

# 10 Ways *to Say* “I Love You”

Josh McDowell



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

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## **10 WAYS TO SAY "I LOVE YOU"**

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McDowell, Josh, author.

10 ways to say "I love you" / Josh McDowell.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7369-5387-0 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-5388-7 (eBook)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title. II. Title: Ten ways to say "I love you".

BV835.M3375 2015

248.8'44—dc23

2014021855

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**Printed in the United States of America**

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 / VP-JH / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to recognize the following individuals for their valuable contribution to this book.

*Dave Bellis*, my friend and colleague for over 36 years, for collaborating with me on the outline of this book, pulling from my talks and other works to then write the rough draft, and folding in all the edits and revisions to shape this work into its final form. I recognize Dave's insight on the topics of marriage and relationships, and I'm deeply grateful for his contribution.

*Becky Bellis* for laboring at the computer to ready the manuscript.

*Terry Glaspey* of Harvest House for his vision and guidance in shaping the direction and tone of this work.

*Paul Gossard* of Harvest House for his expert editing and the insight he brought to the manuscript completion.

Last but not least is *Dottie, my wife*, for her written contribution in this book, for her love and patience toward me, and for her over 40 years in a devoted journey with me that has unlocked the secrets of loving.



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## What Do You Want in a Relationship?

Working late one night, I jumped when my concentration was broken by a phone call.

“Mr. McDowell?”

The young woman on the line hardly waited for me to respond.

“I’ve been married six months,” she said, “and already the honeymoon is over. Tonight my husband went out with the guys after we had a big argument. I feel alone and rejected. I sat here thinking, *Is this all there is to it?*” Obviously depressed, her voice cracking with emotion, she concluded, “Please tell me there is something more.”

This woman had some idea of what she expected in a relationship, and what she was experiencing wasn’t it. She repeated her request. “Please tell me there is something more.”

“There is,” I replied. “It’s called an intimate relationship.”

Have you longed for a romantic evening with your husband, only to get a few grunts as he watches a basketball or football game? Have you dated and wondered how a fun time with a person could blossom into a committed love? Or have you just wondered how to make a good marriage into a great one?

If you want to know how to spark or enrich a love relationship, you’re not alone. The search for a true intimate love is the theme of most hit songs and runs as an undercurrent through most movies. The theme of the secret of loving is the lifeblood of millions of best-selling novels and nonfiction books. And many TV programs reflect

and rekindle our dream of a true love that will last. But for many a lasting love relationship remains elusive.

### **What We Fear**

I believe there are two fears that keep many people from experiencing the intimacy and joy of the love relationship they really desire.

One is the fear of never being loved.

The other is the fear of never being able to love.

Let me reassure you that these fears are not abnormal. Many people are like me. I didn't see a true intimate love relationship modeled when I was growing up. My father was the town drunk. He was abusive to my mother, stayed drunk most of the time, and more or less ignored me. I never remember hearing my dad say, "I love you." When I left home I feared that my dysfunctional childhood would carry over into future relationships. I was scared that my emotional baggage would keep me from truly loving and being loved.

The truth is, no one has experienced a perfect home life growing up. There is no such thing as perfect parents who model a perfect love life. So we all have experienced some form of relational dysfunction in our lives—it's just a matter of how dysfunctional we've become. We all have emotional baggage to deal with in life. The big question is how we are going to work through our dysfunction to form a healthy, intimate love relationship with another person that will last.

We live in a culture where love relationships are often short-lived. Many couples live with each other on a "trial basis" because they fear that the marriage won't last if they don't "test" it out first. Recent studies show that "marriages are at an all-time low, and if divorce rates continue to increase the way they have for the past 20 years, then only a minority of couples can expect to be together for over 15 years."<sup>1</sup> Yet at the same time most married and dating couples I know want their relationship to last a lifetime.

So if you want a truly intimate relationship that will last, what do you do?

Quite often I've had a man tell me his relationship with his wife would really be great if she'd get on the same page with him sexually. Many men see sex as the bonding agent in their marriage and the key ingredient to make it last. It's like love and sex are synonymous in their minds. They think if you love someone you're going to have great sex, and if you have great sex it must mean you're really in love. Reality is, that is simply not the case.

Sex is a major factor in developing an intimate love relationship between a man and a woman—there is no doubt about that. And this is confirmed on a biological level. Researchers have discovered a hormone called *oxytocin*, nicknamed the “cuddle hormone.” Oxytocin is a chemical your brain releases during sex and the activity leading up to it. When this chemical is released, it prompts feelings of caring, trust, and deep affection. The purpose is to create a deep bond or attachment to the other person.

Every time you have sex, your body has a chemical reaction—the release of oxytocin—that tells you to be intimate with that person. That is one of the primary purposes of sex—to lead to an intimate relationship. But that's only part of the dynamic. Relational intimacy isn't achieved by simply engaging in a physical sex act. Human sexuality involves every aspect of a person's being—physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational. And sex is meant to connect us on every level.

Over the years I have encountered scores of married couples wanting to know why they have lost the intimacy in their relationship. They have sex physically, but they are missing that deep love connection on every level. It's as if sex as a physical pleasure is separate from their emotional and relational lives. It is something they do rather than being a way of expressing the deep love they have for each other. Truth is, a fantastic sex life isn't the cause of a great

relationship. Rather, an intimate, close relationship on every level results in a fantastic sex life.

The point is, *nothing good is going to happen in bed between a husband and wife unless good things have been happening between them before they go to bed.* Sex is an important factor in a relationship, but sexual involvement is no cure for an anemic relationship. Many people are willing to give time, energy, and money to become better sex partners, but neglect the nurture of the essential skills of caring, loving, and becoming relationally intimate.

Would you like to experience a deep emotional connection and bonding of your inner spirit with another person until you know beyond all doubt you have found your true soul mate? Perhaps you know the one you love is the one for you and you're married to him or her. Would you like to take that relationship to a whole new level of intimacy? That is what we are here to discover. On our journey together we want to show you how to develop a true and intimate love relationship with each other.

Love, true love, isn't something you fall into. Cupid's arrow doesn't just strike you and *boom*, you're in love. Soul mates don't magically appear overnight. True intimacy is developed, formed, and shaped into a lifelong love relationship. A love relationship deepens and grows when two people understand what love is and then take the committed steps necessary to nurture that love. It's not simply about emotional feelings, it's about a commitment to love someone for life. Feelings come and go but loving someone is about choosing—specific love choices that happen day in, day out.

### **Commit to Making Ten Love Choices**

It was a long time ago, but I vividly remember the words of the minister when he asked me, "Will you, Joslin David, take Dorothy Ann to be your wedded wife? To have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish 'til death do you part?"

The end of that ceremony wasn't the conclusion of my marriage to Dottie. It was the beginning. A love relationship, especially a marriage, isn't a destination, it is a relational journey on which the travelers are bonded together by a lifetime of love choices. On that wedding day I made a solemn vow, a commitment, to choose to love Dottie every day for the rest of my life. She committed to the same. And the choices we have made have blossomed into a relationship that has provided us all the meaning, happiness, and joy we could ever hope to experience.

Dottie and I have actually made ten commitments reflected in ten very specific love choices that have produced and continue to produce a deep, intimate love relationship between us. I contend that if you commit to these love choices you will discover the true secret of loving too.

Your commitment to make certain love choices will be flawed. Understand that up front. You are human and humans are flawed. While you won't be able to deliver on every commitment perfectly, you can choose to love to the best of your ability. The following love choices can be your heartfelt attempts, your honest endeavors, your earnest striving to fulfill these commitments and keep making them. Love—intimate love—is a journey of loving and being loved. With that in mind I challenge you to make these ten commitments—ten ways you choose to love your spouse by

1. making God a priority in my life
2. loving and accepting myself
3. being a fantastic lover
4. becoming a great listener
5. learning the art of communication
6. demonstrating an accepting, loyal, enduring love
7. resolving conflicts quickly
8. always forgiving

9. making money matter
10. keeping my love life fresh and alive

Did you notice that none of these love choices is dependent upon the performance of your spouse or another person? It's true that relationship is a two-way street, and you of course want the person you love to reciprocate by making these choices too. But this book is for you and these are choices *you alone* can commit to make regardless of what anyone else does. By making these choices you will more clearly understand what love really is and what is required to truly love another. These are love choices that will lead you down a path of becoming an absolutely irresistible lover. You will be building and nurturing yourself so you can be the kind of person who is caring and considerate, patient and not easily offended, giving and not demanding of your own way, understanding and forgiving. Does that sound like an attractive lover to you? I suspect every man, husband, woman, or wife would want that kind of person as their lifelong partner and lover.

In other words, committing to these love choices is first and foremost about developing yourself into a great lover and lifelong partner in marriage. The golden rule of a happy and fulfilling marriage might be stated like this: "Whatever qualities you desire in your spouse, develop first in yourself."

I posed a question when I phrased the title of this first chapter: "What do you want in a relationship?" If you were to answer that question you might think about what qualities you want in a spouse or what you really want out of a love relationship. However, by committing to make these ten love choices you are not so much focusing on what you hope to get out of a love relationship but rather what you are willing to put into it. Committing to these choices isn't so much about what you get, but what you are able to give. It isn't about changing someone else, it's about you becoming a changed lover. This book is designed to empower you with choices

that transform you into a person who is free to give without having to get in return. It is about you becoming a person who knows what love truly is and what it takes to develop a deep intimate love relationship—a relationship that can grow more meaningful every day and can last a lifetime.

In the pages that follow we will learn how you can commit to make these love choices an everyday reality in your life. I encourage you to share this book with your spouse or the person you are seriously involved with. Tell him or her you are taking steps to become a better lover, which will lead to a deepened intimate relationship with him or her. In effect you are saying, “Join me in a journey to discover how we can grow deeper in love with each other.” Reading this book together and comparing notes can be fun and enriching.

So let’s get started. And the place to start is with God—the One who is the embodiment of love. He is the one who created humans to love. How we relate to him has a great deal to do with how we relate to others. That’s the topic of the next chapter.

