

How Do You Love Your Partner?

By Jan Johnson

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“It takes courage to love, but pain through love is the purifying fire which those who love generously know. We all know people who are so much afraid of pain that they shut themselves up like clams in a shell and, giving out nothing, receive nothing and therefore shrink until life is a mere living death.”

— *Eleanor Roosevelt*

So—you love your partner? Can you quantify it, can you tell me when you decided to love your partner? Hard, isn't it? You didn't love them when you first met them, but you love them now. I Hope. Right? So, when did it happen? In what precise moment?

It's like getting in shape. You go to the gym today, you come back home and you look in the mirror. See any changes? You go to the gym tomorrow and come back home and look in the mirror. Any changes? No, but you keep going to the gym, and I can't tell you when, but one day you will be in shape if you continue to work at it.

Most of us brush our teeth when we get up in the morning and when we go to bed at night. Twice a day, about two minutes at a time. This is necessary to keep your mouth and teeth healthy. It's something small, but it has to be done.

If you have a garden, you know that there is a time to water and a time to fertilize, and you have to pull out the weeds that seem to grow with no attention at all. This week I noticed one of my plants drying out in the front of my house where I had installed a drip irrigation system. I assumed that water was going to each plant, but upon a closer look found two leaks in the dried-out hosing that prevented water from reaching that plant. Things are not always what we think.

I think you are getting the picture. You can't go to the gym for 10 hours one day and be in shape. You can't brush your teeth for an hour once a week and expect a healthy mouth. You can't spend one weekend at a leadership course and get a certificate that says "Here, you are now a leader!"

That box of chocolate and the dozen roses on Valentine's Day will not make her fall in love with you. There has to be a consistency, a constant putting of the other person before our own selves. Looking at the other person in the eyes and saying good morning before you look at your phone. It is the sum of all the small daily things that cause us to fall in love. When you come home from work after having a great day, you are dying to share what a great day you had and find out that she had a bad day. You listen while she tells it all and you empathize with her. Your good day can come too, but at the right moment. You hold the door for her, you are always on her team no matter what, you remember the flowers and the birthdays and anniversaries, and what she likes to eat and drink, all the small routine things that one day causes something inside of you to say "I love that man, or I love that woman."

But love is not defined by sacrifice. There is joy in sharing. Marisela tells me all the time that coffee is what keeps our marriage running well. I always wake before she does and take her cup of fresh coffee to her bed when I wake her up. Regardless of whether we were in a good mood or not the night before. She always thanks me and tells me how much she appreciates that consistent gesture of love that starts our day on the right foot. Simple things that warm our souls.

We fall in love because we enjoy being with that person. It's fun, it brings happiness, it causes us to be alive and look forward to sharing the beauty that surrounds us. If you both love music, or fishing, or hunting, or cooking, or dancing, or praying, then do them together and share the pleasure and joy that God wants you to have. Marisela and I took Tango lessons for a while, and she tells me how important it is for when we dance, it is a moment of closeness, of coordination, of moving together, of intimacy, an act of love.

Webster's dictionary defines love as "to hold something dear, to cherish, a strong affection for another"

C.S. Lewis said that "Affection is responsible for 9/10ths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our lives."

The Bible takes us through the four types of love. We have been addressing *Eros* or passionate love depicted in the Song of Solomon. You all know that there are three other types of love: *Storge*, or family love as found in Romans 12:10; *Philia*, love for our fellow humans, showing care, respect and compassion for those in need. John 13:35, Jesus tells us that, “**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.**” And of course, *Agape* love which defines God’s immeasurable, incomparable, unconditional, perfect, sacrificial and pure love for us (John 3:16).

In Chapter 22 of Mathew we find Jesus responding to the Pharisees:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

“Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[c] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[d] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**”

Your neighbor: not the ones of a certain color, religion, political affiliation, grumpy or nice. Your neighbor.

The world tells us that to love others, you must love yourself first. In my personal opinion, this is a difficult concept. Loving as I love myself makes more sense. Love by its very nature subordinates the interest of the lover to those of the one who is loved.

But, the love of God must be first. Good and evil must be distinguished. We must be careful as we are not to judge others, nor assume the role of the Holy Spirit. We cannot reaffirm a loved one’s actions when we know that they are wrong by God’s standards, not those of our world today. We are only imperfect lovers and our mistakes can deter our progress toward righteousness. Only God’s love is perfect. When we lovingly correct or discipline we are also loving. We love the sinner but not the sin, as we are all sinners. We cannot use this as an excuse to berate or criticize. There are things in my life of which I am not proud and have had struggles with that Marisela has pointed out to me. I realize that she was right, and this has caused me to seek strength and help in our Lord.

Love is not easy, marriage is not easy, and life is not easy. We have to work on these daily. It is truly a decision to be consistent and constant in our efforts. The joy and happiness of the privilege of loving make it all worthwhile. Like most things in this world, love requires maintenance, like my broken drip system. We must set aside time to examine and guide our needs, our finances, our health, or whatever issue in our relationship that needs help.

So yes, get the flowers and the candy. Write the notes and letters, listen and laugh a lot, for our time here is short.

But remember **Ecclesiastes 4:12**:

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

In any relationship where Jesus is the third strand, His power will hold it all together, for when all things fail, Love will remain.

Jan Johnson

CGD Valentine's Dinner