

The Glories of Love

Choosing To Love (part 4)

Summary: We have so far explored what love is not. Let us today consider what love is. This is the glories of love, the active part, the part that should be easiest, right?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13; John 15:9–17¹

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Introduction

Refusing Help to Save Others

Various persons have observed that no one has any more religion than he or she can demonstrate in an emergency. This was certainly true of Arland D. Williams, Jr., a bank examiner with the Federal Reserve System in Atlanta, [Georgia, USA,] who was aboard the ill-fated Boeing 737 that crashed in the frigid Potomac River shortly after taking off from Washington's National Airport, 13 January 1982.

Identification of the hero was announced in June of 1983. Representatives from the Coast Guard said when a helicopter lowered a line to survivors, Williams indicated he was trapped (it was later discovered his seat belt was jammed) and passed "the line on to other injured persons." By his not grabbing the rescue line, thus saving valuable time, other passengers were saved.

In presenting the medal to Williams's mother [and his children], President Reagan said: "You can live with tremendous pride in your father."²

This man was considered a hero but he did not actually do anything. He did do something, but his action was passive, in that what he did was to choose not to receive help so that others could be rescued much quicker than he. In this, he surrendered his own life to save others.

According to Jesus, this man's heroism is the epitome of love, representing its glories.

What & Why?

With this series, we are looking at how the apostle Paul described the love Christians should exhibit toward one another. This is the love we receive **from God** and thus we love this way **for God**.

We have so far explored **what love is not**. Let us today consider **what love is**. This is the glories of love, the active part, the part that should be easiest, right?

Explanation

Love is Patient

Love is patient, love is kind.

(1 Corinthians 13:4a)

The apostle's description of what love is begins with a passive verb: **love is patient**.

To be patient is to maintain one's composure under suffering; it is to not allow oneself to become angry when provoked by circumstances or people. It is self-restraint, refusing to complain, waiting some time for a change to occur.

While patience is passive, it is still a verb because patience does require us to do something. One must consciously choose to be patient.

Because the context of this chapter is the love for one another in community, the patience the apostle is encouraging is with people rather than circumstances, the people we live and cooperate with at least every week, for the same purpose and common interest.

In community with others, there are many temptations and provocations to anger with others, but the one who loves is patient.

Love is Kind

The description of what love is continues next with an active verb: **love is kind**.

The verb here is associated with gentleness as well as goodness. To be kind to another is to be loving and merciful toward them (Mic 6:8) in our treatment of them or our gifts to them. "It indicates action which alleviates pain, worries and fears of others and contributes positively to their happiness."³

To be kind then is to care about and provide for the wellbeing of another person, possibly ahead of your own.

In community with others, there are many temptations to react with angry words and to withhold needed gestures, but the one who loves is kind.

Love Rejoices in the Truth

Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. (*1 Corinthians 13:6*)

Interestingly, in verse 6 there are two instances of "rejoice": the negative encouraging us to not find joy in unrighteousness or evil and the positive encouraging us to **find joy in the truth** or that which is good.

By "truth" here, the apostle is not referring to the capital-T truth, but the lowercase truth, by which he means "whatever is true" (Php 4:8). When we see something that is true or someone acting in a way that is good, that is something we should celebrate.

At this time of human history, we absolutely must celebrate whatever is true, for there is much evil all around us and much unrighteousness in us. To celebrate whatever is true is to encourage the continuing pursuit of and adherence to the truth.

To find joy in the truth is a significant tool in our belt (Eph 6:14), that equips us to work with God to make his Kingdom come.

In community with others, there are many temptations to find joy in evil and unrighteousness, but the one who loves finds joy in truth.

Love Bears All Things

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(1 Corinthians 13:7)

Verse 7 creates a problem for interpretation. The apostle Paul uses the stylistic trick of repeating “all things” for effect, but this does tend to obscure his meaning for readers. The best thing for us to do, then, is to treat each of the following clauses as being separate.

The Greek verb that translates as, “bears all things”, is related to a word for roof. Thus, it carries with it the sense of either supporting or covering a heavy load.

Despite the seeming impossibility of it, **love bears all things**, which is to say love encourages us to support or carry a lot, for there is nothing that love cannot face. To stand silent in the presence of that which would annoy or trouble us, or be tolerant of the evil of others, is to bear hardship willingly for a greater purpose. We can certainly argue we personally get little or nothing out of facing such hardship but the greater purpose to keep in mind is the good news about Jesus.

But the emphasis here is not on what we personally endure—that aspect comes up in a moment—but the emphasis is on covering or concealing the faults of others. It is related then to the previously mentioned patience and kindness. In bearing all things, love protects others from being exposed, ridiculed or harmed, it corrects sin when it is known to have been committed. The love that bears all things bears it in others.

In community with others, there are many temptations to expose or react harshly to the faults and failures of others, but the one who loves bears all things.

Love Believes All Things

Despite the insults of our detractors, Christians do not mindlessly believe things that are not true!

In instructing that **love believes all things**, the apostle meant to have faith in others. It is to assume the best of others before we assume the worst. It is to give a person the benefit of the doubt, to err on the side of believing her rather than suspecting her.

To believe all things is to adopt a posture of trust in God, “that in all things God works with those who love him” (Rom 8:28). It is to imagine the success of God’s purposes in the world, that he is able to bring good out of evil.

In community with others, there are many temptations to assume the worst in and from others, but the one who loves believes all things.

Love Hopes All Things

To say **love hopes all things** is to expand on the previous, “believes all things”.

Love not only assumes the best in and from a person, but refuses to accept defeat when all he demonstrates is his worst.

Love has a conviction that God’s purpose in another person’s life will win out. He can be redeemed, but it may take some time, with lots of bumps in the road. Love refuses to take failure as defeat, it continues to bear and believe all things because where a person may fail God can bring victory.

In community with others, there are many temptations to give up on others, but the one who loves hopes all things.

Love Endures All Things

In the process of bearing, believing and hoping, one is going to have to endure ill-treatment. And without a good reason, all of us will break at some point.

But **love endures all things**. This means the one who loves expects to suffer and to face persecution, but continues to love people anyway. She refuses to stop bearing, believing and hoping, knowing there may come a cost to herself. Yet she loves anyway because she knows good can and will come out of it.

In community with others, there are many temptations to expect suffering, but the one who loves endures all things.

Love Never Ends

Love never ends.

(1 Corinthians 13:8a)

Between last week and today, we have explored the apostle Paul's description of the characteristics of love, the nature and action of love, the quality of love. All of that comes to a head with this final portrayal, that **love never ends**.

Some translations render this quality as, "love never fails". Thus, love is both never defeated and it continues against all odds. To love is not a 'once-off' but an 'always and forever' state of mind and action.

Considering all that love is and is not, what it does and does not do, it really is hard to imagine that love is even possible.

In community with others, there are many reasons to give up on love, but the one who loves never fails to love because love never ends.

From all of this, love therefore consists of being patient, kind, rejoicing in the truth. It involves bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things because love never fails nor ends.

These are **things that love does**, both in an active sense and a passive sense. Doing something is so much easier than refraining from doing those things we considered last week. It is easier to do something than to hold yourself back from doing what you want to do, isn't it? These are the glories of love, yet we may just discover doing these things can hurt sometimes.

Application

Patience Without Limits

In the apostle Paul's description of love, found in 1 Corinthians 13, we are reminded love is always directed toward another person. We do not love ourselves, for we do not need to be convinced to act in our own self-interest. We love others, which is to either act or refrain from acting for the benefit of others.

From the list we have considered today, we have found love, as the apostle encouraged, can be as simple as being patient.

There are many easy examples of patience:

Waiting For A Pie To Cool

Have you ever waited for a pie cooking in an oven. Have you then taken it out of the oven, excited to eat it, but when you bit into the pie, you burnt the top of your mouth?

In such situations, you need to be patient before you can enjoy the reward of yours or someone else's labour. Wait for the pie to cool!

Waiting For A Parcel To Arrive In The Post

Have you ever been excited about a parcel coming in the post? It can be a long, slow, frustrating process waiting for that parcel to finally arrive at your front door.

Cursing and thinking poorly of the delivery man or woman is not going to make the parcel arrive any quicker. Remember that Phil and Llewena are doing their best! Just be patient!

Waiting In Line For Your Turn

When someone steps out of line and tries to go in front of you and others who are waiting patiently, they are criticised as being rude.

People who wait in line for their turn are not only patient, but also respectful of others around them. It is good manners to exercise patience when waiting for your turn.

Putting Up With Someone You Don't Like At Work

Everyone has worked with or gone to school with someone they don't like. Sometimes we need patience with these people.

We need to listen to what they say, even though we often disagree with their points. A patient person gives even people they don't like respect and listens to them.

In fact, you may even learn something from someone you strongly disagree with!

Doing Things The Right Way (Not The Fast Way)

Watching someone struggle to do something right can be frustrating. So much easier to just jump in and do it the right way. Sometimes a shortcut might help you overcome your impatience but can also lead you and your team to a lower quality product at the end.

Teaching a Child to Ride a Bike

Teaching is one profession that requires a lot of patience. People often don't learn things the first time they're taught them.

Learning often requires a lot of patience and practice. People have to be taught things over and over again for them to have a "light bulb moment", that moment when someone finally understands something.

For riding a bike, it may take a long time for a child to realise he or she can balance on two wheels without falling. They need to develop confidence in order to reach that point.

I taught my children to ride their bikes and to do so was such a joy! However, I would be lying to you if I said I was patient in the process.

I took my daughter for quite a long ride one day, on the streets of Bankstown, Revesby and Panania. She was not at all confident and I was not at all patient. I put her at risk as a result and can only hope she has forgiven me by now.

When we are teaching someone a skill or some knowledge, we can get so impatient because it would just be simpler and faster if we did it ourselves. Yet to interfere with the learning process, especially with children, is to risk long term negative effects.

My daughter still prefers to be chauffeured around in a car and I simply can't afford the staff anymore —I'm kidding ☺

If we were being honest, being patient is not at all easy, for we are busy and important people! We have no time to wait for another person's incompetence to end in disaster, nor do we have the humility to allow another person's negligence to interfere with our own progress.

To be patient then is to experience some level of discomfort, if not outright suffering. It is not surprising our culture does not like nor encourage patience.

But wait! We do, in fact, like and encourage suffering.

The Grandest Archetype

The story I started this sermon with was the real life story of a man who willingly chose to suffer and die for the sake of other people being rescued. He was a hero although he was no one special and did nothing more than wait patiently for others to be rescued before himself, a choice which resulted in his own death.

His self-sacrifice was exemplary. To sacrifice oneself is so exemplary we retell such stories and celebrate the archetype in both popular and high culture. Some movie examples make this clear:

Pay It Forward (2000)

Pay It Forward, in which a tween boy sacrifices his life to live the ideals of service and sacrifice he learned as part of a school project.

Titanic (1997)

Titanic, in which a seventeen-year-old aristocrat falls in love with a kind but poor artist aboard the luxurious, ill-fated R.M.S. Titanic. Jack sacrificed himself for Rose, allowing her to move onto a float to escape the cold North Atlantic waters, yet he stayed with her —many argue he needn't have, but his sacrifice is still romantic.

Top Gun: Maverick (2022)

Top Gun: Maverick, in which Tom Cruise's Maverick character leads a team to destroy a foreign country's unsanctioned uranium enrichment plant. *[spoiler alert]* The team reaches the plant and destroys it, but engages surface-to-air missiles. Rooster, the son of Maverick's former co-pilot Goose, runs out of countermeasures, and Maverick sacrifices his jet to ensure Rooster's safety and ejects. Rooster then sacrifices himself to save Maverick from a helicopter gunship even though Maverick told him not to. All the American pilots survive and everyone's reconciled in the end. Happy happy joy joy!

Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness (2022)

Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness, in which Doctor Strange teams up with a mysterious teenage girl from his dreams who can travel across multiverses, to battle multiple threats, including other-universe versions of himself, which threaten to wipe out millions across the multiverse. The doctor risks dream-walking with the zombie version of himself to stop the Scarlet Witch from stealing her own children —okay, this is a hard example to explain, but the doctor's self-sacrifice saves the multiverse, end of story.

The point is, even in our most fantastical expressions of popular culture, the theme of self-sacrifice comes up again and again because Hollywood knows what the people want. Hollywood may want to subvert this grand archetype, but the power brokers and myth makers cannot deny successful movies celebrate the glories of self-sacrificial love.

Everyone is happy when the boy gets the girl, but a hero is admired and celebrated for his self-sacrificial bravery! That is when love is truly worthy of glory.

This is because self-sacrifice is an act of love for the benefit and well-being of others. Jesus himself stated,

This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. *(John 15:12-14)*

Jesus could command such behaviour because he himself acted in such a way. In fact, it is fair to say that contemporary Western cultural representations of self-sacrifice harken back to Jesus' own ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus' death was the example without equal. His self-sacrificial death led to his resurrection to eternal life, which reminds us that love, as taught and exemplified by Jesus, is the path to life. Let us walk in it.

Conclusion

There is no denying, the apostle's description of the glories of love —that love is patient, kind, rejoices in the truth; that love bears, believes, hopes, endures all things; love never fails never ends. The glories of love requires you to put effort into protecting and providing for the wellbeing of another person, effort which is very likely to come at a cost to yourself, a cost which may feel like you are giving up your own life, even if your life doesn't actually end there. Yet, according to Jesus, the cost of love is to our credit and is ultimately worth it.

Let us then be patient and kind and rejoice in the truth we see around us. Let us bear, believe, hope and endure all things for the sake of others. And let us never fail or give up doing so.

While it may have seemed like Jesus' love for us ended on the cross, his 'death' ended up being the doorway to life as our Creator always meant it to be, for him and for you and for me.

If we become known as a community that loves one another, that will be for our glory and will draw lost souls to consider placing their own faith in Jesus and to begin living a Christian lifestyle.

Jesus commanded his friends to love one another and that is the best command of all!

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 G. Curtis Jones, *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Nashville, TN, USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986), pg 49.
- 3 Orr, William F., and James A. Walther, *1 Corinthians*, The Anchor Yale Bible, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman (Garden City, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1976).