

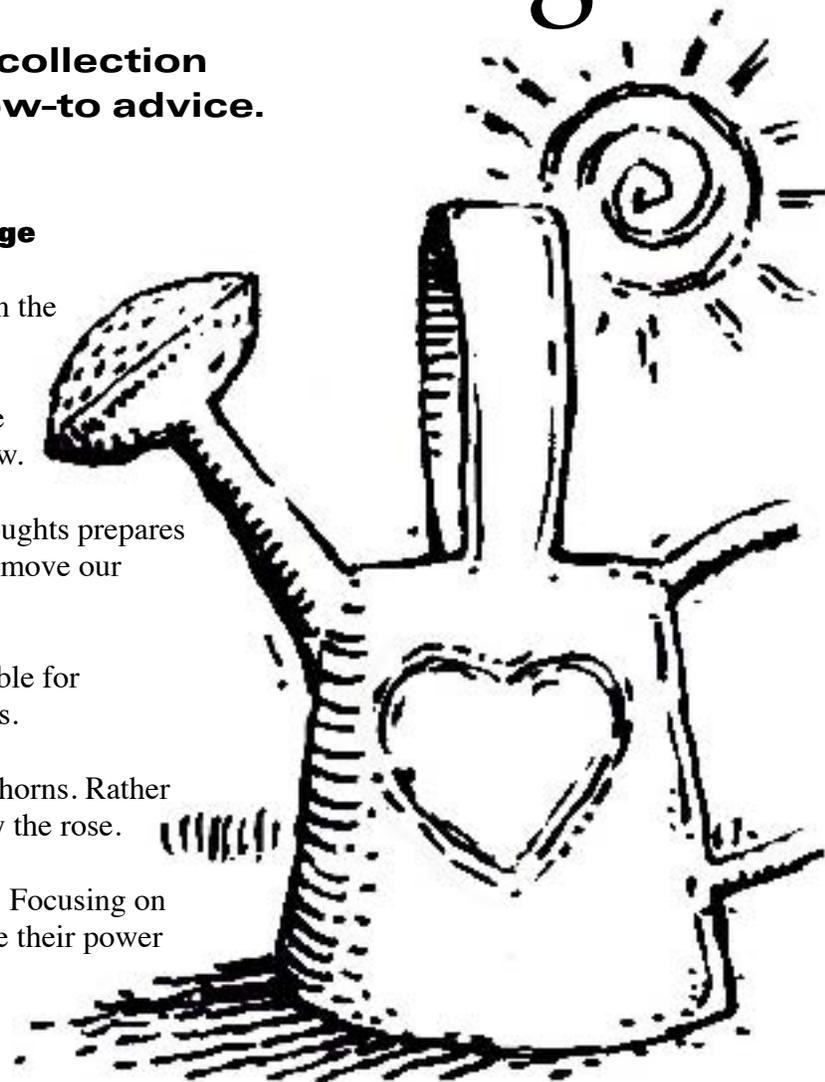


Nurture: Do the Work of Loving

Get ready to garden with this collection of tips, plans, and practical how-to advice.

Review — Guiding Principles for Marriage

- **Seek the light:** More truth will be found in the light than the darkness.
- **Notice your feelings:** If we dwell on tense and angry feelings, those feelings will grow.
- **Speak from peace:** Thinking peaceful thoughts prepares us to share ourselves in a helpful way and move our relationships forward.
- **Weed your own garden:** We are responsible for changing ourselves rather than our partners.
- **Manage expectations:** Roses come with thorns. Rather than waste time resenting the thorns, enjoy the rose.
- **When your soul speaks, take great notes:** Focusing on good feelings and experiences can increase their power in our lives.



Doing the work of loving

Marriage can grow from a handful of seeds to a garden filled with colorful, radiant life. But this won't happen by accident. It will require careful attention to the well-being of the plants. We may need to increase the light of encouragement, the fertilizer of time spent together, and the water of kindness. We need to weed out destructive thoughts and actions while encouraging healthy growth. Steady investments in the relationship will assure a bountiful harvest.

1. Nurturing requires patient study and intelligent effort

Suppose that you really want your backyard garden to flourish. You go to the local nursery and ask for their best fertilizer. You haul home a fifty-pound bag and start dumping it liberally on every plant. What is the likely effect of your efforts?

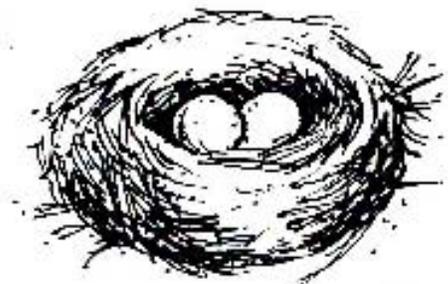
You will probably kill many plants and waste your investment in fertilizer.

Experienced gardeners know that no one fertilizer is good for every part of every garden. We must study the nature of the soil and the needs of the particular plants that we have. One garden—or one area of the garden—may need more compost stirred in. Another area may need lime. To randomly throw even the best of fertilizers into the garden without first assessing the specific needs of the soil and the plants almost guarantees that more harm than good will come of your efforts.

The same is true in marriage. Different people need different kinds of emotional nutrition in order to feel that they are loved.

Imagine, for example, that one afternoon your partner suddenly grabs you for no apparent reason, gazes into your eyes, and declares: “I love you with all my heart!” What would your reaction be?

Depending on your personality, you might be thrilled. You might wish that your partner would express himself or herself this way more often! But depending on your personality, this sudden display of affection might make you wonder if your spouse had wrecked the car. Or maybe you suspect he’s drunk. Or maybe you think she wants to get you in the mood to spend some money.



Consider a different example. Imagine that your spouse leaves you a beautifully wrapped box. You open it to find an expensive ring. What would your reaction be?

Again, it’s possible that you might be ecstatic—you might feel you have the world’s most thoughtful husband. But depending on your personality, you might wonder how you’re going to pay for it. Or you might wonder why he didn’t buy a different one. Or you might wish he had bought you a puppy, a new computer, or new furniture.

When we first began our relationship with the person we later married, we were filled with warmth, love, and enthusiasm. It all seemed so natural. Nearly every expression of love seemed absolutely perfect.

But those feelings of romance only last so long. Within two years, most couples have returned to earth. It may seem like irritation is more common than closeness. The demands of daily living deplete our soil of vital nutrients. Our garden wilts. We now have to put effort into figuring out what our partner really wants so that our love can continue to thrive.

Wally Goddard, one of the authors of this program, tells about his own efforts to discover what nutrients needed to be added to his marital garden with his wife, Nancy.

I love stuff. I love it in virtually all forms. I love wind-up toys, scraps of wood, beautiful pictures, and picture frames. I love bird eggs and ficus trees. I love stuff.

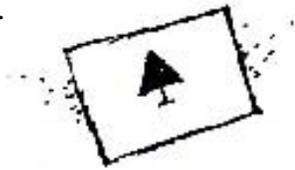
I feel loved when people give me stuff. And when I have wanted to show my love to Nancy, I have bought her stuff. I have often felt very proud of all the stuff I got her. But Nancy doesn’t like stuff! When I have given her stuff, she has sometimes said, “Well, thanks, dear. I appreciate it. But I don’t need it.”

I would laugh. “You may not need it but you can store it with all my stuff and rest knowing that you have it.”

Nancy wasn’t convinced. She would grimace and say, “But we can’t afford the stuff you bought me.”

Again I would laugh. “That’s not our problem. That is the bank’s problem!”

Obviously Nancy and I had different ways of giving and receiving love—I call those love languages.



When I asked Nancy what she wanted for her birthday, Christmas, or anniversary, her answer was always the same: “Nothing.” I figured she was just being agreeable. For years I tried to spy on her. I tried to notice what she looked at when she was at a department store. But the stuff I bought her didn’t please her. She continued to insist that she didn’t want any stuff.

Nancy is much more aware than I am. She knew that I did like stuff. So she bought me stuff. Because she is frugal, it was often inexpensive stuff. It might be a little toy that was on sale. But I was happy.

After 27 years of marriage and no success at figuring out what to get her for special occasions, I finally decided to try something different. I tried to notice the way she seemed to like receiving love. I noticed that she loved getting notes from me and from our children.

When I thought about it, I realized that she often gave me little notes from time to time. She might write a note of appreciation to me and put it in my work bag. When I found the note, I always appreciated her thoughtfulness. (But I also wondered where the stuff was.) Apparently Nancy’s language of love was notes.

I decided I should try writing her a note. So I pulled out my appointment book from the year that reminded me of the places we had been and the things we had done. I worked my way through it looking for special experiences we had shared in the course of the previous year.

It took hours to go through the events of the year but I ended up with a letter that was about four or five pages long telling about sweet experiences we had enjoyed in the months previous. I printed out the letter on nice paper, decorated it with expensive stickers, put it in an envelope, and placed it under the Christmas tree.

As Christmas got closer, I started to panic. What if Nancy got mad because I didn’t get her any stuff? What if the holiday felt flat for her because she didn’t get what she wanted? But I didn’t know what else to get her. So I decided to stick with the letter.

On Christmas morning, our daughter Sara handed out presents. Nancy was perplexed to get an envelope. She opened it and began to read. As she read, the tears began to trickle down her cheeks. As she finished the letter she turned to me and said, “Honey, this is what I always wanted for Christmas.”

I replied, “Yes, but there will be some great sales after Christmas!”

It took 27 years for me to figure out that Nancy wanted something very different from what I had been giving her. She wanted words of love and appreciation. Finally I had learned her language of love.

I suppose that the key to discovering Nancy’s language of love was noticing how she preferred to show love. I could also have asked her how she liked to be loved. I could have noticed the loving gestures that had touched her heart in the past.

Reflection:

Take a minute to respond to these questions:

- Did anything in Wally and Nancy’s story stand out for you? Make notes of anything that helped you understand and appreciate healthy marriage and effective nurturing.
- If you showed love to your partner in the way she or he prefers, how would it affect your relationship?

Key Points:

- In order to show love effectively, we must study our partners’ preferences. This is likely to require patient attention over time.
- We can only improve our marriage gardens with wise and deliberate effort.

2. There are several different languages of love that are common

One way of thinking about languages of love is that there are three specific languages:

- Show me.
- Tell me.
- Touch me.

With the table below, consider the meaning of each of the three languages and whether it describes the way you and your spouse like to be loved:

Languages of love	Show me I like it when you show your love by helping me with tasks or by giving me things.	Tell me I like it when you express your love in words—either spoken or written.	Touch me I like to hold hands, cuddle, sit close, and be together.
How do you like to be loved? Mark your 1 st , 2 nd , & 3 rd choices.			
How do you think your partner likes to be loved? Mark his or her 1 st , 2 nd , & 3 rd choices.			

3. There are two languages of love that are important to most people

While there are usually some specific and unique ways each person likes to be loved, there are also some languages of love that are important to most people. They are:

- **Spending time together**
- **Feeling understood**

Just as gardens require regular attention, relationships require regular, enjoyable time together. Yet most of us fail to do this. What keeps us from doing it?

Sometimes our lives are very busy, and we can't find time to do things together. Sometimes we have a hard time agreeing on what to do together. Sometimes we have very little energy at the end of our busy days and weeks to do things together. Sometimes we can't afford the things we like to do.

How can we make time for our relationships? There are no genies in the lamp to solve this problem. Patience and creativity are required. If each partner makes a list of things he or she enjoys, then partners can work together to find time.

The second language of love that is important to most people is feeling understood. For most of our lives, many of us have been encouraged to deny our feelings. We have been told to be happy when we aren't. We have been told to stop being mad when we are. So many of us are confused about our feelings and don't know what to do when strong feelings occur.

When someone takes a genuine interest in how we feel and—rather than arguing with our feelings—tries to understand how we feel, it can feel like warm sunshine on a chilly patch of the garden! For most of us it is a rare experience—and it is priceless!

Showing understanding is so important that it is the subject of the next lesson in *The Marriage Garden*.

Reflection:

Take a minute to complete this exercise:

- Make a list of things you enjoy doing. Share this list with your partner. Look for things you might do together. If your partner is not involved in the Marriage Garden program, think about things she or he enjoys that you might join, or think about things you enjoy to which you could invite her or him.

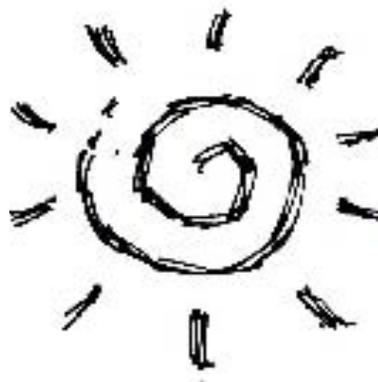
Key Point: Spending happy time together is good for relationships.

4. Relationships thrive when they have plenty of sunshine

Many plants fail to flourish because of a lack of sunshine. Many wilt and wither when they are in the shade.

Marriages are similar to plants. They need lots of light. They wither and die in the absence of light. But this light is not ordinary daylight. It is the light of positivity.

Research on strong relationships show that they typically have five positives for each negative. That means that a partner will express love, appreciation, and affection an average of five times for each correction or complaint that he or she offers.



The good news is that everyone can find ways to be more positive. Instead of talking about the things that bother us, we can talk about the things we enjoy.

There are three parts to every relationship.

1. There are the things I like about my partner that don't need to change.	2. There are the things I don't like about my partner that never will change.	3. There are the things I don't like about my partner that can change.
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I might say that I like about 80% of my partner. That would leave 20% that I wish were different.

80%	20%	
1. There are the things I like about my partner that don't need to change.	2. There are the things I don't like about my partner that never will change.	3. There are the things I don't like about my partner that can change.

What happens if we think and talk a lot about the things we DO like about our partners (the things in box 1)? As we think and talk about the good, we appreciate our partners even more. We feel more loving. Our relationship grows.

What happens if we think and talk a lot about the things we don't like about our partners (the things in boxes 2 and 3)? If we think and talk a lot about the things we don't like, they fill our minds until it seems like there is nothing good about our partners. Our relationship becomes dark and hopeless.

John Gottman has discovered something interesting about the things we don't like about our partners. He found that approximately 70% of what we don't like will never change. These may be things like different personalities or food preferences or simply our personal styles. Some things simply won't change! We can talk about them, complain about them, and nag about them, but these things aren't going to change.

If you are good at math, you recognize that 30% of what you don't like can change. Is it productive to talk about this part of our relationship?

The answer is a surprise. Gottman has found that the only way to get our partners to change is by loving them the way they are. Talking about our discontents doesn't usually cause our partners to improve. But enjoying, appreciating, and loving our partners helps them grow in ways that cause us to love them more!

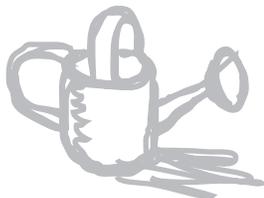
Instead of complaining about a messy kitchen, I might appreciate a lovely meal. Instead of complaining about socks left on the floor, I might pick them up and be grateful for the opportunity to serve.

Gottman suggests that the following behaviors can increase the sunshine in our marriages:

- Show interest.
- Be affectionate.
- Show you care.
- Be appreciative.
- Show your concern.
- Be empathic.
- Be accepting.
- Joke around.
- Share your joy.

Gottman also suggests that we keep handy (maybe in our wallets) a list of qualities we enjoy in our partners. When we are feeling irritated or frustrated, we might pull out the list and think about good times and good qualities. We might also put pictures, notes, gifts or other reminders on our desk to help us remember the good.

The way we think about our partners has a very big impact on how we feel about them. We can choose to dwell on the good. Then it will be quite natural to be positive and loving in the things we say.



Reflection:

Take a minute to respond to these questions:

- What are some of the things you enjoy about your spouse? What can you do to help you be mindful and appreciative of these things?

Key Point: We can bring more sunshine to our relationships by filling our thoughts with light and by talking about the things we appreciate.

Teaching Resources:

Teaching tips and teaching outline

Select the major points you want to emphasize. Build a session using the stories, exercises, and group discussion that your time allows.

Resources you might use:

Gottman, J. (2004). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Orion.

Chapman, G. (2004). *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Chicago: Northfield. (There are many good ideas and stories in this book that fit nicely with this lesson.)

Olson, T. (2004). *Being Realistic in Marriage Relationships*. In D. E. Brinley & D. K. Judd (Eds.), *Living in a covenant marriage*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book.

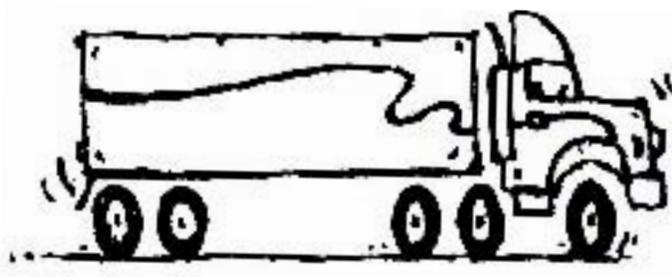
Supplemental stories:

Story #1: Bringing Light Home

Terry Olson, a professor of family life, tells an excellent story of filling life with light. He describes a situation where many of us would be annoyed and abrasive. Yet this man apparently rose (at least on this occasion) above an unhelpful reaction.

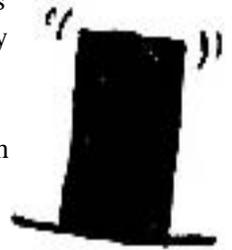
The wife of a long-distance truck driver is worried about dinner being late. She and her husband always celebrate his return from his three or four days on the road with a quiet dinner. Although he is a little later than she expected, she is grateful she has not yet heard the brakes of the big rig in front of the house, because she wants the whole thing to be ready, and it's not. Alas, there is the noise she had been both dreading and hoping for. She begins to imagine his coming in the back door, hanging up his jacket and then, before washing up, leaning around the hall entrance and smiling a greeting. She worries he will see the upset table and discover the unready meal. She is worried that his face will fall, that he will think his homecoming is no longer a big deal or will not include the spirit of welcome she typically offers. In other words, she is imagining him being offended—perhaps even resentful—at her unpreparedness. She worries he will hold it against her. Her imaginings seem absolutely realistic to her.

Her husband, however, presents her with an alternative reality. When he actually does lean around the corner and sees that dinner preparations are incomplete, he smiles, catches her eye, and says, "Hi, honey. Looks like I got here just in time to help. Be right there." (Olson, 2004, p. 125)



Story #2: Avoiding an Uncivil War

[Abraham] Lincoln was outside talking to a congressman about the important political matters of the day. Mary Todd stormed out of the house, ruthlessly castigated Lincoln for something he had done, and then stormed back inside. Aghast that a wife would behave so outrageously in public, the congressman looked to see Lincoln's reaction. Lincoln was undisturbed by the incident and explained to the incredulous congressman that such outbursts made his wife feel so much better that he hardly wanted to put a stop to them.



Christensen, A., & Jacobson, N. S. (2000). *Reconcilable Differences*. New York: Guilford, p. 131

Story #3: Love is as Strong as Death

Viktor Frankl described the way thoughts of his wife and his love for her sustained him through the difficulties of being a prisoner of the Nazis:

We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road running through the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbor's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his hand behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: "If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us."

That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another on and upward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look then was more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world may still know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when a man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life, I was able to understand the words, “The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.”

In front of me a man stumbled and those following him fell on top of him. The guard rushed over and used his whip on them all. Thus my thoughts were interrupted for a few minutes. But soon my soul found its way back from the prisoner's existence to another world, and I resumed talk with my loved one: I asked her questions, and she answered; she questioned me in return, and I answered....

My mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn't even know if she were still alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, and the thoughts of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I still would have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of that image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. “Set me like a seal upon thy heart, love is as strong as death.”

