

A Life of Love

In the normal course of events each of us is conceived in love and throughout our lives the very heart and centre of our being is this thing called love. As with water, we cannot live long without it. We have a continuing need to receive it, to be “topped up” with love every day of our lives or, after a while, we spiral out of balance and eventually die.

We all want and, indeed, require love to keep us moving and alert, but somehow many find it difficult to give love to others. Yet, love demands that it must be given *before* we can expect to receive. The love, deep in our spirit, must overflow so love can flow out of us to our ‘neighbour’. Unfortunately, the love that comes from our spirit can be contrary to other parts of our nature. Love looks for friendship while envy builds dissension; love is self-giving but selfishness is self-seeking, looking only for personal gain; love seeks peace but hate seeks war. Martin Luther King Jr. put it very succinctly when he said,

“Hatred paralyses life; love releases it,
Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it,
Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it.”

Love is the lynchpin that provides the balance in our lives and without it nothing else matters. We can give everything we have, do all that we can do, but in the end it means nothing if our labour is without love. It is a well-known fact that when we “love” doing something, whether it is our job or our hobby, it is done more easily and with better results than if it is done under duress. People who are successful work hard but they are pursuing what they love. Those who love playing the piano are happy to practice for hours to develop their skills and those who love to swim will practice long and hard to learn how to swim properly. If someone has no interest in music or if they do not like to swim, the practice would be tedious at best and torment at worst.

Unfortunately, society lauds greed and rivalry, contempt, anger and power, each of which lead to lack of control, while at the same time painting love as a weakness. Since when did anger ease an argument? When did contempt ever build self-esteem and how does greed develop generosity? Only love can bring peace to an argument, only love can build self-esteem and only love will develop generosity.

Countries play war games which cause further division, yet if the love from man’s spirit were used to discuss differences there could only be unity.

Envy, strife and dissension put our family, social and working environments under unnecessary stress. It is a well-known axiom, a basic principle, that “a house divided against itself will fall”. Unity of purpose brought about by love and understanding; however, builds a house of strength on a firm foundation. Compare speaking the truth in love to the divisions brought about by envy, strife and dissension. They are diametrically opposed to each other and they cannot both work at the same time. Speaking the truth in love leads to growth and maturity; giving in to anger and malice, selfishness and envy,

lead to degeneration back to childishness. A true love attitude is unable to harbour uncharitable thoughts or any ill-will or resentment of others. Instead, a love attitude builds harmony and peace of mind.

True love is an act, not an emotion and it is important to understand that the giving of ourselves in love does not always depend on emotion. Emotions come and go but deep, profound love, that love that comes from the centre of our being, is intelligent, discerning and wise. Certainly emotions may surface when we touch the lives of others but emotional feelings are not what drive love. When we have love in our hearts we have the right and the responsibility to choose to spread that love around. There will be times we don't feel like loving people but if we harness mind and heart together we can still pour out love to those in need of it by an act of our will because love is a decision, a determination to do good for others.

Many think that because they lack the feelings in a given situation they are unable to love that person. But our emotional level does not reflect the love we have in our heart. Rather it is our lifestyle that reveals how much love we are prepared to share. It takes awareness of self and a desire to spread love in all situations. If we do not love others we are not using the innate love within us and we can die emotionally. True love requires a choice of will to extend ourselves to our fellow man and we need to actively love the people with whom we come into contact not just tolerate them. Love is always self-giving and active allowing us to care for anyone who comes across our path as well as those close to us. Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman philosopher, is credited with the following statement, "Man must be arched and buttressed from within, else the temple wavers to the dust". Love is the central pillar of our being which maintains our emotional balance.

Love is a treasure that grows as it is given away. It can be expressed through encouragement and the building up of one another and through comforting words and actions. Often love can be a bridge to gain trust and build relationships. If there has been confrontation, love can build an attitude of reconciliation rather than condemnation. Real love does not judge the actions of another. Rather it seeks to meet needs and to forgive.

Love is the most precious gift that can be given and received because it is natural and encompasses unconditional acceptance. Love is not indulgence and permissiveness. The recipients of such misguided actions grow up full of compromise and greed. Instead, people given challenges and responsibilities, in love, grow up with positive values and life goals because love builds self-esteem.

Love that has conditions attached to it is not real love at all, but an imitation of the real thing. When a parent says to a child, "I will love you if you are good" they are sowing the seeds of conditional love which can cause confusion, misunderstanding and distrust of the word "love" in later life. Lives lived without the knowledge of "real" love are incomplete and sadly, the emotional needs of these people are rarely met. Their lives are empty and they often try to fill the void with drugs and alcohol. Only true, unconditional

love has the power to heal the wounds and make the recipient whole and complete and to create relationships which bind people together in unity and happiness.

Remember

Love is the most powerful force in the world when released, but too often it is imprisoned within us and not allowed to do its work of healing mankind. Love is only love when it is given away and each one of us has the responsibility of spreading its message through our families and all those with whom we come into contact. Love creates great good, engendering a better understanding and a closer relationship between peoples within and between countries. Allow it to fly free.