

**Reeks:** *Keeping Love...*

**Titel:** *...What's Love got to do with it?*

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Good morning, friends. It's good to be with you. I'm glad you decided to come to church rather than go to Oppikoppi. I was talking to the guy who works our sound at... in Benoni at our church who's going to his ninth Oppikoppi festival this weekend, so I said to him, how were the last eight? He said I don't remember a thing.

It's really good to be with you. We start a series today, Keeping Love. I'm going to start the series this morning. Johan will be with us next Sunday morning as he looks at the birth and the death of romance, and then on the third Sunday, which is in two weeks' time, I'll close the series off as I explore the theme trust and betrayal, trust and betrayal.

Obviously the series will, I think, be helpful to those who are married, but we are very aware that in a congregation like ours here at Mosaic a large, large percentage of us are either single or divorced. Many on the staff here are single, and we are hoping that each of the messages, while they hopefully be helpful for those who are married, will be helpful to every person who comes to worship.

I don't know if you've heard about that couple who've been married for 50 years, and it had really been a struggle. They had fought and bickered and argued, and eventually they made it, 50 years, and when they were celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary their children got together to decide on a gift that they could give to their parents who had been married for 50 years but who had struggled so much, and so they decided to send their parents to the best psychiatrist that they knew in Benoni, the best psychiatrist hang out in Benoni, and so they sent them off to see the guy, and in the first interview immediately they started fighting again, bickering, arguing with each other and then, during the interview the psychiatrist got up and he did something which was really not ethical. He walked across to the woman, he lifted her to her feet and he kissed her, and he said to the guy this is what your wife needs at least three times a week, and the husband just looked at him open eyed, and said to him, okay, doctor, okay, I will bring her in on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

We joke a lot about marriage and about relationships, but underneath all our laughter often there is a lot of tears, a lot of heartache, a lot of struggle. I read an article, I think it was about two weeks ago, in the Star newspaper, a very, very, very good article, I thought, entitled Are You Trapped in a Half Happy Marriage, not bad enough to leave, not good enough to fulfil. Not bad enough to leave, not good enough to fulfil.

Many of our relationships often are like that, and maybe that's where you are today, and my prayer is that if that is where you are, that that is going to be the place where God meets you and me today. God always meets us where we are. Can I say it again? God always meets us where we are, and when God meets us God always meets us with grace, with an invitation to something new, and with a challenge to change.

Now, it's against this backdrop, friends, today that I want to invite you to come with me to Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthians were really struggling. They were really battling the Christians in Corinth. They were battling in their relationships in the church, they were battling in their relationships in the community, they were battling in their relationships at home, and what Paul does in the letter to the Christians in Corinth, and this is what I like about this letter, is that he deals very practically with the issues that they are struggling with.

For example in the seventh chapter, and if you've got your leaflet with you you may want to take it out of the folder that was given to you as you entered the door. I have put on one side large portions of 1 Corinthians 7, which I'm not going to delve deeply into today, but I really commend that you read that passage. It's where Paul deals with lots of practical issues about marriage and relationships and divorce.

He deals with the question, for example, of sexual intimacy. There are some Christians in Corinth who believe that the closer you get to God the less you need a sexual relationship, and Paul says, nonsense, and he talks about how a husband's body belongs to his wife and a wife's body belongs to her husband, and he talks about a mutuality that is so needed between husband and wife.



He deals with the issue of divorce. On the one hand he holds out a vision of marriage as a lifelong commitment, and yet he's deeply realistic and he acknowledges the pain of divorce and he responds to that, and some of you, if you've got a particular interest in that, I preached on that subject in May. You can download that or get a CD if you want to.

He deals with the issue of singleness, for many people a very painful issue, and he writes... Paul writes in a culture where if you were a young adult you got married and singleness was looked down upon, and Paul responds to that in 1 Corinthians 7, he elevates singleness. In fact, he says for some people it may even be a calling, and he suggests that singleness is an opportunity, sometimes a painful opportunity, so serve God wholeheartedly and single-mindedly.

He deals with the issue of when a believer is married to a nonbeliever. He deals with that. You can read all about that in 1 Corinthians 7, but I'm not going to go into it at depth. Rather what I want to do today, this morning, I've got about 20 minutes, is I want to take you to the great love chapter in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 13. Tina Turner sang a song, I was going to have the video here but they didn't allow me to have it, Tina Turner sings with her raspy voice what has love got to do with it, huh.

If Paul was here this morning, Paul the apostle, he would want to say to Tina, Tina, love has got everything to do with it, everything. Paul the apostle believes deeply that love lies at the heart of human flourishing, that when we love someone we really come alive. Paul knew that. Paul knew that we are made by love in love to love. Paul knows that. That's why he writes this chapter, and yet he also knows that love can be badly misunderstood, and so what he does, and I want us to memorise this verse today, it's a very short verse. What he does for us in 1 Corinthians 13 is that he gives to us a very beautiful description of what love is.

He describes love in this way: he says love is patient and kind. Can we say that together? Love is patient and kind, and I want us to take that description of love today into every relationship that we have, with a partner, with our children, with our parents, with our mother in law, with our mother in law, with our mother in law, every relationship we have, I want us to take that description with us.

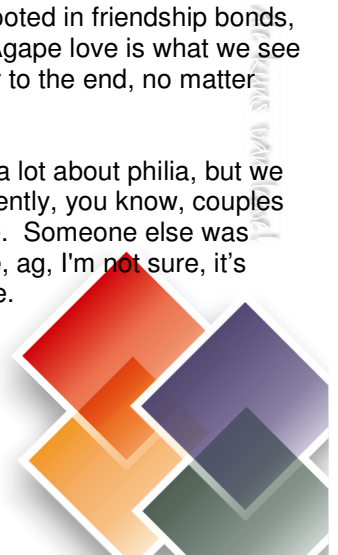
I want us to notice a few things about that simple, simple sentence. Notice a few things with me. Notice first of all that when Paul speaks about love, notice this: he uses a very specific Greek word. Now, I'm not trying to be larney when I start talking Greek. He uses a very specific Greek word, and I want some of you who are making notes to write down this Greek word.

The English language is very impoverished when it comes to the word love. It only has the word love, and the word love gets used and thrown around in all kinds of different ways. I love dark chocolate. I love it when the Lions beat the Bulls, and then we say to the person closest to us I love you. Now, we've taken the same word, we've used it for chocolate, we've used it for rugby and we've used it for marriage. No wonder we get... it gets... we kind of lose its meaning.

The Greeks had a number of words for love. They were very wise. They had a number of words. They had the word eros. We get the word erotic from it, sexual love. Paul could have used that word when he spoke about love but he doesn't, he doesn't. They used the word philia. Philia is brotherly love or friendship love. We... Philadelphia is the city of brothers they say. Paul doesn't use the word philia. He could have. Paul uses another word for love. Can I give it to you? Agape.

A G A P E. Agape. Agape love is that love that God has for us. Agape love is the love that we see in Jesus Christ. Agape love is not rooted in desire so much, although it can include that. It's not rooted in friendship bonds, although it includes that certainly. Agape love is rooted in the will, in the will, in the will. Agape love is what we see on the cross, that's agape love. It is God saying to us on the cross I will love you faithfully to the end, no matter what. That's agape love. I will love you faithfully to the end. That's agape love.

Now, our culture knows very little about agape love. We know a lot about eros, we know a lot about philia, but we don't know too much about agape. I just think of some of the things that I have heard recently, you know, couples saying to me, ag, we'll see how long it lasts. We'll see how long it lasts. That's not agape. Someone else was speaking to me. They were talking a bit a relationship they were in. He was saying to me, ag, I'm not sure, it's friendship with benefits, or we just want to hook up with someone. Agape love is not there.



I'll never forget someone in my life saying to me, someone very wise, Trevor, a good marriage, a good partnership in life is like a three legged stool. There's eros; sexual love, there's philia; friendship love, but those two come and go. The third leg is always agape love. Agape love. I will love you faithfully to the end. No, I don't think we can do that without Christ. I really don't. I don't think we can love agape without Christ. I just don't think it's possible. I really don't think it's possible.

I was leading a retreat yesterday at Origins at our retreat centre with some Mosaic people, and I got a text message early in the morning from a young guy, he's in his early... I think early 30s, married, two kids, and I got it at about nine o'clock in the morning, and he texted me and he said please pray for me, so I texted him back and I said what do you want me to pray for, and he said I'm angry.

Now, I know what he's angry about. He's married, he's got two kids, and things are not going the way he wants them to go. I know that, so I texted him back and I said, okay, I'll pray for you if you promise to also pray for yourself through this day. That's what I said to him. Last night he tweeted on Twitter these words for the whole world to read. Now, he's been praying all day I think. Lord, he tweets, how do people stay married, love each other, forgive each other, be parents, raise children, have meaning and purpose in their loves without You? Today I've learned I can't.

Without Christ it's very hard to agape love someone, and maybe for someone who's really battling today, maybe your battle is an invitation to allow Christ into your life in a fresh way, but let's make another observation. Paul describes agape love with two words. He says... secondly he says agape love is patient. It's patient. Here is my homemade prescription of patience. Patience is suffering through another person's imperfections. That's patience. That's how God loves us. That's how God loves us.

God suffers our imperfections. God doesn't give up on us, hey. God stays with us as we wrestle and struggle with all our different imperfections. God is patient with us. God is patient. I love that bumper sticker: Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me, huh, hey. God works gradually and slowly and patiently with every one of us and I love that about God. I love that about God.

Many years ago there was a book published about God called Your God Is Too Small. I would love to write another book called Your God Is Too Fast, huh, hey, and we live in an instant culture, and we want a fast God, and we want God to come unto our life and within 24 hours make us whole. It doesn't work like that, huh. It doesn't work like that. God works patiently with us, works patiently with our imperfections, and then calls us to reflect that patience with the imperfections of those people roundabout us.

I think that's one thing about an intimate relationship. In an intimate relationship imperfections come to the surface, huh, and then, what do we do? We start looking at others and we begin to fantasise about how perfect they are, huh, and we think about so and so's husband, you know; he's really perfect, or so and so's wife; she's just the perfect wife. My one is imperfect, hey.

Patience suffers another person's imperfections, stays with that person as they work with their imperfections, huh. Please be patient with me. Please... I want to say that to my family often. Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet... yet. God is patiently at work, with you, with your partner, with your spouse, with your child, with your mother in law as well, huh. Love is patient and kind.

Here's my description of kindness. Kindness does not treat people as they deserve to be treated. Kindness... kindness responds to people in their needs. Can I say that again, because I thought a long time about that? Kindness does not treat people as they deserve to be treated. Kindness responds to a person's needs, how they need to be treated. That's how God deals with us.

Thank God that God doesn't treat us like we deserve to be treated. Thank God! We'd be written off, but God responds to us as we need to be treated. We need unconditional love, and that's what God gives us. We need an acceptance, that's what God gives us, and then God calls us to give that same love, that same kindness to those in our lives. That's what kindness does. Kindness always seeks to respond to what this person needs.

I'm going to share with you a questionnaire that was done in a local Methodist congregation. I'm not going to tell you which one. There were over 900 respondents. It was given out to people in intimate relationships with each other, and wives were asked what they needed more of from husbands. Husbands were asked what they needed



more of from their wives, and we listed... we got a lot of responses in and then we listed the top five needs from one to five.

Now remember, these are Methodists, okay. You will pray for them as you see these needs, okay. This is what... this is what women needed more of from the men in their lives. Look at the top one. We'll stay with it for a while, a real need for the guy to share his thoughts and feelings. Now my... Debbie, the woman I'm married to would not have that number one. She usually says to me when she can't sleep, Trevor, will you share your thoughts and feelings with me deeply so I can go to sleep. Her number one would be most probably more time to watch Master Chef. I don't know what it is. I don't know what it is, but that is number one, but this is... this was number one.



Look at what number two was. I just wish that he would plan special moments together more often. That was number two, the second need; that he would just plan more good times together. Look at number three; that he would listen, that he would listen, huh. Number four, this came in at four, this was... I found this very interesting, that he would facilitate moments of worship and prayer. I find that particularly challenging when I looked at all the needs listed. The fifth one, the one... that he would share household tasks. Now, I fail on almost all five of them. Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet, not yet, not yet.

What do you think was number one for the guys, huh? Trivial pursuit question: what do you think number one was, huh? No surprises. No surprises at all, hey, not at all. Look at number two. I found this interesting. It was kind of just... the guys just needed lots of affection, just little gestures of affection, a touch, just affection. Guys need affection. Look at number three; just... often we just want to have more fun together, playfulness. Number four was interesting because sometimes this need to be affirmed, need to be affirmed or thanked, maybe even admired. Maybe it's the ego thing. I don't know why that came in at number four. Number five was listen, listen.

Now, maybe those lists can get you talking, maybe when you go leave this place today and you talk about each other's needs. Maybe you want to list your own top five and share that with person in your life. Maybe you want to ask your children to list their top five, and share your needs as a parent with the child. Kindness does not treat people as they deserve to be treated, huh.

Kindness does not treat people as they deserve to... it treats people as they need to be treated. That's what kindness is, and I don't know about you, but at my funeral one day I just pray to God that those who may thank me for my life will say Trevor was a kind man, he was a kind man. I would love them to say that. I don't know if they will. I would love that.

So let me bring this to a close. What I've tried to do today very simply, using Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13, I've tried to give you a vision of love, a very simple but a very beautiful vision of love. It's patient and kind, it's patient and kind, and I'm praying that somehow God will speak to us all, that we'll take that vision with us into every relationship that we are part of, huh.

Love is patient and kind, and maybe the first step, and this is my specific invitation to you this morning, maybe the first step on a new journey into love is to confess our failures, and maybe today we can just say sorry to God and sorry to those in our lives that we've let down. My greatest failures in life have been failures in loving, and I'll talk more about those failures when we speak about trust and betrayal.

We've all failed in loving. Can we confess that today, huh? Can we go into the Klipkerk after the service, maybe as a couple, maybe alone, and just say to God, God, I have really failed your vision of love, and then, let's invite Christ again and His agape, his agape love into our life. Let's receive His love so that that love can deepen in our life, that we can grow in that love and then share it with others. That is my invitation to you today as we begin our series, a vision of love. Let's confess our failures so that we can start again freshly.


Let me pray for you. Dear God, when we speak about these things I know it brings memories of failure, of inadequacy, of heartache, of pain. We find it very difficult, Lord, to love the way You've loved us, very difficult, and we know that without you we cannot, and so we come to you at the end of this service together. This is why we are here today, for You to meet us in a new way, and as Bill prayed earlier, smile on us, Lord, Your smile of love.

Visit us again, visit us again with Your spirit that we may receive again the kind of love with which You have loved us, and then help us, Lord, to begin to give that love and to share that love and spread that love in those relationships that make up our lives. This is our prayer, this is our longing, this is our deep desire, and we offer it to



You, Father, in the name of the Jesus Christ and for His sake, and we say together as God's people, Amen. Amen.

Well, friends, today is a duvet day, so I hope it will be a good day for you, but above all, may the joy of Jesus Christ, the wild, wild joy of Jesus Christ be with you. Have a good day, friends. God bless you. Take care.



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