

Love Casts Out All Fear

by Joe Aldrich

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding our true value and living according to God's love, which is essential for our growth and transformation.

Duration: 57:52

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 13:34, 1 Corinthians 13:5, Ephesians 4:1-15, 1 John 2:5

Topics: "Fear"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of discipline and love in parenting. He explains that effective discipline comes from a child's understanding that they have disappointed someone who loves them. The speaker also discusses the role of context in evangelism, stating that building a relationship and demonstrating love is necessary before sharing the message of God. Additionally, the speaker highlights the power of prayer and the need for personal transformation before expecting change in others. The sermon concludes with a reflection on surrendering to God's purpose and treating others with value.

Transcript

When I was a youngster, I still do, but I had a lot of fantasies. And when you're young, the line between reality and fantasy often gets blurred. And I always wanted to fly an airplane, and in my dreams I flew a little peach craft made out of a peach box around our orchard at home on the farm where I live.

And I always wondered if I got some boards and put them under my arm and get up on the roof and ran the length of the roof and jumped off, whether or not I could fly. And I wasn't really sure whether I could, but on the other hand, I wasn't really sure I couldn't. And I was not a student of aerodynamics, but I knew that, you know, airplanes had wings.

And one day I was thinking about this, and about the same time, a little neighbor buddy, Wesley, came over from the next farm. And I said, Wes, I've got a great idea. I said, I really think that if we got some boards and put them under your arms, and we got you up on the roof of the barn, and I'll be the air control tower, and you know, you'll be the airplane.

It's always more fun to be the airplane because you get to fly. And I'll just have to sit there and, you know, give the orders. I think if you ran the whole length of the peak of that roof and leaped off that you could fly.

Well, he was kind of a skeptic, but I was a good salesman. It wasn't too long before old Wes was up there on the end of the barn, and I told him, now stay right on the top of the ridge. You know, don't get down the side, just go full bore all the way down.

When you get to the end, it's a great big leap. And Wes, you're going to be flying all over the orchard. It's going to be a, you know, really an experience.

Well, I checked the air, you know, make sure everything was all right. And boy, on your mark, get set, go. And he went right down the ridge of that barn.

You wouldn't believe it. Took a gigantic leap and went right off straight down, fortunately, into the manure pile at the back of the loafing shed. Probably saved his life.

And the myth about flying with boards underneath my arms died. You don't like this that way. There are a lot of myths that we carry into adulthood.

And one of those myths is that we can't do anything. There are a lot of information items that come to us from inappropriate sources that become haunting. And as a result, we're greatly limited by our lack of understanding of what we might do.

I think of Joan of Arc. And I have an illustration here that illustrates, I think, very well. In the first part of the 20th century, a French peasant made by the name of Joan of Arc was called upon to save her country from its enemies.

With her sacred sword, her consecrated banner, and her belief in her mission, she swept her enemies before her. She sent a thrill of enthusiasm through the French army such as neither king nor statesman could produce. On one occasion, she said to one of her generals, I'll lead the men over the wall.

The general said, not a man will follow you. Joan replied, I will not look back to see whether anyone is following me. But the soldiers of France did follow Joan of Arc.

And she saved her country from the British and then fell into her hands. While the fires were being lit around the stake at which this 19-year-old French peasant girl was to be burned alive, she was given a chance to regain her liberty by denying what she believed. In choosing fire above freedom, she said, the world can use these words.

I know this now. Every man gives his life for what he believes. Every woman gives her life for what she believes.

Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, and yet they give their lives to that little or nothing. One life is all we have to give. One life is all we have to live.

And then it's gone. But to surrender what you are and live without belief is more terrible than dying, even more terrible than dying young. But there's a worse fate than living life, or excuse me, there's a worse fate than living without belief.

It's to live with a firm commitment to that which at the end of life, at the portals of eternity, turns out to have betrayed you. And this morning, we kind of asked the question, when you and I come to the end of our life, and we have nothing but death to look forward to, nothing but memories to look back upon, what will we need to conclude that our life was a success? And the first thing we saw was an individual needs to

surrender to a purpose. Paul says in 2 Timothy, we cleanse our lives that we can become instruments for noble purposes.

And so the first priority of our life is to submit to the control of God and to express his character. And we chatted a little bit about the more manward dimensions of the outworking of God's purposes, and that is to treat something according to its true value. And if you and I are going to be in the business of marking men and women for Jesus Christ and leveraging them towards the cross, and if God is going to take our five loaves and two fishes or our bologna sandwich, and he's going to multiply it, then we need to be certain that we are responding appropriately to value.

And we saw that this value begins with looking at ourselves. Walking through the forest one day, a man found a young eagle which had fallen out of its nest. He took it home and put it in his barnyard, where it soon learned to eat and behave like the chickens.

One day a naturalist passed by the farm and asked why it was that the king of all birds should be confined to live in the barnyard with the chickens. The farmer replied that since he'd given a chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it never learned to fly. Since it now behaved as the chickens, it was no longer an eagle.

Still, it has the heart of an eagle, replied the naturalist, and can surely be taught to fly. He lifted the eagle toward the sky and said, you belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly.

The eagle, however, was confused. He did not know who he was, and seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again. The naturalist took the bird to the roof of the house and urged him again, saying, you're an eagle, stretch forth your wings and fly.

But the eagle was afraid of his unknown self and world and jumped down once more for the chicken food. Finally, the naturalist took the eagle out of the barnyard to a high mountain. There he held the king of the birds high above him and encouraged him again, saying, you're an eagle, you belong to the sky, stretch forth your wings and fly.

The eagle looked around back towards the barnyard and up to the sky. Then the naturalist lifted him straight towards the sun, and it happened that the eagle began to tremble. Slowly he stretched his wings and with a triumphant cry, soared away into the heavens.

It may be that the eagle still remembers the chickens with nostalgia, may even be that he occasionally revisits the barnyard. But as far as anyone knows, he has never returned to lead the life of a chicken. And I think a lot of us illustrate the truth of an old Yiddish proverb that says, if one man calleth thee a donkey, pay him no mind.

But if two men calleth thee a donkey, get thee a saddle. And one of the things that we need to be liberated from is the realization that we're not donkeys. We're the king's kids.

Our value grows out of the value that God has attached to us. And he says he's committed to us as he's committed to the sparrows because of the great value that we have. And the pilgrimage toward wholeness is a pilgrimage that begins by treating God according to his true value and then treating ourselves.

According to our true value. The third phase of the process is treating others according to their true value. And I'd like to look at this process for just a few minutes as explained to us in Ephesians chapter four.

And here we'll see a behavior change model. We'll see the mechanism, the theory, the philosophy, the essential ingredients of kissing frogs. Now, all of us are waiting on a lily pad, aren't we? For someone to come along and kiss us warts and all and move us on toward beauty.

And then I want us to look at the mechanics of it. We'll look at the mechanism in Ephesians chapter four. And then we're going to look at the mechanics or the practice of doing this from first John chapter four.

Now, if you remember the argument of the book of Ephesians in the first three chapters, Paul presents the incredible truths of redemption, reconciliation, and then the revelation of the church. And having finished his theological section, as he does in many of his epistles, then he moves to the practical implications of that theology. Remember, Romans follows the same pattern, chapters one through 11, and then chapters 12.

I beseech you, therefore, on the basis of God's mercy, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice. And immediately he starts talking about the body of Christ because it's in the body of Christ, this transforming community that the theology of the first part of these books becomes operational in our experience. Same thing in Ephesians.

Ephesians chapter four, verse one begins, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, beseech you that you walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called. And then he goes and talks about all the unities. There's one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all who's in us all, through us all and so forth.

And then he drops down and he reminds us of Christ's incarnational ministry, how that he descended to this earth, he entered into conflict with the foes of our soul and he ascended victorious. And it's a picture of a Roman military conqueror coming back from battle victorious with all the booty. He sacked the cities and he's robbed the treasuries and the museums and everything else.

He gets his buddies all around, he gives all the goodies away. And the text there says, and the Lord gave gifts. He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for their work of ministry.

And he goes on to tell us why, so that we no longer be children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But he goes on, speaking the truth in love, we will grow up in all aspects into him who is the head. Now I want to take that little phrase, speaking the truth in love, we will grow.

I think that is probably the most significant statement of the philosophy of how God changes the life of anything in scripture. Three things he's talking about. The first is intent.

And if you and I are going to be effective in a ministry of multiplication, our intent must always be the growth of the individual that we're relating with, relating with and to. The second is content, truth. Truth is the tool, the only tool basically that moves us on toward maturity.

Maturity is always a return to the truth about ourselves. It's truth that sets us free. So the individual who is going to be effective in multiplying his gifts and seeing one become a thousand, the individual who knows truth, the individual whose life is grounded in truth, the individual whose life is truth.

But truth alone is not enough for growth because truth has a soil in which it takes root and produces growth. And if that soil is not there, truth produces bitterness. So we have intent, that's growth.

We have content, that's truth. But we also have context, that's love. It's not just speaking the truth.

Truth without love is brutality. And love without truth is mushy sentimentality. And this passage is telling me that long before I've earned the right to say anything, that is communicate content, I have to carefully build the context of love.

Because love greatly influences the impact of truth. If you can come to me, you can say, Aldrich, I don't like the way you talk, or I don't like the fact you wore a tie, or I don't like the way you comb your hair. Well, you deliver me a verbal message, that's 7% of effective communication.

38% is tone of voice. 55% is totally nonverbal. And if I get the message from you, from your tone of voice and your nonverbal communication, you don't give a rip about me.

What you say may be true, but the chances of it contributing to my growth go way down. You know, the ultimate test of love, if I claim to be a lover, and I used to think I was. When I was a teenager, my motto was, rush em, mush em, crush em, flush em.

And that's what I did. Well, then I got married, and boy, I discovered I didn't know anything about love. Didn't know anything.

I discovered that a marriage license is just a learner's permit. I discovered that everything in one person nobody's got. Someone has said that marriage begins with a prince kissing an angel and ends with a bald-headed man looking across the table at a fat lady.

In fact, Plato said, Baal means Mary. If you find a good wife, twice blessed you'll be. If not, you become a philosopher.

Lord Chastbury said that if the Pope had been married, he would have never come up with such a ridiculous doctrine as papal infallibility. I think that shows a lot of wisdom, a lot of insight. But marriage begins like a tree with blossom on it.

And if fruit is going to come, the blossoms have to disappear. You can't have it both ways. The evidence that I, as a husband, am loving my wife is her growth and beauty.

The purpose of love is always to call forth beauty. Ephesians chapter 5. Jesus Christ loved the church, and he gave himself for it. So he could present it to himself, not having spot or wrinkle or blemish.

And one of the great missions that you and I have is to be about the business of building beauty into the lives of those people that God intersects with. That's what growth is all about. And as our lives intersect with the lives of other people, we need to be contributing to their growth.

Now, the tool that contributes towards spiritual and emotional growth is truth. It's truth that literates. Now, this sword cuts both ways.

To know and not to do is not to know at all. And long before you and I start communicating truth verbally, we've got to be living it. Children have a tremendous ability, don't they, to close their ears to advice and open their eyes to example.

Practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent. And friend, if you want those kids to bleed, you've got to hemorrhage. And Howard Ennard used to tell us all the time in class, he said, quit praying that God will

change your husband or your wife because nothing will happen.

Start praying that God will change you. Miracles will take place. Now, when we think about dealing with truth, we have to recognize that we are the message.

God's strategy of communication involves the incarnation of the truth of his character in your life and my life, and we are to display his character, the universals of it, through the particulars of our everyday living. His strategy for evangelism is not a mouth that moves on cue. It's a life.

We're called shining stars. We're called good seeds, the Greek word kalos, beautiful, beautiful seeds, sown out in the world. We're called living epistles.

Evangelism is allowing the non-Christian to turn the pages of the book of our lives and read the fine prints. We're called a shining star. We're called a fragment of Roma.

All of them telling us that we are the message. And how important it is to realize that as you and I get involved in changing other people's lives, we've got to be what we're teaching to them. Now, there's a statement that Ray Steadman has made famous, and that is the maturity is always a return to reality about yourself.

Want to be mature? You need to welcome feedback. One of the marks of a mature individual is openness to feedback. When I became pastor of Mariner's Church, first board meeting, I met with my men and said, gentlemen, I'd like you six months from now to meet in a private session to evaluate my marriage, my family, my preaching, my teaching, anything and everything.

Because I want to be a growing person. I'm not content to live with blind spots that go on and on and on for years and years and years and turn off people toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Because people aren't going to receive Christ through me if they won't receive me.

You know, that was the wisest thing I ever did, and I can't take any credit for it. You know, I wish I was smart enough to know it was going to happen. And I tell you, I went away from some of those sessions bloody, and I went away thanking God that they only saw the tip of the iceberg.

That's right. In fact, I remember I had two or three groups of men I met with every week, and this one group, I was coming here to the Glen to speak, brought my wife with me. And they said, well, Joe, we held each other accountable in a whole lot of areas, and said, well, what's your biggest prayer request? And I said, well, just pray, you know, the Lord will bless me here as I speak at the Glen.

Well, what kind of problems do you anticipate? I mentioned a few. I said, well, one of them is I get involved in speaking, and when my wife is there, I kind of become public property. So I tend to ignore her, and I don't spend enough time with her and so forth.

And they said, well, I said, I'd really like you to pray about that, but I'll spend more time. And they said, well, we'd be happy to do that. But how much time do you intend to spend with her? I said, well, how about a couple hours a day? Great.

I got five telephone calls from Southern California from these men while I was here teaching that week. And they said, well, Joe, how are things going? Oh, it seemed to be going pretty good. People responsive, you know, and everything else.

Well, that's great, but that's not what we're calling for. Are you spending time with your wife? Wowie. You know, every one of us needs that kind of a relationship.

You ever stop to think of the fact that if the Spirit of God had 10,000 years to conform you to Christ before he went home to glory, that you would not be out of the starting blocks. If that truth will ever grip your heart, you'll never be the same. You see, someday we're going to wake and be like him.

But you and I will never come close to that in this life. He is perfect in every dimension. Perfect in holiness, perfect in compassion, perfect in understanding.

And we're never going to be close to that in this lifetime. Ever stop to think, too, just parenthetically, that the more you walk with the Lord, the more corrupt you should feel. And that if you don't, you're not growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I didn't say you are more corrupt. See, when most of us come to know the Lord, we think all we need is a little spiritual deodorant and a choir robe and we're ready for glory. And we read a verse like, what is it, Jeremiah 17, 9 or whatever it is, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Yeah, that's Hitler, that's Mussolini, you know, that's all these guys. But, you know, as you and I come to understand more and more of the holiness of God, we realize that, boy, when the Bible says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, it's talking about your heart and mine. And it's an amazing thing to me to see two men of the stature of an Isaiah and a John who are finally given a glimpse of the holiness of God.

And both of them find themselves flat on their faces, crying out, woe is me. I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips.

And I live among a people of unclean lips. But nobody's telling us we ought to feel more corrupt. So we do feel more corrupt.

And as a result, we try and hide more and we flee rather than recognize, hey, you're just beginning to appreciate grace a little bit more and beginning to understand, hey, it's by grace alone that we're saved. Not a work. There are no works that merit the attention of an infinite God.

Got to be open to feedback. The other area a mature person needs to be open is to self-disclosure. See, there are parts of you that you know about that others don't.

Now, not everybody needs to know everything. But you need to have some people around you that you can share some of those innermost longings with. Because, you know, everything inside isn't bad.

It's not a question of sharing a whole lot of dirty laundry. But there's very little growth without accountability. When I left Marianist Church, we had a couple hundred groups of men meeting every week.

And they did three things. They shared the word and prayer together. They shared their schedules together, their business and professional schedules.

We wanted them very much to understand that God was just as interested in their contract negotiation that Thursday afternoon as he was whatever happened Sunday morning in the Sunday school. And they shared how they were doing in their marriages and families. And a man's number one fear is the fear of

failure.

And we've bought the line that to be macho means we bite a bullet right off into the sunset alone when we're hurting. But, friend, that's not biblical. And if you want to be a frog kisser that's going to really smack, there has to be a vulnerability and an authenticity there that invites people to come into your presence and to seek help because they realize here's somebody who's in process, too.

That's an important, important step in all of our lives. And I trust we can all grow in that dimension. Truth, we've got to not only be it, we've got to know it and communicate it.

But in the process, we have to be continually building that context of love. Research shows that for every time a parent says, hey, you did super, 15 times he puts that kid down. Fifteen times.

He becomes what he sees reflected in the faces of his parents. Now, I was raised in a home, nine kids, and occasionally a family would be brave enough to invite us all over for dinner. But my mother was a real believer in praise.

She knew that the reinforced response returns. You tell a kid not to pick his nose, what's he going to do? He's going to pick his nose. And you and I determine what we will reinforce.

And we're either always reinforcing the name or we're reinforcing the response. And if you reinforce the positive, the negative comes up less and less and less. And I can remember mother on occasions, we'd get in our old worn out Cadillac funeral hearse.

That was the only thing we could all fit in. And we'd go charging off to somebody's house. And she'd say, you know, it's so neat to be able to go out to dinner with you kids.

And one of the things that was going to make it a neat experience is the fact that when you get in that house, you're not going to tear around, tear it all apart. You're not going to be ripping the bedrooms up and breaking toys and so forth. And we did sometimes.

But most of the time, we didn't. And when we didn't, on the way home, she'd say, you know, dad and I are sure fortunate to have kids like you. It was just a delight to be able to be out that evening and know that your kids didn't totally crater the house.

You know, every one of us thought we were the most, we went around and talked about this, and I always thought I was mother's favorite. I find out all my brothers and sisters thought the same thing, you know. And let me illustrate how it works in terms of my own life and excuse me for using my own experience, but I, one of you wants to share your own, tell me and I'll use it the next meeting.

To illustrate, I chatted with my darling little nine-year-old daughter on the phone last night and I and she said, daddy, what you doing? And I usually answer this way. I said, Kristen, I'm talking to the most wonderful girl in the world. Oh, I know that, dad.

But what are you doing? I'm just about to go into a meeting and I'm going to tell them about you. What are you going to tell them? What do you think? She knows. She said, you're going to tell them I'm going to grow up and be a lady, aren't you? That's right.

That's exactly what I'm going to tell. I was driving home from the beach, my little beach cabin with my daughter, just my daughter and myself here about a week ago. And I haven't had a chance, the joy, the

fun of sharing the facts of life with her.

And I feel a dad should do that for his daughter. And so we got talking about a neat couple who just adopted a baby. And one thing led to another.

I said, Kristen, do you understand where babies come from and all that kind of stuff? No, I, you know, I really don't. I said, well, let me tell you about this. It's the most wonderful thing.

And we were just serendipity the whole time. I mean, magic moment. And after we got finished discussing this whole thing about marriage and intercourse and all of these kind of things, I said to her, I said, you know, Uncle John's just got a brand new baby girl.

He doesn't know how to be a daddy. And I want you to sit down with him one of these days. And I want you to tell him what he needs to do to raise up that little girl.

What would you tell this man, Kristen? Or what would you tell Uncle John? Right away. First of all, Uncle John, you got to tell her she's going to grow up to be a lady. Nine years old.

Second, you got to tell her every day she's special. That's right. Got to do that.

Third, you got to tell him to spank her buns. Well, I have never, never given my daughter spanking. But I spank her buns all the time.

Daddies will understand that. Little girlies have the cutest little buns that just ever existed. And when my little guy was about 18 months old, we used to go through a litany every night.

And I'd say, Stephen, let's talk about all the people that love you, that think you're special. We go through this list every night. Mama, yeah, Mama, she thinks you're neat.

Dad, yeah, he thinks you're the fourth member of the Trinity. Grandpa, yeah, he thinks you hung the moon. And we just go through this list.

Go through it, go through it. And when I put my little daughter to bed, I still do it. I put her to bed, both the kids, when I'm home.

But I don't always do this. But I used to do it regularly. I'd go in, I'd put my hand under her head and I'd say, Christine, you know what excites me about you? She'd say, no, Dad.

She knew what I was going to say. But she says, no, Dad, what? I said, Christine, you're going to grow up and be a lady. Not every little girl grows up to be a lady, but you're going to.

And you know the exciting thing? Every time I see her doing something that a little lady doesn't, I want to tell you, she is a little lady. She is a little lady. I'm so high.

I'm hired a kite about that little gal. And every time I see her do something, I'm enthusiastic in case you can't tell. I say, Christine, you did it again.

You get me so excited. See, it just proves you're growing up to be a lady. She calls me almost every day at work.

Secretary knows, put her through whoever's there. Doesn't make a difference. And we just jab her on and on.

And well, usually when she does it, Dad, what you doing? No, don't say it. Don't say it. Because he knows I'm going to say, Kristen, I'm talking to the neatest girl in the world.

And I want to tell you, she is one of the most loving, one of the most giving girls. And we talk a lot about beauty, talk about it all the time. And I probably ask her a hundred times, Kristen, what is a beautiful lady? What makes her beautiful? She's learning how to give.

She's learning how to be kind. She's learning how to be thoughtful. Yeah.

And then one little refrain that I keep signaling my kids with all the time too is, you know, kids, we love you even when you're boots. And that message has to be conveyed. Otherwise, they'll think you only love them when they're special or when they're doing good.

And you know, I was raised in a home where I was the black sheep. And every time the car would pull in the garage, I just had a Pavlovian response. I'd go right down the basement stairs because I knew that's where I was going to end up.

And I don't know how many hundreds, this is not ministerially speaking, this is true. I don't know how many hundreds of spankings that I had as a kid. And I rise up and call my father blessed for that.

My father is the most balanced, mature man I have ever met in my life. I've never seen anyone come close. But I have not spanked my little boy in all of his life, though I'm a firm believer in it.

I've been trying to count it up, I think three times, maybe four. Those kids want to please. Now, I need to say, they have the capability of kicking everything over.

And I'm well aware of that. Five years from now, I'll know a lot less about raising children than I do right now. But I had the fortunate experience of being raised in a very balanced home.

And I want to tell you, when you start building that context, it's sure a whole lot easier to introduce content into it. You see, the key to discipline is not beating that little kid's rear end until it glows. That'll just produce bitterness.

Or it may. The thing that makes discipline effective is that child realizing that he has disappointed someone that loves him. But if he doesn't know he's loved, you don't have the right to discipline him.

You don't have the right to discipline. So here's a little model. Speaking the truth in love, we're going to grow.

Now, let's look at this in terms of evangelism. Long before you've earned the right to verbalize the message, that is, communicate the content, you have the responsibility to build the context. Remember that song, don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus till you show me what a friend I have in you.

People have an incredible, you know, people don't care what you know until they know that you care. So if you and I move out into our neighborhoods, and part of the explosion of our lives and the multiplication of our lives is going to be marking men and women for Jesus Christ who don't know Christ. We'll talk a little bit about that tomorrow.

You need to build that context before you introduce content. And that's what it's really saying in Ephesians 3, 17. Speaking the truth, excuse me, that God has planted us in the soil of his love, that we're rooted and grounded in the soil of his love so we can grow.

Now, let me make one other comment here. Love is the filter for the communication of all truth. That's what this passage is saying.

Love is the filter for the communication of truth. Now, filter lets certain things through and keeps certain things. From getting through.

Now, you really want to get convicted. Turn with me for just a moment to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. This is where the rubber hits the pavement.

This passage begins in verse 4 saying that love is patient. Now, if I'm to speak the truth in love, and if my objective is to contribute to the growth of that individual, then I've got to put the patient filter up. And if what I want to communicate is liable to come from a state of impatience, it won't contribute to growth.

Love immediately stands up and says, wait a minute, you know, you can communicate the truth. But if you're genuinely interested in the growth of the individual that you're going to communicate it to, and you're totally impatient, just forget it. Love is kind.

Boy, I think how much communication we'd eliminate if we just put that filter up. Love doesn't envy, doesn't boast, it isn't proud. Boy, if I want to contribute to your growth, see, I can't come across as a proud, cocky, bandy rooster.

No, when I package truth with a genuine humility, it has explosive power. But the next one, love is not rude. Want to contribute to the growth of your wife? Stick that filter in front of everything you say.

Be a lot of silence around some of our homes, wouldn't there? Love isn't rude. And if I'm going to speak the truth, communicate content that is going to have soil to grow in, I've got to eliminate rudeness, not self-seeking. Boy, I think how much we'd eliminate if we could really run everything we say through that test.

Love is not easily angered. And this next one is, I wish the Lord hadn't put it in there. Love keeps no record of past wrongs.

I had an experience in my office, and this is honest-to-God truth. I had a lady come in my office, dragging this little moth-eaten-looking male species in behind her by the ear, almost literally threw him in a chair, slapped this great big packet on my desk, and, you know, almost, you know, dared me to challenge her. And I said, well, ma'am, what's this all about? She said, that's a record.

I said, well, a record? A record of what? Everything he's done for the last 18 years. I thought she was kidding, so I made some inane comment, and, you know, she shared with me a piece of her mind she could ill afford to lose. And she was serious.

She had a record of everything that poor soul had done in the last 18 years. And any time he'd open his mouth in protest against something she'd done, man, this thing was, you know, like a Scofield Bible about 20 years old. The edges were all brown.

She knew the chapter and the verse of every single thing he'd ever done. So I turned to 1 Corinthians 13, and I said, well, let me just read you some verses here. And I, phrases, and I read the first couple of ones.

Yeah, yeah, he's rude all the time. You know, he's doing this and that. I came to this one, keeps no record of past wrongs.

There was silence. He said, it doesn't say that. See, his mouth's right here.

Looked at it, and so I picked up her stuff, and I held it over the waistband. I said, want me to drop it in here? Doesn't keep any record of past wrongs. Boy, she grabbed that thing and head out the door just like that.

Was gone, never saw her again. Boy, how we make people prisoners of the past. And how many times all of us in our marriage relationships have decided we're going to go for it again, one more time.

We're going to make another effort. We do, but we stub our toe. All of a sudden, we're inundated with this verbal traffic jam from the past.

And pretty soon, we throw in the towel. Well, if you and I are going to communicate the truth in such a way that it contributes to the growth of a person, we've got to be willing to eliminate the past. And the power of the past.

Well, we could go through them all here. Always protects. Always trusts.

Always hopes. No matter how dark the day, and no matter how horrible the truth that I have to communicate, it must be communicated in a context of hope. Even if you're telling that kid you're going to have to face the consequences of this, it may mean going to court, it may mean going to jail.

Hey, I'm with you. We'll work it out somehow. I'm on your team.

It always perseveres means it hangs in there. Now, this is kind of all theory up to this point. So turn to 1 John 4, and I just want to mention a couple of practical things.

How do you build that context? 1 John talks about some exciting things that a lover does. 1 John 4, verse 18 says, there is no fear in love. And here I think this next phrase is one of the most incredible statements about love in all of Scripture.

But love, perfect love, drives out fear. Now, the word perfect could be translated, when love has completed its task. It's a Greek word, teleos.

When love has accomplished its purpose in the life of its object, it has eliminated fear. This tells me that one of my major missions in life is to be identifying sources of fear and doing one of two things, either eliminating them, if it's possible to eliminating them, or help the individual process that fear. My little guy was totally crippled a few years ago, and it was a tough time.

Fortunately, the Lord was very gracious, and he's well on his way back. I'm emotional about that. Anyway, he tried out for basketball.

Well, he doesn't have the stamina, he doesn't have a lot of things that the kids his age do, and so, having been a basketball player, of course, I was excited that he wanted to do this, but he's a couple years

behind. So I went to his first game. Now, here's a big, macho father wanting to relive his life through his little son.

I wouldn't admit to that, but that's probably what I was doing. Well, a crazy kid gets out there, and the guy finally got him in, you know, second half, and put him in as a guard. Well, you know, guards bring the ball down the court, and the fella throw it out to him, and he'd just throw it right back, and then he'd run as fast as he could go.

And he'd go over to the opposite side of the court. If a play was coming to the right side, he'd go to the left. If a play was coming to the left side, he'd go to the right.

And I'm sitting there thinking, what in the world is going on? You know, my kid's not dumb enough to do that. And then, on defense, he was guarding one of the guards on the opposing tee. And if the kid went over here, he went over here.

Then the kid went in, scored point after point. And I'm sitting there, you know, totally frustrated. What in the world is going on? And I finally, you know, at halftime, I forget if it was quarter break or something, I ran out and said, Stephen, you've got to stay with your man.

You've got to help out your buddy. And tears welled up, and I said, Daddy, I'm afraid. Well, of course he was.

Boy, I realized, man, you know, I'd just been studying this passage, in fact, perfect love identifies and dries out fear. I'd blown it. That hadn't helped him any.

So I thought, well, what motivates Stephen? Well, among other things, money does. So I said, well, Stephen, let me tell you what I'm going to do. I said, son, every time you dribble that ball, I'm giving you a die.

I said, every time you shoot it, I'm giving you a quarter. I don't care if you even come close to it. You just try and shoot, and I'll give you a quarter.

And I saw a little spark come in his eyes. And it was so funny because he'd be down at the end, and he's not too swift a dribbler. And the guy would throw it out to him.

He'd stand. It wasn't moving. He'd go one, two, three.

I could see his cash register, you know, ringing his eye, one, two, three, four, five. He'd throw it back to the kid. And then he'd get down there underneath the basket, and he'd throw it up from anywhere.

And I don't think he came within 10 feet of the thing. But that's part of love. And if I really love an individual, I want to get to know them well enough that I can identify those things that haunt them.

And I begin asking myself the question, why is the kid still wet in his bed? Why is he still chewing his fingernails? And I have to ask myself the question. Not only am I responsible to process fear, but I have to ask myself, am I producing it? And I am a hilarious swamp, Charlie, that creates fear in the lives of those kids all the time. Well, that's not love.

That means for that wife, I need to realize that the turning of the calendar and the tick of the clock and a whole lot of other things create fears. A woman's number one fear is a fear of being used and abandoned.

It's her number one fear.

And she needs to be reminded all the time that she's special. And the most important message that you men can communicate to her is that she gets better with age. That's the number one thing she wants to hear.

She gets better with age. She fears inadequacy. She fears loss of meaning in life as the kids grow up and leave.

She fears all kinds of things that haunt her. And part of a little conversation I had with my daughter the other night, in fact, it actually started out, I said, Kristen, what are some of the kind of things that make you happy? We talked about these for a while. Then I said, Kristen, what are some of the things that make you sad? What I was trying to find out, what are some of the things she's afraid of? And I said, Kristen, when you go to school, you ever afraid of anything there? And there were some things.

Well, love is in the business of identifying those fears, driving them out. And boy, if your wife fears your financial irresponsibility and just blowing money everywhere, quit doing it. And if she fears that you're not committed to her, communicate that you're committed and continue to do it regularly.

If that husband believes that you don't believe in him, you better communicate that you believe in him or he doesn't have a chance of amounting to anything. I told my wife the other night, I said, dear, there's not a person on this earth that I want to hear, Joe, you did good from more than you. Absolutely no one.

And those of us in the speaking world, we get a lot of things hurled our way and the glorifying of the worm ceremony takes place regularly. And I just say, yeah, God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. But I'll tell you what I want to hear from my wife.

You did good. And if I hear that, you know, nothing really means as much. And yet their husbands have never heard that from their wife.

So we could talk a lot about what these fears are, but we don't have time. But love, first of all, is a fear hunter. And it says a man who fears has not yet experienced.

The full dimension of love is what that last phrase really means. Now, the second thing here is love. Verse 17 is made complete among us so that we'll have confidence when we face judgment.

So not only is love involved in the business of eliminating fear, that's the negative, but a lover is someone who's in the process of building confidence in the people. Confidence. You know, one thing you want to build is confidence that you love your kids.

Now, we've done something for a lot of years. And seeing Bob Foster here, I can use an illustration of it. We take memory pictures.

And we were at Lost Valley Ranch here a few years ago. And we, one evening, had square dancing. It was just delightful.

My little five, six-year-old daughter was down there. She'd fallen in love with all the teenage college staff workers there. And she just had a ball.

But she wore herself out. My little guy wanted to stay longer. So I took her up and put her to bed.

And we got her little jammies and got her pink blankie. And it was one of those gorgeous, gorgeous nights. I mean, the Colorado moon was there, full moon, the stars.

And our little cabin was up on the hill. It had those little swing and porch swings on it. So we went out there.

And it was just one of these magic, magic moments. And we sat there. And I held her.

And I rocked her. And I sang to her. And then I said, Kristen, let's take a memory picture.

And so I asked her, what do you see? And we identified about 10 or 15 things. Big tree, the silhouette of the moon behind it, the little ranch house down there, the creek down below, and everything else. And I asked her, what do we hear? Hear the squeaking of that thing going back? And there were some crickets chirping.

And what do we smell? And we just smell the fresh air coming through those pine trees or whatever they're up there. And it's amazing. As you take these memory pictures, I can ask Kristen those questions today.

And she remembers every detail. It's just embedded in her mind. And her minds are over and over again.

Hey, we've had some special times together. We've got to build confidence. You see, friend, if you don't believe in a person, if you don't believe in those people closest to you, nobody will.

I'll do anything, almost anything, for someone to believe in me. I think most of us will. And one of the missions of love is to build confidence.

And I sit at some of these ballgames. And I must admit, I've had some of the thoughts. Hopefully, I haven't verbalized them.

And I hear some of these parents just decimating their children. How can you be so stupid? And so forth. And I've fought them.

But I hope I haven't communicated that. And you'll see a child in a restaurant just being verbally abused. And the parent violates the dignity of the child.

And the child always has the right to be respected and treated with dignity, building confidence. I can go back up a few more verses. Verse 12, it says, If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.

Now, this same Greek word is telling us that when God's love has completed its task, we've learned how to love each other. Now, if that's what God's love is in the mission of doing, helping you love me, that tells me that's what my love is supposed to be doing. Ephesians 5, 1 begins, Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love, just as Christ loved us.

So as Christ loves, we're supposed to. So this tells me that one of the missions of love is, I am to encourage you to love other people. One of my missions is to help my little daughter love my son, and that's a real challenge at times.

And to help them love some people that aren't so lovely. And so if you and I are going to be building that context of love, we're going to be continually identifying fear, driving it out. We're going to be continually doing all that we can to build confidence.

And then we're going to be encouraging people to love each other. And there's one more occurrence of this little verb in the book, and I'm done. Or is it? Chapter 2, verse 5. Same verb, telling us how God loves, modeling love for us.

Chapter 2, verse 5, If anyone obeys God's word, God's love has completed its task in that individual. And that's telling me that one of the missions of love, and one of the challenges of a lover, is to be continually adjusting the life of the object of my love to reality. Truth hurts.

But one of my missions is to try and bring my own life into a place of obedience. And then move those people that I love towards accepting and responding in obedience to the truth about God. I still can't believe we did it, but when I was a youngster, every morning, every night, without exception, very few anyway, we spent time in the Word together as a family.

All nine of us, plus two missionary children that lived with us. And I often just think, well, you know, it's like pouring water through a sieve, but you pour water through a sieve, it gets cleaner, doesn't it? And I'll close with this illustration. You have to model it.

Well, I was raised on a farm, and Dad used to milk the cows before we boys got old enough to have to do it. My brother figured out if he developed hay fever, he could get out of the chore, and I wasn't smart enough to figure that out. So I ended up having to milk the cows.

Well, when my father milked the cows, he used to put a little stand in the gutter, a little wooden stand, he'd put a Bible on it, and he'd sit there and milk the cows and read seven or eight chapters. Every day, twice a day. Because I thought, and still do, think my father hung the moon.

Well, I accepted that responsibility. Because I'd seen his obedience to truth, and I'd seen the fruit of that obedience in his life, for about six or seven years, twice a day, I'd sit there milking those cows, reading my Bible. Well, that goes back to modeling.

And the basic principle is found in Luke 6, 40. The pupil, when he is fully taught, will be like his teacher. Doesn't say he'll know what his dad or his mother knows, it says he'll be like him, or like her.

What a challenge. Let me close with two illustrations. First one comes out of the 16th century.

There's a famous Italian artist, Guido Rini, who is noted for his portraits of beautiful women. And one day, an Italian aristocrat came into his studio and was just awestruck by the beauty of these portraits. And he turned to this famous artist, and he said, boy, I'd sure love to meet your model.

And he summoned a rather coarse-looking man from the back part of the studio, and invited him to sit down on a stool, and he began to paint. And he talked as he painted, as he painted a face of a woman of radiant beauty. And this Italian aristocrat turned to the artist and said, you don't mean to tell me that this coarse-looking person is your model? And Rini turned to this individual and said, you see, Your Excellency, it makes no difference who the model is, if the artist has honorable intentions.

That's right. God can take the most warped life, and use us to produce beauty. How many of you read The Velveteen Rabbits? Any of you ever read that? Shouldn't confess I have.

No man has read The Velveteen Rabbit? There we go. Let me read something closing from this. What is real, asked the rabbit one day when they were lying side by side in the nursery before Nana came to tidy the room.

Does it mean having things that buzz inside of you and stick out handles? These are stuffed animals talking. Real isn't how you're made, said the skin horse. It's the thing that happens to you.

When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real. Doesn't happen all at once, said the skin horse. You become, takes a long time.

That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges or have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you're real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose and shabby in the joints. But these things don't matter at all, because once you're real, you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for not choosing angels to reach this world, but Lord, giving us the privilege of being instruments of Your love and coming as broken people to be available to You and available to be fear hunters, learning how to identify it, to eliminate it, and to help people process it. And then, Father, may we be a people building confidence, helping people respond appropriately to their value in Your sight.

And Father, give us the ability to encourage mutual love between us that the world may see that we're followers of Jesus Christ. And then, Lord, help us to adjust our own lives to truth and then be continually committed by model, by example, by precept, and by word to taking those that You bring across our path and pleading with them to respond in obedience to truth that beauty can flower in their lives. And we'll thank You in Christ's name.

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