

What Wives Wish Husbands Knew

Session 2—Agape

“I Wish You Knew How To Love Me”

His name was **Avery**. Stylishly dressed in a navy cashmere blazer and light tan slacks, complimented with a 100% cotton pin-point, wrinkle-free, button-down collar shirt and Allen-Edmonds loafers you could see yourself in, he was seated in the pastor’s office beside Alex, his wife, who’d taken only cursory stabs at preparation for public viewing that day—hair that had obviously been brushed at, no make-up, and an out-dated jogging suit.

Things hadn’t been great lately. Avery, naturally enough, seemed a bit nervous. Alex, on the other hand, wasn’t nervous at all. In fact, she seemed almost totally detached from her surroundings that morning. Dispassionate and despondent, she sat motionless, hands listlessly folded in her lap, beside her husband of 21 years, three months and a day, staring stoically at a large blank wall over the pastor’s left shoulder.

Following the customary exchanges of “how’ve you been” and “good to see you” kinds of things, as well as discussions about the weather that always seem to accompany awkward situations, the pastor turned his attention to the obviously oblivious Alex: “Good morning Alex.” Deafening silence. “Nice to see you.” Utter quietness. “Pretty sweat suit!” Not a word. Ensuing attempts proved equally feeble, despite his proficient pastoral panache and considerable natural charm.

Thinking through as clearly as he could what he was now considering, he threw caution to the wind, jumped out of his chair, scooted around the corner of his desk, grabbed Alex by the shoulders, stood her up, put his arms around her and kissed her! Her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree! Turning to Avery, he then: “Avery, that’s all Alex needs—about three times a week.” Avery’s face revealed his agony as he replied: “But I work out of town and can only bring her in on Thursdays.”

In **Clint Eastwood’s** 1986 film, “Heartbreak Ridge,” he played the part of Gunnery Sgt. Tom ‘Gunny’ Highway, a tough, leathery Marine—a no nonsense, twenty-four year veteran, Congressional Medal of Honor winner...

While he’s gained an admirable reputation among his peers, he’s also managed to lose his wife who doesn’t want anything to do with him. But he wants her back.

He does what all macho-types would do—he starts buying women’s magazines, hoping somehow to figure out just exactly what’s gone wrong and exactly what it is that she wants from him...

- The irony is that it’s perfectly obvious to everyone else. But Sarge doesn’t have a clue.
- Love is a concept about which our ideas are often extremely vague and ambiguous...

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3

³¹ “...eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

13:1 If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to feed the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

I. A Definition of Love

The Bible uses three words to define this “most excellent way” that we’ve reduced to the one word, love:

- Eros, (erotic) defines sexual attraction and is a totally legitimate and necessary aspect of marital love...we’ll talk about it more in two weeks.
- Phileo, (filial) defines the very important aspect of marital love, friendship, which we’ll talk about next week.
- Agape, (a relentless, pursuing passion); to be concerned for the well being of another, with passion, aggression, and relentless commitment.

Romans 5:8

God demonstrates his own *’agapeen* for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (italics added)

Galatians 5:22a

The fruit of the Spirit is *’agape*... (italics added)

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, *’agapate* your wives, just as Christ *eegapeesen* the church and gave himself up for her. (italics added)

- *Agape* is a **bigger, grander & nobler** form of love than we’re accustomed to thinking about when we hear the word, *love*.
- The *agape* message (1 Corinthians 13) concludes in 1 Corinthians 14:1 with these words: “Follow the way of love.”
 - “Follow” is *dioko* and means “to hunt” or “to pursue relentlessly.”
 - To “follow the way of love” means that the primary aim of our lives as husbands is our wives’ happiness and well-being.
- *Agape*, therefore, is a loveliness that targets our wives as the object of our love, and pursues her best interests relentlessly.
 - The result is the demonstration of a commitment to love her and to be concerned primarily for her well being.
 - That, coupled with a friendship and companionship (*phileo*) that shares life in common and incorporates the physical and sexual component (*eros*), is God’s plan to make husbands and wives **lovers for life**.

FIRST DISCUSSION:

- Since “the greatest of these” (referring to authentic spirituality) “is love,” why don’t we see more evidence of it in the Christian community?
- What are the first three concepts or ideas that come to mind as we think about the manner of Christ’s love for his church, which is another way of saying his love for you?
- How might those concepts transform the institution of marriage as we know it?

II. The Obligation of Love

Love naturally incorporates feelings—and they are at times inexplicable. Two people meet and bells ring, whistles sound, and we say they’ve “fallen in love.” It’s a strange way to talk about it, but what else are you going to call it?

In those *love-laden* times we behave wonderfully—but when those feelings begin to change over time, which they always do, we often allow our behavior to change as well. Agape doesn’t change the way it behaves...

A. Loving your wife means you behave patiently toward her (v. 4a)

- The KJV calls it “suffering long,” which means that *love suffers a long time*—if necessary.

Love makes us vulnerable to hurt, which is why we’re often resistant to “agape.” We want the “eros” or the “phileo” without the “agape.” Sometimes our giving isn’t returned. We give and give and give, but they may not. And that hurts. Maybe you’re giving a lot more than you’re receiving but it’s being misunderstood or taken for granted. That hurts too.

- Here’s the hard part—love is prepared to do that!

Because “love suffers long,” and is primarily concerned with the well being of the other person. It targets the other person as the object of our love and the goal of the relationships even when it requires that we suffer. Our suffering doesn’t become a more important issue than the person whom we’re loving.

- How long does love suffer?

I want to answer carefully and sensitively. I don’t think God expects us to be destroyed by a relationship, but he does expect us, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, to love them patiently and to be willing to endure as we pursue them.

B. Loving your wife means you behave kindly toward her (vv. 4b-5a)

Being nice works wonders in a marriage. Too frequently men aren’t nice to women...after we get what we want from them. Just as frequently we expect a lot and we

get mad when we don't get it and our behavior isn't kind—which indicates a lack of concern for the well being of the other person.

- We want them to be kind to us but we aren't always willing to be kind to them—which is what?
- RUDE!
- Agape isn't rude!
- Any time we find ourselves behaving toward our mate in a rude manner, we should note that we're being disobedient to our commitment to love each other.

What's better, sweeter or more memorable than kindness? Very little. It's tragically remarkable—of all the people in the world, this is the person we chose to marry. No one made us choose them. We chose them. So now we're married and we sometimes refuse to extend even the simplest kindness to them. That's insanity! Kindness isn't a feeling, it's a decision.

C. Loving your wife means you behave with humility toward her (v. 4c).

Here's a problem. God is love (1 John 4:8). The Bible also tells us that God is a "jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). But here the Bible says "love isn't jealous." There's more than one kind of jealousy...

- **Protective Jealousy**

If you attack my wife or daughter, you'll have to go through me first." I'll protect them jealously...I'm getting ticked just thinking about it. That's holy jealousy—because I'm doing it.

- **Possessive Jealousy**

Where one person assumes a power role in a relationship in order to dominate the other person.

- **Not boastful**

It's the language of insecurity. It describes the person who, for the sake of proving their own worth, will belittle and humiliate another person. It's the person who's so self centered that they will hurt, harm, or embarrass someone else in order to feel better about themselves.

- **Not proud**

Of all the bad things listed in the Bible, God has reserved his most scathing criticism for "pride." He hates it. Pride is the essence of "Me-ism," that essentially pushes God off his throne and makes me the center of the universe at God's expense.

When humility is lacking in a marriage we find husbands and wives, who, rather than having developed a partnership based on friendship, companionship, mutual encouragement and concern for each other—are simply two people, locked in a marriage relationship, who are totally **committed to themselves**.

Let me ask you, what are the chances they're going to survive with any sense of fulfillment or happiness or joy? Zilch.

When push comes to shove, if two people are committed primarily to themselves rather than to each other, they begin to consider these kinds of thoughts: "I don't love you anymore. I don't even like you—I want out."

D. Loving your wife means you behave altruistically toward her (5b).

Verse 5 says "Love isn't self seeking, easily angered & it doesn't keep a diary of wrongs".

- **"Self seeking"** is the antithesis of love and is the enemy of all that we've been talking about. It's seen in relationships where husbands and wives are less interested in serving one another than they are in being served by each other.
- It's says "me" not "you," "I" not "us," "mine" not "ours."
- It uses "my" time, "my" interest, "my" priorities at the expense of "your" time, "your" interest and "your" priorities.
- If we look honestly, our discretionary use of time, energy and finances will prove or disprove the existence of "self seeking." If my use of those things disregards the wishes of the other person in the relationship it means the only commitment I've made is to myself.

- **"Anger"** can range from a mild type of testiness to explosive abuse and can't possibly be the fruit of love.
- If I love someone, my primary concern is for them, not for myself.
- Love is more concerned with **what's wrong** with that person than it is **with the wrong** they've done.

- **"Record keeping"** describes the tendency to bring up things from the past that have been done to you in order to justify the way you're behaving.
- Love doesn't do that. Love let's it go.
- If we don't let it go we're setting a destructive stage: **1st** we remember; **2nd** we rehearse; **3rd** resent, **4th** we revenge.

E. Loving your wife means you behave truthfully toward her (v. 6)

"Love doesn't delight in evil but in truth". A love relationship exists only where two people are committed to **promoting** truthfulness between each other, and **protecting** truthfulness between each other.

- Deception cannot coexist with love.
- Deceit erodes trust, and once gone it's extremely difficult to rebuild it.

F. Loving your wife means you behave protectively toward her (v. 7a).

This word pictures a roof. A roof protects those by covering them and by supplying the underlying support structure that holds it up.

Agape protects and supports. Love doesn't intentionally hurt. Love watches out for the partner. Love is looking for ways to guard and care for the partner.

G. Loving your wife means you behave with perseverance toward her (vv. 7b).

Love is prepared to hope the best is true and encourage the partner to go for the best. Agape endures...

H. Loving your wife means you behave this way consistently (v. 8a)

"Love never fails." It's made of tough stuff. It holds on and doesn't let go. This is not to say that love always succeeds in perfection but that it keeps on keeping on till it gets it right. And when it's there—it never fails.

SECOND DISCUSSION:

- How important is it for men to learn about the obligation of agape?
- Which of love's eight obligations (as listed in 1 Corinthians 13) do you sense that most men understand fairly well?
- Which of the eight provides you with the greatest challenge as you evaluate your own marriage?

III. Can You Get There From Here?

I've never conducted a wedding where either of the two persons being married were forced to take their vows. In every case they've wanted to be there. By their own admission they "can't live without each other" and all that sort of thing. Excellent beginning!

How do we get from "I can't live without you" to "I can't live with you?" And how do they get back? Could it be that the beginnings of their love for each other (eros, phileo) wasn't properly nourished? Might the Holy Spirit's involvement have been ignored?

If that's the case, and I really think it is the case, then the desire to love, God's way, needs to be renewed. Can we get there from here? Yes. How do we begin the process?

A. Loving is a decision.

The decision to love is the result of our decision to obey God. It's up to you. You're in charge. "Agape" makes the decision to go on loving in spite of "_____." You fill in the blank.

If you're tempted to withhold your love from your spouse because of what he or she is or isn't, because of what they have done or haven't done, always remember; "agape" hangs on and does what's right loves in spite of what someone else did or didn't do, what they were or weren't, could have done, might have done, should have done, or shouldn't have done—just as God loved us and continues to love us (Romans 5:8).

B. Loving requires dedication.

There's a spiritual dimension here that must never be short-changed—authentic marital love only accompanies a dedication to go on loving your spouse.

If I'm dedicated to physical fitness then I'm going to do all the things necessary to remain in the best physical shape possible. To love someone is to be dedicated to the intelligently informed process of doing whatever is required to make things right.

C. Loving is the result of devotion.

This is the X-factor. The possibility of loving depends on the ability to love. We don't have that ability. The best among us can do well. Without the Holy Spirit's power, "agape" will never be a reality. Therefore, knowing how to love is the result of an intense devotion to Christ Jesus, himself the empowering force behind agape.

Are we prepared, and are we willing, to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? Are we also prepared and willing to let God teach us about love? And are we ready to assume the responsibility for being people who are committed to God's plan to make us, loving husbands?

- If your answer is yes, make your personal commitment to God right now in a private and silent prayer.
- Next, maybe you could commit to tell someone else, other than your spouse, as a point of accountability.
- Finally, if it would be helpful, apologize to your wife, and commit to her that from now on nobody on the face of this earth is going to be loved more than they will be loved by you.
- If you're ready to watch God do some amazing things in your home, make those commitments right now...