

# I Love You Anyway . . .

These familiar verses from 1 Corinthians 13 are read at almost every wedding. Like everything we hear a lot they tend to lose their impact. But what if we read them again as if listening for the first time?

***love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

*love never fails.*

*— So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

I don't know about you but if I'm honest with myself I find I'm not nearly as loving as I want to be. Patience isn't one of my strengths and when I'm impatient I often get angry. I remember a time when my children were young and I came home from a difficult day at work and tripped over schoolbags left in a heap by the front door. I exploded and said things I later regretted. My oldest son gave me a reality check and said, "Mom, I'm really sorry that you had a bad day at work, but we're not responsible for it and it's unfair of you to take it out on us." Ouch! He was right and I apologized and was forgiven. My children loved me in spite of my lack of patience and quick temper. Though I didn't want to repeat that kind of behavior, it felt safe to be at my worst and still be loved.

We are all a combination of saint and sinner. As a recovering alcoholic clergyman said, "I am an angel with a great capacity for booze." And each of us has our own demons that tend to get in the way of our loving as we desire. Thank goodness we don't have to measure up for God to love us.

The failures and struggles with loving can often be opportunities for grace, I believe, and they help us "bear all things,

*believe all things, hope all things, endure all things."* I learned this the years my husband was sick and dying. Our dreams of a long life together were not to be. Finances were tight. The day he got his terminal diagnosis he said to me, "I guess we aren't going to make that trip to Europe." The end was in sight and there was so much planned that would be left undone. He felt embarrassed and less a man because he couldn't give me the life he hoped to do. (I learned this from his friend after he died—he felt too ashamed to tell me himself.) It was not an easy journey as the rough edges of each of us rubbed into each other. But through it all we somehow managed to be faithful trying to love the best we could. The night before he died I asked his forgiveness for ways I had failed to love. He told me that he had been thinking about that as well and said "I was an \*\*\*\*\* a good deal of the time, but you loved me anyway." We both loved each other anyway—the best we could. Love didn't fail.

When I was a child I had a long list of things to do so that I would be acceptable to God. It included being an obedient and respectful daughter, something I struggled with since I had (and often still do) a tendency to open my mouth before thinking and considering others' feelings. I tried to be a good older sister, but it was so much fun being bossy and teasing my younger siblings. I wanted to be pious but I often daydreamed during church and broke my resolutions as quickly as I made them. I tried. I really did. If I had to do certain things for God to love me, I thought then I'd never be worthy or make it to Heaven. For a large part of my life, God was the great scorekeeper in the sky waiting for me to fall and looking disapprovingly at me. I could never be

good enough for God. But I continued to try. Maybe, just maybe, God would smile on me. It was exhausting living this way and I never seemed to make sufficient progress.

I finally quit trying to measure up. It was an impossible task and then I learned something wonderful as I have gotten older—I don't have to perform for God to love me. Like my relationship with my husband, God loves me anyway. With all my flaws and failures I am beloved and cherished by God. Love is a gift. It cannot be earned. No performance on my part needed, just acceptance of unconditional extravagant love.



"Above all it is necessary that he is listened to. With listening, a guest is welcomed as a person, with his history, his heart rich in sentiments and thoughts, so that he might feel truly that he is among family."

—Pope Francis

