

Begin With Love

By Norman Vincent Peale

This is the condensed version from In God We Trust.

Without Love, You are nothing; I am nothing; the world is nothing.

If it were possible to sum up the teachings of Christianity in one word, that word would be Love.

“ A new commandment I give unto you,” Said Jesus to his disciples at the last supper, “ That Ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

The Gospel stresses love because a person will actually wither and die, ultimately, unless he has love in his heart, both for himself and other people.

One of the greatest books on this subject was written by the late Smiley Blanton, with whom I had the honor of founding the Blanton-Peale Institute in New York City. Smiley was a great American psychiatrist, a great teacher, and a great lover of humanity.

He wrote “Love or Perish” A book that based its theme on the following:

Either you love or you will die.

Here is one thought - provoking passage from the beginning of that book:

To say that one will perish without love does not mean that everyone without adequate love dies.

Many do, for without love the will to live is often impaired to such an extent that a person's resistance is critically lowered and death follows.

But most of the time lack of love makes people depressed, anxious, and without zest for life. They remain lonely and unhappy, without friends or work they care for, their life a barren treadmill, stripped of all creative action and joy.

Love or perish! No wonder Jesus makes love central to his whole teaching!

If you are going to live creatively, you must learn to love.

A judge in Philadelphia, speaking of his experiences, dealing with juveniles in trouble with the law, said that most of the young people who came before his court for discipline were hostile and aggressive.

But their attitude didn't bother him nearly as much as the attitude of their parents.

Often the child's father would be outraged: “Why do you do this to my boy?” he would ask.

“Why do you bring him in here?”

“But,” said the judge, “never did I see any of those fathers show any affection for their teenagers. Never once did a father put his arm around his son or daughter. Never once did he even touch his child. When a parent shows love, even by a simple act of touching, there is an opportunity for redemption.

Otherwise, young people die emotionally; they die mentally because of lack of love.”

Now, to avoid any misunderstandings when talking about love, you must first define it.

The kind of love I am talking about is not the type that is dished up in the television soap operas or in the movies.

The kind of love I refer to is a deep feeling for others, for people generally, that is hard to express.

If you are seeking understanding and help from someone, you can experience this from a smile, a handshake, a pat on the shoulder, or on the back.

These gestures transmit a feeling that cannot easily be put into words.

And how do you express love?

By sharing, by touching, and by closeness to one another.

Love comes first in creative living, and to have it, you must love yourself.

That is primary.

Now, I ask you this question: Do you truly love yourself?

“Oh,” you may say, “that’s easy. Of course, I love myself. And I am proud of myself.”

But wait a minute. That isn’t love. That is egotism. True love of yourself is having a deep, joyous respect for yourself, being mindful of your God-given abilities and potentials, and using them to the fullest extent possible.

The Gospel indicates that, without this wholesome loving respect for yourself, you cannot really love anyone else. It tells us, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 19:19). This implies that if you don’t love yourself, you won’t love your neighbor. But if you do love and respect yourself as a child of God, then you can likewise love and respect another person as a child of God.

If you want people to like you, get up in the morning and say, “Lord, help me to love everyone I see today,, at least, help me to like them. Help me to see the good that is in them.”

There are some people, however, who actually seem to enjoy not liking people. It is the kind of enjoyment that comes from biting on an aching tooth,, which is a sadistic act. But our objective in this life should not be to inflict pain and misery on others, but to bring out,,, and pass along,,, the best that is in each and every one of us. And when you get to loving people, your whole personality changes. You will find that, instead of spreading the kind of misery that only comes back to haunt you, love will come to you in great abundance. Here are two simple rules for getting people to like you: Develop an easy, relaxed attitude in your personal relationships. Then begin to practice the art and satisfaction of loving people.

I once had a friend I will never forget. I was 28 years old and had been invited to Syracuse to preach in a church where, without my knowing it, I was on trial as a candidate. It was a university church, with professors and students in the congregation. Beside me was a huge man. I leaned toward him. “Professor Tilroe,” I asked, “I am interested in knowing what subject you teach.”

“I am Dean of the College of Public Speaking,” he said. I slid still lower in my chair.

Then he added, “I don’t know any more about it than you do. I just teach it.”

This comforted me. I gave my sermon, and I don’t know whether they really liked what I had to say, but they called me to serve as pastor.

I was there for five years and whenever I would get into any difficulty, I would see Professor Tilroe. He loved to go fishing, so I always knew where to look for him,, out on his favorite lake fishing. Once, when something was bothering me, I joined him there. We sat side-by-side fishing for quite a while, when he remarked plaintively, “until you showed up, the fish were biting.”

We had lunch, then fished some more without getting one single bite.

Finally he asked, “What did you come to see me about?” “I forget now,” I said. And I had forgotten. All it took was sitting next to him. He was so great-hearted, he sent out love. His mere presence helped people.

So if you do not have a healthy spiritual self-esteem, by all means, seek to have it.

Pray about it; read the Bible; get closer to God. You will automatically learn to love yourself as you become increasingly aware of God’s everlasting, unremitting, constant love for you.

One of the greatest statements ever made is this: “For God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). If you were asked to demonstrate love, what greater example could you give than this? It’s the most poignant gift of love ever known in the history of mankind. And it culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

After scourging Jesus, putting a crown of thorns on His head, spitting on Him, and showing Him every contempt possible, the Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross. Then, raising the cross, they let it fall to the earth with a thud. It must have pulled every tendon and muscle in his body with excruciating pain. And Jesus, physically, was human.

Yet as he hung there on the cross what did he say?

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

What greater love could there be?

There is no circumstance in your life where God will not stand with you and help you, no matter what it is. He understands all your troubles, and all your frustrations and disappointments. He understands your many weaknesses.

HE LOVES YOU.

So if you want to live creatively and grow spiritually, you must practice loving people, individually, in Jesus’ name. Without love, we are nothing.

The Bible tells us:

“I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains... But if I have not love, I am nothing.

I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned... But if I have not love, it does me no good.

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous, or conceited, or proud; love is not ill-mannered, or selfish, or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with truth. Love never gives up: its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Love is Eternal” (1st Corinthians 13:2 – 8).

Norman Vincent Peale.