

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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What causes love to die in your marriage?

Is your love for your spouse alive and well? Do you still have that passion that once burned in your heart? Or has your love slowly died? Has the fire gone out?

The Scriptures describe the love between a husband and a wife as a fire. This is how the Shulamite, in the Song of Solomon, described her love relationship with her husband. She said, "...*For love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame*" (Song of Solomon 8:6). Her love for Solomon was a passionate fire in her soul. She compared her love to the strongest and most powerful forces she knew: the power of death and the power of the flame. These two metaphors are descriptions for the strength and passion of marital love.

First, consider the comparison of love to the strength of death. This is a great illustration because death is so powerful and all consuming. Death takes everyone sooner or later. It never gives up. This same love was demonstrated by Christ. He loved you to the point of death. His strong love drove Him to sacrificially lay His life down. His love is tenacious. He is still pursuing you today. At this moment, His eyes are looking

to and fro throughout the whole earth to find willing and loyal hearts. He wants to show Himself strong on their behalf (2 Chron. 16:9). Is your heart willing? God wants to give you His strong, persistent love for your spouse; a love that is totally committed.



Light the fire again!

Consider the second illustration of love as a fire that burns in the soul. In Scripture, salvation is described as "*a lamp that burns*" (Is. 62:1). Salvation is primarily a love relationship between you and the Father. The great commandment declares, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matt. 22:37). Your heart becomes a lamp that burns with the fire of His love. Again, this illustration is fitting because you are also called to be a light to the world. The love of Christ is the light the world is looking for. His love in you is what makes you a bright

light. Jesus called John the Baptist a "*burning and shining lamp*" (John 5:35). Why? Because he had this intense love and passion for God.

These metaphors also relate to how love dies in your marriage. The illustration of the fire is most important. Each of you has stood by a fire at one time or another, and you know very well what causes a fire to die out. It happens in only one of two ways.

One way a fire goes out is by your **inaction**. If you fail to watch and stoke the fire with more wood, what happens? The fire slowly goes out. This is also what happens in your marriage. Your inaction to love and to show attentiveness to your spouse will surely kill your love relationship. Your spouse will see this inaction and determine that you really don't care.

If you want your love to die, just do nothing. It won't be long before the fire is out. Many couples simply fail to do the maintenance required to keep the love between them alive. What do I mean? Do you recognize your mate's labor and accomplishments? Do you thank your spouse when he or she pleases you? Have you neglected to pray regularly with and for your partner? When is the last time you had a date together? When is the last time you gave a gift or did something special for your loved one when it wasn't a birthday or Christmas? Each of these actions

She is your companion and your wife by covenant. Mal. 2:14

will stoke the fire of your love. If you're forgetting these things, the fire will slowly go out!

Each forgotten action of love is simply a sign of laziness in your relationship. Yet, Scripture encourages you to love in a different manner. Paul says, "*Be kindly affectionate to one another... not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*" (Rom. 12:10,11). The term "fervent in spirit" means "to be hot or to boil." Love is depicted here as a blazing fire burning inside your heart to serve the Lord, in direct contrast to a lack of diligence or laziness.

If you want your love to die, just do nothing.

If God is encouraging us to be diligent and not lag in our love for our brother, how much more fervent should we be toward our mate? Are you showing the kindness and affection toward your spouse that you should? If you are, the fire between you will never go out. It only burns hotter and more intense with each passing day.

But there is another way to put a fire out besides your inaction. Your **deliberate actions** will cause the fire to go out as well. You can take the deliberate action of throwing water on a fire, and it will surely die. What deliberate actions pour water on your relationship? Are you verbally abusive? Do you criticize or mock your partner when you talk together? Are you physically

abusive? Are you refusing sexual relations to punish your loved one for lack of attentiveness to you? Do you act harshly or rudely? Have you been seen flirting with someone else? Have you broken your vows by adultery? These actions will surely quench the fire of love.

Paul taught that doing evil to others is what quenches the Holy Spirit in our lives. He exhorts, "*See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone...do not quench the Holy Spirit...abstain from every form of evil.*" Evil done to any person quenches the Holy Spirit in your life because this is sin and it grieves the heart of God. These actions grieve your spouse as well and quench the love between you! Read the entire context of 1 Thess. 5:15-22.

Make changes today. Don't wait any longer. Your love relationship can only take so much neglect. The flames of your love can only take so much dousing with water before the fire goes out. Stir up the embers, take the action God requires.

Therefore, it should not be a mystery as to why love dies within a marriage. It's as simple as either 1) failing to maintain the fire or 2) continuing the deliberate sinful actions that quench the fire. When these problems go unresolved in your relationship, you slowly drift apart. The love slowly dies.

Some couples do both. They do nothing to stoke the fire of their love, and they are dumping water regularly on what's left. This relationship will not last! How do you stop this downward cycle? Read on!

What rekindles love between you?

Many times couples ask me, "Is there any hope to ever renew the love we once had?" They wonder if they could ever rekindle the matrimonial fire. They think, "too much has happened that can't be changed." Yet, when you start asking these questions, you are on the right path. Yes, there is something you can do! Yes, there is hope! What should you do?

1. Return to your first love with Christ.

I have never seen a marriage that was in trouble where the two individuals involved weren't in need of spiritual renewal. Where there are unresolved conflicts, there will always be resentment. Where there is resentment, there is unforgiveness. Where there is unforgiveness, there is hardness of heart. With these attitudes inside, a person can't help but struggle in his relationship with God. You can't say you love God and hate your spouse at the same time (1 John 4:20). The hardness you have in your heart toward your mate, will bring a distance in your relationship with God, and this destroys any possibility for change. Jesus said, "*Without me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). If you desire to rekindle your love relationship with your spouse, you need to return to your first love with Christ (Rev. 2:4,5). God is love (1 John 4:7,8). He is the Source of love! You can't give what you don't have, and you need Him to give you the love you lack in your relationship. First reconcile with Him those

resentments you have in your heart. Ask His forgiveness for the hardness and unforgiveness you've had toward your loved one.

Once you've reconciled with Him, you will sense the power of His love working within you. You will then be able to take the action God requires of you. Remember, *"...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:13). You must be in right relationship with the Lord to have the power you need to have a right relationship with your spouse. The steps you need to take will not be easy. In fact, they are impossible if you have a resentful heart. You need to say with all confidence, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13). If your heart is right with Him, He will strengthen you to do all that He requires!

Are you showing the kindness and affection toward your spouse that you should?

Let me say a word to those of you who have never personally received Christ as your Savior. This is a critical issue for you. You may not realize it, but this is a central problem in your marriage. Without Christ you cannot be the husband or wife God requires. The love you need to enable you to resolve each of your problems is God's love, and it comes only from Him. Trying to love your partner with only your

love and in your own strength will always be insufficient. The problems you are having in your marriage today should make this abundantly clear. If you believe this, this is an issue that must change. Humble yourself right now before God and pray. Ask His forgiveness and invite Him to come into your heart. Ask Him to take over your life and your marriage, and to fill you with His Holy Spirit, making you the man or woman you need to be.

2. Next, go to your spouse and begin to reconcile the conflicts that divide you. How should you begin? Start with yourself! Jesus said, *"First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye"* (Matt. 7:5). He knew that this principle must be the priority for anyone to reconcile conflicts.

If you are ready to get things right, try this. Take out a piece of paper and write down whatever faults you have in your marriage. Be honest with yourself and with God. What have you done that has offended your spouse? Where have you failed to obey the Word of God? What have you neglected to do that you've been asked many times to remember?

Once you determine your failures, go and ask forgiveness for them. Don't start by pointing out your mate's faults, start with your own (James 5:16). This action immediately softens the heart of your spouse and usually creates a response in your partner to compile a similar list. If this doesn't happen, gently encourage your spouse to consider his or her own faults and do some soul-searching as you have. Encourage

your spouse that you want to change the direction of the relationship, and explain that only by reconciling these issues can the love return between the two of you.

What have you done that has offended your spouse?

This process of reconciliation might entail getting some counseling from your pastor. Many times, a third persons objectivity helps to show both of you what Biblical action is needed.

3. Begin to provoke your spouse to love by deliberate godly actions. Paul said, *"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24). We usually provoke one another to wrath and evil works; to provoke your spouse to love requires the power of God. It takes the love of God reigning in your heart to subdue your selfish actions. In most cases, love provokes others to love and stirs them up to love you back. Think of a time when a friend has done something for you that was totally unexpected. What was your reaction? Didn't it stir you up to want to do something in return for that person? Of course it did!

Love provokes others to love and takes care of the problem of inaction. The word provoke means "to stir up." Every action of love is like throwing another log on the fire. The more you take

deliberate actions of love, the more the fire blazes. You will naturally be attracted to the warmth of this kind of relationship, and it will naturally draw you closer together.

You will begin to look forward to getting home to see your spouse because of the love that has been rekindled between you!

4. Stop any of the deliberate sinful actions you are taking.

If you want the fire of love to begin to burn again, you have to stop throwing water on the fire. This will show your spouse that you mean business! When there is true repentance in the heart, it is always demonstrated by reversing the direction of your life. If you are doing anything that is contrary to the Word of God, you must stop it. Where you are living selfishly, reverse directions. Paul said, "...do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20).

Every action of love is like throwing another log on the fire.

This would mean you must stop any verbal or physical abuse. Ask God to control your explosive anger. Resume regular sexual relations. If you are involved with another man or woman, cut this relationship off today. This is what real repentance does!

5. Do preventive maintenance daily.

So often couples begin to work out their differences and then one of the two will revert to the same old habits. This

quenches the love between them, and the whole unhealthy process starts all over again. You must guard against this with all your heart.

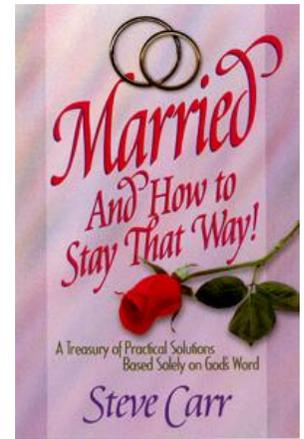
As you build a good fire by constant vigilance and attention, so you must be diligent to show your kindness and affection. This is a daily work. This is what love does. It works! Paul called it the "labor of love" (1 Thess. 1:3). If you love your spouse, you will put time and effort into building depth into your relationship. God loves you very much, and He has been at work for a long time to draw you to Himself. The work of the Cross was His labor of love for you. Yet, His labor of love is a daily action as well; He daily loads you with benefits (Ps. 68:19). This is what He wants you to do with your spouse. Daily stoke the fire of your love together! Daily reconcile the conflicts that arise! Demonstrate your love today!

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What is *Covenant Keepers*?

1. A ministry of Pastor Steve Carr of Calvary Chapel in Arroyo Grande, CA.
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3. Through our quarterly publication of *Covenant Keepers* we strengthen the biblical approach to counseling marriages.



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