



THE FOUR LOVES

& THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS



THE NATURE OF LOVE
IN ALL FACETS OF OUR LIVES

BY CASEY PAUL GRIFFITHS

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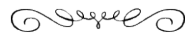
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EROS



“There is not a more pure and holy principle in existence than the affection which glows in the bosom of a virtuous man for his companion.” —Parley P. Pratt

WHAT IS EROS?

Eros, or romantic love, is the most well-known of the four loves. In our current culture it is almost impossible to escape. It is celebrated in poetry, music, cinema, and nearly every kind of form of art known to humanity. Nearly any person can rattle off different phrases in their head that directly correspond to the feeling of being in love. “Love is like oxygen—Love lifts us up where we belong—All you need is love!” Eros—or being in love—is one of the great obsessions of our current culture. Songs and poetry talk about the exhilarating feeling of meeting someone new, realizing mutual attraction, and then experiencing the feelings of closeness that come from realizing someone loves us too. We cry and cheer when on-screen couples connect and kiss, and then the screen fades to black. Why are we so obsessed with Eros? *Because it is so great.*

While our discussions about Eros in Church settings often revolve around chastity and its importance, we sometimes forget that our theology is strongly in favor of Eros. “Consider the power of the idea that of all people on earth, we Latter-day Saints know the most about genuine romantic love,” taught Elder Marlin K. Jensen.² Romantic love is the foundation of not just our theology, but also our perception of the universe. “Our theology begins with heavenly parents,” taught President Dallin H. Oaks, “Our highest aspiration is to be like them.”³ Consider for a moment the power of that idea. We believe that everything in the universe, all the surrounds us, all that makes us happy and gives meaning and purpose to our existence, is the result of a loving union between a Celestial Father and a Celestial Mother. They love each other romantically, and out of that love the universe was born, including the sons and daughters of this union of love. Not only did their love and attraction, their Eros, lead to the creation of mankind, but they intended for their children to experience Eros as well. The first and most important commandment given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was, “Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth” (Moses 2:28).

Not only was this commandment one of the first teachings found in the scriptures, but it has also been re-emphasized in the last days. Joseph Smith and all the prophets of the Restoration have taught that Eros between a man and a woman is a gift from God that is intended to make us happy here on earth and usher us into the eternities. Early Apostle Parley P. Pratt was completely overwhelmed by the eternal nature of Eros when

it was taught to him by Joseph Smith. “I received from [Joseph] the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which . . . are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness,” Parley wrote after a discussion with Joseph Smith. Having been raised outside of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, Parley had always assumed that Eros was a fixture of mortality, not something that could blossom as a part of eternal life. “Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state,” he added. Reflecting years later on this lesson, Parley wrote:

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore. . . .

I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.⁴

Eros is good. Latter-day Saints should not be afraid or ashamed to talk about Eros and the power it has to enrich and enliven our lives. If our highest aspiration is to become like our Heavenly Parents, feeling Eros is among the greatest joys of our life.

EROS AND SEX

C. S. Lewis wisely observed, “Sexual experience can occur without Eros, without being ‘in love,’ and Eros includes other things besides sexual activity. . . . Sexuality may operate without Eros or as a part of Eros.”⁵ In our society today, Eros is often thought to be the same thing as sexual attraction, and that misconception is part of the problem. Sexuality is a biological function, and part of experience here on earth, but it is not always associated with Eros. Experiencing Eros with another person often results in an impulse to want to touch, caress, or experience physical intimacy with them.

As a young student in a college psychology class, I remember our professor calling up a male and female student as part of a role-play in class discussion. He asked us to imagine that the couple (who didn’t know each other, and giggled through the whole experience) were genuinely in love. Then he asked us how we would be able to tell that they were in love from external observations. “They will want to hold hands!” came one reply, which produced a wave of immature laughter from the class. “He will want to kiss her!” brought even more giggles. All of the frivolity in the room was suddenly silenced when the professor bluntly stated, “Will he want to have sex with her?” No one spoke. We were all chuckling before, but now you could have heard a pin drop. The professor looked at us

intently, allowing silence to completely fall over the room. Finally, one person in the class said, meekly, “No, he won’t want to do that if they love each other.” The professor cocked his head to the side, raised an eyebrow, and said, “Really? If they actually, truly, deeply, love each other?” We just sat there in an awkward silence. We were willing to giggle and laugh about holding hands and kissing, but suddenly the discussion had gotten deeply personal; the professor had broached a topic many of us were not ready to discuss.

The truth is that sexuality is a component of Eros. It is okay for us to talk about it and acknowledge it as a part of the experience of being in love. At the same time, sexuality is not wholly synonymous with Eros. Eros is much larger than just the sexual attraction two people feel for each other. Feeling a physical attraction toward another person does not mean that you are in Eros with them. In fact, an overemphasis on sexuality and its relationship to Eros can be damaging and dangerous. Quoting historians Will and Ariel Durant, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once noted “that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group.”⁶ Because of the inherent dangers surrounding violations of the law of chastity, our approach toward discussing Eros and sexuality has largely centered on preventing people from violating Church standards. This avoidance of sin is good and proper, but only discussing Eros in terms and sexuality and chastity leaves a gap in our knowledge.

Of the four loves, Eros is perhaps the least steady. This might be why it is so often likened to fire in our discussions about it. Fire is undoubtedly useful. It is a chemical reaction that provides us with warmth from the cold and light in the darkness. But it can also be dangerous when used unwisely. Two pitfalls can sometimes lead us down the road to discontent and unhappiness. The first is when a couple does nothing to nourish or feed the fire that provides the warmth of companionship and closeness that comes from Eros. The second pitfall is an overemphasis on Eros, which can cause the fire of our emotions and attractions to become destructive and harmful. Like a campfire in a cold wilderness, Eros can be a vital tool for our well-being, or, if left unchecked, a spark that leads to untold destruction.

INTERLUDE TWO WRINKLED HANDS



Abram and Sarai sat on top of a hill, gazing out over the land of their inheritance. They had come to this land a lifetime ago, when Abram was only sixty-two years old and Sarai was fifty-two, just a young married couple by the standards of the Book of Genesis (Abraham 2:14). They arrived in Canaan with practically nothing. Abram wrote poetically that “eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation” (Abraham 2:16). At the time Canaan was a hostile place and Abram and Sarai “called on the Lord devoutly, because we had already come into the land of this idolatrous nation” (Abraham 2:18). In the years that followed they had experienced losses and gains, and the travails of a nomadic existence. But the one

constant was the love they felt for each other.

Now Abram was ninety-nine and Sarai was eighty-nine. They had long passed the stage of their lives where their love was driven by physical attraction. Abram reached over with his wrinkled hand and grasped the wrinkled hand of his wife. Sarai was so striking in her younger years that her beauty literally put Abram's life in danger when he entered into a foreign court. The rulers of other nations desired her because of her loveliness, and only quick thinking and fast talking on Abram's part kept them from slaying him to seize his wife.

Now, in what they thought was the twilight of their lives, the Lord had spoken to Abram again. "My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4). The Lord promised to give Abram a new name - Abraham, meaning a father of many nations. He also promised a new name for Sarai - Sarah, both names meaning "princess" in Hebrew. The Lord added, "I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations" (Genesis 17:16).

Now using their new names Abraham and Sarah contemplated how it was possible to have a child at their ages. They long knew of God's promise to Abraham, and had even employed a surrogate at Sarah's request, Hagar, to fulfill the promise the Lord made to them. They now loved and nourished the child, Ishmael, thinking the Lord's promise was fulfilled in him. But this promise was even more specific. Sarah, even in her advanced age, would be the mother of the child. The two grasped each other's hands even more tightly, wondering how an octogenarian and a man one year away from being a century old could have a child.

A few days later three holy men visited Abraham and Sarah. Abraham welcomed them into his tent, while Sarah prepared food and other hospitalities from these visitors of the Lord. Sarah went into a different room of the tent, eavesdropping on the her husband's conversation with these holy men. In the course of their discussion, these messengers from God repeated the Lord's promise, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (Genesis 18:10).

Sarah's response? She laughed. She may have stifled the sounds, but she could not keep a straight face at the ridiculous prospect of her and Abraham, at their ages, having a child. "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Genesis 18:12). Her laughter might not have reached the ears of the men in the other part of the tent, but it did reach the Lord.

The Lord spoke to Abraham, asking him why Sarah laughed at His promise, and short comedic episode ensued as Sarah tried to hide her mirth from an all-seeing, all-knowing being. Sarah dared to continue to laugh, now out loud, telling the Lord, "Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?" The Lord assured her, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:13-14).

The three holy men left, and Abraham and Sarah, the mother and father of nations, sat together in their tent. Could they still have a child? Would Sarah be the mother of the covenant people of God? Abraham gazed and Sarah, her face weathered and worn from years of nomadic living in the deserts of Canaan. They had grown only together. In the final years of their lives would they finally see a child born from their love?

Abraham did not know how or when this blessing would come. But one thing was for certain. Sarah was the great love of his life. Whether she bore a child or not, their Eros remained undimmed by the decades of time they passed together. As Sarah reached over and grasped Abraham's hand, she knew that - come what may - he was her intimate partner in all parts of her life. Their love was the beginning of a story that would bless all the nations of the earth.

NOURISHING EROS

When we are young, Eros comes naturally, almost overwhelmingly to us. We seek love constantly and fall into infatuation easily. It is normal and natural for us to do this. The fire of Eros burns brightly and leads most people to choosing a companion. But the unsteady nature of Eros at times makes such a relationship difficult to sustain over long periods of time. Eros, like a fire, must be continuously fed and nurtured. If we assume that the spark of attraction that brought us together will sustain itself forever, we are foolish. We must instead feed the fire and tend to it in order to keep it burning. It is possible for a couple to be married for decades and still experience intense Eros for each other. It is also possible for a couple who only rely on the initial spark and chemistry from when they first met to fall out of love. If their Eros is not tended to and kept burning bright, Eros often grows weak and then exhausts itself.

A few years ago, I served as an ecclesiastical leader in a very young ward. Most of the families in our ward were in their mid-twenties with one or two children. As I met with couples to counsel them, a common theme emerged among the couples who were struggling in their marriages. "I don't know him/her anymore," was the most common way these feelings were expressed in my counseling sessions with these couples. I listened carefully to what both spouses had to say, and I tried to seek the Spirit to know the right words to help these couples heal their unions. Over several months of counseling with young couples, I saw a common pattern. Most of these couples had very young children at home. I would ask a question like, "When was the last time you spent time together—just the two of you?" The answers to this question were strikingly similar. Nearly every couple replied by saying something like, "We haven't really had any time together since the baby was born," or "We have hardly been alone since I started my job," and so forth. Most of the couples felt they were doing fine when I asked about many of the common red flags in troubled marriages, such as communication or finances. When I asked a blunt question like, "Do you still *like* each other?" the answer was also usually a quick "yes."

So what was the problem? Most of these couples had not deliberately or maliciously made an effort to fall out of love. They just stopped being romantic. They stopped nourishing their Eros, usually because their schedules became too full with other responsibilities, and the fire had ebbed and died. They didn't feel like they were in love anymore because they stopped doing the things people do when they fall in love. As just one example, in a situation where parents devote all of their time to a small child, it can be easy to neglect the romantic part of your relationship. The same neglect can also come about if we place too high a priority of work, hobbies, or other things that can draw focus from our loved ones. In a society where we visualize success as something that happens in the workplace and not in the home, it can be easy to neglect a partner's emotional needs. This neglect might manifest as simply as when everyone uses their own screen to watch their own show, and no one shares the experience of watching something together.

Instead of associating the word “sex” with Eros, I wish we would associate the word “intimacy.” As Lewis points out, Eros and sex are not synonyms. Eros is much more than just sex. Likewise, intimacy is much more than just physical intimacy. In recent years, family therapists have begun to shift the use of the term “intimacy” away from meaning just physical intimacy and have started to point out other ways that couples can be intimate with each other. Consider the following types of intimacy:

- Emotional intimacy: being on the same wavelength and feeling close.
- Intellectual intimacy: sharing thoughts and ideas.
- Aesthetic intimacy: sharing the beauties of the world.
- Creative intimacy: sharing acts of creating together.
- Recreational intimacy: playing together, having fun.
- Work intimacy: sharing common tasks in closeness.
- Conflict intimacy: facing and struggling with challenges and differences.
- Crisis intimacy: coping together with problems and pain.
- Spiritual intimacy: experiencing the uniting of spirits, sharing spiritual experiences.⁷

When we only think of intimacy as a synonym for sex, we can miss out on a lot of wonderful experiences, and it may also limit our opportunities to experience physical intimacy. But each of these different kinds of intimacy require effort to cultivate.

The kinds of intimacy you experience may vary depending upon the interests of you and your partner. If both of you enjoy the kind of exhilaration that comes from the energy of a crowd at a sporting event, you can experience this intimacy which a stadium full of your closest friends. If you appreciate nature and the beauty of the world around you go on a hike, visit a national or state park, or just arrange an outdoor adventure. If you or your partner enjoys being creative, take an art class, or maybe even try instruction in social dance.

When we think of intimacy only in terms of physical intimacy, we greatly limit the way we can share ourselves and experience intimacy. In turn, if a couple isn't experiencing any of these other kinds of intimacy, it is likely that they will not feel close to each other; and if they don't feel close to each other, they probably won't experience physical intimacy either. The fire of Eros grows cold, and we feel that we are no longer “in love.”

In a similar fashion, a couple doesn't have to experience physical intimacy to be close to each other. I know a couple where one partner encountered serious health issues that limited the physical part of their relationship. They are still one of the most intimate couples I know. They talk all day together, share meals, make plans, and are hardly ever even in a different room. One of the most intimate experiences of my life occurred when my wife and I found out that a couple we were close with were separating and contemplating a divorce. We stayed up late talking about what we could do to help the couple, how to avoid some of the problems they faced, and how grateful we were to have each other. There was no physicality involved, just long and meaningful conversation with each other. We experienced crisis intimacy as we worked to resolve this difficult and traumatic problem. When the Lord told Adam and Eve that “by the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread” (Moses 4:25) it was both a curse and a blessing. Their labor, their suffering, and their sorrows were a way to create togetherness.

For the couples I counseled, their feeling of not being love usually came from a lack of conscious effort to nourish their Eros. For most of them, the solution was to recognize the problem and create time to be alone and experience romance. This could take the form of a regular date night, a stroll in the evenings after the events of the day had quieted down, or just sitting on the couch and watching a program together. Here are a few suggestions to nourish Eros:

1. Schedule time to talk every day. Set aside your concerns, your responsibilities, and most importantly, your devices, and listen to one another.
2. Find a time to be alone together. This can be difficult with younger children, but it is worth the effort to find a babysitter and have a night out.
3. Schedule an overnight date or trip every two to three months. Go somewhere that allows you to escape from your regular responsibilities and settings.

This won't look the same for every couple. A few years ago, my schedule shifted so that I was teaching class in the evenings, and it became difficult to find a regular night to go on a date. Instead, my wife and I walked our daughter to school together every morning and then came home and made breakfast together. The time we spent together was invaluable. In another example, early on in our marriage, we created a "cooperative" with two other couples who lived nearby. Each week one couple would watch all the children at their home while the other two couples went on dates. This meant that we had ten screaming children in our house every three weeks, but in the end it was a positive experience for our children and us. Efforts like this are the equivalent of carefully monitoring and stoking the fire of Eros so that it doesn't burn out and become cold. This is just as important for older couples as it is for new couples. Without care, Eros can burn itself out and grow cold.

A regular date night can be a great way to create different kinds of intimacy, but sometimes schedules or tight finances won't permit even one night a week to go out together. In these cases intimacy can still be created by finding time to spend alone together, talk together, or experience closeness. One couple I knew just made it a priority to be in the same room together whenever possible. In a world where the number of distractions is rapidly multiplying, just the act of giving someone your attention can be very intimate. But it might require you to put down your device, set aside messages or other distractions, and just genuinely devote your time to the person you love.

BRIDLING EROS

In much of today's culture, Eros has become synonymous with love. Eros is love, but we often treat Eros like it is *only* the kind of love. Placing too much emphasis on Eros can be just as dangerous as putting too much fuel on a fire. It is true that God implanted attractions within us, but if we treat these feelings as though they are the only path to satisfaction in life, we miss out on much of the joy God wants to offer us. Especially in its early stages, Eros can become obsessive, making us neglect the other relationships in our lives that are vital to our happiness.

Further, when sexuality is divorced from Eros we end up with blind, wanton lust—something that can truly destroy the relationships we cherish. When a person looks at pornography, for example, they are not experiencing Eros. There is none of the warmth, care, or reciprocation of feelings that comes from truly being love. There is only an object of gratification. Sometimes if we overemphasize the sexual aspect of Eros, we can deeply

hurt those who we are truly in love with. The writer of Proverbs warned, “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? . . . Whoso committeth adultery . . . destroyeth his own soul. A wound and a dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away” (Proverbs 6:27–28, 32–33).⁸

It is true that these desires are built into us, are natural, and come from God. But any desire can become damaging to us if overindulged. When discussing this concept in my classes, I usually put a picture of a sugar cookie on the screen. Everyone agrees that cookies are delicious. Then I ask, what if your appetite for cookies became so great that you thought about them all the time? What if you searched the Internet for photos of cookies? What if you sought out nothing more than to view or look at cookies every moment when you were alone? By this point everyone in the room knows we aren’t talking about cookies. The adversary seeks to take the natural, good gifts we have been given from God and then seeks to twist and change them into things that hurt us. Alma counseled his son Shiblon to “see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Passion is a great part of life, but left uncontrolled, our physical appetites don’t lead us to Eros, only to ruin and bitterness.

Likewise, treating Eros as if it is the only type of love can leave us unfulfilled. I have no doubt that, after our relationship with God and Jesus Christ, our relationship with our spouse is the most important in our life. But to place all of our happiness, contentment, and fulfillment on just that one relationship is too much pressure. The most fulfilled people I know have a network of people they can connect with as a support system to help them find satisfaction and joy. This is largely why a clear understanding of the other loves—Philia, Storge, and Agape—is so important to our development into complete beings.

Just like the songs, poems, and films all say, Eros is one of the greatest things in the world. But it is not the only love we need to learn in this world.

² Marlin K. Jensen, “A Union of Love and Understanding,” *Ensign*, October 1994, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1994/10/a-union-of-love-and-understanding?lang=eng>

³ Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 84, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/04/apostasy-and-restoration?lang=eng>.

⁴ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979), 297–98.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 91–92.

⁶ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Personal Purity,” *New Era*, February 2000, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2000/02/personal-purity?lang=eng>

⁷ I am indebted to Ty Mansfield for sharing his research with me on these different types of intimacy.

⁸ See Holland, Personal Purity.

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