

Love Never Fails

Love. Love one another. Jesus told us to do it. It sounds so simple. But ask any underappreciated employee or overworked public servant; ask any intimacy-deprived spouse or time-starved child; ask them about the people who are supposed to love them. “My boss just cares about his bottom line.” “I try to protect them and they hate me.” “My wife doesn’t want me.” “All my parents do is yell at me.” No matter what your situation – you can probably relate to not always feeling the love. I’m not saying it’s all the time, but maybe you have felt love lost.

I think one of the problems is that we don’t all share the same definition of love. We are looking for different things, and so often we identify those things we are looking for as love. More specifically, sometimes we identify getting those things, receiving them, as love. And sometimes they may be. But more often, as one commentator put it, *“the love romanticized and glorified by modern culture is self-seeking. It is rooted in self and its needs and emotions.”*¹ And no matter what we call it, anything self-seeking is not love. So God’s Word today shows us what love is – not just a feeling, but activity, and not just activity, but activity with heart, activity that acts even when it doesn’t want to – because it wants to want to. Make sense?

Today, we see what Paul wrote to those believers in Corinth who seemed to be having some struggles with living love – he tells them that **Love Never Fails**.

Love never fails. Try telling that to the spouse who feels like they haven’t been loved since not too long after the honeymoon. Try telling that to the mother who just wanted to see her kids for a few hours on Mother’s Day, but got a gift card in the mail instead. Love never fails? Well then, why the divorces? Why the violence? Why the bickering and arguing and hurt feelings – in any area of your life?

Why? Because what we often call love fails. Always. So let’s look at what God calls love, that thing that NEVER fails. Our text from 1 Corinthians 13 is really 3 parts, where Paul shows us what love is. He says “**Love Never Fails**” as he is describing first, how real LOVE flavors all I do. Then, how real LOVE takes

commitment. And finally, how Real Love lasts. **Love Never Fails.**

And when I say that, I'm not talking about the way you see it in the movies. You know... The couple falls in love. Then they have a problem and they fall out of love. Then they suffer for a while apart and finally he comes riding in at the end on the white horse to rescue her with some overt display that he really loved her all along. Love won out. And they are happy ever after, or at least until the sequel. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something much more complete, much more real.

In the first paragraph of our text he talks about having all sorts of gifts and accomplishing all sorts of things in two different ways: either Selfishly or Lovingly. You can do great things, but if they are rooted in self, if they are self-seeking – they are worthless. Think about it. If I mess up and then go and buy my wife some flowers and present them to her with a card saying, “OK, I bought you flowers. We're even. You can't be mad anymore.” without any kind of remorse or affection, how do you think that will go? It's like going and doing something you know will get you into trouble with the plan of buying a gift to fix it after. It doesn't take away the wrong. The heart's not there. That's easy to see. So Paul says, no matter what I do, if it isn't in love, it is nothing. But on the flipside, whatever I do in love, well that's something.

That's not saying it makes it easy. Look at how he defines love in the 2nd part there, in verses 4-7. Scan through that. This is the love that never fails. Now, as I wrestled with this, trying to figure out how to explain it, it was a struggle, because everything he says in that list is so counter-intuitive. It's just not how people naturally act. Unless, of course, they are moms. You know, there's a reason Mother's Day is a 10x bigger deal than Father's Day. Because when you think of mom, you think of love. At least I do.

Now, maybe I'm biased, or maybe it's just the “Mother's Day” in the air, but I thank God that he gave me such a picture of love in her. So what I want to do is kind of walk through this lengthy definition of love bit by bit and consider how my mom demonstrated it. Maybe it'll make you think of your mom a bit and praise God for her too. That's all good. But hopefully some of these pictures will help you see what love is.

First, he says, **love is patient.** Patient – as I think back to how my mom worked her way through training 14 of us who are

kind of wired to be more leaders than followers. She put up with our challenges. Looking back I wonder how she did it. But I guess I know.

Love, which Paul says, **is kind**. It's been said my mom could find something nice to say about hell if that were possible, which it isn't, but if anyone could, it would be her. "Well at least it isn't cold"

Love does not envy. She was always willing to go without so that others could have. I remember one time when my dad was frustrated after we had delivered our food to a family who was asking for help and then when we got there, they were all watching their big screen TV, when ours was 13". I remember my mom encouraging him and trying to put the absolutely best spin on it.

Love does not boast. It is not proud, not rude, not self-seeking. One after the other, you're describing my mom. I mean, "not self-seeking"? She would wake up to make sure the kids doing the 5am paper route were up and ready and she would be up waiting for us when we got home as teenagers, no matter what time, usually half asleep with her People's Bible in her hands. I mean, just being eager and willing to raise 14 kids – you know she's giving far more than she could ever get out of that. Although she would disagree with that statement.

But Paul keeps going with this definition: **Love is not easily angered**. I think I got my mom truly mad at me once. And if you've had to put up with me for any length of time you know what a feat that is.

Love keeps no record of wrongs – forgiving and forgiving and forgiving.

Love does not delight in evil (You know, it doesn't gossip) **but rejoices with the truth**. I don't know how many times I heard her try to curb someone's criticism and find the good in whoever they were talking about.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Now – I love my mom, and like I said, I saw this kind of love in her. But I realize my mom set a standard that not many other moms (or other people for that matter) can meet. I certainly fall short. But even her standard is not what is being talked about here. He says. **Love never fails**. As close as she seems, my mom isn't perfect. And I'm pretty sure you and I are well below even her bar.

Because we know when our love has failed, when we weren't patient or kind; when we were envious, proud, rude, self-seeking, when we kept and still have a tally of the wrongs others have done us, when we get eager to share the juicy tidbit about that acquaintance, when we jump to conclusions, and doubt, and assume the worst and give up. I am a prime proof that what I made the theme of my sermon is wrong.

Love does fail, when it's in my hands, and yours. But here's the thing. It's not. It's in God's. In fact, it is what God is. God is Love. By definition love does not fail, so God could not fail in keeping his promise of love to fix our problems of lovelessness. That's why Jesus always said he "Must go to Jerusalem and be betrayed and arrested and crucified." But it's also why he said he "Must rise again on the third day." There was no way he could fail, because he is God, because he is Love. And so, Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

That's the ultimate proof that love does not fail! So now go back through that list and consider how Jesus fulfilled love perfectly – and realize that this is the love that is on your record. Now this is what God sees in you when he looks at your heart cleansed by the love of Christ.

He sees perfect patience, as our Savior withstood the slowness to believe of so many, even his own disciples. He sees kindness that touches the leper and helps the helpless. He sees neither envy or boasting or pride. He sees a man who was betrayed by a close friend, arrested wrongly, beaten senselessly and nailed to a tree praying for those who were torturing him. He sees forgiveness and truth. He sees the one who always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. Everything else has its time in the sun, but love endures forever. And because you are going to be living forever in that love, you might as well start now, celebrating the love that lasts. After all, that's how Jesus said we'd be identified as his. On the night he was betrayed, arrested, condemned for us he told us to love one another so that all may know that we are His disciples. God grant it.

In Christ,
Amen

¹ From Gregory Lockwood's commentary on 1 Corinthians, pg. 456.