

TOP 10 WAYS TO LOVE YOUR SPOUSE



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HANS MOLEGRAAF

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INTRO

I'll never forget that day back in 1996.

I had been out of town for about a week and I couldn't wait to be home to see my wife and 2 year old daughter.

My excitement quickly turned to confusion as I pulled into the driveway to her standing outside and holding hands with our innocent, red haired, pig tailed, daughter by her side. Next to them were two suitcases.

I got out of the car and asked what was going on.

She was noticeably distant and silent for a few moments, then she looked up and said with a cold determination, "Hans, I'm leaving".

"What?!"

"I said, I'm leaving."

"Why?"

"Are you kidding me? *Why?*"

I was in disbelief. I felt like I was hit by a truck. I didn't even argue with her I was so shocked. She had begged me to go to marriage counseling for some of our problems for months, but I minimized her concerns and I thought I could rely on my own wisdom and strength to make things better.

It was the start of our six month separation where I fought for our marriage. Alone.

Our separation led me to start counseling where I started to understand God's blueprint for marriage. As I applied this newfound wisdom to my relationship, my marriage slowly but surely started to turn around.

One of the many, and most significant, pieces of wisdom I received during that season of counseling was the list I'm going to share with you: The Top 10 Ways to Love Your Spouse.

This list was the most life-changing list I had ever encountered.

I want to suggest it can be for you as well.

The Key To Applying This List With Wisdom

This list is generic. Your spouse isn't.

I'll give you examples of ways you can put these Top 10 Ways to Love into practice in your marriage. **But the real key to living this out with wisdom is to know your spouse inside and out.**

I tell each of my counseling clients in the first session that I can only help them as well as I know them. For me to love them in a way that leads to change, I need to know all the intricacies of who they are as individuals.

That's why I spend the entire first counseling session hearing each person's story. I will be limited in my ability to help and love them to the degree I am ignorant of who they are as individuals.

The same is true in your marriage. **You will only be able to love your spouse as well as you know them.**

Loving your spouse is an art project, not a science project. Yes, there are principles of love that should lead you in your efforts to love your spouse. **But the application of those principles might vary depending on the unique DNA of your relationship.**

Another way to say this? Love looks different depending on the person you're attempting to love and the circumstances surrounding the opportunity to love.

Consider that Jesus was, and is, the perfect lover of people. But have you ever wondered why His love looked different to different people in different situations?

He pursued a meal with Zacchaeus. He confronted the woman at the well. He overlooked the brutality of the soldiers leading Him to the cross. He waited to raise Lazarus from the dead. He turned over the tables in the temple.

Was Jesus loving perfectly in each of these situations?

Absolutely.

Consider what Ephesians 4:29 has to say about what it looks like to love others in the context of meeting needs:

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as *is good for edification according to the need of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (NASB, emphasis mine).

That’s the goal of loving our spouse: *meeting the need of the moment*. The wisdom of love, and I believe the art of marriage, is being able to identify and meet the need of the moment.

Sometimes meeting the need of the moment will look like listening. Sometimes it will look like appreciation or praise. Sometimes it will look like overlooking an offense. Sometimes it will look like instructing or gently confronting. It depends on the situation, the person, and the particular need of the moment.

There’s no one-size-fits-all solution for what it looks like to love your spouse. Principles can and should guide you, but applying the principles of love with wisdom have to consider the person you’re trying to love. Discernment is required to hit the mark in your relationship.

Although there’s no way I could direct you completely in this area on paper, I’ll offer a few suggestions and I’ll also offer an exercise, too, for deeper insight.

As you read through this list and corresponding ideas below, circle or underline the ones you think will hit the target of love for your spouse.

ATTENTION

Attention: conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care; taking thought of another; entering another's world.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

An epidemic of busyness is destroying our relationships.

We live in a fast-paced, always-connected, performance-driven, keep-up-with-the-Joneses-and-their-kids world. Between youth group, church, sports practices, piano recitals, homework, exercise, friends—our weeks are full. But are they leaving us more connected? More full within us?

Several years ago I entered all of my daily activities in a spreadsheet and listed them out in order of priority. Then, I listed daily hours to accomplish those activities. The result? I needed 37.5 hours per day! Before this exercise, I genuinely believed I could accomplish all of those daily activities in 24 hours.

Almost every couple that comes into my office for counseling is “too busy” to spend quality time together regularly. I'm not exaggerating...almost *every couple*. Why? They're likely trying to fit 37.5 hours worth of daily activity in to 24. And the marriage almost always gets the leftovers. Sometimes, the marriage is totally neglected resulting in 1 or both partners feeling alone and isolated.

What used to be a thrilling, engaging, romantic, intimate marriage has turned into roommates pursuing separate interests, tag-teaming to decide who'll pick up the kids from basketball.

Busyness will nibble away at your marriage unless you purposefully and intentionally resist it.

Take it from a counselor: Part of why counseling works has nothing to do with the counselor! Marriage counseling *works* when a husband and wife spend an undistracted hour a week actually talking about their marriage. Surprising things happen in a relationship when a husband and wife talk to each other!

Time together is the foundation of attention. But entering your spouse's world builds the walls, roof, rooms, and fine finishes of attention. Entering your spouse's world turns time together into *quality time* together. And patterns of quality time build a happy and healthy marriage.

The hard thing about entering your spouse's world is it requires you to leave your own. And that requires sacrifice.

One last reason attention is of the utmost importance? It really is the "Entry Gate" for you to love your spouse in the other nine ways. **It will be impossible for you to love your spouse without extending them attention and spending time with them.**

Time in and of itself won't build a great marriage. But time is required to build a great marriage.

Key Ingredients of Attention

- Busyness will nibble away at your marriage unless you purposefully and intentionally resist it.
- Spending time together takes intentionality, prioritizing your marriage. It takes planning, commitment, sacrifice, and potentially saying no to cultural norms. Marriage is the second biggest rock (second only to our relationship with God), which we should prioritize daily.
- Time in and of itself doesn't build a great marriage. But time together is required to build a great marriage. Those in fulfilling marriages spend regular time together.
- Attention requires entering your spouse's world...which requires leaving your own.

Examples of Attention

- Send a text to your spouse in the middle of the day to let them know you're thinking about them or can't wait to get home.
- Call your spouse at some point during the day to check in on their world.
- Set aside 10-15 minutes at the end of your day to talk about the happenings of your day.
- Schedule a recurring weekly date night.
- Schedule a recurring marriage "[staff meeting](#)." to talk about the business of your marriage.
- Come home from work early or even take an entire day off to spend time together.
- Go to your spouse's workplace or come home for an impromptu lunch together.
- Go to bed at the same time.
- Plan a "responsibility retreat" where you and your wife spend a day away from your responsibilities. While you're there:
 - List out all of your daily and weekly tasks.
 - Determine daily hours required to accomplish those tasks.
 - Prioritize and calendar the tasks only you can do.
 - Delegate what still needs to get done, and eliminate the rest.
 - You only have 24 hours in a day. Plan accordingly!

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance: Receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other's behavior has been imperfect. Being willing to continue loving another despite offenses or differences.

I was a jerk and I deserved rejection.

Several years ago, a close friend of Star and I stayed with us for the weekend. I really liked this person and had a lot of respect for them in a lot of areas. But they'd recently made a life-altering decision I was having a really hard time keeping my mouth shut about.

The beginning of the weekend went smoothly. Conversation was casual and when the controversial subject came up I refrained from speaking or subtly withdrew from the conversation.

But after stuffing some thoughts and emotions for 48 hours, the final day of conversation proved too difficult for me. My speech came out rude, pointed, judgmental, and inappropriate. My words significantly offended our friend. Our friend went outside to compose themselves and prevent any additional hurtful words from embedding in their mind and heart.

Star and I sat in our living room silent. I was ashamed and embarrassed. I thought Star was going to lose it on me. After sitting in silence, digesting what just happened, she went outside to check on our friend. After five minutes or so, Star came back in, alone. She sat next to me on the couch.

I braced myself.

She moved closer to me and hugged me. Close to my ear, she whispered, "I love you." She continued, "I hate what you said to our friend. And your words were incredibly wrong and hurtful. But I love you."

I lost it. Tears found their way to my cheeks. I was bracing myself for wrath, but Star offered grace: grace I didn't deserve but desperately needed.

Before that undeserved kindness, I was ashamed and filled with guilt—guilt which wasn't from God; it was all about me. I cared more about how my sinful heart was exposed to Star and my friend than how my sinful heart and words caused deep hurt in my friend and embarrassment for my wife. But after I received Star's acceptance and grace, I was moved to genuinely confess and apologize to our friend from a place of true humility and understanding of how I'd hurt them.

Star's kindness and acceptance motivated my repentance.

She accepted me as a person despite my behavior—and it led to genuine repentance and a significant step in my journey of change.

...God's kindness leads you to repentance
Romans 2:4

Acceptance sometimes comes easier in the early years of our relationship.

In those glowing years, all we often see are each other's good qualities. But as we spend more time with each other, we naturally, and sinfully, become more in tune with each other's faults and differences. Our "relational rose-colored glasses" fall off—and this is where true acceptance is put to the test.

The heart of acceptance is receiving your spouse the same despite their behavior, offenses, and differences.

Acceptance is a decision based on commitment, not a conditional behavior tied to feelings or your spouse's performance.

As with each of these ten ways to love, Christ offers the model for what it looks like to accept your spouse.

How does Christ accept you? Unconditionally.

When did Christ accept you? Two thousand years ago. Why is this significant? Christ accepted you with complete foreknowledge of how you'd behave and think in unacceptable ways. He made a decision to accept you perfectly with your most unacceptable acts (i.e. sin) in mind.

This is crazy love!

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.
Romans 15:7

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

I don't know about you, but I didn't have that model of acceptance in mind when I recited my vows to Star! But Christ set the appropriate bar for what our acceptance of each other should look like.

Key Ingredients of Acceptance

- The foundation of accepting your spouse is recognizing your spouse as God's perfectly designed gift to you.
- Acceptance can grow in difficulty as you see and understand your spouse's imperfections more clearly.
- Acceptance focuses on your spouse's identity more than their behavior.
- Accepting your spouse doesn't look like accepting sinful or abusive behavior.
- Acceptance isn't silent. Acceptance is action-oriented. Acceptance says, does, expresses, gives, and replays in your marriage, in action, what Jesus did for both of you.

Examples of Acceptance

- Don't try to change your spouse to be more like you. Instead, bring out the image of God in them.
- Acknowledge, accept, appreciate, and adapt to your spouse's differences.

- Show interest in your spouse's hobbies—especially if you don't naturally have any interest! Ask questions, engage in conversation, express opinions.
- Show patience and grace with deep-seated patterns of your spouse's life that need to change.
- When you need to confront your spouse, speak with kindness (see [Ephesians 4:15](#)).
- In controversial conversations, look for ways to agree before you disagree.
- Look for ways to reconcile and extend forgiveness as opposed to holding grudges and allowing a root of bitterness to develop.

AFFECTION

Affection: Expressing care and closeness through physical touch and without needing to say I love you.

Remember the days when you couldn't keep your hands off your spouse? It's so natural in the honeymoon stage. But it seems the hand holding, back rubs, and impromptu lovemaking for many couples takes a back seat to our to-do list after just a few short years.

Did you know that when you affectionately touch your spouse, their body releases the hormone oxytocin, encouraging more emotional and physical connection? It's behind the feeling of extreme closeness leading up to, during, and after a couple has sex. Touch breeds more touch, more emotional connection.

Although sex is the *result* of a healthy emotional connection, it can also lead to experiencing *more* emotional connection. **Emotional connection leads to physical connection, and physical affection leads to even more emotional connection.**

But don't put the cart before the horse. **If you are experiencing an unhealthy emotional relationship, the solution isn't sex.** Sex doesn't fix an emotionally broken relationship. Sex can lead to a temporary feeling of emotional connection, but solid relationships aren't sustained on a foundation of sex.

Healthy relationships are built on a foundation of a spiritual connection, then an emotional connection, and finally a physical connection. When a relationship is built and sustained in this order, all components of connection catalyze each other, and a marriage relationship fires on all cylinders.

I should also mention that affection doesn't *only* include sex. In healthy marriage relationships affection definitely *includes* sex, but is much more than sex. My wife frequently tells me she needs NSA. It's her code word for "Non-Sexual Affection." Or as she likes to joke, "No Sex Allowed."

NSA is just as important as sexual affection. Hand-holding, sitting close on the couch, impromptu hugs, foot rubs... They're all important expressions of physical touch.

Typically one spouse is more "affectionately inclined" than the other, physically speaking. This is normal. The cliché "opposites attract" oftentimes proves true in marriage. If you are more affectionate than your spouse, adjust your expectations and advances in a way that sacrificially serves them. If you are less affectionately inclined than your spouse, do the same.

When two people have this sacrificial attitude towards sexual expectations and consider each other's needs more than their own, good things typically happen. Remember, **real fulfillment and satisfaction in marriage come from giving, not getting.**

I often hear, "How many times should we have sex in a week?" That depends on your unique relationship. The answer should flex in response to you and your spouse's intimate knowledge of each other and a willingness to sacrificially serve each other.

Sex should never be forced, and should occasionally be refused (in healthy relationships). **Your request and response for sex should first take your spouse's needs into account, and then your own.**

Having said that, I know healthy couples who have sex every day. I also know healthy couples who have sex only a couple of times a month.

As I talk to couples about sex, I'm generally looking to see if they are having sex about once per week. If that's happening, I don't have any huge concerns. If they are having less than that, I ask more questions. More than that, I also ask more questions.

There's not a magic number of times a couple should be having sex per week. The "magic number" is couple and season-specific.

Key Ingredients of Affection

- Regardless if you are naturally affectionate or not, daily affection and regular sexual affection is a key ingredient of a healthy marriage.
- Emotional affection leads to physical affection, and physical affection leads to even more emotional connection.
- Repeated physical rejection leads to emotional disconnection.
- Healthy marriages are built on a spiritual foundation, not a sexual foundation.

Examples of Affection

- Hold hands in the car, while walking, while praying, or while expressing a sincere expression of love, appreciation, acceptance, or comfort.
- Constantly look for ways to put your hands on your spouse in non-sexual ways; place your hand on a shoulder, the small of their back, their hair.
- Kiss your spouse before leaving and when arriving home every time. Let some of those kisses linger and be more than just a routine "peck."
- In social settings, look for appropriate, subtle ways to touch your spouse that communicates a sexual desire.
- Initiate sex more or less depending on the desire of your spouse.
- Be willing to talk about likes, dislikes, preferences in the bedroom.
- Talk together and agree on clear boundaries with the opposite sex.

- Reject any consumption of pornography individually or together.

APPRECIATION

*Appreciation: expressing gratefulness through thanks or praise.
Recognizing effort or accomplishment.*

. . . and be thankful . . .
Colossians 3:15b

I want you to try something. But you have to follow the rules. Don't read ahead on this one (that's cheating!).

Look around the room you're in right now and make a mental note of everything green. Seriously; there's a quiz coming.

Got your list?

Ok, here's the important part. Read the next paragraph—it's just one sentence—and immediately close your eyes, doing what it says. You're going to be tempted to pause and look around again, but please don't do it. It will ruin everything!

Without looking around, immediately close your eyes and try and recall everything around you that is red.

How'd you do? I bet it was pretty difficult. I pre-conditioned you to focus on the things around you that are green, so of course it was difficult to recall the red things.

You just experienced the power of focus. And focus is (mostly) a choice.

Just as I pre-conditioned you to focus on everything green, **you are pre-conditioned to focus on everything that is wrong with your spouse.**

You typically don't start that way (that's just the nature of dating), but the longer you live with someone, and the longer you get to know someone, you will be more aware of their faults.

Part of the reason is just simple logic. But a deeper reason is your sinful nature. The drift of your gaze will be to focus on your spouse's faults. **The key to appreciation is to resist that drift and focus on your spouse's gifts and strengths.**

If you don't purposely focus on your spouse's strengths, you will appreciate them when their behavior is good, and criticize them in your heart (and possibly with words and actions) when their behavior is bad. **If you focus on your spouse's faults your marriage will, at some level, fail.** If you focus on your spouse's strengths, your marriage begins to succeed.

I know that's a big statement, but think about it. How long would you be able to happily exist with someone who constantly criticized you? Not very long. Your spouse needs your appreciation. Your *marriage* needs your appreciation.

My wife and I could easily fill a legal pad with criticisms of each other. We are both messed-up people with a lot of faults. But because of God working in us, there is a lot of good as well. If we chose to, we could also fill up a legal pad with each other's strengths and positive accomplishments. The key to appreciation is not to focus on the longer (i.e. more "deserving") list, but to focus on the right list: strengths and positive character.

Ask God to help you resist the drift of your gaze and focus on your spouse's strengths...especially when their behavior is less than perfect.

As God helps you see and be reminded of the good, **tell your spouse.** Right away. Send a text, write a note, leave a voicemail, or tell them face to face. Purpose to catch your spouse doing something right every day and praise them for it—as opposed to catching them doing something wrong.

Resist the temptation to go on a sin-hunt, and purpose to go on a praise hunt. Your marriage depends on it.

Key ingredients of Appreciation

- The natural drift of our gaze is to focus on our spouse's weaknesses and faults.
- The longer we are with someone, the more intimately we know them, and the more aware we become of their faults.
- Unless we purpose to focus on our spouse's strengths, we will increasingly focus on their weaknesses and faults.
- We need God's help to resist the drift of our focus.
- Don't focus on the longer, more "deserving" list of good or bad behavior. Focus on the right one: the good.

Examples of Appreciation

- Praise your spouse's character that led to the achievement, not just the achievement.
- Praise your spouse daily.
- Praise publicly—as appropriate based on spouse's personality.
- Give specific examples of your spouse's praiseworthy character.
- Don't wait for big moments to praise your spouse. Praise in the small moments.
- Purpose to praise the inside of your spouse twice as much as the outside. If you focus on praising appearance, it could lead to insecurity in your spouse as their body and looks naturally deteriorate with age. Looks fade. Character doesn't.

COMFORT

Comfort: Responding to a hurting person with words, feelings, and touch; to hurt with and for another's grief or pain; to provide consolation with tenderness.

One of the most significant lessons I've learned (and am still learning) is the art of how to respond when my wife is hurting.

Star's hurt might be the result of something I did or said or the result of someone else's words or actions. Regardless of the source, I have a responsibility to respond to the hurt.

And notice I said "art," because responding to your spouse's hurt is truly an art. There isn't a formula. I wish there was! If there was, I'd be rich. I promise.

When your spouse is hurting, the goal is comfort or empathy. The Bible defines it this way:

. . . and mourn with those who mourn . . .
Romans 12:15b

This doesn't necessarily mean crying with your spouse (although it might), but it does look like letting your spouse know you *see* their pain, *understand* their pain, and are willing to *do something* about their pain (when necessary; sometimes your spouse won't be ready for you to "fix").

Seeing their pain looks like understanding the circumstances and emotions around what happened to them. Ask them what happened and get all the details they're willing to share. This requires active listening. Make eye contact, turning your body towards them.

Don't think about what you're going to say next, but seek to understand. Seek before you speak! Be careful of making assumptions. Ask *lots* of thoughtful questions (proportionate to the magnitude of their pain). You'll only be able to comfort and show empathy to the degree you understand their perspective, through asking questions and active listening.

Pro tip: Your spouse might not know why they're hurting or upset. Sometimes it's obvious, but other times it's not. Don't let your inquisition turn into interrogation in the absence of information. **Resist the temptation to explain their bad day or what went wrong.** Your goal is not to teach or dissect. Although you'll be limited in your ability to express comfort and empathy, gently seek to understand what happened the best you can and comfort them with the information you have. More than the facts, your spouse's experience is your focus.

So after you understand the facts, seek to understand the emotion. You know they're hurting, but try and understand best as possible how they are feeling. Get them to name emotions they're feeling.

Don't get clinical or make them feel like they're in a counseling session, but listen for specific words they use to describe their emotions and reflect them back to your spouse: "I'm sorry you're feeling angry / hurt / betrayed / insecure." If they don't share how they're feeling, ask before assuming. If they don't share any emotion, or can't name the emotion, put yourself in their shoes and state how you would feel if the same thing happened to you, "I imagine you feel really frustrated / rejected / grieving / alienated."

Active listening lays a foundation for communicating your understanding, but **speaking your spouse's emotions back to them will ensure they really know you understand.** That process of listening and restating the emotion back to them is comforting and empathetic in and of itself.

Comfort looks like seeing the pain, understanding the pain, and lastly, doing something about the pain. Before I talk about what it looks like to comfort, I'd like to share what not do. Comfort doesn't come naturally for some people (especially a lot of guys). Many times our intuition, although well-meaning, doesn't hit the mark of comfort and sometimes does more harm than good. Proverbs 12:15 reminds me, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"—including little "deaths" in a marriage, like the death of safety or understanding.

Please don't respond to your spouse's pain with:

1. **Facts, logic, or reason**, explaining why they're struggling or seeking to correct their understanding. There's a time for that, but it's probably not in the midst of your spouse's hurt.
2. **Criticism**: "What's wrong with you now?"
3. **Comparison/minimizing**: "You think your day was bad? Listen to mine."
4. **Pep Talks/encouragement**. Western Christians are prone to this avoidance of negative emotions like fear, anger, or grief. We say, "Could be worse." "Tomorrow will be better."
5. **Spiritualizing**. "Well, you know that God is working this out for your good!" (Romans 8:28)—ignoring that Jesus, too, wept at Lazarus' tomb. Or we respond with a trite, plug-and-play answer, minimizing God-given emotion: "Well, it's God's will."
6. **Neglect**. "What's for dinner?" Or, worse yet, we're silent. *The absence of emotion doesn't communicate neutrality, logic, or intelligence*. It communicates indifference and un-involvement. Your indifference can be just as painful as rage, rejection, or betrayal.

Key Ingredients of Comfort

- Giving comfort requires *seeing* your spouse's pain, *understanding* your spouse's pain, and *doing* something about their pain.

- You can only comfort your spouse's pain as well as you understand their pain. Understand through asking questions and active listening.
- *Doing something* about your spouse's pain doesn't equal *alleviating* their pain.
- Comfort doesn't require you to agree with your spouse's emotions.

Examples of Comfort

- "I feel sad / hurt for you."
- "I hate it when you're hurting."
- "I deeply care about and love you."
- "I am committed to walking through this with you."
- Finally, don't underestimate the impact of a simple hug. Don't let go until they do.

Remember, showing empathy / comfort to your spouse is truly an art form. There are principles to consider, but you need to apply them with an intimate knowledge of your spouse. **Empathy can look different depending on the person, relationship, and specific circumstances.** Start with the above principles, but have a conversation with your spouse about what empathy looks like for your marriage.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement: urging another to persist and persevere toward a goal; stimulating toward love and good deeds.

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another.
1 Thessalonians 5:11

Allow me a moment, here, would you?

My wife thinks I'm the best husband on the planet. And she tells me often. She tells the world through Facebook, in conversations with our friends, and when we speak at conferences. I love the way she encourages me.

Now let me be clear. I know I'm not the best, most handsome, most talented, most spiritual husband in the world. But my wife makes me feel that way when she speaks to me and about me. **Her words of encouragement give me confidence, hope, and motivation to pursue goals and dreams I'd never be able to accomplish on my own.**

I am who I am and have accomplished what I've accomplished first and foremost because of God's grace and strength in my life. But God has used my wife more than any other person to encourage me to try things I didn't think I was capable of and accomplish things I didn't think I had the strength to complete.

My wife's words have deeply impacted me.

Your words to your spouse matter. **Your words can empower them or deflate them in an instant.**

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
Proverbs 18:21

In a world where most of us negatively compare ourselves to others in so many ways and are discouraged by the people around us, our marriages need to be places where words of encouragement help fuel us towards everything God wants us to be (see [Hebrews 10:24-25](#)).

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, “If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.” Encourage your spouse for their potential, not just their current reality.

Isn't this true of how God speaks words of encouragement to us? God calls us *saints*. He calls us *holy*. He calls us *blameless*. On one hand, all of these things are entirely and already true of us as believers. But, in another sense, these things are becoming more true of us as we become more like Christ. In a sense, **He is encouraging us for what we will one day become.**

When I focus on what I'm not, I become discouraged, unmotivated, and stuck. However, when I focus on what I am and what I can become I am empowered and motivated to change. I'm thankful God speaks life into my identity when I am having trouble believing what is true about me.

You have much more influence over your spouse than you think. **Speak to your spouse like God speaks to them and you'll set them up to become more than what they ever could be on their own.**

Key Ingredients of Encouragement

- Choose your focus. Your spouse has faults and will experience failures. Your bent will be to focus on their failures and faults and to ignore the ways they are growing. Choose to focus on their strengths and encourage them to persevere in their weaknesses.
- Encourage *who they are* in addition to what they do. Encouraging your spouse's behavior is “elementary encouragement,” but “graduate-level encouragement” speaks to who your spouse is as a person—their identity as God says they are.

- Encourage your spouse for their potential, not just their current reality.
- Don't ever compare. One of the most damaging things a spouse can hear is, "I wish you could be more like..." Your words might not come out as direct as this, but let there not even be a hint of comparing your spouse to another in a negative way.
- Never stop encouraging. Sincere and honest encouragement *never* gets old.

Examples of Encouragement

- "I'm so glad you're my husband/wife."
- Write a short encouraging note and leave it where they can find it.
- Send a text during the day encouraging them in their role at work or home.
- "I respect you."
- "You did a great job."
- "I'm so proud of you."
- Pray for them on the spot. This might be the most simple, yet powerful, way to encourage your spouse on daily basis. When I share my discouragement with Star and she immediately prays for me in response, it breathes life to my weary soul. It reorients me away from discouraging circumstances motivates me to persevere when I feel like quitting.

INSTRUCTION

Instruction: Humbly modeling, equipping, and training in how to live—or a gentle or friendly reproof.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

When God created man and woman in the garden of Eden, He offered instruction. Why is this significant? Consider the timing and the location of God speaking. Adam and Eve were living in a perfect environment, had a perfect relationship with God, and existed before sin entered the equation. Adam and Eve had *everything* going for them, yet they still needed God's instruction for living (Genesis 1:28-30, 2:16-17).

If Adam and Eve needed God's instruction in the Garden of Eden, how much more do we need instruction from God (and others) on this side of the Garden? We live in a far-from-perfect environment, have a far-from-perfect relationship with God, and sin distorts all of our thoughts, motives, actions, and beliefs. We need instruction now more than ever!

But how does instruction make the Top Ten Ways To Love Your Spouse?

Let's face it, sometimes your spouse doesn't have a clue what it looks like to love you! They need help understanding you, your past, your personality, preferences, perspectives, and your personal problems and struggles so they can love you completely. **Your spouse can only love you to the degree they know you, and they will be limited in their ability to know you to the degree you withhold loving instruction from them.**

So one of the most loving things you can do is to gently instruct your spouse how to love you better. When you lovingly instruct your spouse in this direction, you are helping them fulfill their most significant calling.

But be careful. Instruction is a part of what it looks like to love your spouse, but it isn't the primary way you should love your spouse. **Instruction minus appreciation, acceptance, appreciation, comfort, respect, and security aren't healthy and definitely won't create an atmosphere of love.**

Instruction is a sub-culture of acceptance. Do it consistently, and create a culture where your spouse feels the freedom to instruct you. As Patrick Lencioni has said, "Failing to confront people quickly about small issues is a guarantee that they will become big issues." Be willing to instruct, but **don't be eager to instruct. And only do so in an environment of acceptance.**

Finally, if you do end up deciding to instruct, make sure you do it with gentleness; undeserved, Gospel-loving kindness (grace); and acceptance.

Key Ingredients of Instruction

- We all need to be on both sides of instruction: giving and receiving.
- Your spouse needs your instruction to understand what it looks like to love you.
- Be willing to instruct, not eager to instruct.
- Be specific in your instruction, not general.
- Instruction is most effective in the safety of an environment of acceptance.
- Acceptance should be greater than instruction, not the other way around.
- Sandwich your instruction between statements of acceptance, appreciation, or encouragement.

Examples of Instruction

- "I love you. Can I talk to you about something? Last night, I felt _____ when you _____. It would mean a lot to me if you would _____ next time. I love our life together and this would make it even better."
- "You're a great dad. But last night wasn't okay. I know you have a lot going on at work that is causing some stress, but I think you need to apologize to him. Would you? Is there anything that I can do in those moments to help you?"
- "I love our time together as a family at night, and I know it's a priority for you, too. Lately, I feel like our dinner time has gotten later and later and it's impacting our time together after dinner. Is there something I can do to help make this better?"

RESPECT

Respect: valuing and regarding another highly; treating another as important; honoring another; conveying great worth.

Honor one another above yourselves.
Romans 12:10b

What does respect look like?

Appreciation. Awe. Admiration. Consideration. Deference. Dignity. Esteem. Honor. Recognition. Regard. Reverence. Tribute.

Who doesn't want that?!

In theory, expressing these things to someone is easy. Practically, it's much more difficult. Especially when your spouse's behavior isn't always respectable. But expressing respect is possible even when your spouse's behavior is less than ideal. The key to expressing genuine respect is to focus on your spouse's identity in addition to their activity.

Respecting your spouse starts in the bottom half of the triangle (see below) by acknowledging and expressing respect for their identity as your spouse and as one of God's children. **Only after respecting their identity should you move to the top of the triangle and express respect for their activity (desires and behavior).**



Notice there is proportionately much more opportunity to respect your spouse's identity than for their activity. Respecting your spouse's identity should serve as a foundation for respecting their activity.

The reason most people struggle with respecting a spouse is that their triangle is upside down. They are primarily looking for respectable activity (desires and behavior). If respectable activity is present, they will respect their identity as God's creation and gift.

This does more harm than good and creates a very unstable and insecure relational environment (think of trying to balance a triangle on its tip). **Respect based only on praiseworthy actions creates a "performance = worth" mentality.** It will lead your spouse to believe they are only as good as they perform. This is a recipe for your spouse to burn out, trying like crazy to always measure up.

Or maybe they'll just give up and stop trying.

Respecting Your Spouse's Identity

Regardless of what your spouse's behavior looks like, they are one of the most treasured parts of all creation (as are you). God created your spouse in His image. He

- fearfully and wonderfully created their inmost being (Genesis 1:27).
- knit them together in their mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-14).
- knows the number of hairs on their head (Luke 12:7).
- planned out all of their days before one of them came to be (Psalm 139;16).

Your spouse has infinite worth! God values their life so much that he sent his Son to die for them. God respects them because of their identity.

If God does, can you?

Gary Thomas talks often about seeing God as his Heavenly Father-in-law. He never wants to forget that he's married to God's daughter.

Think about that for a second. You are married to one of God's kids! How might realizing that dynamic of your spouse's identity change how you see and treat them?

Not only is your spouse God's possession to care for, but they are also God's perfectly designed gift chosen specifically for you. God created, crafted, and chose your spouse specifically for you. When you said "I do," God took two people and made one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Your spouse is an extension of you, a part of you, an inseparable piece of you, and spiritually speaking, a part of your own body (see [Ephesians 5:29](#)). In the same way, you wouldn't disrespect your own body, it doesn't make any sense to disregard and disrespect your spouse.

The beauty of showing respect for your spouse's identity is that it isn't contingent on their behavior. That means every person reading this can take a step in this direction.

When you respect your spouse's identity, it will end up positively affecting their activity. There's something that happens to a person's confidence, strength, and abilities when they know someone believes in them and has respect for them as a person.

Your words have a unique ability to influence your spouse's behavior. Let me say this a different way: You have a special *power* over your spouse! Picture your spouse as a ship in the harbor ready to set sail. You can be the wind in their sails or the storm that takes them down. You can respect the respectable in them!

Your goal is to treat your spouse in a way that acknowledges them as the most significant and valuable part of God's creation. Treat your spouse as if they are the most important person in the world. Why? Because to you, that's the title they hold.

Respecting Your Spouse's Activity

The most significant way you can respect your spouse involves speaking into who they are to God (His child) and who they are to you (a gift). But it doesn't stop there. As appropriate, respect also involves acknowledging their respect-worthy activity. Not just the outward behavior, but the inner desires of their heart.

I want to tell you a secret about most of your spouses: They deeply want to be respected and they are desperately trying to be worthy of respect. You might not always see it, and you might not always believe it, but your spouse likely desires to be the spouse you want them to be. As you sense your spouse's desires are in the right place, acknowledge and appreciate them!

Finally, it is important to respect your spouse's outward behavior. This is last on the list and represents the smallest opportunity for respect. But it's the icing on the cake—so don't leave it out!

But please remember the order. Respecting your spouse's behavior before their identity is completely opposite to how God relates to your spouse and what he says is true of them.

God assigned your spouse infinite worth completely separate from their behavior (see [Romans 5:6-10](#)).

By the way, God also did the same for you and continues to do the same for you even though your behavior is less than perfect. Now God is asking you to freely give away to your spouse what you have freely received from Him: respect.

Key Ingredients of Respect

- Express respect for your spouse's identity (who they are) before you respect their activity (what they do).
- Respecting your spouse's identity will eventually improve their activity.
- God is your spouse's Father-in-law. Express respect to your spouse with this in mind.

- God created, designed, and chose your spouse perfectly for you. Care for and express respect, acknowledging this reality.
- Look for ways to express respect for your spouse's desires and behavior.
- How you say something typically hurts more than what you say. Pay attention to the message and method of your words.
- Respecting your spouse is imitating God and glorifying to him.

Examples of Respect

- Express common courtesies: good morning, hello, please, thank you.
- Admit when you're wrong.
- Look for tangible ways to lighten their load: Fix lunch, wash dishes, bathe kids, prepare dinner, regularly ask how you can help.
- Enter their world: "How was your day?" "What's going on at work?"
- Remind them of their identity and God's love for them (send them scripture)
- Pray for and with your spouse.
- "Can I pray that God would give you strength to..."
- Make eye contact.
- "I love to see you trying so hard to..."
- Be their biggest cheerleader.
- Without exaggerating or making your spouse feel inadequate in the moment, tell your spouse what you see is possible for them in the future.

- Express admiration of their dreams and ambitions.
- Be okay with them getting it wrong sometimes.
- Express your belief in them.
- Praise your spouse's accomplishments.
- Praise their efforts even when they fail (character vs. achievement).
- Tell them you're proud of them.
- Let them know you want them sexually and relationally.
- Look at them with admiration and pride.
- Tell your spouse how it feels, in a good way, to be their husband/wife.

SECURITY

Security: harmony in relationships; freedom from fear or threat of harm. Safety, peace, protection, commitment, guarantee, sanctuary, bond, care, covenant, guard, promise, retreat.

Be of the same mind toward one another...If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Romans 12:16, 18

One of the most beautiful expressions of God's love for us is expressed in Deuteronomy 31:6: "...never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." There is a certain freedom, comfort, and peace that comes with having a relationship with someone who loves us like this.

The best marriages are developed in this same environment—security—rather than one of constant fear for what the future holds.

When I counsel pre-marital couples, I'm looking for two things more than anything else: a commitment to Christ, and a commitment to each other. **If I see both of these, I believe they can get through just about anything that life can bring and overcome almost any incompatibility that exists.** (By the way, we're all incompatible to a certain degree.)

Commitment trumps compatibility 100% of the time. Compatibility doesn't make a great marriage. Commitment does.

Two people committed to each other for a lifetime results in a secure marriage environment where a husband and wife can be honest, disagree, give themselves freely, be themselves, be goofy or weird, have an off day, and enter into conflict knowing there will be reconciliation.

The key to providing security to your spouse is believing there isn't an out—and regularly expressing your commitment to them. Commitment is the foundation of any great marriage.

Key Ingredients of Security

- Security believes marriage is a covenant between two people until death parts them.
- Security feels secure in one's own relationship with Christ and strives to extend that security to their spouse.
- Security regularly expresses commitment.
- Commitment to your spouse precedes a feeling of security.
- Security doesn't just happen at the altar. It is built and restated over a lifetime together.
- Security is best built in the everyday, small moments of life.

Examples of Security

- Don't withdraw from your spouse when offended or hurt.
- Tell your spouse you'll never leave them, no matter what.
- Don't make your spouse guess how you're feeling. Speak the truth in love.
- Never stop pursuing your spouse spiritually, emotionally, and physically.
- Keep your promises—big and small.
- Choose and hang out with friends who reinforce your commitment and values.
- Have a “no secrets” policy. Secrecy destroys intimacy.

- Talk with your spouse and agree on shared boundaries with members of the opposite sex.
- Reserve your innermost thoughts and feelings for your spouse.
- Men: Do what needs to be done to meet the financial needs of your family (income, budget, savings).
- Spend according to your budget and level of income.
- Men: Get term life insurance.
- Eliminate the word divorce as a threat.
- Spend individual time cultivating your relationship with God.
- Pray with and for your spouse.
- Pursue and submit to a personal mentor/marriage mentor to speak into your life and marriage.
- Let there not be a hint of sexual immorality (Ephesians 5:3) with your thoughts, eyes, or actions.
- Be a “safe place to land” for your spouse.

SUPPORT

Support: coming alongside and gently helping with a problem or struggle; providing appropriate assistance; helping carry a load.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2

Growing up my dad always used to say, "Many hands make light work."

He typically said that to motivate me to help him, or my siblings, get some type of house chore done. I didn't like the saying, and I didn't necessarily always like helping him, but I did it. And we always got the work done more quickly. I guess he was right. Now I find myself saying the same things to my kids.

The saying is true in a physical sense, but it also accomplishes something else I didn't realize or appreciate as a kid. **There is something significant to accomplishing something, whether it be a task or a project, as a team.** It bonds people. It connects them. It makes memories stick. It creates intimacy.

Accomplish a task alone and you have a completed task. **Accomplish a task with your spouse and you have a memory, a bond, a connection, *and* a completed task.**

This is especially true when someone initiates helping you when you don't ask. When someone sees you need help, cares about you enough to be motivated to help you, and then actually helps or supports you, it's meaningful.

That's the key to successfully supporting your spouse in marriage. You have to have eyes to *see* how your spouse needs help. You have to *care* enough about them to be motivated to do something. And you actually need to *do* something to help them out.

Support sees, then it cares, and finally, it does.

If I'm running around the house in the morning trying desperately to get to work on time and my wife sees me but says nothing, I might feel neglected.

If she takes it a step further and actually says something like, "Babe, I'm really sorry you're late"—but doesn't do anything to help, I might feel even more frustrated.

But, if she sees me, expresses empathy, and blends my protein shake so I can get out the door a few minutes sooner, I feel loved and cared for.

Key Ingredients of Support

- We weren't meant to do life alone.
- Joint accomplishment completes a task *and* creates a bond.
- God wants to use you to express *His* support of your spouse.
- Your spouse's needs are more important than your own (see [Philippians 2:3-4](#)).
- Support senses a responsibility and desire to help your spouse.

Examples of Support

- "I'd love to help you with that."
- "Do you need some help?"
- Support helps without having to be asked.
- Support lovingly and with discernment persists in giving help to a spouse who struggles with independence.
- Support helps without needing gratitude or appreciation.
- Support is continually looking for ways to lighten your spouse's load.

- Support offers to take over tasks in your area of strength and your spouse's area of weakness.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUR SPOUSE?

I believe your spouse desires to be loved in each of these 10 ways, but because of past experiences, present circumstances, personality, preferences, gender, what they received or didn't receive as a child, etc..., I believe some of these are more important to them than the others. Part of identifying and meeting the need of the moment requires you to know which of these top 10 ways to love are the most important to your spouse.

What do you think your spouse would say are the 3 most important ways they desire to be loved? What would they say is the most important way you can express love to them?

Take a minute or two and rank what you think is most important to your spouse:

Order of Importance	Top 10 Ways to Love
	Acceptance
	Affection
	Appreciation
	Attention
	Comfort
	Encouragement
	Instruction
	Respect
	Security
	Support

Now, take another few minutes and think of 3 practical ways you can love them in each of those top 3 areas. Go back and look at what you underlined in the explanations / suggestions above for ideas or think of some new ones altogether.

You should end up with a list like this:

Acceptance

1. Show interest in his golf game
2. Overlook him putting the toilet paper on the “wrong” way
3. Be more accepting of his mom

Appreciation

1. Express appreciation for at least 1 area of her responsibilities every day
2. Tell her thank you for something you typically take for granted
3. Pick up after myself to respect / show appreciation for her keeping the house clean

Respect

1. Put down my phone and give him my undivided attention when he’s talking
2. Tell him he’s a great provider, parent, servant, etc...
3. Praise him in front of the kids today

The Top 3 Ways Your Spouse Desires To Be Loved

#1 - _____

- o _____
- o _____
- o _____

#2 - _____

- o _____
- o _____
- o _____

#3 - _____

- o _____
- o _____
- o _____

Ask Your Spouse

Just to make sure you're on the right track, ask your spouse to read through your list and invite them to make any tweaks (if possible and appropriate). You probably have a pretty good idea of what it looks like to love them, but inviting them to speak into the list will not only help you love them better but also make them feel respected.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Don't be overwhelmed with your list! You don't have to immediately start doing all 9 things tomorrow. Pick 1 and start to put it into practice.

I've heard it said that success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in and day out. The same is true in marriage. Since a majority of your marriage is lived in the everyday small moments of life, **the everyday is where marriages are built and destroyed.**

Marriages aren't built on candlelit anniversary or ballooned birthday getaways, or even glittering summer vacations.

They are built in conversations before work, throughout the day, before bed. They are built in the time you listen when you wish you could turn on Netflix, the moments you call to say "I'm sorry", the occasions you face an issue rather than sliding it under the sofa one more day. They are built on cups of coffee made for each other, turning down the bed at the end of the day, cleaning up your mess in the sink, "I love you" text messages, holding the door, or rubbing a back.

Working on your marriage is like working out your body. In the beginning you'll experience a lot of pain and no visible results. But over time, the workouts get easier and the results become apparent.

Pick 1 of your ideas and implement it every day for the next 7 days. Then, pick another one and start to put that into practice. Take small steps and build on them every week. You might not notice any difference in your marriage right away, but as you consistently love your spouse in these small moments your marriage will start to experience big changes.

You'll Need More Than This List

As I said at the beginning, implementing this list will help you understand your spouse, grow in your communication, and help prevent unresolved conflict. It can legitimately help turn your marriage around.

But at the end of the day, your marriage needs more than a checklist to go the distance. Your marriage needs a person, and that person is Jesus.

I'm not being hyper-spiritual. Just profoundly practical.

Jesus offers so much more than a trip to a perfect place at the end of your life. What He offers can actually help you here, now—in your life, your marriage.

I want to suggest Jesus (His life, death, resurrection, and ascension) provides the ***muscle and motivation*** for both of you not just to go the distance, but *thrive* in your marriage.

Jesus Provides Critical Muscle for Your Marriage

The last thing you need in your marriage is an impossible to-do list—and Christ's model of love is a high bar. If marriage was as easy as having a list of do's and don'ts, everyone could have the kind of connected, intimate relationship we dream about.

You've already experienced that marriage takes more than a to-do or how-to list. It takes more than looking at Jesus and doing as He did.

An out-of-this-world marriage takes muscle: A supernatural power outside of yourself.

Here's the sobering truth. You don't have what it takes to have the marriage you want and that God desires you to have. **You need muscle you weren't created with.** We are powerless to be perfect.

The muscle you need is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead: the all-powerful Spirit of God. Jesus had to come for this muscle to be available to live inside of you and be your ever-present, all-powerful help in your time of need (see [John 16:7](#)).

Let your inadequacy and failures to love your spouse be a reminder of your need for the all-powerful Spirit of God to help you (see [1 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

Daily ask him for help to love your spouse in each of these ten ways (see [John 15:5](#)).

Jesus Provides Motivation for Marriage

I suspect most Bible-believing people understand their need for the All-Powerful Spirit (the “muscle”) to help them in marriage. But I believe where most people fall short in marriage is motivation. They know what they should do but just don’t do it. **Their *ought* to doesn’t match their *want* to.**

Again, Jesus doesn't disappoint in providing a solution.

The story of Jesus is not *only* a distant, academic, story of a man who did some good things for some people, died on a cross, and then miraculously came back to life.* The story of Jesus is as personal and heartfelt a story as you’ve ever heard.

It’s a story of a Creator coming to the rescue of His creation, a Father rescuing His children, a Husband rescuing His bride. It’s a story of Someone who gave up everything so he could give you everything.

It’s the most relevant, practical, and inspiring story that’s ever existed. The story of Jesus is the climax of every other story ever told, including your own.

Because ultimately, in the story of God saving you—if we were likening it to a marriage—you were the difficult, biting, even wandering spouse of His, unworthy of forgiveness. (See the story of Hosea in the Bible, where God likens His sinful people to a prostitute, who Hosea is instructed to marry).

He closed the distance to the point of sacrificing His rights, comfort, physical safety,** authority, agenda, and even His own life to restore us and our intimacy with Him.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8

Your marriage will be difficult at times. Your spouse will be difficult to love at times. It's in those times where you need more than some muscle to continue loving.

You need motivation, and your greatest motivation to love your spouse when the going gets tough? It's found in how Jesus loves you.

The twist of this list? It's not only a list of the top 10 ways to love your spouse. It's also a list of the top 10 ways God loves you. He accepts you, appreciates you, comforts you, respects you, instructs you, and is always with you and available to you. I don't know about you, but as I grow in my realization and belief of God's love for me in these 10 ways I'm increasingly compelled to obey him by loving my wife (and others).

If you love me, you'll obey my commandments.
John 14:15

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
Galatians 5:6

A Life Changing Email

About 20 years ago, I sent an email to a local counselor asking for help in loving some difficult people in my life. Within minutes of sending my email he sent this response:

"I'm happy to help! I can't meet for a couple weeks, but in the meantime I want you to consider that your struggle isn't loving difficult people as much as it is understanding how much God loves you. As you understand how much you are loved by God, you'll be able to better love those difficult people."

His email represented a truth that I have come to learn, love, and strive to live by as stated in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us."

As you understand how deep, how wide, and how high the love of Christ is for you (someone who was once one of God's enemies), you'll be able to better love difficult people. Even if that difficult person is your spouse. **God's love for you is the greatest motivation to love your spouse.** You'll love your spouse best when you realize how deeply you're loved by God.

I hope and pray you have a better understanding of what it looks like to love your spouse after reading this resource. I also hope you now see why this list was the most life changing list for me (and I now also hope for you too).

But more than anything, I pray you realize how profound God's love is for you. And know this: there's always more to God's love than what you realize. It's just not possible to fully comprehend it completely this side of heaven. So wherever you are in your understanding of God's love, know there're more to it and ask God to show you. Because as you become more aware of and remember God's love for you, you'll be in the best position to love your spouse in these 10 ways.

**If the story of Jesus has only been a distant intellectual story to you, I want to personally invite you to make it your heartfelt reality by [clicking here](#). Your life, and your marriage, will never be the same.*

***This is not a justification for abuse! See [this article](#) if you're wondering if you're in an abusive relationship.*

Top 10 Ways to Love or Serve your Spouse - Mark 10:45

1. Acceptance: Receiving another person willingly and unconditionally especially when the other's behavior has been imperfect. Being willing to continue loving another in spite of offenses or differences.

Romans 15:7 - Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

2. Affection: Expressing care and closeness through physical touch and actually saying "I love you."

Mark 10:16 - And they were bringing children to him so that He might touch them . . . And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

3. Appreciation (Praise): Expressing gratefulness through thanks or praise. Recognizing effort or accomplishment.

Colossians 3:15b - . . . and be thankful . . .

4. Attention: Conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care; taking thought of another; entering another's world.

1 Corinthians 12:25 - . . . but that the members may have the same care for one another . . .

5. Comfort: Responding to a hurting person with words, feelings, and touch; to hurt with and for another's grief or pain; to give consolation with tenderness.

Romans 12:15b - . . . and mourn with those who mourn . . .

6. Encouragement: Urging another to persist and persevere toward a goal; stimulating toward love and good deeds.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Therefore encourage one another and build up one another . . .

Hebrews 10:24,25 - And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . . encouraging one another . . .

7. Instruction (Admonition): Modeling, equipping and training in how to live, or a gentle or friendly reproof.

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.

8. Respect: Valuing and regarding another highly; treating another as important; honoring another; conveying great worth.

Romans 12:10b - ...Honor one another above yourselves.

9. Security (Peace): Harmony in relationships; freedom from fear or threat of harm.

Romans 12:16,18 - Be of the same mind toward one another . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

10. Support: Coming alongside and gently helping with a problem or struggle; providing appropriate assistance; to help carry a load.

Galatians 6:2 - Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

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Lastly, to my wife Star. God has used your encouragement, love, grace, patience, and forgiveness to teach me, grow me, and understand love and marriage more than anyone. You live this stuff out and I'm so glad I get to be the recipient of your love and get to do life with you every day. I pray God gives us at least another 27 years together so we can continue to grow in our love for each other as we grow old together.



Hans Molegraaf