

ALL FOR LOVE

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)

After a year spent hunkering down, living smaller, and experiencing a little more fear and anxiety than usual, we are declaring this is the year of going big. It's a year of fresh starts and turning ordinary experiences into extraordinary ones. Enthusiasm will replace worry. Friendship will replace loneliness. No longer will we wait to "get back to normal"; instead, we will start making space for the new things God has for us. We will become less guarded and more daring because this is our year to live *All For Love*.

Love is the most powerful force on the planet, and yet the concept almost seems cliché. We tell somebody we love them, and in the same breath we talk about how much we love a new podcast. Perhaps we've become so accustomed to the word that we've forgotten how revolutionary it is, how God's love changes everything. It is life-altering, curse-lifting and, as shown in Christ's resurrection, quite literally death-conquering.

This year we embrace the transformative power of love, to the point where it starts to affect everything we do—the way we talk to our kids, interact with strangers, handle disappointments, celebrate victories, make decisions. When love floods into our lives, it all shifts. It results in less doom-scrolling, more conversation. Less comparison, more community. Less fear, more confidence. More over-the-top displays of compassion. More patience. More life in our souls. This year, love will save us. In fact, it already has, because love's name is Jesus.

WALK IN POWER.

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 2 Timothy 1:7

The opposite of love is fear. Fear drives so many of our thoughts and decisions. It is a potent emotion that causes us to do and say things that are out of alignment with who we want to be. It causes us to act in anger. Fear can make us timid and preoccupied; it might control our thoughts and keep us up at night or hold us back from forming deep friendships because we are afraid of being vulnerable. Fear keeps us stuck, but perfect love casts out fear. Here is the truth: There is nothing that can stand between you and what God has planned for you. God has given you a spirit of power, love, and self-control, and it is time to walk in this power that comes from the Holy Spirit. Love gives us the courage to exchange the intimidation of fear for an extraordinary life, full of passion and confidence to solve any problem that comes our way.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:39

Author Brennan Manning brilliantly wrote, "The litmus test of our love for God is our love for our neighbor." Love is sobering because it asks us to care for all people; even our enemies are made in the image of God and are worthy of dignity and respect. Loving our enemies is not an endorsement of what they do, it is an affirmation of *who they are*—God's beloved. And mercy triumphs over judgment. This year we will practice loving people who annoy us, offend us, or overlook us. We'll not take ourselves so seriously but instead go out of our way to do kind things for other people, especially if they don't know it was us. Even when it takes some extra energy, we will celebrate each other's victories and carry one another's burdens. We will engage other people with open hearts and go to extremes to love well because we have a God who shows us how it's done.

MAKE LOVE YOUR LEGACY.

Let all that you do be done in love. 1 Corinthians 16:14

Your legacy is what people remember when you leave a place. Whether that place is your kid's room at bedtime, your house each morning, or this earth. It's the stories your great-great grandkids will hear about you. Here is why this is so important: Love is contagious not just from person-to-person but also from generation to generation. It might be maddening to think about "leaving a legacy" when the little ones around you demand every ounce of your energy, but sometimes it is essential to look a little farther out, decide how you want to be remembered and what matters most to you, and take small intentional steps to make it happen. It's asking the question, "If I want love to be my legacy, how do I want to live today?" It doesn't have to be anything big; in fact, it usually starts in small ways. Clean up your home in love. Prepare dinner in love. Do your work in love. Play with LEGOs in love. *Doing everything in love* becomes a little more challenging with the harder aspects of daily life: Move through a traffic jam in love. Strongly disagree with someone in love. Discipline your kids in love, resolve conflict in love, engage in social media in love. These small moments ... This is where legacy is born.

*This is the year of big things. Love is starting to fling open doors, and when love comes into the room, no one is safe.
Comfort zones crumble,
Relationships are born,
Fear is cast out,
Whimsy is restored,
Perspectives shift,
Ready or not, here it comes ...*