

Real Love

Intro (David)

This message on marriage was supposed be on Valentines Day, which was last Sunday, but I was speaking at Taupo last Sunday. Valentine's Day wasn't associated with romantic love until the middle ages, and it wasn't until the 18th century in England that it evolved into an occasion in which lovers expressed their love for each other by presenting flowers, offering confectionery, and sending greeting cards. These days, it's a big commercial enterprise centred around love and romance. Today, Lyn and I want to take some biblical principles about the real love found in 1 Corinthians 13, and talk about how we can apply those principles in marriage. We have been working on this for 45 years now. We still don't always get it right. In fact, as I was putting this message together, Lyn had a minor scrape with the car. I have to confess that my response wasn't the greatest reflection of biblical love! So we are still on the journey.

What we are going to do is share together a mix of translations of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, trying to bring out the truth of what the Bible teaches about real love. Here's how the New International [Version puts it](#): ***"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails". (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV)***

Before we begin we have a little exercise we want married and engaged couples to do during this message. We want you to hold hands. We want you to do this so that you don't get tempted to play the Holy Spirit and try convicting your partner with a nudge whenever you hear of one of their shortcomings. But while you are holding hands, whenever you hear something that you know the Lord wants to deal with in your life (not in your spouse's life but your life) you can give his or her hand a little squeeze. That little squeeze is saying "I know this is me, and I need your help to change".

But we also want to be affirming, so as we are speaking we have asked some of the pastoral staff to help us by giving out a Valentines rose to couples that they think demonstrate some of these qualities that we are going to talk about.

1. Real love is patient and kind. (Lyn)

[I live with a very patient](#) and kind man. He's definitely far more patient than me and has helped me change quite a lot over the years. Another version translates the word patient as "longsuffering". One of the things you discover in marriage is that sometimes the other person either doesn't get it, or their rate of change in dealing with issues in their life is painfully slow. Patience means giving the other person time and space to change. Being committed to a lifelong relationship means that there is time for change to take place. If that patience is in an atmosphere of kindness, then change can happen. Kindness is caring for the other person's needs before your own. It's looking after the kids to give her a break. It's listening to him after he's had a hard day. It's being willing to pitch in and help. It's being gentle when she is feeling vulnerable. Kindness means thinking about the needs of the other person and doing something about it. Kindness is putting [this scripture into practise](#). ***"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* (Ephesians 4:32 NIV)**

2. Real love doesn't envy. It's humble. (David)

[Real love looks like this](#). It's proud of the achievements and gifts of the other person. It delights when the other person is centre stage. If you are married, stop and ask yourself this question "Am I proud of the person I am married to?" If you are, tell them. Affirm all the things they are good at. Tell them about the qualities you admire in them. True love doesn't parade itself. It doesn't boast about its own achievements, but boasts about the achievements of others. Love doesn't strut. It doesn't have a swelled head. True love is humble. True love keeps thinking "I'm really blessed to be married to you". Some of you men may disagree, but I think I'm married to the most beautiful and talented woman in the world. She's a great cook, wonderful with children and a whole lot more that I've told her, but I won't tell you now because I don't have time. All over the country there are marriages that are foundering because one or both partners have such a high opinion of themselves and such a low opinion of the person they are married to. When we are proud and stubborn, saying sorry is not something that comes easily. Often it's pride and arrogance behind the assumption that we are always right. For a marriage to work, there has to be [humility](#). Ephesians 4:2 says ***"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one***

another in love." Pride builds a wall around us that prevents the other person getting close. But humility towards one another does just the opposite. It opens us up and makes us vulnerable. And vulnerability is the garden in which the flower of love can grow.

3. Real love is respectful and selfless. (David)

[It's not rude, or ill-mannered](#). I don't know if you feel this way, but when I hear married couples putting each other down in public, I cringe. Respect means no name calling, no sarcasm, no shouting. It means courtesy. It means listening to the other person without interrupting. It means honouring and valuing the other person – their ideas, their skills, their talents, their achievements.

Nicky Gumbrell tells the story of a couple who never listened to one another and used to argue so much that their kids paid for them to see a psychiatrist. When they went into the psychiatrists office they were still arguing, so much so that after a while, the psychiatrist got up, took the woman in his arms, and gave her a passionate kiss. Then he turned to the husband and said "Now she needs that at least twice a week." And the husband said "OK Doc, I'll bring her in on Mondays and Thursdays."

Real love doesn't insist on its own way. It isn't selfish. It isn't always "me first". Lyn and I have learned that when we are both selfless, we both win and our marriage wins. When each of us has the attitude "My primary aim in this marriage is not my own happiness, but your happiness", it's amazing what happens. The whole atmosphere in our home changes because the question is not "What do I want" but "What is best for you and what is best for our marriage relationship". [Here's a scripture that deals with this](#) ***"Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."* (Philippians 2: 2- 4 NIV)**

4. Real love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. (Lyn)

[Real love is not quick tempered](#). It doesn't fly off the handle. It's not irritated by every little thing. That's a huge challenge for me. I have to really work at that. Love keeps no record of wrongs that others do, is not resentful, thinks no evil, doesn't keep score of the sins of others. Wow! Another huge challenge! You can think you've forgiven, but then that disagreement happens and you find yourself reviewing previous situations and what he said and did, and there you go – you're counting the score all over again. Keeping a record of wrongs helps to keep your partner in a box – you make assumptions about motives and suddenly he's the enemy that you have to get even with or get around somehow. You have to win! I am still learning, but as time goes by I realise I am learning to overlook more and more things that annoy me, and move on – not get stuck by them. You may have heard the story of the couple who had been married 50 years. She was asked "What's the secret?" She said "When we were married I decided I would overlook 10 of his faults. Every time he did something stupid I would say to myself "Lucky for him that's not one of the 10"

In a relationship it's not good to overlook sinful behaviour that should be faced and corrected, (physical or emotional abuse etc). but most things are not in that category. Most things are just annoying. Resentment comes from lack of forgiveness – holding on to things – choosing to take and hold offence. Forgiveness is an essential process [in a marriage](#).

***"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* (Colossians 3:13)**

5. Real love does not delight in evil or wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. (David)

[There is a phrase](#) that most parents have learned about bringing up kids. Catch them doing things right and praise them for it. We all know how condemnation crushes the spirit of a child, but praise and encouragement motivates them to do the right thing. Hey people, the same truth applies to marriage. If you are constantly finding fault and pointing out the failings of the person you are married to, you are crushing their ability to love you. But if you are constantly affirming them, always looking for the good in the other person, it's amazing how that attitude can make love grow. Believe the best about each other. Always assume that the other persons motives are good. Here's another scripture to [put into practise](#).

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Philippians 4:8 NIV

6. Real love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (Lyn)

Wow!! Always!! What a tall order. But let's take each point and look at them in more detail.

Love always protects, is always supportive,

Love is willing to take on anything that will threaten to harm or break up the relationship

- We have made an agreement that we can talk about anything together, even difficult issues like feelings for someone else or doubts about the security of our relationship.
- Things like our fears and failures – things that might make us feel ashamed
- We agree to support and protect each other through difficult times
- To invest in marriage or individual counselling if necessary (which we have had in the past)
- To be committed to change
- To stay connected even when we may feel distance between us for whatever reason

It always trusts, believes all things, trusts God always. Real Love is trusting

We know that trust is an absolute key to intimacy and a life-long relationship

- A breakdown of trust will destroy your marriage if it's not repaired
- One of our mottos is "We are on the same team"
- We trust each other's motives – that they are for good in our relationship
- We choose to believe the best of each other rather than assuming the worst
- We are loyal to each other both in public and private
- We believe and trust that God is on our side and working for us

It always hopes, hopes all things, is hopeful, and always looks for the best

Hope is so important. Without hope people die, and so do marriages

- So when it looks like nothing will ever change
- Keep hoping (in the believing sense)
- Know that this thing you are going through is part of the refining fire
- If you stick with it, you will have something to praise God for
- You will have something precious like gold

It always perseveres, endures all things, doesn't stop trying, it bears up under anything and everything that comes

Like a marathon runner who perseveres and pushes through the pain barrier again and again to get to the finish line

This is the heart of the traditional Marriage Vows

- To keep loving through all things – for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health
- To not quit when the going gets tough
- To keep believing there is a way through any problem or situation. We've been tested on that on numerous occasions. God is faithful and He knows the way through the bog
- To be totally committed to each other and your relationship, knowing there's time to work on things

7. Real love never fails. (David)

The model for real love is the love of God as seen in Jesus. Our human love does fail. Our human love is often tempted to give up. We need to finish by saying that all of these characteristics of love are impossible to achieve in our own strength. On the human level it's hopeless. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to love the way Jesus loved. We can love one another through his power and grace.

Over our years in ministry we have had many times when couples have come to us in despair. Often they will say that they have no loving feelings left for one another. Their marriage is just an empty shell. They have lost hope. The joy and sparkle that was once there has all gone. When they do that I will often tell them this parable.

There was once a young couple that moved into a brand new apartment. They loved it. The carpet was new. The paint was new. The windows were clean. It was a delight to live there. But as the years went on, they stopped vacuuming the carpet and cleaning the windows and fixing the leaky taps. Rubbish piled up. Flies and cockroaches were everywhere. The place stank. The shower was filthy and the sink was full of grease and dirty dishes. The grass was growing up to the windowsills. It was a mess. They used to think "I hate living here. I want out"

Now that couple have three options. All of the options are painful.

Option 1: They can stay living the way they are and be miserable.

Option 2: They can walk out and leave the mess and look for a new apartment. That sounds like a good option, but in 5 years time the new apartment will be just like the one they hate living in now. It will be even more painful if that happens.

Option 3: They can roll up their sleeves and do the work that should have been done right from day one. It will be hard. It will be painful, but there is the promise that the apartment can be all that it was in the beginning.

No matter where your marriage is at, God wants to help you make it even better than it is now. He can give you a love for one another that is more than you could ever imagine. His love never gives up. If you are willing to let him change you and make you all he wants you to be, and you are holding your spouse's hand, just give their hand a gentle squeeze. If you have done that, stay for a moment at the end of the service and pray together, inviting the Lord to help you have his love for one another.