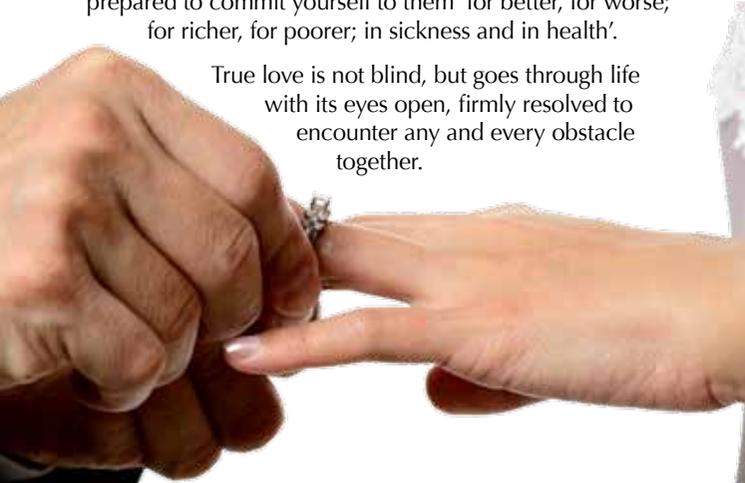


Perseverance

True love is expressed not only in the midst of the most intense feeling and emotion, but in all the ups and downs of a shared life. When you really love someone, you will be prepared to commit yourself to them 'for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health'.

True love is not blind, but goes through life with its eyes open, firmly resolved to encounter any and every obstacle together.



Patience

To say 'If you really loved me, you would be willing to give me what I want' is not the language of love.

True love can wait. Sexual intimacy outside marriage is sometimes excused on the basis that, 'I am so much in love that I couldn't help it.' The assumption is made that love drives us out of control so that we are no longer responsible for our actions.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our culture cries out to us that we have a 'right' to every good thing, and we have a right to it 'now'. We expect and we demand instant gratification. We have become impatient, and we suffer the consequences in terms of personal debt, emotional trauma, sexually transmitted infections and family breakdown.

When a couple take control of their natural sexual desires for each other before they get married, they are not withholding their love from each other, but expressing their love in the way that is most appropriate for them at that period of their lives. They are demonstrating to each other that they are able to control their passions and that will give them both the assurance they need that when they are married their husband or wife is well able to resist the pressures and temptations that come their way.

Young people today often expect to have a series of short-term relationships before they finally settle down with someone for life. Such casual relationships frequently prove to be a training ground for divorce rather than for happy and fulfilling marriages.

But it hasn't always been like that, and it doesn't have to remain like that.

Most of us want to get married one day and to stay married. No one dreams of having a series of broken marriages. But if we want to know the security and satisfaction that marriage can bring, we need to remember what true love is all about.

SO...

- When magazines, music and the soaps present a view of love based on physical attraction, infatuation and lust, don't be taken in. Ignore them!
- Don't be taken up with thoughts of who makes you look good and feel good. Don't be preoccupied with physical appearance, but focus on character.
- When you are ready to seriously think about marriage, only consider someone who will be fully committed to you for life, someone who will be faithful to you, someone who will stick by you through the bad times as well as the good, someone who understands that true love is patient and doesn't seek its own way.
- It's a good test to ask yourself, 'How does he treat his mum?' or 'How does she treat her dad?' It is quite likely that they will treat you in the same way.
- Prepare yourself by developing the character qualities that you will need to sustain a stable and fulfilling marriage – commitment, faithfulness, perseverance and patience. Are you fickle and unreliable, or can you be trusted to keep your word?



WHAT IS LOVE



Love is a word that passes our lips every day...

We use it to express our affection for all kinds of things – food, sport, clothes, cars, music, TV shows and celebrities.

But most of all, the word 'love' has a special link with romantic relationships. In that context, it features strongly in TV soaps, pop music and advertising. We speak of 'falling in love', being 'head over heels in love', and becoming 'lovesick'. We say that 'love is all you need', 'love will find a way' and 'love is the answer'.

But what is love?

Not all love is true

First of all, we need to recognise that not all love is true. There is such a thing as false love and many people confuse it for the real thing.

True love is not to be mistaken for **physical attraction**, **infatuation** or **lust**.

Physical attraction

Just because you find someone good-looking and exciting does not mean that you love them. True love is based on something that runs far deeper than a sweet smile and a smooth voice.

Good looks may fade as a person gets older, but love that is true will last a lifetime.



Infatuation

It is all too easy to become so taken up with someone that you become blind to their character. Just because you can't get someone out of your mind doesn't mean that you love them. All too often, the person of your dreams is your own creation – a fantasy figure that bears little resemblance to the real person.

Infatuation can come and go, but love that is true will stand the test of time.

Lust

The force of sexual desire can be strong, but it should not be mistaken for love. Lust is the longing to use another person for the fulfilment of your own selfish desires, but love is all about seeking what is best for the other person.

You will never find love through sexual encounters based on lust. Lust will leave you empty, frustrated and unfulfilled every time.

The objects of lust may change frequently, but the object of true love remains constant.

Take Tom and Jen, for example. They are inseparable. When they are not together, they are forever thinking about each other, texting each other and chatting online. They are strongly attracted to each other – obsessed with each other even – and they find in each other the fulfilment of their sexual desires. Yet there is no thought of lifelong commitment and of keeping themselves for each other for ever.

Their attitude towards each other can be summed up in these words: 'You give me pleasure, and I shall continue to get pleasure from you for as long as I feel this way about you. But if someone else comes along who I find more attractive, then I reserve the right to seek my pleasure elsewhere.' They would never express their feelings for each other in these words, of course, but the truth is that no matter how often they may speak of their love for each other, their relationship is based on little more than physical attraction, infatuation and lust.

True love is more powerful than the strongest of feelings and emotions. While it certainly does engage our feelings, it does not depend on them. Feelings can rise and fall in their intensity, but if you really love someone your love for them remains constant even when the initial gush of emotion has subsided.

True love

True love runs much deeper than a desire to stay together 'for as long as we feel this way'. Love doesn't keep its options open.

Where love is true, there will be **commitment**, **faithfulness**, **perseverance** and **patience**.

Commitment

True love is not about getting, but giving. When you love someone, you won't be asking, 'What's in it for me?' but 'What is best for the one I love?'

There is all the difference in the world between true love and the selfish pursuit of short-term romance. Where there is no commitment, there is always the possibility that the other person may go away and seek intimacy with someone else.

When people try to separate romance from commitment it often ends in tears. Opening yourself up to someone emotionally only to have your hopes dashed by someone not interested in sticking by you through thick and thin can cause deep pain. It is therefore unwise to forge an exclusive relationship with someone of the opposite sex until you are ready to think in terms of committing yourself to them for life.

Faithfulness

When you truly love someone, you will keep yourself exclusively for them. That is not to say you will never be attracted to anyone else, nor that you won't be tempted to be unfaithful, but love is built on trust and that demands faithfulness.

This is one of the reasons why sexual intimacy belongs in marriage. When a man and a woman marry they promise to keep themselves for each other for as long as they live. For the rest of their lives, they share their hearts, their hopes, their joys, their sorrows and, through their sexual union, they express the total self-giving of the one to the other.

In the context of a faithful, lifelong marriage, sexual intimacy is beautiful and enriching, but where a sexual relationship is pursued to express passing feelings and emotions, it is ugly and destructive and will lead to misery and regret.

