

WHAT LOVE IS

*Reflections on the True Meaning
& Authentic Practice of Love*

Thom Rutledge

AUTHOR OF THE *GREATER POSSIBILITIES*



Cover Photo by Mark Smith

When it is time to say good bye, if there is just one photo at my wake, may it be this one. -Thom

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Dedications

For Karen with my sincere apology for blowing up the lab.

For Lisette & Wynn and for Zoe & Brad, as you begin.

For Lorene, Jason & Luekelina because love is strength.

And especially for Dede: To me, you are what love is.

The highest function of love is that it makes the loved one a
unique and irreplaceable being.

— Tom Robbins

Immature love says, “I love you because I need you.”
Mature love says, “I need you because I love you.”

— Erich Fromm

One cannot be strong without love.

— Paul Tillich

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INTRODUCTION

We teach best what we most need to learn. — Richard Bach

As I write this, I have been on this planet almost 64 years, enough time to have learned a thing or two, maybe even to have accumulated some wisdom. Or, as my therapist often said at the end of our sessions, “Or not.”

Somewhere along the way, I became aware that to love someone well takes work. Unfortunately, I had not learned that before my first marriage. As a result, I came up way short, to say the least, for my wife and her two wonderful daughters. I love my life now, the life my current wife and I have created together over these past 30 years, so I have no desire to travel back to change what went before. But I remain very sorry for hurting the three of them.

I did not do so well with my parents, brothers and sister either. I believe I did the best I could at any given time through the years but with the perspective these additional years have given me, I have discovered some regrets. I remind myself that I can have regret without shame – and that helps. And it is important for all of us to be careful

to not judge our past selves with our current selves as the standard of measure.

No doubt, my wife, Dede, has been my greatest teacher of what love is. And she and I have certainly been students together, our relationship being the teacher. I will leave it to her to write her own book and tell you about her perspective. I will tell you that, for me, the past 30 years have been exciting, fun, terrifying, enlightening, worrisome, hilarious, entertaining, painful, confusing, more fun, interesting, scary, surprising, fulfilling and I could fill at least a couple more pages with this description. Not sure who I would be, but I would not be this particular version of Thom if Dede and I had not become lab partners through this strange experiment called life. Whether our coming together was a happy accident or our relationship was planned from the beginning, I am filled with gratitude for what we have. And Dede is too. She told me so – just yesterday, in fact.

My work as a psychotherapist has also been a primary source of my learning about love. That could most certainly fill another book (that I probably should write) but for now, I will paraphrase the words of the innovative physician/healer, Patch Adams: everybody is a teacher and everybody is a student. Doing my best

to figure out how to help other people with love – difficulties in relationships and terrible difficulties with loving themselves – has afforded me the opportunity to actually work on learning about love for a living. Not a bad job if you can get it.

I did not realize it at the beginning of this project but *What Love is* is the second book in a series that is taking shape as I write. The first, *The Greater Possibilities*, was released last year. And my plan is to have the third in the series ready to roll out next year.

So, for now we land on this book. Simple and straightforward. I hope you will find it thought-provoking, instructive, challenging, reassuring and entertaining. I have written this as a gift book and hope that you will like it enough to want to share it. Gift book or not, I have not written some namby-pamby book of cliché aphorisms and happy affirmations. I have written this book to genuinely share some of what I have learned about love.

This is no comprehensive treatise on the nature of - or the practice of – love. These are my thoughts, my reflections; these are lessons I have learned along the way. One of the many slogans from Alcoholics Anonymous applies here: Take what is

helpful and leave what is not. I do hope you will find something useful here. Thank you for reading. Let me know what you think.

—Thom Rutledge / October 2017

The Most Important Thing

Discovery is meaningless without action. — TR

I can take guitar lessons from Eric Clapton but if I don't practice between lessons, I will not play the guitar. I can show up faithfully for my lessons, I can pay close attention and I will be able to genuinely claim that I know a lot about playing the guitar. But without practice, what I know will not change the fact that I cannot play.

You can understand everything there is to understand in this little book and it will not make the slightest difference in how you love.

Please read what follows with the intention of creating a daily practice of what you discover to be useful here. Practice is the only way to change. And commitment to perpetual practice is the only way to mastery.

Practice makes...practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thom Rutledge is a psychotherapist and has been working with individuals, groups and couples for 35 years. He has been featured on NBC's Today Show, Anderson Cooper 360, The Fox Network, Australia's Channel 10 and has consulted with The Dr. Phil Show.



Thom has been married to Dede Beasley (the well-known Experiential Equine Counselor) for 32 years and they live on a small farm just outside of Nashville, Tennessee.

One More Thing

Wait. Before you go, one more thing. Extremely important. In fact, tear this page out and carry it with you.

Laughter. Humor. Just because something is serious, even sacred, that does not mean it is not also, at times, hilarious.

Serious and funny are not opposites. Very often they need each other. And you will need them both.

Laughing together
- that's what love is.