

There are three interesting Greek words depicting different kinds of love. They are (1) Agape, which is the God-kind of love; also described as "charity", because of its giving and sacrificial nature. (2) Eros, which means sexual love, from which the word erotic is gotten. (3) Phileo, which represents tender affection and fondness. We must note that Agape is not based on feelings, unlike the other two. Agape is an unconditional love: Jesus died for us even while we were yet sinners and He expects us to love, even the unlovable! I believe that every marriage must be founded upon Agape. The Bible says husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives also should submit to their own husbands as unto the Lord. (Eph. 5:22, 25) Eros and Phileo are also very important in marriage, however, because they are based on our feelings, they must be founded on Agape. Eros, for instance can be very selfish if not based on Agape! Phileo is the kind of love that has to do with friendship. The older women were to teach the younger women to love their husbands, (Tit. 2:4) that is, to be fond of them and be affectionate as wives. Friendship is a very rare commodity in many homes. A few try to maintain Agape but most focus on Eros; and this is mostly due to the foundation of the relationship itself. I believe that friendship adds a lot of spice to the relationship, and even enhances the sexual health of the marriage. I think it is easier and more fun to go to bed with someone you are fond of. It is this lack of fondness or friendship that makes even Agape and Eros seem like a chore! Your spouse can and should be a friend! However, let's look at friendship from the Biblical perspective.

1. "A friend loves at all times" (Prov. 17:17) or "A friend is always loyal" (NLT). This talks of commitment through thick and thin and even when your spouse is not at their best. Jesus said a man lays down his life for his friends. (Jn. 15:13)

2. "There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother"

(Prov. 18:24b). This tells me that a friend is not necessarily a blood relative. Your spouse can be closer than your brother or sister if you'll cultivate that friendship. After all, the two are meant to become one! (Gen.2:24)

3. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6) This means friends don't always tell us what we want to hear; they tell us some truth that can hurt us, but their wounds are born out of love and faithful. Friends love us too much to leave us the way we are. So, as we cultivate friendship in the home, our spouse will have the liberty to say some things that we might find to be uncomfortable but we receive them because they have our best interests at heart. (Eph. 4:15)

4. "As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend" (Prov. 27:17 NLT). Friends bring good contributions to us that can improve the quality of our lives. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up" (Eccles. 4:9-10) We therefore expect couples to draw strength, support and encouragement from each other, and even to provoke each other to good works! (Heb. 10:24)

5. In Luke 11, Jesus told the story of a man who had a guest at midnight and went to knock on a friend's door to ask for bread for his guest! Jesus said the friend will rise up from bed to give that man bread because of his importunity; that is, unashamed asking! Have you ever heard the words "What are friends for?" As we cultivate friendships, we are not ashamed to ask for help and there is an openness with little or no protocol. The Bible says Adam and Eve were naked and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:25). From the above, you'll agree with me that many marriages are not there yet. Married couples still walk on egg shells around the house, afraid of rocking the boat! The truth is,

friendship is cultivated and that involves a process. Becoming one is indeed an adventure.

How Then Do We Cultivate Friendship In Marriage?

1. Get rid of fear. Fear has torment. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18). Get rid of the fear of rejection, that fear of each other, etc.

2. Work at harmony, don't stop trying. Disagreements are not necessarily evil, they can help you know each other better and increase your agreement potential (Amos 3:3). Deal with issues- some don't go away because you leave them. Talk! Some couples don't talk. Don't assume your spouse knows how you feel, talk about it. Keep the communication line open, no matter how hard it is.

3. Learn and work with, the building blocks of relationships i.e. Love, Respect (mutual), Trust and Understanding. (Rom. 12:9-18, 1 Cor. 13:4-8, Eph.2:25-32, 1 Pet. 3:7)

4. Give each other space. There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. (Eccles. 3:5, Prov. 25:17)

5. Control your tongue, especially when you are angry! (Eph. 4:26, Prov. 14:17) Only a fool says all that is in his mind. (Prov. 29:11) Choose your words carefully, be sensitive. (Prov. 15:1-2, Jas. 1:19, 3:2)

6. Believe the best about your spouse (1 Cor. 13:7) Give them the benefit of the doubt. Don't jump to conclusions. Seeing is not always believing. Give a fair hearing. Don't judge without hearing. (Jn. 7:57) Don't listen to gossip. (Prov. 16:28, 17:9, 18:8, 22:10)

7. Fellowship with each other. Spend time together. Interact with each other. Plan times together, not only to have fun, but to share dreams, your heart, your fears, etc. (1 Jn. 1:3)

8. Be friendly. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Prov. 18:24). Some folks are friendlier with outsiders than they are with their spouses. That needs to change. We can practice friendliness on our spouses- let charity begin at home! The Bible says we should be courteous (1 Pet. 3:8, Eph. 4:32).

9. Learn to forgive! Learn to overlook mistakes and shortcomings of your spouse! Don't take offence all the time. Learn to enjoy jokes, even at your own expense. Don't take everything too seriously, avoid being petty. Let your spouse be. Don't correct them all the time. Create a relaxed and not a tensed atmosphere in your home! (Ps. 119:165, Matt. 6:12, Eph. 4:32, 1 Pet. 3:9)

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