



The love you receive is in proportion to the love you give.

Lesson 1

God's Design for Love

Do you daydream about a handsome prince in shining armor—or maybe in a late-model convertible—driving up and the two of you riding off into the sunset? Or maybe your fantasy is of finding your beautiful Cinderella in her glass slippers—or inline skates—and mustering the courage to ask her to skate, hoping that you'll live happily ever after.

At one time or another—when algebra gets boring or when you feel your heart race for the first time or when you see your friends dating—at *one time or another*, all teenagers have romantic fantasies! You are entering one of the most exciting and dangerous periods of your life—when you are playing the dating game for real! It's exciting because you have an opportunity to make your fantasies come true. But why is it also dangerous? Because it's a game you play for keeps, and the whole course of your life is impacted. *Chances are, someone you date in the next five to ten years will be someone you'll marry!* And, unless you know how to play the dating game wisely, your fantasy of finding love for a lifetime will burst like a bubble.

The popular media would have you believe that strangers meet, fall in love, jump in and out of bed, and move on. No

loyalty, no response, and certainly no commitment or marriage. They call it love, but is it?

What is love, anyway, and what does it have to do with marriage and family?

This is the big question with which our discussion of family must begin. There are several distinct kinds of love. Maybe stepping back to the beginning can clarify them.

Picture God creating Adam. He could have spoken just one word, and “zap,” there he was! That's what God did for everything else He created, except for human beings. Genesis 1:3 states, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” In verse 6: “God said, ‘Let there be an expanse between the waters.’ ” On through that first chapter, it was always, “God said,” and it was. But when He created human beings, God changed His method of creating. He took time shaping Adam out of dirt: molding, forming, massaging, until He was satisfied with His work.

At that point, God could have spoken, and Adam would have come to life. But He didn't. Instead, God bent over him and gave him artificial respiration; He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). You might say, the Father God kissed His son, Adam, to life. With this type of intimate encounter, is it any wonder that God loved Adam—and Adam loved God!

There is a significant difference in the quality of a relationship you have with someone you only speak to and with someone you touch and kiss! The method God chose to bring Adam to life was just the beginning of the close creator/creature relationship that God initiated with Adam. God looked forward to walking and talking with Adam on a daily basis. But this love relationship was not to be exclusive. Created within Adam was a need not just for a vertical God/man intimacy, but also for a horizontal intimacy with someone like himself.

Can't you just see Adam, after his busy day of naming the animals, sitting alone on a polished stone, reflectively kicking his foot in the golden dust as God comes to chat? Adam doesn't want to seem ungrateful, but he has noticed that all the other animals have mates, so he expresses his loneliness to God. And God says in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

God could have created Adam's partner before. He knew while He was shaping Adam that there would be a love void in Adam's life that could be filled only by a wife. But He waited until Adam felt the emptiness and asked for a companion.

Since God formed Adam out of dirt, you'd think that's what He would have done with Eve. But no! Eve was created for intimacy, to be a helpmate to Adam, to stand beside him as a companion, with a body formed to have a one-flesh love relationship with him. To symbolize this oneness, God made Eve out of a part of Adam's body. Amazing, isn't it?

One might say that God performed the original cloning! They were one flesh, but different, so they could be joined. "In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27), perfectly suited for emotional, as well as physical, oneness.

God created sex to be the expression of the type of love that would form a stable foundation for a family. In the beginning there was marriage, but to complete His plan for family, God put sperm within Adam and ova (eggs) within Eve, so that as they were expressing their most intimate one-flesh love to each other, their union could create children in their own image.

Notice, just as God stroked and kissed man into existence, He planned that this same intimacy would be a vital part of the creation of children. And then He instructed the first two lovers on earth to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28).

It is interesting to note that while God said about the rest of His creation, "it was good," after Adam and Eve were created God said, "it was *very good*" (Genesis 1:31, emphasis supplied).

So what does love have to do with family? *Everything*. Love was the reason God designed a human family. And a family is the result of love—or at least that was God's original plan. The closer you follow that plan in your own life, the more intimacy you will experience, and the more fulfilled you will be.

To separate love from family may result in a momentary windfall of passion, but ultimately its wages are heartache, loneli-

ness, and alienation. The problem is that today's culture is confused about the meaning of love, thinking of it in terms of being loved—or *getting*—rather than being loving—or *giving*.

Psychiatrist Erich Fromm, who wrote *The Art of Loving*, argued that we need to learn how to love in the same way we learn how to play a musical instrument. It is an art to be practiced, requiring discipline, concentration, patience, and supreme concern. He goes on to suggest that when we start working at love, our relationships will be characterized by giving, caring, responsibility, respect, and knowledge.¹ This doesn't sound much like the romantic love that we usually associate with marriage, does it?

Jack and Judith Balswick, authors of *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, suggest that complete love—the type that holds a marriage together through a lifetime—has three equal dimensions:²

1. Commitment, or *agape* love.
2. Intimacy (friendship), or *philia* love (closeness and understanding, not sexual intimacy).
3. Passion, or *eros* love.

In past generations when marriages were arranged, com-

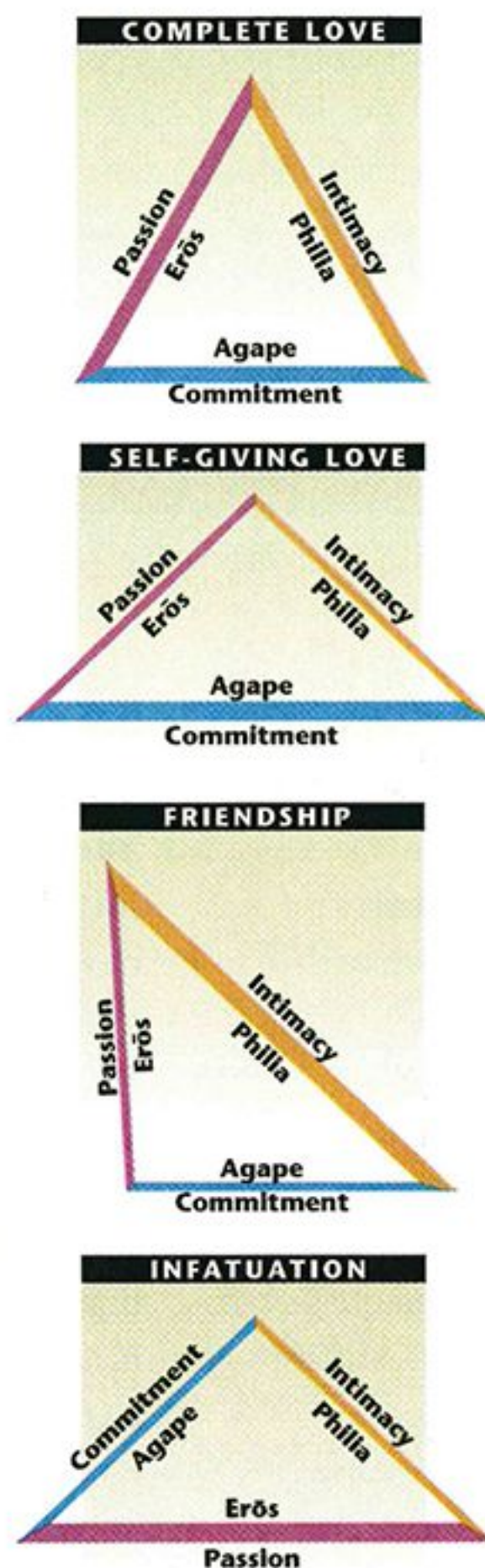
mitment love was the primary glue for the relationship, with intimacy (friendship) and sometimes passion following.

Today, with couples making their own mate selection, the relationship usually starts with passion, ideally moves to intimacy as the friendship develops, and finally to a marriage commitment. Unfortunately, in too many cases, the commitment part of love is the weak link in the chain, so when

either of the other two loves—passion or intimacy—declines, commitment to the marriage also declines. That's a major reason why one out of two marriages today ends in divorce, while in the early 1900s it was only one out of twelve!

Families are changing.

Today there are more single-parent families, step families, and blended families (in which both parents have children from a previous relationship) than ever before. But even though the structure of a family may change, the ideal remains the same: A family is a place to find love, security, and a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, the dreams and ideals of young couples who are in love often fade and disappear in the complicated realities of daily living. Here are four hazards that you should be aware of:



From the Pen of Ellen White

What love is . . .

- "True love is a high and holy principle" (*The Adventist Home*, 50).
- "Love . . . is wise and discriminating, and its devotion is real and abiding" (*The Adventist Home*, 51).
- "True affection will overlook many mistakes; love will not discern them" (*The Adventist Home*, 47).
- "Love is a plant of heavenly growth, and it must be fostered and nourished" (*The Adventist Home*, 50).
- "Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus" (*The Adventist Home*, 50).
- "Love . . . is revealed in words and acts" (*The Adventist Home*, 51).
- "True love . . . is calm and deep in its nature. It looks beyond mere externals, and is attracted by qualities alone" (*The Adventist Home*, 51).
- "Love cannot be commanded. . . . Only by love is love awakened" (*The Desire of Ages*, 22).

What love is not . . .

- "Love . . . is not unreasonable; it is not blind" (*The Adventist Home*, 50).
- "That love which has no better foundation than mere sensual gratification will be headstrong, blind, and uncontrollable" (*The Adventist Home*, 51).
- "True love is not a strong, fiery, impetuous passion" (*The Adventist Home*, 51).

What love can do . . .

- "Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another" (*The Adventist Home*, 15).
- "Every home should be a place of love, a place where the angels of God abide, working with softening, subduing influence upon the hearts of parents and children" (*The Adventist Home*, 18, 19).

1. It's easy to fall in love. Most of you have already fallen in love at least a half dozen times. You are now entering a more critical period of life. The chances are high that you will marry someone you date and fall in love with during the next five to ten years!

2. You can fall madly in love with the wrong person. Feelings of love result from gazing at the other person, spending time together, and touching. You may feel the passion, but the question is, How compatible are you? Make sure your romance is a rational one. Use some common sense. Just because you have fleeting moments of intense

passion, don't stay in a relationship in which you are demeaned or made to feel miserable.

3. You can fall in love with almost anyone. "No way," you say. "I could never love him or her!" Just start helping him out, counsel her, be nice because you feel sorry for him, and tell her your secrets, and guess what? The more time you spend together, the more intimate the talk, the more feelings are aroused! And before you know it, . . .

4. Being in love is not reason enough to marry. Feeling passion for another or having a romantic love

affair is not a guarantee that intimacy and commitment (the other two dimensions of love that are necessary for a satisfying marriage) will follow. Don't make a long-term commitment to a short-term interest!

Anchor Text

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Bible Search

1. God desires an intimate relationship

What Bible evidence is there that God desires an intimate relationship with His human children? Look up the following Bible passages and record the message of each. Then write a paragraph summarizing your findings.

- A. Genesis 3:8-11.
- B. Genesis 4:9-15.
- C. Genesis 5:22-24.
- D. Genesis 6:13; 7:1; 8:1.
- E. Genesis 12:1-3.
- F. Matthew 1:23.
- G. John 14:1-3.
- H. John 14:16-18.
- I. Acts 9:1-7.
- J. Revelation 3:20.

2. What is love?

Find examples in Scripture of each of the three types of love:

- Committed love.
- Intimate love.
- Passionate love.

Is it love or infatuation? (Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Love is

Patient
Kind
Rejoicing with the truth
Protective
Trusting
Hopeful
Persevering

Infatuation is

Envious
Boastful
Proud
Rude
Self-seeking
Easily angered
Keeping record of wrongs
Delighting in evil

This kind of love never fails.

And the result is that infatuation doesn't last!

Scan the stories found in the following references. Identify the type of love illustrated in each and explain how the example demonstrates it.

- A. Judges 14 and 16.
- B. Ruth (Scan the entire book, especially chapters 3 and 4.)
- C. Song of Solomon (Scan the entire book.)
- D. John 15.

Endnotes

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York, N.Y.: Harper, 1956).
2. Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick. *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 60.
3. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 21 July 1904 or Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1091.

Reaction

Discussion Questions

1. On family

- A. If God created family because it was good for humans, why is it that so many families are dysfunctional and do damage to each other?
- B. What must families do in order for each member to experience love, security, and a sense of belonging?
- C. God established the first family as a husband and wife. Could that family have reached God's ideal for them if they didn't have children? In what ways do children add to a couple's satisfaction? In what ways might they decrease satisfaction?

2. On love

- A. What is love?
- B. Of the three dimensions of love (commitment, intimacy, passion), which is the most important for a healthy, satis-

fyng marriage? Why? Would this differ depending on the stage of family? Explain.

Would this differ between men and women? Why?

- C. When someone says, "I love you," what does it mean? For example, what would it mean if one of the following said, "I love you"?
 - Boyfriend or girlfriend.
 - Mom or dad.
 - Steady date.
 - Fiancé(e).
 - Married couple.
 - Grandparents or great-grandparents.
- D. How can one know whether a couple is in love or merely infatuated?
- E. For an honest and open relationship, is it important that the person saying "I love you" explain exactly what is meant when the words are said, or is it better for relationships to just progress on guesswork?
- F. At times the verbal message

"I love you" may conflict with the behavior message.

- How can you tell if one of your friends loves you with commitment?
 - How can you tell if one of your friends loves you with intimacy?
 - How can you tell if one of your friends loves you with passion?
- G. After reading the narrative about love, including the quotations, what would your definition of *love* be? What do you feel are love's essential qualities?
 - H. Why do you think that in cultures with arranged marriages, divorce rates tend to be almost nonexistent?

Personal Response

1. God wants to have an intimate relationship with you. In Revelation 3:20 God is pictured standing knocking at the door of your heart. Picture Him calling to you, "I love you and want to come into your life. Please open the door." How would you respond?

- Would you talk to Him through the closed door? If so, what would you say?
- Would you open the door a crack, leaving the safety chain on? Why do you feel the need of a safety chain? What would you say? What would make you feel like opening the door all the way?
- Would you throw open the door? What would you do next? What would you say?

2. A. List what you like best about your family.
- B. If you had the power to change something in your family, what would it be?
- C. Write down your description of the "ideal" family that you would like to establish.

Practical Application

1. Creation of the family

After reading the narrative of God's creation of Adam and Eve, write a paragraph to God, expressing how it makes you feel knowing how God created you.

2. The hazards of love

There are four hazards in the complexities and realities of love:

- A. It's easy to fall in love.
- B. You can fall madly in love with the wrong person.
- C. You can fall in love with almost anyone.
- D. Being in love is not reason enough to marry.

Write a response to each of these hazards. Questions to consider concerning each of them:

- Is the statement true or false?
- What examples can you give to support your opinion?
- If you assume there is truth to the statement, make a list of what you can do to avoid the hazards.

3. Amplifying the meaning of love

"The Lord desires me to call the attention of His people to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Read this chapter every day, and from it obtain comfort and strength. Learn from it the value that God places on sanctified, heaven-born love, and let the lesson that it teaches come home to your hearts. Learn that Christlike love is of heavenly birth, and that without it all other qualifications are worthless."³

First Corinthians 13:4-8 is an excellent definition of *love*. List each defining word or phrase in these verses (there are sixteen in all). Give an example from everyday life that is an application of the meaning of each of the words or phrases.