

**The MASTER's Group** includes special features and commentary to assist with understanding the life issues and challenges of aging successfully and the opportunities available for personal enrichment and Christian service.

## Meet David Gallagher



Dr. Dave Gallagher is nationally known as an author, speaker and pastor. He is also on staff at Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, Wisconsin. A widely respected authority, Dave has written extensively in the field of pastoral ministry, outreach, small groups, loss and grief, and middle, senior, and elderly adult ministry.

Recent books include *Healing Takes Time* (Liturgical Press); and *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century* (Wipf & Stock Publishers; originally by Group Publishing). Dr. Gallagher leads seminars around the nation on strengthening adult ministry in the Church. He and his wife, Mary Ann, reside in Surprise, Arizona, and have two adult children and two granddaughters.



## Keeping Love Strong

Dr. Dave Gallagher

As we approached another wedding anniversary, I was trying to think of something creative. What can you do that is different after over thirty years of marriage? I wanted our wedding anniversary to be a surprise. I telephoned the Hyatt hotel in downtown Phoenix and made a one-night room reservation. On our anniversary day, I suggested to my wife that we just go walk around downtown and keep this anniversary simple. She asked if we would go out for dinner and if so, how should she dress? I encouraged her to just be flexible and not worry. I told her that we be spontaneous and just decide "at the moment," and to just dress comfortably.

Unbeknown to her I packed an overnight bag for the two of us and set it in the trunk of the car. When we arrived downtown, we walked around a shopping area she of course wanted to look in some specialty shops, which gave me the perfect opportunity to suggest she shop and we meet at a given point in an hour – which we did. While she was window-shopping in specialty shops I quickly raced to the car, pulled out the overnight bag and raced to the Hyatt to check in. Next, I rushed up to the 20<sup>th</sup> floor, put her clothes in the dresser, put a rose on the table along with a card and set a few mints on her pillow. Then I dashed back down to where we were to meet and met her unassumingly.

I suggested that we walk over to the Hyatt and perhaps just take the elevator to the top floor to enjoy a view of the city. When we entered the elevator, I pushed the button for the 21<sup>st</sup> floor. When the doors opened, she realized that we had not reached the top floor to which I suggested that we just walk up the extra flight. As we walked down the hallway of that 20<sup>th</sup> floor heading for the stairway, we came to the room I had reserved. I pulled the door key from my pocket and slipped it into the door lock and we walked in. You can imagine her surprise when she saw her personal items, the flower and mints. Of course, she was thrilled and that simple creative event reminded us both of our wonderful marriage of over thirty years together (We are now coming to our 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary).

Maybe you are acquainted with the various Greek words for love. The three most common are *Eros*, *Philia*, and *Agape*. Love is about far more than sex. Later-in-life couples can make sure their expressions of love for each other are well rounded, encompassing all that these three words mean.

*Eros* is the love that seeks sensual expression—romantic love and sexual love. It is inspired by the biological part of human nature. In a strong marriage, you will love each other romantically and erotically. Yet in later-in-life marriages, sexual challenges can arise. So if your marriage has been built only on *Eros*, you could be in trouble.

If your marriage is strong, you and your spouse are also good friends. Friendship means companionship, communication, and cooperation. That's *Philia* love—true friends who enjoy each other.

Then there is *Agape* love. *Agape* is the self-giving love. *Agape* is the love that goes on loving even when the other person is unloving. This sort of love does not come naturally. You and your spouse must work at making this kind of love be a part of your marriage.

Love in your later-in-life marriage will suffer if you and your spouse do not have a clear understanding of these three biblical concepts of love. In addition, you must be willing to communicate deeply and have an absolute commitment to each other. If you and your spouse suddenly declare that you no longer love each other, the real question is, "When did you choose to *not* love one another?"

What kills love? Love dies when you spend little or no time together and when you stop sharing activities that are mutually enjoyable. You create or destroy love by deciding to either have pleasurable activities together or to not have pleasurable activities together (not necessarily sex) over a period of time together. Your marriage relationship diminishes when either you or your spouse (or both of you) stop smiling, caressing, complimenting, showing compassion, and spending time together.

Here are some questions to discuss:

1. What do you do to reinforce the behaviors you enjoy?
2. What can you do to increase feelings of friendship and deepen the love relationship with your spouse?
3. How can the presence of Jesus in your life help you love your spouse through *Eros*, *Philia*, and *Agape* love?
4. What might you do today to strengthen your *Philia* (friendship) love with someone special in your life?
5. When was the last time you really expressed *Agape* (sacrificial) love?