



Love Love Love

*Ps Debbie's testimony of
accepting and Embracing
the unconditional love of
God*

Well I have to say that Rogers testimony last week is a hard act to follow.

I guess because today is Valentine's day and last night we celebrated our 25 years of marriage, I want to talk a bit about love today.

I was born in 1963 in Waitakere Maternity Hospital. Where my mum tells me they got scones with jam and cream on for morning tea.

I am a middle child. I have an older sister and younger brother.

I am strongly middle child in my characteristics.

Put your hand up if you are a middle child?

Eldest?

Youngest?

I googled middle children and found out that:-

The middle child often has the sense of not belonging. They fight to receive attention from parents and others because they feel many times they are being ignored or dubbed off as being the same as another sibling. Being in the middle a child can feel insecure. The middle child often lacks drive and looks for direction from the first born child. Sometimes a middle child feels out of place because they are not over achievers and like to go with the flow of things.

They are peacemakers.

They are however very artistic and creative.



They like jobs that have flexible hours, and projects that frequently change are good for a middle child. The best possible match for a middle child would be a last born.

My parents separated for the first time when I was 6 and I was about 11 the last time.

The years in between I was unsure about everything.

I lived worried and not knowing if our dad was going to leave again.

So add that to my 'middle child insecurity' and I was a very insecure child.

I became allergic to conflict and still am to this day.

I will avoid conflict at all costs.

To get attention when I was a child I lied.

I made up huge stories that I would tell my friends so they would think I was special and I would feel important.

One year at Easter camp we had a slumber party where we all piled into one tent and the girls heard some of the stories I made up when I was a little girl. We got into trouble for the laughter and noise we were making.

Being a liar as a child has helped me as an adult and as a parent, because I was such a good liar I can now spot a lie from a hundred metres.

Sad for my kids but good for me.

For me the insecurity I felt had to be compensated by a deep deep desire to know what was happening so that I could gain some kind of control of the things that were affecting me.

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Back in the 70's marriage break-ups were a lot less common.

In fact statistics say that divorce is now 3 times more likely than back in 1970. So I was the only kid in my class whose parents were going through this.

My mum did a great job of raising me.

She is here this morning and I want to honour her.

There is nothing about my upbringing that I am disappointed or embarrassed about.

I always knew my mum loved me.

Everything that has happened to me in my life has made me who I am today. There is nothing in my testimony today that I would change.

It has brought me to this place in my life and I am very happy with that.

There were lots of parties in my childhood. Pub loads of people would arrive at our place for a party at 10.30pm on a Friday or Saturday night. We always had lots of people in our home and there was always a good conversation to be had around the dining room table.

As a teenager I spent my weekends drinking and partying – still insecure and searching for a fathers love and not having to be someone else in order to be accepted.



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It was winter in 1983. I was a swimming instructor which meant not much work through the winter months and had I come out of an abusive relationship and had just lived for 3 months unsuccessfully with my Dad and his wife so I decided run away and to travel down New Zealand to get away from it all.

The first part of my trip was very worldly.

But I ended up in Temuka staying with my Uncle Colin and Aunty Fay who were pastoring at the Temuka Baptist. It was free accommodation and i was hoping to see some of the south island. How bad could it be? Right?

Well I happened to be there while they had a team of Americans doing a church renewal week.

So after hanging about with my aunty and these American Christians all week I went to church.

During the service the Americans suggested that the church show their appreciation for my uncle and aunt.

The Congregation poured up to the front and lined up to hug their pastors. I watched in awe as I saw and felt the presence of God in that place.

You could almost see the love and what I now know to be the presence of God.

It was like a heatwave or a very light cloud of mist, you just knew it was there.

I started crying. I didn't know why. I had no idea what was going on.

I didn't know how a room full of people loving my Uncle and Aunty translated into God's love for me but it did.

I didn't know what or why I just knew that they had something that I had never experienced before.

None of the alcohol that I had in the preceding weeks came anywhere near to making me feel like I felt in that church.

Of course I know now that God is love and so the love in that room was God.

That afternoon I sat in the Temuka Baptist church manse lounge with my Uncle and he led me through the four spiritual laws and into a personal relationship with Jesus.

I ran away from my old life and found new life, but really I had no idea what I was doing. I just knew that I needed that kind of love and was prepared to give this Christianity a go.

My Uncle gave me a good news bible and wrote the second part of Hebrews 13:5 in it.

For God has said "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you"

He had no idea how important that verse would be to me. Or maybe he did!

When I came home from my life changing trip I spent a few months with a foot in each world but my non Christian friends very quickly ostracised me.

They had no idea the favour they were doing me.

With no support and not knowing any Christians I would have easily forgotten the experience I had at Temuka and got back into the pub and party scene.

But when my friends got all freaked out by my decision and the fact that I had begun attending church, my new church welcomed me with open arms.

Now I know that for me I need to be accepted I needed to belong, before I believed and that is what my Uncle gave me.

He accepted me into his home and family and church. Then I believed and it is only after those two happened that eventually I began to behave.

Too often we the church expect people to behave and they think that they have to be perfect before the church will accept them. (sadly often they do have to be perfect before the church will accept them) but not God he just loves them.

Then when they finally think they can behave they believe and then we accept them and they belong.

I believe we have it wrong , people need to belong then they will believe and then eventually their behaviour will change.

If I hadn't had a sense of belonging in that first church I would never have stayed and learned about God and the decision that I had made to follow Him and truly believe.

Believe me my behaviour changed over the first couple of years of being a follower of Jesus but not because I was made to change but because the desire to change came.

I was baptised within a month of becoming a Christian and became totally immersed in the church in the first four months.

The church was a vibrant and lively place, I had come into the kingdom amidst the charismatic renewal. I learnt about prayer and worship and was discipled by a lovely young couple.

But mostly I learnt about having a relationship with God. This was all so new to me that I soaked it all up. It was a very rich time.

Roger and I met in the youth group and to be honest I had checked him out and decided that he was not my type and too young for me.

Then one day he came around to help me with my guitar and I fell in love with him. Just like that.

We had known each other for about 10 months but something changed that day. I became a woman on a mission and for the next week I would make sure I was anywhere I knew he was going to be.

On the Saturday night we were having a progressive dinner.



I was pretty sure the soup was at my flat but decided that it would be good to check with Roger as he was part of the young adults leadership team.

I headed to the church work scheme office and asked if they knew where he was as I needed to check what course we were having at our flat on the Saturday.

The receptionist there said she thought he was at the church office and that she thought we were having the soup course.

I headed for the church where I saw the youth pastor and asked him if he knew where Roger was because I needed to know what course we were having for the progressive dinner.

He told me that Roger was out reading water meters and that we were having the soup course.

So I headed out on to the streets to find Roger.

I tracked him down and asked him what course we were having for the progressive dinner?

He wasn't sure but he thought it was the soup.

A few hours later he called me and asked me to go out with him on the next Monday night to celebrate his birthday.

I, of course said yes.

If he had proposed on that first date I would have said "yes".



He didn't propose but he did say that he would not have spent his last \$20 on this dinner if he didn't think this relationship would end in marriage. I said I was happy with that.

He proposed 6 weeks later and we were married 8 months after that.

I loved Roger then but I had no idea what that love would grow into.

I had no idea what that love would require of me.

I had no idea where that love would lead me.

And I had no idea how that love would deepen.

You know I think our relationship with God is like that too. As we get to know God more we learn to love him more.

When I became a Christian I had no idea what having a relationship with God would require and I certainly had no idea where that would lead me.

I never expected the man that I had married because he was a strong man of God, who knew what he wanted and where he was going, to have a breakdown or for us to have to learn to live with mental and physical illness being an everyday thing.

When I said "in sickness and in health" I never dreamed what that would actually mean.

I will come back to that but first I want to tell you about when we had left our first church.

As Roger said last week we were offered police protection from the pastor.

We took a few weeks to find a new church and our first week at Glenfield Baptist was the first week of the new pastor there.

His name was Maurice Milmine and if our first church was a place where foundations were learnt and we learnt what not to do in ministry then at Glenfield we learnt about forgiveness.

Maurice and his wife Dianne met with us weekly to work through the things we had seen and experienced at our first church.

They taught us that forgiveness is a choice.

It is something we do, not because we feel like it and not because the person that hurt us deserves it but because God knows that that is what we need.

Forgiveness is an action not a feeling, it is a choice not an emotion.

And most importantly it sets *us* free.

It is a gift we give ourselves.

When I was a girl all I wanted was to grow up and have my own family.

I wanted lots of children. So I managed to convince Roger after a few months of marriage that we should have a family straight away instead of waiting the planned 2 years.

Well we lost two babies to miscarriage before I gave birth to Josiah just one week before our 2nd wedding anniversary.

Being a mum was and is everything I expected it to be .

I love my children more deeply than I imagined could be possible.

With each added child I have been amazed at the capacity of my mother's heart. My family is the number one calling in my life.

Love hurts doesn't it?

Being a parent can be the most painful thing. We want the best for our kids.

But for me because of my insecure childhood I am often a marshmallow parent. I hate to see my kids hurting either physically or emotionally.



About 18 years ago someone had a word for me about me being like a

mother bear who wants to protect her children at all costs. You know that is so true and I think it is because I don't want them to feel the insecurity that I did.

When Roger had his breakdown I had 3 preschoolers.

My life was already incredibly busy. Then I had to pick up all of his household duties because when he was home he was what I called a wall watcher.

He couldn't even read the kids a bedtime story.

I had to carry Roger's medication in a locked box in my bag and never knowing if I would come home and find that he had taken his life.

I stopped talking to God.

I was angry with Him.

People told me that it was a good thing that Roger was having a breakdown, and that Roger would be a better person in the end.

Well I was happy with the man that he was.

I didn't want my life to change.

So God was the one that I got frustrated with.

I couldn't get frustrated with Roger, I had to look after him. I certainly couldn't take it out on the kids.

So God copped the lot.

But you know what? I knew God was with me and sometimes I would look up, shake my head and grunt an acknowledgement to Him.

Thankfully God doesn't take offence and He was patient with me.

He understood. And you know I look back on that time and I know that He was the strength that got me through.

You see if you have never lived with someone suffering from mental illness or physical illness you don't know what it is like to have to be the *constant* solid support.

To be the one who gets to the end of your rope only to have to hold on for dear life for you and your kids and the one that you care for.

It was tough.

I had some great friends who supported me through those years.

Friends that didn't mind coming to dinner and having Roger hiding in the bedroom.

Friends that would come around and fold my washing and play with my kids. Friends that



would just be there and especially friends that didn't have any expectations of me.

As Roger shared last week as he was coming out of his breakdown his physical illness flared up.

So four years after his first panic attack I had a ten week old baby as well as the other three children and Roger heading into major surgery.

Again I look back on that time and see just one set of footprints in the sand.

I know that God carried me through and gave me the strength and patience to survive it.

I know that there of some of you this morning who are caring for someone or living with someone who suffers from a mental emotional or physical illness.

I want to say to you "take courage". In Hebrews 13:5b God says "I will never fail you or forsake you" and when you feel like you are at the end of your rope and you don't think that you could handle any more.

I want you to know that you can handle more and that God will be there to be the pillar that gives you strength.



I remember about 6 weeks after Rogers surgery lying down on the sofa and saying to God "I have to have a break I just can't do this anymore." I was physically exhausted and emotionally drained.

Tears slipped from my eyes and he walked into the room and asked if I was ok. I told him I was and he said "that's good because I think I you need to call an ambulance, something is not right."

You know I was up off that sofa and managed to find the strength both physically and emotionally to cope with what was happening.

Only God could have given me that strength because all of my reserves were empty.

The bible talks often of God strengthening us.

Psalm 59:16

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; *I will strengthen you*, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Habakkuk 3:19

The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights

Well that day He certainly made my feet like the feet of a deer and my burden light.

God may not stop us from going through difficult times but He will *absolutely* give us the strength to survive them. I know that for sure.

So if our first church was a place of laying foundations, and Glenfield was learning forgiveness, then our years while Roger was ill and we were at Northwest were about learning Trust.

Trusting in God for peace patience and strength.

Now don't get me wrong we had fabulous times too and I wouldn't change any of it.

I had strong foundations in my relationship with God.

I knew He would never leave me or forsake me. I knew without a doubt that He was with me.

Roger was 18months in to a 3 year degree at BCNZ when we heard of a church going through a hard time.

We offered to help with anything that was needed, office work, worship, preaching, anything at all.

They needed help with worship and preaching and so we came here to Te Atatu and the very first Sunday God did something amazing for me.

He gave me a love for the people here that was instant.

I remember praying with some people after the message and felt truly privileged to be able to do it.

I still do.

I still count it a real privilege to be able to pray with and for people and I still have that great love for each and every one of you that walk through that door each Sunday.

We are also so blessed as a pastoral couple to walk the journey with you our church family.

As Roger said last week through the tough times and through the good times.

So four months later Roger and I were called here to be your pastors, I was going to be the best pastors wife/pastor ever.

You see I had all these expectations about what was expected of me.

But we soon realised that other people had expectations too about what or who a pastor should be.

Only thing was their expectations were different to ours.

We went to see another pastor to help us with some struggles and he told us something that set me free in many ways.

I talked to him about the struggle I was having with being myself because by simply being myself I hurt people. I am the person that wants to protect people from hurt. It wasn't something I wanted, I didn't mean to hurt them but I did.

Now hear this because I think that some of you might need this, this morning.

He said to me "You haven't hurt them. They have been hurt, but *you* didn't hurt them." He said to me "you cannot and will not be able to meet the expectations that are put on you, to be someone that you are not."

Now I have to say I did feel some relief.

But here is where it set me free. I was able to think of all the people that had hurt me and realise that I had been hurt but they hadn't hurt me.

Now sure there have been some times and some people in my life where the hurt has been intentional but they are very few.

So I was able to really look at some of the sad and painful times, some relationships where I had been hurt and see that the other person hadn't hurt me. I had been hurt and that pain was real but they hadn't hurt me.

I wonder if there might be some of us here this morning that this might also free.

Now I have talked before about relationships because for me relationships are really important.

And so here is another amazing thing have just recently learned.

When a relationship with someone ends and let's face it they do and let's face it you are usually hurt, a spouse, a friend or a family member, don't be robbed of the good times in that relationship.

at parachute this year I saw someone that I used to be really close to but now we don't have anything to do with each other. Roger said to me "those were good times weren't they" It was like I had forgotten.

The good times *were* still good times. but you know we get hung up on the bad times and the problems, whatever it was that brought closure to the relationship and we



lose the good times.

They get locked behind a curtain of sadness and loss.

Sometimes it is ok to let the curtain down and remember the good times.

So if the first church was about learning good foundations and then Glenfield was learning about forgiveness and northwest was learning about trust then our time here so far has been about Gods faithfulness.

In fact I think that has been an overriding theme and lesson since my Uncle wrote Hebrews 13:5 in my bible. "I will never leave you or forsake you."

So I think a testimony should always finish with what is happening in your life now.

My husband, my children, the church and God

Firstly Roger, I want to tell you and him that I think he is the most intelligent, self aware, perceptive and caring man I know.

I love that he is mine and I am his.

He is a gifted pastor and teacher.

His relationship with God is real and inspiring to me.



Our marriage of 25 years has had many rocky times and many many times of great joy and laughter and I believe that being married to him is an adventure.

Life was never meant to be easy or necessarily secure but he makes me feel secure.

His love for God makes me feel secure and his love for me and our children makes me feel secure. His love for this church for each of you makes me feel secure.

My children are wonderful. I am very proud of each of them.



We have had many changes in our family in the last few years.

Two new daughters-in-law, Melz and Kristy, a grandson Mykah and soon a new son-in-law Danny all added to our lives. So soon we will only have three children living at home.

I love each of them more deeply than they could ever know and I wonder, if I can love them this much how much more does our heavenly father love them.

If I had time I would tell you about each of them individually.

This church, not the building but you the people who belong here.

God gives me a love for you all and I believe that my call and Rogers is to love you, just as you are and to point you towards God. Quite simple really.

Our job is to accept you as Christ does and help you to know and love Him too.

You see I am not an intellectual. I have a very simple theology, Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so.



I love God with all my heart and soul and mind.

I live to serve Him, in my home, in this church and the community.

I have known God for 27 years and been married to Roger for 25.

When you have been married for a long time or had a friendship or any kind of relationship for a long time you start to know what the other person is thinking.

Sometimes I don't need to finish my sentence because Roger knows what I am trying to say.

Well my relationship with God is like that.

We all know that He knows our thoughts and heart attitudes but I believe we can begin to know His.

The more I know Him, the more I read His word, the more I know what He wants for and from me.

The more I know Him the easier it is to trust Him that when I have come to the end of my rope, to trust that He will give me more and will not let go.

The more I know him the more I believe and understand That He is faithful. He will never leave us or forsake.

Now this was the end of my testimony but God spoke to me as I typed those last words.

This is personal but I want to share it with you. think that just as it was a revelation to me it might be a revelation to someone else here this morning.

It was like God was saying “don’t you get it?”

I have been trying to say to you all these years “that I will never leave you or forsake you like your Dad did”.

All these years this has been the verse I have stood in and on to but never seen that side of it.

It is good let me tell you to know that.

Even as an adult to have that security in God that He will never leave me.

How Good and wonderful God is that He continues to work in our lives and fix us with His faithfulness and love.

Lets pray.

Please come forward if you would like prayer this morning and the elders and Roger and I would love to pray with you.

By the way we did have the soup course at my flat!