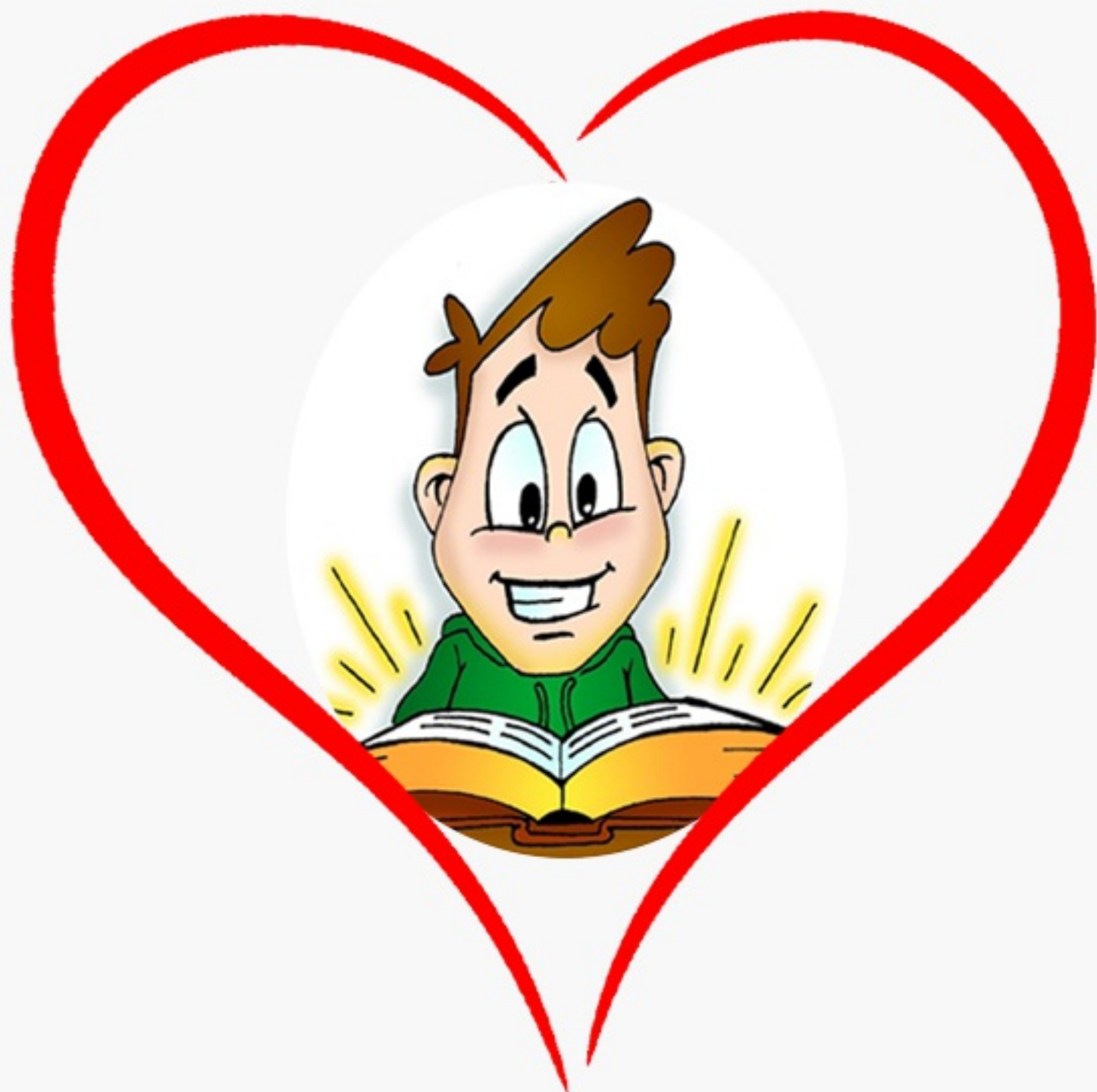


Finding True Love That Lasts Forever



LORRAINE PETERSON

Finding True Love that Lasts Forever

Lorraine Peterson

About the Author

LORRAINE PETERSON was born in Red Wing, Minnesota, grew up on a farm near Ellsworth, Wisconsin, and now resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She received her B.A. (in history) from North Park College in Chicago, and has taken summer courses from the University of Minnesota and the University of Mexico in Mexico City. She lived for some years in Mexico.

Lorraine has taught high school and middle school. She has been an advisor to nondenominational Christian clubs in Minneapolis public schools, has taught teenage Bible studies, and continues to write for teenagers. She has written several bestselling devotional books for teens.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1; GOD *DOES* LOVE YOU!

Nobody Loves Me

Forever Love

But You Can't Hug God!

Love Is a Two-Way Street

How to Get A Full Cup

If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?

Nothing Else Matters

Chapter 2; THE RIGHT KIND OF ROMANCE

Love Is Not That Queasy Feeling in Your Stomach

Thirsty Camels and Prince Charming

The True Love Exam

The Bible Talks About Figs, Not Dates

I Don't Need Any Advice

Your Responsibility in Dating

I'd Rather Lie Than Hurt His Feelings

Chapter 3; THAT MOUTH OF YOURS

Does Your Tongue Need a Prison Sentence?

Please Erase the Remark I Just Made

Your Mouth Needs a Lie Detector

You Mean Complaining Is a Sin?

Snakes, Quails, and Grumblers

Did You Know That Your Mind Is on Parade?

Chapter One

GOD DOES LOVE YOU!

Nobody Loves Me

Have you ever wondered if God really loves you? Or maybe you've talked to someone who has serious doubts about God's love for him or her. A friend of mine received a call from a nurse at a local hospital. She was afraid that an eighteen-year-old patient of hers might die because he had absolutely no desire to live.

A talk with the boy revealed that he had suffered a crippling disease as a child but had, by constant exercise and work, not only learned to walk again, but to run and excel in athletics. He was now in the hospital as a result of a terrible automobile accident that had killed everyone else in his family. He had suffered severe injuries, but the doctors told him that if he worked hard he had a chance of walking again. This young man would not believe that God loved him.

My friend took his Bible and read to him the story of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. After he finished he asked gently, "Don't you think the God who sent Jesus to suffer and die for you really does love you?" The boy agreed.

You may not understand anything that has happened to you, what you are going through now, or what the future will hold, but the crown of thorns, the spear in His side, and the nails in His hands forever say, "I love you."

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him" (Matthew 27: 27-31).

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4: 9).

1. Study the passage from Matthew 27 and then list all the things Jesus suffered.
2. Why didn't Jesus stand up for His rights when He was treated unjustly?
3. Would you voluntarily go through such torture for anyone?
4. Can you think of one reason to doubt that the Jesus who went through all this for you really loves you?

Forever Love

-

The Bible speaks often about God's "steadfast love." Steadfast love is *forever* love. It never changes. It is always the same. Your mom might not love you for an hour after you lose the smartphone she bought you. Your boyfriend or girlfriend might love you less after you disappointed him or her. Your employer may not have loved you at all the day you overslept and left the restaurant shorthanded.

But God will always love you. Jesus came to earth to offer visible proof of God's eternal love. Although Jesus knew that the "rich young ruler" would not give up his wealth to follow Him, the Bible says, "And Jesus looking upon him loved him."

After Peter had denied Jesus three times, the Lord turned and looked at him. That look of love caused that tough fisherman to run out and cry. Jesus loved the woman with the bad reputation who put perfume on His feet at a dinner party, and He made her feel comfortable among the critical guests. Jesus loved Thomas the doubter and did everything possible to help him believe.

Jesus loves you and will demonstrate His love to you – if you let Him. People can accept love only from someone they trusts. You can trust Jesus and depend on Him for never-ending love.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide (scold), nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sin, nor requite us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him. ... As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103: 8-11, 13, 14).

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end" (Lamentations 3: 22).

1. Describe God's love.
2. Can you ever find the top of the sky? Why do you think the height of the sky ("heavens") is used in Psalm 103 to explain the extent of God's love for us?
3. Psalm 103: 13, 14 are verses to read over and over again on days you can't seem to do anything right. What comfort do you find in these verses?

But You Can't Hug God!

The guy who tells a girl that he loves her and will do anything for her, and the girl who responds with the same words, make the theme for a million stories, movies, and song lyrics. Something within us longs for someone who will give himself totally for us. Although we know that “and they lived happily ever after” in the children’s storybooks is a myth, there’s something about a total commitment to another person that we all want to experience.

The Apostle Paul says that marriage is a symbol of the love between Christ and the Church. The beautiful thing is that Jesus has given himself totally for you. He left heaven for you. He was born in a manger for you. He put up with the Pharisees for you. He allowed Roman soldiers to put nails in His hands for you. He rose again for you. He is now in heaven praying for you.

Jesus can, and will, do everything for you. The more you think about all that Jesus has done, the more you'll want to respond to Him with a total surrender of your life. It isn't such a tough thing. It's a natural response to give to someone who has given everything for you. And even if you can't hug God, you'll discover that the relationship you can have with Him is deeper than anything you could experience with another human being.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1: 3-6).

“In this is love; not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation (way of making amends for guilt or wrongdoing) for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

1. When did Jesus choose you?
2. Do you find it exciting that God chose you before He made the world?
3. Describe the kind of life God has planned for you.

Love is a Two-Way Street

-

God has enough love to satisfy you completely. Most people are unable to receive all of God's love because they have not given themselves totally to Him. If you really love someone, pleasing that person is more important to you than your own desires. Is pleasing Jesus the most important thing in your life? True love is gives without counting the cost.

A man from India lost all he had when he became a Christian. His wife and children left him and his friends became his enemies. His comment was, "People always ask me what I gave up to become a Christian, but nobody asks me what I gained." He believed that what he had acquired was well worth the price he paid. That man knew that the more he gave in love to Jesus, the more of His love he would experience in return. Since you're human, you may respond to God's love imperfectly, but determine to give yourself totally to God, and you will have a beautiful relationship with Him.

"Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!,' 'Here am I.' Abraham replied. Then God said 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering ... He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the alter ... But the angel of the Lord called out to him ... 'Do not lay a hand on the boy' ... The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you ... through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed my voice'" (Genesis 22: 1-2, 10-18).

"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14: 21).

1. What was the basis of the wonderful friendship Abraham had with God?
2. Do you have an "Isaac" (something important to you) that must be sacrificed if your relationship to God is to improve?
3. How do you think Abraham felt after he passed God's test? (Read all of Genesis 22.)

-

How to Get A Full Cup

-

Can you imagine a game in which each player has a half-full cup of water and the object is to get your cup full of water by begging, borrowing, or stealing from someone else's half-full cup? Since the other players also want full cups, the game doesn't tend to produce friendships.

Most people are playing such a game, and they are playing for keeps. Worst of all, the scarce "water" they're fighting for is love. Everyone needs love and tries to obtain it from other people, but people just don't have enough to give very generously. Some people completely give of themselves until they reach a certain point, and then call a sudden halt. Others give only when their love is to be returned. Some have been hurt and they become loners rather than risk more heartbreak. Others have no love to give and become leeches, trying to get love and attention wherever they can find it.

Obviously, what's needed is a never-ending supply of water or of love from an outside source. God is that never-ending supply of love. In fact, He is love. He loves you now. He has loved you all your life and will love you forever – no matter what. God can give you so much love that you can spend your life giving love to others.

"How precious is thy steadfast love, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings" (Psalm 36: 7).

"By day the Lord commands his steadfast love; and at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life" (Psalm 42: 8).

"Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee" (Psalm 63: 3).

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to thy name, O Most High; to declare thy steadfast love in the morning and thy faithfulness by night" (Psalm 92: 1, 2).

"We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4: 19).

1. Describe God's character. (Be as specific as possible.)
2. How much time do you spend thinking and talking about love?
3. Think about God's love. Thank Him for being love. Memorize one of the verses.

-

If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?

-

A three-year-old's definition of love would be something like this; "If Mommy really loved me, she'd let me eat all the candy I want."

An eight-year-old's definition of love might sound like this: "If our teacher loved us, she'd let us spend four hours on the play ground each day."

As we grow older our definitions don't get much better. We feel that if God really loved us, He'd let us have our own way, give us the possessions we desire, and keep trouble away from our lives. We forget that since God is love, He is the One who understands love.

Love is not giving a person whatever he or she wants; God does not love you by satisfying your every whim and fancy, and you don't love others that way either. Genuine love always stays within the boundaries of God's commandments. Real love is sometimes tough – it's not always what we want. A God who really loves us will not fulfill our every desire.

We can enjoy God's love only if we accept the fact that He knows how to run His universe. If you're a cat lover, you know that some kittens can be lovingly petted on your lap and their purr will nearly drown out the TV. With the same loving intentions, you can pickup another cat and it will spit and scratch and bristle. The difference is only a matter of the cats' attitudes. In the same way, you can choose to accept God's love or reject it. Are you a "purr-er" or a "spit-er"?

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the Day of Judgment, because as He is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love" (1 John 4: 7, 8, 14, 17, 18).

"Keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21).

1. According to 1 John 4, what are some signs that show God's love is in you?
2. How would you answer this question: "If God loves me, why did He allow my new bike to be stolen?"
3. Have you ever been angry at God for something? Did God make a mistake or were you looking at the situation from the wrong point of view?

-

Nothing Else Matters

-

Jesus warned that if we love anyone or anything more than we love Him, we are not worthy of Him. Jesus is to be more important to us than anything else.

One can be so taken up with the beauty of the countryside that looking for landmarks or remembering the way back becomes irrelevant. Lovers can forget the time of day and even skip a meal. Have you ever loved Jesus so much that nothing else mattered or seemed the least bit important? Seeing Jesus like this will take away your sense of self-sufficiency. You will not dare to depend on yourself to serve God. The hard times that prove you are nothing in yourself will not throw you, because you realize that each time you become dependent on God in a given area, you find the real life God has for you. You will also be willing to do anything God asks – even something you would normally dislike.

Losing your life for Jesus involves giving unselfishly. I've seen a plaque that reads, "Cooking, like love, must be entered into with utter abandon or not at all." When a person really loves someone, the gift isn't too expensive, the effort to please isn't too great, and the self-sacrifice necessary to do what the other person wants isn't too big a price to pay. Everyone else might say, "What a waste," but the person in love could care less. Do you love Jesus so much that you'll do what He wants even if everyone thinks it's ridiculous?

Wholeheartedly loving Jesus means doing everything for Jesus and not for other people. If you do good deeds for the poor, help the sick, or comfort the people who hurt, you'll soon feel that these people are taking advantage of you. However, if you do it all for Jesus and you love these people because Jesus loves them, it won't matter, because you're doing it only to please Jesus – and He's worth any sacrifice.

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 37).

"And he (Jesus) was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. He was still speaking when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (Matthew 17: 2, 5-8).

1. Why is it logical to give all your love to Jesus?
2. Make a list of "Christian" things you do. Do you do them because you love Jesus, or for some other reason?

Chapter Two

THE RIGHT KIND OF ROMANCE

Love is Not That Queasy Feeling in Your Stomach

After watching television or reading romantic novels, one is apt to view love as some great sensation that suddenly overwhelms a person – people fall in love while walking in the moonlight on a warm summer evening, or sitting by a fireplace after a sleigh ride, but never while cleaning the house or visiting a critically ill hospital patient. Love is generally viewed as an emotion or chemical reaction that is either absent or present. When you ask how to recognize this unparalleled unpredictable emotion, many answer, “Don’t worry, you’ll just know.”

Common tests for love go something like this; Do you get butterflies in your stomach every time you see that “special someone”? Do you think about this person so much you have trouble studying? Is he or she your “perfect” ideal?

Then a thousand TV commercials a day declare that you must be physically attractive so that someone will be sure to fall in love with you. It would be a shame to miss it all because of using the wrong toothpaste!

But, then, people fall out of love for the most amazing reasons. Liz cut her hair, so Harry doesn’t love her anymore. Jim decided to play baseball three nights a week, so Jennifer broke up with him. When Sue was asked out by a good-looking football player, she forgot all about Brian.

These misconceptions our society forces on people locks them into a treadmill of falling in and out of love, marrying, divorcing, remarrying, and divorcing. People think that if their heart skips a beat, they’d better marry the person who caused this great feeling, but as soon as the great emotional feelings leave, they get a divorce. Don’t fall into that trap. It comes straight from the pit. It is not the kind of love God wants between a man and a woman.

Because this whole maze of boy-girl relationships can become such a sticky mess, you desperately need God's guidance in choosing the person to date. He or she may not even put one butterfly in your stomach – but you can count on God to give you *the very best!*

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. Discretion (good judgment) will watch over you; understanding will guard you” (Proverbs 2: 6, 11).

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil” (Proverbs 3: 7).

“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adventuress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes” (Proverbs 6: 23-25).

1. Why is “let your emotions be your guide” dangerous and unscriptural?
2. Why can God do a better job of running your dating life than you can? Are you willing to let Him control this area of your life?

Thirsty Camels and Prince Charming

-

The Bible defines love as an *act of the will*. It *commands* all people to love God, followers of Jesus to love their enemies, and husbands to love their wives. Because real love isn't based on emotions, a Bible love story is very different from most novels you've read. It starts with obedience to God and prayer.

Abraham obeyed God by determining not to let his son Isaac marry an idol-worshipper, even though he had to send a servant to a far country to choose a wife for his son. Imagine the faith involved in this decision! The servant prayed that God would send the right girl to the well and that she'd offer water for his camels. Sure enough, Rebekah came and offered to water his camels. When Rebekah's father and brother heard the story they answered; "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken" (Genesis 24: 50, 51).

When they asked Rebekah if she would go to marry Isaac, she consented. It was a marriage based on God's will. Maybe that doesn't sound very romantic, but after Isaac and Rebekah had been married forty years, we read, "Abimelec, King of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah his wife."

Love based solely on emotions changes if the other person does something we don't like. Love that is based first on God's will and then on our willingness to love that other person – no matter what – is the kind that lasts. That relationship will even be more romantic in the long run. Your first step toward getting in on the kind of romance God has in store is letting *God* decide whom you should or shouldn't date.

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, and said to the servant, 'Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?' The servant said, 'It is my master.' So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24: 63-67).

1. What problems did Isaac and Rebekah avoid by letting God arrange their marriage?
2. What problems could you avoid by allowing God to decide whom you should date?

-

The True Love Exam

Skiing at top speed down your favorite slope through crisp, sparkling snow, scoring the winning touchdown in a championship game, and strolling down lovers' lane on a moonlight night can be enjoyable experiences charged with emotion. Yet, breaking a leg, dropping the ball, or starting an argument could turn these same activities into pure misery. Obviously, it's not very logical to build a lifetime commitment, such as marriage, on emotions. But because emotions can be very strong and very real, it's all too easy to base everything on them.

When you're experiencing that "falling in love feeling," pray a lot. Ask God to sort out your emotions. You can *choose* to follow God *no matter how you feel*. Keep in mind that the Bible not only defines love as an act of the will, but also declares that love can be tested by certain attitudes found in a person. Here is the Bible's "true love exam";

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7).

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12: 9, 10).

In light of the verses you just read, check the statements that are tests of genuine love.

- I just *have* to be with her all the time.
- I'm so jealous when he pays attention to someone else.
- I wish he'd hurry up and get around to asking me out.
- When she is on vacation, I miss her so much I get crabby.
- He is so understanding and he is the only one who makes me feel good about myself. I just can't live without him.
- She'd better not be dating someone else. I wouldn't stand for it.
- We love each other so much we've decided to move in together.

If you checked even one of the statements, you'd better reread the verses. Every statement is *false*. The way God tests true love and the way the world tests love are very different.

Think of a guy or girl that you are interested in. Take each quality of true love listed in the above Bible verses and write down how you could show that quality of love. (*Example*; If I really loved him, I'd be *patient* about his lack of organization and inability to plan ahead.)

The Bible Talks About Figs, Not Dates

-

“He’s not a Christian but he’s the nicest guy I know – a lot nicer than the *Christian* guys I know. Besides, you can't tell me what to do because the Bible doesn't say anything about dating.” You can't get through life without hearing that a few times. It is true that dating, as we know it, was nonexistent in Bible times, so the Bible doesn't mention it. However, this does not mean that the Bible has nothing to say on the subject.

What the Bible says about friendships and life attitudes is very applicable to dating. For example, the Bible states, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed (attracted) by his own desire” (James 1: 14). Dating a non-Christian automatically initiates some strong desires. You want your relationship to work out. You want to defend that person before your Christian friends. You also want to please that person and make him or her happy. Wanting very much something wrong opens the way for the devil to deceive you. You may want the person to be a Christian so badly that you convince yourself that he or she is a Christian. It's easy to close your eyes to all the faults of that person and refuse to listen to advice. If you raise an immediate defense every time someone questions your actions, you'd better talk to God and ask Him to sort out your desires.

Another thing that you do by dating a non-Christian is to encourage that person to show a false interest in the Bible or church, just to please you. The person may also be “faking it” in other areas, such as drinking and morals. If a person keeps acting a certain way just to please you, that person will begin to resent you for being his or her conscience. The only thing left will be for the two of you to break up, or for you to lower your standards. Giving God the control of your desires will keep you from hurting yourself and other people.

“Hope deferred (postponed) makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13: 12).

“A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul; but to turn away from evil is an abomination (something hateful and disgusting) to fools” (Proverbs 13: 19).

1. Why is dating a non-Christian, with the hope that he or she will change, so dangerous?
2. The soul is the part of you that has will, intellect, and emotions. Why do we enjoy having our desires fulfilled? What is *true* fulfillment?
3. Read Proverbs 13: 19 again. Notice that even if our desires are evil, it is very hard to turn away from them. The important question is, do you really want what Jesus wants? Are there desires in your life you must give to Jesus? List them.

I Don't Need Any Advice

-

When your father starts out with, "When I was a boy," or, "'I've lived for a long time and I know," it's easy to snap back, "But I don't need any advice!" The truth is, all of us accept advice from someone. The girl who thinks her mother's ideas are old-fashioned will constantly ask her girlfriends to help her pick out clothes; the guy who won't get a haircut to please his parents will do so immediately if he finds out his girlfriend likes short hair.

From whom will you take advice? When will you refuse to listen? These are very important decisions. The Bible says about taking advice, "A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels (advice) of the wicked are treacherous" (Proverbs 12: 4, 5).

Did you notice that marrying the right person and accepting advice from the appropriate people are linked in Scripture? There are a couple of important reasons for this. First, the advice of the person you date or marry is important to you. The Bible says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1: 1). God cannot bless you if you constantly take advice from a girlfriend or a boyfriend who is not a believer. This is one of the best reasons for deciding not to date non-Christians.

On the other hand, a person who is secure in doing the right thing listens to advice from many people without becoming defensive. The Bible teaches that we are to obey those in authority over us unless their orders are contrary to God's will. If you're constantly on the defensive and can't stand any questions from your parents, your youth director, or your Christian friends about the person you date, something is wrong. Unwillingness to take advice from other Christians is very dangerous.

If you don't have Christian parents, and even if you do, find a mature Christian to advise you in your dating. Ask that person to pray for you and for your boyfriend or girlfriend. Godly advice is a valuable aid to right living.

"Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11: 14).

"By insolence (pride, disrespect for authority) the heedless make strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom" (Proverbs 13: 10).

"Do not be deceived; 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15: 33).

1. Whose advice should you follow and whose advice should you discard?
2. What are the advantages of taking godly advice?
3. Whose advice have you been refusing that you should begin accepting?

Your Responsibility in Dating

-

The responsibility you have toward the person you date is the same responsibility you have toward all Christians. However, it is intensified because your relationship is so close and the opinion of the other person is so important to you. Your first responsibility is *to help the other person be the very best Christian he or she can be*. This obviously includes helping that person keep the highest moral standards. This requires some advance thinking, so when you plan a date, consider these kinds of questions; Would seeing this movie bring us closer to Christ? Would sitting around talking for a long time in the moonlight invite unnecessary temptation? Would wearing this outfit make it harder for my date to keep his thoughts pure?

Because you are Christians, your purpose in life – and on every date – is to glorify God. It is your responsibility to pray for the person you date and to encourage that person in Bible study. Be willing to give up time spent with each other so each of you can serve Christ – maybe there is a boy or girl who isn't dating who needs some of your time. Encourage the person you date to put love for Jesus above love for you. A big Scripture memorization project could be dynamite for both of you.

An important responsibility you have toward those of the opposite sex is giving them a healthy self-image. If one girl tells another she has a lousy figure, the remark, although inexcusable, can be forgotten. But if a guy says, "Well if the fat, flat look were in, you'd be a star in Hollywood." that girl will remember it until she is ninety.

If a girl tells a guy, "You are the clumsiest thing on two feet," that will help ruin his self-image. Flattery is wrong, but carefully worded encouragement can be invaluable in building up another Christian. Dating is a good place to practice showing consideration, kindness, and acceptance.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to thy Word. With my whole heart I seek thee; let me not wander from thy commandments! I have laid up thy Word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed be thou, O Lord; teach me thy statutes" (Psalm 119: 9-12).

"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building" (Romans 14: 19).

1. How can you live up to the high standard of purity that God has for you?
2. After reading this passage, what place do you think studying and memorizing God's Word should have in a Christian dating relationship?
3. According to Romans 14: 19, what should be your goal in a dating relationship? If you're presently in a dating relationship, are you seeking to fulfill that goal?

I'd Rather Lie Than Hurt His Feelings

-

After your dating relationship is ended, the person you dated will either be closer to Christ or farther away because of you. Consider that. You must be careful not to hurt the other person unnecessarily; judge your actions according to the effect they will have on him or her. Don't just consider what you mean but also what the other person thinks you mean. A popular girl has no right to flirt with a shy guy just because she needs a New Years Eve date, and then suddenly become "busy" for the next five months. The "goddess" who leaves a string of broken hearts behind her certainly isn't heeding Jesus' command to "love one another."

Guys, realize that girls are dreamers who make mental memory books out of all your words and actions. Don't say, "I love you" unless you really mean it – she may start planning the wedding! Girls sometimes interpret an outward display of affection more deeply than was intended, so fellows need to be careful. It isn't fair to set another person up for a big letdown.

Covering up true feelings by pretending that you are going to date the person indefinitely, and then dropping him or her like a hot potato, has no place in Christian dating. If you habitually pray together, you'll find it easier to be honest and open with each other. Besides, you need God's help. But because prayer knits hearts together, it is wise to pray by telephone, zoom, or in a public place in order to avoid sexual temptation afterwards.

Books on marriage seem to agree that lack of communication is the number one problem in marriage. If you think being honest would ruin your relationship, it should be ruined, because it has no future.

"Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me thy law" (Psalm 119: 29)!

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good" (Romans 12: 9).

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4: 15).

1. List some ways you could lie or create a false impression on a date.
2. In what situations is it difficult to be honest in dating?
3. Is a "but I might hurt her feelings" a good enough reason to disobey God's Word?

-

Chapter Three

IT'S NOT EASY TO LOVE

Broken, Bleeding Hearts and Puppy Love

“You'll get over it.”

“Well, they say that puppy love is real to the puppy, but you're too young to take it so seriously.”

“There are other fish in the sea.”

When breaking up was not your idea, and you're really hurt, none of these comments is very comforting. Although we usually associate “heartbreak” with romance, your parents’ divorce, your unfulfilled dream, or moving in the middle of your senior year may be just as painful. But, there is something you can do with your broken heart. You can bring it to Jesus and He can heal it; “He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147: 3).

First, confess any bitterness or resentment you feel. Bitterness and resentment are sin, and are like dirt that keeps a wound from healing unless totally cleaned out. A broken heart is bad enough. You don't need to get it full of infection.

Second, you must *want* Jesus to heal you. This may sound strange at first, but we really do enjoy self-pity. I once heard a girl admit, “Every time I talk about Bill breaking up with me, I cry, but I just love to talk about it.” We all know people who fill any listening ear with all the sad tales of their lives.

Indulging in self-pity is also wrong and must be confessed. No matter how unfair the situation, no matter how much you are wronged, and no matter how deceitful the other person was, you must reject self-pity and treat it as sin.

Finally, Jesus can't heal your broken heart if you've decided that stone hearts don't hurt when they get broken – you'll just be tough and let your heart harden. Although there is always room in the “Who-Needs-Women-Anyway Gang,” observe how this kind of person turns out. Because he is afraid to love and afraid to give, he keeps his distance from people. God doesn't want you to become that kind of person.

You cannot heal your own broken heart. Healing a broken heart takes a miracle – and only Jesus can do it. Be honest with Him. Tell Him the whole thing. But don't stop there. In faith, ask Him to heal your broken heart and *expect* Him to act. Hearts don't always heal instantly, so keep trusting Him, even if the hurt is still there after you've prayed. Let Jesus use the experience to draw you closer to Him.

“For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from

whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53: 2-5).

1. Why is Jesus qualified to understand your heartache?
2. Do you think that Jesus’ dying on the cross to make us whole and to heal us includes emotional healing? Why?

-

Jesus, the Heart Healer

-

Maybe your heart is broken in so many pieces that putting it back together again would be like trying to reassemble an egg that slid off the kitchen counter and splatted on the floor. The girl who is depressed because her boyfriend broke up with her might seem like “kid stuff” to you. Maybe you’ve given in to sexual temptation, and it resulted in shattering heartbreak and a baby that needs your constant attention. Maybe your home is in constant turmoil and you feel as if no one has ever cared about you. Perhaps you are part of a vicious circle that goes like this; no one has really loved you, so you are afraid to or don’t know how to love anyone else; therefore, no one finds you easy to love. Jesus offers love and pardon for your wrong choices and the ability to forgive those who have sinned against you. If you depend on His strength, He’ll help you navigate the situation – no matter how complicated and difficult the circumstances. When Jesus read the following scripture in the synagogue He applied it to Himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61: 1).

Receive His forgiveness if you messed up and be willing to pardon those who hurt you so that you can receive His healing for your broken heart. As you give each hurt to Him, ask Jesus to heal your heartaches. Jesus can take you out of the vicious circle and put you into the winner’s circle where you can receive love from God and give it to other people.

“Why are you downcast O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 42:5

“I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16: 7, 8, 11).

1. Reread Psalm 16: 11. Where can you always find real joy in spite of what has happened to you?
2. Did Jesus heal the blind who seek His help? Why not? Do you think Jesus will totally heal the broken hearts of people who decide to suffer through on their own instead of allowing Jesus to do His healing work?
3. Will you determine to bring your heartache to Jesus?

-

But, Everybody's Doing It!

-

“The only people I know of who think that sex before marriage is wrong are my pastor and my grandmother.” You may have heard statements like that. There’s a virtual epidemic of people living together before marriage. Because the couples living together include everyone from your girlfriend’s mother and her boyfriend to college students who grew up in your church, you may wonder if it can really be so bad.

When it comes to moral standards, whether or not others are doing it is *completely* irrelevant. The point is; *What does God think about it?* Older people in our country are accustomed to a society in which a majority of people supported Christian moral standards. When they were young the Jesus Followers didn’t have to be “different” to have high morals. But all that has changed. If you follow God's moral standards now, you are in the minority. But there is no room in the life of a Christian for justifying sex before marriage.

Although God has very important psychological and physical reasons for prohibiting sex outside of marriage, the proponents of sex before marriage can make their arguments sound very good. In this area of life as in every other, we obey what God says, because our Creator is smarter than we are, He loves us, and He knows what is best for us. What other people are doing and what may seem logical must be disregarded if it is contrary to the Bible.

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” (1 Corinthians 6: 13b, 15).

“It is god’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.” I Thessalonians 4: 3- 5.

If you have been involved in sexual immorality the unpleasant consequences remain but God offers complete forgiveness and a new life.

1. Why is premarital sex wrong? List the reasons.
2. Why is the sex act meant to begin a permanent union?
3. What is God's intended purpose for our bodies?

-

God Lays It on the Line

-

If you've ever made a model airplane, decorated a cake, rebuilt an engine, or painted a picture, you took extremely good care of your "creation." God made you, and His rulers about sex are designed to take the very best care of you. *He* created sex and He wants you to get the most out of it. He knows that within marriage you will receive the maximum enjoyment from sex. This does mean, of course, that you will have to give up momentary pleasure now for the more lasting satisfaction then. If you are given a choice between a hamburger at McDonalds now, and a steak dinner at the best restaurant in town two hours from now, you will of course, deny your stomach instant food in order to enjoy the steak. The steak dinner will taste all the better because you didn't have the hamburger.

God's rule is, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20: 14). Someone has observed that God gave Ten *Commandments*, not ten *suggestions*! His laws are based on the fact that people have willpower and are responsible for their actions. He doesn't talk in terms of "accidents" or people who "just can't help themselves". If you have a good enough reason for not doing something, you'll refrain from it. If you knew that each action of yours would be televised on the major networks, you'd find it very possible to exercise a lot of self-control.

But you've got an even better reason for doing right; disobeying God has harsh consequences. God's rules are safeguards for us. Instead of looking on God's commandments as unwelcome restrictions, learn to say like the Psalmist, "Thy testimonies (words including the rules) are my delight. They are my counselors" (Psalm 119:24).

"But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7: 2).

"Treat younger men like brothers, and older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5: 1 b, 2).

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous" (Hebrews 13: 4).

1. How was young Timothy to treat the young women of the church?
2. Do you regard Christian young people of the opposite sex as brothers or sisters in Christ?
3. What is God's view of the position of marriage?
4. What does the Bible say about sex outside of marriage?

-

Are You Running a Reform School?

I was listening to “*Unshackled*,” a Christian radio drama. The story was one of many that began with, “I married a beautiful Christian girl and she was determined to reform me, but it just didn’t work out.” That day I gained new insight on the issue of trying to use one’s influence to reform another person.

I’d recently talked with a high school girl who was convinced she couldn’t stop dating her non-Christian boyfriend because he “needed” her good influence. She had argued, “If I drop him, who will lead him to Christ?”

Although I knew from experience that trying to reform another person by charm and influence was hopeless, I had never thought of it as being clearly wrong. Through that program, I saw it. Since only Jesus can redeem a soul, only Jesus can reform a life, and only He can meet every human need. When trying to help a person spiritually, any time we make that person dependent on ourselves instead of depending on God, we are doing something terribly wrong.

The reason that it’s so easy to fall for Satan’s lie at this point, is that our “need to be needed” is so great. All of us enjoy playing hero. This is God’s answer: Instead of depending on another person to make us feel secure, we can find everything we need in Jesus. Also, we are wanted and loved by Jesus. The poem that begins, “He has no hands but our hands to do His work today” is true. God could have been self-sufficient, but He designed the world so that He would need us to cooperate with Him in doing His work. *That* should make you feel needed!

Also realize that if Jesus can supply our every need, He can do the same for everyone else. You can drop your non-Christian friend and God will take *better care* of him than you ever could. God loves that person much more than you do. You don’t have to date that good-looking non-Christian girl “just to help her,” because if you really wanted to help her, you’d pray for her! There’s no room for the kind of pride that says, “I can do something that God cannot do.” All of us sooner or later need to realize that God is the only one who can change people from the inside out. Then we will stop trying to reform people ourselves and start praying that God will work in their lives.

“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21: 1).

“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? says the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18: 6).

1. Why isn’t it your responsibility to reform anybody?
2. Are there some people you should stop trying to change and instead be praying for?

Love Someone You Hate

“I just can't stand that woman.”

“That guy gives me the creeps.”

“He'd do the human race a favor by evaporating!”

Have you ever said or thought things like that? People show great lack of love toward others for a thousand reasons; they use the wrong deodorant, they sing off-key, they talk too much, or they slurp their soup. Sometimes we try to sound “good” by saying, “I love her, but I don't like her,” or, “I usually love her but I not today,” or, “I'd love him if he'd change.”

Jesus, however, commands us to love one another unconditionally – “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15: 12). Jesus loved each of us enough to die for us while we were still sinners, deserving nothing from Him. If I honestly hate Sue, and God says I should love her, I can't just say I love her; that would make me a hypocrite. However, I can love by faith. I can obey God's Word literally, knowing that if Jesus commanded me to love everyone, He'll give me the power to do it. I must act on that belief and love that person by faith. If I've ever done anything wrong to Sue, I apologize and make it right – even if Sue has done ten times as many bad things to me – and I don't word my apology in such a way as to expect one in return. I simply say, “Sue, I borrowed your blouse without asking you and I'm sorry. It's washed and clean now. Will you forgive me?”

I can also do nice things for Sue, such as buy her flowers, help her with homework, and invite her to go with my friends and me to the basketball game. I don't do it by gritting my teeth and whispering under my breath, “I'm going to love Sue if it kills me,” but rather, I pray, “Jesus, what I'm doing for Sue, I'm doing for you, and I'm asking you for the love I don't have.” If you obey God's command to show love, sooner or later the right emotions will come tagging along behind.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ... But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6: 32, 33, 35, 36).

1. Why don't we get “points” for loving people who are nice to us?
2. What reason is given for the command to love our enemies?
3. List some of the unkind and selfish people God expects you to love.
4. What's the difference between trying to love people on your own and loving them with God's love?

Love Can Melt Enemies

-

Maybe it's the kid at school who constantly bullies you, posts your worst pictures on snapchat and spreads false rumors about you; or perhaps it's the person who was terribly unkind and unfair to your mother; or maybe it's the teacher who constantly scoffs at "Bible-believing fanatics"; or it could even be another Christian that you have trouble getting along with – somebody is bound to give you the opportunity to demonstrate God's dynamite weapon against enemies. *Prayer!*

God commands us to pray for our enemies. If you sincerely and constantly pray for your enemies, some exciting things will happen. For instance, you can't hate and pray at the same time. If you continue to pray, God will miraculously give you love for those who have wronged you. Also, God will work in *their* lives, and they will begin to notice that in spite of what they've done, you love them. Now, the other person will not necessarily stop hating you. In fact, he may feel so guilty that he'll treat you even worse. But God will use your actions to advertise Christianity.

If Christians don't love their enemies, they are no different from the world. God has made "love your enemies" love available to all of us. Maybe you'd better start by making a "Those Who Don't Like Me Very Much Prayer List," and pray for those people every day.

"You have heard it was said, 'You shall love your neighbors and hate your enemy.' But I say to you; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles (and non-Jews) do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5: 43-48).

"Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12: 17, 18).

1. What are we to do for those who persecute us?
2. Is it always possible to make our enemies love us even if we love them?
3. How does God treat the people who reject Him?