

EXPLORING
FAITH, HOPE, &
LOVE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my wife Sophie who challenged my immature ideas on love; and my family who encouraged me to not give up. I also want to thank my friends Anita and Mark for taking me seriously enough so that I knew I had some healthy strategies when it came to growing in love.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The art on the cover for this book depicts love, hope, and faith in the midst of the darkness, with wind and water currents all around; it is a beautiful thing to behold. The darkness, the wind, and the waves are adversaries worth challenging; requiring a solid commitment, a direction, and a central focus of purpose. The light shines in the darkness like a flickering of supernatural love; the hope for the people is the support of a sturdy boat; and the faith is hidden in the hearts of the fishermen in the boat. It makes for a captivating adventure worth taking and re-telling.

In this book I take a look at love, hope, and faith based on what I have been learning from my bumpy journey through the darkness into the light. I have learned that having correct theology on what Love looks like won't by itself grow love. This book became my goal or hope that I pursued with my faith in Jesus, that led to me navigating a learning curve that involved embracing humility which led to love.¹

I admit it—every time I see a Scripture in the Bible dealing with love I want a recipe that will guarantee me living it out. Who doesn't do this? I have come up with a lot of recipes in my faith journey over time, some have been dropped and others modified, as life lessons accumulate and hope moves me forward.

¹ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Dismantling the a Tree of Knowledge of good and Evil Within so Love can Thrive*

In this book I will focus first on love, then hope, then faith. The chapter on “Love” is focused on 1 Corinthians 13, whereas the “Hope” and “Faith” chapters are more philosophical but with a God focus. The hope and faith sections offer a framework on how to view reality, and relationships in a way that leads to caring enough to love.

2 Love

Focusing on and loving concepts won't necessarily bear deep and abiding love. I have found from experience that if I look for truths on how to love I won't necessarily end up loving people, because as time goes by concepts become more important than "wanting" to love people. Also, if I seek power to love, I won't necessarily love either, because then I may always be waiting for power to love; or when I am weak I won't love, because I complain that I don't have the power to love.

Focusing on love out of caring for people leads to the ability to love. Love is the way. Not truth, and not power. Only love. Love grows in weakness, not strength. It is not about being in ministry and holding onto power, position, and pedigree so we can somehow be an authority on love. We must focus on love: "Doing to others what we would want done to us"² in the context of grace, and in this way we will live out our destiny. When we care enough for people we will find ways to love them: no obstacle will defeat us; no lie will keep us; no weakness will prevent us. Only grace will seal us.

Whatever love is, it is either cold and refreshing or warm and soothing; it is not a lukewarm affair. Often sparks are flying in the dark as we fight our way through to wholesome caring love.

I still remember my early struggles and attempts to

² Cf. Matthew 7:12

consciously love the people in my life after starting to read, *The Greatest Thing in The World* by Henry Drummond. The book starts out by quoting (in King James English) 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love in the Bible. The language used for this text was difficult to understand, but better to me than the modern versions I read during that time. The Old English version made love loftier, more exciting and mysterious, and worth aiming for. But it did not instruct me on how I was to go about loving, because I didn't understand many of the older words. About the only thing I got out of the text was that I was supposed to—with pure motives and God's help—give good things to those people I met.

The modern versions that I read of this text seemed dull to me at the time, as though they had no depth, even though I grasped more of the English words used in them. In reality, my heart was hard, I was a poor lover, and only later would I see the words from this text more closely for what they stood for. I would realize that they have a depth and beauty that waited to resonate with the renovations that God did to my heart over the years as I walked with Jesus. At the time, it did not matter which bible version I used of this text. I understood very little of what was said by any of them, because my foundational beliefs were incorrectly laid within my heart. I told myself that I did not know what love was, which was more true than false at that time. The quality of our love determines our knowledge of love whether we can express it in words or not.

Love seemed to be something that only God could properly

do this side of Heaven. And because I thought only in “all or nothing” terms, it provided me with very little incentive to continue along God’s path. I also wrongly put the same pressure I used to accomplish everyday tasks in trying to love. We have to co-operate with God in order to love. Love does not come from putting pressure on oneself, and I unfortunately put pressure on myself.

My standards for achievement were set so high that I set myself up for continual failure. Because of this I did not navigate a healthy learning curve when it came to the way of love. Who is going to attempt something that she or he believes is impossible to accomplish? Perfectionism kills love. Perfectionism causes guilt. A better way to love is to do just what is needed to get the job done.³

C.S. Lewis⁴ made the distinction between the natural loves and supernatural love, and how they complement each other. If I had known the thinking behind his observation my confusion, judgmental attitude, and legalism could have been replaced by truth, understanding of the “big picture” and a chance at real wholesome growth in supernatural love with God’s help along with embracing the natural loves wholeheartedly. My theology was really poor, and it prevented me from seeing the good in others (especially non-Christians) I am sad to say. Mine was a black and white, “all or nothing” worldview based on incorrect interpretations of certain sayings found in the Christian Bible.

³ Insight from my friend Anita

⁴ The Four Loves

There are natural loves: Eros (romantic love), Philia (enjoyment, fondness, and friendship), Storge (family loyalty), and Charity (helping the less fortunate); and then there is supernatural love. The natural loves (which all humans possess as gifts from God from the moments of their conceptions in their mothers' wombs), are good as far as they go, but they are lacking in some important ways. Supernatural love completes or extends the natural loves, and lifts them up to where they ought to be. Supernatural love encompasses love for one's enemy, which is impossible without God's grace.

Politicians, lawyers, Democrats, Republicans, Conservatives, Liberals, Communists, Socialists, Tax-cheaters, Tax-payers, the unemployed, the working, the rich, the greedy, the poor, robbers, extortionists, addicts, pot smokers, Mormons, Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, Moslems, Jehovah Witnesses, leaders, followers, slaves, free people, rapists, pedophiles, murderers, the proud, the humble, homosexuals, and every day people everywhere all possess the natural loves in one degree or another. Perhaps falling short here or there and excelling elsewhere. But that is not what God wants most. God wants us to love supernaturally: extending, completing, and lifting up the natural loves to where they are destined to reach, only with His help.

Many people are very compassionate, loving, tolerant, and peaceable, but have yet to realize that it was God who gave them that goodness when He created them in their mothers'

wombs.⁵

We love because God first loves us. When we experience God's love, some of us can go far and deep along the path of love. Others go weakly or much shallower. We all want to grow in love, be kinder, more caring, more compassionate, and more patient. But how do we move past those things that block us from growing in the freedom to love supernaturally? Those interior things that lash out, or cause us to compromise what we know to be love.

For those who don't have a relationship with God, the first step is getting in touch with their God-shaped vacuum, and drinking in the grace that God pours out through Jesus Christ. This comes from making a commitment to give up sin (i.e. not wanting to love or pay the price to love other people) with Jesus' help, and then to follow the way of love through trust in Jesus and His companionship. He will never leave nor forsake us.

How does it work? Through grace. A relational definition of "grace" means that God loves us whether we do good, bad or have apathy. This means that we don't have to earn God's love by doing good and He doesn't stop loving us when we do bad. This is another way of saying grace is unconditional love. When God touches our soul/ heart we become alive to grace and immediately live for a higher purpose. Those who have nothing to die for have nothing to live for. Willing to die for love is where mature love takes us through grace.

⁵ I am in debt to my wife Sophie for this insight.

I'm not saying this will give us the inner fuzzies for eternity, rather God's touch gets us through thick and thin as we trust Him, remember His goodness, listen to Him, and follow Him in friendship.

The second step is to forgive those who have hurt us in some way, along with asking Jesus to forgive us for the hurts we have caused others. And receiving God's forgiveness and healing emotionally; not just intellectually⁶.

The third step is to pray for humility, and to kill the prideful attitudes that we have⁷. When we grow in humility we will grow in spiritual health and love for people.

Next, we live in the moment, aiming to love out of caring for others by receiving, and giving grace (the way Jesus directs) while implementing the Golden Rule in all our relationships.

⁶ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Expanding the Twelve Steps* for good advice on how to work through forgiving people

⁷ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within so Love Can Thrive* for a healthy grace filled strategy to do this

