

Part 3 - Love For A Lifetime

TODAY IS DAY SEVENTEEN OF THE LOVE DARE!

Let's do a brief review of the principles we have been learning ...

Since we were together last week we've tackled some 'invasive' and even difficult subjects in the "LOVE DARE" ...

- Love cherishes (to love your spouse is to love yourself)
- Love lets the other win (the moment one yields the argument is over)
- Love fights fair (the deepest damage is done in the midst of conflict)
- Love takes delight (love that chooses is stronger than loves that feels)
- Love is honorable (love honors the other even when it is rejected)
- Love intercedes (you cannot change your spouse, but God can)
- Love promotes intimacy (intimacy is our greatest blessing or danger)

None of this can happen in a marriage without:

- **COMMUNICATION** (first week) – "He Said / She Said"
- **CONTENTMENT** (last week) – "Cultivating Contentment"
- **COMMITMENT** (this week) – "Love For A Lifetime"

VIDEO CLIP: "LOVE FOR A LIFETIME"

Approximately 90% of adults will eventually marry, but tragically around half of all marriages end in divorce. Most will perish from "irreconcilable differences," which is a catch-all phrase for Caleb Holt's description, "It's just not working out anymore." Other common explanations include, "I've fallen out of love with him/her," or "We're just two different people now." The statistics scream at us and we still refuse to listen:

- For both men and women, staying married boosts their chance of surviving to old age to more than 90%.
- The National Population Health Survey declares that single mothers report consistently worse health than married mothers.
- 40% of married people are "very happy" with their life, much higher than common law couples, the separated and the divorced, who consistently rate as the least happy.
- The HRDC reports that children living in post-divorce custodial arrangements have a higher prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems than children living with both parents.
- Children of single-parent families are more likely to repeat grades, have poor language skills, and be in poorer health.
- Boys raised without a father in the home are twice as likely to engage in criminal activity; girls raised without a father in the home are three times as likely to get pregnant or have an abortion before marriage.

- A 25-year study on the effects of divorce found that children of divorced parents are much more likely to abuse drugs and seek therapy, 40% more likely to avoid marriage themselves, and twice as likely to see their marriages fail if they do marry.

Why in the name of all that is decent would anyone subject the children they claim to love to such odds? Because of sin and selfishness! My needs! My feelings! My happiness! My! My! My!

But for Christians, there is another much more important reason – keeping our marriages together is a commandment of God! God plainly says "DON'T LEAVE!" Don't give up on your marriage!

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (MSG) And if you are married, stay married. This is the Master's command, not mine. If a wife should leave her husband, she must either remain single or else come back and make things right with him. And a husband has no right to get rid of his wife.

If you are married, you need to decide right now that adultery will NEVER be an option – that is God's standard for you! It doesn't matter what your spouse does, what needs they don't meet, or what happens in your marriage – being faithful is God's command!

Malachi 2:13-17 (MES) You fill the place of worship with your whining and sniveling because you don't get what you want from God. Do you know why? Simple. Because God was there as a witness when you spoke your marriage vows to your young [spouse], and now you've broken those vows, broken the faith-bond with your vowed companion, your covenant [partner]. God, not you, made marriage. His Spirit inhabits even the smallest details of marriage. And what does he want from marriage? Children of God, that's what. So guard the spirit of marriage within you. Don't cheat on your spouse. "I hate divorce," says the God of Israel. GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies says, "I hate the violent dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage." So watch yourselves. Don't let your guard down. Don't cheat. You make God tired with all your talk. "How do we tire him out?" you ask. By saying, "God loves sinners and sin alike. God loves all." And also by saying, "Judgment? God's too nice to judge."

Why is God being so "harsh" here? Because He knows that you don't just wake up one day with "no feelings" for your spouse. That only happens when you allow a thousand little acts of disloyalty to fracture your marriage over a long period of time. **In reality, there are days in every relationship when there are "irreconcilable differences." But God intended marriage to last a lifetime. The salt and pepper lesson from "Fireproof" portrays a great truth – marriage is a COVENANT.**

Did you know that all you need to do to ruin every relationship in your life is ... PLAY FAIR?! Treat others just like they treat you. If they're nice, be nice. If they're not nice, then ...! That's why the human race is in such a mess. That's why marriages break up, families split, and countries go to war. It's because we have **CONTRACT WITHOUT COVENANT**.

CONTRACT SAYS "I WILL ONLY IF YOU WILL"
COVENANT SAYS "I WILL EVEN IF YOU WON'T (OR CAN'T)!"

The biggest problem in every human relationship is that there are two capital "I's each wanting their way. So it requires constant negotiation if we are going to see 'I' to 'I' ... ☺

ILLUSTRATION: TWO BOXES – DESIRE & EXPECTATION

Contents of desire box: house, car, diaper, laundry, duster, clock, Christmas tree, piggy bank, nightgown, vacation brochure

What is the common denominator of all these desires? "I ... I ... I"

DESIRES are fine (after all, we're human!) ... but our problem is that we take our desires and turn them into EXPECTATIONS. Once we transfer them to the expectation box, we have lit the fuse for relationship conflict.

There are basically only three options when "I's collide ...

1. QUIT – leave the relationship

This is a cop-out; it doesn't solve anything. And it is why so many second marriages have similar problems – because you took your "I" with you! "Wherever you are, there you are!"

2. CONQUER – stronger partner dominates

Here is a secret about all human relationships ... It's very easy for ME to be ME, and it's very easy for YOU to be YOU ... but it's very difficult for YOU to be ME, or ME to be YOU. And trying to force someone to be like someone else is extraordinarily stressful! When the strong partner CONQUERS the weaker partner is forced to CONFORM ... but this is a recipe for an explosion down the road.

3. COMPROMISE – draw strict boundary lines

This often seems like the best option to people in difficult relationships, because it seems to bring "peace" ... but the "peace" is really just an uneasy truce. We divide my responsibilities from your responsibilities, my money from your money, my friends from your friends, and before we're done we are in totally different worlds.

In this kind of relationship, we say "I will if you will" – but that is just a CONTRACT, not a COVENANT.

As long as I am dumping my desires on someone else (turning them into expectations), I create a **DEBT-DEBTOR relationship** (Barney song – "I owe you, you owe me, we fight like two cats in a tree").

We could all build a convincing case to support our EXPECTATIONS, but anytime relationships degenerate into a DEBT-DEBTOR status, trust and intimacy evaporate because there is no margin left for the one thing that human relationships need most ... UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

We don't give others any credit for merely meeting our expectations ... "Congratulations, you're up to ZERO now!" That's why you only get "personal letters" from businesses when you DON'T meet their expectations (you've never received a love letter from your bank!).

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IS A GIFT WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED.

When I "desire" ... I'm grateful if it's done.

When I "expect" ... I don't even notice it, unless it isn't done!
(No one gets credit, in fact everyone is just trying to reach the bar.)

Every human being has legitimate desires, but you can't put the fulfillment of your desires on the shoulders of someone else!

How do you know if you've moved from DESIRE to EXPECTATION?

1. Expressions of Gratitude (when was the last time you said "thanks"?)
2. Acts of Service (do something that isn't even your responsibility)

Imagine a relationship where everything stayed in the DESIRE box, and the EXPECTATION box was empty! Imagine a relationship where each "I" concentrated on fulfilling the DESIRES of the other "I" instead of just expecting them to live up to a set of EXPECTATIONS.

The question is NOT "how do I eliminate my desires?" – that would not even be reasonable. The proper question to ask is "how do I move my expectations back to the desire box?" How can I remove the "burden of expectations" from the ones I love?

WHAT IS IN YOUR EXPECTATION BOX? This one question will reveal the answer ... **"What does your spouse/friend/family OWE you?"**

VIDEO CLIP: "LEAD YOUR HEART"

Caleb Holt found out in the movie “Fireproof” that only CHRISTIANS can really solve the problem of desires vs. expectations in their relationships. Why? Because they know they owe God more than their spouse could ever “owe” them! Caleb decided to stop “following his heart” and made the COMMITMENT to “lead his heart” regardless of what happened.

Ephesians 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Submission to one another simply means to PRIORITIZE their desires over yours ... not in reverence to THEM, but in reverence to the LORD!

Ephesians 5:22, 25 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Christians don’t conduct their relationships in the shadow of two big “I”s, but in the shadow of the CROSS. God wants THEM to know His love through ME (my actions toward them are the physical channel for God).

God was the first one who ever said, “You don’t owe me anything!” ... and focusing on that is the only way to keep the expectation box empty! There are no guarantees when you show unconditional love ... but it is your only hope for that relationship! (Calvary had no guarantees either!)

At least, unconditional love creates the potential for a miracle ... because **following God’s principles is an invitation for God to get involved!**

BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY DESIRES BOX?

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

HUMILITY is not responding to someone’s rank, it is a DECISION to put someone else’s desires above your own (it shows up best in conflict!). If we refuse to do this in our relationships, then God “resists the proud” – that is, He refuses to get involved and actually opposes our “BIG I.”

However, when we submit to one another, we become “LITTLE I’s” in God’s sight, and the Bible says He will give GRACE to the humble. What is grace in this context? It is “ENABLING POWER FOR THE MOMENT.”

To HUMBLE YOURSELF then is to (1) declare your dependence on God and (2) announce your obedience regardless of the consequences. But this is the part I hate, because God’s “due time” is different than mine!

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY DESIRES IN THE MEANTIME?

1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

God says, “Tell Me about it, and don’t edit your true feelings! If it’s causing you anxiety, dump it on ME, no matter how small it may be!”

“IT MATTERS TO ME BECAUSE YOU MATTER TO ME!”
(USE OBJECTS FROM BOX AS ILLUSTRATIONS)

We might as well face real life and admit that some of our desires may never come true anyway. But if and when that bothers you, continually take it to God in prayer – DUMP IT ON HIM INSTEAD OF ON OTHERS.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

“What God did for me in DUE TIME was so great that I wouldn’t trade it!”

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how well do you feel you’ve kept the covenant of your wedding vows ...

- **To have and to hold** (how well have you bonded and “held” to your spouse?) _____
- **For better or for worse** (how stable is your treatment of your spouse, regardless of the circumstances?) _____
- **For richer or for poorer** (how well does your marriage stand up to financial pressures?) _____
- **In sickness and in health** (how well have you supported your spouse through physical and/or emotional struggles?) _____
- **To love and to cherish** (how well do you put your spouse’s needs and requests above your own?) _____
- **And thereto I pledge my faithfulness** (how faithful have you been to your spouse?) _____

THE LOVE DARE CHALLENGE:

Ask God to change your heart toward your spouse in any area where you have not been unconditionally committed to them. Do something to show your spouse that you have prioritized their needs above your own.

Now, commit to implementing it this week in a practical way!

TOMORROW IN THE LOVE DARE: “LOVE SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND”