

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

So You Think You *May* Be In L♥ve

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This work has been subdivided into more manageable 10 – 15 minute sections. To accomplish this, days of the week have been used as dividers.

Monday

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 ~ one might call it “being attached,” or the hunger for “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 is intent upon redefining our culture’s value system. Things that used to be considered “truth” and “sacrosanct,” today are considered personal opinion. The philosophy of “do-whatever-works-for-you” has arrived, replacing the previous generation’s philosophy of “do-what-is-right;” and in our parents’ day what was “right” was basically accepted as being grounded in scripture. This is where the rub begins, because without an accepted basis of meaning and truth, each person doing what seems right for themselves can only lead to chaos and abuse of power. When Rodney King asked his famous question, “Can’t we all just get along?” the answer is, “No, we can’t. We need God’s help.” And there is no more frequently observed area in which this dynamic exists, than marriage.

This drift toward “doing-whatever-works-for-you” has created a lot of questions in regard to the definition and meaning of love. In the next pages we’ll look at a few questions regarding love, because they will set the stage for the answers provided later.

Questions About Love

So You Think You May Be In Love

What is love? How is it built? Why do you think you're in love? What makes love 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? Is it the same as love? Can a person learn how to create and sustain deep and lasting attachments, or are such things 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? Does love mean controlling or being controlled?

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 40 years there are millions of emotionally wounded, attachment hungry men and women seeking love to fill the hole dug by 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 day-old fish.

Consider current trends. Ponder the impact of a 50% sustained divorce rate on a culture. Ponder the fact that approximately half of our children now grow up in single parent family systems, and nearly half of our culture's children are now born out of wedlock. Ponder the fact that suicide is third leading killer of teens in the U.S. Psychologists have long known that healthy attachment in adults is a product of healthy attachment during childhood. We know that if a child goes through his or her first few years *without* bonding and *without* steady emotional support from mother and father, then that child is very likely going to have difficulty sustaining a marriage. Ours has become a culture heavily influenced by attachment disorders ~ abandonment issues ~ feelings of rejection ~ and these issues tend to be multi-generational in their effect.

Definitions of love: 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 (linking up), cheating (i.e., having affairs), multiple partners (serial monogamy), homosexuality, physical abuse, pornography, gross disrespect for women, divorce, kinky sex, and so on. To be honest, one simply must ask whether *any* of these have *anything* to do with love. The answer is decidedly, absolutely, and unequivocally NO!

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.

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More questions. What happens if the relationship gets painful? What happens if it becomes deeply wounded? Most marriages face some element of deep wounding along the way. Is it even possible to rebuild love when trust has been badly 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?

Yet 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 magically become able to live happily ever after? What if one "finds the wrong person" but doesn't discover this fact until 25 years later? 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 sexual relationships, dumping them when they lose their appeal?

This paper is for people who think they're in love. We will first consider a few things that do not constitute love. Next, we'll consider a few characteristics of love. Finally, we'll 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. 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.

For Reflection

Take any two of the questions in *italics* from the previous four paragraphs, and write your answer to them. If you are in a group, share your thoughts. If you are not in a group, share your thoughts with your fiancée.

Tuesday

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.

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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