

INTRODUCTION

We’re going to be reading today from the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, sometimes called the Song of Songs. The easiest way to find this book in the Bible is to go to the book of Isaiah. There are three big Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. If you find Isaiah 1, then back up one page, you will be in Song of Solomon, chapter 8. Today we’re going to be talking about the characteristics of marital love, as I talk about how to love your mate for the rest of your life.

When I was just a little kid, I watched the movie, “Snow White,” with my parents. In this movie, Snow White is standing outside a wishing well, and I’m sure you girls remember what she sings, “I’m wishing, I’m hoping, for the one to come, to love me today.” And meanwhile, this handsome prince has ridden up on his horse, and he hears her singing this, and finally at the end he steps up and sings, “Today” and scares her and she runs back into the palace. You know the story, she goes off and lives with these seven strange guys. That sounds pretty modern to me. She sings to them, “Some day my prince will come.” And so she’s waiting on this prince, she eats the poison apple, goes into a coma, sure enough, her prince comes. He kisses her, she wakes up, marries the prince, and they live happily ever after.

There is a problem with this “Snow White Syndrome.” Snow White has never grown any older through the years since that movie was made. I watched this movie this week and she still has young, smooth skin, and the prince hasn’t grown any older either. He’s the same young, handsome prince. That’s not really life, is it? Because even Snow Whites get older and get a few wrinkles, and guys, the princes, they get a little older and develop a spare tire. As Princess Diana learned, even princes can be jerks. That is not true to life. There is one part of that story we all ought to hang on to. It is possible, and not only is it possible, it is God’s will for your marriage, that you and your mate live happily ever after, until one of you is taken home to glory. That is God’s plan and will for your marriage.

How can I do that? I want us to look in the Bible. If you want to find out about love, you don’t open the pages of *Vogue* magazine or *Playboy* magazine, you open the pages of the Bible. This is God’s instruction book for life, every experience of life. We have been studying the book of Romans. Romans is God’s definitive word of salvation. Did you know that the Song of Solomon is God’s definitive word on romance, marriage, love and sex? And it is in the Bible and it is God’s truth. So I want us to look at chapter 8:6 and learn some characteristics of the kind of love that will keep marriages together until one dies.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7, this is the woman speaking; they are already married. She says, “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. (We’re still talking about love here.) Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it (or literally he, the man who would try to do that) would be utterly scorned.” In these two verses, we learn four characteristics of the kind of love that will keep a marriage together.

I. MARRIED LOVE IS POSSESSIVE

Married love is possessive. The word that is used to describe that is the word "seal." "Place me like a seal over your heart and your arm." In the Bible, a seal means identity; it means possession. Today when you enter into a contract, or sign your name on a check, you place your signature on a line. Back in the Bible times, it was done with a seal, not a signature. They would take a soft piece of wax and take some kind of a seal or stamp, and they would seal it, saying, "This is mine, I'm lending my identity to it." This wife is saying, "Husband, I want you to place your identity on my heart."

1. A seal means that you belong to me

You are in my heart, and I am in your heart. You belong to me. Now guys, let me tell you what that means. That means that there should be no other human being on earth who occupies a higher place in your heart than your wife. There should be no other female on the face of the earth to whom you give more emotional energy, physical energy, time or talk than your wife. Your wife needs to know that she occupies the prime position in your heart. She needs to know that she is more important than your career, more important than your hobbies. You need to place a seal over her heart that has your signature on it, saying, "You are mine, and I'm yours."

Did you notice verse 6 also says, "Like a jealous fire?" Did you know that you are to be jealous for your wife? Doesn't the Bible say love is not jealous? That's not what it means. It means that you are not jealous *of* your wife, but you are always jealous *for* your wife. If your wife gets honor or recognition, you don't look at her with envy and say, "Why do you get all the good things? I wish I could do that." No, you're not envious of her, because you love her. To be jealous for your wife means that you don't want any other man in her life who has more of her emotional attention than you do.

When we talk about being unfaithful, we sometimes think only in terms of physical infidelity, physical adultery. Did you know that it is possible to be emotionally unfaithful to your mate? Maybe there is someone at work that you give more of your emotional and conversational energy to than your wife. That is being unfaithful. You need to place a seal over the heart of your mate that says, "You are mine and I am yours."

2. The seal also means that I will fight for you

This verse talks about a seal on the arm, and the arm speaks of strength. Now guys, if some man threatened your wife or said something ugly about your wife, I imagine you would say, "Yeah, pastor, I would fight for my wife. I would put up my fists and do whatever it takes to defend my wife." But let's face it, seldom, if ever, are we going to be called upon to physically fight for our wives.

But I want to ask you, guys, how serious are you about fighting for your marriage? Because there is an adversary out there, there is an enemy who's trying to destroy your marriage. The Bible says in Ephesians 6, we're not fighting against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, invisible forces. There is a real devil, and he has demons, and I promise you, he is trying

to put a wedge and destroy and destruct every marriage in East Texas. He’s trying to divide marriages, divide families. I wish you guys would get mad about it. I wish you would say, “I’m going to fight for my marriage. I’m going to fight the devil with every bit of energy God gives me.” We need some warriors who will fight for their marriages. I am intense about this because God has given me a burden and passion for marriages in our church and the devil is successfully tearing some of them apart. Every time I hear about a divorce in our church, it breaks my heart, it breaks the heart of God, and the devil laughs, “Ha, ha, ha. I’ve done it again.”

Guys, you are going to have to become warriors and fight for your marriages, because somebody out there is trying to destroy them.

II. MARRIED LOVE IS PERMANENT

Married love is permanent; it is not temporary. You remember last week, I talked about how some people say, “I don’t love her anymore,” or “I don’t love him anymore.” I said “hogwash” to that. Love is not some emotional squirt that you feel, some emotional spasm that runs up and down your spine. Feelings of affection do rise and fall, but according to the Bible, love is permanent. It is a choice that you make.

Look at verse 6 again. It says, “Love is as strong as death, that’s picture number one. Its jealousy is as unyielding as the grave, that’s picture number two. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame, that’s picture number three. Here’s what it means.

1. Marital love is as strong as death

You know, once death grabs hold of a person, that’s it. They don’t come back from it. Spiritually speaking, one day we’re all going to be raised from the dead, those of us who know the Lord Jesus, and those of us who die physically, we’re going to live forever with Christ. But the Bible says a person dies once, and after that the judgment.

Somebody asked me one time, “Why do they build fences around cemeteries? Are people trying to get out?” My response is, “I think people are dying to get into this place.” You don’t have to build a fence, there’s nobody trying to get out, because once death has you, that’s it. The Bible says married love is as strong and permanent as death.

2. Marital love is as strong as hell

That’s right, hell. You say, “I didn’t read the word hell in there.” Look in verse 6 where it says “unyielding as the grave,” that is the Hebrew word “Sheol,” and it is most often translated in the Old Testament as hell. It is as unyielding as hell. Once somebody is an occupant of hell, they are there permanently. It talks about the permanence of hell as a picture of the permanence of married love. It means that when I’m doing a marriage ceremony here in this church, and I turn to the groom and say, “Do you promise you will love her for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part,” if that groom looks at me and says, “Like hell I will,” that is a Biblical statement. It disrupts the ceremony, but it is a biblical statement. Married love is as strong as hell. That’s exactly what this verse says.

3. Marital love is as strong as the fire of God

Where it talks about a mighty flame in verse 6, it is not talking about any old fire. It is the word that was used of the flame on the altar in the tabernacle. It is a flame that never was extinguished; it is the fire of God. Husbands and wives, that means your commitment to your mate ought to be as strong as God's commitment to you. And what has God said? He says, "I love you and I'm not going to stop loving you."

Psalm 27:10 says, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." If the closest people on planet earth run out on you, God says, "I'll never run out on you." God says in the book of Hebrews, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He says, triple negative, "I will not, never, no, never leave you or forsake you." If some of you are thinking about leaving your husband, leaving your wife, you are doing exactly the opposite of what God has said He will do for you. The Bible says that is the kind of permanent love we ought to have for one another.

III. MARRIED LOVE IS PERSEVERING

The third word that describes the kind of married love that the Song of Solomon talks about is persevering. I call it a stubborn kind of love. It just hangs in there; it doesn't quit. Verse 7 says, "Many waters cannot quench love; many rivers cannot wash it away." That word in verse 7 where it says quench love, it's a word that means put out a fire. The Bible is saying that true married love can never be extinguished. People may sometimes say, "The fire's just gone out." Do you remember in the 1960s, Nancy Sinatra sang a song that went like this:

We got married in a fever, hotter than a pepper sprout.
We have been talking about Jackson, ever since the fire went out.

The truth is, in a Christian marriage, the fire never does go out. It may smolder a little; you may move away from the fire, but it never goes out. God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit is like squirting gasoline on smoldering coals, the fire is still there. The problem with some husband and wives who say, "I just don't love him anymore," or "I don't love her anymore," is that you are not talking about the kind of love the Bible talks about. You are talking about some kind of human emotion that is divorced from what the Bible says love is.

Do you want to know what love is? 1 Corinthians 13 is God's definition of love. "Love is patient." This applies to marriage. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres . . . and now these three remain, faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." Do you know why love is greater than faith and hope? Because even though we need faith and hope here in this life, when we get to heaven, we will not need faith. When we get to heaven we will not need hope. That is hope realized. But even in heaven we will enjoy love. That is how permanent and eternal love is.

Some husbands and wives read 1 Corinthians 13 and say, "That is not present in my marriage so I must not have love for my mate." This is not something that happens accidentally. Have you ever thought about this? The command to love your wife is a directive of God. It is not something you just feel accidentally. It is a choice you make to obey God. Because the Bible says love is patient, you can't just say, "Well, I don't have patience with my wife so I must not love her." That is wrong. You say, "Because the Bible says love is patient, I choose by an act of my will that I'm going to be more patient. I choose by an act of my will that I'm going to be slow to anger." These are commands of God and you make a choice to obey or disobey.

I may make some of you mad when I say this and you may get up and walk out but that is okay. Don't you dare say, "I cannot love my mate." Come on, be honest and say, "I will not love my mate," because you can do anything you choose to do in the power of Jesus Christ. Now, let's look at some words that tell us what love is like in marriage.

1. Real love is patient

That doesn't mean you have to be a patient person. It means you choose to be patient towards your mate. I don't know if you know this about me, but I'm probably the world's most impatient person. I'm a go-getter, and I want to always be doing something. When I was growing up, my daddy taught me if I wanted to be somewhere, I had to be there fifteen minutes early or I was late. That is the way I am.

My wife's parents never said anything like that to her. In fact, she grew up thinking fashionably late was the thing to do. We've had some problems through the years I want you to know. You know what I used to do? I used to get ready to go somewhere and I would go into the garage, crank the car, and gun the engine. I would even blow the horn, beep, beep, beep. It just made her slow down more.

I don't do that anymore. I have learned she is worth waiting for. I learned to choose to be more patient toward her in that one area. I still get in the car and run the engine; I just don't blow the horn. You can choose to be more patient with your mate. It is a choice, not some emotion. Choose to be patient towards your mate, because that's what love is.

2. Real love is polite

Real love is kind. Many marriages need an infusion of good old-fashioned kindness. Husbands and wives, do you remember how you treated your mate when you first met and were dating? Remember how you were trying to impress him/her? You always dressed nicely, and if you were a guy, you opened the door for her and pulled out her chair. Do you remember how you used to say nice things to each other? Saying positive, complimentary things toward each other is a part of kindness.

Guys, your wife wants you to say good, complimentary things about her and to her. The problem is the way men compliment each other, their buddies. We say ugly things to a guy if we like him. "Hey, fat boy. How are you doing, man?" If we really like them, we'll hit them on the shoulder, "You old, ugly so-and-so, how are you doing?" Those are words of affection, aren't they?

Guys, women don't talk to each other like that. When they greet each other, they don't say, “Blubber-hips, how are you doing?” They don't like to talk like that. You are making a mistake if you talk to your wife the way you talk to your buddies. It won't work like that. Your wife was created by God to enjoy and expect romance. You see, guys, husbands are not really into romance. We're just kind of into the sex thing. Somebody has said that women have sex so they can have romance. Husbands have romance so they can have sex. Women are more into the journey, and guys are into the destination. Men are microwaves; women are crockpots.

Guys, you need to say kind, polite things to your wife. That's what love is: love is kind. Most guys do not know how to talk. The longest word they know is delicatessen. Most men are not English poets like Keats or Shelley. They don't know how to say those things.

Guys, there is something in the Song of Solomon for you. I want you to flip back to chapter 4. You are going to do yourself a favor if you study this. Chapter 3 of Song of Solomon is their wedding. Chapter 4 is their honeymoon. When these words are being said, they are at the Sheraton Hotel; it is a honeymoon night. Guys, here's how to be romantic toward your wife. You need to modernize these words. “How beautiful you are, my darling. (This is the guy speaking.) Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats.”

It doesn't say your hair looks like a goat. Or it doesn't say you look like a goat with hair on your back. It says, “Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.” Jewish women wore their hair up and seldom ever cut it, but they would let it down for their husband. She is letting her hair down, and as it cascades down, it is like a flock of goats coming down the mountain.

“Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing.” Have you ever seen a shorn sheep? One that has just had all the wool cut off? That sheep's skin is smooth and slick and clean. What it means is there are no particles of pizza in her teeth; her mouth is clean. He keeps talking about her teeth. Verse 2, “Each has its twin; none of them is alone.” That means she's not a snaggletooth. This is good stuff if you understand the times.

Verse 3, “Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate.” He starts with her eyes and starts going down. He sees her teeth because she is grinning. Remember, it is their honeymoon night. Verse 6, “Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hangs a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. (He is probably talking about her beautiful necklace.) Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. (In other words, they deserve to be treated tenderly.) Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. All beautiful are you, my darling, there is no flaw in you.”

Now, does any man or woman in this room honestly believe that she was truthfully without any flaw whatsoever? Of course she had flaws. We all have flaws. But when he looked at her, he didn't see any of them. You know what that means? That means that you are to be kind and polite toward your mate. Guys, you need to take Song of Solomon 4 and update it and go with it.

3. Real love is pardoning

It pardons; it always forgives. That's what 1 Corinthians says, "It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Through the years, there have been couples that have come to me carrying a legal pad on which they have written a list of things about their mate they do not like. Sometimes it's probably good to make a list to think about and discuss, but the true characteristic of love is that it doesn't keep a list.

If you were to ask me, "Has your wife, Cindy, ever wronged you or hurt you or done or said anything you didn't like?" My honest reply to you is, "I don't think so. I cannot think of one single time in 25 years of marriage that she ever has." Now, she probably has, but I just refuse to remember it. I refuse to keep a list of it. That's an act of the will. That is a choice that you make. You don't keep a list of everything you don't like.

4. Real love is protective

In the Jewish weddings, the bride and groom didn't exchange rings. Instead the groom would take off his outer garment, his cloak, and he would cover the shoulders of his new bride, which was symbolic of covering her with protection. In Malachi 2:16, God says, "I hate divorce." He goes on to say, "And I hate those that cover their garment with violence." God hates divorce, but also hates any kind of physical abuse in marriage. You are to protect your mate, not to hurt them. You are to protect them verbally, emotionally, never ever say anything negative or condescending about your mate when you are out with someone else.

5. Real love is persistent

It always perseveres; it doesn't stop. Rivers can't wash it away; waters cannot quench it. If you have the true kind of love that the Bible talks about here, you are going to hang in there, stick with it, stay with your mate. It is by choice, not a feeling.

IV. MARRIED LOVE IS PRECIOUS

1. No price tag can be placed on the love between a husband and wife

Would you look at verse 7 again? "If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned." He would be utterly scorned. There's no price tag that can be placed on the love between a husband and a wife. You cannot put it down to quantitative amounts. Husbands, what if somebody came up to you and said, "I'll give you \$500 if you divorce your wife." You would just laugh at him. What if they came to you and said, "I'll give you \$60 billion if you divorce your wife." Sir, if you have the kind of love for your mate that the Bible talks about, you would look that man in the eyes and say, "You fool, how dare you reduce something so precious to a dollar amount. There is no price tag that can be placed on my love and my commitment to my mate." The Bible says there is nothing more precious than that. It says all the wealth that a person has can't buy it, and can't sell it.

If you are a teenager, you might think, "You're talking to married people, don't you have any word for us today?" Absolutely. Would you look at Song of Solomon 8:8? These are the friends

speaking, “We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. [Meaning she is 12 or 13.] What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for?” In other words, how can we prepare her for marriage? The Bible says this is how you prepare for marriage: “If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.”

When it comes to sexual purity, some people say, “Absolutely no. I’m going to be sexually pure until I get married and until then I am a wall.” Young people, if you choose to be a wall, you are to be honored. The Bible says a tower of silver will be built on you. But sometimes, young people are doors. Come on in. And what does it say they’re going to do to a girl like that? They’re going to close the door and nail it shut to keep her away from men.

I say to young people today, the most precious thing you can give to your mate is your virginity. There are some of you girls in this room that you’re still virgins, and some of these guys, you’re still virgins, and you feel a little bit out of place. I want to say, “Good for you.” Some of the girls who have chosen to give up that precious gift before marriage may look at you and laugh a little bit. But girls, you can look at them with pride in your eyes and say, “Any time I want to, I can become like you, but never again in your whole life can you become like me.” Girls and guys, hang on to your virginity until marriage. Be a wall until you meet that special person and you are married.

In fact, that’s what she says, verse 10, “I am a wall, (when I got married, I was a virgin) and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.” You see guys, if you’re not married, the most important thing to you is not to seek a mate, the most important thing is to develop Godly character and purity and God will take care of the rest.

2. No price tag can be placed on the love God has for us

No price tag can be placed on the love *God* has for us. Read 1 John 4:9-12. I’m not going to take the time to read those verses. You need to read them. Love comes from God and if you don’t love God, you can’t love others, but if you love God, he’ll produce all the love you need to love your mate. I’m talking to those of you who are married right now. It is God’s plan for you to stay with your mate until death.

In Europe, they had a custom in the late Middle Ages and we have adopted part of it. It started in the Netherlands, and when a husband and wife were coming home from their wedding, the groom would pick the bride up in his arms and would carry her across the threshold into their new home. We do something like that, but we’ve lost the rest of the custom. They would never walk through the front or main door of the house. They would walk through a special door into their home then shut and lock that door. That door would never again be opened until either he carried her dead body out or she carried his dead body out. That locked door served as a constant reminder, “We are together until death.”

As a pastor, I have stood at the head of a casket at lots of funerals. I’ve watched many women stand there and look into the face of the corpse of that man that they have been faithful to for all those years. And I’ve watched as they’ve reached up with their hand and lovingly caressed that gray head and that face and said, “Goodbye, sweetheart, I’ll see you later.” What I’ve wanted to

do is stand there and clap and say, “I am so proud of you. I’m so proud that you stayed with that mate until death and death only parted you. Thank you for keeping your commitment to your mate, and thank you for keeping your commitment to God.”

It is a matter of integrity. It is a matter of keeping your word to each other and keeping your word to God, “We will stay together. We choose to love each other in spite of all kinds of problems, we choose to love each other until death and death alone comes between us.” And that is the kind of marriage that God blesses. Let’s pray.

Father, I pray for couples in this room right now that are struggling and hurting and going through all kinds of problems. God, I pray that right now your Holy Spirit will slip in and will strengthen the bonds of marriage and strengthen the ties that are there. Lord, I pray that as a result of not something I’ve said, but something you’ve done supernaturally, that there would be marriages that are saved and redeemed and healed because people began to honor You and honor Your word. And I pray this in Jesus name, amen.

OUTLINE

Married Love is:

I. POSSESSIVE

A “Seal” means:

1. You belong to me (heart)
2. I will fight for you (arm)

II. PERMANENT

As strong as:

1. Death
2. Hell
3. The fire of God

Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.
Psalm 27:10

III. PERSEVERING (Stubborn)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. *1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13*

Real love is:

1. Patient
2. Polite
3. Pardoning
4. Protective
5. Persistent

IV. PRECIOUS

No price tag can be placed on:

1. The love between a husband and wife
2. The love God has for us

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since god so loved us, we also ought to love one another, god lives in us and his love is made complete in us. *1 John 4:9-12*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes