

The Happiest People in the Word.

Youth's Bible Study Course

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psalm 16:11.

Lesson 9: The Greatest of These Is Love

Memory Verse: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." John 15:11,12.

Christians are the happiest people in the world, and I enjoy talking about things that make Christians happy. Because getting married is one of the happiest events in life, I want to talk now about love, sweethearts, and marriage.

In 1 John 4:8 we read, "God is love"; in John 15:11, 12, 17 Jesus says, in order that our joy might be full, He has given a commandment: "That ye love one another."

Paul, after talking of the most important virtues of life in 1 Corinthians 13:13, says, "The greatest of these is love." Revised Version. I like these verses, and if love is so very great and important, surely it is proper and profitable to study about it.

Did you ever stop to realize that the three most important steps in life occur generally in the first ten years after childhood, between the ages of twelve and twenty-two? The first step is a decision for God, resulting in baptism. This rightly belongs to the first years of awakening manhood and womanhood, and it prepares for the second step, which is the choice of lifework. This decision rightly belongs to the junior and senior academic years, when, after weighing the talents and abilities, one should decide whether it is best to enter the field of agriculture, mechanics, business, nursing, medicine, education, evangelism, or missionary service. And this step prepares for the third, which is the choice of a life companion.

Of Jacob's love for Rachel we read in Genesis 29:20, "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." That is the love God wants us to love each other with, a love that will make the years seem but as day, and that is the love I want to talk about. Let us take a look at its beautiful picture given in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. We read from the Revised Version:

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; Love envieth not; Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, Seeketh not its own, Is not provoked, Taketh not account of evil; Rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, But rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, Believeth all things, Hopeth all things, Endureth all things."

No wonder the Spirit of Prophecy says: "Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves." Messages to Young People, p. 435.

Some time ago I came across a jingle by some unknown writer, it was called "Love Is a Funny Thing." It went something like this:

"Love is a funny thing,
It catches the young and the old.
It's like a plate of GI stew.
Before you turn round, it is cold.
It makes you feel like a fresh-water eel,
And causes your head to swell;
You lose your mind, for love is blind,
And you spend your money as well.
If married folks have lots of cash,
Their love is firm and strong,
But when they have to live on hash,
Their love don't last so long.
O boys, keep away from the girls, I say,
And give them lots of room,
For once they're wed, they'll bang your head
With the baldheaded end of the broom.
And so, young man, take my advice,
And don't be in a hurry to wed,
For you'll think you're in clover,
Till your honeymoon's over,
And then you'll wish you were dead."

If this were a true picture of love, then love would surely be a funny thing, but let me hasten to tell you this is not a picture of L-O-V-E.

Do you know that nearly everything precious in this world is counterfeited? In Burma we had counterfeit rupees. They looked like rupees, but they were not! Here in the United States we have counterfeit dollar bills. They look like the real things, but they are not!

God created a delightful Sabbath day. Satan made a counterfeit. God gave man a precious gift of love, and Satan has made a counterfeit for that also. It actually looks like love. It is a word of four letters which begins with "L," but it ends with "T." It is a counterfeit, and this is the miserable stuff that grows cold like a plate of GI stew, as millions have found out to their deep sorrow.

In Proverbs 14:12 we read, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." How careful we must be not to confuse love with lust. Our living "happily ever after," with the years passing by as days, or our wishing we "were dead," with the days dragging by like years, depends on our ability to discern between the true and the false.

In old Burma the only way to tell the true silver rupees from the false was by ringing each one on some hard substance. Although it took time, it was the only way we could save ourselves from being cheated. I propose therefore to study with you five tests of true love, by which you can try your friendships and your affections, and save yourself the regret and remorse of being cheated of this precious gift.

Listen to this: "Love is strong as death.... Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Song of Solomon 8:6, 7. Do you hear the ring of it? That's the real thing! Listen again, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12. Can you hear the difference? The first love is real; the second is counterfeit!

Before we consider these five tests let me see whether you will agree with me on one fundamental truth. When I was a boy I thought that the worst thing in all the world was death. Do you think so? I no longer do. As I have grown older I have discovered many things in the world that are worse than death. For a number of years we lived almost opposite a home that had a shadow over it. We could tell from the washing on the line that there was a child in the family, but we never saw her. As we mowed our lawns and came and went, we became more or less acquainted with everybody in the block, but we never got acquainted with the people in that house. As the man passed to and fro he was always in a hurry; he seemed to have neither the time nor the inclination to get acquainted. But, little by little, we learned that the unseen daughter was a crippled imbecile fourteen

years old, and her mother never left her side. Then we understood. And as our hearts have ached for countless others, we know now that there are many things more cruel than death.

Similarly, when I was a young man I used to think that the worst thing that could possibly happen to a young woman would be to become an old maid. Did you ever think that? Yes, I once did, but I do not think so now. I have changed my mind, for in my ministry I have met many disillusioned, heartbroken, love-hungry wives who would give anything in the world if they could only be old maids, and I have been forced to the conclusion that there are some things that can happen to a young woman worse than being unmarried. Do you agree? I am sure you do. Let us, then, approach this problem from this angle; simply getting married is not the supreme goal in a young person's life, but to be married happily and to "live happily ever after." And if you young men and young women are serious and in earnest about your quest for happiness, then here are five tests that will guarantee this happiness to you if your friendship and affections ring true to them.

Test Number One. Ask yourself this question: Does my friend make selfish demands of me? Does he require me to bend to his foolish fancies and whims without thought of parents or family or school rules?

Glancing at the beautiful picture of love in 1 Corinthians 13, at once we notice the phrase "Charity vaunteth not itself, . . . seeketh not her own." True love is not selfish; it does not demand--it gives. Listen to what the Spirit of Prophecy says about these selfish lovers who do not care what the folks think or what the school rules are: "He who would lead a daughter away from duty, who would confuse her ideas of God's plain and positive commands to obey and honor her parents, is not one who would be true to the marriage obligations...."

"The underhand way in which courtships and marriages are carried on is the cause of a great amount of misery, the full extent of which is known only to God. On this rock thousands have made shipwreck of their souls." Messages to Young People, pp. 445-447.

These statements are plain enough, but let me put beside them a paragraph from a modern writer. Alfred Murray, in his book Youth's Problem No. 1, on pages 184, 185, says: "Friends help you build noble, beautiful and true lives: enemies disregard all these virtues that they may satisfy themselves. You are but a toy which amuses them until they tire of you and can secure a new one. A friend will use himself to satisfy your needs: an enemy will use you to satisfy his desires. An

enemy will make demands upon you at any cost to your character and life; but a true friend will make demands upon himself at any cost of sacrifice and self-surrender."

Now answer the question at the head of this section honestly, and if your friendship rings with selfishness, underhandedness, and indifference to what parents and teachers think, wave them good-bye and run for your lives! Shed no tears. You have not lost a friend; you have escaped from an enemy.

Test Number Two. Ask yourself the question: Does my friend suggest anything that degrades or would cause me to lose my honor or my virtue?

A glance at the picture of real love immediately assures us that love "doth not behave itself unseemly, .. thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity."

From Youth's Problem No. 1 we read on page 183: "The quickest way to lose the respect of an acquaintance is to yield to his requests to forfeit name and character and to defy society and God." On page 184: "Men who encourage women to sin learn to despise such women. They will tell women that they are not this way, but the fact remains that they are. Those who are most persistent in seducing others to sin with them, are also the most emphatic in their rebellion against such women. When young couples come to me unhappy in their marriages, I find that the majority of them practiced sexual intercourse before marriage, and either pregnancy or fear of it hastened their marriage."

I used to wonder why the story in Second Samuel was written in the Bible. I know now. Amnon, the son of David, fell in love with his half sister Tamar. He was so lovesick that he could not eat. He confided in his friend Jonadab, and they decided on a plan. Amnon feigned sickness and requested Tamar to bring him some refreshments. He ordered all the servants from the room and then suggested something that would degrade, that would cause Tamar to lose her honor and her virtue. She, good girl, did her best to save the situation. "Speak to the king," she said, "and let us get married."

But Amnon was unreasonable, and he forced his half sister Tamar into sin, and the record in the Good Book immediately adds, "Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her." 2 Samuel 13:15.

If young people could only realize how unfailingly this principle works today, and has worked through all the ages, how careful they would be! Of course, young men do not plan deliberately to sin or entice a young woman to sin, and a young

woman has no idea that these temptations will ever come to her. It is generally the result of indiscriminate petting and necking. This is what stirs the fires of infatuation until the couple are emotionally intoxicated and incapable of serious thought or self-control. Then they say love is blind and unreasonable!

Some people say that there is no harm in petting. Read another paragraph or two from Youth's Problem No. 1: "The man who never opens a Bible will inform you that it is not true. It is not true, because it is against his mean, selfish way of treating his fellow men. 'There is no harm in petting,' says the person who is determined to indulge in it regardless of what it does to another." Page 131.

And on page 132 of his discussion Mr. Murray says: "'Harmless petting' arouses feelings and emotions which are satisfied in the more intimate relationship that follows. Thus the petter will resort to one of five outlets, for emotional fires will break out somewhere." He then goes on to give the avenues by which the emotional fires are gratified. We need only say that they include every kind of immorality.

It sounds horrible, does it not? But, better to be frank now than sorry later, and this is exactly what the Spirit of Prophecy means when it says: "Satan's angels are keeping watch with those who devote a large share of the night to courting.... It would be more appropriate to let some of the hours of courtship before marriage run through the married life. But as a general thing, marriage ends all the devotion manifested during the days of courtship!

"These hours of midnight dissipation, in this age of depravity, frequently lead to the ruin of both parties thus engaged. . . . They are married because passion moved them, and when the novelty of the affair is over, they will begin to realize what they have done. In six months after the vows are spoken, their sentiments toward each other have undergone a change.... Each discovers imperfections that, during the blindness and folly of their former association, were not apparent. The promises at the altar do not bind them together. In consequence of hasty marriages, even among the professed people of God, there are separations, divorces, and great confusion in the church." Messages to Young People, pp. 457, 458.

Some time ago, while attending a large gathering of Seventh-day Adventists, a sweet-faced young mother with a little boy in her arms, approached me and said, "Do you remember me, Pastor Hare?" I did remember. I knew her well. I knew her mother and father. The last thing I remembered was that we were kneeling together during a Week of Prayer at one of our academies, and I was praying that

God would open her eyes and that the Spirit of God would constrain her to take father and mother's advice and not marry until she had had more education.

But she thought that I did not understand. Her parents were old-fashioned. Her case was different, and even if she was only a junior in the academy, she was going to get married no matter what anybody said. I looked into her bright eyes as I shook her hand, and I knew that she knew what I was remembering.

"And are you happy?" I smiled hopefully. In just a second a cloud passed silently over her sunny face; then she whispered tearfully, "I was happy for three weeks."

Three weeks! That is all you need in these streamlined days for the novelty of marriage to wear off. Let me assure you, my dear young people, there is very little wrong with the usual run of fathers and mothers and chaperons. They are not out of date and old-fashioned, and many more young people "live happily ever after" who take their advice than who follow the trail of no restraint and intoxicating infatuation.

My hat comes off to the girl who went to a social in a community where petting was customary among couples who scarcely knew each other. A young man whom she met that evening accompanied her to her home, and as she was about to enter he said in a tone of amazement, "Aren't you going to kiss me good night?"

She replied, "No, I am not. Why should I? I have never met you before."

"All the other girls do," he pleaded.

"Well, I don't," she said; "I'm saving my kisses for the man who will someday be my husband."

"And who is he?" asked the young man.

"I don't know: I have not met him yet," she replied, and with a pleasant good night and a wave of her hand she ran inside.

"There's a girl whose kisses are worth going after," said the young man to himself as he walked thoughtfully home. He set to work to make himself worthy, was successful in wooing the girl and winning her, and, other things being favorable, they should live happily ever after.

Now, answer the question at the beginning of this section honestly, and if your friendship is tainted with suggestions that degrade and would cause you to lose honor or virtue, run for your life! Far better to weep a little now than to "wish you were dead" for the rest of your days.

Test Number Three. Ask yourself this question: Does he (or she) have a sincere interest in me, my work, my goals, and my progress?

We need not dwell at length on this self-evident truth, that two young people must have enough common ground in their spheres of life, in their education, in their friends, and in their interests upon which to build a home. What interest could a swine have in a pearl? What kind of home could a monkey and a parrot have? Could a peacock and a goat have much prospect of living happily ever after?

Young people, check up on your friend, and if he or she does not belong to your world, or whatever you want to call it, run for your life! Better that the heart should ache a little now than that you should wake up from a dream and find the millstone of incompatibility tied around your neck.

Test Number Four. Ask yourself this question: Can he (or she) offer me real companionship?

We often refer to the words of Amos: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3. I like to put them with Paul's plea to the Corinthians: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15.

In spite of the ridiculous impossibility implied in every illustration Paul uses in this text, frequently we find young people daring to believe that their case is different from that of everyone else. They point for assurance to the few unbelieving husbands who have been won to God after marriage to believing wives. They eagerly produce as evidence of being happy forever the few unequally yoked couples who are seemingly happy for the present moment.

But, my dear young people, after thirty years in the ministry I am sure these paragraphs from Messages to Young People are as true today as when they were written:

"If, in your infatuation, you can repeatedly turn from the prayer-meeting, where God meets with His people, in order to enjoy the society of one who has no love for God, and who sees no attractions in the religious life, how can you expect God to prosper such a union? ...

"Unless you would have a home where the shadows are never lifted, do not unite yourself with one who is an enemy of God. As one who expects to meet these

words in the judgment, I entreat you to ponder the step you contemplate taking.... I would warn you of your danger before it shall be too late. You listen to smooth, pleasant words, and are led to believe that all will be well; but you do not read the motives that prompt those fair speeches." Pages 437-441.

"Satan is busily engaged in influencing those who are wholly unsuited to each other to unite their interests. He exults in this work, for by it he can produce more misery and hopeless woe to the human family than by exercising his skill in any other direction....

"The thought of marriage seems to have a bewitching power upon the minds of many of the youth. Two persons become acquainted; they are infatuated with each other, and their whole attention is absorbed. Reason is blinded, and judgment is overthrown. They will not submit to any advice or control, but insist on having their own way, regardless of consequence." Messages to Young People, pp. 455, 456.

Be honest with your soul and true to yourself; if you find that your friend, in whose company you rejoice, is not of the same religious faith, do not pursue that course further. Better to suffer a moment now than to be plunged into misery and hopeless woe for years to come.

Test Number Five. Ask yourself this question: Will he (or she) have respect for me and I for him (or her)? You want a love that suffers long and is kind, that is not easily provoked, that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

On what delicate threads this priceless treasure of respect hangs. What an influence your past, your upbringing, your manners, your speech, have on being happy ever after. Have you ever wished for a crystal ball into which you could gaze and tell with certainty just how this spruced-up, perfumed, polished essence of elegance will treat you after you are married? I can give you an infallible one!

"Let the woman who desires a peaceful, happy union, who would escape future misery and sorrow, inquire before she yields her affections, Has my lover a mother? What is the stamp of her character? Does he recognize his obligations to her? Is he mindful of her wishes and happiness? If he does not respect and honor his mother, will he manifest respect and love, kindness and attention, toward his wife? When the novelty of marriage is over, will he love me still? Will he be patient with my mistakes, or will he be critical, overbearing, and dictatorial?" Messages to Young People, p. 450.

There you are, young women! Now you can tell just how he will treat you after marriage. Sometimes, when you are not expected, go to visit him in his home. Listen to the way he speaks to his mother; watch the way he respects her. If he is discourteous to her, he will be discourteous to you. If he is thoughtful of her, he will be thoughtful of you. If mother's face lights up with pleasure when her son comes in from work, your face will light up with pleasure when your husband comes in from work. It is as simple as that, and it is as accurate as that!

And, young men! It will work just as well for you. Do you often wonder what kind of wife this charming, graceful, angel lady would make? Take a trip to her home when you are not expected. Listen to the way she talks to her mother and her father; watch the way she treats them. If she cheerfully takes her part in the home, she will cheerfully take her part in your home. If mother and father smile at her words and her presence, you too will rejoice and be delighted with her presence. If she makes everybody dance attendance to her in her home, believe me, son, she will make you dance attendance in your home. If she helps mother wash the dishes, she will help you; and if she does not help her mother do the dishes, do not be surprised if she makes you do the dishes by yourself.

So, you who are young people, gaze into the crystal ball of your lover's home, and if you do not like the picture of your future, escape ere it is too late. "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house." And, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman." Proverbs 21:9, 19,

"In these days of peril and corruption, the young are exposed to many trials and temptations. Many are sailing in a dangerous harbor. They need a pilot.... They are infatuated with the subject of courtship and marriage, and their principal burden is to have their own way. In this, the most important period of their lives, they need an unerring counselor, an infallible guide. This they will find in the word of God." Messages to Young People, p. 443.

As one who expects to meet you again in the Day of Judgment, I have earnestly and sincerely tried to give you this simple, infallible guide.

I tell you, young people, getting married is no joke! But if we as Christians will take time to test our friends and our friendships and our affections by these simple tests, there is no reason why we cannot expect Heaven's sweetest smile and richest blessing to rest upon our homes.

The other day I read these words from the pen of La Rochefoucauld

"The same wind snuffs candles, yet kindles fire,
So when absence kills a little love, it fans a great one."

Even so, the love that is snuffed out by the wind of these tests is not worth a single tear; but if it survives, it will be that beautiful, precious gift of God, and when you get married you can be assured that you will live happily, not just while you are on your honeymoon, not just till the novelty of marriage is over, but happily forever after.

LOVE'S SUNLIGHT

Love is the sunlight of home,
Beautiful, bright, and clear,
Shining through every passing day
And every passing year.
It bears no frown or rod;
It binds no tyrant chain;
But in its self-forgetful grace
Gives joy instead of pain.

Like some bright seraph's smile,
It bids the gloom depart,
Flings not an arrow from its tongue,
And wounds no quivering heart.
Its kingdom is divine,
And sweet its sovereign sway;
Better than gold or gems of earth,
Its presence cheers our way.

Love is the light of home.
It brightens all below
And calms the billows on life's sea
When angry tempests blow.
Bid welcome to its smile,
And let its radiance shine!
Walk with it ever by your side,
A friend that is divine.
Robert Hare.

Lesson 9 Quiz:

Write True or False [T or F]:

1. _____ People need to get married to be happy.
2. _____ Satan loves to get people to make unwise marriages.
3. _____ Getting married always makes people happy.
4. _____ A man that's rude and unkind to his mother, will not respect his wife.
5. _____ True love will never demand an acquaintance to do wrong to please him.
6. _____ Any problems before marriage will go away once you are married.
7. _____ If a relationship does not pass all 5 tests in this lesson then run from it!
8. _____ Most Marriages are happy these days.
9. _____ Better be single than make an unwise marriage.
10. _____ Intimate behavior should be avoided completely before marriage.