

WITH God in Faith, Hope & Love  
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Text

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NRSV

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Faith, hope and love – A life lived WITH God is marked by these three. A life lived under, over, from or for God always falls short of them.

If you have been following along with us through this series, then my hope is that you have noticed some things in yourself and in your relationship to God. I hope you are more able to notice:

- Which areas of your tend to be marked by fear and a need for control...
- How those fears and that need to feel secure lead you to treat God like a thing instead of a person...

And I especially hope you are noticing how

- Trying to appease, manipulate, or bargain with God never brings about the peace and security you long for.

I know I'm noticing these in myself a lot more! I know I live with doubt, cynicism and fear more often than I care to admit. Somehow those seem more real – and more realistic – than Faith, Hope and Love. It's easier to believe in them than to believe that God loves us, never mind that God LIKES us and God WANTS us! This is what it means to be God's Beloved.

(Core)

To know the love of God that never ends means that we come to know God as God truly is, and know ourselves as who we truly are – and always have been.

Of course, this was true among Jesus' first hearers too. Jesus wanted to train people to live in Faith, Hope and Love. The Sermon on the Mount is basically the condensed version of all Jesus' teaching and training with that goal. It is Jesus' way of describing how to live a free, generous, peaceful, and fearless life – which Jesus. But as Skye Jethani discovered when he taught a course on the Sermon on the Mount, that is not how most people look at life. He asked his class, "Do you think Jesus was serious? Do you believe he actually expects us to live the way described in the sermon?" (pg 126). I think you can guess the responses he got

"It's just not possible to live that way," said one woman. "No one can really love his enemy or give that generously. Jesus was exaggerating to make a point."

"It's unrealistic," another man said. "This world is going to walk all over someone like that."

Paul's description of love morning probably felt equally unrealistic – even foolish – to the church in Corinth. They were so fixated on how to get God's blessings and then flaunt them that they probably thought Paul was exaggerating to make a point.

We hear Jesus say "love your enemies" and Paul say "Love never ends" and we think: They can't possibly mean that!

But what if they did mean it? And what if Paul is so adamant about Faith, Hope, and Love because he had already tried the other ways, and knows they don't work? Notice how, in the opening sentences of 1 Cor 13, Paul deconstructs the four postures we have been looking at. He says that if he receives miraculous gifts from God such that he could speak in the tongues of men and and angels, but doesn't have love, then it means nothing. Living for what you can get from God won't work. Then he takes on life over God: The ability to understand the great mysteries, possessing all the knowledge of how the Watchmaker has made the watch... this can't compare to the importance of love. He dismisses life under God with his description of faith that moves mountains. And he even says life for God – giving everything away, becoming a martyr, etc – is of no benefit apart from love.

Paul has tried all of these. So have we. God has something far better for us!

At the end of his book, Skye Jethani has three chapters that focus on the WITH-God life, and as you've probably guessed they are about life WITH Faith, WITH Hope, and WITH Love. To help us understand Faith, Jethani recalls an image that Henri Nouwen once used. Nouwen says Faith is like being on a trapeze. We are the one who swings, and God is the One who catches. Faith is having the courage to let go.

We can take this image a little further to understand hope. While in mid-air, we enjoy the peace and assurance that God will not let us fall, but will instead catch us. Hope is allowing ourselves to enjoy the thrill of soaring.

Once caught, the experience is complete. All that remains is the love between the Catcher and the caught.

This is what Paul means when he says that Love never ends.

There will come a day when Faith and Hope are no longer needed. Faith is the courage to surrender control. We know how difficult this is to do when there is so much to be afraid of. “But a day is coming when all dangers will be disarmed, and when God’s goodness and glory will cover the earth” (Jethani 167). If, as the author of Hebrews puts it, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” then there will be a day when everything is revealed.

To grow in our ability to trust so much that we let go, and allow ourselves not to be in terror but to be in pure joy, and to let God grab hold of us and feel completely safe – this is what it means to be beloved of God. This is God’s deepest desire for us.

(Call)

Don’t settle for being less than be God’s Beloved.

What I mean is: Even though it may feel like under, over, from or for are the only ways you experience God, I invite you to at least notice when that is happening. And when it does, say out loud:

God, I want to let go.  
I want to let you catch me.  
I want to know the fullness of your love.  
Help me do that.

Amen.