

NEVER GIVE UP ON LOVE

1CORINTHIANS 13:4-8

Recently, I ran across a list of comments from elementary aged children who were discussing the subject of love. These are *real opinions* from *real kids* about the thrills and chills of love...

On why love happens between a man and a woman a little girl named Mae, age 9, said this... "No one is sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell. That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular."

On what falling in love is like: John, age 9, says, "Its like an avalanche where you run for your life." Glenn, age 7, adds, "If falling in love is like learning how to spell, I don't want to do it. It takes too long."

On the importance of love: Greg, age 8, says, "Love is the most important thing... but baseball is pretty good too."

Here are a few general opinions about love: Floyd, age 8, puts it, "Love is foolish, but I still might try it sometime." A little girl named Regina, age 10, comments, "I'm not rushing into being in love. I'm finding fourth grade is hard enough."

You that are single perk up, here are a couple of surefire ways to make a person fall in love with you: Alonzo, age 9, makes this suggestion, "Don't do things like have smelly, green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love."

Here's a suggestion from 9 year-old Bart, "One way is to take the girl out to eat. Make sure it's something she likes to eat. French fries usually works for me."

And what about a few song titles for the person you love: Will, age 7, would sing, "Hey Baby, I don't like girls, but I'm willing to forget you are one!" And what about 8 year-old Larry's song, "You are my darling even though you also know my sister."

Finally, a few suggestions on how to make love last: Erin, age 8, "Don't forget your wife's name. That'll mess up the love." Dave, age 8, "Be a good kisser. It might make your wife forget that you never take out the trash." And last, Natalie, age 9, offers us some sage wisdom, "Don't say you love somebody, then change your mind. Love isn't like picking what movie you want to watch." A profound statement indeed!

As insightful as John, Floyd, Regina, Alonzo, Erin, Dave, and Natalie are on the subject of love... the most profound statement on love comes from God...

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, God tells us... "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

This is *real love*...it's a bold, and determined, and daring kind of love. This is the kind of love God has for us, and the love He wants us to have for one another.

I'm sure we all would agree that the safest kind of love is a mother's love. A baby snuggles and cuddles in her mom's arms and relies on her completely.

A toddler skins a knee and goes racing to his mother. Children need love and find it in their mother.

But as kids grow older they reach out to love people *other* than their *mother* and love becomes a risky proposition. By the time you leave Middle School, you've learned that people you love can let you down.

Friends and classmates can't always be trusted. Love leaves us vulnerable to hurt and disappointment.

Remember in elementary school, before admitting you loved the little girl who sat by the window in your 6th grade science class, you'd write her a note, "I love you. Do you love me? Check one: yes, no, or maybe."

Even in 6th grade, you were already looking for ways to buffer yourself from the pain of rejection. Before you took a chance on love you wanted a guarantee your love would be reciprocated. It doesn't take long for human beings to learn that love is risky business.

As adults, we've all experienced the empty feeling of having loved and lost... *Have you felt the pain of a failed friendship? Or the agony of a fading romance?*

Have you ever felt the awkwardness of living around a wedge driven between two family members? We've all been wounded deeply by someone we've loved.

Perhaps you were neglected by a sibling - or taken advantage of by a friend - or rejected by a spouse.

Maybe your teenager took and took and never showed a shred of gratitude for your sacrifices... You've loved and come out on the short end of the stick.

Is it any wonder, you sit here this morning just a little cynical about this subject of *love*. *Oh, if all love was as simple and unconditional as a mother's love...*

I know folks who'd never say they're against love. *Who in their right mind would be opposed to love?*

But there are people who only pretend to love.

They love... *sort of... or so-so*. The love they muster is a placid kind of love. Their involvements are kept at arm's length - their passion only rises to lukewarm temperature. Years ago, they stopped throwing themselves into other people's lives. Without realizing it, they became guarded, and protective, and closed off.

There are folks who deep in their heart have vowed to never let themselves love like they once did. They'll never become that vulnerable again. Love is too risky.

They'd rather skim through life, *like a rock skipping across the lake* - indulging in an occasional, superficial friendship - than to plunge head first into a relationship, and experience the thrills and chills of real love!

When we were young, we loved lavishly and unreservedly, but now that we're adults we know better.

We've opted to harden our hearts and nurse our hurts. We've allowed ourselves to grow bitter. In the wake of our disappointments, we've toughened up and grown callous. **Some of us, have given up on love.**

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is John 13:1.

John is recounting the events that led to the cross. His comment sounds like just a passing statement, but it sums up the heart of Jesus like no other verse...

John 13:1, "Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

Did you hear that? Over the following few hours, Jesus' disciples will abandon Him. In His moment of greatest need, they'll fall asleep and then flee in fear.

They'll even deny they know Him. One of His most trusted men will collaborate to kill Him... yet, listen again to John 13:1, He loved His disciples "to the end!"

Understand, **Jesus never gave up on love!**

Let's read our text again, 1Corinthians 13:4-8, "Love suffers long..." - like a Timex watch love *takes a licking and keeps on ticking*. You don't hear Jesus tell his disciples, "You knuckleheads, have got one last chance. Forsaking me in the Garden is one thing, but you better speak up for Me at Pilate's Judgment Hall."

When Jesus submits to the Roman scourging, He doesn't tell them, "Alright, you can beat me... but no nails, no cross. Right here is as far as I go." Instead, *love suffers long!* It bears with a burden as long as that burden needs to be bared. **Love never quits.**

Years ago, I was listening to his radio program when James Dobson interviewed a lady dying of cancer.

When she was first diagnosed, one doctor told her she should live out the rest of her days on the beach somewhere. Enjoy the sun and surf in Acapulco. Take advantage of the short time she had left to live...

While another doctor told her she could undergo grueling, brutal radiation and chemotherapy sessions with the hope of extending her life maybe 2 to 4 years.

She chose the treatments to extend her life. And this is the explanation she gave to her three small children, "I've chosen to survive for you. This has some horrible costs, including pain, loss of my good humor, and moods I won't be able to control. But I must try this, if only on the outside chance that I might live one minute longer. And that minute could be the one you might need me when no one else will do. For this I intend to struggle, tooth and nail, so help me God." Her care for her kids showed love's willingness to "suffer long."

Paul also writes, "Love is kind..." It's not harsh or demanding. Love leads, rather than pushes. Love's urgings are respectful, and its proddings are gentle.

"Love does not envy..." It never wants the blessing that God chooses for someone else. In other words, it reads the name tags on the gifts before it grabs them.

And it's happy for the person who gets the nice gift...

"Love does not parade itself..." It doesn't show-off, or attract attention... And it's "not puffed up..." Love is humble. It

doesn't mind picking up a towel and washing some dirty feet.
The purer the love the lessor the pride.

As a father of four kids, I've picked four noses, wiped four rumps, and cleaned the wax out of 8 ears - and I can honestly say I never once minded - *at least not the noses and ears.* Real love doesn't mind the dirty work!

And love **"does not behave rudely, does not seek its own..."** Love doesn't intend to embarrass anyone. It's always concerned for the feelings of the other guy.

It reminds me of a young bride-to-be who went to purchase material for her wedding dress. She asked for the noisiest material available. The clerk thought this was an odd request... *until the young girl explained... "My fiancé' is blind and I want him to hear when I reach the altar so he won't be embarrassed."*

Love **"is not provoked..."** Or **as the NIV puts it, "keeps no record of wrongs."** It doesn't hold grudges...

Love **"thinks no evil..."** It doesn't jump to negative conclusions. It always gives the benefit of the doubt.

Love **"does not rejoice in iniquity..."** Love doesn't take delight in someone else's sin. It's not waiting on the day when the other person blows it so bad it finally has a justification for giving up on that person. No, love isn't looking to resign. It grieves over iniquity and sin.

Remember it was love hanging on the cross crying out... **"Father forgive them they know not what they do."** How many times has Love repeated that same statement in regards to

your life? *A hundred times? A thousand times? Maybe a thousand times this week?*

Paul concludes, "**Love rejoices in the truth...**" Love despises clouds of suspicion - its irritated by gossipy whispers - it celebrates when the truth is made known.

"**Love bears all things...**" Love has broad enough shoulders to bear the embarrassment of another person's sin or shortcoming. Love stands up for the person who's fallen. If Jesus can bear the sin of the world, *with His help*, we can bear the shame of a friend.

"**Love believes all things...**" It's the eternal optimist. Love never gives up on what *should be* and *can be!* Love looks past the *actual* and sees the *potential*.

And "**Love hopes all things...**" No matter how dark the sky appears or how fierce the storm rages - **love believes the sun will shine again.** Love knows the night doesn't last forever. A new day eventually dawns.

And "**love endures all things...**" *Thirty-nine lashes laid to His back...7-inch iron spikes pounded into His wrists and ankles...a ring of thorns piercing His sweaty brow...blood oozing into His eyes...a pointed javelin thrust between His ribs...the jeers of the crowd...the terrifying rush of sin over His spotless soul...feelings of isolation from His Father in heaven...a tightly-wound shroud...and three days in a wet, cold crypt...that's what love endured for us!* **Love endures all things.**

And with the love of Jesus we can endure *problems in our marriage...or rebellion in a child...or difficulties with a church*

member...or conflict with a neighbor... Love endures. It outlasts...and it pushes through...

Love is all these things, and yet there's one more truth that applies to love. Paul shouts out the crescendo for all the world to hear, **"Love never fails."**

This is why a lover is always a hero. When my capacities diminish and abilities fade, and I lose the wherewithal to impact others with my reasoning or my strength, I can continue to influence through my love. *Love never fails.* The person who loves always wins.

At the end of his career, Babe Ruth was a shell of the star he'd once been. No longer a slugger for the New York Yankees he was now an error-prone right fielder for the Boston Braves. *In one inning, the Babe's poor play had accounted for five Cincinnati runs...*

As he walked off the field, boos and catcalls rained down from the stands. It was embarrassing. When Ruth neared the dugout, a young fan jumped out of the bleachers; the boy ran to his hero and with tears streaming down his face, clasped onto the Babe's leg.

Babe Ruth didn't hesitate, he scooped up this child in his arms, gave him a big bear hug, and then set him down on his feet, with a playful pat on his head. It was a kind and heart-warming gesture from the ball player.

And it effected the crowd. The boos ceased. A hush fell over the stadium. Suddenly, a different standard was being applied to this baseball has-been. His performance was no longer as important as his heart.

Though his abilities had receded, it was his love that still made the Babe special. He still had a big heart for his fans, and in the end, it was his love that endeared the crowd to their hero. This is why **love never fails.**

Jason Tuskes was a 17-year-old honor student, who was also an expert swimmer and an avid scuba diver.

Jason loved his parents and had a great relationship with his younger brother, Christian. The four of them constituted a loving, and tight-knit, and happy family.

One Tuesday morning, Jason left home and headed for west-central Florida where he and his friends were going to explore some underwater caves. Jason had promised his mom he'd be home for dinner. It was her birthday, and the family had plans to celebrate...

But Jason never returned.

That morning he got lost in one of the underwater caves and panicked. He tried to slip through a narrow passage and got pinned. He couldn't free himself.

At some point in the struggle, **Jason realized his fate and took off his yellow oxygen tank. With his diver's knife he engraved a message into the paint on the tank. It read, "Mom, Dad, Christian - I love you!"**

Obviously, Jason never stopped loving His family. He loved them even to the point of death. Jason's final actions upon death were illustrative of Jesus' attitude toward His disciples, **"He loved them to the end!"**

Realize, this is how Jesus loves us. "He loves us to the end!" His love has no expiration date or statute of limitations. It never stops caring. His love never gives in to fatigue, or discouragement, or frustration.

Jesus never runs out of love.

Don't doubt Paul's statement, "Love never fails" - *for you are its proof*. That you are God's child today is the result of God's never-failing, always-prevailing love!

Listen to what little Dave, age 8, says about love. "Love will find you, even if you are trying to hide from it. I have been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me." Yet take the boy's comment and substitute the word "God" for "girls" and you've got the story of our lives!... "Love will find you, even if you are trying to hide from it. I've been trying to hide from it since I was five, but God keeps finding me."

And God keeps finding you! Perhaps you've run from His plan and bucked His will. You've rooted in and stiffened your neck. You've insisted on your own way and hardened your heart - *but God keeps finding you!*

There's a famous poem that refers to the Holy Spirit by the metaphor, "the hound of heaven." I hope you realize this morning that you've been *sniffed out and treed* by the love of God. Without a doubt, if you're a Christian, you are proof that "Love never fails."

Over the fourteen years we had her, I learned a lot about God's love from my dog. I could come home upset and ticked off - and vent my frustrations on that dog. I could talk to her in

mean tones... and the next time I would come home she would be right back at my feet wagging her tail, letting me that she loved me.

A dog's love is unconditional and so is God's love.

Don't misunderstand, **God's acceptance of us is highly conditional.** God forgives and bestows His favor only on people who commit their lives to His Son.

But whether you accept Jesus or reject Him - God still keeps loving you regardless. *His love never fails!*

Do you realize, God loves every soul that's in hell?

Actually, God never sends anyone to hell. Everyone in hell is there because they've chosen to be there.

Hell is populated by folks who chose to reject God's love. At times, people may *fail* to receive God's love, but *God's love never fails!* Jesus loves people today to the very end. **His love never, never, never gives up!**

So I ask you, **"why have you given up on love?"**

You see, it's one thing for me to *receive love*, but it's an entirely different thing for me to *believe in love*.

For years, I benefited from God's love, without ever trying to live it out in my own personal life. I believed love was *free for the taking*, but what I didn't realize was that love should be *me in the making*. God wants us to live out the love with which He has loved us.

On traditional church calendars, the Thursday before Easter Sunday is called **"Maundy Thursday."**

The word "Maundy" is Latin. It means "*the day of the Mandate.*" It harkens back to the night before Jesus was crucified when He gave His disciples a new commandment - *a new mandate.* In John 15:12, He told them, "*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" They were to love one another, even as He had loved them - *to the very end.*

Jesus mandated that love be our **modus operandi.**

For a disciple of Jesus, love is not an occasional foray... it's not an excursion from the typical routine. For the believer in Jesus, love needs to be a way of life!

Ernest Gordon paints a powerful analogy in his novel, "*Miracle On the River Kwai.*" The Japanese Army were using Scottish POWs to build a railroad bridge in the jungle. The soldiers were near despair.

They'd abandoned all military rank, and order, and discipline - *even decency.* The Scottish soldiers were at each other's throats...until one afternoon... at a checkpoint a shovel turned up missing. The Japanese officer in charge was furious. He demanded that the missing shovel be turned over immediately - *or else!*

Fearing that all the POWs would be killed, one the Scottish soldiers stepped up. The officer laid down his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the soldier to death.

Then he made the prisoners carry the man's bloody corpse with them the rest of the day. It was barbaric.

At the next checkpoint, again the tools were counted, but this time there was no missing shovel. As it turns out, the soldier had died due to a simple miscount.

Quickly, word traveled through the camp that a man had laid down his life for the sake of others. Suddenly, the attitude within the camp was radically altered.

Decency and order returned among the men. The Scottish troops started caring for each other. The prisoners began to treat each other like brothers.

And this is the effect the work of Jesus should have on us! The world *laughs* at those who *love*. Doubters scoff, "[Why care about folks when they don't care about you? It's better to look out for number one. Nobody else will.](#)" But among us, love should be in fashion! Giving and sacrificing for the other guy should be in vogue. Jesus set the pace and we should follow.

In secular history, an interesting quote appears by a Greek writer named, Lucian. He lived between 120 and 200 AD - and witnessed firsthand the lifestyle of the early Christians. Lucian writes, "[It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first leader, Jesus, has put it into their heads that they are brothers.](#)" *Has it gotten into our heads, and planted in our hearts...that we really are brothers and sisters?*

When was it that you stopped loving?...

What was it that scared you off?...

It doesn't really matter because on the day you came to Jesus you received **a new mandate**. When we were kids, we loved all-out - *with a reckless abandon*. Now we're God's kids, and we need to dare to love again!

Let me ask you, *"Do you really believe in love?"*

Do you love your parents, now that they've found fault in you? Do you love your spouse, now that he or she has let you down? Do you love that wayward son or daughter, now that they've been a disappointment?

Do you still love your estranged friend, even though he's mistreated you, and now wants your forgiveness?

I believe there's a marriage here today...

In the beginning, you both were givers. You served and sacrificed for each other. You thought more about each other, than you did yourself. But now, you've stopped fighting to make your marriage work and keep love alive... Somewhere along the line you retreated into your corner - like a tired boxer you've given up.

Ladies, you want your husband to change, but rather than offer your support, you've discovered it's easier to just point out his deficiencies. Rather than encourage him to godliness, you're content to get your own way.

And men, *have you given up on love?* You say it takes long hours at work, but we both know it's easier to work a little longer than it is to come home - and help with the kids - and minister to your wife's needs.

It's easy to give up on love.

Perhaps you've about to lose your patience with your testy two year old - or your disrespectful Middle Schooler - or your teenager who wants the privileges, but none of the responsibilities... *Why care? Why try?*

Why keep loving? Because it's love that never fails!

Saint Augustine was not always a saint. There was a time when Augustine was quite a hell-raiser. He drank alcohol, and gambled, and indulged in illicit sex - and his shenanigans broke his poor mother's heart.

Monica was a fervent believer who loved the Lord and prayed constantly for her son. She devoted her whole life to praying for Augustine's salvation.

One day, Monica was so concerned for her son's soul that she asked a priest to visit him and try to show Augustine the error of his ways. When the priest said he didn't feel comfortable in visiting her son, Monica broke down and began to weep and sob profusely.

The priest told her, "Lady, you have nothing to fear. It is not possible that the son of such tears should be lost forever." Augustine's mother, Monica, never gave up on her son, because she never gave up on love... and eventually her love led to her Augustine's conversion.

If you're serving God, one of the greatest temptations you'll face is to give up on love. *For love takes longer...*

If you prefer instant results - be a manipulator, or an intimidator, or an agitator. For a while, you can pressure people into action - and bully them into service. Ignore love and you'll accomplish a lot more in less time...

But what will you have truly accomplished?

Our goal in serving the Lord is not raw results - what we should be doing is nurturing others into a maturing faith, and a Christ-like character... *virtues that can't be pushed or forced*. If you want people to really grow spiritually, it takes time, and patience, and lots of love.

Early in my ministry, I learned a vital lesson... I had a friend I had leaned on heavily. For months, my friend was a constant help. But when he started dropping the ball I got angry and I came down hard on this fellow.

Rather than love him and let him lean on me for a while, I expected him to shape up or ship out. So my bruised and injured friend **shipped out**. *He left us*.

I was crushed. As I prayed about it, I was trying to figure out what had gone wrong - that's when the Holy Spirit spoke three words to me, **"Love never fails."**

I realized my awful mistake; *I had given up on love!*

Later, I sent my friend a letter of apology, and in it, I quoted a poem. It reads as follows, **"I was told in the Bible that I should dare to love, and with this commandment comes strength from above. To love was my duty, and it became my delight; trusting in my Jesus - walking in His light.**

Love rode with my intentions when I reached out at first, but then I went with my inventions, and we took a turn for the worse. I resorted to lesser methods in relating to those I held so dear, all because I stopped believing in the love that was in gear.

Love is only a gamble to those who lack in faith. For those who stick to loving have never lost a race. Never stop believing, even if love seems to fail. Continue in His loving - it is certain to prevail.

Please forgive this doubter when he gave up on love. He thought he'd devised a way - a way better than to love. He failed, but maybe he has learned what the Apostle Paul said well: That love will never fail - you see the passing time will tell."

Perhaps it's a person in your office - or maybe it's a family member - or a neighbor - or even a friend at church... and they're acting more like an enemy than a friend. They've made you mad, and ticked you off, and have caused you frustration... *How do you react?*

How do you treat them? Do you tell her off...give him a piece of your mind...or do you treat them with love?

Just remember, **love never fails!**

Once upon a time, it looked as if love had failed...*What was successful about hanging on a cross?*

Love had been beaten, and bruised, and tortured, and crucified - but love kept coming - *Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday night - then Sunday morning it busted through...*and it became apparent to everyone who saw, that love still lived! Love never fails!

Thus, don't you ever, ever, ever give up on love!

Don't just love the people who love you. Love those hard to love folks that Jesus has placed in your life. And love them like Jesus did...Love them to the end!