

# Loving Smart

*Over many years we've come to realise that most of our mistakes in love come from the assumption that everyone experiences love the same way we do. Instinctively, we tend to love the way we like to be loved. So if physical affection is important to us, we'll tend to express love through affection. If affirmation or gift-giving or recreational companionship is a primary love need, then we'll tend to 'speak' our love to others in those ways. - Byron*

But it's unlikely that our spouse, children or friends will have the same love needs that we have. 'Smart Loving' is an other-centred way to love that is effective because we love according to the love needs of the other. It seems so obvious, yet it's surprising how often people complain that their spouse misunderstands their gestures of love, that they try really hard to love their spouse but it just doesn't seem to be enough. We can be incredibly generous and self-sacrificing towards our spouse, but if our gestures are not meeting his or her love needs, it won't have the impact we desire.

'SmartLoving' is about knowing your spouse's love needs, and loving them the way they like and need to be loved. It's 'smart' because it's effective. After all, who has the time or energy to love in ways that just don't work? And it's genuine 'loving' because it's other-centred, focussed on building up and advancing the good of the other.

## Marriage Formation

Learn how to love more efficiently with a marriage enrichment experiences.

Marriage Encounter  
[www.wvme.org.au](http://www.wvme.org.au)

SmartLoving Marriage Enrichment Seminar  
[www.celebratelove.org](http://www.celebratelove.org)

Couples for Christ  
[www.cfc-australia.org](http://www.cfc-australia.org)

Teams – a Movement for Married Spirituality  
[www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au](http://www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au)

New Families Movement of the Focolare  
[www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org)

Schöenstatt  
[www.schoenstatt.org.au](http://www.schoenstatt.org.au)

Christian Family Movement  
[www.cfm.org](http://www.cfm.org)

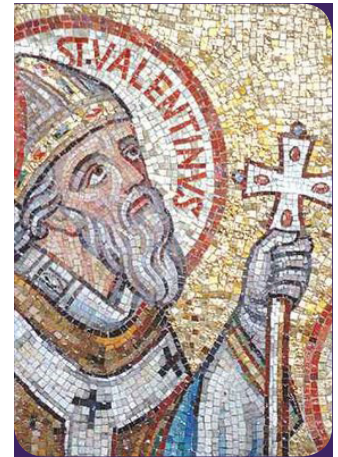
Retrouvaille  
[www.retrouvaille.org](http://www.retrouvaille.org)

Catholic Society for Marriage Education  
[www.csme.catholic.org.au](http://www.csme.catholic.org.au)

For Your Marriage - US Bishops  
[www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org)

A resource from the  
Australian Catholic Marriage and  
Family Council  
for the Bishops Commission  
for Pastoral Life  
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# The Mystery of Love



The pages of history bear testament to humankind's long-standing obsession with the phenomenon of love. Love gives meaning and purpose to living. It inspires us to heroic virtue and sacrifice and connects us in a mysterious way with our eternal destiny. Love transcends time, space and the limitations of human capacity. Love transports us into the realm of the divine – a place where time is both suspended and eternalised, where distance both contracts and expands to infinity, where freedom is simultaneously perfected and willingly surrendered.

Love is powerful. Love is most assuredly the most precious good in existence. It is also often misunderstood and misapplied. In the romance scene love seems to play havoc with our emotions taking us from euphoric highs to crushing lows.

## The Spousal Meaning of the Body

**In his writings known as 'The Theology of the Body', Pope John Paul II describes the purpose and meaning of human existence as a call to love, to make a gift of ourselves to another. He notes how the very structure of our bodies, as male and female, 'speak' of this calling...**

*The human body, with its sex, - its masculinity and femininity - seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains "from the beginning" the "spousal" attribute, that is, the power to express love: precisely that love in which the person becomes a gift and - through this gift - fulfils the very meaning of his being and existence. [15:1 Man and Woman he Created Them, Jan 16, 1980]*

St. Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time of Emperor Claudius II. His association with marriage arises from the story that Claudius, urgent to recruit soldiers, decreed that all weddings be suspended so as to encourage more single, unattached men to serve in his armies. Seeing the anguish of the young couples forbidden to marry, St. Valentine allegedly performed secret weddings in defiance of the Emperor.

He was eventually arrested and imprisoned. While awaiting execution, St. Valentine restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter. On the eve of his death, he penned her a farewell note signing it, "From your Valentine".

On February 14, 269 AD he was beheaded. He is the Patron Saint of engaged couples and married lovers.

ref: [www.catholic.org/saints](http://www.catholic.org/saints)

# Romantic Love

# The Experience of Love

When it strikes 'Falling in Love' is a wonderful experience. It tantalizes our senses, inflames our passions and invigorates our imaginations. We feel so alive, so thoroughly potent and sexual! A series of changes in our brain chemistry initiate a feeling of euphoria. Appetites wane, energy levels soar and sexual inhibitions diminish. The shy is emboldened, the humourless becomes engaging and dormant sexual interest ignites. We are filled with energy and thrilling excitement.

This state, scientifically identified as 'infatuation,' is not biologically sustainable. Eventually, our brain chemistry acclimatizes and with it the euphoria also wanes, usually within six to eighteen months. This is when real love begins to take root. As their relationship matures, the couple's love becomes increasingly grounded in genuine care and self-giving.

*We'd been married about three years and the honeymoon period was definitely over. Though we had a firm commitment, the sparkle of our early romance was gone. Being unaware of the science of infatuation, I was confused and worried. I didn't 'feel' the same powerful feelings that I thought was the hallmark of love. Was I still 'in love' with my husband? I was confused by the media portrayals of love and I just didn't know if this was normal or whether there was something wrong with our marriage. - Fran*

It's the kind of comment we hear often – "I

love him (or her), I'm just not 'in love' any more". There is this unrealistic expectation that the euphoria of infatuation will be sustained indefinitely. And we all fall for it! When we are in the throes of infatuation, we are convinced that we will be different. Other couples may fall out of love, but not us! It feels so overwhelmingly real and potent, we can't imagine that the feelings we have for each other will ever fade.

And yet fade they do. It's impossible for the body to sustain the rush of euphoria indefinitely. Eventually, we have to eat, we have to sleep, we have to attend to the practical realities of life. In this process of 'accommodation', the body, and the brain in particular, becomes habituated to the stimulus and the impact of the stimulus (ie the beloved) becomes less dramatic. Like all biological variances, we eventually return to equilibrium.

## The Truth about Romantic Love

**The truth is that romantic love is both a feeling and a choice. It has subjective (feeling) and objective (choice) dimensions. A healthy romance and genuine, reciprocal intimacy requires both the senses and the will to flourish. All give, and the relationship becomes very hard work. All take and the relationship lacks the substance to endure through the inevitable tough times.**

While everyone experiences love uniquely, some clear gender patterns have emerged through relationship research. Women primarily experience love and connection through the expression of 'cherishment'; gestures of care and tenderness, intimate conversation, attentiveness, personal affection and closeness, selfless acts of service, protectiveness. On the other hand, men have a bias towards love expressed as 'respect': admiration, deference, valuing of his opinion, giving him the benefit of the doubt, following his lead.

Obviously women want respect also... just as men want to be cherished. However the important insight here is that, while both are important to us, one is usually critical to our feeling loved in a convincing way. It's a bit like being left or right handed... we need and value both hands, but one is dominant.

This gender difference in the experience of love becomes very pronounced in the absence of either respect or cherishment. A wife may be very generous in cherishing gestures but if she fails to respect her husband, those gestures will be ineffective. He will just feel unloved. Similarly for the wife, the absence of cherishment leaves her feeling totally unloved, even if her husband is respectful.

This understanding is really helpful for married couples. Happiness in marriage is not simply about loving bigger and more generously in any haphazard way.

It requires us to thoughtfully eliminate the biggest 'love busters'; those behaviours that kill the joy and sense of connection for our spouse. For men, disrespect from his wife is a massive love buster. It drains his energy and crushes his confidence in relationship. For women, indifference and disinterest (that is, the absence of cherishment) is more likely to top the list of love busters.

Of course, this is not a new insight. Almost 2000 years ago, a certain St Paul was giving the similar advice:

**"Each one of you must agape [i.e., cherish] his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband". Eph 5:33**

*Nothing undercuts my self-esteem as a man more quickly than when my wife behaves disrespectfully towards me. It really wounds when she is dismissive or judgemental. On the other hand, I've seen how my wife responds when I cherish her; being attentive and caring really helps her to feel loved.- Luke*

*I resisted the idea of loving my husband by respecting him, because I believed that respect was something one earned. He had to deserve it. Yet I didn't apply the same principle to myself being cherished. The truth is, love in any form (respect or cherishment) is not earned. It's a freely given gift. - Cathy*