

Prep for Marriage
Me to We – Series 2019

The “Perfect Love” Challenge

Elders Conell & Rhonda Hollins

Understanding the heights & depths of God’s Love through Marriage:

The Perfect Love We Seek...the Imperfect Love We Give

Before entering the bonds of marriage every couple typically answers **“Yes, I am ready for love”** and every couple should answer this way. Especially if the next step for that couple is love in marriage. However, often we answer “Yes” to love before truly counting the cost of what love *really* is. At times, we throw around the word love to describe meaningless topics or to label trivial items. When the truth of the matter is; many couples haven’t individually experienced real love; let alone **“Perfect Love”**.

Throwing around terms such as, *“I love those shoes, I love that car, or I love your hair”* minimizes and devalues Love. Sometimes it is easier to love inanimate object rather than a person due to the work involved. Love is not simply a word, a catchy-phrase; nor merely a feeling or something we show others. It’s grander than that. It’s a state of mind; a graduated level of success. A badge of honor to those whom abide in it. At times, many of us do not realize it but **God is love**. Love is the reason behind everything he does. He is motivated by his love for us. Yet, many of us do not understand that God and love are one in the same. There is no difference. **Love is who He is.**

1 John 4:7-9 New International Version (NIV)

God’s Love and Ours

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**

Exodus 3:14 King James Version (KJV)

¹⁴And God said unto Moses, **I AM THAT I AM:** and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

The Greek word for perfect [adjective and Verb] is **teleios** which signifies **“completion, finished, full-grown or mature. Perfect Love** is mature love. An elevated status of love, an accomplished love. A perseverant love. Most of all, perfect love requires sacrifice. Something our Father in heaven most certainly accomplished. He loved us perfectly when (we) the world, gave Him imperfection in return. He offered us redemption, a clean slate,

forgiveness a new abundant life. Yet, we repaid him with sin, mockery, a crown of thorns and crucifixion.

John 19:28-30 New King James Version (NKJV)

It Is Finished!

²⁸After this, Jesus, ^[a]knowing that all things were now *accomplished*, that the Scripture might be *fulfilled*, said, "I thirst!" ²⁹Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. ³⁰So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

It is finished! It is accomplished! It is complete! It is Perfect! His love is perfect. Showing love is clearly important to Jesus. He states on many occasions to His disciples to love **"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). "These things I command of you, that you love one another." (John 15:17).** However, to have love like Christ...we must be like-minded.

Philippians 2:1-5 New King James Version (NKJV)

Unity Through Humility

2 Therefore if *there is* any ^[a]consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Old School Love

Christ's first and only true love

Ephesians 5:25-30 New King James Version (NKJV)

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might ^[a]sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no

one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰For we are members of His body, ^(b)of His flesh and of His bones.

1 Corinthians 13:1-10 New King James Version (NKJV)

The Greatest Gift

13 1 Corinthians 13:1-10 New International Version (NIV)

If I speak in the tongues^(a) of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^(b) but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸**Love never fails.**

Ready for the Challenge?

Time to Dare to Love!

Romans 12:10 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁰*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

The challenge to the "**Perfect Love Challenge**" is valuing others above yourself. Begin by taking your current expressions of love to the next level. To be perfected in love you must exercise your love muscles. Practice makes perfect! If you are exercising love for your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are following the law God has set forth. The more you practice-the more you are being perfected in love. However, shouldn't the creator of love experience your love first?

Psalm 63:1 New King James Version (NKJV)

Joy in the Fellowship of God

A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

63 O God, You *are* my God;
 Early will I seek You;
 My soul thirsts for You;
 My flesh longs for You

Our hearts should desire an intimate relationship with the Lord. We should long to fellowship with God. Ask yourself do you seek God like King David did in the book of Psalm? Do you diligently seek him daily and desire his presence? God knew you from the beginning and knitted you in your mother's womb; He made you for a time such as this. He made you to express and experience...**His Love**

Matthew 6:33 New King James Version (NKJV)

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

The Enemy of Perfect Love

Answer this question, if you have never been loved fully, deeply and perfectly...can you really love someone fully, deeply and perfectly? Probably not. Yet, why do we still offer an imperfect view of love? Furthermore, why do we accept love that is not made in His image? Why do we allow fear to intimidate us? Sometimes, the brokenhearted make a half-hearted attempt to love whole-heartedly in marriage and unfortunately are ill-equipped for the journey. *What we always say we are ready for is not what we are emotionally, spiritually and physically capable of.*

1 John 4:18 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁸There is no fear in love. But **perfect love** drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made **perfect in love**.

Perfector Deflectors

What are you afraid of? Fear is the enemy of Perfect Love. That is probably what is holding you back from letting go. Do you not know how treasured you are? How precious you are to Him? Your joy and happiness are valued above all by Him.

Luke 12:6-7 New King James Version (NKJV)

*⁶"Are not five sparrows sold for two ^[a]copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **Do not fear** therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

Over the years we have heard couples of all seasons of marriage say, "Nothing is holding me back". After hearing this we decided to rephrase our question to ask, "**what must take place to press you forward**"? Have you unlocked every possibility and liberty to love? Are you loving to your full-capacity? Remember, just saying you love someone does not qualify you for love. And just because you want love doesn't mean you are entitled to it either. Perfect Love comes from the Father. He is the only one that can love perfectly because he is the only one who has made **the perfect sacrifice**. God can judge the effectiveness of your intentions and how to *perfect* your love towards your loved ones.

Hebrews 4:12 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹²For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Examine yourself

"The apostle John hit on the basic reason God's people do not always show perfect love. John tells us that perfect love casts out fear. Fear of something prevents us from doing what we know we should." **Perfect Love ~ Linda Schreiber**

The bible calls us to examine ourselves for this specific reason. To recognize what is preventing us from loving fully. Often, because of childhood experiences, familial background as well as previous relationship hurts; shape the way we perceive love. Causing many of us not only to shift our perception of love but even misconstrue the way we express love. If we examine our true feelings; those deep innermost feelings that we seldom express, we can begin to pray strategically to the Lord to break generational curses as well as break spiritual strongholds that prohibit us from opening our hearts fully. That is where the challenge begins. Are we open to being honest with ourselves?

2 Corinthians 13:5 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁵Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

5 Love Styles Test

"Each person's childhood experiences form the roots of who they are; continuing to inform the way that person responds to others or expresses love, even far into adulthood. The result of all these experiences are actually very predictable because people tend to fall into one of five special categories: called "Love Styles".

REV. MILAN YERKOVICH, M.A. & KAY YERKOVICH, M.S., M.F.T

5 Love Styles	Traits
<p><i>The Avoider</i> "I like people, but I'm not very comfortable when they get emotional. I like to keep it simple... it's so much easier when people just take care of themselves."</p>	<p>Coming from often affection-less homes that value independence and self-reliance, the Avoider grows up learning to just take care of themselves. The catch? They restrict their feelings and needs so they can deal with the anxiety of having little to no comfort and nurturing from their parents.</p>
<p><i>The Pleaser</i> "I work hard at making those I love happy, and I'm not great at saying "no" or keeping boundaries. But anything is better than having people upset with me."</p>	<p>Pleasers usually grow up in a home with an overly protective or angry critical parent. Pleaser children do everything they can to "be good" and avoid troubling their reactive parent. These kids don't get comfort: rather, they spend their energy comforting or appeasing their troublesome parent. As adults, Pleasers tend to continually monitor the moods of others around them to keep everyone happy. Eventually, they can become resentful and break down or leave the relationship.</p>
<p><i>The Vacillator</i> "I long for relationships and connection, but people always let me down. Sometimes I wonder if it's even worth it anymore."</p>	<p>Growing up with an unpredictable parent, Vacillators' needs aren't top priority. Without consistent parental affection, they develop feelings of abandonment. By the time the parent feels like giving again, their child is tired of waiting and too angry to receive. As adults, Vacillators are on a quest to find the consistent love they never received as children. They idealize new relationships, but then get tired of it once life (and the relationship) gets less than perfect.</p>
<p><i>The Controller</i> "I don't like being outside of my comfort zone, so I always make sure I'm the one in charge. That way I know for sure that I won't be taken advantage of."</p>	<p>Controllers need control to keep the vulnerable, negative feelings that they experienced in childhood from surfacing in their adult lives. Having control means having protection from the feelings of fear,</p>

	<p>humiliation and helplessness. Anger is the one emotion that is not vulnerable, so intimidation and anger are often used to keep control. Control may be highly rigid or more sporadic and unpredictable, but Controllers rarely realize the real reason they need to be in charge.</p>
<p>The Victim “I keep my needs quiet, and honestly, I’m not even sure what my needs are. It’s safer when I just go with the flow... there’s less opportunity for a blow-up.”</p>	<p>In chaotic homes, compliant kids survive by trying to stay under the radar and be as invisible as possible. They hide, appease and learn to not be fully present in order to lessen the pain from their angry, violent, chaotic parents. Some kids build whole imaginary worlds in their heads where they can escape the pain of abuse. Victims lack a sense of self-worth or person hood and are often anxious, depressed and just going through the motions. They may replicate their childhood home environment by marrying a Controller and using the coping methods of compliance and retreat to get by. Suppressed anger may be inflicted on the kids when the Controller is not present.</p>

What is the basis of your relationship? Why are you together? Establish your foundation and build your marital love nest on the truth and not fantasy. It is important to take a deep dive into your own background to see what you are bringing to the table both positively and negatively

**Dr. Les & Leslie Parrott – Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts Curriculum:
 III. How to Predict a Happy Marriage**

- Over the last 3 decades, there has been much research into the ingredients of a happy marriage. As a result, we know more about building a successful marriage than ever before. Les and Leslie Parrott, Gary Smalley, Smart Marriages, etc.
- **Seven indicators:**
 1. Healthy expectations of marriage
 2. An accurate and realistic concept of love (1 Corinthians 13)
 3. A positive attitude and outlook toward life
 4. The ability to communicate their feelings
 5. An understanding and acceptance of each other and gender differences (**Personality Types: Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholy, Phlegmatic**)
 6. The ability to make decisions and settle arguments
 7. A common spiritual foundation and goal
- Living in a successful marriage is less than a mystery & more about learning certain life skills.
- **Many couples wrongly blame in-laws, each other, money, sexual issues, but generally the hot points in marriage usually stem from poor communication, gender/personality issues, and lack of spiritual health (unwillingness to forgive, etc.).**

IV. Have You Faced the Myths of Marriage with Honesty?

Myth 1: If I just find the right soul-mate, I will live happily ever after without ever being challenged.

Myth 2: I can discover whether my fiancé and I are compatible by living together before marriage.

Myth 3: Families of origin don't make any difference when you're really in love.

Myth 4: We expect exactly the same things from marriage.

Do you have a **clear picture** of what life together will be like? Have you discussed it in practical detail? How have your ideas of married life been formed?

A. **Unspoken Rules** (who will cook, clean, take out garbage, shop, etc...)

What unspoken rules might you have inherited from your family of origin?

Examples:

- Don't interrupt another's work
- Don't talk about money in public
- Don't express anger
- Don't work too long
- Leaving clothes all over is not OK
- Tip big or don't tip
- Boundary issues with the opposite sex

B. **Unconscious Roles**

- Just as an actor in a play follows a script, married couples fall into unconscious roles, almost involuntarily, inherited usually from parents, but also personal dispositions.

Examples:

- The planner
- The boss
- The navigator

- The shopper
- The cook
- The comedian
- The fixit person
- The cleaner

What roles might you follow? Make your roles conscious!!

Myth 5: Everything good in our relationship will get better.

- Many things improve in relationships, but some things become more difficult.
- Every successful marriage requires necessary losses.
- In choosing to marry, you inevitably go through a mourning process.

What are three things you will have to give up when you marry?

Examples:

- Childhood
- Parents
- Freedom and carefree lifestyle
- Idealized image you have of your partner
 - We want to see our partner at their best
 - We don't consider they might get fat or irritable

“No matter whom we fall in love with, we sooner or later fall out of love if the relationship continues long enough. The honeymoon always ends, the bloom of romance always fades.” - Dr. Scott Peck

- Romantic love is actually chemistry in the brain and blood which is measurable.
- Has a half-life of about 3 months.
- Thus, the essence of married love is covenant and affection, not romance.
- No human being can fulfill your idealized dreams.
- BUT: disenchantment enables you to move into deeper intimacy.

Myth 6: Everything bad or difficult in my life will disappear.

- This myth has been handed down through countless generations, especially in movies such as Cinderella.
- Deep down, we all long to meet a Prince Charming or Cinderella and make all the hurt go away.

- No matter how glorious marriage is, it is no substitute for inner spiritual healing and transformation.
- Marriage does not erase personal pain or eliminate loneliness. Why? Because people get married primarily to further their own well-being, not to take care of their partner's needs.
- The bad feelings and traits you carried around before marriage are still with you as you leave the wedding chapel.
- Marriage therapy vs marriage as therapy. Three Colorado psychologists discovered that many growing up in dysfunctional homes (alcoholic, abusive, etc.) healed themselves through marriage.
- Harvell Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, explains that a healthy marriage becomes a place to wrap up unfinished business from childhood.

Myth 7: My spouse will make me whole.

Prov 27:17 - Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

- Growth will occur from marriage, but not wholeness. Wholeness comes from God.
- Marriage is where the rubber meets the road of Christianity.
- Mr. or Ms. Right – marrying the wrong person? Growing in relationship.
- Enmeshed relationships – dependent on the partner. Coupled with low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, easily controlled by partner. Want to suck happiness out of their partner, rather than personal growth.
- Opposite problem is the disengaged relationship. Living together under same roof.
- Healthy marriage is not mutual dependence, but shared life together.

