



Food for Thought: **Love and Kisses**
“*Let all that you do be done in love.*”

~1st Corinthians 16:14

It's that time of year again, February. The month of love some call it. Romantics dream of chocolate and flowers or of that perfect date. Some hope it helps renew the spark in their relationship even if it only lasts for a day or two. Others simply dread the idea of Valentine's Day and avoid all it stands for like the plague. And as you can imagine, this leads to mixed feelings about just what Valentine's Day stands for. It makes me wonder just where Jesus falls in line with this red and pink, Hallmark holiday?

Most don't know that Valentine's Day traces back to a century's old tradition that centers around a Bishop named Valentinus who lived in the 2nd Century during the Roman Empire. At that time, the Empire ordered its officials to discourage young people from getting married in the church. Still, many young Christians wanted to be married by a priest, in the church, with God's blessing. Bishop Valentinus was sympathetic to their plight and continued to help marry them even though he was threatened by government authorities.

Sadly, he was taken to Rome and put to death for his faith and his defiance of the emperor's rule. In memory and in honor of his determination to help people get married the way God intended, he was Sainted by the Church. To honor Him, young couples started talking about choosing a Valentine, when they were really talking about choosing a bride to keep the Roman officials confused about their true intentions. That tradition has continued for the last 2100 years and is now what we call Saint Valentine's Day.

Valentine's day has become so commercialized today, that it now starts with the children as young as Kindergarteners. They hand out paper Valentines to their friends and classmates with hearts all over them or give out heart shaped candies. Later, when we become a little more selective with whom we give them to, we up our game and switch to store bought cards, and depending on our age, accompany them with candies and flowers – usually red carnations or red roses as they have come to symbolize the sentiment, "I love you." And if we really want to impress the person, we opt for the \$12.99 cards and give even more expensive gifts like diamonds to "*show them that we care*" as the television advertisements say.

But don't let the enemy confuse you regarding love. Love is not merely an array of quaint messages on folded pieces of paper that they sell for \$6.99 each. Love is not "two dozen of anything, a box of the assorted kinds/flavors of something else, or even a quiet dinner for two." Sure, these are expressions of love, but in and of themselves, they are NOT love.

Without a deep, understanding of the love that Christ has for us, the cards, the flowers, the chocolates, and the dinners are, well, just that...cards, flowers, chocolates, and dinners. They are simply things that remind us of someone we care about with whom we share joyful memories, or at times, maybe some not-so-good ones.

There is a popular reality television show that depicts single men and women meeting several members of the opposite sex to "find someone to fall in love with." As they get to know each contestant, they eliminate the ones that they are not interested in one-by-one. Sounds cruel, right? It is. It's all done in the name of "love," –and for lack of a better term, entertainment because they tell us it is real. But before you comment on how "real" this reality show is, realize that it is all scripted and written just for ratings. In truth, it is just about as far from real love as one can get.

As they are rejected one by one on the show, contestants are publicly humiliated on television. Of course, they feel awful. One woman expressed her hopelessness after her rejection, saying, "If I could have opened myself up to him, I think, if he saw the real me, he would definitely reconsider." Another thought if she were more beautiful or charming, then he would have chosen her. "I tried, and it just wasn't enough," she said. Unfortunately, like these scripted exits, in romance, many times, heartbreak comes before lasting love.

I am sure glad that God does not line people up, inspect them, and then reject the ones He doesn't like because that is not what real love does.

In other words, Valentine's Day must begin and end with Jesus for it to have any real substance worth cherishing at all. And if the LORD is your Valentine – someone truly worthy of your love and affection – then the celebration of this day would be a beautiful thing, whether you are single, married, or dating. After all, God gave us his Son to show us that He loved us. That was a really a great gift, wasn't it? Much better than any card, or candy, or flowers.

Don't take my word for it, read the Bible. God has A LOT to say about love. That word is used over 300 times in the Bible.

He gave us a love that surpasses knowledge. A love so wide, so long, so high, and so deep that we cannot understand it or comprehend it. We didn't understand it then, and very few of us understand it today. We are loved by Him. Take a moment and allow that to sink in – the Lord has an unending love for us. The King of kings loves us. Instead of making much of our pain and our hurt that life brings, we need to make much of the fact that Jesus loves us because when all around us changes and fades away, His love will never change.

Sure, there are quotes from the Bible about love that have made it into marriage ceremonies, wedding vows, and are even reprinted on greeting cards. But there is no way we can begin to love someone else or share that kind of love with others until we understand what it means to be loved by Christ. Even on their best day, card companies can't grasp how wide, how long, how high, or how deep that love is. It's a love that surpasses knowledge, as the Bible says. Hallmark will never come close to expressing that kind of love on a Valentine's Day card.

This is the truth about love. Even if you have heard it all before, God's Word is living and breathing and speaking to you in new ways through those same old scriptures about love. Although you have read them one hundred times before, God's messages about love permeates every chapter in the Bible. His *Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres*. In short, the Bible teaches us that God is love.

If we were to write that in the language of mathematics, the equation would be $God = love$. In the language of today's teens, it means that *God is, like, totally all about love*. From a purely philosophical sense, *He is so wrapped up in love that He is one with love itself*.

Others have heard someone say, "I love you," but the happy-ever-after ending didn't follow. For some, the word "love" has been exhausted. That's because if we read or speak beautiful words about love again and again, but do not do it with the intention or understanding from the Bible, then the words sound like empty statements.

1st Corinthians 13 challenges people *to do everything out of love*, specifically the kind of that God showed us through the life of His Son, Jesus. Love was His inherent motive. That means loving friends, enemies, neighbors, co-workers, spouses, children, parents, and even strangers with the merciful and selfless love that comes from God.

That is the kind of holiday that we need to celebrate love. But while Valentine's Day focuses, for the most part, on romantic love, people can be sure that there's so much more to learn about that four-letter word than Hallmark can teach us. There's a lifetime of days to connect to God, the Source of love, who can teach us by example, to love with patience, faith, generosity, wisdom, and grace.

Only then, can we begin to tell someone that this card comes *With Love and Kisses* and be able to explain what that means in a way that God intended!

Just some Food for Thought