



Lesson 1: Love that “never fails”

Video introduction includes (speaker reference only; do not include this in student handout)

- Otter illustration
- 1 Corinthians 13 reading
- Explanation of what love “is” (vs. “feels”)
- Agape love explanation – connect with cross
- Explanation of activity (brief)



How Loving Are You?

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Evaluate yourself and your capacity to love by using the criteria about real love from 1 Corinthians 13, as expressed in the statements below.
- Silently read the statements below as if you yourself were saying them, then circle the number that best corresponds with how true it is for you in your marriage right now, using the criteria below:

Always true	=	4
Frequently true	=	3
Sometimes true	=	2
Seldom true	=	1
Never true	=	0

- It is very important that you **do not show your spouse your answers or look at their answers at any time**. Agape love only evaluates itself related to how well it expresses love toward others, regardless of how worthy or unworthy the recipient of that love is.
- Take your time with this exercise. Be honest. The more thoroughly you reflect on yourself, the better your marriage will be served.
- Once you have both finished the activity, continue by reading the instructions on the next page.

1. I am patient 4 3 2 1 0
2. I am kind 4 3 2 1 0
3. I am content; I am happy when my spouse has something I don't 4 3 2 1 0
4. I don't go fishing for compliments; I don't try to impress my spouse with how great I am, or try to impress upon them how lucky they are to have me..... 4 3 2 1 0
5. I am not proud; I don't look down at my spouse; I am not arrogant; I don't put my spouse down in order to feel superior 4 3 2 1 0
6. I am not rude. I am courteous and polite. I am considerate; I am well-mannered both at home and in public 4 3 2 1 0
7. I am not self-centered. I am not manipulative. I am willing to sacrifice. I am willing to change. I am genuinely concerned about my spouse. I serve my spouse with a selfless heart 4 3 2 1 0
8. I am slow to anger. I am not easily annoyed or irritated with others. I control the expressions of my anger. I don't attack others. I don't 'pile on' criticism in order to win an argument 4 3 2 1 0

9. I am willing to forgive. I don't hold grudges. I don't keep a record of wrongs. I live in the present and do not bring up past mistakes 4 3 2 1 0
10. I don't enjoy making fun of my spouse or exposing their faults. I express appreciation for my spouse. I am not critical. I try to bring out the best in my spouse. I aim to inspire them 4 3 2 1 0
11. I am loyal, faithful, and trustworthy. I seek to protect my spouse at all costs. I am willing to carry their burdens and problems. I keep confidences 4 3 2 1 0
12. I am not suspicious. I trust my spouse. I have confidence in them. I treat them with respect. I'm not constantly demanding assurance and affirmation 4 3 2 1 0
13. I hope for the best, no matter the situation. I maintain a positive attitude. I am not moody 4 3 2 1 0
14. I recognize my own faults and consider them to be more serious than the faults of my spouse 4 3 2 1 0
15. I am committed to my spouse. I show my spouse strong determination that we will persevere through anything. I am steadfast. I hang in there. I am consistent with my love. I realize that love is primarily a choice I make and not a matter of feelings or emotions. I choose to show love even when I don't feel very loving 4 3 2 1 0

INSTRUCTIONS (after both have completed the exercise):

- Identify two qualities of agape love you consistently put into practice. Look to build on these strengths by writing down one new way you might express the same quality of love (it's okay to ask your spouse for advice here).

Quality #1 –

Quality #2 –

- Identify at least two qualities of love you don't put into practice very well in your marriage (your lowest scores). Write those down:

One way I could show better love my spouse is by:

Another way I could show better love to my spouse is by:

- **OPTIONAL EXERCISE** (best if husband and wife are alone): Take turns looking your spouse in the eye and verbally apologizing for where you have fallen short in your love (using what you just identified in the previous activity). Do not make excuses for yourself. Simply apologize.

For example, if you easily lose your temper with your spouse (#8), you would look at your spouse and say something like the following: *“(spouse’s name), I know that I lose my temper so easily when we disagree about something. There is no excuse for my unloving action. I am sorry I have failed to love you better.*

The other person may offer forgiveness immediately or wait until you go through the conclusion in this lesson. Either is good. Remember that extending forgiveness to the penitent is also an act of agape love.

- Once you have finished the previous exercise, read the Conclusion out loud.

CONCLUSION: Hosea and Gomer

Hosea was a prophet in the Old Testament. His marriage was arranged by God. God commanded Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer. Gomer was a prostitute. God wasn’t trying to be funny or cruel to Hosea. God wanted Hosea’s marriage to be an illustration of God’s love for his people in Israel. The bible often refers to those who turn away from God as spiritual prostitutes—they love something else more than the one who has been most faithful to them. Through Hosea and Gomer, what wanted the Israelites to see a picture of his unconditional love for his unfaithful nation, hoping they would see his great love and respond with thanks.

As we get to the verses below, Hosea had already married Gomer, and Gomer had already left him and was unfaithful to her husband. Very few, if any, would have blamed Hosea for giving up on this broken relationship. God, however, said the following:

Hosea 3:1-2

¹“Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.” ²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.

We aren’t told how Hosea felt having to pay for a woman who had wronged him. It’s easy to imagine it would have been difficult for Hosea to put that action into practice.

Neither are we told how Gomer felt when she discovered that the man who had purchased her was the one man to whom she had been most unfaithful.

Maybe Gomer felt the same way God wanted Israel to feel when they looked at him; and the same way God wants us to feel when we consider the price God was willing to pay to bring us back to him. “It was not with silver or gold that you were redeemed from your empty way of life,” it says in 1 Peter chapter 1, “but with the precious blood of Christ;” blood that poured

down a cross when God put into action a love that was willing to pay any price so that anyone who has ever felt ashamed and broken can know how it feels to be entirely loved and forgiven, and treasured by God more than anything. It was hard to show that love. But he did, and we are better off because of it.

Just as your marriage will be better off when you put the same love into practice.

If you haven't yet, look your spouse in the eye and say, "I'm sorry."

Then look your spouse in the eyes and say, "I forgive you."

Finally, look your spouse in the eye and say, "I love you."

You will find that the best marriages are those in which each spouse isn't afraid or ashamed to regularly say all of those phrases, while also putting them into practice.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father in heaven, thank you for the guidance you give to our marriage in your Word. Thank you for the perfect love you have shown to us in Christ Jesus. Give each of us the strength and determination to practice that same agape love so that our marriage will never fail to follow where you graciously lead us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.