

**IN EVERY SEASON:
The books of our marriage
1 Cor. 13**

INTRODUCTION: I am a seasonal person; in other words, I enjoy four true seasons. My favorite season I guess is the fall, when the leaves start turning, the air is a bit crisp in the morning, and hey – college football! And every season always brings its challenges: Right now for us it is snow. I looked on the weather this morning and our youngest daughter and her husband are under a severe weather alert in south Georgia for thunderstorms and possible tornados – it's all relative. But I love the fact that here we have four true seasons. But we are never happy because when it's cold we want it to be hot and when its hot we want it to be cold. When its dry we want rain and when its raining we want it to dry out. Every season has its challenges. I lived on a tropical island for six years – three years on Guam and three years in Hawaii. On tropical islands there are only two seasons – wet and dry. Both islands were always in the 80s in the day and in the 70s at night with quite a bit of humidity; it never changed. And when typhoons and hurricanes came – and they did – you just have to batten down the hatches because there is no where to go; you just have to ride it out. Marriages have seasons too. These seasons are marked by how long you have been married and the challenges that life brings with each season.

This morning we are going to discover how our marriages can be held together through the seasons of life. We are going to study what the apostle Paul wrote about love in one of the more well-known chapters in the Bible – 1 Cor. 13. And here is what 1 Cor. 13 will teach us:

LOVE IS THE GLUE THAT HOLDS MARRIAGES TOGETHER THROUGH THE YEARS.

[SCRIPTURE]

We're studying what the Bible teaches us about how love keeps our marriages together through the years.

I have called the books of our marriage because, well, every other sermon begins with a "B" and books was the only word I could come up for seasons, so books it is!

The word 'season' has been defined as, "*a time characterized by a particular circumstance or feature*¹." Our lives go through seasons and our marriages go through seasons, particular times characterized by circumstances or features. I have identified at least **five distinct seasons** that marriages go through and unique challenges in each season:

1. **New life**: the beginning after the honeymoon.

the challenge: KNOWING - learning to live together as husband and wife.

2. **New look**: children and all that involves.

the challenge: GROWING - raising children, juggling jobs and schedules.

3. **New lessons**: children growing up and moving out of the house.

the challenge: GOING - adjusting to children moving out, college, marriages, etc.

4. **New love**: the empty nest, getting reacquainted with your spouse all over again.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, on-line edition.

the challenge: FLOWING - learning to go with it as part of the empty nest. You may feel like going to out to eat, or to see a movie, or staying in; you are on no one's schedule any more except your own.

5. New legacy (slide says HORIZONS – CHANGE THAT). Retirement and beyond.

the challenge: BESTOWING - leaving a legacy of faithfulness.

Here is a great way to understand this fifth season:

What kind of marriage legacy do I want to leave my family? You need to be living that right now.

Just this morning in my devotion time, I am journaling through Ecclesiastes, this was the verse I made some comments on:

ECC. 2.21: When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

Solomon wrote that we have no idea what those coming behind us will do with the legacy of work we have left. But what we can do is train them and pray for them to carry it on. The same is true of our marriages. We must pray for and train up the generations coming behind us what a godly marriage looks like because our marriages are the legacies we are leaving right now.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO TURN A NEW PAGE IN YOUR MARRIAGE. THE GOAL IS TO FINISH STRONG.

ALL SPORTS TEAMS, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ARE HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, OR PROFESSIONAL, HAVE RECORDS. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT RECORD REPRESENTS?

HOW THEY FINISHED! NOT HOW THEY PLAYED, BUT HOW THEY FINISHED.

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO FINISH STRONG IN YOUR MARRIAGE.

1 Cor. 12 is an excellent discussion on the church and the use of spiritual gifts within the church. Go back up into ch. 12 and look at vv. 8-9 for just a minute:

Notice the gifts listed: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues. These are not all the gifts, but Paul's point in ch. 13 is these gifts are useless if they are not exercised with the framework of love; in fact, they become nothing more than just religion.

Paul wraps up his discussion at the end of ch. 12 this way, in v. 31:

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Paul was getting ready to share with the church that while God has given gifts to the church for the benefit of others, the context in which those gifts are to be exercised is love. Without love, unconditional love, the love that God has for us, without that kind of love, the exercise of those gifts is useless. Love is the framework within which these gifts are to be exercised. The same is true of our marriages. Unless our marriages are operating within the framework of love, God's unconditional love for one another, we are spinning our wheels, going through the motions. Love must be the framework regardless of the season of life our marriages are in.

One man said that for Paul, love was not an idea, it was behavior; to love is to act².

² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 628.

So let's take a look at this great chapter on the importance of love and place it over our marriages as a sort of template to see how important love is regardless of what season our marriages may be in.

I. THE FRAMEWORK OF LOVE in every season (vv. 1-3)

v. 1

Paul opened his discussion on love by listing the use of tongues. Speaking in tongues was a highly valued gift in the church of Corinth, and Paul is not discounting speaking in tongues. In fact, Paul goes into a lengthy discussion of tongues in ch. 14. But here is what Paul is getting at, while tongues are an important gift of the Holy Spirit, that gift is useless if it is not exercised within the framework of love. Tongues, as all spiritual gifts, are designed to build up the church, but without love that building is only a shell

vv. 2-3

this same is true of prophesy and giving, without love these become nothing more than religious practices.

We can work ourselves to death in the church, but if our motivation for doing what we do is not love for our fellow man, then God is not being honored and God will not bless anything we do.

In order for God to bless our marriages we must serve our families with a giving spirit, our love for others is what fuels our marriages. It does not matter what season you are in, when it comes to your marriage, **love must be the guiding principle that you live by** and as the reason you do what you do. If love is not the guiding principle for what you do, then you are simply going through the motions in your marriage and that is not a marriage that is going to survive and thrive.

Go back and refresh yourself with

MATT. 6.33: *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness , and all these things will be added to you.*

If I am seeking God's kingdom first in my own life, then my marriage will be based on the love of God because that is what God will be doing in my own life, in your own life.

When you are in the season of NEW LOOKS, which is probably the most hectic of them all, and you are trying to juggle jobs and kids schedules and you have become the taxi service for the family and you get to the end of the day just flat wore out, love still must be the motivating factor for all you do. It gets hard, it gets hectic. Just remember – you are not alone, you have a God who loves you and a church family that supports you. Anyone who has ever been married and has children has gone through it, just reach out and I promise you there are many who would love to pray for you and help you through it.

II. THE FUNCTION OF LOVE in every season (vv. 4-7)

When couples are first setting out in marriage they have to get used to each other, their quirks and their personality. Couples need to discover what they like and what puts them in a bad mood.

And even as couples progress through the various seasons in life and marriage, they still have to learn how to live together and how to discover each other as the seasons progress.

Paul helps us understand this by giving us some characteristics of what love is and is not:

Love is:

PATIENT – because God has been and is patient with us, so too should we be patient with our spouses. The opposite of patient would be, impatient.

2 verses of Scripture about patience you need to write down:

2 PET. 3.9, 15 [READ]

KIND – to act in a beneficial way towards others

Love is not:

Self-centered, self-promoting, shameful in its actions, or joyful in the misfortunes of others;

Love is ready to allow for circumstances and to see the best in others (Leon Morris);

Love never loses hope (Gordon Fee)

Marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. And because marriage is a marathon, then through the years husbands and wives must learn to love each other unconditionally. Setting aside self, not promoting self, **seeing the best in your spouse and seeking the best for your spouse** – that takes time. Let's be honest, we are all a little self-centered at times. But as the years roll on in our marriages, it is important to understand that a lifetime following Christ means that less of you and more of Christ comes through, and as more of Christ comes through, then you will be more than willing and equipped to show that kind of love to your spouse. Love is the glue that holds your marriage together, and the longer you are married the stronger that glue should be.

Bears, believes, hopes, endures – words that give us the picture of the long walk of marriage through the years.

The function of love in the marriage is to hold the marriage together through the years.

III. THE FORCE OF LOVE in every season (vv. 8-13)

I use the word FORCE because love is powerful, it is an action word, it is a word that brings about change.

a, Love is permanent (v. 8)

Prophecy, tongues, knowledge – all temporary compared to love. Love is permanent because God is eternal; because God IS love, because God SO loved. The love of God existed before there were spiritual gifts, before there was a world and the universe, and the love of God will be there when the world comes to an end.

b. Love is revealing (vv. 9-10, 12)

Love reveals who we really are on the inside. Love reveals to us who God really is, love reveals that there is always hope in Jesus Christ; love reveals that there is no sin beyond the grace of God; love reveals the power of God's forgiveness.

Right now, on this side of eternity, there is a lot we don't fully understand nor do we fully understand the power of love. But one day we will know beyond a shadow of a doubt the power of love.

Notice v. 12: right now our life is like looking through a glass that we cannot see the entire picture. One day, however, when we are with the Lord in glory, we will fully understand the power of God's love.

c. Love is dynamic (v. 11)

To say that love is dynamic is to say that love does not sit still; love is always at work. We all go through phases in life. What we enjoyed as grade children we outgrew as we became middle schoolers. And what we thought was cool in middle school we were just so over it

when we moved into high school. And when we went to college we discovered we were one of many on campus just trying to find our way. And on and on it goes in life.

As children we lived one way, but as we grew older we changed. Marriage is no less different,

You grow IN marriage as you and your spouse grow WITH marriage.

Just think about this: is your marriage the same right now as it was the day you were married? Of course not because you have changed over the years, you have shared life together, the joys and the triumphs, and hopefully your love has grown stronger for each other. Love is dynamic.

d. Love is binding (v. 13)

It has been said that **faith** is vehicle that gets us to the grace of God;

Hope makes us a future-oriented people;

Love for one another is the glue that holds us all together.

CONCLUSION/CALL TO ACTION:

There is no way your marriage or relationship can or ever will survive apart from love. Love must be preeminent or the marriage will struggle. Whether you are just starting out in marriage, or you are in those middle years of juggling children, school, and schedules, or even entering the empty nest phase, love must be first, foremost, and always.

I have come up with something that you may find a bit corny but I believe it works, and I call it the **Marriage 3:16 rule** – based on **John 3.16**:

We will SO love each other, as God loves us, that we will give ourselves, as long as we live, to make this marriage survive and thrive.