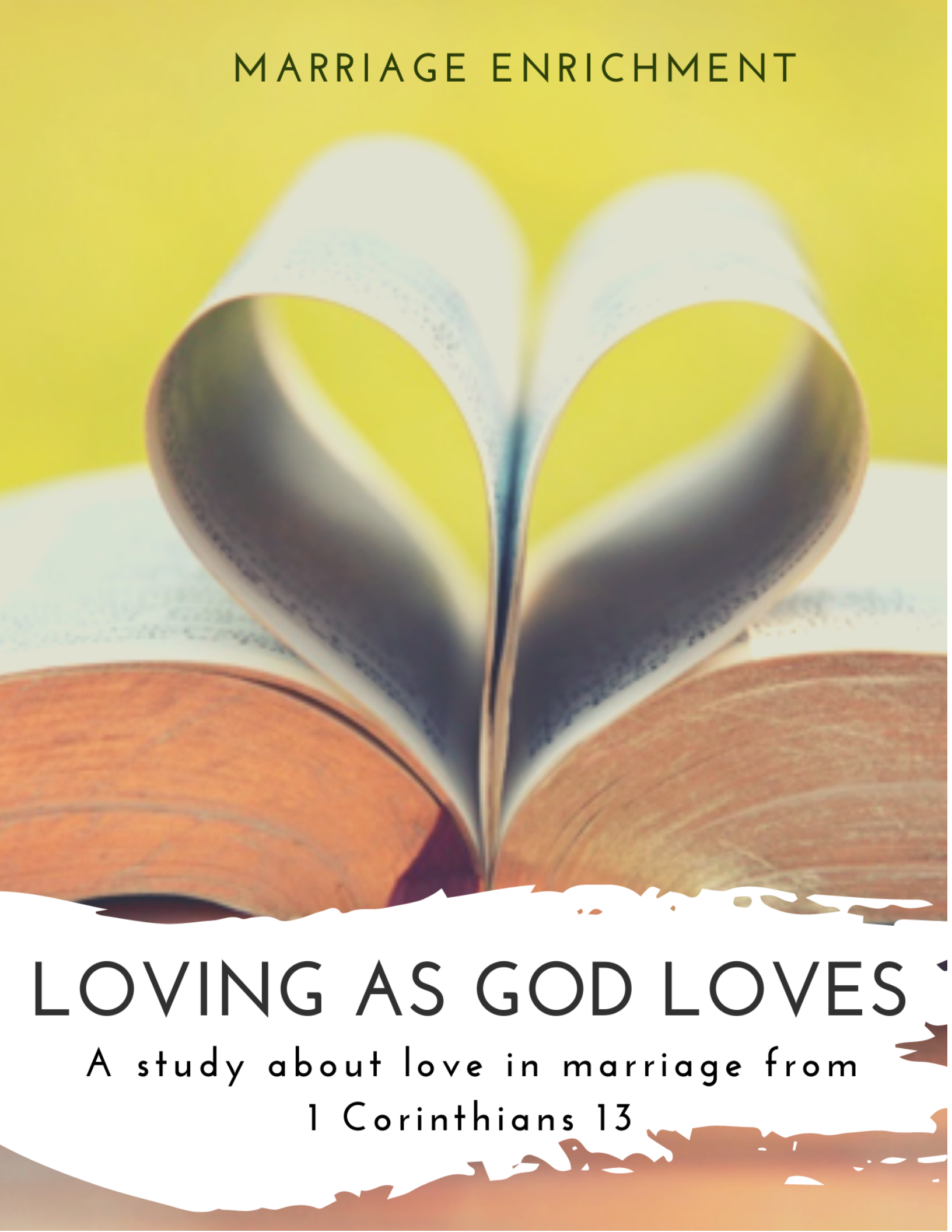


An open book is shown from a top-down perspective. The pages are curled upwards and outwards, creating a symmetrical heart shape. The book is open to a page with a light blue or teal color. The background is a solid, bright yellow. The book's cover, visible at the bottom, is a warm, reddish-brown color.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

LOVING AS GOD LOVES

A study about love in marriage from
1 Corinthians 13

LOVING AS GOD LOVES

Agape love is not mere **emotion**. Love, as God defines it, is not primarily an emotion. The world says, “when the feeling stops, the love is over.” Love is not a tingly sensation. Love is not sentimentalism. Love has nothing to do with how you feel. God so loved the world that he gave His only Son. He didn’t look at the world and say, “I just can’t resist them; I’ve got to get them in heaven. They’re terrific.” There wasn’t one thing in us that was deserving. We were enemies; we hated God; we were sinful and vile, but God loved us anyway. And He loved us so much, he gave Himself.

Agape love is not mere **appreciation**. It is not just saying nice words to someone. Proverbs 27:6 — “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” Love is more than empty words. Love is action. Love is an act of your will that chooses the best for the other person. We can say all kinds of nice things to a person and it not help them. Sometimes love is saying very hard words to a person.

Agape love is not **admiration**. It is not simply liking or being fond of someone. Agape love goes far beyond admiration. It sacrifices for those that are not admirable.

Love is a Reflection of God

We read in our Bible that “God is love” (1 Jn 1:16). Jesus is the exact imprint of God’s love. By looking at the cross we can say that agape love is a voluntary abandonment of self-preservation for the good of another. Husbands, use your position of authority to sacrifice your life for your wife.

Agape love is a God-centered, sacrificial love. Understand the Bible makes a shocking statement like: “God is agape – sacrificial love.” Take that in. He is sacrificial love. Consider 1 John 4:16: “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” Do you “believe the love that God has” for you?

You cannot truly love your spouse as you ought without being born again into this love. This kind of selfless love is impossible to know simply through the human nature. You must have the divine nature dwelling in you. We must “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). God must dwell in you. This is the only way to experience God-centered love.

When God’s love transforms a believer, we are given the ability to love in some manner as God loves. No longer is love dependent on the object of love. It is now self-originating. In other words, God’s Spirit in your heart is where God’s love for your spouse now starts.

God’s love is so amazing because it is unexpected. We have no problem understanding God’s judgment because we are very clearly all guilty. God’s love for guilty sinners amazes us.

“Let us but feel that He has His heart set upon us, that He is watching us from those heavens with tender interest, that He is following us day by day as a mother follows her babe in his first attempt to walk alone, that He has set His love upon us, and in spite of ourselves is working out for us His higher will and blessing, as far as we will let Him – and then nothing can discourage us.”¹

~ A. B. SIMPSON

Love is Most Displayed in Jesus Christ

The demonstration of a husband’s love ought to mirror Christ’s act of sacrifice on the cross for His Bride. Over and over in the New Testament, the apostolic demonstration of love is the cross.

¹ A. B. Simpson, as quoted in *Once-A-Day: Walk with Jesus* (Nashville: Zondervan, 2012), 65.

1 John 3:16 — “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” This is how we come to understand the love of God—look at the gruesome picture of Calvary. Look at the Son of God writhing there in unimaginable pain. The One who knew no sin, the Lamb who is worthy of all glory, writhing in pain. Men, demonstrate that to your wife.

But you say, “She doesn’t deserve my love. You have no idea how she’s been toward me.” Remember that Christ’s love was given to people who had not merited it, who did not deserve it, who did nothing to earn it, in whom there was nothing that compelled Him to love them.

Romans 5:8 — “but God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ gave own spotless life for the most unworthy and rotten people. This is love. The word Paul uses is agape. Christ died for those who spit upon Him, who ridiculed Him, and who hated Him.

We cannot know love unless we know God, for God is love. “God so loved the world that he gave...” (Jn 3:16). Love is not like a doormat or a dictator, but a heroic self-sacrificing person that always puts others first. Husbands are told to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Self-sacrifice is the ultimate definition of love.

When Paul named the greatest things in this world and the next, he said, “the greatest of these is love.” Love is the greatest thing. Love outlasts everything else (1 Cor 13:8a). It is that one thing that makes us most like God. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). To love is to be like God.

Love is Not an Option but a Command

- Husbands are to love their wives.
- Wives are to love their husbands.
- Parents are to love their children.

- Believers are to love God.
- Believers are to love their enemies.
- Believers are to love their neighbors.
- Believers are to love one another.

Love is About Growing in Christ

Paul is focusing specifically on Christians as they function in the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12-13 are all about spiritual gifts, and our function in the Body of Christ. And so love is the goal of our Christian growth. Paul presents love as it relates to growing and changing in Christ. Love is the highest expression of spiritual maturity in Christ (2 Pet 1:5-8). If we are called as husbands and wives to love each other, we need to know what it is. We find the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” Let’s unpack these amazing words so that we can practice them.

WHAT LOVE IS...

1. Love is *patient*.

Love gives people time to grow.

Love’s Timetable

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if God changed our character into Christlikeness overnight? Wow! That would be amazing. But He has chosen to do it over time.

The context of 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 is spiritual gifts and growing to be like Christ. That takes time, doesn’t it?

It's no surprise that Paul's first instruction is that love is patient (1 Cor 13:4). Have you ever prayed for patience? It means to "suffer long." It has the idea of having a "long fuse" or to be "long-tempered." It is the exact opposite of our expression "short-fused."

"In our dealings with people, however stubborn and however unkind and hurting they are, we must exercise the same patience as God exercises with us. Such patience is not the sign of weakness but the sign of strength."²

If you're patient, you're slow to anger, you endure personal wrongs with gentleness, without retaliation. You bear with your spouse's imperfections, faults, and differences. You give them time to change – room to make mistakes without coming down hard on them.

Ability to be Inconvenienced

John MacArthur said it this way: "Love's patience is the ability to be inconvenienced or taken advantage of by a person over and over again and yet not be upset or angry."³

How do you act when you've been inconvenienced or wronged by your spouse? On our leadership teams at church, we like to say we need to have "thick skin and a big heart." That's patience. Love is big-hearted, giving people room to grow and change.

Patience Waits

Patience waits for a godly outcome. Patience is how love *reacts* in order to bring peace of Christ to a negative situation. When you don't get what you want, how do you react? A lack of patience will turn your home into a war zone. Patience waits and refuses to give in to sinful anger.

Love has no clock. It's not just 9-5. It's 24-7. You have to help your brothers and sisters at 1 in the afternoon and sometimes at one in the morning.

² William Barclay, *Growing in Christian Faith: A Book of Daily Readings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 49.

³ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 338.

A Refusal to Retaliate

Chrysostom, the early church father, said, “It is a word which is used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself but will never do it.” He is like a ship “settled as it were in a harbor, enjoys a profound calm.”⁴ Patience never retaliates.

Understand that patience is not just “white-knuckling” your emotions in order to hold back the rage or storm that really wants to come out. No, patience is joyfully submitting to Christ for the good of another person. Jesus submitted to death on a cross, so we are to joyfully submit to Christ knowing the outcome will be good (Heb 12:2).

2. Love is **kind**.

Love helps people grow.

Giving Till it Hurts

On the positive side, Christian love is **kind** (1 Cor 13:4). Someone described kindness as “giving until it hurts.” Growing in Christ is a lot of work. No one can do it alone. That’s why we need to be kind and serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As a married person, your closest brother or sister in Christ is your spouse. “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph 4:32).

Definition: To Be Useful

Origen had it that this means that love is “sweet to all.” Jerome spoke of what he called “the benignity” of love. So much

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*. In P. Schaff (Ed.), H. K. Cornish, J. Medley, & T. B. Chambers (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, Vol. 12 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 194.

Christianity is good but unkind, especially in marriage where there is less accountability.⁵

The word translated “kindness” here means “to be useful or profitable, to furnish what is needed.” Love puts the needs of others first. To be kind is to make life easier for the other person and to serve them from your heart. It is the same word that Jesus uses when he says, “My yoke is **easy** [same Greek word for kind] and my burden is light.” Kindness, like Jesus, gets into the harness of life’s problems with the other person and does all they can to lift those burdens. That’s kindness.

Kindness takes many forms. In general, it is soft and gentle. Occasionally, however, kindness must take the form of a careful rebuke designed to bring about a good result.⁶

WHAT LOVE IS NOT...

3. Love is not **jealous**.

Love isn’t jealous over another’s position, place or gifts.

Definition of Jealousy

Love is not jealous (1 Cor 13:4). To be jealous means “to experience strong envy and resentment against someone.”⁷ Wayne Mack goes further: “Envy consists of a disposition of dissatisfaction or dislike over the fact or thought that someone seems to be ahead of us or above us or superior to us in honor, position, respect, success, possessions, or effectiveness.”⁸ “She has it so easy as a woman,” says the husband. “Well he has it so easy as a man,” says the wife.

⁵ Barclay, *Growing*, 49.

⁶ Pratt, *ibid*.

⁷ J. P. Louw, & E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains, 2nd edition, Vol. 1* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 759.

⁸ Wayne Mack, *Maximum Impact: Living and Loving for God’s Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 69.

There is often jealous resentment in marriage. A person growing in Christ isn't going to be jealous of other people's position, personality or spiritual gifts. The word translated "jealous" means to eagerly desire, and it is used both positively and negatively in the Bible. Positively, it's good to be jealous for God's glory and the good of others. God is jealous – in righteousness He protects His glory. But Paul is using it here in 1 Corinthians 13 negatively. The jealous person wants what others have, he wants things for himself. He is too selfish to applaud others' success; he desires to have all the attention.

Jealousy Wants "What's Mine"

Love is not jealous for "my ...rights, things, opinions, ideas, way, etc. at all cost" in the Body of Christ. Love puts others first and zealously wants them to succeed. Indeed, I ought to be happy and eager to sacrifice myself so that my spouse might succeed! We ought not to think of ourselves but of others, especially those of our own household. Further, if my spouse sorrows, I ought to sorrow and rejoice when she rejoices. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26).

The Cup of Jealousy Has No Bottom

The cup of jealousy has no bottom. It can never be satisfied. If you have a covetous, resentful, envious heart, then you need to rest in Christ. Only Christ can satisfy your needs.

Only when you know Christ can you be jealous in a good way. We need to be jealous for the glory of God and jealous for the good of others. Godly ambition is fine, but selfish ambition is destructive.

Sinful jealousy is nothing more than selfishness. But to be jealous for God's glory and for another's good is a virtue. We are not important. Let's not be protective of our glory and usefulness and

position. I want to use my position to serve my spouse. I have no right to complain. Every day I deserve hell, but I get God's mercy. Everything is a gift. Love is not jealous of my spouse's position or personality or place in the home. Love is grateful and glories in God's generosity.

On the positive side, instead of being jealous, I am to be grateful for the gifts and position and personality of my spouse.

4. Love is not **boastful** or **proud**.

Love doesn't use inflated words or have an inflated view of self.

Love is Not a Windbag!

Love is not boastful (1 Cor 13:4). The word for *boastful* could be translated to "be a wind-bag"⁹ or to "parade oneself" through your words.

I kind of think of the Macy's day parade. A braggart is like one of those gigantic inflated balloons. Sometimes we inflate our own worth with boastful words. What windbags we can be.

Sometimes, we confuse spiritual growth with spiritual pride. There are those Christians who think they are the standard, and they boast. As struggling Christians, we have the potential to become "wind-bags" of our own spiritual greatness. We boast too highly of ourselves; we inflate our own value.

There are Christian husbands or wives who make themselves wind-bags, especially when an argument comes.

50 Reasons from the Bible Why I'm Right

Let me give you an example of how I can be a wind-bag to my wife. I have mistakenly believed that knowing or quoting the Bible is automatically godly. In a heated conversation with my wife, I am

⁹ Kim Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament* (Dallas, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), Kindle Locations 5452-5453.

sadly very good at giving my sweet wife “50 reasons from the Bible why I’m right” speech – complete with telling her that she needs to submit and follow me.

Imagine how surprised I was to discover that this kind of reasoning is “temporal, sense-oriented and demonic” (Jas 3:15). My mouth might have been quoting the Bible, but my heart was twisting it with my own selfish ambition, and “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (Jas 3:16).

Wind-Bag Attitudes

We all have “wind-bag” attitudes from time to time. “I’ve got it all figured out.” Love never says that. Love does not brag or boast.

Have you ever been in a difficult discussion with your spouse, and when you were in a corner, you began to paint yourself as the most spiritual person on the planet? You say things like: “I would never do that!” That is not love. That is the boasting of a wind-bag kind of person. Love doesn’t show off by using inflated words or parading one’s own accomplishments or virtues to win an argument or to exalt oneself in an argument.

Love is not Arrogant

Boasting comes from an attitude of *superiority* over others. It is usually combined with a feeling of contempt or disregard for another. This is why Paul continues and says, “love is not arrogant.” “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

This word translated “arrogant” means to inflate, blow or puff up. In the New Testament, it is used figuratively of pride or self-conceit. This could be translated as follows: “Love does not put on airs.” “Love does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.”

An Inflated Head

To be arrogant is to be puffed up and self-focused. It speaks of someone who has a “big head.” Love doesn’t get its head swelled;

instead it focuses on the needs of others. Among Christians, the worst pride is *spiritual* pride. Wesley says that if we are possessed by love, we are “*our souls are humbled to the dust*”!¹⁰ We might plainly say: “love is not inflated but humble.”

Humility: Self Forgetfulness

Don't be mistaken. Humility is not putting yourself down. “C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* makes a brilliant observation about gospel-humility at the very end of his chapter on pride. He says the thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less. Gospel-humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, ‘I'm in this room with these people, does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?’ “True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings.”¹¹

How to Deal with Pride in Your Life

You ask, how can I get rid of pride in my life? It's a lifelong battle, but the first thing you need is Christ. You cannot change yourself. You must have God dwelling inside you. If you are God's child, then begin with the following actions.

1. Pray and ask God to illuminate your heart so you can begin to see the fruits of pride in your life.
2. Ask your family or close friends to point out the fruits of pride in your life realizing your heart is exceedingly deceitful. Be self-suspicious.

¹⁰ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850), 436.

¹¹ Timothy Keller, *Freedom of Self Forgetfulness: The Path to the True Christian Joy* (Youngstown, OH: 10Publishing, 2012), Kindle Locations 275-279.

3. Ask God to convict you point by point. “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psa 139:23-24). Trust God that He will show you specific areas of pride to repent of. You don’t want or need general condemnation, only precise, godly conviction.

4. Confess your pride to God point by point and ask for his forgiveness. Just as importantly, ask him to cleanse you of all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).

5. Don’t ask God to humble you – the Scripture says to humble yourself (1 Pet 5:6). Humility isn’t an emotion; it’s a decision of the will to think and act differently.

6. Confess your sins of pride to the family and friends and others you have affected. They can help to hold you accountable and bring the on-going encouragement and correction you will need.

7. Ask God to give you a holy hatred for pride and its fruits in your life. Be continually on the alert. Don’t allow pride to grow in your heart.

8. Ask God to give you a love for anonymity. Encourage and serve others each and every day. Associate with the lowly. Think much about God and little about yourself. In order to do this, regularly study the goodness and greatness of God.

9. Be impressed with God – don’t be impressed with yourself. Live to promote the reputation of God and not your own. Find your satisfaction in him and not in your vain accomplishments.

10. Remember your war against pride is life-long. It is not a battle won in a day. But as you faithfully put pride to death and put on humility, you will experience greater freedom and more importantly greater conformity to image and likeness of Christ. In so doing, God will be glorified in your life!

5. Love is not **rude**.

Love does not act rude, ugly, or **unfittingly**, but tries to lovingly “fit” with the rest the growing Body of Christ.

The word “rude” means to act unbecomingly, and unfittingly—to act with disdain for someone else, even to the point of disgracing or embarrassing someone. According to Merriam-Webster, being rude is defined as “not having or showing concern or respect for the rights and feelings of other people.”

Love is not rude (1 Cor 13:5), but works hard at always saying or doing the appropriate or fitting thing. Love is considerate of other people at all times. We may be tired or sick or overwhelmed, but love never gives into the temptation to please self.

Rudeness can be words or actions that are offensive, hurtful, or an embarrassment to others. Even when one’s demeanor is relatively mild or calm he/she can still be guilty of being rude. Unbecoming words and ill-mannered actions qualify as being rude no matter what the impetus or circumstances. “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Rom 15:1-2).

Common Excuses for Rudeness

Here are some very common excuses for rudeness that I’m sure you’ve heard before:

- “Hey, what do you expect? I haven’t had my coffee yet.”
- “I have it so hard – I’m just coping.”
- “I’m having a bad day.”
- “You were disrespectful. I had to put you in your place.”
- “I’m not feeling well, and I’m just cranky.”
- “Something upset me last night, and I’m still troubled by it.”

- “I’m not a morning person, ok?”
- “I can’t help it. Being hot-tempered is something that runs in my family.”
- “I’m on a tight deadline – you have no idea the pressure I have on me.”
- “I’m from a family of yellers and screamers.”
- “Look, no one is perfect. We all have our bad moments. It’s a part of life.”
- “I was just ‘fighting fire with fire’ ok?”

Consistently taking your anger out on people when you’re having a bad day is the lowest form of emotional maturity. It is never ok to be rude in marriage or any other relationship. As followers of Christ, our attitude is laid out clearly in Scripture: “To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2).

“But I’m Under So Much Pressure”

One of the contributing factors that reveals rudeness in my heart is pressure. When I’m tired, overwhelmed and am trying to meet deadlines, I have found that my selfish rudeness can explode out of my heart.

I often feel a lot of pressure on Saturday evening. Ironically as I am meditating on my sermon for the next day, I can be rude to my wife if she interrupts my studying. I have realized this reaction is nothing more than idolatry. When I am rude, I am saying: “What I am doing is more important than your needs.”

“But I’m under so much pressure!” I would rationalize and excuse myself to my wife. The truth is, there is no good reason to be rude to my spouse. The pressure was like the hot water and the tea

bag. The tea bag goes into the water and whatever is on the inside comes out.

We Grow at Different Rates

As we grow in Christ, sometimes people grow at different rates. Don't be rude to your wife or children if they don't have the same standards or rate of growth as you do. Don't be rude or scolding because they are not where you are at. Be polite. Use words in loving, strategic ways that will edify each other in love. God may use your courteous words to bring your children to Christ. "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:31-32). Rudeness doesn't reflect Christ and never helped anyone to grow in Christ.

6. Love is not selfish.

Love lays aside "my rights" for the good of the Body.

Paul says, Love does not insist on her own way (1 Cor 13:5). This has the idea of laying aside my importance and my rights for the good of others. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4).

Selfishness (putting my needs above others) destroys relationships because we become incapable of seeing others' needs and desire. My consuming desire to fulfill my every need will always lead to my own self-destruction. I need relationships in the Body of Christ to grow. One way that I can grow in my marriage is by being selfless. Spurgeon was right when he said, "Only when a man is

saved does he forget self.”¹² As Tim Keller states in his book *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*: “...the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”¹³

If you are going to grow in Christ, you must realize that the Christian life is not about you! **It’s all about Jesus.** It’s about the community of saints, where Jesus, not you or me, is head. Jesus is our Head. Jesus is our King of kings and Lord of lords.

Growing in the Body of Christ means we need to relinquish the idea of ourselves being at the center. There are many members in the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:14-20, “For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

This is especially obvious in marriage: we are different. Young married couples often go into marriage wanting to change the other person to be more like themselves. As we mature, we come to realize God made us different on purpose. God made us different to live in harmony, not in discord.

Selfishness Never Works

“The way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov 13:15). Selfishness never leads to peace. Getting your own way always leads to

¹² Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 33*, Sermon 1957, “The Lord’s Own View of His Church and People” (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1887), 205.

¹³ Timothy Keller, *Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to the True Christian Joy* (Youngstown, OH: 10Publishing, 2012), Kindle Locations 278-279.

relationship breakdown. “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas 3:16-18).

It is not healthy or wise to seek our own. We need to remember we are part of a great big Body of Christ where there are many different Body parts that ought to fit together in harmony. God is the Architect not only of His church, but also of your family. You can’t grow in Christ on your own. You need the whole Body. He also gave you your spouse to help you grow. Marriage is an amazing way to grow together as one. This can only occur when we experience the joy of self-forgetfulness.

7. Love is not **irritable**.

Love is not put off by the hang ups of others as they grow.

Love is not irritable, or easily provoked to anger (1 Cor 13:5). “The term the apostle uses for irritability (*paroxunetai*) has a range of meaning. One standard Greek lexicon translates the word as ‘easily provoked.’ The New International Version renders it like this: “easily angered.” Similarly, Charles Hodge defines it as “quick-tempered.” Anthony Thiselton offers a more detailed linguistic analysis and concludes that the word can refer either to simple irritation, or to outright anger, or to anything in between. In the end, he offers the word *exasperated* as perhaps the best translation.”¹⁴ David Garland gives us something a little more colorful when he says that love is not “cantankerous.”¹⁵

Phillip Ryken further sheds light on the heart of irritability. “We could add other synonyms. Love is not grumpy or grouchy. Love

¹⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 47.

¹⁵ David E. Garland, *First Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 618, as quoted by Ryken, *Loving*, 47.

does not get ticked off. Love does not go off on a rampage or a tirade. Love does not launch into verbal abuse, or give people the silent treatment, or get into a bad temper, or do whatever else it is tempting to do when we are angry or irritated.”¹⁶ Irritability is anger’s trigger finger— what Lewis Smedes calls “a spiritual readiness to get angry.”¹⁷

We All Have Hang-ups

Love realizes that God makes each of us unique, and we don’t need to be irritable with each other. Does anyone not have hang-ups and quirks? Love realizes that each of us is unique. A foot is different from a lung. But both are needed. Because we are all so different, we can all seem quirky to each other.

If we get our focus off Jesus our Head, we can become irritable. The idea here is that love is not easily injured or offended. Psalm 119:165 (KJV) —“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

Touchiness

Are you touchy or defensive? That is the opposite of Christlike love. There is a difference between sensitivity and touchiness. It’s important to be sensitive to the needs of others, but touchiness is being thin-skinned and overly sensitive to myself. This is sinful, self-centered and from the pit. This irritability can come across in having a pity party for yourself, or just being irritated with another person.

Often touchiness, anger, and irritability is displayed when we are weak...

- when we are overwhelmed with life
- when we are sick

¹⁶ Ryken, *Loving*, *ibid*.

¹⁷ Lewis B. Smedes, *Love within Limits: A Realist’s View of 1 Corinthians 13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 60, as quoted by Ryken, *Loving*, 47.

- when we just worked hard and are now exhausted
- when we've had a bad day
- when we've been insulted or hurt
- when we just stayed up half the night to finish a project

Love is not Moody or Touchy

Love is not touchy, or moody. Love is not hypersensitive or easily hurt. Love does not take things personally. The battle cry of one who is easily irritated is: "Don't you get it?! *I am the one that matters.*" This person cares for no one but self. This person is upset by anything that is said or done that infringes on their agenda, forces a schedule change, or puts a bad light on their character.

Consider some common excuses for being easily provoked to anger:

- It's just a weakness.
- It's just letting off steam.
- I don't really mean it.
- It's just the way I am. I can't help myself.
- It's their fault. I'm the victim.
- It's the only way I can get results.
- They pushed me over the line.
- I was born this way. I inherited it.

These are all human justifications that are based in falsehoods that the irritable person chooses to believe. According to God's Word, being irritable or annoyed is not just a harmless weakness. Until we learn to look upon giving in to irritability as a sin we will not overcome it. Until we identify annoyance and being easily angered what it really is – a selfish sin against God – we cannot hope to change in this area of our life.

Does your family have to "walk softly" around you for fear of an explosion? "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back" (Prov 29:11). By God's grace, we can be wise men and

women and quietly hold back our irritations. Even more we can put off irritation and put love in its place.

Solutions for Irritability

Love is not irritable, yet we as weak human beings are often irritable. What's the solution?

Physically, you may need rest. Make time for fun things. Allow yourself to wind down more. If your spouse is often irritable, they may be tired. If a wife with small children is irritable, she most certainly is exhausted. Also, remember, that on average women need at least one more hour of sleep than men. If you have small children the wife needs even more rest. A godly husband should make time to watch the kids each week and give his wife time to rest and recreate.

Socially, when we are irritable, we normally want to get away from people. When we are weak and tired, people seem more draining or demanding.

Irritability can spiral out of control if you let it. It can lead to a bitterness toward God. We can become resentful that God has allowed our life to be so hard. "Irritability is like that" says Ryken, "it has a negative view of God. Refusing to seek God's help, irritability chooses instead to get angry. If money is running short, or time is running out, or problems are running out of control, the person who gives way to irritation does not trust God to provide what is needed. Rather than turning toward God in that moment, we exaggerate our problems and get exasperated with God."¹⁸ When we look to God, instead of exasperation, we have every reason to be thankful. According to Titus 3:3-8, there is no reason a child of God has to be irritated with anyone, since we were once "hateful" filled with "malice and envy." But now we can be uncontentious, gentle and considerate toward all men.

¹⁸ Ibid.

God's Word is powerful enough to remove your spirit of rudeness. Renew your mind by committing the following verses to your heart:

“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7).

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isa 26:3).

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:1-2a).

“The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

“‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor 12:9).

8. Love is not **resentful**.

Love is not resentful when those wrongs and hurts and insults come. It keeps no record of wrongs suffered (1 Cor 13:5). “The word translated store up [or keep] is an accountant's word. It is the word used for entering up an item in a ledger so that it will not be forgotten. That is precisely what so many people do.”¹⁹ Love doesn't hold grudges. A husband and wife that are growing in Christ do not spend much time nursing anger and letting it simmer and intensify.

“There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”²⁰

~ PURITAN RICHARD SIBBES

As Christians we have no private file of personal grievances that can be consulted and nursed whenever there is possibility of some

¹⁹ Barclay, *1 Corinthians*, 144.

²⁰ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1894), 31.

new slight. It's stance in the presence of genuine evil precludes such accounting; for at the deepest level, love cannot bear to be judgmental or hypocritical. Love covers a multitude of sins because all we have to do is look in the mirror and see we are all sinners. "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8).

Love hurts. Love requires that we get so close to someone and be so vulnerable that we see each other's flaws. That means love hurts. Everyone who loves will get hurt. We often give offenses and insults to the ones we love the most, don't we? C.S. Lewis rightly said: "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."²¹

Sad to say, I think Philip Ryken is right when he says, sometimes it feels so good to hold a grudge. He says, "Although it is morally perverse and ultimately unsatisfying, the sheer pleasure that comes from nursing a grudge is intense. When somebody does us wrong, our anger smolders, and, to tell the truth, we enjoy the feeling. In fact, some people feed off their resentment for an entire lifetime. They say, 'I will never forget what that person did to me!' and they never do, because as much as they hate what happened to them, they still love the taste of licking their wounds."²² "Don't say, 'I will get even for this wrong.' Wait for the LORD to handle the matter' (Prov 20:22, NLT).

We Know the Deep, Forgiving Love of Jesus

If you have kept a record of wrongs, it means that you have forgotten the deep, deep love of Jesus. Oh how deep is the love of Jesus, that He would keep no record of our wrongs. He buries them "into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19).

When a person puts their faith in Christ, His payment for sin on the Cross is put in our place. Banks keep records or debts. That's the term being used here. God puts our wrongs on Jesus. There is a

²¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

²² Ryken, Philip Graham. *Loving the Way Jesus Loves* (p. 161). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

great exchange – our sins for His righteousness. Our debts are wiped away!

The same Greek word is used often in the New Testament to represent the pardoning act of God for those who trust in Jesus Christ. “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not *take into account*” (Rom. 4:8). “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not *counting* their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Once sin is placed under the blood of Christ there is no more record of it. It is blotted out, “wiped away” (Acts 3:19). In God’s heavenly record the only entry after the names of His redeemed is “righteous,” because we are counted righteous in Christ. Christ’s righteousness is placed to our credit. No other record exists.²³

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psa 103:12).

True Forgiveness: Paid in Full

As true Christians, we do not keep the records of those who sin against us, but instead we truly forgive. To forgive is an accounting term that means never to bring it up again. It is a true sign of love to forgive as Jesus told us to – seventy times seven!

If your mortgage is forgiven, the bank can no longer remind you of it; it’s paid in full! Same with your sin debt. God has forgiven it. He will never remind you of it. It’s “paid in full.” “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared” (Psa 130:3).

May Take Time to Build Trust

Love forgives. Sometimes it is hard to forgive, but you know you have forgiven if you are willing not to bring the wrong up again. It may take time to build trust.

Love is not resentful. Love doesn’t “save up” wrongs to use strategically at a later time. Resentment is careful to keep books,

²³ MacArthur, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 347.

which it reads and rereads, hoping for a chance to get even. Love keeps no books, because it has no place for resentment or grudges.

Chrysostom, the golden tongued preacher of the Fourth Century, observed that a wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched. Love quenches wrongs rather than records them.²⁴

9. Love does not **rejoice in wrong-doing**.

Love does not parade another person's failures.

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing – when others fail (1 Cor 13:6). Let's face it, when others fail, it might make us feel more spiritual or be filled with spiritual pride. Can we not see our own sins? Is our own self-importance and pride blinding us? Why would we gloat when others sin? "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). The job of accusing the church of their sins is that of Satan. There is coming a day when God will forever put down the accusations of our enemy: "I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God" (Rev 12:10).

There is no room in love for spiritual pride or gloating when those around us fail. There is no "I'm better than them" attitude in love. Love does not gloat in spiritual pride like that. That's hypocrisy. We are all sinners.

May there never be "a smug feeling of sinful happiness that comes only when someone gets caught doing the kind of thing we always suspected them of doing. Love would never feel this way, however, because love does not rejoice at wrongdoing."²⁵ "It delights not" wrote Henry Drummond, "in exposing the weakness of

²⁴ Chrysostom, *Homilies*, Vol. 12, 194.

²⁵ Ryken, *Loving*, 64.

others.”²⁶ Loving Christians don’t gloat over another’s sin, we grieve, because God is grieved over sin. If repentance comes, we rejoice.

Don’t Be Lazy! Work Hard in Marriage

Love is does not rejoice in the failures of others. Love is instead sincerely grieved and is not double-faced. There is a wholesomeness and genuineness to Christian love.

Love cannot rejoice in wrongdoing because it’s sincere. It’s hard work to help people let go of sinful habits and thinking!

It is not loving to allow another person to go on in sin. Love will sensitively confront and correct precisely because it cares deeply and knows that sin destroys.

Our Focus is on Growing in Christ

The major emphasis of the Christian is not what is wrong, but what is true. Love never takes satisfaction from sin, whether our own sin or that of others. When our spouse sins through pride, we must not gloat over their failures and say, “Ha! I told you so!” That is hypocritical self-righteousness.

We do not “rejoice in wrongdoing” with a prideful self-righteousness. Instead, we want to help them and restore them.

Consider Galatians 6:1-3, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Restore your spouse quickly, but be sure you truly are restoring them. Don’t just give empty words. It may take some time with God before you can truly forgive. If you don’t deal with it, you’ll keep bringing it up.

²⁶ Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.), 27.

What we are tempted to do with faults is to store them up and use them in a time of war. Instead of rejoicing in iniquity, seek to help your spouse or your children to reconcile. If they ask for forgiveness, forgive them immediately. Love does not rejoice in the spiritual failures in our home. And so every spouse should grieve when sin overtakes someone in our home.

10. Love rejoices in **spiritual growth**

Love rejoices when others walk in the truth (1 Cor 13:6). Jesus is at the center! He is the truth. Love's emphasis is not tracking down people and telling them everything that is wrong, but rather, to encourage people to come to Christ and walk in the truth.

Love rejoices with the truth. The idea is rejoicing in spiritual victories when one is walking in the truth.²⁷ The emphasis of Christianity is not negative but positive. We rejoice in changed lives!

Intense Joy for Spiritual Growth

Love rejoices with the truth. Love gets excited when it hears of spiritual victories. "Here the word for rejoicing is not the same word that is used earlier in the verse, in connection with wrongdoing, but something more intense (*sunchairein*). In effect, the person who rejoices with the truth... has greater joy. The feeling that comes with knowing and living with absolute sincerity elevates the spirit and brings elation of the soul. This is love's holy joy, the joy that comes only from pursuing what is right and true..."²⁸

Love encourages by expressing joy over little evidences of growth. John, the apostle of love, wrote, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 Jn 4).

²⁷ John Gill. *Exposition of the Bible*, commentary on 1 Cor 13:6.

²⁸ Ryken, *Loving*, 64-65.

As Christians, our highest joy is to see God's people advancing in spiritual growth. This is why the motto of the church I pastor is "Growing and Changing in Christ." Certainly, we need to stand against the destructiveness of sin and the deceitfulness of sin, but let's get on to the business of growing in Christ! Let's rejoice in the power and truth of Christ in changed lives!

Ways You Rejoice in Spiritual Growth in Marriage

As a Christian couple, it's so important to grow in Christ together. Here are some spiritual growth ideas to get you started.

- Encourage daily Bible reading.
- Pray for and with your spouse.
- Encourage participation in weekly worship.
- Memorize Scripture together.
- Be involved in discipleship opportunities together.
- Encourage expression of spiritual gifts.
- Give money together to God's kingdom.
- Serve in the church together.
- Share your faith together.
- Read a Christian biography together.

I hope you are taking Christian growth seriously in your marriage. If not, there is no other meaningful way to change. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

If your marriage is stagnant, it's likely because your walk with the Lord is stagnant. Let us experience our highest joy in marriage as we grow together in Christ.

WHAT LOVE IS and DOES “ALWAYS”

11. Love *always* **protects**.

Love bears all things (1 Cor 13:7). Love covers the reputation of others with care. The idea is that love “covers” or “protects” like a soldier throwing himself on a grenade to protect his fellow troops. Or like a police officer putting himself in the line of fire to protect his fellow man and woman. Love bears all things.

Fallen human nature has the opposite inclination. There is perverse pleasure in exposing someone’s faults and failures.²⁹ “The Greek word *stegei* can mean ‘to cover over’ or ‘to keep hidden,’ since as a verb it is closely related to the noun for ‘roof.’ On this interpretation, the point would be that love knows when to keep things covered up or confidential.”³⁰ Sound familiar? This is taught over and over again in Scripture.

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4: 8).

“Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand” (Prov 10:14).

“The one who guards his words guards his life, but whoever is talkative will come to ruin” (Prov 13:3).

“A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:7).

“Anyone who overlooks an offense promotes love, but someone who gossips separates close friends” (Prov 17:9, ISV).

Protecting from Gossip

Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure, ridicule, or harm. Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip. Even when a sin is certain, love tries to correct it with the least

²⁹ MacArthur, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 353.

³⁰ Ryken, *Loving*, 135.

possible hurt and harm to the guilty person. Love never protects sin but is anxious to protect the sinner.³¹

Often tidbits of gossip come our way about members of the Body of Christ. Do you protect the reputation of God's children? Do you "bear all things" with God's people? Do you cover them and protect them?

Love protects. Paul uses the word "cherish" for this idea in Ephesians 5:28–29, "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and **cherishes** it, just as Christ does the church." Husbands are to cherish their wives.

When you hit your thumb with a hammer, you feel the pain, and you do all you can to relieve it. You hold it and cherish it and protect it. Do you do that for your wife? Do you know when she is hurting? Do you protect her?

Love handles the sins of others in ways that will not bring needless exposure or shame. Paul had in mind the concept of endurance. He meant that love bears with many offenses and does not stop loving even under the strain of difficulties imposed by others, even going so far as to love enemies (Lk 6:27). If he had in mind the concept of covering, then he may have meant that love will not seek to expose the sins of others.³²

A Limit to Protection

It is evident that Paul limited such endurance or protection for people's good. For example, he instructed Timothy that "those who sin are to be rebuked publicly" (1 Tim 5:20). Likewise, he called public attention to the strife between Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2). He commanded the Corinthians to stop tolerating the man who had his father's wife (1 Cor 5:1–13). Wisdom is required to

³¹ MacArthur, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 353.

³² Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 232). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

know when and how to protect or to expose, and love always tends to protect.³³

Protecting Reputation

So it is that love protects people even in their sin. God never intends His people to ultimately be hurt or condemned for their sin (Rom 8:1). “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Psa 103:10). We confront sin directly with compassion and forgiveness, not through gossip or slander or exaggeration. We want God’s people to be restored, not ridiculed.

The Lord intends that His children grow through their struggles with sin and be chiseled into Christlikeness. A loving Christian will make sure that no brother or sister is maligned or mocked or gossiped about, but seek to protect them, and if there is sin, to help them grow and learn by their failures.

Remember a “righteous man falls seven times” and then gets up again (Prov 24:16). We need to help our brothers and sisters get up every time they fall.

Ways a Husband Can Protect His Wife

Security is the ability for a man to extend love, safety and comfort to his wife. This is what every woman wants in her man. Without security, stability lacks; and where stability lacks, marriages begin to crumble. In order to prevent this – Christian husbands have got to know how to make his wife feel secure in him. Here are a few places a godly husband can start.

1. Keep God first. Lead her to love God more. Wash her in the water of the Word. Have a consistent devotional life with the Lord. Pray with and for your wife. She needs to see you praying each day. She needs to hear you praying over her.

³³ Ibid.

2. Love her unconditionally. Sacrifice in tangible ways for her each day. Be sure each day to lift the burden from her. Tell her and show her you love her often. Cards, a hand on her shoulder, a listening ear, etc.
3. Provide for her. I am willing to work anywhere and do anything to provide my wife.
4. Speak kindly to her. If you ever raise your voice to her, ask for her forgiveness and repent, choosing never to fall into the same sin.
5. Listen to her. Put down your phone, get up from the computer, look her in the eyes and connect with her.
6. De-escalate arguments. When your wife decompresses, don't take it personally. If she is intense, be a voice of calm. Never tell her to "calm down." Instead, tell her she is loved. Rub her back. Speak calmly to her.
7. Don't air dirty laundry. Keep her quirks and struggles quiet. If she needs help, get her help privately from a trustworthy pastor or elder.
8. Make your wife your only female friends. We may have various acquaintances, but we vowed in marriage to "forsake all others" and cleave to our wife.
9. Be accountable. This includes internet and social media. My wife and I have a joint Facebook account. I use internet accountability software (Covenant Eyes) for internet oversight. Your accountability also might include a couple of godly men in your church that your wife can ask you to contact if you are not being right. Every marriage needs mediation and accountability.
10. If you have children, be connected with your kids. Know their hearts. Do special things with them individually and collectively.

11. Lead family devotions. It doesn't have to be formal (Deut 6:4-7). At the dinner table, have each person share what God is teaching them.
12. Pursue your wife. Pursue time with her. Do whatever it takes. Make life easier for her. "Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10). Be the first to clear the kitchen table after a meal. Be the first to make the bed in the morning. When things aren't right at home, pursue your wife. Be the first to ask for forgiveness after an argument. Pursue her in the bedroom. Be the first to make the move toward intimacy. You might say, "she rarely pursues me." That's right. She is the woman. God made her to receive. God made the man to pursue. Don't get discouraged because you as the husband are almost always the first to ask forgiveness, to initiate sex, etc. What do you expect? God made the man the loving leader of the home.

Ways a Wife Can Protect Her Husband

Believing husbands are called to bear the blasts and the burdens of life for his wife. But what are some ways a wife can protect and cover her husband?

1. Walk with God. Nothing is more important to a godly husband than to know his wife is consistent in her walk with God.
2. Share your heart with him. Don't let friends or even close family take the place of his companionship.
3. Encourage him in his calling. Pack him a lunch if he needs it. Put a love note in there. Be understanding when he has to travel or work late as long as it is an exception and not a habit.
4. Serve in the local church with him. Join him in Kingdom work. Bring the kids with. Don't use them as an excuse to skip out.

5. Guard the media and internet access for your husband. Sign up for Covenant Eyes or something like it and use it.
6. Be a safe place for him. When he fails, be kind and forgiving in his failures. He may fail with his temper, keeping his word - he may struggle with lust. Be hopeful and safe.
7. Enjoy regular intimacy with your husband. You as his wife are the only woman he can lawfully have on the planet. Plan for at least once a week.
8. Voice your gratitude often for all he does. Praise the good things your husband does before others. Remember only seven per cent of your communication is your words. Ninety-three per cent is your tone of voice, attitude, facial expressions, and gestures, etc. A sincere cheerfulness in your tone of voice makes all the difference.
9. Never air dirty laundry. Never cut him down publically or privately to others, including your children.
10. Be united in your finances. Have one bank account. If this is an area of weakness for him, pray about how you can support his growth. Perhaps you can help him, if he's open to the idea, by organizing financial files or providing other practical assistance.
11. Listen to him. Take time to hear his heart. Try not to interrupt.
12. Let him lead. Don't let fear or panic lead you to manipulate control from him. Support him even if you don't agree (unless it is sinful).

12. Love *always* **believes the best.**

Love trusts and gives the benefit of the doubt.

Believes the Best

Love believes all things (1 Cor 13:7). Love “fills in the blanks” of people with good thoughts. Love thinks the best of people. Love takes people at their word. “This does not mean that love will believe absolutely anything,” says Philip Ryken. “Love is not so gullible that it will believe something that is logically impossible, or fraudulent to the faith, or against the holy will of God.”³⁴

“This characteristic” of love, says William Barclay, “has a twofold aspect. In relation to God it means that love takes God at his word... In relation to our fellow men it means that love always believes the best about other people.”³⁵ We must always have the highest opinion of people until we have undeniable facts proving otherwise. There is no limit to love’s believing. It “never loses faith.”³⁶

Remember When You First Met?

The idea is that love trusts and believes the best of people. You married men, remember when you first met your wife? As you got to courting her, you thought she could do no wrong. She had deficiencies then, but back then you thought they were “cute.” You loved her. You thought the best of her. She thought the best of you. You got along well, because you displayed this aspect of love.

Believe All Things? That’s Crazy!

When St. Paul says love “believes all things” he is not saying we park our brains at the door. As Ryken says, “Rather than taking the word ‘all’ (Greek *panta*) as a noun, meaning ‘all things,’ we can take it as an adverb, meaning ‘always.’”³⁷ It means that love has a commitment to believe the best about someone unless the facts prove otherwise.

³⁴ Ryken, *Loving*, 150.

³⁵ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians: The New Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 145.

³⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1057.

³⁷ Ryken, *Loving*, 151.

Wayne Mack explains: “Whatever Paul meant by ‘love believes all things,’ he didn’t mean that love is to be gullible or naïve. Some people may think the way to make friends and influence people is to be a person who never asks questions, who never evaluates, who never challenges, who never disagrees with anyone, who is always a ‘yes’ person, who goes along, with whatever other people do or say. That is just not the way to do it!”³⁸

Fill in the Unknowns with Positives

Often when we are hurt we think the worst. We fill in the blanks with negatives and accusations. When things are going great in in any relationship all the deficiencies of your wife are forgotten, they are covered, but when things are hard, you fill in any blank spaces with further negatives. Focus on the positives of your wife. Give her the benefit of the doubt. Fill in the unknowns with positives.

To say that love “believes all things,” writes Leon Morris, is to say that love “is always ready to allow for circumstances, and to see the best in others.”³⁹ Love is not cynical, but trusting. “Rather than taking the risk of being hurt or getting taken advantage of, the cynic holds back from truly loving other people.”⁴⁰

Love believes the very best, and in marriage, this means we respect our spouse and are positive and praising in how we speak of them. Never, never, never speak ill of your spouse or any other person in front of others. Speak about that person as if they were there. Constantly rehearse in your mind the things that you are thankful for when it comes to your spouse.

13. Love is *always* hopes for the best.

We are all a work in progress are we not? Love hopes all things (1 Cor 13:7). Love sees God’s work in people. This does not mean that love has a subjective wish or yearning or aspiration that all will go

³⁸ Mack, *Maximum Impact*, 241.

³⁹ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 185.

⁴⁰ Ryken. *Loving*, 151.

well. The idea of “hope” means a “certain expectation.” There is no question mark. Love is absolutely convinced and has a rock-solid anticipation that God is going to work good for His people. “Love never tires of support, never loses faith, never exhausts hope, never gives up.”⁴¹ Love doesn’t write “hopeless” over anyone or any circumstances. St. Paul expressed it in similar terms: “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). There is absolutely no doubt about the final outcome.

This biblical optimism grows out of faith in God, not men. Hope is the joyous anticipation of good to come. This hope in God must be woven into the practical fabric of our lives.

Hope is Anchored in God

Hope is not anchored in having things your way, or manipulating people or situations because you are “smarter” than everyone. God calls the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and weak things to confound the strong (1 Cor. 1:26ff).

Hope is anchored in God Himself to do what is right, good and best for all and knowing that He will give sufficient grace to handle any situation that His plan has for you. It is hope in Him that He will bring about what is good, right, fair, etc. in every one and all situations.

Jesus believed that no human being is hopeless. It is also true that no marriage is hopeless. “Love never loses hope but is always hopeful about the goodness of God and his power to work in someone’s life.”⁴²

14. Love *always* perseveres.

⁴¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1057.

⁴² Ryken, *Loving*, 107.

Love goes beyond normal limits and boundaries for imperfect people. Love “endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7). Love perseveres with imperfect people. The word for endurance is a military term that means “to stand fast against the assault of an enemy.”⁴³ In other words, you are your brother’s and sister’s keeper. Our armed forces leave no one behind. So it is with the Body of Christ. We persevere with each other! We leave no one behind. Enduring love is “not a patient, resigned acquiescence, but an active, positive fortitude. It is the endurance of the soldier who in the thick of the battle is undismayed.”⁴⁴ The idea could be paraphrased as follows:

- “Love never gives up on people”
- “Love endures without limit”
- “Love gives us power to endure everything”

Battles have been won because a small pocket of men refused to quit and run. It means to remain under – that is to endure or sustain a load of miseries, adversities, persecutions or provocations in faith and patience.

Eliminates Negative Attitudes

“All things” – every sort of offense, pressure, affliction, difficulty, victory, defeat etc. Love endures! It eliminates attitudes such as:

- I don’t know how much more I can take.
- Things have got to ease up.
- If things don’t change, I’ll crack.
- I just want to run and get out of this marriage.

Your love for God and others, energized by God within you (Phil 2:13), is the source and strength for endurance. Only theology can change this. You must know God and His love and care for you in a personal way.

Biblical Examples of Endurance

⁴³ Hodge, *Exposition*, 271.

⁴⁴ Morris, *Corinthians*, 186.

Consider some biblical examples of endurance.

Job endured. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15).

Paul endured. “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

Jesus Christ endured. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb 12:2-3).

Strategies for Endurance in Marriage

Many people enter marriage fighting for their own way, and they end up fighting their spouse. Remember you already have the victory! “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me” (Psa 138:7, NASB). Let’s consider how you can endure in marriage.

- 1) Know who the true enemy is. The enemy is not your spouse. The Bible teaches us that the fight is not against “flesh and blood” enemies but against “cosmic powers” who rule “over this present darkness” (Eph 6:12). To endure against the true battle, you need to know who the enemy is. My spouse is my companion, not my adversary.
- 2) Remember to put on your battle equipment. You are equipped through Christ with “every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3). You need to put on the “whole armor of God” (Eph 6:10-18). “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Rom

13:14). You have “assets that make you ‘more than victorious’ through the sheer size of His love” (Rom. 8:37).⁴⁵

- 3) Get a trustworthy mediator for your marriage. You are foolish if you think you can endure without help. It might be a pastor or an elder or a godly older couple that can help you mediate disagreements in your marriage. You are a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is a student and a learner. As a Christ follower, you must be teachable like a little child (Mt 18:3). Do not think you are going to grow in marriage through your own ideas or that you are able to see things clearly. Be humble and admit you have a thousand blind spots. Every couple needs a faithful counselor and encourager. Talk to your spouse about this and once agreed, try to connect with someone right away.
- 4) Humble yourself before your spouse. Humility toward your spouse will keep the devil far away. This is the key to endurance and victory in marriage. Regularly ask your spouse for forgiveness. This type of sincerity and humility will build trust and make the devil flee. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7b). The evil one has a thousand deviant paths for your marriage if you give him the opportunity to counsel you. How do we actually resist the devil? The key is found in the preceding command of James 4:7, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God*. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Satan leaves only when we are humble and broken and submitted to God. The verses that follow in James 4 give us a precise guide to exactly how to submit to God: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (Jas 4:8-10).

⁴⁵ Priscilla Shirer, *Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan to Serious, Specific, and Strategic Prayer* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 65.

- 5) Get your focus off of your spouse and onto the Lord Jesus Christ. *“I could never do this for my spouse – there is too much hurt.”* You might feel this way, but you must not allow feelings of hurt and bitterness to control you and define you. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look to Him. Get your eyes off of your spouse. Do all that you need to do for Jesus first.
- 6) Choose to love your spouse. *“But I don’t love my spouse anymore.”* Love is not primarily an emotion. When “God so love the world that He gave His only unique Son,” (Jn 3:16) He did see anything in the world that was attractive or love-worthy. He chose to love you and me, despite us being spiritually dead in our sins and hostile toward Him (Eph 2:1-3; Col 1:21). To love is to sacrifice yourself for the good of another, not based at the worthiness of the person. Love is a choice. You chose to love your spouse when you vowed before God to “love and honor” your spouse “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.”

15. Love *always* **produces** eternal fruit.

The consequences of love will never end.

A Love that Never Falls

Love never ends or fails (1 Cor 13:8). Love “never collapses in defeat, is never destroyed, never falls apart, never falls short, or never fails to have an effect.”⁴⁶ Love is the bedrock foundation that never crumbles.

A Love that Never Ends

⁴⁶ David E. Garland, *First Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 621, as quoted in Ryken, *Loving*, 179.

The positive consequences and fruit of love will never, ever end. It is truly the gift that keeps on giving. Love bears eternal fruit and brings eternal rewards. Love is always unfailing – it always triumphs and prospers. When everything else passes away, love will remain.

When we love, we live on earth the way will be living for our eternal home on the new heaven and the new earth. Love is “not designed and adapted merely to the present state of existence, but to our future and immortal state of being,” so said theologian Charles Hodge.⁴⁷

This love is supernatural. You cannot produce this on your own. This is God-sized love. “The love of God must melt down the unlovely heart in man, and beget in each of us the new creation – a new person who is patient and humble and gentle and unselfish. And there is no other way to get it. There is no mystery about it. We love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, and more than anything else, *we love our God, because He first loved us.*”⁴⁸

The Greatest of These is Love

When all the great eternal things are lined up side by side in eternity, whether it be faith or hope or love, God says the greatest of these is *love*. That’s why Paul says in the very next verse (1 Cor 14:1), “Pursue love.” When we pursue love, we are growth in Christlike character.

CONCLUSION

“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 Jn 3:16). The one closest to us is the one we should lay our life down for.

⁴⁷ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 271.

⁴⁸ Drummond, *The Greatest Thing*, 16-17.

Marriage is a temporary institution. There is no marriage in heaven. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. Determine to demonstrate Christ's love to your spouse. Let the husband, as St. Paul commands, take the lead in this.