



Putting Your **LOVE** to the Test

What is real love, and how do you know when you're in it?

Hundreds of songs have been written about love, right and wrong, and the feelings that go with it. And for good reason. It's a major part of life.

And right love, with the right person and at the right time, can bring a lot of happiness. But wrong love can bring a ton of trouble instead.

The story often goes something like this: A teenage girl of, say, 15, falls in love with an older guy of, say, 17. They feel so swept up with romance and love that they do things that worry their parents.

They date steadily. They begin kissing and necking, and maybe more. Then one day they go fur-

ther and have sex or run away and get married.

And why? Because they are in love—or are they? Their parents don't usually think so.

What is real love, and how do you know when you're in it?

Even if you're not in love now, someday you'll want to know for sure whether what you are experiencing is real love. Your future happiness depends on it.

But most people, including most adults, simply don't know what love is.

Love, as the Bible shows, is an outgoing concern for the one loved. It is a selfless desire to give of self for the benefit of another.

But, even so, there are obviously different types of love. For example, you no doubt have a family love between you and your brothers and sisters (sure you may argue, but you still have that deep family bond). Also, you have strong feelings for your close friends that could also be called a type of love.

Romantic Love

It seems that romantic love is much different from these other kinds of love. Just what is this thing called romantic love?

First, let's understand what it's not. It is not the surge of warmth people feel when they are near the person they think they love.

It is not the excitement, the rising pulse rate, the blushing, the dry mouth, the butterfly stomach or the perspiring brow of the person in love.

It is not the daydreaming about the person when he or she is gone, nor the staring at the person when he or she is near. It is not loss of appetite or fitful sleep.

These things are merely physical and emotional responses and feelings. They might be triggered by a good figure or body build. Or by a pretty or handsome face. Or by other things you are not even consciously aware of—but that still have the effect of causing excitement.

These things are just feelings. Happy, exciting, powerful feelings, yes. But just feelings, not love.

Romantic love is a lot more than just these feelings. It also includes something much deeper. That something is love as it was defined earlier in this article—an unselfish outgoing concern toward the one loved.

So romantic love really isn't that different from other kinds of real love. Oh, it includes the additional element of the romantic feelings mentioned

above. But these feelings are not the love. The love isn't just some surface thing that fades after a while. Love is much deeper.

Many people confuse the feelings and emotions of romance with love. Or, they decide that since they have the feelings of romance, they must also have love.

Believing that these feelings are a sure sign of love is a tragic mistake. Love can and should produce these feelings of romance, but these feelings can also exist without love. They can exist merely because the mind and body of one person react emotionally to the presence of another.

This is natural, for God intended romantic attraction to spark interest that eventually, if the people are compatible and old enough, might develop into true love and lead to marriage.

The Qualities of Love

Since romantic feelings do not ensure that it is real love, how can you know when it is real? What are the qualities of a real, right kind of love?

First, real love must be selfless.

A person with real love wants the best *for* the other person, not *from* him or her. Real love isn't concerned with getting affection, gifts, attention or anything else from the person, but in trying to do what is really best for the one loved.

Second, real love survives troubles.

That romantic attraction that dies with the first misunderstanding is not love.

Third, real love remains steady over time.

Right here is where many people planning marriage should stop and think. A courtship that has lasted only two months may not be based on love, because it has not yet proved itself. Love takes time to grow strong enough to last.

Fourth, although it is accompanied by romantic feelings, real love does not die out even when the first excitement of romance decreases.

Many other things could be said about real love. It is such a deep subject that it takes years to understand fully.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

One thing tends to complicate the matter. When you become attracted to a person, strong romantic feelings may so overwhelm you that you have great difficulty deciding whether you are really in love or not—even if you know what true love is.

And even if you can tell that it

Real romantic love includes something much deeper. . . .

is real love, if you are still a teen, you probably should not get married yet because you haven't had enough time to prepare for the awesome responsibilities of marriage.

Some people think that if you love someone you should marry him or her no matter what. But there must be a lot more to it than that. Are you spiritually, educationally, emotionally, financially, and in every other way compatible and prepared for marriage?

Many wonder how they can be sure that a particular person is compatible with them—that they've found the right one.

The best way is to get to know a lot of different people of the opposite sex and find out what types of personalities and characteristics you get along with best. Many unhappy marriages result from people narrowing down the field too soon.

You can avoid the pain of wrong love. Remember that feelings are not themselves love, and can lead to pain and wrong if they are followed blindly.

But right feelings, backed up with right, true love, at the right time and with the right, compatible person, can be more right than just about anything else can be! □

