



Who benefits
when you hold
on to anger?

Why Can't You Just Say “I Love You”?

“That’s it!” Lacey yelled, yanking her coat off the wooden hook by the door. “What is your problem? Why can’t you just *say* ‘I love you’ huh? I say it all the time and all I get in return is a ‘Right back at ya’ or something stupid like that. We’ve been married two years. Do you love me or not?” She stood in front of the door still holding her coat with her hands on her hips, daring him to answer otherwise.

“Me! What about you?” James retorted. “You never *do* anything for me. How am I supposed to know that you love me?” He threw up his hands in frustration. “Have you ever considered that your ‘I love you’ doesn’t mean that much to me?”

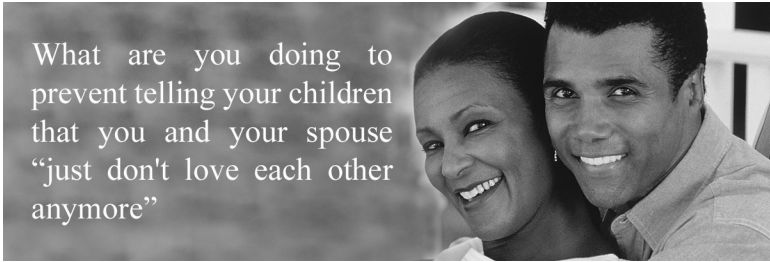
Stunned and hurt Lacey glanced at James then at the floor, put on her coat, and quietly walked out the door.

James sat down on the black leather couch, elbows on his knees, and forehead resting in his hands. They had been having this argument since a few months after they were married and he still did not get it. What was the big deal about him not saying “I love you” very often. They were just words to James. He thought back to his family and tried to remember if they said “I love you.” He thought

for a moment. There were not very many instances that he could remember, but he knew that they loved each other. He remembered surprising his sister by making her bed while she was in the shower or making his dad's favorite breakfast on his birthday. James also remembered his dad occasionally bringing flowers home for mother or surprising her with a small gift—just because. “Yes,” he thought, “we knew we were loved because of those special moments, because of the things we were willing to do for each other.” Thinking about it made him even more frustrated. He had tried all those things with Lacey, but she never seemed to appreciate it like he anticipated. Getting angrier by the minute, James lay down on the couch hoping he could sleep off the surge of emotion coursing through his body.

Lacey pulled into a parking lot, turned off the ignition and banged her fist on the steering wheel. James was so difficult. All she wanted was a simple “I love you” and it would start World War III! How could he be so stubborn and so hurtful? She rested her head on the steering wheel and began to cry softly. “My ‘I love you’ means nothing?” she whispered the question into the silence. She watched the children playing in the park while mulling over her thoughts. Another half-hour passed and Lacey slowly started her way back home. She and James needed some help and it seemed their only option was counseling. Lacey had heard somewhere that some couples took as long as six years after trouble started to seek help, by then it was usually too late, and Lacey didn't want to be one of those couples. They would have to start to fix the problem now—hopefully.

When Lacey arrived home James was still peacefully sleeping on the couch. She went over, sat down on the floor next to him, and gently started running her



What are you doing to prevent telling your children that you and your spouse “just don't love each other anymore”

fingers through his hair. The anger had passed and she lovingly looked at the man she had promised to spend her life with. More than anything Lacey wanted a happily ever after and she was willing to put in the effort she knew it would take. James began to stir and slowly opened his eyes to look at Lacey. After a minute or two Lacey decided to break the comfortable silence.

“James, I’m sorry,” there was a gentle tone to her voice now; “I don’t mean to get so upset. It’s just that it would mean so much to me to hear you say those words. It also seems like there is something you need from me that keeps bothering you and I don’t know what it is. Maybe we should talk to someone and try to get some help.”

Lacey was still running her fingers through James’ hair and down the side of his face. He looked up at her and saw how sincere she was. He thought for a moment then finally said, “I guess that would be alright. You just have to promise me that if it doesn’t start helping us soon then we can stop going. Okay?”

“Deal.”

Two weeks later James and Lacey were sitting in Dr. Singer’s waiting room. Together they had decided that after a month if they were not seeing any benefit to counseling then they would stop, and possibly find another counselor or just quit all together.

“Come right on in you two,” Dr. Singer was holding

open the office door. “Go ahead and have a seat and tell me a little bit about what’s worrying you two.

James and Lacey sat down on the couch and proceeded to tell the therapist how they had a hard time feeling that the other person truly loved them and when they discussed the matter it usually ended in conflict.

Dr. Singer gave a slight smile and there seemed to be a little twinkle in his eye. “It may or may not surprise you that a lot of couples deal with this same type of struggle. Let me first explain why and then we’ll talk about some solutions. Sound good?”

James and Lacey nodded their heads.

“Good. Obviously you have both come from different families and in those families you learned how to express love differently. From what you have both told me it sounds like Lacey came from what I call a verbal family. Your family expressed love predominately by saying it or writing little notes to each other and things like that. Correct me if I’m wrong.”

Lacey slightly shook her head “no.”

“Now James, it appears you come from a visual family. Don’t misunderstand me. I don’t mean you notice perfect body figures or that Lacey has to have her make-up and hair done perfectly every day. What I’m saying is that you notice things that she does specifically for you; for example, if she made the bed, made your favorite breakfast, or swept up the floor in your work shop for you. Right?”

James nodded in the affirmative.

“The third type is touch. These people like a hug and a kiss on their way out the door, holding their partner’s hand while walking down the street, or just being close by them. Everyone is generally a mix of all three, but it seems that you Lacey are predominantly verbal and you James are a visual. Now, here is the solution. You have to practice