

What To Do With the Love Gap?

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Much of my past 10 days have been spent in a hospital room taking care of my dad who had a very successful bypass surgery but has developed some complications with fluid in and around his left lung. To be more precise I spent a lot of time in the hospital room taking care of my mother as she insisted on being present and doing all she could to take care of my dad.

The care consisted mostly of listening and responding. Dad went through the process of getting stronger, the removing of thick tubes and skinny IV lines, and finally out of intensive cardiac care to a regular room. After moving to a regular room he then went through the process of adding thick tubes and skinny IV lines. In addition to his nurse he added to his medical entourage certified nurse assistants, respiratory therapists, dieticians, doctors specializing in diabetes and heart and lung function. His vitals would be taken on odd hours every two hours, and his breathing treatments and back pounding to break up mucus, would be every four hours on the even hours.

He would make a noise and we would instantly be by his bed like a parent afraid of every noise their sleeping baby makes. He would start to cough and then try to suppress it. At first, he thought the big red heart shaped pillow was ridiculous. We would tell him to hold it and he held it in the palm of his hand like a beggar holding a cup to collect pennies, but he soon learned of its value. We were there with tissue to his lips and his pillow to the new zipper on his chest.

At the beginning of this stage of healing his nurse would speak loudly over the cough, "Hold your pillow and squeeze it like it was your wife!" He was in too much pain for his eyes to twinkle and mom always longed for his touch but work kept the hugs too few and too far apart. All of us in the room know this truth about their life together. It is too soon to tell if there is new insight, regrets, or the power to change, but open heart surgery sure opens the door for a new perspective on life and new appreciation for the ones you love.

On one of my drives from the house to the hospital, or the hospital to the house, I don't remember which, I heard on NPR a literary review of a collection of short stories written by Edna O'Brien. The voice from the car radio said,

"Moving to Ireland now with novelist Edna O'Brien's new story collection, and the twinkles disappear and the landscape, whether Ireland or London or New York, darkens. Dark is almost everything in these eleven stories on the matters of sex, love, home, and death. The reason that love is so painful, O'Brien has one of her characters say, is that it always amounts to two people wanting more than two people can give"

I think this is true, but it is not just true of love between two people; it is true of love in general. Faith, hope, love abide and the greatest of these is love but it often does not measure up. Movies, paperback novels, television, songs, musicals, and the internet give us an ideal of love but reality is something different. There is this ideal of love which is always bright, warm, fuzzy, and complete. In contrast are you and me, as human beings who are deep pits of love needs. The two things, the ideal and the reality, don't quite zero out or balance out.

Kahlil Gibran writes about love.

When you love you should not say, "God is in my heart," but rather, "I am in the heart of God."

And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.

Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.

But if you love and must have desires, let these be your desires:

To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.

To know the pain of too much tenderness.

To be wounded by your own understanding of love;

And to bleed willingly and joyfully.

To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving;

To rest at the noon hour and meditate love's ecstasy;

To return home at eventide with gratitude;

And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart and a song of praise upon your lips.

Please note that the words are not about some fulfillment, but rather about the gaps of love, and the tension between the ideal and the reality. That is the meaning of such references as "the pain of too much tenderness", "to be wounded by your own understanding", and "to bleed willingly and joyfully".

I watched a lot of people at the hospital this past week and one of the observations I made was that some people coped well with the gap between the ideal of love and the reality of love and some people did not.

The people who did not deal well with the love gap seemed to live in a constant state of wounded-ness always wanting and needing more than can be humanly given. The people who did well with the love gap seemed to live in a state of acceptance and grace for the way life is.

It occurs to me that love is not striving for some ideal. Love is best expressed in the way we respond to the gap between what is needed and what can be offered. It is how we

decide to deal with the gap that really defines love. The most mature spiritual people can respond to the gap with compassion, kindness, and patience. We can respond to the gap between the reality of love offered and the ideal of love needed in gracious ways and in that kind of response find peace.

How many times have we seen a child make the pies made of mud and offer them to the parent? The parents' response is not one of disappointment or despair but rather the parent acts like it is the greatest pie ever made and in such a gracious response creates joy for child and self.

Love is great, but when it painfully falls short, let us fill in the gap with our own loving response.

"As a physical reminder of the Moonine's physical life among us, Darrell will place a **token amount of her ashes** in the niche. The remainder of her ashes will be returned to Mother Earth symbolizing her life as participating in creating the future.

"Wayne will place a small amount of Moonine's (and his) **favorite beverage, Dr. Pepper**, which symbolizes his gratitude to her for being his living mother.

"Dawn will place a **dress pattern** to remember Moonine's passion as a seamstress and also a **ribbon** she won at a 4-H fair as a reminder of her passion for excellence in sewing.

The family also places a **picture** of Moonine's grandson, Austin.

The family also sends with Moonine's ashes a **neckscarf** which she knitted and wore for her picture. Just as a scarf is used to wrap around ourselves to keep warm the family acknowledges the gift of her love which she wrapped around each of you.

"During their year of courtship, Moonine wrote fifty **love letters** to Darrell which he still has. He will place one of those in the niche as a remembrance of over fifty years of continuing love.

"We now close the door on Moonine's life in the expression we know best, but because you carry on the impact of her life and her love in a unique expression through each of you, she lives on in a new way. The shadow of her life will extend far through each of you and generations to come.

A Committal Prayer

Eternal God, you have shared with us the life of Moonine. Before she was ours, she was yours. For all that Moonine has given us to make us what we are, for that of her which lives and grows in each of us, and for her life that in your love will never end, we give you thanks.

As now we offer Moonine back into your arms, comfort us in our loneliness, strengthen us in our weakness, and give us courage to face the future unafraid. Draw those of us who remain in this life closer to one another, make us faithful to serve one another, and give us to know that peace and joy which is eternal life Amen.