

SERMON – 04/20/08

TO LOVE & TO CHERISH – “After the Honeymoon”

I will share with you today a list of all of the girls I’ve ever loved, romantically.

- My first love came in the winter of 1976... while the Olympics were being televised.
 - Her name was Dorothy Hamill... and I was sure that I’d get to marry her someday.
 - (I was in the 3rd grade, and hadn’t yet figured out how the world worked!)
- My first crush came in the 5th grade... a girl whose name I’ve forgotten...
 - She was from Maine, and was in Arizona for a year...
 - Not only did she go to my school, but she also attended the same church!
 - (I never ever mentioned to her that I liked her, though...)
- In the 6th grade, it was Diane Santorico... she’s the first girl who actually liked me back!
 - But since I wasn’t officially allowed to have a girlfriend, we could never go out.
 - (I think I held her hand once, at school, though! Woo-hoo!)
- In the 2nd half of 6th grade there was another girl I “dated” (and I use the word very, very loosely!)...
 - I don’t remember her name, either... but I do remember getting busted by my parents when we tried to go out on a secret double date with our best friends!
 - It would have worked, too... except one of the other moms called my mom the night before to ask if my mom could pick everyone up after the movie!
 - (Of course, I wasn’t supposed to be dating, so... well... I didn’t get to go to the movie that next day... or any day after that for a long, long time!)
- In 8th grade... at our graduation dance... I fell in love with Geri Ann Costello... and a week later had my very first kiss!
 - Which was also my only kiss from Geri Ann... because right after she kissed me I said, “Wow, that felt just like a frog!”
 - (Yah, nobody called me “Casanova” in middle school!)
- In 9th grade, Heather Atkinson was ALMOST my girlfriend... we were very close friends, and would have become boyfriend & girlfriend... except that was the time my dad got moved to Hawaii!
- Then I saved up all my love for 2½ years... until Jody and I started dating our senior year...
 - She was, to be honest, my first real girlfriend...
 - (And, if we’re going to be technical, my first real wife.)

- (Okay... my only wife!)

Welcome to week two in our ongoing sermon series entitled: “TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH: a Biblical View of Love, Sex & Marriage.”

- I know that not everyone here is currently married... I hope and pray that you won't simply 'check out' of the sermon...
 - Each of us here is in a position of influence with friends & family members who ARE married...
 - Maybe something you hear this morning will be part of what God wants to do in the lives of someone close to you!
- Today's topic is “After the Honeymoon”... and we're going to be focusing on what it means to DO LOVE for our spouses...
 - But I wanted to begin today by telling you about my “girlfriends”...
 - Not because I wanted to brag... (it's definitely NOT because of that!)...
 - But because I want us to start with the issue of **falling in love**.
- Psychologists have concluded that the need to feel loved is a primary human emotional need.
 - The need to feel loved by one's spouse is at the heart of marital desires.
 - But there's a difference between falling in love and staying in love.
 - Actually, I'd like to use the expression the “in-love experience,” as taken from Dr. Gary Chapman's book The 5 Love Languages.
 - He writes, “At its peak, the ‘**in love experience**’ is euphoric. We are emotionally obsessed with each other. We go to sleep thinking of one another. When we rise that person is the first thought on our minds. We long to be together. Spending time together is like playing in the anteroom of heaven. When we hold hands, it seems as if our blood flows together. We could kiss forever if we didn't have to go to school or work. Embracing stimulates dreams of marriage and ecstasy.”
 - In short, the person who is ‘in love’ has the illusion that his/her beloved is perfect.
 - Unfortunately, the “eternality” of the ‘in love experience’ is fiction, not fact.
- Dr. Dorothy Tennov, a psychologist, has done long-range studies on the ‘in-love’ phenomenon... and has concluded that the average lifespan of a romantic obsession is TWO YEARS (if it's a secretive affair, it could last a little bit longer).
 - Did you know that 40% of every first-time marriage now ends in divorce... many of which happen within the first 2-3 years!
 - Then 60% of every second marriage and 75% of every 3rd marriage also end in divorce!

- Every couple eventually descends from the clouds and has to plant their feet firmly on the ground again.
- Their eyes are opened, and they see their beloved, ‘warts’ and all!
- As this wears off, reality sets in... and a couple has a choice to make.
- They no longer feel the ‘in-love’ euphoria... some might even say they’ve ‘fallen out of love’...
- A couple can then withdraw, separate, divorce, set off in search of a new ‘in-love’ experience... or begin the hard work of learning to love each other without the euphoria of the in-love obsession.
- That’s what today’s sermon is all about... how to DO love... when we don’t necessarily FEEL love!
- As wonderful as it feels at the time, the ‘in love experience’ isn’t really “true love”... the kind that one builds a lifetime relationship on...
 - True love is a love that unites reason & emotion...
 - It involves an act of the will, requires discipline, and it recognizes the need for personal growth.
 - True love is a CHOICE... a choice to expend energy to benefit the other person...
 - And Dr. Chapman argues that true love can’t begin until the ‘in love experience’ has run its course!

Although it’s been a New York Times “bestseller,” I’d never read Chapman’s The 5 Love Languages until this week...

- And let me say I was absolutely blown away by what I read!
 - It’s the culmination of 30 years of marriage counseling... and it’s extremely practical!
 - Dr. Chapman believes that there are basically 5 emotional love languages... 5 ways that people speak and understand love.
- Seldom do a husband & wife have the same primary emotional love language.
 - We tend to speak our primary love language and we become confused when our spouse does not understand what we’re communicating.
 - We’re expressing our love... but the message doesn’t come through... because we’re speaking what, to them, is a ‘foreign language.’
- Each of us has an emotional love tank that needs to be full to maintain a healthy marriage... it would be like trying to run a car without maintaining the proper oil level!

- Oh, it will work for a while... but eventually, you'll burn out your engine, if you never bother to fill up the oil!
- And as expensive as a new engine is... the cost is far, far, greater than that on a marriage!
- Whatever the quality of your marriage is now... it can be better!
- When you're spouse's emotional love tank is full and she feels secure in your love, the whole world looks bright and your spouse will move out to reach her highest potential in life.
- But when the love tank is empty and he feels used but not loved, the whole world looks dark and he will likely never reach his potential for good in the world.
- So if you're willing, let's take a look at Dr. Chapman's insights together... and as we journey together, try to find not only **your** love language, but **the language of your spouse!**

The first love language is **WORDS OF AFFIRMATION**...

- The true object of love is not getting what you want... but doing something for the well-being of the one you love.
 - It is a fact, however, that when we receive affirming words we are far more likely to be motivated to reciprocate.
 - If this is your spouse's primary love language, then s/he feels most loved when you give:
 - **Verbal compliments**... which are always far greater motivators than nagging words...
 - **Encouraging words**... because all of us have areas in which we feel insecure. Most of us have more potential than we'll ever develop! What holds us back is courage. A loving spouse can supply that all-important catalyst.
 - **Kind words**... (how we say things is just as important as what we say!)
 - **Humble words**... because love makes requests, not demands on our partners.
 - Another way to love your spouse in this language is to try giving **indirect words of affirmation**... that is, saying positive things about your spouse, when s/he is not present! (Eventually someone will tell your spouse & you'll get full credit for love!)
- Remember, if this is your spouse's primary love language... then giving them the opposite – words that criticize, demean, or tear down – are especially devastating & hurtful.

The second love language is **QUALITY TIME**...

- If this is your spouse's primary love language, s/he may constantly be wanting you to **DO THINGS** together...

- But it's important to remember that a central aspect of quality time is **togetherness**... not proximity!
- Togetherness has to do with FOCUSED ATTENTION.
- Some husbands & wives think they are spending time together when, in reality, they are only living in close proximity.
- Doing something together and giving our full attention to the other person is a wonderful way of expressing love!
- You can also share in **quality conversation**... sympathetic dialogue where two individuals are sharing their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context.
 - Most individuals who complain that their spouse does not talk do not mean literally that s/he never says a word. They mean that s/he seldom takes part in sympathetic dialogue.
 - (The difference between this and the 1st love language is that Words of Affirmation focus on what we are saying, whereas quality conversation focuses on **what we are hearing**.)
- Sometimes one's **personality type** makes a big difference in this love language.
 - Chapman lifts up 2 distinct kinds of people... "DEAD SEA" folk are the ones who, just like their namesake, receive, but never give back!
 - "BABBLING BROOKS" are the exact opposite... they have a lot to say and aren't afraid to say it!
 - Many times a 'Dead Sea' marries a 'Babbling Brook' – because when they're dating, it seems like such an attractive match!
- And finally, another dialect of Quality Time is **Quality Activities**...
 - Here are the 3 simple ground rules for quality activities...
 - First, at least one of you **wants** to do it (whether it be going to the movies, playing cards, taking a walk, working on a puzzle, etc.)
 - Second, the other is **willing** to do it...
 - And third, you both know WHY you're doing it... to express love by being together!
 - This is a wonderful way to start sacrificing your own desires & interests... in order to express love to your spouse, by sharing something s/he loves doing!

The third love language is RECEIVING GIFTS...

- A gift is something you can hold in your hand and say, 'Look, he was thinking of me,' or 'She remembered me!'

- You must be thinking of someone to give him/her a gift. The gift itself is a symbol of that thought.
- It doesn't matter if it costs money or not... what's important is the evidence that you thought of him/her!
- Gifts, then, are **visual symbols of love**.
- For the first 7 years of our marriage, I never got the whole "giving flowers" thing. Flowers are expensive, and they're just going to die in a few days anyway, I thought.
- I didn't get the fact that it wasn't just the flowers... it was that I was thinking about Jody enough to buy the flowers in the first place!
- Gifts may be purchased, found or made... and this is one of the easiest love languages to learn...
 - But to do it well, you may have to change your attitude towards money.
- If this is your spouse's primary love language, then just about **anything you give** will be received as an expression of love!
 - If your spouse has been critical of the gifts you've given in the past, and almost nothing has been acceptable... then receiving gifts is almost certainly not his/her primary love language!
- Finally, never underestimate the power of the gift of your **physical presence**... especially in times of crisis!
 - In these instances, your body becomes the symbol of your love.
 - When your spouse is going through a difficult time, being there for him/her is critical... remove the symbol, and the sense of love evaporates.

Fourth on the primary love language list is ACTS OF SERVICE...

- This is doing things that you know your spouse would want you to do... and through your act of service, express love!
 - Just about everything you do, if done with a **positive spirit**, can be seen as an expression of love!
 - Near the end of his ministry on earth, **Jesus** washed his disciples' feet... demonstrating to them that in his kingdom, God desires servants!
 - It's important to remember that **love is always freely given**... it cannot be demanded! We can request things of each other, but we must never demand anything.
- If your spouse has this as his/her primary love language, know that you don't have to do them... in fact, some of the requests may be things you really don't enjoy!

- But if you want to express your love for your spouse, fulfilling those requests become tremendously meaningful!
- For some of us, we may have to reexamine our stereotypes of the roles of husbands and wives... and be willing to do the dishes... or cook... or vacuum... or change the oil in our car... if it can be a blessing to our spouse!

Finally, the 5th primary love language is PHYSICAL TOUCH...

- (I know, many of the guys are thinking... finally, this is the one I've been waiting for!)
- Babies who are held, hugged, and kissed develop a healthier emotional life than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact...
 - In the first century, the Hebrews living in Palestine, recognizing Jesus as a great teacher, brought their children to him "to have him touch them"...
 - Wise parents, in any culture, are touching parents.
- Physical touch can **make or break a relationship**... It can communicate hate or love.
 - To the person whose primary love language is physical touch, the message will be far louder than the words, "I love you" or "I hate you."
 - A slap in the face is detrimental to any child, but it is devastating to a child whose primary love language is touch.
- **Sexual intercourse** is only ONE DIALECT in the love language of physical touch.
 - **Lovingly touching** your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love.
 - S/He knows best what they perceive as a loving touch. Don't insist on touching them the way YOU like to be touched.
 - Learn to **speak his/her love dialect** (running the hand through the hair... giving a back rub... holding hands... embracing... kissing, etc.)
 - Your spouse may find some touches uncomfortable or irritating. To insist on continuing those touches is to communicate the opposite of love.
- And **in times of crisis**, more than anything, we need to feel loved. If your spouse's primary love language is physical touch... nothing is more important than holding her when she cries.
- [Just a note of caution... many men tend to think that physical touch is their primary love language... because of the strong physical desire for sexual intercourse. But if the other kinds of loving touches aren't as important, than this may not be your primary language!]

I know this has been a lot of information, but I strongly believe it is crucial for strengthening the health & wellbeing of our relationships.

- So before we close, here are three ways of finding out your primary love language:
 - What does your spouse do or fail to do that hurts you most deeply? (The opposite of what hurts you most is probably your love language.)
 - What have you most often requested of your spouse? (The thing you have most often requested is likely the thing that would make you feel most loved.)
 - In what way do you regularly express love to your spouse? (Your method of expressing love may be an indication that that would also make you feel loved.)
- If two languages seem to be equal for you, that is, both speak loudly to you, then perhaps you are bilingual.
 - If so, you make it easier on your spouse! Now s/he has two choices, either of which will strongly communicate love to you.
 - But more important than knowing your love language... get to know your spouse's!
 - And ask him/her on a regular basis... "How is your love tank?" and "What can I do to help fill it?"
- Love is a choice, my friends... it's not a feeling.
 - We need to be aware of the difference between the 'in love' experience... and the emotional need to feel loved.
 - If we learn the emotional love language of our spouse... and learn to speak it frequently... then s/he will continue to feel loved!
 - It needs to be a choice we make EVERY DAY...
 - Because love is something we do for someone else... not something we do for ourselves.
 - *"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."* (1 Cor. 13:4-8a)
 - May each of us choose to DO love this day... and every day... AMEN.