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## DO YOU LOVE ME ?

Valentines on your mind? Let's count the ways you love - not your spouse or other loved one, but God's Word, the Bible. You can use the same categories you would apply to loving another person, because loving God's Word is an extension of loving God Himself. First, remember that love is not a feeling, it's an action. Love is best defined as "*choosing to do what is best for the other person.*" That's the issue isn't it, because if you can fool yourself into thinking love is merely an emotional feeling that comes and goes, then you can rationalize your lack of love for others. But God is our maker and model for love. Let's see how we measure up in love for Him, in terms of some common markers for "love."

**1- SPENDING TIME** - If you say you love someone but spend no time with them, you fool no one but yourself. The psalmist says, "*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*" (Psalm 119:97). How much time do you spend with God's Word? A recent Lifeway survey shows nine of ten American households have a Bible (four copies, on average). While 49 percent of evangelicals claim to read some of the Bible each day in some systematic way, only 22 percent of all Americans do. And 35 percent never look at it, while 30 percent do "when they need to." Some 19 percent only re-read their favorite parts, while 17 percent read a random passage. Of those who attend worship services at least once a week, 39 percent say they read the Bible every day, compared to only 13 percent of once-a-monthers.

**2- LISTENING WELL** - Likewise, if you say you love someone but never listen to what they say, you fool no one but yourself. Psalm 119:15 says, "*I will meditate on Your precepts, and fix my eyes on Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes, I will not forget Your word.*" Yet Lifeway research finds "most Americans don't know first-hand the overall story of the Bible, because they rarely pick it up. Even among worship attendees, less than half read the Bible daily. "The only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it." While 37 percent call the Bible "life-changing," 27 percent don't prioritize reading the Bible, and 15 percent say they "don't have time." Yet, it would take only about 12 minutes per day for most people to read or listen through the entire Bible in one year.

**3- RESPONDING ARIGHT** - Likewise, if you say you love someone but only do what suits you and when it suits you, instead of what suits them, you fool no one but yourself. Psalm 119:11 says "*Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform Your statutes, forever, to the end.*" The popular book "*The Five Love Languages*" says people love and feel loved in five major ways - words of affirmation, acts of service, gift-giving, quality time, and physical touch. While people respond to some of these more than others, it is in our human nature to love and to be loved. The concept is like filling someone's love tank or emotional bank account. Most people make many more withdrawals than deposits. The other person soon runs dry. But when you learn their love language, then you can be much more effective in communicating real love to them.

Similarly, you can read the Bible, listen to the Bible, study the Bible, memorize the Bible, meditate on the Bible, and pray the Bible into your life or the lives of others. As you spend time with the Bible, listening to God speaking through it, you realize what a gift God has given, such that you can sense His presence. And the Bible inspires and equips you to go out and live it, loving others. Doers, not hearers only.

**4- PRACTICING 24/7** - Likewise, if you say you love someone but only pay attention to them when you feel like it, instead of when they need you, then you fool no one but yourself. Psalm 119:67 says, "*My soul keeps Your testimonies; I love them exceedingly.*" Remember, we're talking about God here, not some flawed person who could take advantage of you by demanding all of you for themselves. God is holy and perfect and loving, and we only understand "love" as well as we understand God Himself. His character and actions always reflect what is best. God never exploits you. When you learn to love according to God's definition, you will also learn that doing what is right for the other person is also best for you, and most fulfilling and uplifting for you. Selflessness trumps self-ishness.

**5- YOUR WHOLE SELF** - Likewise, if you say you love someone but only engage them with part of yourself and your life, you fool no one but yourself. Psalm 119:47 says, "*I find my delight in Your commandments, which I love.*" It's an echo of Deuteronomy 6, where God says "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. And you shall teach them diligently, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way.*" Loving God and His Word means all that you are, heart and mind and will, responding to all that God is and reveals of Himself in the Bible.

It means loving Him with your entire being, all that He is with all that you are, as best you know Him. Does this seem humanly impossible? That's why Jesus Christ gives believers the Holy Spirit, so the author of Scripture dwells within you. So you can hear and read God's Word, and heed it. To know His truth, and put it into action, by His power. You say you love God. Prove it - read His Word. And live it! □