



Maryville Daily Times FROM THE HEART Column

The Essence of True Love

Joy Smith Ed.D. Licensed Professional Counselor

While enjoying my lunch at a local eatery a few weeks ago, I noticed a young teen couple snuggling in a booth next to me, oblivious to their surroundings. The body language was obvious--eyes fixated in a hypnotic, adoring gaze, hands tightly intertwined, and soft whispers and giggles of delight only found on the faces of those in love.

Young love is certainly unsurpassed in terms of energy and excitement. As I observed the pair, I reflected on my days as an adolescent. At that age, I considered my knowledge base on the subject of love to be sufficient to fill the universe. Nearly a half century later, I realize that what I really knew would have fit in a thimble with room to spare. Over the ages, the definition of love has been the subject of considerable debate, introspection and speculation. And in a world where the word "love" is used to describe feelings about everything from a good hamburger to the latest fashion, it is little wonder at the confusion about what real love is.

If one looks at the essence of true love, it is not the emotional high that engulfs us during the early stages of infatuation or even chemistry or physical intimacy. These are certainly important collateral elements, but they are not what constitute the very core of enduring love. The essential material which shapes the infrastructure of genuine love is trust. Although this may sound overly simplistic, trust is the foundation which supports the development of other facets of love such as reciprocal respect and deep friendship. In relationships, trust can be defined as the confidence in the character, strength and truth of a partner. Without it, love is never long lived and all other expressions of love are meaningless.

An atmosphere of trust offers a safety net for both partners to be themselves without fear, allowing vulnerability without ridicule, judgment or abandonment. Development of trust is always a function of time, requiring evidence of trustworthiness over an extended period. And because trust takes time and is an essential and core ingredient of love, only chemistry and attraction can occur at first sight—never true love. Trust requires equal personal power where no one person controls the relationship. Personal power is present only when both partners have the freedom to experience self-discovery, make mistakes, and try out new strategies without fear of rejection, manipulation or reprisal.

Fear always tips the balance of power. Fear compromises trust and robs couples of the ability to fully enjoy other important aspects of a love relationship such as physical and emotional intimacy. Trust and true love cannot survive in an emotional desert nor in a relationship in which abuse, unfaithfulness or physical intimidation occurs even intermittently. A Bible passage succinctly addresses this very point when it says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:18.) Trust and fear cannot coexist because the loving haven of a secure and safe relationship extinguishes fear. For this

reason, trust will always evolve as the essence and ultimate proof of love. Without it, love withers away, starving for nourishment.

The young couple in the restaurant picked up their belongings and walked out with their arms held tightly around each other, her head still on his shoulder. And as I watched them leave, I fervently hoped that when all is said and done, they will be able to capture the essence of true love with their thimbles.