

Love

What Is It?

What's love? That question is probably a topic to be debated. We've got a million different definitions for this thing that we call "love." It seems that we're in love with the idea of "love," but we're not all that caught up in the sacrifices that love will demand of us. And so, we craft and we carve and we contort love to be something that we love, but something that we don't love so much that it demands much of us. None of that is really love. And so, what is love?

It's the stuff of endless novels, myths and legends. Entire movies and plays are driven from the first line to the last by this single theme. We live for it, fight for it, plead for it, cheat for it and die for it. We even go so far as to fabricate cheap and limp imitations of love to at least get a small piece of something that looks like love. But none of that is really love.

We step into the quandary of the greeting card aisle and we're faced with an endless variety of cards that extol love. We've got a whole holiday dedicated to it. Our tombstones are cut with inscriptions that talk about how we loved or were loved. We're quick to say that we love certain foods or certain people or certain hobbies or certain colors. Sometimes we speak the word "love" with a deep passion we don't even understand. Other times we throw it around to describe something we tend to like or feel good about. But what is it?

Love is Powerful

One thing's for sure, love is powerful. We all want it, or in reality we all need it. It's inborn in us as some sort of fundamental human need that's as important as water, food and oxygen. You can't grab it. You can't box it. It doesn't ship well and refrigeration doesn't preserve it. Love doesn't allow you to control it or catch it or herd it. We didn't invent it and all of our efforts to dissect it end up leaving us as mystified as ever. There are a million different stanzas and an equally large number of musical scores that bespeak of our love for "love," but it still evades us. It's abundantly clear that we've in love with "love." But what in the world is it?

Because love is powerful, we also fear it. While love can lift us up to unimaginable heights, it can also drop us to equally unimaginable depths. The greatest pain that we can feel is often the pain associated with love. Love gone wrong and turned inside out results in horrifically horrific things like abandonment, betrayal, injustice, treachery, infidelity, abuse, exploitation and more. Yes, we love "love." But love turned sour and turned back on itself can be devastating beyond comprehension. Therefore, there's a side of us that fears love as well.

Feeling or Decision?

So what is this thing that we call love? The debate rages on around a central question . . . is love a feeling or a decision? The advocates seem committed to one side or the other. The argument plays out as one of those 'either/or' types that love must either be an emotion or a decision. It has to be one or the other . . . so the field of opinion seems to fall.

We can say with some certainty that love is a deep human emotion where the most fundamental of our passions are stirred. I think we'd all agree on that. There's something so powerful about love that people have risen to unbelievable heights and achieved phenomenal things because of love. On the other side of that, people have also plunged to frightening lows that some individuals never crawl out of. It's a powerful emotion that makes us uniquely human and gives us the ability to do things we never imagined we could do.

What if Love is Both?

2 - Craig D. Lounsborough, LPC

It seems that true love is an emotion, but it moves beyond emotion because it's bigger than simply an emotion. I would suggest that love starts as an emotion, but the strength of the emotion itself compels us to make choices and take actions that are more than just emotionally based. Emotion can falter when things get difficult, or other more negative emotions can begin to take over in the tough times. Love is powerful, but it's also fragile.

It seems that love in its greatest moments is an emotion that prompts a decision to stick with that emotion even when life or circumstances kill the emotion. 'Love' loves when you don't feel like it because love means loving when it's not easy or convenient. True love means sticking with the decision to 'love' even when there are plenty of other easier or less painful choices. Love means that we remain committed to loving even at the times when the emotion is so diminished or altogether missing that we can't feel it at all. Love hangs in there even when there seems to be no good reason to hang in there. That's what makes love what it is.

Love might be better defined by a benchmark of sorts rather than a strict definition. I think the best benchmark is recorded in the bible when it says, "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Love means putting the interest of someone else ahead of our own regardless of what it costs us to do that. Love knows nothing of short hauls because it has committed itself for the long haul. It's that all or nothing kind of thing that doesn't leave us some sort of middle ground to fiddle around with. You're in or you're out. You're completely 'sold out,' so there's no way that you can 'sell out.' Love won't tolerate anything else.

That kind of benchmark can certainly be motivated by emotion, but at some point it becomes so costly that it becomes a decision. We choose. We choose when it hurts to choose. We choose when the choice may cost us dearly. We choose when not choosing seems the better choice. But that's what love is and that's what it does. Love is about investing in the best interest of another without regard to our own interest despite the cost to our own interests. And that decision is immovably rooted in a profoundly deep emotion that sustains such a decision at all costs. That's love. And you won't find that in a Hallmark card, or a song, or a script.

True Living

There's one final thing about real love that makes it unique. Maybe it's the most important thing. Living and sacrificing in love gives life an authentic richness far superior to a life that's invested in just taking, or trying to give based on some cost/benefit analysis. Love is first and foremost about how it helps someone else. But in sacrificing for someone else something powerful returns to us. Love kind of splashes back on us. It will eventually come full circle possessing more than what we'd sent it out with. That's enriching in ways that are truly great. Love and it will return. Love and you will be loved. Love and you'll end up falling in love with loving. This is what love is.