

Faith, Hope, & Love & Narcissism

Faith, hope, and love. What would life be without them? They provide the foundation for a meaningful life as well as the essence of the Christian life. Yet, faith in God's power, hope that God would answer my prayers, and expressing God's love seemed to have failed in helping me navigate my relationship with a narcissist.

Examining 1 Corinthians 13, a familiar passage on this triad of faith, hope, and love, revealed answers for my heart.

Faith

Paul referenced a local proverb when he wrote about "faith that can move mountains" (v.2). I had sought faith to move a mountain—the heart of a narcissist. When nothing changed, I wondered what I had misunderstood about the power of faith.

Paul instructed in 1 Corinthians that even a faith strong enough to overcome mountainous obstacles lacked eternal value unless it was offered in love. Paul's faith to move a mountain was not challenging me to have that quality of faith for my mountain. He directed me, instead, in the use of faith. My failure to move a mountain was not a personal failure of faith.

Hope

I had refused to give up hope that God would answer prayers for the narcissist. Giving up hope contradicted my Christian faith. Exploring various contexts for biblical hope provided the insight my heart sought concerning this complex emotion.

I have Eternal, Living Hope, through my relationship with the living Savior, Jesus Christ. Because of this relationship, I can embrace hope for my own eternal life with Him. Peter wrote, Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

Trusting God for his help, mercy, and grace, lives out Expectant Hope. I cling to this hope for issues of my heart and for specific needs. The psalmists often wrote of this type of hope. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Ps 42:5).

I experience Wishful Hope when desiring a sunny day for an outdoor picnic or a soccer game win. King Herod expressed this type of hope when Jesus stood before him. Luke wrote that "he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort" (Luke 23:8).

This wishful hoping played an active role in my prayers for the narcissist. I hoped God would answer my intercessions for their changed heart. I hoped their actions would be more loving. This hope also kept me engaged in the abuse cycle.

Redemptive Hope trusts God's ability to redeem all things for His glory, including the hardships in my life. Redemptive hope directs my faith to the promise of Romans 8:28. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Love

Love encompasses multifaceted emotions. Scripture incorporates four Greek words to define it: eros (romantic love), philia (brotherly love), agape (sacrificial love desiring another's highest good. It's less of an emotion and more of a character trait revealed in action) and storge (family love).

I felt confused, though, by what felt like love for the narcissist. I have learned that several things can be true at the same time in a narcissistic relationship:

1. I had fallen in love with the person the narcissist portrayed themselves to be.
2. I felt love for the person I believed they could be.
3. The empathy I felt for their backstory and current struggles felt somewhat like love.
4. I felt love when reflecting upon the memories of good days.
5. What stirred in my heart seemed like love when the narcissist drew me back into the relationship after an emotional discard.

I also assumed the phrase love never fails (v 8) meant "if I loved enough, then love would never fail to make my marriage thrive." Never fail means it will never end or cease. Faith and hope will persevere until Christ's return. But God's agape love, the greatest gift, will continue for all eternity!

Father, thank you for being our source of authentic faith, hope and love. Fill us with your joy and peace as we entrust our lives, our futures, and our hearts to you. Continue to renew our faith and trust in you as you guide us into the treasures of your Word. May your promise of redemption allow our challenges and losses to shape our hearts and to bring you glory and honor for all eternity. Amen.