

## *Sam's Corner*



### ***“What is True Love?”***

The idea of true love has been pondered for centuries. I think we all have some idea of what it means, and I believe our ideas change as we experience more and more of life. What does it mean if someone says to you, “I have found **True Love**?” If you ask what that means, probably the person will answer the question with a description of the wonderful attributes of their new love that make him or her the perfect match. With this person, he or she feels totally understood, accepted and important. The love is “unconditional.” This is surely the description of “new” love, but is it “True Love?”

Many times, I have heard people express their belief that, in a marriage, we should love each other “unconditionally.” After thirty years as a marriage and family therapist and a pastoral counselor, I have come to believe there are only two times we can anticipate being in a state of continuous unconditional love. The first is hopefully during the first year of our life, which becomes the foundation for the rest of our life. The second, I believe, is when we die and return to the “Unconditional Love” that got us here in the first place. In the confines of our humanity, I believe we live with only glimpses of love that is “unconditional.” I hope there are many of those glimpses in your childhood. I think we experience the “unconditional” profoundly at those times when we feel unloved and unlovable, and yet we truly realize we **are** loved. We are loved, “*Warts and All.*” These are moments when we experience that glimpse of the “unconditional” that Victor Hugo so eloquently expressed when he wrote, “To Love another person is to see the face of God.”

We live in a world that, by and large, is filled with all kinds of “conditions.” I propose that the “True Love” we experience in our marriages and relationships has a lot to do with how we handle the “conditional” that frequently challenges, and sadly, often overwhelms our endeavor to retain our love for one another. There are always “conditions” invading our lives and our relationships. Many of these “conditions” can cause stress, anxiety, anger and isolation. These “conditions” are often created by money, time, children, work, intimacy, housework, yard work, laundry, pets, “etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.” I believe “True Love” is a love that steadfastly challenges itself to deal with the “conditions.” This is why it is awfully hard to be married and even to be true friends with one another. Unfortunately, there are “conditions” that can insidiously poison and even kill love. I believe “True Love” is experienced when we meet the challenge of both the toxic and the nontoxic “conditions,” and still hold on to love in the midst of all the “conditions.” Perhaps “True Love,” in the limits of our humanity, is not about comparing it to the “unconditional,” which we can probably never fully comprehend. Maybe meeting the challenge of all the conditions is measured simply by knowing at “the end of the day,” we feel loved and validated. Not having this knowledge can make for an unhappy day, and having too many unhappy days can make for an unhappy marriage, and even an unhappy life.