

Characteristics of Genuine Love

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A young man recently asked me to write down the ways that a person could distinguish between true love and infatuation. The Bible is the only source that has the answers for such an important subject as this. I spent hours on the subject and sent some material to him, but the topic is multifaceted and cannot be covered in a few pages of written dialogue. There are many levels of love and there are many ways in which a person can be deceived by someone whose motives are self-serving and not pure in nature.

In the Bible one of the great love stories is found in 1 Samuel starting with chapter 17. Compare it with the story of Samson and Delilah and you will learn some facts about human nature that remains unchanged though many generations have come and gone. It not only is an interesting love story but it also covers the enemies of love which is jealousy, hate, envy and actions a person will commit to protect his own interest when he feels threatened. The distinctive difference between love that comes from God and the earthly love that crumbles when tested by fire is defined in one word, TRUTH.

In the story of Samson who was defeated by a Philistine woman, the snare she used to get rich and to learn his secret were in the words, "If you love me, you will...." She vexed his soul because he loved her, yet there was a part of him that didn't trust her. Yet because of her tears and persistence, he told her about his covenant with God and if his hair was cut, he would lose his strength. He played games with her and it seemed innocent and fun, yet each time that she realized he was not telling the truth or the whole truth, she cried and wailed that he didn't love her. Her heart was not committed to him; she loved money and he was the coveted prize for the Philistines. She was willing to be used to get the monetary reward regardless of the outcome for Samson. Samson lost his special relationship with God; he lost his eyesight and he lost his freedom; he also faced the reality that he didn't lose the love of Delilah for the truth came to the surface that her heart was never his. She was a wicked woman who accepted and loved the challenge of bringing a champion down to a low level in exchange for wealth. There is always the danger of playing with fire for many people have been badly burned and their lives have been changed forever by keeping company with the wrong type of people and not seeking and believing TRUTH.

In contrast, I want to share some insights from the story of David and Jonathan. David, in 1 Samuel 17 verse 54, had just won a great victory over Goliath the dreadful giant who had defied God and troubled Israel for many days prior to David accepting the challenge and trusting God to defeat the enemy. Goliath was taken off guard when a youth approached him without armor, without a sword and spear, and without any protective clothing to cover his body. The giant didn't know how to respond to the lad and he mocked Israel for sending out a child to fight him. Yet David told him that Goliath came with a sword and spear, but David came in the name of the LORD and God gave him the

victory. King Saul asked the captain of the army whose son the lad was and Abner didn't know. However he found David and brought him before Saul and David said he was the son of Saul's servant, Jesse from Bethlehem.

At the end of the conversation, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David and Jonathan loved David as his own soul. In chapter 18:3, Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. This phrase is repeated throughout the chapters covering the future events of David running from Saul when Saul chased him. Jonathan took clothes off his own back and placed them on David, the shepherd, as well as handing over his sword, bow and his girdle. From that day on, David went wherever Saul sent him and throughout the whole account, David behaved wisely and always brought honor and victory to the king. Saul placed David over the soldiers and he was accepted by all people and also by all of Saul's servants. Things went rather smoothly for a while until following a victory over the Philistines; Saul was watching the women who had come out singing and dancing with joy and playing musical instruments. He had been used to people praising and exalting him as the king but this time he heard them elevate David above him. His ears perked up when they attributed David's victories 10 times above his. He took offense and immediately started thinking about his kingdom. David, in his mind, became a threat to his throne. He began to watch David's every move and yet he could not find any fault with his actions. David always behaved wisely and never did anything that would cause suspicion that his goal was to seize the throne. David played his harp to ease the king's mind, yet the king threw a javelin at him and David had to flee. The Bible states that Saul was afraid of David because the LORD had departed from Saul due to his rebellion and Saul recognized that the LORD favored David. He became afraid of David and he dwelled on the assumption that David would one day take over his kingdom. Saul felt that he had to find a way to dispose of the threat. The problem that he faced was due to David's upright character, wise decisions and behaving wisely in all his ways, Saul had nothing to base his assumption on. The more that Saul watched how David conducted himself, the more he realized that God was with him and the more threatened Saul felt. He tried many ways to get rid of David. He set traps for him, but David escaped every time. He decided to give one of his daughters to David for a wife in hopes that she would be a snare to him. Servants were sent to persuade David to marry the king's daughter and David's reply shows his character. He told them that he couldn't think of marrying the king's daughter because he came from a poor family and he couldn't pay a dowry for her. The servants had been commanded to go secretly and to tell David that the king delighted in him and all the servants loved him. David said, "It seems to me that you think it is a light thing to be the king's son-in-law, but I am a poor man and lightly esteemed." David thought "Who am I that I should be honored in this manner to be given the king's daughter for a wife?" Yet King Saul had a motive. He told David to go and avenge him of his enemies. In order to marry his daughter, David was to kill 100

Philistines and that would be accepted in exchange for the hand of his daughter, Michal, in marriage. The king reasoned that perhaps the Philistines would kill David and that would take care of the problem. However, he didn't plan on David being successful and he didn't realize that Michal would love and protect David's life from the king's hate and jealousy. Saul realized that the LORD was with David and nothing that he planned worked out the way that he desired. He became David's enemy continually. The Bible never states that Saul ever loved David. He used him for his own benefit. David calmed the king with his music; he was placed over soldiers and that brought victory to Saul. However along the way, his popularity grew and Saul became more and more afraid of him and his world began to revolve in scheming to get rid of David for he viewed him as an enemy though he didn't have any facts to confirm his assumption.

Power struggles within relationships destroy harmony and cause destruction. Jealousy destroys people and marriages are broken because the destructive nature of jealousy. It has no place in hearts that are committed to love and honor one another. Mistrust destroys love and distorts reality. In chapter 19, Saul came to the conclusion that he needed to act quickly and he spoke to Jonathan and to all his servants that they should kill David. Saul was always looking for someone else to do the dirty work of disposing of David. He didn't want to take the responsibility of doing the job himself though he had become so distraught at times that he would throw a javelin at David. David always escaped. When Jonathan learned that Saul wanted to kill David, he told David to go and hide out until he could find out what the underlying issues were that was prompting his father to ask others to kill David and he promised David that he would tell him.

Jonathan spoke TRUTH to Saul. "Don't sin against your servant, David, because he has only done good things for you and he hasn't sinned against you. His works have been very good. He put his life in his hand fighting the Philistines and the LORD brought about a great salvation through David for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced! Why would you shed innocent blood without a cause?" Later Jonathan told David that he knew the reason was because God had chosen David to be the next king over Israel. Jonathan was not angry, bitter or jealous. He accepted his role and loved David even to the point where King Saul turned on him, accusing him of not facing the reality that David was going to be the next king if he was not disposed of, insulting him for protecting David and he even threw a javelin at Jonathan because Jonathan refused to accept Saul's point of view. Jonathan made a covenant with David that they would take care of each other's families forever. When Saul made it clear that he would never change the course that he had set for himself, Jonathan went to the place where he had sent David to hide and he kissed David, they wept together and Jonathan sent David away in peace. Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace for as much as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD saying, The LORD be between me and you and between my seed and your seed forever." David departed and Jonathan went into the city. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13.