

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at www.mlcchurch.com

Love and marriage: it's hard work. One of the high-water mark teachings of our faith tradition is to *love our enemies* and to *do good to those that hate us*.

For any of us, that's a huge bite; perhaps, even, over the top. Certainly, it's an immediate reminder of the demands love makes. While we might easily dismiss this teaching as too lofty and rigorous, if we stay with it, it can take us to a bigger love.

Loving our enemies unpacks for us the truth about love—that it's hard work. That it asks something of us. What is more is that, along the way, we become a bigger and better person. Again, to be meaningful and to evoke true joy from within, *love and marriage* are hard work.

In the entertaining movie, *A League of Their Own*, which came out some years back (about a women's professional baseball league back in the 1940's during World War II), the star catcher for the *Rockford Peaches*, played by Geena Davis, threatens to quit the team. She's had it; she'd tired and worn out. She's worried about her husband who is off in the war. And now, in a low moment, she wants to throw in the towel.

Complaining to the manager, played by Tom Hanks, she moans, *It's too hard. Everything about it ... it's just become too hard. I don't want to do it anymore.*

The manager won't have any of it. Totally exasperated with her attitude, he says to her, *It's supposed to be hard. If it weren't hard, everybody would be playing it.* And then he adds, *Hard is what makes it great.*

Finding common ground. Part of what makes marriage and any committed relationship hard is that we have to give up stuff we don't want to give up. We have to make adjustments, talk things through, value and appreciate the individual differences of the other person. To the point: we have to be willing to find common ground.

However, the process of *finding* common ground helps us grow and evolve as a person. We grow when we are nudged outside our comfort zone—when we are challenged to embrace the uniqueness and the differences of the other person and to find ways of affirming them.

But again, we have to be willing to *give up stuff*. More still, we have to be willing to make a commitment. Without the commitment, too easily, we throw in the towel. We don't pay the price for taking the marriage (the relationship) to a higher level.

Curiously, commitment has a way of enabling us to work our way through the troubled waters of life to the balmy beaches on the other side. But there's no short-cut. Again, it's hard work.

Serving love's purposes. In his new book, *Overcoming Life's Disappointment*, Rabbi Harold Kushner tells of meeting with a young couple to prepare their wedding ceremony. Everything was going fine until the groom asked,

*Rabbi Kushner, would you be willing to make one small change in the ceremony? Instead of pronouncing us **husband and wife, for as long as we both shall live**, could you pronounce us **husband and wife, for as long as we both shall love**?*

We've talked about this, he went on, and we feel that if we ever get to the point where we no longer love each other, it's not morally right for us to be stuck with each other and be deprived of any chance for happiness.

To his credit, Rabbi Kushner would not agree to the change, saying to them: *if you don't enter into marriage on the assumption that it is forever, you will never achieve the ultimate happiness to which marriage invites us.*

The truth of marriage (and of most relationships) is that hard times are going to come—times that invite us to stand back from it all and re-evaluate. However, the re-evaluation can be a good thing because it feeds and stretches the love.

The key in relationships—always—is to *serve love's purposes*. Love sees the *big picture* of our lives (how everything fits together). Love does what is best for the relationship, knowing that what is best for the relationship is best for the individuals involved.

Loving our spouses over the years *is* hard work, to be sure. But when love's purposes are being served, the joy in heaven knows no bounds.