

EXPLORING
FAITH, HOPE, &
LOVE

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™ Used with permission.

Copyright © 2017 Rene Lafaut (v 2.03)

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1978344503

ISBN-13: 978-1978344501

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all those people who challenged my immature ideas on love; and my family who encouraged me to not give up. I also want to thank my friends Anita and Mark for taking me seriously enough so that I knew I had some healthy strategies when it came to growing in love.

ENDORSEMENT

Good, practical teaching on the Christian life. I was reminded of the need to have open hands towards our neighbors and those around us.

This life of faith is a journey from beginning to end. Rene captures this very well.

Bill Reimer, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Foreword

1	Introduction	1
2	Love	3
3	What is Love?	9
4	Coveting Love or Power	17
5	Love as Giving	19
6	Going Deeper into Love	25
7	Love and Forgiveness	39
8	Love as Sacrifice	44
9	How to Motivate Love	51
10	Abiding in Jesus	65
11	Waiting to Grow in Love	68
12	Being Good Towards Others or Loving Others	71
13	Exploring Hope	78
14	Exploring Faith	87
15	Pathways	103
16	Living out of Grace vs. a Slave and Law Mentality	114
17	How Love Plays Out In Who God Is	117

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to acknowledge everyone who has encouraged me in the ways of faith, hope, and love. I also want to acknowledge Deegy for editing parts of this book.

FOREWORD

What holds us back from loving?
The pitfalls of trying to work at it without God's grace.

God helps us to live in the in betweenness between a promise and the fulfillment, between our prayer and God's answer.

This is a book that tries to give answers. It speaks in a direct down-to-earth manner, showing us the things that hold us back from being filled with love, and the natural transmission of that love to whoever is around us.

Rene has learned what he knows by believing God's promises, and wrestling with revealed truth to bring his thinking and actions into alignment with his faith. A deeply personal journey shared with searing honesty. His writing has the power of stripping away what separates me from walking 'in the Spirit' and each time I spend time reading his books, I am as it were, reunited with my Lord in some significant way.

Anita Patel.
Fellow traveller

1 INTRODUCTION

The art on the cover for this book depicts love, hope, and faith in the midst of the darkness, with wind and water currents all around; it is a beautiful thing to behold. The darkness, the wind, and the waves are adversaries worth challenging; requiring a solid commitment, a direction, and a central focus of purpose. The light shines in the darkness like a flickering of supernatural love; the hope for the people is the support of a sturdy boat; and the faith is hidden in the hearts of the fishermen in the boat. It makes for a captivating adventure worth taking and re-telling.

In this book I take a look at love, hope, and faith based on what I have been learning from my bumpy journey through the darkness into the light. I have learned that having correct theology on what Love looks like won't by itself grow love. This book became my goal or hope that I pursued with my faith in Jesus, that led to me navigating a learning curve that involved embracing humility which led to love.¹

I admit it—every time I see a Scripture in the Bible dealing with love I want a recipe that will guarantee me living it out. Who doesn't do this? I have come up with a lot of recipes in my faith journey over time, some have been dropped and others modified, as life lessons accumulate and hope moves me forward.

¹ Cf. Rene Lafaut, Dismantling the a Tree of Knowledge of good and Evil Within so Love can Thrive

In this book I will focus first on love, then hope, then faith. The chapters on “Love” are focused on 1 Corinthians 13, whereas the “Hope” and “Faith” chapters are more philosophical but with a God focus. The hope and faith sections offer a framework on how to view reality, and relationships in a way that leads to caring enough to love.

2 LOVE

Focusing on and loving concepts won't necessarily bear deep and abiding love. I have found from experience that if I look for truths on how to love I won't necessarily end up loving people, because as time goes by concepts become more important than "wanting" to love people. Also, if I seek power to love, I won't necessarily love either, because then I may always be waiting for power to love; or when I am weak I won't love, because I complain that I don't have the power to love.

Focusing on love out of caring for people leads to the ability to love. Love is the way. Not truth, and not power. Only love. Love grows in weakness, not strength. It is not about being in ministry and holding onto power, position, and pedigree so we can somehow be an authority on love. We must focus on love: "Doing to others what we would want done to us"² in the context of grace, and in this way we will live out our destiny. When we care enough for people we will find ways to love them: no obstacle will defeat us; no lie will keep us; no weakness will prevent us. Only grace will seal us.

Whatever love is, it is either cold and refreshing or warm and soothing; it is not a lukewarm affair. Often sparks are flying in the dark as we fight our way through to wholesome caring love.

I still remember my early struggles and attempts to

² Cf. Matthew 7:12

consciously love the people in my life after starting to read, *The Greatest Thing in The World* by Henry Drummond. The book starts out by quoting (in King James English) 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love in the Bible. The language used for this text was difficult to understand, but better to me than the modern versions I read during that time. The Old English version made love loftier, more exciting and mysterious, and worth aiming for. But it did not instruct me on how I was to go about loving, because I didn't understand many of the older words. About the only thing I got out of the text was that I was supposed to—with pure motives and God's help—give good things to those people I met.

The modern versions that I read of this text seemed dull to me at the time, as though they had no depth, even though I grasped more of the English words used in them. In reality, my heart was hard, I was a poor lover, and only later would I see the words from this text more closely for what they stood for. I would realize that they have a depth and beauty that waited to resonate with the renovations that God did to my heart over the years as I walked with Jesus. At the time, it did not matter which bible version I used of this text. I understood very little of what was said by any of them, because my foundational beliefs were incorrectly laid within my heart. I told myself that I did not know what love was, which was more true than false at that time. The quality of our love determines our knowledge of love whether we can express it in words or not.

Love seemed to be something that only God could properly

do this side of Heaven. And because I thought only in “all or nothing” terms, it provided me with very little incentive to continue along God’s path. I also wrongly put the same pressure I used to accomplish everyday tasks in trying to love. We have to co-operate with God in order to love. Love does not come from putting pressure on oneself, and I unfortunately put pressure on myself.

My standards for achievement were set so high that I set myself up for continual failure. Because of this I did not navigate a healthy learning curve when it came to the way of love. Who is going to attempt something that she or he believes is impossible to accomplish? Perfectionism kills love. Perfectionism causes guilt. A better way to love is to do just what is needed to get the job done.³

My theology was really poor for a long time, and it prevented me from seeing the good in others (especially non-Christians) I am sad to say. Mine was a black and white, “all or nothing” worldview based on incorrect interpretations of certain sayings found in the Christian Bible. My understanding of love was weak, and I really didn’t clue into the relationship between the natural Loves and supernatural love.

The natural loves are: Eros (romantic love), Philia (enjoyment, fondness, and friendship), Storge (family loyalty), and Charity (helping the less fortunate); and then there is supernatural love. The natural loves (which all humans possess as gifts from God from the moments of their conceptions in their mothers’ wombs), are good as far as they go, but they are

³ Insight from my friend Anita

lacking in some important ways. Supernatural love is breathed into us by the Holy Spirit when we become God's friends. This new life enables us to love in new, healthier, wholesome, and fuller ways that before were impossible for us to live out by ourselves alone. We get to participate in Divine love. Supernatural love encompasses love for one's enemy, which is impossible to do without God's grace.

Politicians, lawyers, Democrats, Republicans, Conservatives, Liberals, Communists, Socialists, Tax-cheaters, Tax-payers, the unemployed, the working, the rich, the greedy, the poor, robbers, extortionists, addicts, pot smokers, Mormons , Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, Moslems, Jehovah Witnesses, leaders, followers, slaves, free people, rapists, pedophiles, murderers, the proud, the humble, and every day people everywhere all possess the natural loves in one degree or another. Perhaps falling short here or there and excelling elsewhere. But that is not what God wants most. God wants us to love supernaturally: extending, completing, and lifting up the natural loves to where they are destined to reach, only with His help.

Many people are very compassionate, loving, tolerant, and peaceable, but have yet to realize that it was God who gave them that goodness when He created them in their mothers' wombs.⁴

We love because God first loves us. When we experience God's love, some of us can go far and deep along the path of love. Others go weakly or much shallower. We all want to

⁴ I am in debt to a friend for this insight.

grow in love, be kinder, more caring, more compassionate, and more patient. But how do we move past those things that block us from growing in the freedom to love supernaturally? Those interior things that lash out, or cause us to compromise what we know to be love.

For those who don't have a relationship with God, the first step is getting in touch with their God-shaped vacuum, and drinking in the grace that God pours out through Jesus Christ. This comes from making a commitment to give up sin (i.e. not wanting to love or pay the price to love other people) with Jesus' help, and then to follow the way of love through trust in Jesus and His companionship. He will never leave nor forsake us.

How does it work? Through grace. A relational definition of "grace" means that God loves us whether we do good, bad or have apathy. This means that we don't have to earn God's love by doing good and He doesn't stop loving us when we do bad. This is another way of saying grace is unconditional love. When God touches our soul/ heart we become alive to grace and immediately live for a higher purpose. Those who have nothing to die for have nothing to live for. Willing to die for love is where mature love takes us through grace.

I'm not saying this will give us the inner fuzzies for eternity, rather God's touch gets us through thick and thin as we trust Him, remember His goodness, listen to Him, and follow Him in friendship.

The second step is to forgive those who have hurt us in some way, along with asking Jesus to forgive us for the hurts we

have caused others. And receiving God's forgiveness and healing emotionally; not just intellectually⁵.

The third step is to pray for humility, and to kill the prideful attitudes that we have⁶. When we grow in humility we will grow in spiritual health and love for people.

Next, we live in the moment, aiming to love out of caring for others by receiving, and giving grace (the way Jesus directs) while implementing the Golden Rule in all our relationships.

⁵ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Going Deeper With The Twelve Steps* for good advice on how to work through forgiving people

⁶ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* Within so Love Can Thrive for a healthy grace filled strategy to do this

3 WHAT IS LOVE?

Ultimately God is Love, but to different people love can mean entirely different or opposite things. To clarify what Christian love is, consider what is called “the Love Chapter” found in the Bible:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.⁷

An Interpretation

First, a very wise person told me, many years ago, that whenever we try to take something apart to understand it then we kill it. Since God is living, Love is living. We cannot dissect God, so we cannot dissect Love. And that’s not what I want to do here. What I want to do is explain how I have come to interpret this marvelous passage. My interpretation here is not the definitive interpretation. Anyone who is further along in the way of Love can easily show me up in both words and deeds.

I will state each verse from the above passage followed by brief explanations:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.⁸

This verse doesn’t outright say what love is, but it does say that any talk or prayer that is not done with love is meaningless. Love always comes through as pure or clean energy from the heart and mind. Speaking kindly, gently, patiently, humbly, and carefully are parts of loving others and self; “Delivery is just as important as the content of what is

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:1

said.”⁹

If we are not in the habit of healthily processing our emotions, then clean energy will be hard to come by. Yes, we need to love ourselves in healthy ways, and not selfish and jaded ways. This starts with the way we talk to ourselves and God. The simplest ways we can love others and ourselves are through what we say, pray, or declare: truthfully, creatively, imaginatively, humorously, warmly, kindly, and not judgmentally. Admitting negative feelings to ourselves is far better than burying them and not processing them. But we need healthy ways to process them. We can love or not love depending on how we speak to others and ourselves. Are we demanding, self-pitying, mean, complaining, critical, judgmental (in the name of truth), bitter, angry, or abrasive towards others? If so, then we need a way to clean ourselves up from the inside.¹⁰

Are we attempting to be infallibly right or appear intelligent, more to feel good about ourselves, or to be seen as in the right, than to bless when blessing is needed? Or, are we gentle, affectionate, gracious, and meek towards others? Treating other people, the way we want to be treated isn't just about doing good deeds but also about how we talk with them (that includes the tones in our voices). Love can also mean keeping our mouths shut. What we say can also become meaningless if our words don't match our deeds.

⁹ I am in debt to a friend for this observation

¹⁰ Cf. Rene Lafaut, Dismantling the a Tree of Knowledge of good and Evil Within so Love can Thrive

When we don't back up our good promises to others with loving deeds then we aren't being loving. In this case, we become a "resounding gong" or a "clanging cymbal". The choice is ours.

We may think we are funny or have authority to say things to people, but end up hurting, humiliating, violating, and wounding them even though we never intended to hurt them. We can't walk away and say that we never intended to hurt them, and so, we aren't responsible. This is being insensitive, cold, proud, and callous in our relational styles. When we cause a car accident unintentionally we still should make amends. Help those we hurt (even those we hurt unintentionally), apologize and admit we did wrong without excuses. We need to go the extra mile for restorative justice to be fulfilled.

The same is true with personal relationships. When we hurt somebody by what we say, and they say so, we need to apologize and repent. We have to change the way we talk with people, and respect their boundaries and wishes, otherwise the relationship is not healthy.

A very important aspect of communication is how we ask people to do things. Using a tone that is mean, threatening, hard, abrasive, judgmental, and forceful is unhealthy; we can do this when we use angry pressure to get our way. Using the negative energy of self-pity to get our way is also unhealthy. When we do so we are demanding and rudely manipulating people.

Moreover, we can still have these negative attitudes or

energies in our hearts and speak sweetly to others; the outside of the cup seemingly clean, but the inside all putrid. We know this is the case when people don't see our conversations the same way we do, because they react to our energy not our presentations.

Another important aspect of communication is what we do when we get angry because of what another person did. A bad approach is when we make assumptions that lead to judging the person in question. We may either judge the person before confronting her or him and hearing them out, or we judge her or him without full knowledge about what went wrong. Judging is always wrong as per Jesus' Teachings¹¹. Truth telling is the correct way to process our emotions and talk to people who may have disappointed us. But how do we know the difference?

"Judging is giving one's opinion on another person; whereas truth telling is giving ones opinion on oneself"¹² using "I"-statements. The former labels, measures, accuses, and tries to use guilt or shame to get one's way. The latter appeals to the nobility of the one who may have done us wrong, and frees them to help in ways we often don't expect. An "I"-statement has the form:

"I feel " _____ " when " _____ " because " _____ ",
and would like " _____ "

How we speak with others in conflicts sends messages to

¹¹ Luke 6:37

¹² Danny Silk video stream

them about what kind of attitudes we have. Love is kind and non-judgmental in speech and expression especially when it comes to disagreements or conflicts. When we are kind in potential conflicts we keep the situations from escalating into violence, because we respect and care for our potential enemies as people with value and dignity.

When we see that our approach to disagreements or conflicts breeds more coldness (as opposed to warmth), hostility, or friction, and robs us of peace. Then our default settings when it comes to how we approach conflicts needs to be replaced with Jesus' way of love. We should renew our minds (attitudes, beliefs, thinking, and understanding) with healthier energy. We have choices when it comes to our attitudes or approaches in our relationships¹³. Jesus is with us and if we allow Him, He is willing to reprogram our beliefs and thoughts¹⁴, and therefore our feelings, energy, and attitudes.

For a long time, I did not know what Saint Paul meant when he said, "Take every thought captive."¹⁵ But I found out later. Many times we can have very uncharitable thoughts inserted in our minds towards others. And if we aren't careful—if we don't take those thoughts captive—they will take us captive. And we will speak those thoughts, and hurt those we should really love.

Words which de-escalate tricky situations ought to be spoken.

¹³ Cf. Rene Lafaut, *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil So Love Can Thrive*

¹⁴ Hebrews 10:16

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:5

I think that the kind of speech that does de-escalates volatile situations is what Jesus meant by turning the other cheek¹⁶. By that I mean He wants us to carry, and let slide the negative, mean, abrasive, antagonistic, accusatorial, judgmental, and manipulative words others may use to intimidate us or get their way with us. We do this when we don't use the same judgmental language back, and politely try to appeal to the person's sense of nobleness when they are attacking us.

We might also want to boast about our achievements or almsgiving if we aren't careful and so lose some of our rewards in Heaven if we don't hold captive such proud thoughts. We need to examine our thoughts, and only say that which will build others up.

Preaching to someone who just did a wrong can easily lead to the person feeling judged, over corrected, and robbed of self-esteem which can lead to discouragement, animosity, and comes from an attitude that says "I know better than you".

Words can be like stones or rocks that we end up throwing. All human hearts can be compared to soils and rocks; some hearts are all soil with no rocks; some have a few rocks with plenty of soil, and others have plenty of rocks and a little soil. Those with only soil are the healthiest and only need water and good seed to bear good fruit like love, patience, peace, joy, and self-control. Those with rocks in their hearts may mean that they have hardened their hearts in some ways, with anger turning into resentments, resentments turning

¹⁶ Cf. Matthew 5:39

into hostility, or hostility turning into hatred. People with plenty of rocks are often proud, bitter, jaded, judgmental, and intolerant. It can also be that people vow to not feel anyone else's feelings or humanity, because they don't want to feel their own feelings of hurt or rejection. They are wounded and often wound others; so, they throw stones too. The darkest and hardest hearts still and always will have some soil. Each person has some good soil within his or her heart known as a safe place. No heart is wholly evil. If one did have a wholly evil heart they would cease to live. Because evil requires life to exist, like rust on paint, rottenness on a fruit, or a malignant growth in the flesh. Once the good is totally consumed the good identity no longer remains, and all life-giving qualities cease to exist—hence there is spiritual death.

Those with good soil are more interested in gardening than throwing soil at others. Those with stones in their hearts are in certain situations going to throw those stones at others. The hurting will hurt others; sick people can infect others.

Truth is we reap what we sow. We need to give up the negative, and say “yes” to the positive—all in faith. This will keep us cheerful and steer away the depressing thoughts that we might be tempted to nurse with addictions to pleasures.

When we embark on cleaning up our mouths, we will realize eventually that what comes out of our mouths comes out of our hearts. And what is stored in our hearts? Our beliefs, desires, and commitments that we value and will fight for either in loving ways or hateful ways. There can be plenty of twisted stuff in there.

