

Chapter 28

What is Love?

Love is a special force that gives happiness, energy and hope to people. And it is through love that we can understand another person. Love that is given to others



is never lost, even when you can't see the good it does. Some people think the love they give is not noticed. But the truth is, the love you give will always come back to you—maybe in a different way than you imagined. One of the interesting things about love is that it is not like a can of soda that will be all gone after a few gulps. Rather it is like an ocean—a vast source that will never be empty.

Love between men and women, or romantic love, is pretty fascinating to us. Many romantic movies end with the leading male and female characters getting married. Sometimes movies show a couple's life after marriage, but usually we see the pre-marriage story.

You have many years ahead of you. We don't want to push subjects that aren't important to you. But after thinking about it for a while, we decided that we should delve into the topic of marriage. Believe it or not, the decisions you make now about love and sex will stay with you for the rest of your life and may

affect your marriage. Just how do you sort through all of the changes and your feelings? That's a tough one, but we are going to try to give you a little advice from our own experience.

Love and Marriage

Most often people get married because they feel that they have found someone they enjoy being with and with whom they can share their thoughts and dreams. This someone is a person they want to spend the rest of their life with. People often marry their best friends of the opposite sex. Obviously, however, married people share more than what friends share.

One way in which love inside marriage is different from love in a friendship is that it is *exclusive*. Although you are able to have several good friends whom you love, and your friends may also have other friends, you wouldn't want your husband or your wife to have other husbands or wives. So your spouse (*another word for husband or wife*) is at once your best friend (*ideally*), and romantic partner.

Marriage is the place where sexual love is fully expressed so that the couple can achieve unity and oneness on every possible level. The relationship you have with your spouse is special. It is a relationship you do not have with anyone else. You are free to be yourself and to express yourself completely.

Crushes and Infatuation

It is very unlikely that you will never look at another person of the opposite sex before you get married. You may have a few crushes or you may have so many that you can't keep track of them all. Crushes, or feelings of infatuation, are normal. This is a sort of preparation for the real thing. What's the real thing? The real thing is love.

Let's take a look at infatuation before we go any further on the subject of love.

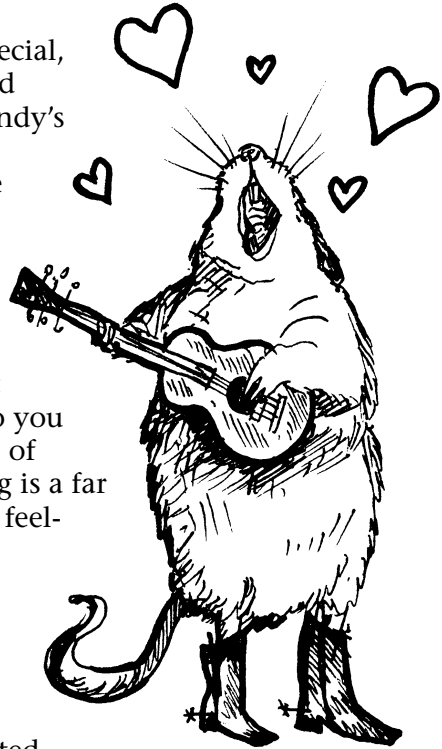
Peter: I can't live without Mandy, she's different from all the other girls. I am sure she's the one for me. Her hair, her smile, her laugh! I love everything about her! I've never felt this way before about anyone.

Marcus: Peter, I don't mean to bring you down, but did you say Mandy or Lisa? Didn't you say the same thing about Lisa last week?

Peter: Yeah, but she's nothing special, and I didn't know Mandy when I said those things about Lisa! I'm sure Mandy's the real one for me!

Have you experienced it yet? The wow! feeling of suddenly falling madly in love with someone? Thinking that they are the best person in the world? And that you will admire them faithfully forever? Chances are you have. Most people do at some point. But why do you laugh at Peter? Because there are lots of Peters out there. What Peter is feeling is a far cry from real love—even though the feelings are intense and powerful. He is infatuated.

So what's the difference between love and infatuation? Infatuation is an intense relationship between you and what you fantasize another person to be like. When you are infatuated you do not see the other person as he or she really is, but rather you see a perfect ideal. These crushes can be overwhelming and mesmerizing. And whether they last for a day, a week, or even for a year, one thing you can be sure is that they will eventually fizzle away, often leaving you emotionally exhausted. Nonetheless, crushes are important in helping us to understand what love is.



The Beginning of Infatuation

- ☞ *A person suddenly thinks another person is the most wonderful thing they have ever seen. The person they are infatuated with can do no wrong, is the most beautiful and charming person in the world. The feelings are very strong, but do not last for very long.*
- ☞ *The person is not someone the other person knows very well.*
- ☞ *The person who is infatuated feels high and happy near that person, but sad when he is away. He is often thinking about the other person, even when he should be thinking of other things.*

What's the Difference Between Love and Infatuation?

Because an infatuation is not with a real person but with a fantasy, it will rarely grow into a healthy relationship. At some point, there inevitably comes a mismatch between the fantasy and reality when you discover the person is not how you imagine them to be. This usually leads to the breakdown of the relationship. By contrast, people who have grown to love each other recognize and accept each other as they really are and do not try to make the other person fit some ideal.

What is Love?

- ☞ *When you love someone you want that person to be happy and to be fulfilled (you don't see that person simply as a way for you to feel happy and fulfilled).*
- ☞ *Real love grows with time, and therefore, is a commitment.*
- ☞ *Love embraces the whole person—not just the way he or she looks!*
- ☞ *When you love another person you become a better person yourself. You realize that sometimes you have to change or grow together.*
- ☞ *You can disagree with someone you love and work it out.*

What is Infatuation?

- ☞ *Infatuation begins quickly and usually ends suddenly.*
- ☞ *Infatuation usually looks at the outward appearance of the person and not at the person's inner nature.*
- ☞ *When you are infatuated with another person other parts of your life often suffer (like your relationships with your friends, your school work, and soccer practice).*
- ☞ *You don't see any shortcomings that the person may have and you can't see that person as a real person but rather as a fantasy.*

What's the Connection between Infatuation and Love?

Usually people get infatuated when they are young. Just around your age! If you experience those incredibly strong feelings

of admiration and longing for another person, you have to be careful not to be totally swept away, and not to let yourself be crushed, either.

Sometimes a person is hurt by his crushes. If he is rejected he might feel lowly, ugly or unworthy. He might wonder, *Why aren't my feelings being returned? What's wrong with me?* We are sorry about that. If you take your crushes very serious-

ly, and you get hurt, you might find it harder to grow to love someone else in the future. It might be harder to trust others.

Is it possible to go through the feelings of crushes and learn from them? Sure it is. Here is what Luke told us.

You won't believe how I met my wife. I was at a party with a girl I had a huge crush on. I thought I was madly in love with her. I would have done anything for her. But she didn't feel the same. She wasn't too nice to me, either. She dumped me for some other guy that very night. The girl that is now my wife was there too. We just started to talk. I was obsessed with the other girl at the time. But I found it so easy to talk to my now-wife. We bumped into each other after that and then I started to go to the restaurant where she worked. She made me feel like I could tell her anything and I trusted her. At first we were just friends. But the more I got to know her the more I liked her. It was the opposite with most girls. Usually I would fall madly in love with someone, just to be disappointed when I got to know her better. We both graduated from college last year and we have been married for two years. I never thought it would be like this for me. It's like marrying your best friend. But the more I know her the more I love her. When I look back at the girls that I was in love with in college it seems far away and unreal.

Luke, 23

The feelings you have when you love someone can also be incredibly strong. You may be willing to risk your life for your husband or wife. Perhaps there is no one in the whole world who will understand you as your spouse does. When you grow to love a person, your feelings are even stronger than when you felt infat-



uated. The difference is that you are committed to each other. You can go through ups and downs. You know the good and the bad things about the other person and you *still* want to be around him or her. You realize that the person you love may not always act loveable. You accept each other and you work out your problems.

Does Love Ever Fail?

In the United States, about half of the people who get married divorce. Why? What's the problem? We don't want to oversimplify this answer so we will only look at the question of love. That means that there are lots of other reasons.

Sometimes people make mistakes when they decide to get married. They may marry someone they are infatuated with and they don't discuss critical matters that will arise later. Sometimes people don't think about the changes life will bring and the challenges they will face together. When you decide to promise your life to someone, it is best to make sure that you two agree on important issues. What is most important to that person in life? Do you share the same values? Do you both want children? Do you agree on how you will raise your children? What is the other person's attitude towards his or her family? How does he or she treat other people? Is that person responsible and dependable? Will religion play a part in your lives? When you are in love these things may not seem important, but when you are married, they are.

Love takes time. Love also takes patience. When you are with the same person for many years, you will have to put effort into your relationship to keep it growing and interesting. Love is an action. So you will have to show that person that he or she is important to you by the things that you do for them. Sometimes people forget about their partner's happiness because they are thinking mainly about themselves. When two people both put a priority on first having their own needs met, a marriage will suffer. Sometimes people feel disappointed when they marry because they hoped and expected their partner would be able to meet all of their needs and desires. They are not realistic. To be happy, you will have to make many adjustments and compromises. You can't always insist on doing things your own way. Some people have a hard time changing. Some people have a hard time giving. Others have a hard time communicating.

No matter what the reasons are for some marriages not lasting,

we can tell you one thing. It is possible to find one person to love. Someone you will care for and who will care for you. Someone to laugh and cry with. There are many couples who have gone through life together and stayed together—happily! It is important that you understand what love is all about. You will have a much better chance of being happy in the long run and being one of those who are successful in love.

I've been married to the same woman for 52 years. We have been through just about everything. I can't imagine life without her.

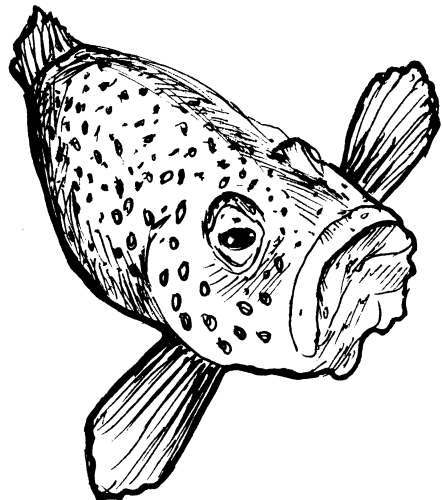
Barry, 73

Who Wants to Marry You?

Of course we don't expect that any of you are going to be walking down the aisle next week, next month or next year. But since we are on the subject of love and marriage, we thought we'd ask you a few more embarrassing questions.

Who would want to marry you? Hmm. Perhaps no one right now, and that's good news. But cast your mind into the future for a moment. Think. What kind of person do you think people want to marry? Do you see yourself becoming that kind of person? What qualities make a great wife or husband? Are they the same qualities you would like in a best friend? Take a look below and see if you agree that these are the characteristics of a great future spouse (meaning yourself):

- ☞ *Trustworthy*
- ☞ *Responsible*
- ☞ *Patient*
- ☞ *Kind/considerate*
- ☞ *Respectful*
- ☞ *Open-minded/accepting*
- ☞ *Moral*
- ☞ *Honest*
- ☞ *Sincere*
- ☞ *Loyal*
- ☞ *Positive attitude*



Remember, it takes time to grow and to develop your personality. So be gentle with yourself. You should not expect to become all of these things overnight. Just like having goals helps you to realize your dreams, having a clear idea of who you want to become helps you to reach your true self.

Waiting for the Right Person

You may find yourself under a lot of pressure to make big decisions about sex. Although we are going to talk more about premarital sex in the next chapter, we want to mention a few things now.

Love waits. If someone really loves you, then that person is more concerned about your well-being and happiness than having sex. If someone tells you that he or she loves you and therefore you should have sex, you know that person is a bit confused about love. When you are mature, you will have the opportunity to choose someone to love and share your life with. Sex is not something dirty or wrong. To the contrary! Sex is great. Sex is wonderful. But there is a proper place for it. That place is in marriage. Sex is an intimate act involving not only your body but also your inner most self. You are safe in a marriage relationship to share both your body and your heart with another person. As Mimi, a mother of four and teen counselor put it:

Abstinence before marriage should be thought of as saying 'yes.' Yes to your future and yes to your future spouse. It is a yes to your true self and all that you are capable of. It is a yes to building trusting, faithful and loving relationships.

Each time you have sex with a person, you are sharing the most precious part of yourself. If you give this away freely to each person you are interested in, you end up feeling used and empty. The best way to avoid these unhappy feelings is to wait until you have grown up and are ready to make choices that will affect you for the rest of your life. In other words, sex is best kept within a marriage.

In the meantime, you have lots to do. You don't have to sacrifice your social life—in fact, you can have a better social life because you won't be weighed down by worries about pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and having your heart broken. Waiting for marriage to have sex is one of the best investments you will ever make.

My wife and I were both virgins when we got married. We both had been tempted to have premarital sex but somehow we wanted to wait it out for our lifelong partner. I am sure that our relationship is better because we kept ourselves for one another. Even though I didn't know her all those years, it's a way of her knowing how important she is to me and that I am serious about our marriage. I really think that it is one of the best choices I ever made. I have to say that it wasn't easy, but it was definitely worth it.

Rob, 26

Is Love Really Worth all the Trouble?

If you are thinking, I don't care about getting married and all that stuff, I'm still young and want to experience the excitement of life.

Don't worry. Real love is worth working for, and worth waiting for. There is nothing boring about love. If you are in a loving marriage relationship, you are free to express yourself and to be honest. You have the security to be yourself. Just because you are secure, and accepted for being yourself, doesn't mean that your life will be dull. Some of the greatest love stories of all times are based on the relationship between married couples. Have you ever heard of the Taj Mahal? You may be interested to know that a powerful king had that world wonder built to honor his beloved wife. It is an amazing place. Take a look at a picture of it if you have the chance. Or fly to India for a closer look.

Infatuation is like a cheap second to love. Let's say infatuation is like eating pizza—it tastes great, but if that's all you eat, you'll have stomach problems. You might even die from malnutrition. Love is like eating at a great restaurant—the food is always different, it's delicious, but good for you at the same time. If you get pizza you don't have to wait, but if you go to a fine restaurant, get ready to wait for your meal. That's the difference between love and infatuation.

Making it Real

Sure, that love stuff sounds nice, but that isn't what my life is like! You might think that all of this love talk sounds a little unreachable. We understand. Learning to love others is not easy. It usually starts with being able to love yourself. Giving to others, wanting the best for someone else and sometimes sacrificing your own desires in order to help someone you love are not always easy

things to do. Be patient with yourself. It takes time to learn how to love and to develop loving relationships. A lot of people are confused about love and how to express their feelings and needs. The payoffs of learning how to create a relationship based on love are huge! So, hang in there and keep trying.

If you are working on developing all of the “great character” muscles that we’ve been discussing, then you will have many of the necessary qualities that it takes to be a good husband or wife. You will be able to create and build a healthy, happy and lasting marriage.



Journal

Some people make the mistake of getting married when they are infatuated with another person. How do you think you can decide what is really love and what is infatuation?



To Do

1. What does a person feel like when he is infatuated? If the infatuation goes, do his feelings change for the other person? How does this make love different from infatuation?
2. Make a list of the characteristics you would want in a future spouse. What is most important to you? What kind of husband or wife do you want to be for your future spouse?
3. In pairs, discuss the following: If a mother loved her child only when she felt loving, what would happen when she was angry, disappointed or embarrassed with the child? When love depends only on feelings, it is very unstable. Think of examples of how feelings may change.



Key Ideas

- @ Love and infatuation are very different.
- @ Love is a very powerful force.
- @ The marriage relationship is unique and special from all other relationships.



The supreme happiness of life is the
conviction that we are loved.

Victor Hugo

