

INTRO: Romeo and Juliet, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, Sir Lancelot and Guinevere, Napoleon and Josephine, Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, etc., all are classified as some of the greatest love stories of all time as we see individuals giving up everything, risking death, losing kingdoms, losing their families, committing suicide – all in the cause of love. Everything paled in their eyes when compared to the love they were seeking, no price was too great to pay for that love, even if just for a moment and in so many of the great love stories, the price to be paid was insignificant to the love that was obtained. Few people will ever experience the storybook version of love, but it does not have to have the fairy tale scenario or ending in order to classify as love cause in reality, love is much more than just a feeling, much more than just a lust, much more than just an overwhelming desire to be with another.

- A.** There are many definitions of love:
- Webster – **AFFECTION BASED ON ADMIRATION OR BENEVOLENCE, UNSELFISH CONCERN THAT FREELY ACCEPTS ANOTHER IN LOYALTY AND SEEKS THEIR GOOD, THE FATHERLY CONCERN OF GOD FOR MAN.**
 - Sophocles said **"ONE WORD FREES US OF ALL THE WEIGHT AND PAIN OF LIFE: THAT WORD IS LOVE."**
 - H.L Mencken said **"TO BE IN LOVE IS MERELY TO BE IN A STATE OF PERCEPTUAL ANESTHESIA."**
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes, **"LOVE IS THE MASTER KEY THAT OPENS THE GATES OF HAPPINESS."**
 - Nicholas Sparks **"LOVE IS MORE THAN 3 WORDS MUMBLED BEFORE BEDTIME. LOVE IS SUSTAINED BY ACTION, A PATTERN OF DEVOTION IN THE THINGS WE DO FOR EACH OTHER EVERY DAY."**
 - Someone said, **"LOVE IS LIKE A VIOLIN. THE MUSIC MAY STOP NOW AND THEN, BUT THE STRINGS REMAIN FOREVER."**
 - All beautiful words and beautiful sentiments and often individuals get into this kind of euphoric state where reality seems to fade into the background as we only see the object of our "love" at the time. But a funny thing about love, sometimes it appears to be love when it is just infatuation or just lust or just the desire for companionship. I do not believe people just "fall in" to love and "fall out" of love for true love will stay, in spite of the difficult times. But in order to really work, it takes two individuals reciprocating that love one for another.
- B.** In 1965, there was a little, bashful and beautiful teenager with brunette hair that I saw at a church social and, I believe, it was planned, there was an empty seat next to her while all the others were filled. So being the suave, cool young buck of 19 that I was at that time, I sat down beside her and before the evening was out, I had asked her for a date and she accepted. As we began to date on a regular basis, I realized I enjoyed her company more and more and we became an "item" in the church. Our love story was not a "fairly tale" affair, I would say, for in the middle of it, I decided I wanted to date other girls so we stopped seeing each other for a while because of my desires, not because of her. The only problem was, all the others that I dated never came up to the standards that I had seen and appreciated in that little brunette. And after my "ventures into the far country" I returned, and though I was not immediately taken back, I worked my way back into the heart of that little girl that I later married in 1969. I loved her and wanted to spend the rest of my life with her and we have been together now over 42 years. But in those 42 years of marriage, I have also learned that the definition of love has changed and that love grows when you share life together, have children and experience the everyday adventures of life and through the good times and through those not so good times. And I have understood God's love even more as I understand the love between my wife and I.
- C.** But I want us to think about another love story, the greatest love story that has not just be told, but that is real and that is found in John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believed in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."**
- Look what we have in this love story, a love so great that the lover was willing to give up His most prized possession for the object of His love. And to those that loved Him in return, with that same degree, they would receive a reward unimaginable that will last for eternity, happy every after. And though His love is shared to all of mankind, it is also a personal relationship between two individuals and though we, as humans, have little to give in comparison to God's ability to give, He still desires our love and did everything possible to obtain that love. He only asks us to give what we can. And as we learn more and more about the lover of our souls, we fall even more in love with Him.
 - Many years ago, I discovered that God loved me in spite of my shortcomings and in spite of my failings and He was willing to accept me as one of His children if I would accept Jesus Christ as my Redeemer and Savior. This love story required something from both of us: He gave His most

prized possession, His own Son, as a sacrifice for my years of sin for His love is a perfect love and only a perfect love in return would make this love story work.

- i. Though I had lived against His wishes for some time, He provided a means whereby all those years of rebellion could be forgiven and as a Father loving His child, He would take me back into His arms if I accepted the conditions that were required. Jesus Christ paid the price of my redemption, the price necessary for my forgiveness and if I accepted that and lived accordingly after that, I would be accepted back into His house and receive His blessings for ever, not just as long as I lived on this earth, but even in eternity.
- ii. He paid the price and all He asked was that I receive this gift and change the direction of my life from one of disobedience to obedience, from one of rebellion to one of companionship, from a life of pleasing myself to a life of pleasing God, from a life of placing myself first to a life of submitting to the will of God, from a life of glorifying me to a life of glorifying Him. In reality, the part that I gave was the easy part, I simply gave everything I had to Him and then received from Him everything I ever needed. In fact, that love from that little brunette was given to me by my God because He knew I needed a companion on this earth to help me in my walk with Him.
- iii. He gave me two beautiful girls cause they would help teach me what unselfish love was all about as my wife and I would give anything we have for them and there was no price too great for us to give for their benefit. My wife and I learned that love some times meant staying up at night, walking the floor with a sick child, worrying over the well-being of that child and sacrificing whatever was necessary to see that child benefit and that love never goes away, no matter how old those children become. And we learned that love also means sometimes disciplining that child cause we could see what was better for them than they could for themselves at that time. Sometimes God disciplines us for the same reasons.
- iv. God has given us a church family and close friends that we are able to love and receive love in return.
 1. Helen Keller – **“BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HAVE THE GIFT OF MAKING FRIENDS, FOR IT IS ONE OF GOD’S BEST GIFTS. IT INVOLVES MANY THINGS, BUT ABOVE ALL, THE POWER OF GOING OUT OF ONE’S SELF, AND APPRECIATING WHATEVER IS NOBLE AND LOVING IN ANOTHER.”**
 2. St. Thomas Aquinas – **“THERE IS NOTHING ON THIS EARTH MORE TO BE PRIZED THAN TRUE FRIENDSHIP.”**
 3. Charlotte Bronte – **“WE WOULD BUILD ON A SURE FOUNDATION IN FRIENDSHIP, WE MUST LOVE OUR FRIENDS FOR THEIR SAKES RATHER THAN FOR OUR OWN.”**
 4. **FRIENDSHIP IS LOVE WITH UNDERSTANDING.**
 5. **A GOOD FRIEND IS SOMEONE WHO WE CAN COUNT ON, AS WELL AS BEING SO MUCH MORE. A FRIEND IS SOMEONE WITH WHOM WE CAN RELAX AND JUST HANG OUT, HAVE FUN AND SHARE OUR INNERMOST THOUGHTS – DEEP DARK SECRETS, LOFTY AND NOBLE GOALS, OR OUR HOPES, JOYS, AND FEARS. A GOOD FRIEND ALLOWS YOU A SAFE SPACE TO SHARE YOUR DEEPEST THOUGHTS AND NEEDS – WITHOUT WORRY OF BEING JUDGED, CRITICIZED OR MADE TO FEEL SILLY FOR FEELING THE WAY YOU DO. FRIENDS CHEER EACH OTHER ON, LAUGH AND CRY TOGETHER, AND JUST PLAIN COMMISERATE AND LISTEN TO EACH OTHER. THAT’S WHY FRIENDS ARE FRIENDS...**mother and daughter, Betty and Jennifer Leigh Youngs.
 6. In order to have friends, one must be friendly – I have been asked often, why do I not have friends? And my reply has always been, have you gone out of your way to be a friend to another? Those of us that are blessed with close Christian friends should be more thankful for them and do our best to give them the benefit of the doubt in situations in which we consider questionable and perhaps they will do the same for us. Friends are a blessing from God and we need to cherish those that God has allowed to come our way.

CONCLUSION: Valentine's day is tomorrow, the 14th and certainly as we think of those we love in family relations and those we love as dear friends, never forget we would not be celebrating any of this if it was not for our greatest Friend and the lover of our soul, Jesus Christ Himself. He has made everything good for us, He loves us with an all-encompassing love, He has given His all for us, He has demonstrated what love is so we may share with others as well as reciprocate in turn to Him. So on your list of valentines, do not forget to put Jesus Christ, especially because He is more than just our valentine, He is our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer, our soon coming King, He is our All in All and because of Him, we have learned the meaning of love.