

I Would Die for You

*One Student's Story of Passion,
Service, and Faith*

Brent and Deanna Higgins

with excerpts from the writings of BJ Higgins



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Section One

The Basics

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.

PSALM 119:9 (NIV)

one

Love IS a Verb

Love is not just an emotion, as the world sees it. It is action. While admittedly it does have emotion involved with it, it is not as unstable or changeable as emotions are. Affections come and go, grow and fade, but love does not. It is constant because it is more than an emotion; it is more of a constant state of selflessness that produces action.

BJ HIGGINS

FROM A LETTER TO A FRIEND • 2004

Love. Just do it.

Love. The word screams at you from the car stereo speakers booming their way through the traffic. It whispers from the ads spinning through cyberspace and appearing on your computer screen. You may even find it wrapped around the brightly colored cups at the fast-food counter or highlighting the menu when

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you stop for a Starbucks. Friends toss it off so easily: “I love your hair!” “He loves seafood.” “Didn’t you love him in that movie?”

Love meant much more than an offhand comment or casual phrase to BJ Higgins. In his words, love was not just what you said—but what you *did*.

Love. BJ taught it. He lived it. He died for it.

This is his story.

Love at first sight? We (Brent and Deanna—BJ’s friends and others from his generation call us Mom and Dad, so that’s how we’ll refer to ourselves in this book) still disagree about that. It happened in Houston, Texas. Although we had seen one another off and on, the Indiana boy and the petite Southern girl did not officially meet until the middle of the summer of 1982, when we attended the same class at church. Mom had recently graduated from Houston Baptist University, and Dad was a fresh transplant to Houston after finishing college in his home state of Indiana.

[Seeing her for the first time] caused my jaw to spontaneously free-fall to its fullest open position. I immediately bowed my head, and said, “Father, if there is any way, this is the girl I want to marry!”

Dad, blog posting

January 14, 2006

We shared similar backgrounds: a deep faith, close family relationships, a strong interest in music. Attraction moved rapidly into a love that quickly drew us to marriage. Within just a few months, Brent Allen Higgins and Deanna Louise Tucker were wed at her brother Dan’s home in nearby Deer Park.

Love (and Dad’s desire to beat the heat) drew us to new jobs and a new home in the Indianapolis area. The arrival of first one, then another baby girl (Lauren Breanne and Whitney Louise) multiplied the love. It also changed the location of “home” from a tiny apartment to a larger duplex to a three-bedroom house.

This home, and this family, welcomed Brent Allen Higgins Jr. (we usually called him “BJ”) to the world on October 1, 1989.



BJ, Lauren, and Whitney

There was a mild element of disappointment when the ultrasound showed he was a girl—after two girls, we were really hoping for a boy. I think Deanna was more disappointed than I was. When he was born, the doctor said, “You have a son.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! I remember immediately picking up the phone and calling my father. This was his first grandson.

Dad

BJ loved to hear the story of the ultrasound that incorrectly identified him as a girl and his astonished family’s delight in his birth. Later, he described their response:

My grandfather was not the only family member that was excited. Almost everyone was, but my sisters were especially. They didn’t really care at the time if I was a girl or a boy; they were just happy that I was a baby. I have two sisters, both older than me, and I was my parents’ first son. When I was born, my sister Whitney was two years old, and my sister Lauren was four years old. Though some people thought my sisters would be jealous of me and of the attention I received; on the contrary, they were thrilled at my arrival! They sometimes even fought over who could hold me next.

FROM “BJ HIGGINS” • 2003

The self-assurance that led BJ to write those words in his autobiography “BJ Higgins” (a school assignment) flowed naturally

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from our family atmosphere. In a world of broken families and painful relationships, BJ knew something radically different. He knew love as much more than a casual phrase. To our son, love was always an action—a lifestyle—a legacy.

BJ was always very loving. All our kids were very affectionate. I had people telling me that when the second and third ones came along, the older ones might be jealous, but that never happened. When BJ was born, the girls both thought he was their baby. They were so affectionate, and I was very thankful for that.

Mom

Spend time with the Higgins/Tucker extended family and you'll experience this love full force. Our eyes brighten and our voices warm when we talk about our children. Pore over the pages of one of Mom's scrapbooks and see the time, care, and love invested. Creativity and pictures matter. Lives matter even more.

Visit a family event to discover the same love in all directions. Cousins tumble over one another in their eagerness to reach an arriving uncle. Brothers and sisters, grown or not-yet-grown, take obvious delight in spending time together. Tickles, giggles, and hugs abound.

Frustrations, faults? Absolutely! Don't look for perfection—you won't find it. Instead, you'll see real people, real relationships—overflowing with acceptance, encouragement, laughter, and love.

From the moment of his birth, BJ Higgins began learning and living this life of love. Later, he described it as a family distinctive:

My family has always been very close, even close enough to know exactly how other family members will respond to certain things. It's instances like this that make me realize how

Love Is a Verb

fortunate I am to live in such a loving, caring family that isn't split up from divorce or separation, and isn't distant. So many people today are faced with the heart-wrenching trials of divorce or distance. Even when some families are close geographically, they are still very distant because of parted ways through disagreements or conflicting beliefs, disownment, or even just lack of communication. However, my family loves each other tremendously, even if we don't always get along.

WWW.XANGA.COM/DEADSILENCE7 • APRIL 6, 2004

We have a close extended family, unusually close. We were blessed to be brought up that way.

LAUREN HIGGINS

BJ used to lean on us. He was very affectionate and for that, I've always been grateful. . . . I'd be standing somewhere minding my own business and he would come up and start leaning. . . . It made me smile and now it reminds me of his love for me. I savor the memory. . . . What joy that boy gave!

Mom, blog posting

March 10, 2006

BJ spoke often about the love he experienced at the heart of his family, the source of his trademark tone of deep passion. Even as a young boy, he knew that love was more than just an idea.

I was reminded this past weekend of a conversation I had with BJ about six years ago. I don't remember why we started talking about love, but for some reason we did. We got into a very heated argument because BJ was trying to explain to me that love is a verb and I, being older, could

BJ leaning on his dad
(ski weekend)

Brent and Deanna Higgins,
I Would Die for You: One Student's Story of Passion, Service, and Faith,
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not accept that I was wrong and so fought him, [insisting] that love is simply an idea. . . . In a recent Bible study, our college group came to the conclusion that faith is not an idea; it's a verb.

Just like love. Just like my little brother tried to tell me so many years ago. . . . Faith and love are part of a lifestyle, not a religion, and it's our job to show that to the world.

WHITNEY HIGGINS, BLOG POSTING • APRIL 19, 2006

It seems obvious that, even in his infancy, God had begun to prepare BJ for greatness—and that he was already a target of the Enemy. In his second week of life, BJ suffered a bout of pneumonia that landed him back in the hospital. Just a few months later, after he had begun to crawl, Dad found him flipped over on the carpet, blue and breathless. Scooping up his baby boy, he begged God to spare his life. A frantic finger sweep dislodged the culprit—a tiny piece of plastic. Once again the Lord rescued one who would grow to love and serve him in amazing ways.

BJ's friends and family all agree that when BJ talked, he often spoke beyond the moment. His words seemed to send echoes deep into eternity. His many writings, from childish journals to Internet postings, reveal this quality over and over again.

No doubt, the truths BJ absorbed from his earliest days shaped the following email.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Now that we have established that love is action, let's go back to 1 Corinthians 13. This passage states seven things that love is . . .

First, Love is patient. So often, we become very impatient and think little to nothing of it. . . . When we would find it easy to become impatient with someone, we should instead be patient, for love is patient, and Christ commanded that we love each other. . . .

Second, Love is kind. . . . Remember every now and then when someone says something like “I love you in the God way” or “Well, I love them in the God way, but does that mean I have to be nice to them/you”? Riiiiight, and please show me the love of God that doesn’t require kindness. And remember, God not only commanded us to love our friends and family, but to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). . . .

The third thing love is/does, Love rejoices with the truth. . . . it’s pretty self-explanatory: love takes joy in the truth. It seeks it, not just for itself and of things, but it also seeks the truth of others.

Next, Love bears all. Love protects. Love has a big shoulder to take the hit for others. Love bears others’ pain with them and for them. Love sympathizes and goes through ALL hard times with others and helps them through it. Notice that it says love bears ALL things. Not just sometimes, not just when the sun is shining, but ALLways. Love is there for you.

Love believes all. Love is positive about others. . . . We must, as it says, “Rejoice in the truth,” and not hide from it, but we must be positive, especially when the truth is not known.

Love hopes all. This probably relates most to “Love is not jealous.” Love hopes the best for others. . . . Love wants others to do well, to be in God’s will. An action that expresses this is praying. When you pray for someone, you are displaying to God that you have love for him or her.

And finally, Love endures all. This one is HUGE. It is basically a summary of everything. If you get this, the others will happen. Consequently, it is the hardest to do. Love puts up with everything. . . .

The Greek word used here is hupono, which is a military term that means “above all else,” or “no matter what the cost.” If an army is going into battle, the captain might say, “Hold the fort hupono!”

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It is helpful, especially with a friend you spend a lot of time with, if they're a Christian, that they understand these points so that you can hold each other accountable when you start to slip up in a conversation by saying, "No, love endures all" or "Love bears all" or "Remember, love believes all."

Otherwise, remind yourself. Keep these verses on your heart.

FROM A LETTER TO A FRIEND • 2004