

How to express your love for God

JOHN 14

I recently observed an unrestrained public display of affection by a couple who had just fallen in love. They were quite demonstrative, leaning on each other, fawning over each other, frequently kissing each other. It made some onlookers feel uncomfortable.

In the same gathering was a couple who had been married for more than 45 years. They smiled understandably at the younger couple. Maybe the young couple rekindled some past memories. The older couple wasn't touching and there was little outward show of affection between them. But no one questioned their love for each other. They had been faithful to one another for four decades and were devoted to serving each other.

Paul Harvey once pointed out that love usually goes through three stages. First there is romance when the couple wants to be together 24 hours a day and can't keep their hands off each other. But romance, as wonderful as it is, always fades.

It gives way to the second stage, which is tolerance. Each learns the other has faults; the excitement dwindles, and the infatuation wears off. The couple sit in awkward silence when traveling. They learn to put up with each other.

Later, mature love sets in—love in the

third degree. Mutual experiences have bonded the couple together and they have remained committed to one another for a long time. They have learned what it means for two to become one.

Paul Harvey points out that one of the problems of our shallow society is that people in the tolerance stage think that because romance has faded, their love is over. So they jump the fence and try to rediscover romance. But in reality they go back to the beginning of the cycle and delay the ultimate fulfillment. Mature people know that romance, while an exciting phase, is just the beginning.

I went to a very expressive worship service recently. Young people were clapping their hands, closing their eyes, raising their hands, and at times even jumping up and down to the exciting music. They were very expressive in declaring their love for God and it was enjoyable to witness. It did make some older Christian observers uncomfortable; however,

It seems to me there are two wrong reactions to emotional, demonstrative worship. One is to be condescending and say, "That's phony! God can't be pleased with that; it's not done decently and in order." However, romance is a wonderful stage of a developing relationship and

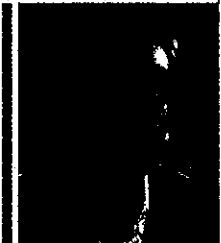
we ought to rejoice with those who are falling in love with the Lord.

But while spiritual enthusiasm is refreshing, it's wrong to conclude that people who are more expressive love God more deeply than those whose worship is more restrained. Some of the most dedicated Christians I know are very reserved in the manner in which they express their worship.

"Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching'" (John 14:23, 24). God measures our love for him by our obedience to his commands, not by our public displays of affection toward him.

One preacher told an excited audience, "I don't care how loud you shout or how high you jump as long as when you land, you walk straight." Good counsel.

Mature love for God is not just an emotional expression but what Eugene Peterson calls "a long obedience in the same direction."



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DAY BY DAY WITH THE BIBLE

<input type="checkbox"/> John 14:22-31	<input type="checkbox"/> John 15:9-17	<input type="checkbox"/> John 16:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 2:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 3:1-13	<input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 4
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<input type="checkbox"/> Hosea 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Hosea 13, 14	<input type="checkbox"/> Joel 2-3
<input type="checkbox"/> John 15:1-8	<input type="checkbox"/> John 15:18-27	<input type="checkbox"/> John 16:12-24
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<input type="checkbox"/> Job 27	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 29	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 31:1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> Hosea 9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Joel 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Amos 1-2

1. How would you describe the manner in which you show your love for God—reserved or expressive?
2. Why have you chosen to show your love for God in this manner?

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