



April 9, 2025

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Lord, thank you for challenging us with a higher calling than anything this earth has to offer."

Pastor George in this week's sermon

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altabap@aol.com

prayer requests:

altabaprayer@aol.com

Connie Larson DeV Vaughn, pastor

George Van Alstine, associate pastor

ALTADENA BAPTIST CHURCH

791 E. Calaveras Street
Altadena, CA 91001-2447
(626) 797-8970

Mailing address:

P.O. Box 91055
Pasadena, CA 91109

HOPELESSLY IN LOVE?

Some things never change. Take young love, for instance.

In 1976, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez performed an Appalachian folk song entitled "Railroad Boy."¹ It told the sad story of a young woman who was so traumatized by the loss of her first true love that she took her own life by hanging herself, leaving this note in her pocket:

"Go dig my grave both wide and deep
Put a marble stone at my head and feet
And on my breast, put a snow white dove
To warn the world that I died of love."

This song was brought from Ireland with poor families who immigrated to the USA in the 19th century. In the old country, the ex-lover was not the "Railroad Boy," but "That Butcher Boy."² The earlier version clearly implies that the young woman is pregnant:

I wish, I wish, I wish in vain
I wish I was a maid again
A maid again I ne'er will be
Til cherries grow on an apple tree
I wish my baby it was born
And smiling on its Daddy's knee

Surely, the girl is presented as an innocent victim, but it seems to be implied that her lover is as well, since in both versions he's described as a "boy." Both of them are novices, falling in love for the first time. However, he's able to walk away relatively unscathed, while her life is turned upside down.

Whether it's about Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in 1597 or Tony and Maria in Stephen Sondheim's "Westside Story" in 1957 or you and your first experience of falling in love, with what's-his-name, in 2015, the script never seems to change. Twenty-five centuries ago, the author of the Bible book of Proverbs put it this way:

*Three things are too wonderful for me;
four I do not understand:
the way of an eagle in the sky,
the way of a snake on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas,
and the way of a man with a woman.*
(Proverbs 30:18-19)

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(Continued from other side)

“Some things are hard to wrap your mind around: Do you get how an eagle can soar for an hour without flapping its wings? Can you figure out what enables a snake to slither across a smooth rock surface without legs? How is a sailing ship able to navigate in heavy seas when the sky is completely covered with clouds? When you can explain all these, maybe you’ll begin to understand what goes on between a man and woman who fall in love.”

The Hebrew words translated as *man and woman in this passage are both specialized terms that focus on their attractiveness to the opposite sex: he is a geber (root meaning - strength), a “hunk”; she’s an almah (maid, unmarried but ready). They’re typical inexperienced young people who are impressionable and ripe for love encounters. The Proverb rightly points out that nobody really understands how that works, so it always catches us off guard. That’s why we describe it as “falling” in love.*

Those of who have been around for a while, in most cases, have some sad stories to tell about painful breakups. Yet, we’re still thankful that this kind of vulnerability is part of our God-given nature as human beings. Falling in love should not be seen as a curse, but as a blessing. For the young woman in the song, it seemed that the end of her love affair meant the end of her life. But take it from us who can no longer be described as *gebers or almahs (see above), God has greater love experiences ahead of you. Your first love was just a taste of his goodness.*

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ You can listen to this classic recording at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_sn1vrR_FQ

² This video will give you the history of the song over 400 years <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHqAwcUrua0> ; Another beautiful version can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwVdcBXgnUU>