

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When 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 childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor 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.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

♪ *Love is a Many Splendored Thing*

‘Tis the season when my summer weekends begin filling up with weddings at which I’ll be officiating. I’ve begun the premarital counseling sessions with some of these prospective brides and grooms. And as they sit there in my office, it’s as if I can hear the song their hearts are singing . . .

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♪ *Love Stinks*

BUT, when the Apostle Paul wrote these words to the people in the church in Corinth, I think he had a different song in his heart. He was ticked. He had started the church in the wealthy town of Corinth. He thought it would be an excellent place to nurture a group of Christ’s disciples who were in a position to do a lot of good for each other and their community. BUT, he received a letter telling him that the folks in the church were behaving badly. The letter described in-fighting, competition, gossip . . . It broke his heart, the people just didn’t get it. And as he writes this letter, I don’t think he’s thinking that *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* but rather, that, sometimes, *Love Stinks*.

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Sometimes love stinks—literally, like the dirty wool socks that end up on the floor next to the couch each evening in expectation of the arrival of the “dirty sock fairy” who apparently lives in our house and figuratively—like the other day when I got to work and pulled “my” keys out of my pocket only to discover that they were Corey’s keys—his car key, his work key, his house key. Sometimes, love stinks.

Chris Halbert's Aunt Suzie lived in an assisted living apartment in Frankfort. As her health continued to decline, doctors suggested that Aunt Suzie move to a full-time care facility. And so it was that Chris and her mom—an octogenarian who is Aunt Suzie's next of kin—moved Aunt Suzie to a care facility in Manistee a couple of weeks ago. After they got her settled, they returned to Aunt Suzie's apartment to begin the process of cleaning up and clearing out. Chris and her mom boxed up all of Aunt Suzie's earthly possessions and moved the boxes to the family cottage. Movers came the next day and moved all of the furniture that was too heavy for Chris and her mom to carry. The next day after that, Chris' mom received a call from Aunt Suzie's doctor. He thinks Aunt Suzie is making so much progress that she'll be able to move back to her apartment in 4-6 weeks. WHAT?!?! They were given the impression that this was a permanent move—and now he's saying that she'll be able to return—to return the apartment that has just been cleaned up and cleared out. And so, yep, you guessed it, Chris and mom spent the next couple of days moving all of Aunt Suzie's earthly possessions BACK to the apartment and arranging for the movers to have them return the furniture. Now that, my friends, is love. And sometimes, love stinks.

And the Apostle Paul knew this—he knew that love is hard, that it didn't always come easily but that, in the end, if life is to have any meaning at all, it must, first and foremost, be lived in love. ¹*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

But Paul also knew that a life lived in love, well sometimes it stinks. And we know it too, don't we. We know that while love is, quite often, a *Many Splendored Thing*, there are times when love is anything but a splendored thing. Love stinks when we we're part of a community we love and something happens that we don't understand and we're so upset that we can hardly hear the song of love that was once in our heart. Love stinks when a friend we love betrays us, leaving us to wonder if the friend ever really loved us at all. Love stinks when someone we love is hurting and there's nothing we can do to make the hurt go away. And, most of all, love stinks when something or someone we love dies and it feels like part of us has died with them. Sometimes, love stinks.

Sometimes love stinks and sometimes love is a many splendored thing because love is the thing in the world over which we have the least control. Love is the thing in the world that leaves us the most vulnerable. Love is the thing in the world that makes us feel the best. Love is, well, love is the thing in the world—the thing that makes our heart sing, our heart soar—our heart break, our heart ache. And for Paul, it is the thing that holds it all together, love is the very definition of what it is to be a Christian—not the love of fairytale happy endings, but the love of other over the love of self and the love of God over anything else. And sometimes, love stinks. And sometimes, love is a many splendored thing, but always, always, love is. ⁸*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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor 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. ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

Thanks be to God.