

Twelve Tests of Love

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On the Feb 10, 2004 "FamilyLife Today" broadcast, Chip Ingram and Dennis Rainey discussed the twelve tests of love.

Do you remember the first time it happened? You caught one another's eyes, and then you looked a second time. Something inside you wanted to glance a third time, followed quickly by a fourth lingering look. You didn't want to stare, but something irresistibly drew you to that other person.

Each of the following tests is designed to help you discern and distinguish between love and infatuation. After you read each statement, apply it to your present relationship, or to your expectations of what a love relationship should include. Ask yourself this question: Is my current relationship or my view of relationships more in alignment with love or with infatuation in this particular area? In fact, I encourage you to take a pencil or pen and write an "L" for love and an "I" for infatuation alongside each of the tests. If your relationship is over 51 percent love by the standard of the test, write an "L" in the margin; if it's 51 percent or more on the infatuation side, put an "I." This isn't a test that you can fail. This is a tool to help you learn and grow in your understanding of the most important part of life—loving another human being.

1. The Test of Time

Love benefits and grows through time; infatuation ebbs and diminishes with time. Love develops out of relationship and caring and core personal character traits, not our instant impression or perception of another person. Infatuation can explode at any moment, but real love takes time.

Are you in a rush to label certain feelings "love," or do you have other words to describe feelings? Do you save the word "love" for something better than feelings? How much time do you think needs to pass before love can be clearly identified? If you find yourself "falling in love" often and early, only to be later disappointed, perhaps remembering this first test of real love will save you future heartache.

2. The Test of Knowledge

Love grows out of an appraisal of all the known characteristics of the other person. How well do you expect to know the person you marry? Or how well do you know your spouse? Can you describe your wife's or husband's central purpose in life? Can you list three objectives he or she would like to accomplish in the next five years? What unusual event or place would he or she most like to experience sometime in his or her lifetime? Have you decided how you can best help him or her achieve that goal or dream? Infatuation quickly decides it knows everything it needs to know. Genuine love creates an atmosphere of such interest that the other person opens like a flower. How are you doing in the love test of knowledge?

3. The Test of Focus

Genuine love is other-person centered. Infatuation is self-centered. In your most important relationships, to what degree is your attention focused on what you are receiving from them and to what degree is your attention focused on meeting the other's needs? Do you think about how you're going to look and feel in the relationship or about what you can do to make that person look and feel great?

4. The Test of Singularity

Genuine love is focused on only one person. An infatuated individual may be "in love" with two or more persons simultaneously. In what ways have you realized that it's much easier to work on problems in an existing relationship where singularity and faithfulness are maintained than to create a whole new set of problems with another person?

5. The Test of Security

Genuine love requires and fosters a sense of security and feelings of trust. An infatuated individual seems to have a blind sense of security based upon wishful thinking rather than careful consideration; infatuation is blind to problems. Security grows and flows out of deep awareness of the other person's character, values, and track record.

How would you describe the level of security that you experience in your relationship? How do problems affect the level of security you experience in your relationship? Genuine love considers everything involved in the relationship with the other person, not just immediate feelings or momentary problems.

6. The Test of Work

An individual in love works for the other person for his or her mutual benefit. People in infatuation only think of their own misery. They often daydream of unrealistic objectives and ideals that neither they nor their partner could ever actually attain. Sometimes the dreams become substitutes for reality and each individual lives in a world of his or her own imagination.

If you're in a relationship and the other person is glassy-eyed all the time so that he or she can't get anything done, suspect infatuation. If you know you need to save some money and you're working at the problem but they won't, there's a danger that you may not be involved in genuine love. Infatuation lives off the relationship; love builds into the relationship.

7. The Test of Problem Solving

A couple in love faces problems frankly and tries to solve them. Infatuated people tend to disregard or try to ignore problems. How good are you and your partner at seeing problems and working on them? Do you find that you gloss over hard issues in your relationship or face them squarely? What obstacles and barriers do you and your partner feel good about facing and overcoming in your relationship?

8. The Test of Distance

Love knows the importance of distance. Infatuation imagines love to be intense closeness, 24/7, all the time. If circumstances require you to be temporarily separated from the one you love, that will teach you a lot about the quality of your relationship. In terms of distance, if you're in a long-term relationship right now and you call each other three, four, or five times a day, or you just have to see each other every day, that's not a good sign. That means you're trying to keep the chemical alive. If there is not a sense of separateness, a distinct life, relationships with other people, and healthy balance, then the relationship is probably a lot more infatuation than it is love.

How does your love handle distance? Do you tend to get anxious and frustrated when you can't be together all the time? What has distance taught you about your love?

9. The Test of Physical Attraction

Physical attraction is a relatively small part of genuine love, but it is the center focus of infatuation. Now don't read "small part" to mean "not a part" in what I just stated. If your heart doesn't skip a beat now and then and you don't feel real attraction for your mate or the person you plan to marry, I'd call that a problem. Let's not make genuine love so spiritual that we deny reality and God's Word. Sexual attraction definitely has a part in love.

How many positive aspects and joys in your relationship can you list that have nothing to do with physical attraction or closeness? Apart from physical attraction, how would your mate say he or she knows that you love him or her?

10. The Test of Affection

In love affection is expressed later in the relationship, involving the external expression of the physical attraction we just described. In infatuation affection is expressed earlier, sometimes at the very beginning. Affection tends to push toward greater and greater physical intimacy. Without the control of the other aspects of genuine love, affection spends itself quickly. It gives the appearance of making the relationship “close,” but the closeness is artificial and fragile. When affection flows out of deep understanding and growing friendship, it gains in meaning and value.

Since in all likelihood your mate experiences being loved in a different way than you do, to what extent do you and your mate use affection as a way of showing each other that you understand the other’s needs? In your relationship, how is affection balanced out by friendship love and giving love?

11. The Test of Stability

Love tends to endure. Infatuation may change suddenly and unpredictably. In infatuation the wind blows here, and you’re in love. The wind blows there, and you’re not in love. Not so with real love. Real love is stable. There is a commitment. The test of stability can hardly be applied to a relationship measured in days or weeks. So how do you test stability?

The best way to test stability in a new relationship comes through knowing that person in the context of his or her other relationships. How is he or she in relation to parents, friends, and siblings?

Perhaps one of the first and best questions to ask as you think about testing stability in your relationship is this: How would I demonstrate to my partner that I have developed the characteristic of stability in my relationships? What’s your track record in relationships? What is your partner’s? Is there a pattern that raises confidence or warning signals?

12. The Test of Delayed Gratification

A couple in genuine love is not indifferent to the timing, but they do not feel an irresistible drive toward it. An infatuated couple tends to feel an urge to get married—instantly. Postponement for the infatuated is intolerable. Why is this? Why wouldn’t a couple wait and do it at the right time in the right way? Why wouldn’t a couple want to deal with the real issues so they could have a solid marriage? These questions reveal the difference between love and infatuation.

As you enter into a potentially serious relationship, ask yourself if your pace is based in fear or faith. Is your pace based on anxiety over deprivation and physical desires, or is your pace the result of a desire for careful and thorough preparation for marriage?

Using the Twelve Tests

How did you do in these tests? Did you find yourself wanting to put “L” for love next to most of the test points but admitting, like most of us, that you had to put “I” for infatuation beside several of them? I hope these tests were not a “downer” but a process that has helped you see more clearly the differences between love and infatuation. They will continue to offer you help in your present relationships, your future ones, and your marriage.

Here’s my heartfelt, pastoral encouragement to each single person reading these words: Decide you are going to base your life on more than appearances and advertisements. As tempting as it may be to jump into relationships without forethought, stop long enough to ask whether you really want the results that the Hollywood formula delivers or whether you want to be one of those who pursue the adventure of doing love God’s way.

As I’ve noted repeatedly, this will not be an easy choice. You will be bucking a powerful and often unseen trend. But I assure you that those who are following God’s prescription can report measurably better results than the world offers.