

FIVE WAYS TO LOVE YOUR MATE

*What is the
quotient of love in
your marriage?*

By Earl H. Williams

Stop and think about it: On a scale of 1 to 10, how much love are you giving in your marriage?

Are you a 3? Maybe a 6? Perhaps a rare 10?

You know you have an IQ (intelligence quotient), but did you realize that (bear with me for the sake of argument) each husband and wife has an "LQ" (love quotient)?

God commands married couples to love one another and to increase their LQ! God inspired the apostle Paul to instruct, "Husbands, love your wives" (Eph. 5:25). Paul also taught that wives should "love their husbands" (Tit. 2:4).

God created marriage to be the most joyous, love-filled relationship. Unfortunately, many hus-

bands and wives are not actively loving one another. Their LQ is dangerously low. They endure loveless marriages of misery.

God wants husbands and wives to be lovers. Here are five ways to show true love for your mate. The first two ways deal with the aspect of commitment in marriage — they will solidify your marriage and place it on a firm foundation. The last three ways deal with the pleasure phase of marriage — God wants your marriage to be brimful and running over with real, deep joy.

Lovers forever

The first way to love your mate is with the love expressed by the Greek word *agape*. This is the word translated in I Corinthians 13 as "love" or, in the Authorized Version, "charity."

Agape means unconditional, unselfish giving. In marriage *agape* could be defined as a willful commitment to give to your imperfect mate without expecting to get in return. You consciously, under all circumstances, make a lifelong commitment to never stop giving to your mate.

God is the Rock from which *agape* flows. He is the source of the force that will give you the power to overcome all obstacles in your marriage. Your union must begin with God. The apostle John wrote, "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3).

The joy of *agape* will be added to your marriage if you first fellowship with God through Bible study, prayer and obedience to God's commandments. You will gain access to *agape* through God's Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). He will be at the center of your marriage, giving it strength.

God plus husband plus wife equal one *agape*-filled marriage. This is the missing formula for success in so many marriages.

As you submit to God's laws concerning marriage and other human relationships, He will unleash the power of *agape* to you, which helps you to willfully choose to love your mate.

Society presents the false and damaging picture of love controlling you. In this false picture, love captures and enslaves you. You are a helpless "prisoner of love,"



Photos by Warren Watson

unable to control your feelings.

Have you heard married people say: "I cannot love him anymore — the feeling is gone"?

In truth, you choose to love or not to love. *Agape* is not a feeling, but a conscious and willful act you control.

God commands us to love one another because He knows we can control love (II John 5). Follow through on your decision to love your mate by committing yourself to give the love that "never fails" (I Cor. 13:8, New American Bible).

Commitment produces endurance

You promised in a covenant with God, on your wedding day, to love your mate unto death. Pray daily to God for the power to love your mate and to keep that commitment in your mind constantly. Determine to allow nothing or no one, including yourself, to stop you from loving your mate. Go to God and recommit yourself to loving your mate.

Since *agape* is a willful commitment to give, your will and commitment must be followed by action. You cannot *get* love — you can only *give* it. Regardless of how little you receive, you will always have love in your marriage because the quantity and quality of love is dependent on how much you give.

In an emergency you would not hesitate to sacrifice your life to save your mate. Are you willing to sacrifice your life daily by pushing aside your needs and wants to satisfy your mate, by putting your mate's needs ahead of your own? When you are tired, do you get up and serve instead of waiting to be served?

The apostle Paul admonished Christians: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Strive to reach the state where fulfilling your mate's

needs becomes, next to your commitment to God, the predominant need of your life. Give and you will have *agape*.

Don't give to get

You may be saying, "But my mate doesn't deserve my love." But *agape* gives to an imperfect person — yes, even to an undeserving person.

How often has this conversation been repeated? "I'll start being a good husband when you start being a submissive wife" or "When you start leading properly, then I'll submit."

This is not the fruit of *agape*. This love does not require the other person to change or be perfect. There are no conditions, no qualifications for the giving of *agape*.

Jesus Christ, the perfect husband and the only human who ever perfectly expressed *agape*, gave His life for us while we were yet sinners (Eph. 5:25, Rom. 5:8). Christ did not require us to change first — His love was unconditional.

We must follow Christ's perfect example of love. Willfully force yourself to give to your mate even when you have been wronged. By giving in spite of your mate's shortcomings, you will feel more positive toward your spouse. Peter expressed the principle in I Peter 4:8: "Above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'" Your unconditional love may cause a positive response in your mate, although this should never be the motive for giving (I Pet. 3:1-2).

Do not become disappointed. It is easy to become disillusioned after giving and giving without any response, not even a thank-you. *Agape* does not require love in return. Love does not give in order to get.

The apostle Paul taught that if we give with expectations of getting in return, our love is vain: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be

burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (I Cor. 13:3).

Remove expectation and then love will fill your heart, leaving no room for disappointment. Jesus Christ taught that the joy is in the giving: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

And yet, at the same time, you can take heart from God's promise that if you faithfully and unselfishly give, you will eventually be rewarded: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over . . . For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

Agape is the most powerful facet of love. *Agape* will carry your marriage through the most difficult trials.

Solomon, in his love song, vividly expressed all the qualities of *agape*: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (S. of Sol. 8:6-7).

Raise your LQ. Give to your mate the love expressed in the word *agape*.

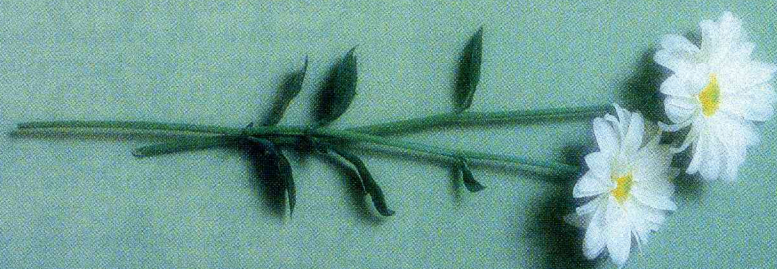
Lovers belong to each other

The second way to love your mate is with the love of belonging, which will bring you and your mate closer together. This love will add another point to your LQ and enrich your marriage.

God created marriage to be the closest human relationship. Yet, many married couples live together as strangers. A cold curtain of loneliness divides them as they go their separate ways.

What about your marriage? Do you live under the same roof, but as strangers to one another? God did not intend husbands and wives to live together like total

Push out your concerns and concentrate on the concerns of your mate. Seek total identification with your husband or wife — immerse yourself in your mate's concerns, feel your mate's hurts, experience his or her frustrations, sing your mate's joys.



strangers. He has a solution to your problem.

What is the love of belonging? This love is characterized by a bond of unity, companionship and loyal devotion. The love of belonging shines brightest in older couples. They act alike and think alike. They have become one. The love of belonging is not just for older couples, but for all couples.

God created man with the need to belong. God looked at all He had made and saw that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). But when God looked at Adam He saw something that was not good: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18, Authorized Version).

Adam was lonely. God prescribed the love of belonging to cure Adam's problem. God gave Adam a woman, Eve, to love. Through giving, the first married couple could have grown to belong to one another.

This need to belong cannot be satisfied through any other person, whether mother, father, sis-

ter or brother — only through your mate: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verse 24).

As with *agape*, you can only give the love of belonging to your mate.

Accept your mate the way your mate is, not the way you would like him or her to be. Your mate will not feel he or she belongs as long as he or she senses you are not satisfied with him or her.

Emphasize the positive things about your mate. Make a list of all the good things. Think back to the time when you were engaged and of all the qualities you admired. You might be surprised to find those same qualities in your spouse today. Constantly think on these good qualities. Look to find more admirable qualities. The love of belonging is making your mate feel accepted.

Learn to empathize with your mate. Push out your concerns and concentrate on the concerns of your mate. Seek total identification with your husband or wife — immerse yourself in your mate's

concerns, feel your mate's hurts, experience his or her frustrations, sing your mate's joys.

Cleave to each other

The apostle Paul encourages us to bear — take upon ourselves — one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). You will become an emotional refuge for your mate — a hiding place where your mate can find warmth and shelter from the storms of life. Both of you will have a home in each other's hearts. Your mate will have a place to belong, and the love of belonging will bring you closer together.

In Genesis 2:24, AV, God tells married couples to "cleave" to each other. The word *cleave* was translated from the Hebrew verb *dabaq*, which means "to solder" or "to weld together."

The strongest welding technique is called *brazing*, in which two pieces of metal are welded together under intense heat. The molecules of the two metals become inseparable.

God compares the trials of life to a fire (I Pet. 1:7). By cleaving to one another as you go through life's challenges you will become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Becoming one physically, mentally and spiritually should be the goal of every married couple.

In the Song of Solomon, the Shulamite bride expressed the love of belonging she shared with her mate when she said, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (S. of Sol. 6:3).

Agape love and the love of belonging are the two legs upon which your marriage stands. They are the foundations upon which the next three loves are built. Use these two loves to increase your LQ — your love quotient — and make your marriage unshakable.

To love or not to love — that is the question. You alone hold the answer, and you alone must willfully decide to start loving your mate. The power is in your hands. □

(To be continued)