

**+ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 + Love Is a Big Word +  
+ The Wedding of Kristin Cowher and Emmitt Bidwell + 20 June 2015 +**

Dear Family and Friends of the Bride and Groom, especially you dear Emmitt and Kristin,

Felicitous, auspicious, rapturous conviviality or simply supercalifragilistic-expialidocious—big words describing the happy, joyful, exciting event that we're celebrating today. When we think of big words, we often think of really long, tongue-twisting words with all kinds of letters and syllables that usually mean something simple. Why not just say happy or joyful or exciting?

Then there are other "big" words that aren't so long and tongue-twisting—words like truth and peace and life. In the lesson from God's Word that we just heard, there's a "big" word in there too. It's easy to say, but often very misunderstood. It's easy to read, but difficult to put into action. It's a big word that the Lord uses to describe what should be at the heart of your Christian life and marriage, and above all, the main reason for what he's done for you. What our God is teaching us today is that **LOVE IS A BIG WORD** that comes with big responsibility and God's even bigger grace.

Now if we were to go around and ask everyone here to define the word "love," I'm sure we'd get 50 different answers. Defining love is a lot like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. It's difficult to say the least. I would guess that most of the definitions we would get would be feelings or emotions based on how you feel or I feel about another person—typically with a deep-down-inside attitude that I should expect to get something out of it.

Yet real love according to God's standards is more than just emotions. If you take a closer look at what St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, you don't see all that much emotion. You don't see him talk about feelings. Instead, you see love in action. You see what God expects love to do and to be and what God expects love to not do and be. It becomes pretty evident that real love according to God's standards isn't some easy emotion, but difficult because it makes me act on behalf of another no matter how undeserving that person might be at times. It's especially challenging when that love is applied to a sinful man and a sinful woman joined together in marriage.

God tells us about such love in action. ***"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."*** Doesn't so easy, does it? Love in a marriage comes with big responsibility! Such self-sacrificing love between a husband and wife isn't just putting up with each other and the kids, but being patient even when the other is being frustrating and even being patient without complaint. Such self-sacrificing love between a husband and wife isn't just being nice, but actually showing kindness. Such self-sacrificing love means not getting jealous when the Lord blesses your spouse with success. On the flip side, it means not being arrogant and boasting when you do succeed. Such self-sacrificing love means making decisions and setting priorities and living your life in a way that does not bring dishonor or disgrace to your spouse or your family or your God.

Pretty big responsibilities, but there's more! It's very tempting to let your temper fly when you get angry about something. The love God wants to see in your marriage means controlling that temper, while being quick to forgive and letting that error go rather than keeping a ***"record of wrongs."*** That's pretty difficult when you consider how well our minds remember how someone close to us has wronged us in the past. The truth is absolutely necessary in a marriage and when a husband and wife can truly trust each other, there is a special joy that God provides.

***"Love...always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."*** These are pretty strong expectations. As you look ahead to your life as husband and wife, there will be times when you won't always protect, won't always trust, won't always hope, won't always persevere. Plus there will be times when you will fail each other.

Now why is that? Well, when God created marriage at the beginning of time, our first parents Adam and Eve could and did love each other perfectly, but then they failed. They bought into the lie that they should doubt what God says in his Word and that loving yourself is the better way. Sadly they passed that failure, that sin to every generation down to you and me and on to our children. Ever since then, every married couple has failed to love as the holy God expects and that always leads to death.

I hate to tell you this, but you're going to fail to love each other perfectly too. You won't always be patient or kind or humble or self-sacrificing. You'll be proud and quick to get angry and keep a record of wrongs. You'll sin against each other and forget to forgive one another—and at times like that, here's what I hope and pray you'll remember most about love.

It's not the emotion or the passion or the feelings or the romance. Love is a big word that comes with big, impossible responsibility, but also with God's even bigger grace. Grace is another one of those "big" words that knocks your socks off when you understand what it really is. It's something we've talked about in class and what your kids will learn when they study God's Word. Grace is God's self-sacrificing loving kindness and mercy that went into action to save undeserving sinners like us.

That's a pretty long definition, so I'll let God's Word explain that "big" word. The Apostle John writes in his first letter (4:9-11,16b), ***"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."***

Since God is love, his self-sacrificing love went into action. God knew how you would fail to love perfectly. He knew how you would be like your first parents and fall for the lie that you shouldn't listen to him and should love yourself first. He knew all that, and still he demonstrated his undying love for you by sending his only Son Jesus to live in your place—to be perfectly patient and kind and humble, always protecting, always persevering, and never failing. He did that for you in your place, and then he took all your failures and placed them on his own almighty shoulders as he sacrificed himself on the cross for your sins. Your sins ruined your relationship with God, but Jesus brought you back with his forgiveness, with his mercy, with his sacrifice, with his love for you.

So now you can love one another. Like St. Paul says, your love for one another as husband and wife is a reflection of God's love—not perfectly, but reflecting his self-sacrificing love for you. In love for each other being loved by the Savior, you can carry out those God-given roles of husband and wife, head and helper as God established them in the Garden of Eden. In love for each other being loved by the Savior, you can carry out the important God-given task of training up your kids to understand the true meaning of God's self-sacrificing love in Jesus by bringing them to worship and Sunday School and spending time together in God's Word as a couple and as a family. In love for each other being loved by the Savior, you can model for your children that Christlike self-sacrificing love in how you act and speak towards each other recognizing that God in his grace brought you together in Christ.

Emmitt and Kristin, it is my prayer that the Lord cause his self-sacrificing love to grow between you and in your family today and always until he brings you to be with him in the glories of heaven where you will enjoy his perfect love forever. God richly bless your marriage with his love! Amen.