

## GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT LOVE

Miller Templeton, at the age of 64

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.”

(From “Sonnets from the Portuguese, XLIII” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

Here are a few of the insights I’ve learned about love from my perspective as a Counselor and a Christian. Six Thoughts:

1. Having a background in psychology, I like **“the behavioral definition of love”** as put forth by the noted psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan: “To love another person is to be TOTALLY committed to helping the other person be everything s/he wants to be (in the present) & become everything s/he wants to become (in the future).” Note that by this definition, love IS NOT ABOUT ME - it’s about the other person. And when that other person has the same commitment to me, then the whole of love is truly greater than the sum of its parts - as we both commit to helping each other be & become everything we want to be & become.
2. Love is one of the few things in life such that **the more of it you give away, the more of it you have.** Richard Rogers (of “Rogers & Hammerstein” fame - The Sound of Music, South Pacific, Oklahoma, pretty much all the great musicals of the 40’s & 50’s) was probably thinking of love in this way when he wrote the following on a valentine to a friend:  
  
“A bell’s not a bell ‘til you ring it.  
A song’s not a song ‘til you sing it.  
And the love in your heart wasn’t put there to stay,  
‘Cause love isn’t love ‘til you give it away.”
3. **Love is Total Acceptance** - warts & all! When folks first become romantically attracted to each other, frequently one will manifest a behavior that the other views as a “darling eccentricity”, a characteristic of their uniqueness or as part of their mystique (like squeezing the toothpaste from the middle of the tube!). However, further down the road, this behavior really starts to bug the other. They can be asked to change the behavior, but the choice is up to them - no one can MAKE another change behavior. (How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but the light bulb has gotta WANT to change.) If the beloved chooses not to change the behavior, ”Ya gotta love ‘em, warts & all”.
4. **Love is finite.** We’re not angels - and only the Divine can love everyone. Scott Peck, author of the incredible book “The Road Less Traveled”, says in his 30 years of counseling he has come to the conclusion that any person can love (in the Harry Stack Sullivan sense), at most 5 to 10 other people. And this usually is a spouse, 2 or 3 children, some immediate family members & one or 2 “best friends”. Jesus was probably expressing this concept when he said (Matt. 19:5) that a person shall leave father & mother & cling to his/her spouse; i.e. some of that finite amount of love gets transferred. Since our love is finite, perhaps we should choose the recipients wisely.
5. In a dialog with the Pharisees, Jesus was asked, “Master, which is the greatest commandment?” (Matt. 22:36-40). Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Then He gave ‘em a freebie: “And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is sometimes called “The Implicit Commandment” because it implies that

before you can love your neighbor, **you've got to love YOURSELF**. Unless your own cup runs over (with self love), there's no love to give to others. You gotta love yourself before you can love others.

6. Love finds its deepest expression in **marriage, often called "the ultimate affirmation"**. When two friends are playing basketball & one sinks a 3-pointer from outside the key, the other says "Hey, Dude, that was awesome!" One friend has just AFFIRMED the other. When a family member fixes a fantastic meal & the rest of the family says "That was the most delicious meal I've ever had!", the cook has been AFFIRMED. But when one person says to another, "I experience such joy & happiness when I'm with you, and I find you SO good-looking & sexy, and when we're together I feel such vim, vigor & vitality - because of all of this and much, much more, I want to spend the rest of my life with you as your spouse." - THEN, this is an **ULTIMATE AFFIRMATION!!!!**

If all people would adopt this philosophy of Love, I believe the world would truly be a better place.