

## Love Is...



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### Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:1—13 (NIV)

*1 If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing. 3 If I dole out all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing.*

*4 Love is patient and is kind; love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, 5 doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; 6 doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they*

*will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, and love remain—these three. The greatest of these is love.*

## **Introduction**

*“'Love is pain,' I hear you say. 'Love is a cruel and bitter way of paying you back for all of the faith that you ever had in your brain.'”*

*“Love doesn't share itself with the world! Love is suspicious, love is needy. Love is fearful, love is greedy. My friends, there is no great love without great jealousy!”*

*“Too much love will kill you, just as sure as not at all. It'll drain the power that's in you, make you plead and scream and crawl. And the pain will make you crazy, you're a victim of your crime. Too much love will kill you, every time.”*

Those were three secular perspectives on love. Secular means that it does not have to do with religion, it is just “in the world”. The first is from a song by Sting called *Brand New Day*, the second is from one of the *Futurama* movies, and the last one is, of course, a song by Queen called *Too Much Love Will Kill You*.

They are very different from what we read in 1 Corinthians 13. These quotations are all about love. We would not say that they are “love songs”, but the reality is that they are about love. But something inside of us resists acknowledging that. We want to say, “No, that's not what love is! Love is something wonderful! More like what we read about in the passage!”

Tonight I want to talk about what love is. Specifically I want to talk about

1. what it looks like when love goes wrong,
2. why it goes wrong and, lastly
3. what it should look like.

## **Definitions**

But before we begin, I need to make one thing very clear. Tonight I am talking about love. What I mean by “love” is any

1. meaningful,
2. committed, and
3. purposeful
4. relationship

which you have with another person. So when I talk about love tonight, I am referring to

- husbands and wives,
- boyfriends and girlfriends,
- parents and children,
- grandparents and grandchildren,
- siblings,
- best friends,
- normal friends,
- neighbours,
- church family,

anywhere where you have someone significant in your life.

What I am *not* talking about are casual sexual encounters. It has become easy for people to talk about “making love”. But taking sex for granted is not love. In a couple of weeks we’ll be talking more about this. For now I need you to understand that tonight we are talking about committed relationships and that they are not necessarily romantic.

## **When love goes wrong**

For my first point I want to come back to the quotes with which I started tonight. As I had said, there is something inside of us that does not want to accept that *that* is what love looks like or even can look like. Love has to

be this noble and happy thing which makes us feel good and like we are floating on clouds. What I want to show now is that the Bible, largely, agrees with those quotes. The Bible affirms that love can and does go wrong. And when love goes wrong, there all sorts of emotions around love which we would not expect. It shows how important love is—how it is more important than anything else and that if it goes wrong, everything should be done to restore it.

I am now going to run through a few examples of “love gone wrong” which we have in the Bible. I am going to try and run through it quickly, so I am not going to expect you to turn to every passage in the Bible, but I am going to have it up on the screen. Please make a note of these if you can and go double check at home that I am not making these up or taking it out of context.

*Love is **jealous**: Deuteronomy 4:24, Zephania 1:18, 3:8*

God is a jealous God. That is a very biblical thing to say. He is jealous that His creation, whom He loves, would stop loving Him and chase after false gods. And so sometimes in human relationships it is right and good to be jealous. There is of course bad jealousy, but not all jealousy is bad. I am not going to go further into this now, but know that love can be jealous.

*Love is **fearful**: Song of Solomon 5:2—8*

The book of Song of Solomon is one long love poem. It is about a girl and her beloved singing to each other. Indeed, the two are passionately in love. In this passage, the girl is asleep and she is dreaming. She dreams that her

beloved knocks on the door and wants to come inside. At first she is like, “really, do you know how late it is?” But she gets up and opens the door for him, only to find that he is missing. So she gets worried and goes out into the dark streets to look for him. She finds a group of men who she should be able to trust and help her find her beloved, but they end up molesting her. She was having a nightmare. What this dream tells her is that when her beloved is away from her, she is afraid and vulnerable.

***Love is hard work and hurt: Genesis 29:15—30***

In this story, Jacob had traveled to a faraway land. There he saw this beautiful girl, and they fell in love. This girl—Rachel—her father said that they could marry after Jacob had worked for him for seven years. And so Jacob literally worked hard to be with his love. But then Rachel's dad cheated him and made him marry Rachel's sister, who was Leah. Jacob was very upset about this because he did not love Leah, only Rachel. He eventually did marry Rachel and had to work hard for another seven years. But he was also still married to Leah, whom he did not love. And so Leah was trapped in this relationship where—even though she loved him—he did not love her back.

***Love is disciplining: Proverbs 3:11—12***

Those who are parents here will know how it feels like to discipline their children. They will understand that it is not a pleasant thing to do. Your child ends up feeling hurt and maybe being angry. You don't want to cause that to your child. But sometimes it is necessary for them to grow and develop healthily. If you don't discipline your children, then over a long

period of time you end up causing them greater damage. You end up showing greater love by disciplining than not. That is why this passage says that the father disciplines the son “in whom he delights”. The parent wants their child to be better and stronger, more loving, careful and thoughtful, all while already being proud of them and loving them. And because they want to encourage all of these things, sometimes it is necessary to exercise discipline. This passage also tells us that God does the same for us and that we need to recognise that He does it not because He is angry at us, but because He wants us to be better off in the end.

***Love is sacrificial: John 3:16, 1 John 3:16***

Jesus gave up His place in Heaven to come down to earth, ultimately to die, so that our sins could be forgiven. That is the example which He gave us. He sacrificed a great deal to do this. It was more than a mere inconvenience: more than interrupting your TV programme to go do the dishes when your mom or wife asks. And let's be honest: giving things up isn't nice to do! It can be uncomfortable! But love is considering the needs of others above what you want to do.

***Love is painful: Hosea 1:2***

God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. He wanted him to do this, because God wanted Hosea to understand what He felt like. The people of Israel did not love God and they kept on worshiping idols and false gods. When the Israelites did this, God became angry, but not before He became deeply, deeply hurt. God wanted Hosea to lie in bed alone at night wondering *if* his wife is going to come home. He wanted Hosea to

look at his wife making eyes at another man. He wanted him to feel that sadness and hurt and abandonment so that Hosea could understand why God was being angry. God was angry because He was hurt by the people being unfaithful. And he felt hurt because He loved the Israelites. The hurt was a direct consequence of love.

### ***Love is anguished: Malachi***

The whole book of Malachi is about God giving the Jews a letter. It is not a letter of divorce, but a letter of separation. God says to Israel, “You have not loved Me.” Israel then says back, incredulously, “How have we done that?” Over and over this happens and each time God exposes their false motives and empty love. Eventually God tells His people that He is going away. They will look for Him, but He won't be coming home at the end of the work day. His side of the bed will be empty: only this letter will be on the nightstand. But one day He will come back. And when He does, He will restore their broken relationship. And we know He eventually did that, hundreds of years later, in the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Why Love Goes Wrong**

My second point, “why love goes wrong”, is going to be very brief. Much can be said about this. But I am just going to say is that it is because we have rejected God. God made and designed us to be in a relationship with Him. But because He gave us free will, we chose to deviate from that design and purpose. We chose to push God out of the picture and to look for knowledge elsewhere. We said to God,



*“Thank You, God, but no thank You. I am going to figure out how to love on my own terms. I am going to focus on my needs and wants rather than that of others. I do not know everything like You do, so I am going to make assumptions about what other people think and what they feel. I am going to set unrealistic expectations of other people. And then I am going to call that love.”*

We fail to love other people as we should because we are prideful. Being prideful means that we think that we are more important than anyone or anything else. It means we think that our needs and wants are more important, and so it leads us to become selfish. It also means that we think we know more than we really do. That leads us to be happy to work with an incomplete picture of the other person.

I can say these things very openly and honestly to you, because I have experienced this myself. In fact, every day I struggle with loving people as I should. And most days I fail.

There is a reason why I can say these things and be honest about them. It is because I am not without hope. And now we come to the last point which I want to make tonight, and that is “What Love Should Look Like”.

## **What Love Should Look Like**

Turn back to 1 Corinthians 13. It does give us a good model of what love is. But I want us to look at it now through the lens of the things which I have said here tonight. Verse 4.

1. “Love is patient”. Why would it be necessary to be patient if there is not something frustrating us? Think about that.
2. “Love is kind”.
3. “Love does not envy”. So it is content with what it has and does not seek anything or anyone else to feed the “self”.
4. “Love does not boast”, so it is content with what it has: no less, no more.
5. “Love is not proud”. (There's that word “pride” again.)
6. “It is not self-seeking”, even though I really don't want to get out of my comfort zone or give up my goals and aspirations;
7. “it is not easily angered”, even though the person that I love has made me angry and will do so again;
8. “it keeps no records of wrongs”, so that I cannot use something against the person that I love later for my own gain.
9. “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth”, because if I am not being truthful with the person that I love, I am being evil.
10. “It always protects”, even though I am afraid;
11. “always trusts”, even though my trust has been broken before;
12. “always hopes”, because even though I sometimes feel hopeless, Jesus loved me before I loved Him and He enables me to love others;

13. “always perseveres”, even though it is not going like I imagined that it would, and now I have no energy left and am ready to give up.

So here is what I perceive love to be: love is *other person centered*. That person can either be another human, or God. You hold no expectations of getting anything in return. You only think about, and work towards, what is better for the other person. From your perspective, love is an incredibly one-sided thing.

And this thought that love is one-sided is incredible when you think about God's letter in the book of Malachi. God said, “you have stopped loving Me, but I don't need you to love Me, because My duty is to love you irrespective of what I get out of it”.

That is where the astonishing miracle comes in from being in a loving two-way relationship. You wake up one morning and here is this person

- sacrificing for you,
- looking out for you,
- putting you above themselves.

Now, you are not called to only seek out such two-way relationships: Jesus commanded us that we should love everyone, even if you are the only one giving. But when you get it back—man! You are put to shame. Because if you empty yourself of pride, if you take that pride and lay it at the cross on which Jesus died, then you know you don't deserve what you get. And so you want to give the other person more. And then, by God's grace, the cycle continues.

## Conclusion

I am going to begin wrapping up. I started with song quotes, so I want to give another one now. In his song *Atlantic City*, Bruce Springsteen sings about a guy who just cannot get ahead in life. No matter how hard he tries, something always sets him back or puts in down. But he tries. In the process he makes some serious mistakes, and this affects the love of his life as well. At one point in the song he says

*“Our love may have died, our love may be cold, but with you forever I will stay.”*

I don't think their love is “dead” or “cold”. Their being “in-love”—which is a feeling and not the same as loving someone—may have grown cold, but I think he still loves her very much. He will give up anything and everything for her, and he will keep on trying no matter what they feel in the moment.

This is not a fashionable attitude to have today. Today, if someone bothers or inconveniences you, you are supposed to call it quits. People get offended when you put in the effort, because it robs yourself and you are supposed to be selfish. But this is exactly what we are called to do in our love relationships. Don't get me wrong: if you are in an abusive relationship, then you need to get out. You can still love someone and work towards their well-being without being romantically involved with them. I need you to please understand this clearly.

### ***Being abandoned: Loving Father***

Some of you here tonight understand love very well. You know its sacrifices and how much you have to pour out of yourself. Maybe you don't get it back. What you are doing is right. You are loving the way in which you should. Now, me saying that may not make you feel better, and that's okay. What I do want to say is that even if you feel like you are alone, you are not. You have a Father in Heaven who knows you better than you do and He sees everything. Jacob's wife Leah was not loved, but God blessed her greatly. I guarantee you that most of the time you are putting a loving smile on His face. One day you will be reunited with Him and He will be so proud of you. And you will be loved back more than you can imagine.

### ***Being hurt: Loving Others***

Others here tonight have loved and you have been hurt. You are not alone. I know that all too well. You being hurt isn't an excuse to stop loving. We need to continue doing so. Like we read in our passage, if we do not have love, we are empty and without meaning. For you I am going to leave with a quote by C. S. Lewis:

*"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it*

*will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."*

You might be someone here tonight who asks, “how can I love someone so perfectly?” The answer is that you cannot: you will always fall short of perfect love. And other people will fall short of loving you perfectly. You can never know someone as perfectly as God knows them. And that is why we have Jesus: Jesus showed us how we should love, that we must forgive if we are hurt and that we must repent if we are wrong or make a mistake. That is okay: we will learn and grow as we go along. And when we are reunited with Jesus, then we will be able to love perfectly.

### ***Being empty: Loving God***

The last group here tonight might have been blessed with having loving relationships in their lives. And they might be loving other people back. It isn't always easy—and mistakes are made—but at the end of the day it works out. But something is still missing. That something may very well be the love for God. God made you to know Him and if you do not, then you are incomplete. Incomplete in your knowledge, incomplete in your hope, incomplete in your love. Don't get me wrong: I believe you can and do love without having God in your life. And I am grateful for that, because you are reflecting love to others. And that is important, because they are loved by God, just like you are, and are deserving of love. What I am saying is that God makes love complete. I didn't come up with any of this on my own. And no-one told me in so many words. But from realising how empty I would be without Jesus, I have come to know all of

these things. He is still holding out for you: why don't make His day and turn the relationship from being one-way to two-way.