

Love - What Is It?

This is love. It is not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. (1 John)

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps on record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians)

Love has no limits. Love never says, "you've gone too far. I can't love you now." "All things" means everything is included. God's kind of love leaves no doubt in the mind of another that you will continue to love no matter what. Do those close to you know that they can fail and do foolish things, yet you will not falter in your love for them?

Love assumes the best about others. If someone offends you, you choose to believe the offense was unintentional or a misunderstanding can be worked out. If a positive light can be shed on a difficult encounter, you hold that. If someone continually provokes you, you set healthy boundaries but continue to love and to bless. You never lose hope in the ones you love. You practice the same unconditional love toward others that Christ gives to you.

And now the Lord speaks - he who formed me in my mother's womb to be his servant, "Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has born. But even if that were possible, I would not forget you ...I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Isaiah)

Kindness. Someone has wisely said that "people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." We build relationship by letting the other know that we care about their happiness and that they are people of value to us.

Encouragement. One of the hardest-to-accept facts about true love is that it is liberating. Love offers a person roots (a sense of belonging) and wings (a sense of independence and freedom). What people really

need is belief in themselves, confidence in their own ability to take on the problems and opportunities of life guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. To encourage means to put courage in. It instills into the recipient a new and fuller awareness of his/her strength, lived in relationship with Jesus Christ, the one full power. We need to let others struggle long enough to win a victory themselves.

Challenge. After conveying kindness and implanting courage, true love should then invite the beloved to stretch and grow beyond the old limitations, to attempt what was always considered too difficult, to break a self-destructive habit that has always been too overpowering, to rise above a fear, to give up a grudge, to open a repressed feeling, to confront a difficult situation, to offer a painful apology. If encouragement makes the loved one aware of his or her strength, challenge is the loving push to actually use this strength. "Try. Stretch. Do it. If you succeed, I will be in the front row clapping my hands off. If you fail, I will be sitting right at your side. You won't be alone. Go ahead now. Give it your best shot. You can do it!"

(Adapted from *Unconditional Love*, John Powell, Thomas More Publisher, Allen Texas, ©1978)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What kind of love has Jesus shown me again and again?
2. Which kinds of love are most difficult for me to give or receive?
3. Which kinds of love am I growing in my ability to give or receive?
4. How does the way I long for love from others differ from the way I offer love to others?
5. How do I need to grow in love as I relate to the needs of others?
6. Who needs kindness, encouragement, or challenge from me today?
7. Who do I need to forgive so I can reach out in love?