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# **“Why I Didn’t Talk about Love at Our Son’s Wedding”**

**1 Corinthians 13**

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**April 28, 2024**

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist on its own way; it's not irritable or resentful; it doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes the partial comes to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; When I became an adult I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

### *1 Corinthians 13*

The usher asked Carol, "Bride or groom?"

Graham, who was twelve, launched into a speech on the stupidity of the question. I explained that while I agree "Bride or groom?" is a stupid question, it probably wasn't fair to blame the usher, a pleasant young man who looked uncomfortable wearing rented clothes.

My son had spent the last 30 minutes with a finger at his throat whining, “I’m choking.”

He was wearing one of my old white dress shirts that was at least an inch too large for his neck. This was 2001, so men all over the sanctuary who spent 40 to 50 hours a week with less than an inch of free space around their necks would’ve been happy to explain to him what “I’m choking” really means.

Graham was, and this is hard to picture now, a half-inch shorter than I was, so my dress shirts, ties, and socks would frequently disappear from my closet and dresser. He enjoyed petty larceny and I felt a peculiar pride in having two pairs of my socks present at formal gatherings.

Our son was thrown when the vows preceded the rings.

He whispered loudly, “What happened to the rings?”

I pointed to the program to reassure him that the minister had not forgotten. I wondered if he always had such little confidence in ministers. He slouched back into the pew, resigned to boredom, and 30 more minutes of life-threatening choking. I put my arm around him, careful to keep my arm on the back of the pew so as not to send him into a preteen affectionate father induced embarrassment.

My son, according to my sarcastic father, was, at twelve, “surprisingly” handsome. We are all glad that he looks like his mother. But his hair never looked combed and his glasses only looked clean when I cleaned them. He had a hint of a mustache and more than a hint of what he would look like when he wore rented clothes someday. There was a girl across the way who looked nine to fourteen—I can never tell—who was studying the program

as though she was deciding which parts were good enough for her wedding. She was wearing a spring dress that the bridesmaids would no doubt rather be wearing than the no-color-to-be-found-in-nature taffeta never-to-be-worn-again dresses that they had been forced to wear.

I remember thinking that it was possible that ten or fifteen years from then, Graham would stand with the daughter of someone we would not know, a girl who could be anywhere in the world, and had, at that point, only the hint of a bride about her. In a decade Graham could be kissing his mother good-bye and starting a family of his own with a woman who was only recently, just like him, a seventh grader.

I was glad he and I had ten or fifteen years to get ready. Turns out, we had 22 years to get ready. The wedding was yesterday. When Graham and Alyssa asked me to perform the ceremony, I was delighted. I took it as a compliment, even though it was also a cost-cutting decision. They probably thought I would use my ten minutes to talk about love. I initially thought I would use my ten minutes to talk about love. Ministers love talking about love. We enjoy waxing poetic, accompanied by Pachelbel's Canon in D.

We want to almost quote *Notting Hill*: "Don't forget. I'm just a minister, standing in front of a boy and a girl, asking them to love each other."

To actually quote *Princess Bride*: "This is true love. You think this happens every day?"

We want to crank out our English accent for *Pride and Prejudice*: "You have bewitched me, body, and soul, and I love, I love, I love you. I never wish to be parted from you

from this day on.”

We love sounding like Tom Hanks in *Sleepless in Seattle*: “It was a million tiny little things that, when you added them all up, they meant we were supposed to be together, and I knew it. I knew it the first time I touched her. It was like coming home, only to no home I’d ever known. I was just taking her hand to help her out of a car, and I knew it. It was like magic.”

And even *27 Dresses*: “Love is patient, love is kind, love means slowly losing your mind.”

The magic of love is why 1 Corinthians 13 is read at most Christian weddings. It sounds like Paul’s wrote it for a wedding: “Love is patient. Love is kind. Love never gives up. Love cares more for the other. Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t strut, isn’t always “me first,” doesn’t have a swelled head, doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score, always looks for the best, keeps going to the end. Love never dies.

Most scholars think Saint Paul was single. The last verse, “faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love” definitely makes him sound single. Because I don’t know, love is where it starts, but when you’re at the end of your rope, hope is the knot in the rope you hold on to.

Jurgen Moltmann is often described as the most important theologian of the last 50 years. More than anything else, he writes about hope. Moltmann argues that Paul was right for the first century when he said, “The greatest of these is love,” but if Paul was writing today, he would say, “The greatest of these is hope.”

The idea of love so saturates our Western culture that it’s lost some of its power. Love still gets the poems, but

noted financier Andy Dufresne said: “Remember. Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

Love is rich with meaning, but hope keeps us moving forward. Hope is what you hold on to on hard days. So I didn't preach about the magic of love at our son's wedding.

I understand that falling in love is great, but scientists tell us that what we call “falling in love” can be attributed to the presence in the body of a drug called phenylethylamine, a natural amphetamine. The problem is we build up a tolerance for this chemical in two to four years. What we call love can be a tentative, partial, or momentary attraction, which is unstable and does not last. Love at first sight is easy to explain. Love after ten years is the miracle.

So I offered to read a poem that the happy couple turned down, but you get to hear it.

This is from John Kenney's collection, *Love Poems for Married People Are You in the Mood?*

I am.

Let's put the kids down.

Have a light dinner.

Shower.

Maybe not drink so much.

And do that thing I would rather do with you than with anyone else.

Lie in bed and look at our phones.

I offered, but was told not to quote Ryan Gosling's immortal words in *The Notebook*: “So it's not gonna be easy.

It's gonna be really hard, and we're gonna have to work at this every day. But I wanna do that because I want you. I want all of you, forever. You and me. Every day."

They passed on *Good Will Hunting*: "It doesn't matter if the guy is perfect

or the girl is perfect. As long as they're perfect for each other."

They vetoed Juno: "In my opinion, the best thing you can do is find someone who loves you for exactly what you are. Good mood, bad mood, ugly, pretty, handsome, what have you."

What are the three most important words in a relationship? "I love you" is a great choice with which to start. People who care for one another need to say "I love you." Those three words are so important, but there are other three-word combinations we are going to need to be a partner, a good relative, or a real friend:

"I am sorry."

"You were right."

"Help me understand."

"I was wrong."

"Tell me again."

"Let me help."

"Are you okay?"

"I love you" is crucial, but it does not mean as much without the other day to day words that lead to hope, that come from our heads as well as our hearts. Love without hope will not survive. Hope keeps love working. Hope lightens what is heavy. Hope gets us through the rough patches. Hope leads us beyond selfishness.

Hope bears all things, believe all things, and endures all things. Hope never disappears, never falls down on the job,

In the New Yorker article, “I’ll Get by With a Little Help from My Herd,” (1/20/23), Betsy Cornwell asks, “Did you know that a horse kept alone in a field will never thrive? It won’t sleep, won’t eat right, will even start pulling out its own hair. But if you put any other herd animal in with it (doesn’t have to be another horse—could be a sheep, goat, or donkey), they’ll get on fine. That’s because in a herd, animals take turns being the lookout. One animal keeps watch while the others rest and eat. A herd animal by itself, or alone with its baby, is always watching for danger. It won’t lower its head long enough to eat much or feel safe enough to sleep deeply. We need friends to take turns being the lookout. We need friends to help us hope.”

If St. Francis had been a bad poet, and had decided to write about hope instead of peace, the prayer of St. Francis might go like this: “Lord, make me an instrument of your hope. When my friend is tired, let me offer encouragement. When my friend is having one of those days, let me give comfort. When my friend struggles with doubts, let me lean to faith. When my friend feels despair, let me offer hope. When my friend sees only darkness, let me be light. When neither one of us feels like much fun, let us help one another remember joy. Lord, grant that when my friend can’t make things turn out right, when I can’t fix what’s going wrong, give us the extraordinary grace of understanding. For it is by giving and forgiving that we’ll be genuine friends.”

Your next-door neighbor knocks on your apartment door late one night. Your two kids are asleep, and you don’t want them awake. She’s looking for ice. Their refrigerator has given up the ghost. It’s been a long day, and she’s



desperate for some water with ice. You don't feel the warmth and magic of love for your neighbor, but you hope you can make her feel better.

You get her a big glass of ice water. You stand in the kitchen, commiserating about kitchen appliances and child raising. The death of the refrigerator isn't even the best story of the day.

She uses Fresh Direct most of the time, because trips to the grocery store are an adventure with her three children, but she got stuck and had to go to Key Food to pick up a few things. As they were walking home, the ten-year-old had a melt-down. He started kicking trees, which seems like its own punishment, but then, and his mother didn't see how it happened, somehow, he broke the light on the neighbor's bicycle in front of the building. She knew she needed to leave a note for the bike's owner, so she scrambled to find paper and pen. She had neither, so she went to the trash can on the corner, and found an extra-long CVS receipt. She didn't have a pen, but she had pink lipstick in her purse, so that had to do. She wrote a note in pink lipstick with her name and number, asking the owner to call her to arrange payment for the damage.

The owner of the bicycle called and said, "I've seen you and your children around the building. You have enough to worry about. Don't worry about this." (Mark Wingfield told a similar, true story on *Baptist News Global*.)

That is not a romantic story, but it is a hopeful story. God helps us care for one another. God helps us support one another. God helps us give one another hope.

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