

Making (1 Corinthians 13) Love

GOD GAVE YOU AN AMAZING WEDDING GIFT!

AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS of marriage, three children, three grandchildren, 12 years serving in family ministries, and two master's degrees in family therapy, Bernie and I can honestly say that one of the most challenging aspects of our marriage has been our physical intimacy. All around us there are distorted messages about our sexuality and extremely unhelpful "advice" and role models. So it's not surprising that we feel bewildered, vulnerable, and confused about our sexual intimacy.

Over the years we've read books, attended marriage retreats, and even answered

challenging questions about sexuality in our own seminars. For a while we thought the Bible was relatively quiet on the subject, apart from the exuberant poetry of the Song of Songs. Then one day we were inspired to apply the concepts of love in 1 Corinthians 13 to our sexual intimacy. We soon discovered that this famous love chapter is packed with amazing principles that can infuse our human lovemaking and make it the amazing wedding gift that God designed for us.



LOVE IS PATIENT.

It's interesting that Paul chooses patience as the first principle in his poetic description of love. At first glance, patience seems like an odd choice; why not kindness, or forgiveness? But patience blends together a whole collection of loving virtues.

Patience with our partner comes from a deep respect for their needs and preferences. Patience is a way to be kind, thoughtful, humble, unselfish, and self-controlled. When someone is impatient with us, we often feel sad, lonely, frustrated, misunderstood, embarrassed, pressured, and inadequate. Instead of drawing us closer to each other, those negative feelings push us further apart.

Patience is an important ingredient of lovemaking. Patience is about putting the other person's needs before our own and waiting warmly and patiently for the other person to be ready. Patience keeps us from being irritated or frustrated with each other, especially when our relationship is facing challenges.

LOVE CARES MORE FOR OTHERS THAN FOR SELF.

Lovemaking works best when the husband and wife are both focused on giving each other a loving, comfortable, and happy experience. What makes my partner feel happy and loved is more important than what makes me feel good. Everyday unselfishness—doing things to support, encourage, and appreciate each other—naturally helps us to feel more loving and close to each other.

LOVE DOESN'T WANT WHAT IT DOESN'T HAVE.

Love is content with what it has. Love is faithful. Love doesn't fantasize about other partners, or desire experiences that our partner finds unappealing or uncomfortable. Love focuses on making the marriage relationship the best it can be so that both of you are content with the love you share together.

LOVE ISN'T PROUD OR PUFFED UP.

Love isn't bossy or boastful about its achievements. Love has a humble and serving heart. It doesn't make love to enhance its own ego, but aims to make love in ways that build up the other person.

LOVE DOESN'T FORCE ITSELF ON OTHERS.

If there's one thing that's definitely incompatible with love, it's using force, guilt, abuse, or pressure to make your partner do whatever you want—especially when they are reluctant, or they just don't want to.

Sometimes it helps if you both make a list of the things that you enjoy sexually. Then swap your lists and let your husband or wife choose the things on your list that they'd most like to do for you. That way you can make your preferences clear, and still leave space for your partner to choose what they feel most comfortable doing for you.

LOVE ISN'T "ME FIRST."

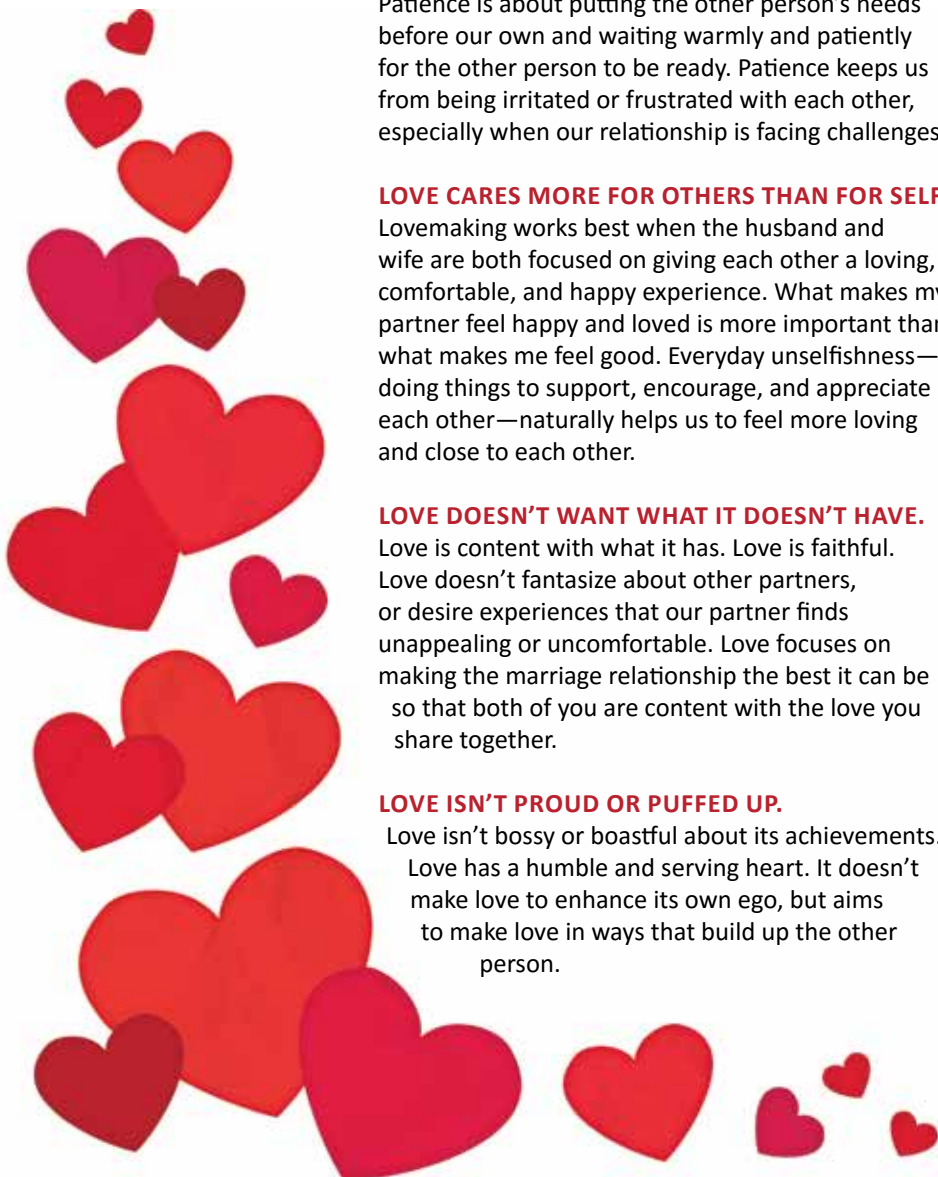
In true lovemaking the other person's pleasure is more important than our own. When each partner's goal is to make the other person feel special and loved, then the whole experience tends to work better.

Author and speaker Mark Gungor's secret for successful lovemaking is being kind to his wife. He discovered that the kinder and more helpful he is, the closer she feels to him. His thoughtful care invites her loving response. Everyday kindness and loving attention paves the way for deeper sexual intimacy.

LOVE DOESN'T FLY OFF THE HANDLE.

Lovemaking doesn't always go according to plan. It's a complicated process, especially for women, whose bodies can respond in completely different ways each time.

When things don't work out, try exploring other ways to soothe and pleasure each other, rather than getting angry or rejecting each other. Try a gentle back massage, a



close cuddle, or kissing each other's bodies. Or look at the funny side and have a tickle and a giggle to help you both relax again.

LOVE DOESN'T KEEP SCORE OF THE SINS OF OTHERS.

Love doesn't hold back to punish the other person. Lovemaking is a powerful way to be a channel of God's love and grace to your partner. When forgiveness is difficult, and trust has been broken in painful ways, pray for the Holy Spirit to heal the pain and bring you close again.

LOVE DOESN'T REVEL WHEN OTHERS GROVEL.

Loving intimacy is something that lifts you both up. It doesn't humiliate or debase the other person, and it doesn't beg or manipulate. Love enjoys celebrating and honoring each other. What could you do to celebrate and honor your spouse?

LOVE TAKES PLEASURE IN THE FLOWERING OF TRUTH.

It isn't always easy to be lovingly honest with each other about our lovemaking experiences, because it's such a sensitive and vulnerable area of our relationship. But it can be helpful to tell each other, "I really like it when you . . ." or "It feels nice when you . . ."

LOVE PUTS UP WITH ANYTHING.

All kinds of life experiences and health challenges can have a profound effect on our intimate relationships. Pregnancy, tiredness, small children, illness, feeling sad, or being overwhelmed by work are just a few of the things that can disrupt our lovemaking. But love patiently and kindly supports each other through the challenges and looks for fresh ways to show care and be intimate with each other.

LOVE MEANS TRUSTING GOD ALWAYS.

God cares about your marriage and wants it to be the best it can be. He wants to bless you both through your sexual intimacy. But sometimes we hit roadblocks and challenges, and then it's worth going for help as soon as you can. Or try reading a book such as *Rekindling Desire* by Barry and Emily McCarthy.

LOVE ALWAYS LOOKS FOR THE BEST.

If something doesn't work out as you hoped, believe the best about your partner and yourself. And after you make love, don't forget to thank each other. Find a way to tell each other the best part of the experience for you so that you can learn about each other's preferences and grow into deeper intimacy.

LOVE NEVER LOOKS BACK.

Rather than regretting the mistakes of the past, or yearning for what used to be, love looks forward to new possibilities for intimacy. Take time to list and share three hopes for your intimate relationship, and work together to make them happen. Try some of the free printables and ideas at www.thedatingdivas.com, a Web site run by Christian women who are devoted to improving marriages with creative ideas for dates and intimate experiences.

LOVE KEEPS GOING TO THE END.

Love finds ways to pleasure the other person, even when your bodies are transformed into silvery seniority. Many older couples continue to enjoy their ever-changing journey into their God-given and mutually delightful intimacy.

LOVE NEVER DIES.

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that moment: trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love. ■

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