

WHAT LOVE ISN'T

Consider some of the "love myths" common today:

● **Myth #1—If we are truly in love now, it will last a lifetime.** Our high divorce rate illustrates the sad truth. Though love

may seem strong and resilient, it's complicated and fragile as well. Love can die if it isn't carefully protected and nurtured.

● **Myth #2—Real love means we'll never argue or disagree.** Nonsense! For two people to hold identical interests, values and opinions, they'd have to be cloned. How boring! The important thing to remember is that differences can and must be worked out as they occur.

● **Myth #3—Young love is the best love of all, and it's all downhill after about age 25.**

Genuine love requires a certain amount of maturity. Teenage years are necessarily a time of self-centeredness and "trying-on" different personalities as you seek emotional and financial independence from your parents. Many teenage marriages fall apart shortly after the honeymoon because of these factors.

"Can you spend long periods of time together without 'making out'?"

● **Myth #4—It's okay to have sex before marriage; in fact, it will strengthen our relationship.** That message is all around today, via the movies, television and popular music. Some teenagers regret they bought that message. Here are some of their reasons:

1. The first sexual experience is often disappointing. It takes awhile to achieve a good relationship that's satisfying to both people.

2. Anxiety about sexual ade-

quacy can interfere with communication, so that every date ends with a verbal or physical hassle.

3. The fear of discovery by parents, or others, plus worry about your reputation can create a *lot* of stress.

4. The fear that you're being taken advantage of or, the opposite, that you're doing your thing at the other's expense can be damaging.

5. The possibility of pregnancy, or of contracting an STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease) such as Herpes is always a factor.

● **Myth #5—In God's plan for my life, there's only one particular person just for me.** It is true, of course, that God loves and cares about us, and that we should seek his guidance in all our decisions. However, we shouldn't oversimplify this relationship by seeing him as a heavenly matchmaker! Remember, there are many people with whom you might find a good and true love, but there's no one *perfect* girl or guy just around the corner!

HOW TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Now, let's assume for a moment that you have survived a couple of crushes, been teased about "puppy love," and fallen in and out of love a few times. You're wondering how in the world you'll know the real thing when it comes along. As you enter your late teenage years, you may have been burned by some unhappy and disastrous relationships. Or, maybe you haven't been part of a boy-girl relationship yet—not uncommon these days.

Let's take a look at some practical guidelines for being able to recognize real love. Give your relationship a quick check by answering the following questions about these love-statements:

● **We're not afraid to question our feelings.** Why have I chosen this person? Is the attraction mostly physical, or are we also friends? Can we spend significant periods of time together without "making out"?

● **We respect and trust each other.** Can each of us rejoice at the success of the other without feeling jealous? Do I feel I've never

been taken advantage of for any reason? Am I allowed the private time and space I need to develop as an individual? Am I continuing to grow as a person? Can I share my deepest thoughts, and know that they'll be respected and kept confidential?

● **We accept each other pretty much as we are.** Can we each pursue separate interests without being harassed by the other? Are we careful to avoid making our commitment to one another on feelings alone, knowing that emotional highs and lows are a common part of life?

● **Sometimes each of us gives more than we get; we don't keep score.** Does our love bring a strong desire to make the other person happy in big and small ways, and to protect his or her interests? After the original intense, exciting feelings begin to subside, will we still seek and want the best for the other, while asking for our own fulfillment as well?

● **Our love for each other has brought out the best in us.** Are we becoming more kind and helpful toward members of our own families? Are we more responsible at school and/or at work? Has our self-confidence bloomed in social situations? Are we both aware that God uses healthy relationships to bring order to our lives, and honor to him?

So, how can you know it's really love? When all is said and done, there's no absolute, foolproof test. However, the apostle Paul, writing in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, gives us a crystal-clear yardstick for measuring love. He maintains that it is patient and kind . . . never jealous or envious . . . never boastful or proud. Never selfish or rude . . . not irritable or touchy . . . never holding grudges. Love demands loyalty, always believing in the other, expecting the best, and always standing your ground in believing in the one you love.

A tall order, isn't it! But who can deny Paul's final word on the matter: ". . . these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love." ☐