

Love Does Not Surrender

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There are stories in life that refuse to be reduced to simple categories of joy or sorrow. They carry both, intertwined in ways that shape the soul over time. This is a story about love, about suffering, and about what it means to stay when everything in life begins to fall apart.

Early Roots of Friendship

Long before illness entered the picture, there was friendship. Deep friendship. The kind that forms early and quietly endures across decades, through laughter and marriages and children and loss. Kitty was part of that beautiful circle of girls who shared life together so fully in those early years. There was Kitty, and there was Leah, and there was Wilma, and there was Carrie. Four close friends, loving life in high school, being silly together, laughing together, walking through the innocence and joy of youth before life began to reveal how much joy and sorrow can become intertwined.

There was something lovely in that early history, something tender and full of life. These were not shallow friendships. They were deep roots. And as life unfolded, those roots held. Through marriages, through children, through hardship, through all the changing seasons of adulthood, that bond remained. Carrie would be the first to pass, taken by an aggressive cancer. She died with dignity, with courage, and with the ache of knowing she would not see her children grow. Yet even there, in that valley, there was love and hope and a reaching toward what mattered most. That loss changed the shape of the group, but not the depth of what they had shared.



Kitty, even from those early years, carried a particular warmth. She was one of the sweetest people I have ever met, marked by kindness, gentleness, and a natural turning toward others. There was something steady in her, something life-giving, something that would later become even more visible in both the way she lived and the way she suffered.

A Life Intertwined Again

We met Alan early in our marriage. He was a young pastor with a deep and unwavering faith, and a personality that held both conviction and joy. He could speak with sincerity about God and, in the next moment, lose himself completely in the chaos of a football game, with a kind of unrestrained enthusiasm that made him both deeply grounded and completely alive.

And it was in that same season that it became clear there was something very special between him and Kitty. There was a depth to it that went beyond the surface, a deep love, a deep respect, and a deep bond that was unmistakable. It was not dramatic or performative. It was steady, grounded, and real. It was obvious where this was going, and they married soon.



Even then, it was clear they had already chosen each other in a much deeper way.

Life then took us all in different directions for a time. For about a decade after we were married, Alan and Kitty were pastoring a church in Nebraska, while Leah and I were in the military, moving through seasons and places, much of that time spent in Europe. Our lives unfolded along very different paths, yet remained quietly connected.



And then, not by chance, but in a way that felt designed by God, our paths came back together. We landed in Washington State, living not more than thirty minutes from one another. What could easily be called coincidence felt much more like providence, the quiet hand of God bringing lives back into alignment.

It was there that we watched our families grow. Our friendship deepened, settled, and became something even more meaningful. There was laughter, a great deal of laughter. Shared meals, long conversations, hikes, football games, and the kind of moments that seem ordinary at the time but later reveal themselves as sacred. Anyone who knew Alan knew how much he loved football, and how completely he would lose himself in it. My family affectionately called him the crazy pastor, and there was truth in that. He did not just watch the game, he lived it, yelling, pacing, fully invested, so loud and so intense that the whole room felt it. Our little Papillon, that tiny butterfly dog, looked like she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown more than once just trying to survive one of those games. And yet that was part of what made Alan who he was, fully, fully present, able to feel deeply and express it without reservation, and at the same time deeply grounded in his faith.

Those were good years.

When Suffering Enters

Life, as it does, held both joy and hardship. Their daughter Mary developed a brain tumor when they were serving at a church in Nebraska and entered into a battle that would test everything. There were surgeries, consultations, and long stretches of uncertainty. Yet she persevered. She fought through it. She survived. She went on to marry and to have children of her own. It was a joy that carried a depth only those who have known real suffering can fully understand.

And after that season, my own life entered a time of breaking. Illness and financial strain brought me into a place where much of what I had relied on began to fall apart. It was disorienting, humbling, and at times overwhelming. And that is where Alan showed up in a different way, not with easy answers, not with platitudes, but with presence and truth. He walked with me. He mentored me. He spoke into that season with clarity and conviction. He told me something that has never left me, that God cares about character, and that He will allow us to walk through trials to refine it, that He is more concerned with who we are becoming than with what we possess. That truth became an anchor for me. It helped reset something deeper, something that might not have changed otherwise. That was Alan.

Love That Stays

And then, as it so often does, life turned again. Kitty was diagnosed with brain cancer. At first, there were subtle changes. Speech became more difficult. Words did not come as easily. Thoughts could not be gathered and expressed in the way they once were. And then, more quickly than any of us were prepared for, that ability began to fade.

Alan stepped in with a kind of love that is rarely spoken about, but unmistakable when it is seen. There was no outward frustration, no visible resentment. What I saw was tenderness, presence, and a quiet, unwavering commitment to care for her all the way through. He guided her spiritually. He stayed close. He carried the weight of what was happening without turning away from it. He knew where this was going, and still, he stayed.



Our final time with them came as Leah and I were preparing to leave Washington State. We stayed in their home. It would be the last time we would see Kitty. By then, she could no longer speak, but there are moments in life that transcend language. Leah sat with her, and their eyes met, and what followed stretched beyond what words can easily capture. There was recognition. There was light. A brightness in Kitty's eyes that seemed to come from somewhere deeper than the disease that had taken so much from her. They did not speak because they did not need to. There was love there. There was memory. There was shared life. Something passed between them that could not be reduced to language. It was sacred. Alan and I stood there and watched, aware that we were witnessing something holy.

Not long after, Kitty passed away. For all the strength Alan had shown, for all the love he had poured out, the cost of it became visible, the exhaustion, the grief, the breaking that comes when you have loved fully and stayed to the very end. He had carried her through, and when it was over, the weight of it all brought him to his knees. This is what love looks like when it does not surrender.

Love Begins Again



And for a time, it seemed as though that chapter had come to a close, as though Alan might spend the rest of his life carrying that loss, weighed down by sorrow and the depth of what had been. But I had it wrong and I remember him visiting us about two years ago, and even then, there was something different, something subtle, something not yet fully formed, but present. He had met someone very special.

Just when we think we have written the final chapter of our lives, just when we believe the story has reached its end, God has a way of taking the pen from our hand and writing something entirely different, something we never could have imagined.

Enter Deborah. A remarkable woman, beautiful in spirit, who herself had endured profound and tragic loss, the loss of her husband in a terrible accident and the loss of her son to COVID. She, too, had been brought into the depths of grief, carrying sorrow in a way that reshapes a life.

I do not think either of them, when they first met, intended for it to go anywhere. But God, in His way, began to write a new chapter. They fell in love, perhaps at first united in their sorrow, connected through the shared experience of loss, each having known what it means to love deeply and to grieve deeply. Both had experienced remarkable marriages, and the question remains, who could ever replace that. The answer is that no one does. And yet, God brought them together.

What became so evident was not the erasing of the past, but the honoring of it. They have each maintained a place for their grief, a place for their sorrow, a place for the love they lost that will always remain part of them. They do not run from it. They do not try to make it

disappear. They honor it. They respect it. They share it. They speak of their spouses with reverence, with depth, with love.

And yet, that does not define them.

What defines them now is also the love they have found together, united in Christ, united in spirit, united in heart.

We were blessed with a five-day visit, meeting Deborah in person after many conversations, and what became immediately clear was the depth of who she is. Not as a replacement for Kitty, never that, but as something entirely different, something uniquely beautiful, a filling of Alan's heart in a way that makes space for both what was and what now is. He does not let one eclipse the other, just as she does not let the memory of her husband Sam be eclipsed.

It is a remarkable thing to witness, to see two people beyond seventy, so in love, so respectful, so grounded, so full of hope, and still carrying a sense of purpose as they serve God together.

What a beautiful tapestry. A life that holds love and sorrow, pain and loss, and yet a willingness to persevere, a willingness to show up again, a willingness to love again. And even when we think we have written the final chapter, God, in His wisdom, takes the pen and writes another.

And it is a beautiful chapter, still being written.