

Lesson 1 LOVE

Principle 1:

RECOGNIZE YOUR INABILITY TO LOVE.

Somewhere it has crossed our path. Despite our inability to retain it in our experience, it still lives deep inside us. Daily, often in painful ways, its image reminds us of what we don't have, even creating anger in our hearts toward those we blame for stealing its fullness. Tauntingly it whispers to our hearts that we should have waited longer, or seductively it suggests it could still be had if only you would run somewhere else.

You might have read it, seen it in a movie, remembered it from a fairytale or simply imagined it in your own mind. You might have thought you had it, only to find out that what you really had was a cruel joke, a cheap counterfeit or possibly a well-orchestrated lie. Whatever the origin of its existence inside of you, you are certain that it is illusively unattainable.

It is love. Romance. Respect. Rest. Joy. Life. Hope. This is the kind of love we dream about, isn't it? The kind of infatuated, reckless, intense love that stuns you into blissful service for the rest of your life. Yet, how can something so real to our hearts be so far from our experience? It has been well-said that "while love may be blind, marriage is a real eye-opener."

We all want the ideal, end up getting an ordeal, and because our idea of love is distorted, start looking for a new deal. Maybe what we need, however, is not a new deal, but a new vision — a new understanding of what real love is.

When you stood at the altar, you probably dreamed that your marriage would have richness, depth, passion and intimacy — so much so that you and your spouse would easily and continually serve and *long* for each other. You imagined you

would be sad when you had to be away from each other and you anticipated celebrating each other when you got back home. That's why you "fell in love." That's why you said, "I do; I will; I'm IN!"

Yet the view of love that's propagated by Hollywood and the kind of love that's put to melody in songs isn't real love. It is fleeting. It is a romanticized, emotional version of love defined by feeling and experience. Emotions alone will not last. So what does all this mean? It means you need and were intended to experience and enjoy something more. Much more.

God wants to help you experience the richness of relationships that you long for, but it's going to come through a love unfamiliar to the natural world; that is, through sacrificial love and selfless commitment. *This* is love as God intended. *This* is true love. *This* is the love that God models and the love that the Bible defines.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 teaches that love:

Is patient and kind. It doesn't look for instant gratification or immediate change. Rather than wounding or reminding of failures, it encourages. It is always thoughtful in actions, attitudes and speech.

Doesn't envy or boast. It celebrates when another is celebrated. It doesn't have to one-up the other to somehow be better. In fact, love actually admits failures and shortcomings rather than making excuses or pretending they don't exist.

Isn't rude or insisting on its own way. Rather than demanding or manipulating to get what it wants, real love actually finds joy in serving the other and putting their needs first. It even studies the other's needs and wants so it can meet them.

Is not irritable or resentful. It can handle interruptions, shortcomings and disappointments without becoming angry or agitated. It gladly overlooks small offenses and graciously forgives larger ones without bringing them up later.

Bears and endures all things. It sees the other's hardships as its own and takes them on in selfless ways. It stays completely and actively committed regardless of how it feels or what it is receiving in return.

Believes and hopes all things. It acts in a trustworthy manner with no secrets, which leaves no room for suspicion. It believes the best about the other and does everything it can to make the relationship work.

Love is not only demonstrated by these actions, but also by initiating, regardless of how your spouse responds. Jesus' life was a model of this kind of initiation.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait for us to be good enough. Rather, while we were actively sinning, He died for us! Real love goes first.

This isn't hard; it's impossible. In fact:

You are powerless to love your spouse the way you promised you would, the way they dreamed you would and the way God designed that you should.

The point of Lesson 1 is that our definition of love isn't big enough and that we don't have the ability to love our spouse as we should without God's help. Recognizing and admitting that you can't love as you should without God's help is the first step toward having the marriage for which you've always hoped.

Regardless of where you would rate your marriage on a scale of 1 to 10 — whether you are simply hoping to reconnect with your spouse or if your marriage needs a complete resurrection — these next 15 lessons will help you understand how to love the way God intended and re|engage with your spouse

For additional resources on this lesson see MarriageHelp.org/love

QUESTIONS/PROJECTS:

Answer questions 1-4 by yourself first, then share them with your spouse (before group time). Some of these questions will be discussed during your group time.

1. What has informed your view of love up to this point in your life (your family, friends, Hollywood, the Internet, etc.)? How does that influence the way you interact with your spouse?

2. How would you describe your parents' marriage? In what ways is your marriage similar? In what ways is your marriage different?

