper subject than the sexual activity of an animal. Within the human sexual act there is a “self” *connection*.

The Bible indicates that this is a spiritual connection. In fact, pastors and therapists know that the self-and-sexual connection is so profound that it’s something like using wood glue to press and bond two pieces of wood together. Once the glue is dry and the pieces are joined, ripping them apart is almost impossible ~ both leave pieces of themselves attached to the other.

Perhaps this is why it hurts so badly when two people who have had sex together for a period of time, decide to terminate their relationship. There is more to the sexual equation than just fitting two sets of physical plumbing. The two have connected in deeper and more profound ways. When the Bible uses the term “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:5) the implication is that intercourse represents not only a sexual union, but also a spiritual union. It’s not just “recreational sex.” This is undoubtedly what Christ had in mind as he spoke the phrase used in most marriage ceremonies: *This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together*” (Mt. 19:5-6 ~ NLT).

When a couple marries and has sex, there is a spiritual union ~ a union created by God in order to meet the deepest longings of the human soul ~ a union created in order to truly bond two souls together ~ a union that meets the human longing for intimate connection and belonging.

The field of psychology (Bowlby, Winnicott, Bowen) has studied what is broadly known as “attachment theory,” the idea that the deepest drive in human beings is to be significantly attached to other meaningful human beings: To know and be known; to love and be loved. When St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians that one day he would “*know as he was known,*” he was anticipating that some day he would have as intimate an understanding of God, as God had of him. That’s intimacy. Deep, personal and private knowledge is part of intimacy. Bonding ~ attachment and belonging ~ is intimacy. Emotional trust is intimacy. *By contrast, sex is not necessarily intimacy.*



Yet the message of sex = intimacy is what's taught on TV every day. Human love, reduced to sexuality, becomes like humping Clydesdales ~ it misses the greater intimacy, the deeper soulful connection, settling for a temporary release which, in the short term may "feel" as if bonding is present, but in the long term actually makes one less able to enjoy the depth of a truly committed monogamous sexual and spiritual union. This is why, as will be seen in the research section of this paper, relationships in which couples first cohabit are less fulfilling, less happy, and are less likely to end in marriage.

Ideally, when two people who are sexually involved, use the word "love," the implication is that the two are exclusively and mutually committed to one another for a lifetime. Such a profound commitment may represent a best case scenario, but why not shoot for the best? The relevance and wisdom of scripture always places sexuality within the context of exclusivity, mutuality, and commitment. To reduce the grandeur of love to mere sex is like reducing a symphony orchestra to a kid playing a kazoo. There's so much more to sex when deep emotional attachment, trust, and mutual commitment are incorporated ~ more freedom to express oneself ~ greater depth of intimate knowledge ~ more comfort and security within its commitment.

Some years ago I was in Amsterdam with my wife and a small group of people. We stayed in a hotel in the old downtown area among the cute "Old Holland" buildings. Unbeknown to us, this area also featured part of Amsterdam's infamous "red light district." Each brothel was identified by red neon lights in the window, and scantily dressed prostitutes sitting in seductive poses. One of our group commented, "The sex you pay for, the disease is free."

As we walked around Amsterdam, we'd occasionally see someone go in to, or come out of one of the brothels. The reasons for going to a prostitute seemed obvious: Lust, sexual drive, a desire for "recreational sex."

Yet sadly, as we saw this ugly scene repeated again and again, we recognized that some were probably going in order to momentarily gain a small sense of attachment ~ or belonging ~ the unhappy lonely soul that goes to gain a temporary sense of being cared for, or accepted. This was poignantly reflected in the life of the lead character in the book "*Of Human Bondage*," ~ a club-foot who could find no sense of attachment except in the arms of a prostitute. Perhaps the "world's oldest profession" offers more than just recreation. How lonely would one have to be in order to pay someone to be their friend for fifteen minutes?

In today's culture there is frequently a "quid pro quo" expectation that if a man takes a woman out on a date and spends money on her for dinner and theater, then he has something coming in return – an expectation that she will provide sexual activity for him. This is not all that far from the notion of paying for sex. It just wears a slightly different hat, and it begs the question of what is being exchanged ~ and for what purpose ~ recreation, or loneliness.

The thought being explored is that *sex and love are not the same thing*. By contrast the wisest approach, i.e., the Biblical approach to love, holds sex in high regard, reserving it for that one, special, lifetime relationship called marriage. Within that relationship one is free to explore and recreate, for within the marital relationship sex and love function together, enriching and strengthening the bond. Outside of marriage, sadly,

sex tends to weaken the bond and lower the probability of fidelity, happiness, security, and many other components of healthy relationships.

### **Love is not Cohabitation**

In our culture in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, cohabitation has become normalized as a testing grounds for marriage. Since 1960 the number of cohabiting couples has increased more than 1,000 percent in the U.S.A. (Popenoe, 2002). More than a third of cohabiting couples raise children together. More than half of new marriages are of couples who have lived together first. The thought is that if a couple can get along well while not married, then they'll probably do fine when married. *"We're just trying it out to see if it'll work first."* *"All that moral stuff about no sex before marriage is from my parents' generation. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century."* *"We're not sure if we're ready for marriage yet. We want to test drive it for a year or two."*

Cohabitation brings several dynamics to the table, and most couples tend to look at the most positive aspects as they move in together. From the positive side of the ledger, cohabitation means:

- Living with a close friend
- The ability to have sex
- Saving money via renting or buying one place instead of two
- Giving a potential marital relationship a trial run
- Providing a two-parent environment for the children of single parents

Yet there's another side worth considering. Here are a few significant thoughts that most who move in together, never consider. Cohabitation represents:

- An inability to commit ~ perhaps fear of commitment
- Fear of intimacy
- A broken sense of morality ~ belief that morality is irrelevant, or situational
- An inability to delay personal gratification
- Willingness to ignore the connection between physical intimacy and emotional damage
- A potential desire to maintain a relational exit in case a better option comes along

Furthermore, research has given cohabitation a very serious black eye. The findings of clinical studies have demonstrated that cohabitation is a very bad bet. The following information is startling in that it strongly disagrees with the popular portrait of successful and happy cohabitation so broadly accepted in our culture. In sum, research has demonstrated that cohabitation prior to marriage is responsible for: a) Lower probability that the couple will ever marry; b) higher probability of divorce if they do marry; c) lower level of satisfaction in marriage, even if the couple marries; and d) higher incidence of physical and emotional abuse. What follows are references from mostly non-religious clinical literature pertaining to cohabitation.

**Lower trust:** MacLean & Peters (1995) found that cohabiting couples showed significantly lower trust of one another than did married couples. Nock (1995) found that cohabiting couples expressed lower levels of commitment to their relationships, reported lower levels of happiness with their relationships, and had poorer relationships with their parents than comparable married couples.

**Less stable relationships:** Stets (1993) found that prior cohabiting relationships *negatively influenced* current married and cohabiting relationships. For married subjects, cohabitation with someone other than the current spouse produced a negative effect. Stets wrote, “It is suggested ... that those who cohabit with someone other than their intended spouse may be predisposed to problems in relationships.” Gage & Anastasia (1993) found that cohabiting relationships were more unstable than formal marriages. Sarantakos (1991) wrote, “Stability and continuity among cohabiting couples were very low compared with married couples. Cohabital breakdown was not only significantly higher, but also more multiple and complex than marital breakdown. Cohabitation was judged to be an unstable system.” Dr. David Popenoe, noted Rutgers University sociologist explains, “the very act of living together may lead to attitudes that make a happy marriage more difficult” (Popenoe, 2002).

Teachman & Polonko (1990) found that data from a national longitudinal study supported the hypothesis that premarital *cohabitation increased marital disruption* in the US, and that this finding was consistent with evidence from Sweden and Canada.

**Higher levels of violence:** McLaughlin, Leonard, & Senchak (1992) found that cohabitation was associated with premarital aggression. Desmond (1989) found that men were more likely to beat women they live with than those they married. Stets & Straus (1989) found that (1) the highest rate of assault was among the cohabiting couples; (2) violence was most severe in cohabiting couples; and (3) the most frequent pattern was for both cohabiting partners to be violent. Huffman, Chang, Rausch, and Schaffer (1994) discovered that there were two factors consistent with males who chose to cohabitate: They had lower levels of religiosity, and they had more tolerant views of rape. This may

help make sense of research by Rodriguez and Henderson (1995) who found that cohabitation was the only relationship in which females outnumbered males as homicide offenders!

**Higher levels of substance abuse:** In addition to domestic violence, Stanton (1997) found that cohabiting couples were more likely to be substance abusers as well ~ perhaps due to the lack of commitment and connection as experienced by married couples.

**Greater probability of divorce:** Stanton (1997) found that people who live together before marriage *increase that couple's probability of divorce by 50 – 80 percent, if they marry!* McManus (2002) found that only 15 out of every 100 cohabitating couples were married after a decade, and that living together before marriage *increased the probability of divorce by 50 per cent.* The Readers Digest, April, 1990, published research stating that, “couples who live together are over 33% more likely to divorce.” Barna (1998) found that, “People who cohabit prior to marriage have an 82% greater chance of divorce than do couples who marry without having first lived together” (p. 66).

The *Prepare/Enrich* (1988) organization writes, “Couples that live alone before marriage seem to have the best premarital relationship, which we have found is also predictive of later marital success.” Axinn & Thornton (1992) said that the results of their study, “...are consistent with hypotheses suggesting that cohabitation is selective of men and women more approving of divorce.” Sociologist Pamela Smock quoted in “USA Today” said most couples who live together, marry or break up within 18 months. She found that only one-in-six couples were still living together after three years, and just

one-in-ten after five years. Smock's University of Michigan study found that "live-ins" are less happy than married couples, less sexually faithful, and less financially well-off.

Meanwhile, those who go on to marry after living together are far more likely to end up divorcing. University of Chicago sociologist, Linda Waite, details how living together can undermine marriage in her book, The Case for Marriage. "Cohabiting changes attitudes to a more individualistic, less relationship-oriented viewpoint," she told "USA Today."

Research conducted by "Focus on the Family" confirms all of the above, finding that cohabitation lends itself to lower relationship quality, less stability, more disagreements, and a higher risk of abuse. While one might suspect that a conservative organization such as "Focus on the Family" may come to such conclusions, yet their conclusions are no different than the conclusions of non-Christian, secular researchers. Cohabitation is ruinous, if what one really wants is the attachment, security, longevity, and joy of marriage.

Stating it another way, the temporary advantages of cohabitation provide a negative wager if one genuinely seeks love. If one is not seeking love right now but hopes to have it later, then cohabitation is an impediment to that goal also. This may be why Carlie Simon wrote the lyrics, "Tonight you're mine completely. You give your love so sweetly. Tonight the light of love is in your eyes. But will you love me tomorrow?" If someone needs to ask, "But will you love me tomorrow," then it's not trust, it's not stable, it's not belonging, it's not commitment, and it's not love.

One of the characteristics of mature love is that it is stable and consistent, capable of being there regardless of the immediate circumstances. Mature love is strong enough

to survive the temptations, the petty cruelties, the sometimes boredom, and the varied emotions that accompany intimate relationships.

So in a very sad but real sense, cohabitation is merely a common way that people delude themselves into believing one can circumvent the plan established by a loving Creator. The growing body of clinical research clearly demonstrates that cohabitation lends itself more to the destruction of love than to the fulfillment of love. The bottom line of circumventing God's perfect plan is the sadness of what could have been.

### **Love is not Romance**

Another thing that love is not: Love is not romance. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck wrote a book (The Road Less Traveled) that was on the New York top ten list for years. In that book he called romantic love by its clinical term, "cathexis." Cathexis is a format of two people feeling emotionally connected and romantically inclined toward one another. Cathexis usually occurs at the beginning of a relationship, when people experience that "falling in love" sensation. It always happens early in a relationship, before the relationship has proven whether it can be stable and lasting.

Cathexis involves two people, believing that "romance" is sufficient grounds for attachment, incorporating a fantasy of their beloved, into their personal interpretive system, and believing it's true. "Ah, she is so tender and gentle." "Ah, he is so thoughtful and attentive." The fact is that cathexis has more to do with what one *wishes* to believe about the other, than it has to do with the *realities* of what the other actually is.

Pitman (1997) gave a humorous but clinically accurate description of the romantic phase of a relationship, calling it "a state of temporary insanity, akin to a manic



episode. It is a narcissistic intoxication that *has no relationship to loving.*” Pretty strong words. In reality, the romantic phase of a relationship is frequently an all-encompassing flight away from reality, an engulfing journey into blind ecstasy, often accompanied by behavior over which one later blushes in remorse.

What many do not know is that such experiences are frequently tied to deeper clinical issues ~ things like emptiness, need, crisis, or depression. The romantic phase of a relationship is based upon passion and a sense of “in-loveness,” and has earned a 4,000-year record of being a totally unreliable basis for an enduring marriage. This is to say, as seen in the research presented above, individuals who “fall in love” and then consummate their relationship with intercourse and cohabitation are *far less likely* to stay in love, and are also far less likely to sustain a long term marriage. At the end of these romantic relationships one, and sometimes both, partners find themselves angry at the other person’s not being able to protect them from their own need or unhappiness.

In clinical terms this is the romantic narcissist being angry at the romantic object (the lover) for the latter’s inability to continually make the narcissist feel happy and secure. It is therefore extremely important to understand that if someone falls madly in love with you *it may not be a compliment.* It may be a statement of their (narcissistic ~ i.e., self-centered) need ~ i.e., their depression ~ their emptiness ~ their broken childhood ~ their recent divorce ~ their hunger for someone to parent their children ~ their loneliness ~ their having been abused ~ their inability to control their sexuality ~ etc. And if you respond with blind romantic love it may be a reciprocal statement of your own need.

In a related bit of research, in 2008 the Heritage Foundation published findings that kids who “fall in love” and then have sex, but then break up, have far higher probabilities of suicide. In girls the suicide rate increases three times. In boys, it’s eight times higher. Simply stated, the pre-frontal cortex of the brain has not sufficiently developed in mid- to late adolescents in order that they may successfully mediate the pain inherent in a failed sexually intimate relationship. Don’t miss the point: When sexually intimate relationships end, there is pain. In fact, if there is not pain, something worse is likely going on. Adults’ brains may be more capable of handling the pain, but there is pain.

Romance is deceptive. It can’t be trusted, and it doesn’t last for very long. People who try to duplicate and re-duplicate the feelings of being in romantic love are like dogs chasing their tails. A few decades ago Bernadette Peters sang a pop song which captured this experience. The song was titled, “Falling In Love With Love.” Her lyrics said, “Falling in love with love is like falling for make believe. Falling in love with love is playing the fool.” This is not to say that healthy marriages can’t be romantic relationships as well. Healthy marital relationships often have times of romance, but for a person to depend upon romance as a definition of love, is an impossible thing. Genuine love is far deeper than romance can ever be. Romance comes and goes. In a healthy relationship it metamorphoses into something far deeper and more trustworthy.

### **Love is not Need**

Need is another thing that love is *not*. To say “I need her,” is not the same as to say, “I love her.” It could be argued that there is an element of need within all

relationships. There is also a continuum of need, from “*not very needy*” to “*extremely needy*,” and one thing is for sure: The farther toward *very needy* one is on such a continuum, the less stable they are able to be. This is why need-based relationships are almost always unstable. Another way of saying the same thing is that the more needy either partner is when they enter a relationship, the less likely that relationship will be able to go the distance.

Chris Christopherson wrote a song called, “Help Me Make It Through The Night,” in which he sang, “I don’t care what’s right or wrong, I don’t try to understand. Let the devil take tomorrow, but tonight I need a friend.” Love is not need; need is not love. Need doesn’t even make a good point of entry into love. Rather, it tends to create dysfunctional, dependent relationships which eventually cave in. There is an axiom of grocery shopping worthy of note in the discussion of love and need: *Hungry shoppers are dangerous shoppers.*

Need is fairly easy to identify. It drives a person with intensity. It pushes individuals toward extremes in behavior including things like: Excessive control or manipulation; abject inability to make decisions; dependency, or conversely a facade of independence; alcohol or chemical abuse; physical or emotional abuse; overeating or anorexia; overperformance or sloth; roller-coaster romanticism, or cold stony emotional distance; having affairs; excessive anger, fear, or sadness; work-a-holism; an inability to commit.

While not every person exhibiting these kinds of behavior is needy in the clinical sense of it, yet when one sees such extremes in individuals one should understand that these dynamics *will certainly be played out* within all relationships. These kinds of

excessive traits are frequently driven by need ~ and needy people are dangerous in relationships.

Jennifer Schneider, M.D. (1988) wrote a book titled Back From Betrayal, in which she quoted one woman as saying, “There’s still a part of me that believes there’s one right person for me. But I realize that what I’m looking for is not really *the right one*, it’s the connection. I believe that we co-addicts, just like addicts, are looking for a connection ~ an emotional sexual connection that has fireworks. I (now) avoid men who have an intensity which I recognize through eye contact. These folks always have some enormous problem, usually in terms of relationships. When I meet such a man now I essentially interview him, looking for the broken part. And I always find it—and then I **run.**”

Later in the same book Dr. Schneider asks several questions which highlight one’s own neediness:

- Do you feel responsible for his (her) behavior?
- Do you believe you cannot live without him (her)?
- Do you fantasize about his (her) problems?
- Do you make excuses for his (her) behavior, blaming it on other people?
- Do you believe that you can make him (her) change?
- Have you threatened to leave him (her) and then not followed through?
- Or have you left him (her) and then returned although no changes occurred?
- Are you afraid to confront him (her) on his (her) behavior for fear he (she) will leave you?

Schneider concludes, “A ‘yes’ to any of these questions suggests that you may be in an addictive relationship.” Schneider calls them “addictive” relationships. One might as easily call them, “desperately needy relationships,” based upon an internal hunger that cannot be fulfilled within any relationship ~ a hunger that will eventually lead to the collapse of intimacy.

There is an ironic spectrum of attachment within needy relationships: *The more needy one is, the greater the likelihood that he or she will find someone with whom to connect that is equally needy.* In fact, within the field of marriage and family therapy this equation is considered more or less axiomatic: Needy people attach to needy people. Extreme controllers are just as needy as extreme controlees. Caretakers are just as needy as alcoholics. And so it goes.

There is much research that supports the idea that when we go out into the world and find someone with whom to connect, we connect with a person who is at our relative level of emotional maturity and stability. Therapists frequently have people say that they married someone who is emotionally dysfunctional. Although most therapists don't say it this directly, there's an internal desire to tell the client that the place to begin looking at solutions to this dilemma is not in the life of their spouse – it's in the mirror. Needy people find needy people. Here's another axiom worth remembering: Two wounded ducks cannot link up to form one soaring eagle.

The more needy a person is, the more likely they will attract someone equally needy, and will “fall in love.” A few weeks or months later they may begin to discover that their partner is emotionally needy. At the beginning of the relationship it made so much sense to hook up. But now they conclude they just made a poor choice when they linked up with “that needy wreck,” and they go out in search of someone new. Therapists know that it's next to impossible to try and convince this person that they locked in to this relationship out of their own sense of neediness, and they are therefore extremely likely to find and hook into another need-based relationship.

The point is that love is not need. Neediness is neediness. The term “codependency” is a format of relationship based upon excessive mutual neediness. By contrast, love is based upon strength. Need can be expressed on a continuum from total dependence to complete independence ~ and either end of that spectrum can be a problem. Need can be seen in roller-coaster emotional gushiness, as well as in stone-faced emotional coolness. The farther out to *either* side of the continuum, the greater the personal emptiness and neediness. Emotionally healthy people live somewhere in the middle of the scale, in a place one might call “mutual-and-mature-inter-dependence.”

Over the years I have had many, extremely attractive and otherwise successful men and women in my office struggling, sometimes tearfully, with their desperate need to be attached, and at the same moment their apparent inability to maintain such an attachment. Some say, “I keep finding the wrong kind of person to marry.” Others grieve, “I don’t seem to be able to hang onto a relationship for more than a few months.” One woman said, “I present well, but the more you get to know me, the less I have to offer. I’m running on empty, looking for someone to fill me up.”

Here’s an analogy: Neediness is like a cork, and healthy relationships are like a stone. Life is like water. Put a cork in the water and it’ll float. Put a stone in water and it’ll sink to deeper levels. Needy people have a very difficult time sustaining long-term relationships because long-term relationships lead toward greater relational depth ~ call it intimacy ~ call it true love ~ and needy people tend to be able to do only surface stuff. They may be really good while “on the hunt,” but when it comes time to make the thing work, their emptiness and needs take over and the relationship suffers. When need

dominates a relationship, the relationship tends to bob toward the surface like a cork. The paradox of need-based relationships is that they both crave, and fear, intimacy.

Here's another analogy. Neediness is like a roller coaster on the first big downhill run. To understand this analogy all one need know is that *need* controls people's actions. This analogy involves an alcoholic and his daughter. The alcoholic is the roller coaster, and his daughter is standing on the track about half-way down the first really big hill. As the roller coaster comes slowly over the top of the hill the daughter says, "Daddy, I need to talk with you about something." But at this point, daddy needs a drink ~ booze is in control of daddy. You know the outcome. The roller coaster is going to gain deadly momentum and flatten the child. Neediness demands a self-focus which is very much like a roller coaster – it flattens relationships in its pursuit of its own need-resolution.

There's no silver bullet in identifying needy types, but there is one trait frequently seen in needy types: Many needy types had exceptionally difficult relationships with their families of origin. The "old unresolved stuff" that comes out of childhood often becomes part of the problem in adult relationships. The pain of childhood rejection becomes the rage of adult conflict. The terror of childhood feelings of abandonment becomes the desperation for adult attachment, at any cost. The humiliation of childhood inadequacies or abuses become the hyper-vigilance and over-performance of adult productivity.

And there's one further dynamic worth noting while discussing "need." Childhood emotional chaos often becomes the grist of an adult *needing chaos* in order to feel stable. It's not unusual for needy adults to constantly live on the edge. The "edge"

could be thrill-seeking behavior. It could be a constant hunt for some new, more fulfilling relationship, or a hunt for the next high. But somewhere in many needy types, there's a sense of living on the edge.

As children these people were forced to live on the edge in some way. Now, as adults, the emotional "survival techniques" or "coping mechanisms" created during childhood, become the basis of adult dysfunctional relationships as their living on the edge gets in the way of settling into truly loving relationships.

The solution to emotional need is not to finally find that one, single, loving relationship. It involves grieving the losses of childhood, and then building many, solid, same-sex adult relationships which can begin to re-fill, strengthen and support a person. Another tip in identifying needy types, therefore, is that they are often loners. *Healing involves re-building one's wounded sense of self, and that re-building always means being warmly connected to others.* To try to address all one's personal needs within one single, intense, powerfully-connected, isolated but loving relationship is to doom that relationship to failure. This is true because of: **a)** choosing someone who's likely to buy into this reciprocal need-equation and therefore proving themselves to be equally needy, and **b)** expecting the relationship to be able to do more than any relationship can be possibly equipped to accomplish. Summary: Love is not need. Need is not love.

### **Love is not Feelings**

The final point to make before considering what love *is*, is that love is *not necessarily* a feeling. That's not to say that there are no feelings associated with love. The words "I love you so much!" may or may not mean anything. One must be careful to



know how to tell whether they mean “I am committed to your highest and best, to serving and cherishing you, and to honoring you exclusively above all others,” or “I have very strong feelings of lust combined with narcissistic attachment desire.” There is a difference.

Feelings are transitory and often deceptive. If you asked my wife to name all of the feelings she’s had for me in the last month I’d be surprised if the list didn’t include: Love, anger, excitement, sadness, calm assurance, fear, joy, irritability, boredom, passion, frustration, encouragement, discouragement, chaos, and peace. So does that mean she doesn’t love me? Not at all. In fact, all of those emotions are part of a normal, loving, stable, adult relationship.

If you asked me how I felt about my wife on our honeymoon I’d have told you that I felt passion, excitement, passion, lust, passion, attachment, and passion. Does that mean when the honeymoon was over and I didn’t feel those same things continually that I didn’t love my wife any more? Not at all. But it does mean something deeper had better happen or I may question *my* ability to remain attached.

There are times in any marriage when love is a feeling. But *most of the time it’s not a feeling*. Most of the time love is something far more stable and dependable than a feeling, and that’s important because feelings change. It’s easy to be “in love with” someone during the courting phase of a relationship. That’s when sexual feelings are often spiced with hormonal excesses, and when emotional needs are inter-woven with narcissistic fantasies. But that’s not love. That’s cathexis. That’s romance.

The water doesn’t run very deep under the “Bridges of Madison County.” In fact it’s much easier to fall in love than it is to sustain a marriage. Some time ago there was a

story on the AP news wires regarding a man named Glynn “Scotty” Wolfe, who had been married 29 times. Scotty died and nobody, not one of his wives, came forward to claim his body. Twenty-nine times Scotty showed that he could feel romance, but 29 times also he showed that he didn’t have what it took to make a marriage work. Romance is not love. According to the news release, his body was likely to be cremated and his ashes would be dumped onto an unmarked public grave. Ah, romance. The ashes of many a torrid emotional flame rest upon the unmarked public graves of human loneliness.

The feelings involved in romance can be deceptive, controlling and dangerous. One does not know exactly what one has in a relationship until the romantic phase has come *and gone*, the dust has settled, both pairs of feet are firmly on the ground, and the relationship is no longer driven by either fantasy or idealization.

Within the field of psychology there’s a term called “Projective Identification.” An understanding of this concept may be helpful in the discussion of love-as-feelings. In a romantic relationship, projective identification can work like this: He looks at her and thinks, “She’s so lovely, so soft, so beautiful, so fresh, so charming, so gentle yet so exciting.” As he looks at her with those assumptions, he actually *reinforces* each of those traits as he sees them emerge in their relationship and conversations. Almost all of his little reinforcements are below the level of his conscious awareness. The important thing to note is that each of his reinforcements *are actually projections of his own personal need*.

At the same, mainly unconscious level, she responds to each of his projections by acting out the message, “Yes, I am indeed lovely, soft, beautiful, fresh, charming, gentle,

and exciting.” He projects his needs ~ she picks up on his projections, and acts as if they are true of her. Keep in mind, all of this transaction occurs at an unconscious level.

She, in turn, looks at him and thinks, “He’s so handsome, so strong yet sensitive, so mature, so wise, so caring, so attentive, so vigorous, and yet so gentle with my feelings.” Picking up on these little non-verbal cues, he unconsciously responds to her with the message, “Yes, I am indeed handsome, strong yet sensitive, mature, wise, etc.” Because they are attracted to one another, what each person is doing is projecting into the other *that which they wish to see*, and *that which they need the other person to be*. It’s called “projective identification” because it involves each person’s projecting their emotional needs into the other person, and then identifying what they think they see, as being a real part of that other person.

As you might guess, reality provides a lethal dose for this process. Sooner or later she will find that he may be handsome, but he’s really into his own good looks. He might be gentle, but only when he wants sex. He begins to find that she may be soft, but her softness covers a brick. She may be fresh, but her freshness can cut like a dagger. That’s the moment when unconscious, feeling-driven fantasy turns into reality. No relationship is even close to being able to make and sustain a long-term intimate emotional and spiritual commitment, until both parties have moved from the fantasy of feelings, to the bright light of reality.

Feelings are untrustworthy. They involve our hoped-for fantasies, projected onto the other. Feelings reflect our needs, and early in any relationship they are handed back to us as currency from the unconscious response of the person we “feel” knows us so

intimately, cares for us so deeply, and is so incredibly attached to us....., that there never has been and never will be another quite like him/her.

A relationship based upon feelings is like living in a balloon, suspended 15 feet above reality. Relationships which begin like this can be fun ~ they have that neat feeling of floating along in the sky, looking down with pity at all those poor pedantic souls who somehow exist without the intoxication of feeling-oriented-love. But these balloon rides are about as trustworthy as the wind. Sooner or later, the balloon will land, the sides of the balloon will thin, and then one day one's feet will be on real ground. The balloon will be gone, and the reality with which one is left will have much more to do with the future of the relationship than the unreality of all those terrific feelings at the front end.

## **So What Is Love?**

When I was a kid there was a pop song that said, "What is love? Four-feet-eleven and a pony-tail; the cutest pony-tail that sways with a wiggle when she walks." I have to admit, pony-tails still get me. But love is a lot deeper than pony-tails. In this next section I will attempt to define what love is. I will use as my basis, *the most widely accepted and universally tested definition* of which I am aware in any literature.

One may ask, "Why does one need a definition of love?" The answer is simple. Our culture has lost its ability to define love. There are myriad definitions that simply do not work ~ definitions which are dys-functional. Our culture has gone mad, looking for love in all the wrong places. So let's go to the right place.

**Terms That Say “Love”**

During one 15-year period of my career, I was the pastor in charge of a large ministry to single adults. In any given year we had 2,000 – 3,000 people involved. Just about every week there was someone in my office asking, “What is love? I thought I knew, but now I’m divorcing, and I need to know, because I don’t want to go through this hell again.” Just about as often, I had others in my office saying, “We’re married, but we’re struggling. We don’t seem to do a very good job of loving each other any more. What is love, and how can we learn about it?”

Let me tell you how I discovered what love is all about. Several years ago, due to a personal struggle, I began a personal quest to understand God. In this quest I decided to read through the Bible, cover to cover, several times, to learn as much as I could about God. I began using a green magic marker to highlight various terms that scripture used in order to describe God and His character. As I identified character traits, I made a list of them. Within a few months the list had become two pages long. It was interesting to read from time to time. Words like friend, kind, encouraging, patient, understanding, gentle, compassionate, forgiving, humble, self-controlled, consoling, honest, just, loyal, merciful, trustworthy ~ all began to combine into a “literary God-mosaic.”

Using my list of these terms I began to see the heart and character of the Being behind the mosaic – the heart and character of God. It was fascinating. Like a shadow on a wall reflecting an object in front of an intense light, I could see much of Him that I had not been able to visualize before then.

One day I noticed the absence of one significant word. On this two-page list of characteristics of God I had not included the word “love.” Recalling the Biblical

concept, “God is love,” I thought certainly this was just an oversight, and rapidly added the word, but then caught myself. The mosaic was speaking to me. All of those terms ~ loyal, merciful, trustworthy, kind, compassionate, affectionate, encouraging ~ all of these terms were character traits of this Being, expressing His love. I had inadvertently created a literary mosaic of what love was all about ~ and it was at the same moment a mosaic of the character of God.

Clinically, I had to ask myself why I had apparently blocked out the word “love” until this point in my quest, because by then I had read the Bible cover-to-cover several times. As I dug around in the root cellar of my soul I found that I had not believed that God *was* indeed, loving. I had been taught all my childhood life that He was punitive, just, and basically merciless ~ like the Czars of Russia, someone to stay far away from! Yet now, right before my eyes, I was seeing a portrait of God and love, being created within this mosaic of descriptive terms taken directly from scripture.

I was like a child seeing snow flakes for the first time ~ awe struck, amazed, curious. Before this moment I’d only associated God with a theological or theoretical concept of love ~ as in, “Of course God is love, but watch out because He’ll likely kick your rear end all around the parking lot if you get too close.” In point of fact, I had never actually associated God with.....love, which was interesting because I’d grown up in a Baptist pastor’s home. One would have thought that I’d have made that connection. But I hadn’t. So now what?

### **God’s Behavioral Definition of Love**

In seeking to understand love, my mind was drawn to a succinct definition of love found in scripture. This definition is the clearest and most concise ~ and most functional ~ definition of love I've found in literature. The definition is behavioral in nature, and it's so common that many people skim across its depth like a stone skipping across the Pacific Ocean. This definition says: "*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance*" (I Cor. 13:4-7 ~ NLT).

This was decidedly not the definition of God's love that I'd learned during childhood. I began to ponder the *behavioral* aspects of this definition. This was not a definition of love based upon one's feelings-system, or upon the ability of some would-be lover to stir me. It was a format of behavior. *It defined how one acted when one intended to communicate love to another.* That thought hit me like a search light in the fog. Here was a concise definition of love that would not fade, would not change with the whims of feelings, and captured the essence of the character of God.

### **The Intentionality Of Love**

Here are some thoughts regarding why this definition of love is so powerful. First, a person *can aim and communicate love, regardless of any other relational factors.* That is to say, even if the other person is self-centered, crabby, arrogant, ratty and prideful, using this scriptural definition of love, one can "aim" loving actions in their

direction, and communicate love toward them ~ even if one's own feelings are completely antagonistic at the moment!

That is to say, I can feel as snarly as a junk-yard dog, and still be patient with my wife. I can feel as empty as a used oil can, and still be kind. Or, I can feel as arrogant as a strutting peacock, and still be humble. This scriptural definition of love made it possible for me to intentionally communicate love, regardless of how I felt.

Further, it also meant that I could receive love even when the other person wasn't feeling particularly lovingly toward me ~ which is a good thing, because there are times when I'm positively not very lovable, and yet I need love. This discovery was profound. Let me put it into an example. Imagine that I come home from work one day and am really crabby. The day has gone badly. Most people with whom I had to work on this day were relationally impaired, intellectually challenged refugees from another planet. As I drive home, my mind ponders all the faults of every one of them (basically so I can feel better about myself).

Now imagine my wife meeting me at the door when I come into the house. How will she communicate love to this grouchy self-centered arrogant ruffian? With a kiss? Not good enough. I'm not inflamed with her kisses like I was on our wedding night. With a hug? Not good enough. I'm too self-centered to care. With, "Hi darling, how was your day?" Probably not wise to even ask right now. So how can she love wretched, isolated, angry, self-centered me?

Scripture teaches how. "Love is patient and love is kind." Do I deserve her patience? Nope. Do I deserve her kindness? Not at all. But that's how God has instructed her to treat me. Fortunately it's not a formula based upon how she feels about



me at the moment. Quite frankly, if she felt like calling me a self-centered toad she'd be well within her rights. But her *behavior*, her *actions*, are the message.

If you lived long enough ago you may recall the name Marshall McLuhan. And if your memory is not too faded with all those years, you may recall his mantra: "The medium is the message." In this situation, my wife's actions are the message. By her actions she's saying, "OK, babe, I can see you had a tough day and you don't want a whole lot of table talk right now. Relax. Unwind. You're home. I love you." Love is patient. Love is kind. Regardless of how she feels, love is patient; love is kind. Regardless of her needs at the moment ~ and they may be huge ~ love is patient; love is kind.

That little phrase, *love is patient, love is kind*, is like the tip of an ice berg of love ~ a massive construct going deep into the farthest reaches and recesses of intimacy. It provides a structure for communicating love, and it places the ability to communicate love, directly into my control. I can control my actions, even if my emotions are leading me in some other direction. In the situation involving my crabby homecoming, my bride doesn't have to feel anything mushy or romantic toward me in order to love me. Better yet, I don't have to feel bubbly or emotionally well-filled in order to receive her love, or to love her in return.

The flood-light was penetrating dark corners in my life that had never before seen anything but shadow. In the midst of my neediness (and all human beings are needy) I had been given a structure and a format which empowered me to rise above the vicissitudes and challenges of my own frailty ~ I could aim love toward my wife. And then an insight began to brighten an especially dark corner: As my wife treats me as God

has instructed in scripture, my emotional needs are met. As she treats me with patience, kindness, gentleness, honesty, etc., there is one consistent message given to me: “I know you, I love you, and I am here for you.” That message, given enough times, is able to overcome even the most pesky clinical issues which may have dogged any individual from childhood years.

One day a friend committed suicide. It was a sad day. In order to gain a little distance from the event I took a day off work and went for a ride in a glider. The ride began being pulled behind an airplane. We went up to 10,000 feet and then the glider pilot released our attachment from the airplane. From that point forward we glided back to the airport.

However, the fun was just beginning when we cut loose. One can stay in the air for hours if one can find “thermals,” those updrafts of heated air created by the action of the sun beating down upon brown fields or green forests, thereby creating invisible towers of rising air that push upward to stratospheric levels where it then cools, usually forming puffy clouds in the process. If one can find a “thermal” and bank the glider so that it circles within the thermal, one can rise upward thousands of feet! The G-forces within a thermal can be amazing, as the glider is lifted higher and higher.

God’s love is like a thermal, lifting us up and up, above the smallness and meanness of our basal characters. His love as described in scripture demonstrates the direction of the source of love. Just as a thermal lifts a glider up toward the clouds, providing power that the glider does not have in itself, so God’s love lifts up upward to Him, providing us with power we normally do not have in ourselves. God is the thermal. He is the One providing the updraft. In a glider, one looks for the thermals to provide

upward draft. In relationships one focuses upon accepting, internalizing, and duplicating the character of God ~ and He provides the upward draft of His love.

It sounds ridiculously simple doesn't it? Let's extend the analogy one step further. As in a glider, without the thermal updrafts one has no choice but to return to earth. Likewise, without God one has no choice but to return to self-centeredness. It is God who provides the power to love. Without God, all attempts at love are prone to being clouded by our own self-interests.

Using God as the thermal, and using I Cor. 4:4-7 as the format of love, one finds that this definition of love is not romantic, but it clarifies love better than Elizabeth Barrett Browning ever did and it builds romance better than anyone ever could have. It's not based upon need, but it helps fill the needs of one's soul better than any self-centered attempts. It's not based upon one's feelings, or one's spouse's feelings, but it provides a stability of affect (feelings) making both partners emotionally dependable for one another.

### **Love's Structure and Format**

God's definition of love provides a structure, a container which provides boundaries for lovers. It's called marriage, and it's based upon a covenant between two people and God. Research has proven again and again that marriage is the only structure strong enough to contain human sexuality. Marriage provides the framework of a relationship on which the walls and shingles can hang. It not only provides attachment – it provides emotional safety, trustworthiness, and stability. It says who's inside and who's outside the circle. It says who's valued above all others, which makes those on the

inside more special and important. It provides boundaries so that couples can be apart from each other, yet remain intimately attached. It provides protection within which couples can have emotional space between them, and yet know they're dependably connected. It provides a safety net within which people can have negative feelings, even heated disagreements, and yet know that love remains.

But marriage is more than a structure. It's also a format ~ a way of doing things regardless of circumstances, feelings, or needs. It's not just being connected ~ it's a *way* of being connected. It's the trim on the house, the flowers in the pots, and the window dressing, that make a house into a home. Likewise, using the format of love from 1 Corinthians is like putting relational trim on the house.

Here are some word pictures about "format:" It's when she chooses to treat him with gentleness after he's been rough with her emotions. It's when he chooses to forgive her small unkindness; or when he chooses to be humble rather than to win. It's when she chooses to seek peace rather than claim feminine rights and escalate the fight. It's when he chooses to offer praise rather than mention her failures. It's when she chooses to be gracious rather than nailing him with the truth of some of his faults.

Have you noticed one operative word here? It's important that you figure it out. Read the last paragraph again and see if you can find the most powerful, operative word, repeated again and again in the paragraph.

Did you find it? It's the word, "chooses." It's a powerful word because love, at its very highest level, is a choice ~ a decision. It's *intentional*. Yes, love is sometimes feeling-driven. Yes, some forms of love are based upon mutual need. Yes, love and marital sexuality are wonderful. Yes, love and romance are wonderful. But above all

else, according to God's instructions, love is *intentional*. It's something we can choose, and indeed must choose again and again, in spite of the many obstacles that muddy relationships and cause pain. *Love is what one does because God says so*. When it's done in a manner that God teaches, it also brings His blessings ~ and it's these blessings that "thermal" the relationship upward.

To have all this going for us, all we need do is be obedient to His teaching. In a very exciting way we're just along for the ride, and like riding in a glider, the ride gets better as we learn to focus on the thermals.

### **Three Love Words**

Some say that Eskimos have more than twenty words for snow. There's light puffy snow; sharp edged snow; hard packed snow; spring snow mixed with the dust of a long winter; icy snow; wet snow; and so forth. The ancient Greeks had three words for "love." One word was "eros." We find the Greek root "eros" in our English language today, in the word *erotic*. But "eros" was not only intended to have to do with sexual arousal. To the Greeks, the concept of "eros" involved being in the grasp of something physical beautiful, something that provided a deep and moving feeling. It could have been applied to a lovely sunset or a terrific symphony performance.

Yet it also applies to sexual desire. Eros is the eye-to-body look – the hunt for some new erogenous activity – some new sexual thrill, or partner. It's the lovely art form of Michaelangelo's "David," or the exquisite nudity of "The Three Virgins" in the Louvre in Paris. Perhaps the key ingredient in love-as-eros, however, is an extension of what C.S. Lewis pointed out in the paragraph above – eros is *self-focused* as it interfaces

with one significant other person. It may *seem* other-focused, but if the other party ceases to be able to enthrall me or excite me, meet my emotional needs, or make me look good ~ like parading a gorgeous woman in the same manner as wearing a bauble on my arm as I enter a crowded room and draw admiring glances. However, given time my “love” will fade and I will search for another love object.

Eros-love is where our culture is predominantly focused. Eros-love is the meat and potatoes of virtually all cinematic love stories. It is based upon the philosophical and relational premise, “I love you because you... (finish the sentence):

- \* are beautiful
- \* are sexy
- \* have green eyes
- \* have a lovely smile
- \* are artistic
- \* make me feel popular
- \* are wealthy
- \* have a great sense of humor

It’s important to notice that *eros love puts the control for loving feelings, into the other person’s hands*. As long as she is tall, slender and sexy, I feel love. As long as he is buff, good looking and wealthy, I feel love. But when the other person ceases to be able to stir me, then I am no longer “in love.” So the control for this kind of love is not in my hands. It is caused upon me by some exterior agent. The field of psychology calls this, “having an external locus of control.” When that external locus no longer meets my needs, then I no longer desire it and am likely to seek another external locus of control.

The next Greek term used to describe love is “phileo,” (pronounced *phil eh oh*) and is found in our English language in the words *philanthropy* and *Philadelphia*. The term has to do with deep friendship or brotherly love. It’s the arm around the shoulder, a spirit of camaraderie, a sense of being united within a family or a cause ~ a sense of commitment due to belonging to one another. I have two brothers and a sister, whom I

love. When we're together there is often an arm around one another's shoulders, or a hug. That's "phileo."

This format of love is somewhat more trustworthy than eros, in that it is less dependent upon what the other party can do for me, and more based upon the mutual commitment we share with one another. Whether or not I have warm feelings toward them, my siblings are still my siblings, and it is on that basis that I love them.

Although lovers frequently mistake the two, there are significant differences between eros and phileo. In his book, "The Four Loves," (1960) C. S. Lewis writes, "Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever about their friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest. Above all, eros (while it lasts) is necessary between two only. But two, far from being the necessary number for friendship, is not even the best" (pp. 91-92).

The third Greek term used to describe love is "agape" (pronounced *ah-gap-ay*). This term is not used within English language as a root of any other word. Hence, it's foreign to most people. The term has to do with *love based upon the highest good for the other person*.

To catch a glimpse of agape love, picture a soldier hurling his body upon a live grenade in order that his fox-hole buddy may live. Or picture a mother in wartime, feeding her children the last bit of food in the house, but not taking any for herself. Picture a man who has a wife stricken with some dread disease such as lupus or muscular dystrophy, as that man continues in his promise to love her, "...in sickness and in health, to love serve and cherish, 'till death do us part." This is the man who does everything he

can in order to make his wife's life better, more comfortable, more hopeful, in spite of the cost to himself.

Now picture the woman whose husband has had an affair, as she forgives him and then seeks to help their marriage overcome the issues which led him to the affair. It is seen in the spouse who is kind and loving when their mate is unkind or bitter. It is seen in the parent who continues to love and affirm the rebellious child.

The highest form of *agape* love is seen in the person of Christ as he died upon a Roman cross to make payment for the sins of the world. And this brings up another component of *agape* love: It is often costly. It is given in spite of what the other person may deserve, and it is given in spite of the personal cost it may require ~ even if it comes out of one's own pocket. It's the picture of "The Good Samaritan" putting the wounded man on his own donkey, and then paying in advance for his ongoing medical needs."

*Agape* love is not given lightly or without thought. There is intent behind it ~ the intent to "bless" the other person. It is not the kind of conditional love given as a reward for good behavior. It is not an emotional response to beauty. It is not based upon belonging to the same family system. It's not even based upon the character of the other person. *It is a decision to treat another person with the highest ideals, the greatest affection, and the most genuine caring, regardless of what the other person has or has not done.* In short, it is a choice. A personal resolution. A determination. It is based upon the philosophical and relational premise, "I love you because *I...*" And if one were to finish that sentence, they would say, "I love you because *I choose to love you.*"

### **The Dependability of Real Love**



The format of love that is most dependable is *agape* love. Love based upon *eros* will fade as the skin develops wrinkles, the hair thins, and the body puts on weight. It fades as a person discovers that their lover may look attractive, but has a selfish personality or weak character.

Love based upon the connection of *phileo* is more trustworthy than love based upon *eros*. Yet it is also limited by its own sense of brotherly connectedness and affection. For example, what happens when a brother steals some of the estate, or has an affair with one's wife, or acts in such a consistently arrogant and demeaning manner that he truly makes himself detestable?

By contrast, *agape* love is something that can be commanded. A person can command themselves to treat anyone with love, respect, and dignity. They may not *wish* to do so, but anyone can command themselves to do it. That is why Christ taught his disciples, "Love one another even as I have loved you." In that moment he wasn't teaching them to have nice emotional feelings toward one another. He certainly wasn't talking about erotic love. Nor was he basing his instruction on the fact that they'd hung out with him for three years and were, in a sort of way, "brothers." Nor did he tell them to have feelings of respect toward each other. Rather, he spoke of the *love which one commands oneself to do*. That format of love is stable, consistent, and enduring.

### **Two Real Love Stories**

Here are a couple of true stories. The names and some details of the stories have been altered, to protect the identities of those in the stories. The point of these stories has to do with the stability of real love ~ the type that the Greeks called "agape."

Chuck and Jill: Jill had known Chuck for five years. Finally they decided to marry. Actually, he talked her into it. On their wedding night Jill finally told Chuck that she'd been raped when she was a child, and found sex disgusting. Chuck was stunned. Why hadn't she told him this before? Clinically, one might speculate that she was attempting to lure Chuck's love for her by using her body as a hook, but when it came to actual intercourse she just couldn't face it. Clinically one may hypothesize that she could tolerate intimacy to only a certain limit, but would recoil as she emotionally re-experienced the trauma of her rape. Whatever her reasons, she now told Chuck, "I love and need you, but I can't tolerate sex. Sorry."

In the following months Chuck hung in with Jill. He sought professional therapy for her and for them, and paid for it. He was tender with her, but non-sexual in his approach. He continued to bring her flowers and tell her what a prize she was to him. He wrote love poetry which he would read to her at night. It was a year and a half, but finally Jill's recovery had led her to the point that she could do one thing with Chuck that she'd never been able to do: She was finally able to trust a male completely with her sexual intimacy, and fully give herself to him.

It was trust and the ability to intimately connect, that had been lost in the rape. Chuck's *agape* love for Jill finally led her to the point of being able to trust again. Chuck and Jill now have four children and a very committed and happy marriage – a marriage which would have never happened without his ability to give *agape* love.

Bill and Sally: Bill and Sally "got married in a fever, hotter than a pepper sprout." They were all over each other from the second date, and marriage was just a formality. But then one day during an argument he hit her in the face, and thereafter he

used his fists frequently in beating her. His family of origin had been violent; it was just a matter of time until he replicated his father's relationship with his mother. In order to even the score, Sally had an affair.

They came to my office on the verge of divorce, and we talked about God's amazing ability to provide the strength to love one another with agape love. After a couple of months of working with them, the marriage was back on track. Eighteen months later I was privileged to lead them through a marriage re-dedication ceremony in a small chapel, as their new baby nursed at Sally's breast. In that ceremony, Bill said, "I beat you, I hit you, I hurt you, and I am profoundly sorry. I know that you have forgiven me – you have demonstrated the love of God toward me. I want you to know I commit the rest of my life to lifting you up as my bride, and to serving you to the highest of my ability. I love you, my precious Sally."

In return, Sally said, "And I commit myself to you and only you. I had an affair. I cheated on you because I hated you. God has healed me of my hatred, and He has filled me with the ability to love. I choose to love you. Thank you for forgiving me, my precious husband. I commit myself to loving and serving you."

This is the kind of love demonstrated by God toward us. Scripture says, "It was while we were yet sinners, that Christ died for us." It is not we who initiate love toward God. It is He who initiates toward us. It is He who continues to pursue us, even in our worst of times. It is He who provides the stability and affection that we need in order to trust. He is the source of love. He is the source of filling and healing. Then He tells us to duplicate what we have experienced in our relationship with Him, with others. It's like hovering around the thermals.

Ideally, one of the highest forms of human love is found within marriage. Ideally, it includes the aspect of *eros* as the couple engages in sexual activity with freedom, exploration, and abandonment. It includes the aspect of *phileo* as husband and wife are bonded together within the family system, and share quiet moments together holding hands and enjoying sunsets. But at the top of the scale is *agape*, that form of love which makes both partners stable for one another, and helps them maintain their honor for and commitment to one another, in spite of what either may “deserve” from the other at any given moment.

This is what makes love trustworthy and stable: It is the knowledge that regardless of what I may do or not do, I am loved. My partner is stable for me – my partner consistently loves me – my partner is trustworthy, because he/she has *decided* to treat me using a format of affection and servanthood that was created by God Himself, and is described in scripture. It is a totally dependable definition, universal in its breadth.

### **Why Boundaries Are Necessary In Love**

Boundaries are important elements of any relationship. Even the most sexually torrid, or dependently mirroring, or hopelessly enmeshed relationship will eventually create its own boundaries. Even the most needy person will eventually reach the point of facing his/her separateness. All relationships must have boundaries. Real love *will* have boundaries. Indeed, healthy love requires many layers of boundaries including physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational. *Boundary-less relationships are generally need-based relationships.* They’re not healthy, and in the long run they are not fulfilling.

They involve people using people rather than people loving people. Like the song said, “You just use me, until you use me up.” That’s what boundary-less relationships do.

Real love requires boundaries. There must be a clear sense of separation between people, in order for one to give this highest form of love. The difference between boundary-less relationships, and those with boundaries, is that the latter can truly exist for the other person. The former exist only for themselves. Healthy relationships have a sense of being separate enough from one another that fresh air can blow between them ~ each person has their own unique identity, and each has their own friendships and life goals. They are able to be separate with no need for control and no fear of loss.

Yet although it has clear boundaries and real separation between people, real love also has thick ropes of attachment. The notion of real love *plus* boundaries is consistent. The most healthy relationships have the highest ability to remain attached even amid the relational hurricanes that sometimes pound them or the distances that separate them. They have both clear separateness, and durable attachment.

## The God-Mosaic

When God provided love for us, He also provided instructions. He said, “Love works best when one does *this*,” and, “Love works worst when one does *that*.” This paper will end with a review of things that work best in love, and things which are counterproductive to love. The list is found on the last few pages. It’s my own personal composite list ~ the “God-mosaic” of which I spoke earlier.

Before pondering the “God-mosaic,” there is one thought worthy of mention.

Although there are no spiritual limitations placed upon love, God has placed an absolute boundary upon sexual activity. His boundary is called marriage. The God who created all things including love and sex, teaches this absolute boundary which, if reduced to a single sentence would say, “*Love is for everyone, but sex is for marriage.*”

As mentioned earlier, marriage is the only container strong enough to handle human sexuality. ***That’s*** why the research pertaining to cohabitation is so pathetic. Cohabitation is a flawed container ~ it has cracks ~ it is a weak system ~ it cannot contain the explosive power of sexual love. By contrast, a committed monogamous marriage is a very sturdy container and is strong enough to hold the many different forms of love, one of which is sex-love. Here, then, is the “God-mosaic.”

***Traits of God; Traits of Evil ~  
How Each Affect Character and Relationships***

***Positive Traits: These traits of God’s character build our character, heal our wounds, strengthen our will, and mature us and our relationships. This is the God-Mosaic.***

Affection	Love	Truth
Blamelessness (in action/character)	Lovingkindness	Truthfulness
Blessing others	Loyalty	Tranquillity
Clean heart, hands	Meekness	Uprightness
Comfort (offering it to others)	Mercy	Understanding
Compassion	Obedience to God	Wise behavior
Confession of fault	Pardon	Wisdom
Consoling	Patience	Worship of God
Contentment	Peace	Work (ethic)
Covenant-keeping	Peace-making	
Dignity	Peace-seeking	
Discernment	Pleasantness	
Discretion	Praise	
Diligence	Praiseworthiness	
Encouragement	Prudence	
	Purity of heart, mind, speech	

***Use of these traits builds and strengthens character, promotes healthy relationships and positive self-esteem, and leads one toward wholeness in general.***

Equity	Reconciliation
Fairness	Recompense
Faithfulness	Redemption
Fear of God	Repentance
Forgiveness	Respect
Gentleness	Restitution
Giving to poor	Reverence
Good deeds	Righteousness
Goodness	Self-control
(character)	Sensibility
Graciousness	Slowness to
Honesty	anger
Honor	Stability
Holiness	Steadfastness
Hospitality	Sweetness of
Humility	speech
Innocence	Temperance
Insight	Tenderhearted-
Integrity	ness
Justice	Thankfulness
Kindness	Trust (of others)
Knowledge of God	Trustworthiness

*These traits reflect the character of God. They are how God wishes for us to be, and what God wishes us to do.*

*They are traits upon which one may build and depend when desiring to mature, heal, grow, and deepen one's walk with God. Those who use them do so to their personal gain.*

*These traits lead one toward healthy and mature intimacy.*

*As a whole, this list of traits is an excellent definition of the word, "love."*

***Negative Traits: These traits of evil destroy our character, wound our relationships, weaken our attachments, cause mistrust, and create personal and relational immaturity. This is a Mosaic of Evil.***

Abusiveness	Lying	Stubbornness
Arrogance	Laziness	Tale bearing
Bitter words	Malice	Treachery
Bitterness	Maliciousness	Ungratefulness
Bloodshed	Maligning another	Vengeance (activity)
Boastfulness	Mean attitudes	Vengefulness (attitude)
Blasphemy	Mean actions	Vileness
Boisterousness	Mockery	Violence
Bribery	Murmuring	Wickedness
Brutality	Oppressiveness	Witchcraft
Callousness	Outbursts of anger	Worldly
Conceit	Partiality in	sophistication
Corruption	judgment	Wrathfulness
Covetousness	Perversion (in	
Craftiness	thoughts, actions,	
(being sneaky)	speech)	
Crookedness	Perversion of	
Cruelty	conversation	
Cursing	or justice	

*These traits weaken and destroy character, self-esteem, and relationships. They lead one to dysfunctional self-identity and*

Deceit	Pleasure-mongering	<b><u>relationships.</u></b>
Defrauding	Pretentiousness	
Destructiveness	Pride of self	<b><i>They are what God does <u>not</u></i></b>
Deviousness	Pridefulness	<b><i>wish for us to do. They reflect</i></b>
Divination	Pugnacious	<b><i>the character and attitude of</i></b>
Drunkenness	Quarrelsome	<b><i>sin and evil. They lead to</i></b>
Double-hearted	Quick-tempered	<b><i>pain sadness, and regret.</i></b>
Envy	Rebellion	
Evil deeds,	Religiousness	<b><i>They are traits which people</i></b>
thoughts, plans	Ridiculing	<b><i>use to harm one another, traits</i></b>
Falsehood	Ruthlessness	<b><i>which are always destructive</i></b>
False witness	Scoffing	<b><i>to the highest and best that</i></b>
Favoritism	Scorn	<b><i>God intended for us personally</i></b>
Flattering lips	Selfishness	<b><i>and relationally. Those who</i></b>
Foolishness	Self-righteousness	<b><i>use these traits do so to their</i></b>
Greed	Sensuality *	<b><i>own detriment, and to the detriment</i></b>
Gluttony	Slander	<b><i>of those against whom they are used.</i></b>
Gossip	Sloth	<b><i>Use of these traits leads <u>away from</u></i></b>
Haughtiness	Spite	<b><i>experiencing mature healthy <u>intimacy.</u></i></b>
Hypocrisy	Strife (causing	
Idolatry	strife,	<b><i>They <u>destroy the trust level</u> needed for</i></b>
Immorality of	maintaining	<b><i>intimacy. They keep others at “arm’s</i></b>
mind or deed	strife,	<b><i>length.”</i></b>
Impurity	stirring up	
Injustice	strife)	<b><i>*This term implies sexual thoughts and</i></b>
Insubordination	Stiff-necked	<b><i>activity outside marriage.</i></b>

### Closing Thoughts

Nobody ever wishes to have painful and dysfunctional relationships. But many have them anyway. Most often they are a product of one’s upbringing in homes where Christian values such as forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, humility, etc., were not practiced, and where harm to family members was tolerated.

The best news of all in this discussion on love, is that no matter where one begins, God provides hope and a brighter future. No matter how dysfunctional one’s past; no matter how badly bruised and broken one may be; no matter how poorly one feels about themselves ~ God always offers hope and a brighter future.



Hope is provided when one finally recognizes that *there are no other positive alternatives to relational happiness*, than the ones God created in the first place. This lesson often comes after the more painful lesson ~ the one learned when we repeatedly try to do things our own way, i.e., in ways that God knows just don't work. After we bash into the wall a few times, sometimes the pain is enough to make us slowly waken to the possibility that God was perhaps right in the first place. As we come to this understanding, God begins to shine the light of His hope and healing upon us.

Brighter futures are a product of growing in God's grace ~ learning how to do what He teaches ~ trusting that His ways are always better ~ acting upon this knowledge. When we begin practicing the truth that God teaches, it's surprising to see how things begin falling into place. Brighter futures are a product of obedience to God, and of building His character into our lives. In this regard, the "God-mosaic" provided above can be a help, since each of the positive traits is actually a trait of God's character. By contrast, each of the negative traits is a trait of sin. The bottom line in personal maturity, emotional health, relational ability, and general character, revolves around which set of traits one builds their lives upon.

### **Closing Story**

There's one final story of love that you might wish to read. It hasn't been written yet, but you can write it. It's your story. Here are the chapter titles to use as you create this story:

1. How I was loved as a child:
  - a. Who loved me well

- b. Who loved me poorly
  - c. What I needed in the way of love when I was a child
  - d. How emotionally well supported and connected I was ~ or was not
2. What I thought love was supposed to be like when I grew up:
  - a. My sources of information
  - b. My personal fantasies of love
  - c. My greatest hopes about love
  - d. My greatest fears about love
3. My early experiments with love:
  - a. My first “crush”
  - b. My first date
  - c. My most meaningful adolescent relationship
4. The first time I fully gave myself in love to another person
  - a. Some things that happened or didn’t happen, that surprised me
  - b. Some “costs” of love
  - c. Two lessons I learned from this experience
5. My current definition of love.
  - a. What the word “love” means to me today
  - b. What I hope God can do in me as I learn to love better
  - c. Why I need to be loved
  - d. Why I need God’s love

If you decide to write this story, you might wish to add some other chapters. They’ll be yours to create. As you write this love story, be sure to track the hand of God in your

life, because at the end of the story, you'll see that His love and guidance is the strand of gold woven into the tapestry of your life. Happy writing.

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Last revised 11/05/07