

“ Set me as a seal upon your heart,As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised.” Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Friendship & Dating--True Love (Part 3)

Theme: Inner beauty and the meaning of true love.

Review

The early-to mid-teen years are not the time to "pair up" with the opposite sex for romance. They are a time to spend having fun and enjoying others. As you develop friendships (and when dating), consider the fruit of Galatians 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ...); who exhibits them? Sure, we are all sinners and do not exhibit these qualities all the time, but neither can a sincere Christian hide them. Your friendship outings should be primarily with those friends who honor God in all things and who help build you up in your Christian life. Remember Solomon had wives who were unbelievers and they brought him down, while Daniel resolved in his heat to honor God, and he was blessed. Fifteen rights and responsibilities were given for you to know and follow; these are primarily biblical in origin and worthy of your attention. The fifteen can be summarized this way: respect, no fear, no harm, and honor. If you concentrate on these items, that is, on being the right kind of person, He will lead you to the right person.



Introduction

The last two lessons referred to Solomon because we can learn so much from his life. The conclusion of Ecclesiastes, which Solomon wrote, relates directly to our topic, **"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them' "** (Eccl. 12:1). If we forget our Lord in our youth, we will pay the price of disobedience in the later years. So, we are told to remember our Creator while young and to establish a pattern of following Him. If we do these things, our final days will be as good (or better) than our beginning.

We learn from Solomon that walking with the Lord is essential, starting as a youth, and Solomon seems to have done so. A good start will help us all our lives; however, we always have to follow the Lord. Solomon ended his life poorly in spite of a good start. How can this be? Well, he purposely disobeyed God as an adult by marrying non-believing women (foreign wives). If this happened to the wisest man who ever lived, surely it can happen to any of us. This example teaches the need for having proper relationships with the opposite sex, and being just friends is the best way to start.

*It would be safe to say, Solomon's foreign wives were heaven on his eyes,
but horrible on his heart.*

If these women had turned only his head, but they also turned his heart—away from the Lord. You will find the same thing is very true today, that is, physical beauty can be very alluring but disastrous. Therefore, we cannot let outward looks deceive us; it is the hidden person of the heart we must find in another (more on this later).

Bible Truth & Life Applications

Now that we have discussed friendship and a little about dating/courtship, there is one big issue left, which is determining what true love is. One reason we have discussed Solomon in these lessons is that he does a great job of telling us what true love is. Therefore, we can learn from his failures and from his wisdom (wisdom that came from God).

True Love

The Song of Solomon (Solomon's chief song) has many verses; most of those verses relate to infatuation, love at first sight, physical love, and so forth, but not the deeper, true love. Then, in just two verses, he presents an eternal truth for all ages, the timeless conclusion to the question, "What is true love?" True love is based upon inner qualities, that is, those of the soul and spirit. **"Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealously as cruel as the grace; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised"** (SOS 8:6-7). Well, so much for not telling us in simple terms; clearly this verse needs some explaining.

Notice that God inspired Solomon to write the Song of Solomon (SOS) and used only two verses to teach a great eternal truth. The surprising brevity is what gathers our attention. Our attention is awakened and keenly focused, because timeless truth is explained so quickly. The message is similar to the old saying, "If you want someone to hear, whisper." God is whispering here for a reason, and we best listen; He is directly stating what is eternal, true, and really important.

From SOS we learn that true love is:

- **unquenchable:** not even a flood can quench it. It cannot be "put out" by anything.
- **priceless:** there is nothing we have that can pay its price. If we tried, anything we offered would be so insignificant that it would be despised. If we have true love, we have the best in earthly relationships. True love is available to all, regardless of money, status, looks....
- **strong:** it is as strong as death, but can be a wonderful thing in our lives.
- **a fire:** a flame that is vehement and cannot be snuffed out. It is a flame from God.
- **enduring:** it endures all pain, circumstances, trials ... for our entire lives.

What constitutes true love is of interest and a godly principle for all ages. The woman in the Song of Solomon asks to be set as a seal upon Solomon's heart and arm. His heart is the source of love and his arm the source of strength. A seal is a sign of a finished and secure transaction, which is what she desired. She wanted a permanent place in his heart and for that place to be secure. She wanted to be placed permanently in the deepest part of his being, based upon his strength. The seal she desires was a binding seal that could not be broken.

Your Thoughts: True love is hard to define. What do you think it means?

Solomon's lover, no doubt, had seen Israeli priests carry the names of the tribes of Israel on their breastplates; these names were held close to their hearts and sustained

by the priests' position of authority. She wanted to be placed next to his heart and for that love to be protected by his strong arm. The reference to love being as strong as death, recognizes that death is very powerful. Death has no pity, is cruel, feels no pain, has no compassion, and torments us. Love has powers that equal death, but its powers can be good. True love can work the opposite of death to create joy, happiness, trust, peace, comfort, and compassion in our lives. If love is not true, it will create jealousy, and that is as cruel as the grave/death. We now know that perfect love casts out all fear (1 Jn. 4:18) because fear causes torment, but true love creates peace and assurance. Thus, true love is far different than infatuation, romantic love, or physical love.

Be the Right Kind of Person

The right kind of person displays a life with true love in his or her heart. In order for you to have a good life, indeed to experience true love, the focus in your life should be to glorify and honor the Lord Jesus. Put Him first. That means being totally committed to Him, following the Bible, and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you. Good looks and true love are not the same. Do not let good looks fool you. Just because a person is beautiful on the outside does not mean that he or she is beautiful on the inside.

It is the hidden person of the heart (the new man/woman) who matters (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). **"Do not let your adornment be merely outward ... rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God"** (1 Pt. 3:3-4). A sincere believer should exhibit a quiet and meek spirit, which come from having a close relationship with Christ. "Incorruptible" means this beauty will never become tarnished or worthless; it constantly works for our good. The beauty of the inner soul and spirit captures the concept of true love. A godly person with a quiet and meek spirit demonstrates that he or she possesses true love.

A quiet spirit means:

- confident, not boastful
- concerned for others, not self-centered
- kind, not taking advantage of others
- cheerful, not always pouting, moody, or complaining
- controlled, not angry or abusive
- honorable, giving honor rather than demanding

A gentle spirit means

- considerate of others, not controlling or self-serving
- humble, not arrogant
- seeking others' views, not thinking he or she is always right
- compassionate, not a control freak
- helpful, not demanding or thinking he or she is privileged

Your Thoughts: A person with a gentle and quiet spirit will build others up, create understanding, show concern, and exhibit compassion—all parts of true love. Discuss.

How We Get True Love

True love is so pure and wonderful that we have to wonder if anyone in this world really has it. How does a person get such love? Let us look at some more verses, which will help us understand the source of true love and how we get it. **"Love suffers long (is patient) and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself (strut its stuff), is not puffed up (self-important); does not behave rudely (overbearingly proud), does not seek its own (self-centered), is not provoked (irritable or angry), thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ... And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."** (1 Cor. 13:4-13, parentheses added).

These verses say a lot, but the words are hard to understand. The passage has to be studied carefully. The love mentioned here comes from God; we do not have it naturally nor can we generate it in ourselves. No amount of self-effort, education, or doing good will enable us to have this love, nor will good looks. This is God's love in us; it is true love. Thus, we now know the source of true love (*agape*, in Greek): it comes from God.

So how do we get this love? True love comes to us from God through faith in Jesus Christ. Once we have faith, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and begins to transform our minds (Rom. 12:2). In the transformation process, His values, character, attitude, goals, desires, compassion ... become part of our lives (see Lesson 13: *My Relationship with God—Transformation [Part 3]*). We become more and more like Christ, the absolute perfection of true love. However, we have a choice as to how much we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives; thus, a person can be a Christian and still live like an unbeliever. Our goal in being just friends and later, in dating or courtship, is to see if a person is displaying, to a reasonable degree, a transformed (Christ-honoring) life style.

The proof of this mysterious true love is known only by the action it promotes. People can say they have it, but the proof is in their lives. Interestingly, we now can start to see the big picture. We want to have true love in our relationships because that will make them pure and lasting. True love is something everyone in the world has always wanted. We now can have it, but it does not come by our own abilities or efforts. It is God's love in us, because of His living in us (when we become saved). The Holy Spirit in us transforms our minds and, in so doing, creates the elements of true love in us, but this transformation takes time. Therefore, a teenager may be slowly undergoing the transformation process, but at first that may not show very much in his or her life. In time, it will show. On the other hand, some people are not being transformed, but do a good job of faking it.

That reason is why we recommend going slowly in your relationships with others, so you can see who is faking it and who is really trying to live for the Lord (but this change takes time to observe in a person's life).

We have discussed four passages on what the inner qualities of a potential mate should be (Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pt. 3:3-4; 1 Cor. 13:4-13). We should learn what those qualities look like in other people during the friendship stage. Later, during dating/courtship, we should make sure we only date a Christian and that he or she displays evidence of the Lord working in his or her life (transformation). Such a person should have a considerable number of the qualities that are part of true love. True love is God's love in us, and that is what enables us to be, and to display, the characteristics mentioned in the passages above.

True Romantic Love

We will now briefly address the question most everyone has: "What is true romantic love?" This is a complex topic and this lesson will only be able to offer insights into the components of true romantic love. This love is what a man and a woman should have for each other prior to marriage. The most important component of this love is the true love from the Lord, which we have discussed. His love will help any relationship be satisfying, fulfilling, joyful, and able to weather any storm. His love will assure a Christ-like nature and attitude in each person. Another important component is physical attraction, which will be obvious even if two people remain pure during the dating/courting times. If there has been a period of being friends with members of the opposite sex, you will be able to tell what that attraction is. If during the dating period there is no "chemistry" between you and the other person, that is, no desire for intimate physical contact, then something is wrong (there should be an attraction, but the goal is not to act on that attraction until marriage). There are other components, one of which is having things in common (mutual interests such as faith, values, goals, etc.).

Another component of true romantic love is compatibility (ability to live together in harmony), which can be discovered best during a period of being just friends (and while dating/courting). During the friendship period you can enjoy and get to know each other in a non-romantic way, so you can see if compatibility exists (romance itself can get so captivating that it obscures other values of true romantic love).

Take 2 Heart

Summary

Remember your creator in the days of your youth, and grab on to godliness so that you will have a rewarding life. True love can only come from the Lord, and is a result of Christ's life in you. Such love is so strong it cannot be snuffed out; it endures all things, and cannot be corrupted. Each person needs to be the right kind of person and to seek others of a similar spirit. Thus, having friends who are godly and the right kind of people is important. Such people display and live in a way that shows they have the love of God in their heart. Lasting relationships between men and women are not based upon outer beauty, but the inner beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit, which is part of true love.

Gospel

If a person places his or her faith in Jesus Christ as savior, then he or she is saved. "Saved" means a person has received salvation (the deliverance from eternal separation from God and assured of a life with Him in

heaven). Once you are saved, the Holy Spirit of God comes into your life and begins to transform your mind, that is, to change you from the inside out. The transformed mind functions in a godly manner; His character, values, and attitude become part of your life. Transformation is what produces true love in us, because we become more like Christ. This is the good news God has for us today.

Encouragement

May each of you make a decision to trust in Jesus Christ and to follow Him all your life. May you be transformed in a way that you experience the true love of God. May that love make you a beautiful person on the inside. As you practice being "just friends" in your teen years, may the Lord enable you to learn how others act and think. Later, when you consider dating, only date a Christian who is truly committed to the Lord and demonstrates a transformed life. May the Lord enable you to have a wonderful and fulfilling life.