

Growing in Love

Someone said "Love that is not cultivated will soon die." How very true is this statement! One great thing about marriage is that it fosters the environment in which each partner can grow in love. Every day family life provides close interaction which gives rise to the many opportunities to love. By living together, we are virtually forced to deal with the problems of life. The common custom in times past had been, for the parents to select their children's future mates. The couple entered marriage with a nominal amount of love, but with the passing of the years, that affection was cultivated and matured. Whereas now, so many of our young folks get married in the heat of passion and their love subsides in a few years.

Marriage is a **covenant relationship rather than a convenient relationship**. Covenants are legally binding agreements which help secure strong relationships. The strength of the covenant must allow the spouses to be more honest with each other. Once they realize that covenant relationship is for life, they must accept it and work harder together to make their marriage enjoyable.

Webster defines the word cultivate as follows: "1. To prepare and use soil, land for growing crops; tilling the soil; 2. To break up the surface soil around (plants) in order to destroy weeds, prevent crusting, and preserve moisture ... to improve or develop (plants) by various horticultural techniques. Especially in this analogy, attention should be given to definition number two. Certainly, in marriage, **there is the constant need to eliminate the negatives** that would destroy the proper relationship between the husband and wife. Every effort must be made to keep the marriage from "crusting." Love will become hard if not cultivated. Care must be given in preserving and maturing marital love. This requires wisdom, knowledge and training to develop (cultivate) this love.

Growing in love has many shades to it. By 'growing in love,' we mean **God's love becoming stronger and more dominant within both parties**. God's love first fills our need and then empowers us to live sacrificially for God and others. We gain our need for love, acceptance and help primarily from God and not the spouse. Only then we will be empowered with God's supernatural love.

Secondly growing in love requires sincere **commitment**. Each spouse should openly discuss and share their desire to love each other with God's love. This is often done at the wedding ceremony but with all the fanfare, it seems to be easily forgotten. Therefore it will be good if we take time to remember the covenant we made on our wedding day and seek His love so that God may lead us in this life long joyous process of growing in love.

Thirdly, it should be remembered that **love is not merely a feeling but love works itself out practically**. Love is super practical. It is rational, consistent, purposeful and creative. We will get off track if we focus on our feelings because feelings often fluctuate.

Fourthly, let our goals be clear. True love has two goals: 1) we need to keep **preferring our partner over ourselves** and 2) we need to be **consistent in our love**. One should seek the other's good and welfare at all times. If one is not careful, selfishness will prevent this from happening. Selfishness is a root sin that contributes to many marital problems.

It is also quite a common situation where one partner feels that his\her love is being 'used' or manipulated. But that is okay. We need only to keep an excellent attitude in our heart because we do not know how God will use our love. That is His business. Of course, it is our concern, but we must let Him be in charge. All we have to do is to focus on our calling/ responsibility of loving. Though it is hard, He will always give us His grace. We must keep on loving even when we do not receive love back. True love demands the generosity of spirit which gives gladly and freely for the

benefit of the beloved and keeps on giving. This is tough but that is when our partner usually realizes that he or she has been rather nasty about things (Eph 5:25-27).

Fifthly, husbands and wives should learn early in their marriage to **give themselves totally** to each other. Love is something that must be given away in order to receive it. Marriage is not a fifty-fifty relationship but the giving of oneself one hundred percent in making it work.

Sixthly, be **patient with each other**. Patience is the willingness to generously give another time and space to grow. Patience is to withdraw our expectations, our timetables, and our methods and allow God's means and methods to prevail. Patience does not demand but waits. This duty we owe to all, but especially to our spouse (Eph. 4:31-32). There are many temptations in marriage to become impatient! Hot tempers ignite civil wars indoors, and no good ever comes out of them. Both need a meek and quiet spirit. It will do well if we learn to hold our peace to keep the peace. Withdraw until the storm is over. We are not two angels married, but two sinful children of Adam. Let us wink at lesser faults, and be careful in confronting greater ones.

Next, couples must learn **never to hold a grudge**. When a teakettle cannot release the steam, trouble is about to happen. Paul wrote, "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). Sure, there will be disagreements, but how beautiful it is when there is forgiveness and reconciliation. When one has been wrong, there is the need to learn to say, "I am sorry." And, the response should be, "I forgive you."

We need to **acknowledge our sins and weaknesses**. If we are proud and egoistic, the growth of love goes on ever so slow. Pride keeps us from learning from our mistakes so that we keep making them over and over. We need to be quick in acknowledging our sins and offenses and consciously humble ourselves. Oftentimes we neither realize the presence of our sins and weaknesses nor are we alert to their consequences. Instead of loving, we become defensive and unwilling to accept another person's nudge to apologize for our wrong. The best way to see these faults in our hearts is to ask God to open our eyes to our own sin. The long-lasting key to a learning heart is having a daily praying time and meditation on God's Word. If we see this as a life process, then we will accept the needed discipline to daily prepare our hearts for the challenges of each day.

Love is a great reason and comfort of marriage. This love is not merely romance, but genuine and constant affection and care for each other "fervently with a pure heart" (1 Pet. 1:22). Marital love cannot be based on beauty or wealth, for all these is transient. Love must be based upon God's command which never changes. The marriage vow obliges "for better or for worse," This true-hearted love brings true content and comfort in its train. It guards against adultery and jealousy. It prevents or lessens family trouble. Without it, the marriage is like a bone out of joint. There is pain until it is restored.

A love relationship left as it is will not improve with time; the original momentum will not continue; in fact, the principle of deterioration sets in. People will have to work out their relationship to keep it, choosing God as the chief architect of the home who is the source of the unconditional love.