

## And the GREATEST of These is LOVE...

Soon we will celebrate Valentine's Day! Can you remember that first Valentine that you got that took your breath away...perhaps it was from the love of your life, from your dearest friend, from your mom and dad, from your sibling or child or grandchild. The card was important only because it held the words and the promises of someone you loved very much. I really don't care if the Valentine I receive is homemade or purchased. I just love a little glitter on it and lots of love oozing out the edges; perhaps a handwritten note inside reminding me that I have made a difference in someone's life.

**John 3:16 (LB)** is one of the first Valentines we ever received! "For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." WOW! What a promise...what a love!

And then in **Psalms 30:11** we read "You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance!" Now that's love oozing out of the edges to fill our hearts and lives.

Barbara Johnson writes that saying someone is a "diamond in the rough is a familiar way of saying somebody has the potential to become far more than they are right now." But, she says, I believe that we are much more like opals than like diamonds. Did you know that an opal is made of desert dust, sand, and silica and owes its beauty not to its perfection but to a defect? The opal is a stone with a broken heart. It is full of tiny imperfections that allow air inside and then the air reflects the light. As a result, the opal has such lovely hues that the stone is called "the lamp of fire" because the breath of the Lord is in it. An opal will lose its luster if it is kept in a cold, dark place, but the luster is restored when it is held in a warm hand or when light shines on it.

In so many ways, we can compare ourselves to the opal. It is when we are warmed by God's love and pass that love on to others that we take on color and brilliance. It is when we are broken inside ourselves, through our defects, that we can give back the lovely hues of God's light and joy to others. It is then that the lamp in us can burn brightly and not flicker or go out.

Without God's touch in our lives...often there is very little sparkle and scant amounts of joy. But when we allow God to work within us...when we feel God's hand upon us...we are no longer dust, sand and silica...we are SPARKLING JEWELS that beautify God's kingdom and bring joy and hope and LOVE to ourselves and others. Like God's Valentines sent in great love...we sparkle from the inside out!

Who needs a Valentine from you this week...a card, a phone call, a word of encouragement and hope? I challenge you to brighten someone's life and day by remembering them. And remember...two ingredients...glitter and love oozing out the edges.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for your wonderful Valentine filled with love and promise! Forgive us when life overwhelms us and we feel far more like dust and sand than fine jewels. Help us to be always mindful of the loved ones you have placed in our lives and empower us to be reflections of your love, joy and light to them. Thank you, God, for turning our sadness into joy. You are an awesome God. This week, O God, give us eyes to see those who need to know of your Valentine and the touch of our love and help us to respond. Let us sparkle for them from the inside out! In your precious name, we pray. Amen