

# Learning to Love



**Love is a goal that any couple can reach.**

**W**HILE MOST OF America is extolling the *emotion* of love on Valentine's Day, Christian husbands and wives should be celebrating the *commitment* of love.

Christian couples should understand, from Bible study and their own experience, what others miss by watching movies and reading paperback novels alone. That is, God commands marital love. And when we obey him, marriage becomes a fulfilling wonder.

God doesn't encourage husbands and wives to *feel* love, although feeling love is certainly good. He doesn't allow them to *wait* for love, as if love were something that visited couples unawares.

God says, "Each one of you . . . must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). This kind of love, the Bible's kind of love, is something that couples can achieve, if they will.

Bob Russell describes the difference between a common definition of love, infatuation, and the Bible's word for the highest kind of love, *agape*.

"Infatuation does not last," he asserts in *Marriage by the Book*. "In fact, the more intense the infatuation, the more precarious the marriage relationship. . . .

"The Bible speaks of something deeper, more stable, than infatuation. It speaks of *agape* love. . . . *Agape* means to . . . do the right thing regardless of feeling. That kind of love is an act of the will. It is not an uncontrollable emotion; it is a decision of the mind: 'I will give myself to this person.'"

Then he ends his chapter titled "Learn

to Love" with a list of seven ways any couple can rekindle love in their marriage. How many of these ideas would make your marriage better?

1. *Make a commitment to your partner exclusively.* "Winston Churchill rallied England during World War II with the phrase, 'Wars are not won by evacuations.' Marriages are not kept together by bailing out."

2. *Pray for God's power to transform your feelings.* "Prayer not only releases God's healing power in your marriage. It forces you to swallow your pride and humble yourself before Him."

3. *Dedicate yourself to fulfilling your mate's needs instead of focusing on your own unmet needs.* "Sacrifice yourself; forget yourself and become involved in providing for your mate's happiness." Russell admits that this is perhaps the most difficult of the seven steps.

4. *Deliberately act the way you wish you felt.* If you do this, Russell says, "you will eventually feel the way you act. . . . That is not hypocrisy; that is obedience."

5. *Spend time together, just the two of you.* "Communication is to a relationship what oxygen is to your body."

6. *Restore sexual intimacy to your marriage right now.* Russell quotes 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 and Proverbs 5:18, 19 to show that God wants a healthy sex life for every married couple. "If there is no caressing or physical intimacy, . . . you are outside God's will."

7. *Develop spiritual maturity.* If two Christians will "really surrender their lives to Jesus Christ and then to each other, He will bring them together—I guarantee it."

I'm going to get Russell's book for my wife and me to read together. It will help us do what every Christian couple should: enrich our marriage by recommitting ourselves to love. ■

(*Marriage by the Book* [29-03156] is available from Standard Publishing or your local supplier for \$6.99.)