

# Love That Characterizes Marriage

By John D. Laing

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read Genesis 29:14–20, and prepare to share your answers to the following questions: (1) Who are the key people in the story, and what are their roles? (2) What arrangement did Jacob make with his uncle Laban? (3) How does the Bible describe Jacob's experience of working for Laban for seven years in order to marry Rachel (v. 20)?

### Assignment Two

Read Ephesians 5:22–24 and then turn to comments related to these verses in the section **It's in the Book**. Be prepared to discuss the meaning of submission and why it should not be seen as a negative posture. Also be prepared to discuss why it does not mean that women are less valuable than men.

### Assignment Three

Read John 13:4–15, 34–35; 15:9–17, and prepare to share your answers to the following questions: (1) What did Jesus do for His disciples? (2) What was the meaning of washing their feet? (3) What is the greatest expression of love?

### Scripture to Memorize

*"Love is patient, love is kind . . . bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."* 1 Corinthians 13:4, 7–8

### Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be able to describe the key features of the love God desires between husbands and wives.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

Ever since she was a little girl, Jana dreamed of her wedding day—the décor, the catering, the dress, the guests—and the man she would marry. She had memorized the words to every princess cartoon, and she couldn't wait to fall in love. But there was a problem. She wasn't sure she knew what love was.

As she got older, she hoped she would just "know," but that seemed too mysterious. She longed to have something concrete to help her know what love is. She didn't want to make the same mistake her mother had made (her mother's marriage failed). What do you think will help Jana here?

### Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on Genesis 29:14–20.

### On Your Own

In the space below write three words that come to mind as you hear the report on Jacob and Rachel.

### Discussion Question

As a group, discuss the characteristics of love that come out in the report on Jacob and Rachel.

Read Ephesians 5:22–29 out loud.

### Studying the Passage, vv. 22–24

The first three verses address the wife's role and posture within the marriage. The whole section on marriage follows a discussion of proper relations within the church as Christians are filled with the Spirit (5:18), and thus walk in love (5:2), avoid ungodly talk (5:4, 12), sing hymns (5:19), and are subject to one another (5:21). Compare Philippians 2:3–4.

**Verse 22. be subject.** The idea of submission seems negative in our culture because we are taught to express ourselves, jockey for position, and promote ourselves. We like to say, "Every man for himself." Submission goes against our sinful nature, which seeks to exalt self. As Christians, we are called to deny self for the sake of Christ.

As we saw in last week's lesson, the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and the church. The important point to note here is the voluntary nature of submission. The command was given to wives, not to the husbands to make their wives submit. Notice that Christ voluntarily submitted to the will of the Father. In the garden Jesus declared, "Not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). Jesus could say this because He loved and trusted His Father. In the same way wives are asked voluntarily to submit to their husbands because they love and trust them.

### Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the word *submission*.

### **Studying the Passage, Ephesians 5:23–27**

**Verse 23. head.** The Greek word is *kephale*, and there is some debate about its meaning. The best evidence is that it has more to do with the position of authority rather than its source. This reading simply highlights the responsibility of the husband for his wife. It is not negative as some suppose. The husband is to be a loving, spiritual leader for his family.

While Paul spends three verses on the wife's role, he spends five on the husband's role and responsibilities within marriage. **Verse 25. Husbands, love your wives.** Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Just in case this is unclear, Paul goes on to note that Jesus died for the church (v. 25) in order to secure her spiritual well-being (v. 26).

**Verse 26. love.** Ancient Greek had four basic terms for love (*agape*, *eros*, *philia*, *storge*), three of which appear in the Bible. They can all be used interchangeably in secular writing. In the Bible the Greek word used here, *agape*, characteristically refers to the pure, selfless love of God. *Philia*, used elsewhere, typically means friendly love.

### **On Your Own**

In the space provided, list as many descriptors as you can for the love Christ has for the church. Take a few minutes to share your answers as a group. Do your lists look similar?

### **Studying the Passage, Ephesians 5:28–29**

**Verse 28. love . . . as their own bodies.** Paul offers a second analogy to illustrate the way a husband should love his wife: as he loves his own body. The emphasis is on responsibility and action. The husband must sacrificially provide care for his wife, just as he does his own body.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on answers to the three questions.

### **Studying the Passage, 1 Corinthians 13:4–5**

This passage refers to the kind of love that ought to characterize the church (not just marriage). However, as we saw earlier, the love that characterizes marriage is meant to serve as a picture of the love Christ has for the church and as a model for the love church members have for one another. In addition, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul gives an extended meditation on the nature of *agape* love.

**Verse 4. patient.** This Greek word for “patient” occurs fourteen times in the Bible and has a sense of merciful waiting (Matthew 18:26, 29). God is patient with us and puts off His judgment for the sake of His mercy (2 Peter 3:9). **kind.** The Greek word (*chresteuomai*) occurs only once in the Bible and has the sense of mildness or even gentleness.

Paul contrasts patience and kindness with envy, pride, and selfishness, which come from self-focus rather than godly self-denial. In order to be patient and kind, you have to consider your spouse's situation as more important than your own.

**Verse 5. does not take into account.** The Greek word for “take into account” (*logizomai*) is related to the term for “word” (*logos*) and literally means to make a record. It could mean to refrain from speaking of the wrongs others have committed. Forgiveness looms large here. Since the model for love is Christ and He went to such great lengths to forgive us (He died in our place!), so also those in marriage should go to great lengths to forgive.

### **On Your Own**

It is fairly common to drag up old violations when we are losing an argument. Think of a time when you were losing an argument and brought up someone's past fault or mistake. Why did you do this? Was it to deflect attention from the fact that you were wrong? Was it because you never forgave the person? In the space below, list the consequence of using this tactic. Then list the outcomes you wish you had achieved. Do the lists match?

### **Discussion Question**

Review the lists you just made. Without getting into the specific situation, discuss with the group some things you could have been done differently in order to act lovingly.

### **Studying the Passage, 1 Corinthians 13: 6–8**

**Verses 6–8. truth . . . hopes . . . never fails.** Notice that proper and true love is directly connected to righteousness and truth (v. 6), and belief and hope (v. 7), and it is eternal (v. 8a). These are characteristics of God and the life of faith. True love can only be found in proper relationship to Christ. This is true in all relationships, including marriage.

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

### **Prayer**

7 minutes

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

If we love the way God loves, we want the best for those we love, even over our own good. This is especially true of marriage partners.

We don't view them as competition but rather as partners, and we rejoice when they succeed. Our desire for their good means we will hope for the best for them and always strive to see the best in them.

We will point them to the highest good, to truth and perfect love, all of which are found in God through Christ. We will put their welfare above our own and will be prepared to sacrifice for their benefit.

Such self-denial and trust in others is both counterintuitive and countercultural. Ironically, though, it is more effective than self-preservation. This is due to the fact that we often have more people looking out for our good than if we all look out for ourselves.

A wife looks out for her husband's well-being, and a husband looks out for his wife's. In the church we ideally have many (perhaps thousands) concerned with our good rather than just one (oneself).

### **Parent Question**

*What are three characteristics of the kind of love Christian husbands and wives ought to have for each other?*

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