

This coming December 27, my wife and I will celebrate our 18th year of marriage. 18 years. Now I know that for many of you that is just a blink of an eye and others of you may be wondering, wow 18 years? How did she stick it out that long? My sisters ask her that every time they see her. In all seriousness, there is an answer. And that answer is - choice. We have made a choice to give love to each other. However what is also true is that over the years both of us have struggled with how to give love. Helping one another navigate their careers? No problem. Raising kids? We are a team in lock-step. Knowing how to give each other love?

Last fall, after wanting to connect more, we decided that we needed a little bit of help. We weren't the same people we were way back in 1998 when she thought everything I said was hilarious and I thought everything she did was mind blowing. So we looked around for some marriage enrichment. To be honest both of us struggled with the decision. I'm a pastor, she's a teacher, both highly educated; couldn't we figure out how to give love on our own?

What we found out was that we needed a third voice. And that third voice was extremely helpful to us and helped us understand how we can give love to each other. That third voice was a worksheet called 5 Love Languages. The Love Language worksheet is a program based on the book "The 5 Love Languages"; the idea being that each of us experiences love in one of 5 ways or some combination of the five. And they are: words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, giving gifts and physical touch.

Now I had heard about the Love Language process before, but I had judged it to be some fluffy headed - book selling - money making - extortionist scheme that prayed upon the naïve. And I was not naïve. But we chose it and so I did it. Afterwards my wife and I compared our worksheets and it turns out that I was naïve, very naïve. I was naïve to the fact that my wife experiences love very differently than I do. What a concept. Who would have predicted that?

Through that third voice, we found out that we both experience love in very different ways. I'm physical touch. She is acts of service/ quality time. So... I was on her like a human blanket, thinking that because that's my love language it must be hers as well. And she keep expecting me to do things for her, that didn't include me touching her, thinking that's what filled me up because it worked for her. Wow, we had a break though. She gets me and I get her and now everything is perfect.

Well... probably as perfect as it's ever going to get because even though we both know how to give love to each other we don't always give love very well. And one of the main reasons why is because we are human beings and often times human beings don't give love very well. It doesn't mean that we aren't in love with each other. She still blows my mind and I'm just as hilarious. We are deeply in love and committed to each other. It just means that we struggle to give love. And my prediction is that we all struggle to give love, not only to our

spouses but to our kids, to our siblings, to our parents, to our friends and coworkers, to those of us gathered here today.

And in the midst of these struggles we all need a third voice and that third voice that we need speaks to us out of the gospel of John. Read John 13:33-35.

Here is this third voice, the voice of Jesus, sharing with us how to give love. The idea of giving love is not new. The idea of loving others saturates our scripture and practice as Christians. So we are not alone. Human beings have struggled with how to give love for a very long, long time. But in John, Jesus changes the motivation of that love. You have probably heard the standard "Love your neighbor as yourself". That line has been around for quite a long time. But in John, Jesus reconfigures the love command. The new love command is not based on the "self-love" standard. People are not to love others as they love themselves. And that's a good thing because we love ourselves just as poorly as we love others.

The third voice from Jesus comes and says that people are to love others how Jesus loves. The new standard is the love that Jesus gives, and that standard is built upon sacrifice; the kind of sacrifice that one makes to wash others feet. In other words, in order to give love to my wife I need to sacrifice whatever it is that keeps me from giving her quality time and acts of service. And that usually means that I need to sacrifice my time, my energy and my focus. The same is true for her. The same is true for you. The same is true for all of us.

And this is where the warning label comes in. Be aware of the sacrifice and treat it like a sacrifice and not a burden. Knowing how to give love and making it happen is sacrificial. It is holy. It is an amazing gift. It should never be a burden. A sacrifice is a choice you make. A burden is a choice that someone makes for you. Guess which one you'll actually live into?

So how do we give love to our spouses, to our kids, to our siblings, to our parents, to our friends and coworkers, to those of us gathered here today? Join with me this week in following these three steps. Step one is to get real with yourself. Pray about whom it is that you need to love better. Step two is to find out what their love language is. (See [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com))

Then make a list of the things you will need to sacrifice in order to give love. You may be like me. You may come to realize that to give love you have to sacrifice your time, energy and focus; remembering that it's a sacrifice, a choice that you make, a gift that you give and not a burden. And the last step is to simply try. Knowing that perfection is not the goal and knowing that you will fail. But try also knowing that you will succeed not because you have worked harder but because God honors your effort because you have made the choice to give love.