

Love is the Answer

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment. And the second
is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

– HOLY BIBLE, MATTHEW 22:37-39

ON THE COLD CHRISTMAS EVE OF 1914, with the bitter chill of winter settling in and the echoes of battle temporarily silenced, a sense of shifting sentiment swept through the trenches along the Western Front of World War I. The once muddy and barbed wire-ridden landscape of war now took on a delicate and flickering appearance, lit by the warm glow of candles and the sound of soldiers singing. Across the barren “no man’s land,” which was typically filled with danger and death, carried the sweet notes of carols and messages of warmth and love. This unusual event has become known as the Christmas Truce of 1914: a demonstration of the deep human need for peace, even amid terrible times.

The soldiers were promised the fighting would all be over before Christmas, a ray of hope amid war. But like so many other things they were told about the conflict, it was a cruel lie. The battle began in July 1914 and by the time Christmas rolled around, there seemed to be no end in sight. Countless soldiers were huddled together, clinging to life in the frozen trenches. The bitter cold seeped into their bones, numbing them to the constant fear and danger that surrounded them. These brave men were often just yards away from their enemy, with British and German trenches separated by as little as thirty meters in some places. The air was thick with the stench of death and decay, a haunting reminder of the countless lives lost in this meaningless war. As they huddled together for warmth and comfort, they could only pray for an end to the endless cycle of violence and destruction.

Under the cover of darkness, the weary German soldiers began to unwrap their precious gifts from home. Shouts of joy and excitement filled the air as they discovered small treasures from loved ones, including Christmas trees adorned with flickering candles. As the lanterns were lit and placed on the edge of the trenches, a soft glow illuminated the faces of the soldiers. A chorus of carol singing started among the German troops, their strong voices carrying through the stillness of the night. And then, like a call and response, the British and French soldiers joined in with their own renditions. It was an unexpected moment of peace and unity amidst the chaos of war. Christmas greetings and well wishes exchanged between enemies, and offers of a temporary ceasefire were communicated between the trenches. The decision was not made by military leaders, but by these brave men who saw each other as fellow human beings in that moment. The sound of laughter and camaraderie filled the air, giving a brief respite from the harsh realities of war.

The British soldiers' voices rang out in unison, their rendition of "Silent Night" aptly capturing their longing for peace and tranquility. And in a gesture of camaraderie and compassion, the German soldiers joined in with their own versions. The dark night was transformed into a scene of unity and hope, as the two sides put aside their differences to embrace the spirit of Christmas together. The spirit of the night could not be contained. Soldiers on both sides fell easily into this shared moment of peace. Soldiers had long since lost faith in the reasons for their battle, but at this moment, they were reminded that they were all human beings with loved ones waiting for them at home. Memories and traditions flooded their minds as they laid down their weapons and embraced each other as brothers. Their exhausted selves found solace in this unexpected reconciliation of differences.

At dawn on Christmas Day, the truce continued, culminating in what was a supremely historic event when thousands of soldiers emerged from their dugouts and the trenches. Eventually it became clear that the soldiers on both sides were no longer enemies, but brothers in arms, and when they emerged to meet one another in "no man's land" where the debris of war had long before denied them any such encounter.

The soldiers swapped chocolates, cigarettes, buttons, and their life stories. They laughed and joked together. They organized soccer matches; the men made peace on the ground by playing a sport that knows no borders. No more Serb or Turk or Croatian: they were all equals on the pitch. It's just a game. But amid all this blood and gore, the soldiers went out and played a game that's not about blood and gore. They did it together, which is part of what football is all about. A levelling away of distinctions—and not just between countries but, more importantly, amongst human beings themselves.

For a brief season, there was peace on earth and good will towards men.

In the ensuing weeks and months as the fighting resumed in earnest, more distant memories of these shared moments would slip back into the realities of war. Many of the same soldiers would continue the bloody battles—firing at one another across the same fields and towards the same positions. But the stories shared—and the bonds of friendship forged between adversaries—would remain with them and continue to inspire us to this day. What happened that Christmas in 1914 points to the universal truth that the frequency of love can endure, cutting across all borders, divisions, and differences that so often drive us apart. We might belong to different countries, religious beliefs, political parties, and tribes, but we are all members of the same human family.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is contemporary evidence that we can declare a ceasefire, that we can build bridges rather than walls; that we can value human hearts over selfish hate, that we have more in common than that which divides us; that the braver world we can imagine is within reach, even if only for a season. What our world needs today, more than ever before, as we contemplate the hearts of those soldiers of a century ago is that love is the answer to what ails us. Love can heal nations, communities, families, and individuals. Added to this recipe for healing, add in some heaping portions of forgiveness, gratitude, and grace. The good news is that the Christmas Truce is possible in our world today, even on the worst of nights.

In a country where unity was once celebrated with the motto *E pluribus unum*, “out of many, one,” we now find ourselves divided along new enemy lines. Our communities have dug deep trenches, and our differences have been amplified by traditional and social media. Neighbors no longer trust each other,

families struggle to maintain civility during holiday gatherings, and friendships are severed because of opposing ideologies. People on both sides of the political spectrum harbor intense hatred for their fellow citizens, forgetting that we are all part of the same human family. The sense of division and animosity has reached every corner of our society, fueled by fear tactics and propaganda from the media. It appears there is no point in seeking common ground or bridging the gap between us anymore. Cable news jockeys for ratings. Ninety percent of all the media in America today is controlled by a handful of corporations. They profit from intensifying friction, not spreading relief. Headlines scream for eyeballs and clicks, snipping off friendships and accelerating familial tumult. This wide divide in our country and throughout the world appears to be just “politics.” But underneath the surface a more sinister story is emerging: conflicts are no longer just political; they are more than that: it is a cosmic battle of good versus evil. “If it bleeds, it leads,” has been the battle cry of news organizations long before I started reporting the news forty years ago. Among other dangerous addictions, Americans have become addicted to outrage. Those suffering wallow in chaos and look for a fight at every turn.

Like a battlefield on the Western Front, social media has become the battleground for lives and reputations. Casualties fall left and right as users unleash their words with no regard for the collateral damage and unintended consequences. But instead of using it less, we should use social media more intentionally. Use your little piece of internet real estate to spread light and love, to make a positive impact on those who may stumble upon it. Don't succumb to sharing mean memes or following toxic people. Instead, surround yourself with people who inspire and motivate you. Build genuine, uplifting relationships. Resist the urge to mindlessly scroll and engage in

negativity and bitterness. Let your presence on social media be a force for good in the world. Paulo Coelho wrote in *The Alchemist*, “When we love, we strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.” I know that everything changes when you do. Be authentic and vulnerable. Vulnerability is your superpower. Bob Marley said, “The problem is people are being hated when they are real and being loved when they are fake.”

The world needs our movement more than ever before, not a political one with its rhetoric and debates, but a personal movement that calls us to “Be More Elfish.” It is time for each of us to recognize our individual responsibility to restore civility and transform our communities, creating an environment that resonates with the frequency of love. This cure for dissonance cannot be found in laws or policies, but rather in the power of love itself. Love can heal even the most broken of souls. It begins with respect, dignity, and a recognition of our shared humanity amidst a world filled with constant vilification. We must make the conscious decision to look beyond the headlines and angry rhetoric, seeing the person beneath it all. Once we have done our own personal work and healed our hearts, only then can we come together as members of the human family to heal our collective soul and unite behind the central message of love. The greatest weapon against dark and selfish people is to refuse to become one ourselves.

For the purposes of my mission as a soldier in this movement to “Be Less Selfish and Be More Elfish,” I define Elfish as, “Of a person, action, or motive. Unselfish consideration for others. Concerned chiefly with other people’s profit or pleasure making the world a better place to live year-round.” Santa is the happiest man on earth, and the elves at the North Pole are the happiest people on the planet because they are “Elfish.”

Selfishness is often thought of as natural, an innate state of mind under which a person prioritizes their own feelings and interests above those of others. Self-care and healthy self-love are of course essential, but an excessive focus on oneself can lead to tremendous harm in one's mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social well-being. Awareness of these harmful effects can help steer one toward a more compassionate and fulfilling way of living.

Mental Effects: Selfish thinking can become reality-distorting in several ways. For instance, constantly focusing on one's own perspective can blur one's vision to the needs and concerns of others. Tunnel vision can enable unhealthy ideas to form and flourish. For instance, ulterior thoughts such as anxiety and paranoia about losing what one cares about arise subconsciously. In addition, selfishness can limit cognitive flexibility—the ability to apply one's thinking in new ways to changing contexts—in turn reducing the potential for personal growth and flexibility, both of which are necessary for remaining resilient in an ever-changing world.

Emotional Effects: Emotionally, selfishness is likely to be a barrier to intimacy with others. People who are self-centered are likely to have lower empathy and be less able to understand and relate to others. This may lead to feelings of emotional isolation and loneliness. Moreover, their emotional disconnection may also lead to a sense of meaninglessness or unhappiness as superficial relationships provide little of the love and support that better reciprocal interactions afford. They may also find themselves in more conflictual relationships, leading to resentment and other forms of emotional distress.

Physical Effects: There are physical consequences of selfishness, even if less evident. Selfish habits can give rise to stress, which we know from our research to be pathogenic, causing a lot of illnesses such as heart disease, obesity, and poorer immune outcomes. Whatever your mind harbors, your body manifests in some way. Stress often manifests itself in aches and pains or a weakened immune system, which makes one more prone to developing an illness. There is also the distress of not being involved in group—family, friends, and community—activities which results in a reduction in physical activities and sedentary lifestyle that impacts one's health.

Spiritual Effects: Spiritually, selfishness can mean feeling disconnected from things such as one's spiritual beliefs or sense of self. If self-interest guides only a person's words and deeds, and not ethical rules or codes, then acting immorally might create inner conflict and pain. Many religious or spiritual traditions advocate altruism and interdependence, an egoic focus can mean feeling hollow or lacking meaning. Existential angst that makes one feel empty might result from being guided by selfishness, and the quest for fulfilment will not be satisfied by selfish acts.

Social Effects: When selfishness drives out social care, it drives out families, friends, and good company. Those who behave selfishly often ostracize themselves by being perceived as self-absorbed, or worse, pitiless towards the suffering of others. They feel left out, and others, rightly or wrongly, begin to feel the same way. Without the support of others, a selfish life quickly becomes a lonely one, as the failures of selfishness beget loneliness. Communities are built on co-operation, sustenance, and generosity. Selfishness undermines these key

dynamics, causing communal life to devolve into partisanship, rivalry, and competition.

Transformative Power of Being Elfish: Instead of corroding into the negative spiral of selfishness, an outwardly focused life of loving, elfish concern has the potential to create a sort of chemical cascade that leads to tremendous positives in the soul and in one's life. Caring for others builds relationships, gives emotional strength, and promotes citizenship.

Enhanced Mental Health: I have discovered that being more elfish can improve mental health. The act of elfishness can release endorphins, and a "helper's high" results in reduced stress and anxiety. The positive reinforcement creates a continuous cycle of comfort and can put the elfish person in a state of equilibrium and calm.

Deeper Emotional Connections: On a relational level, being elfish increases one's empathy and capacity for connection with others. Elfish people tend to take the time to listen to the people around them and are better at empathy. By listening to and thinking about others, they increase their relationship capital through the fundamental social process of emotional reciprocity. They end up building up a network of support that helps them negotiate the uncertainty and challenges of life.

Improved Physical Wellbeing: Aside from addressing underlying mental health problems, community activities and acts of elfishness often involve large numbers of people, sparking social interaction and physical movement that can improve physical health. Acts of elfishness, such as volunteering, often lead to better health outcomes as well. A welcoming person,

feeling a sense of purpose when serving others, naturally forms a community of positive relationships that contribute directly to health. Furthermore, feelings of happiness bring forth friendships and love, and that affects our relationships with friends and loved ones. These relationships are crucial to one's wellbeing.

Spiritual Fulfillment: Being elfish also boosts meaning and purpose in life when one's actions are consistent with one's values. Often, there is a spiritual satisfaction in contributing to the wellbeing of others; sharing goals and outcomes can lead to a perception that "we're all in this together" and a sense that one's life has meaning in connecting with others. This can lead to inner peace and connectedness with others and spiritual fulfillment.

Strengthened Social Bonds: Being elfish will make the community stronger and more cohesive. People who think beyond their own welfare seek to meet the needs of the group, creating a strong social fabric characterized by trust and cooperation. The benefits of strong social bonds go deep: they make people happier and healthier. Families are enriched by elevated levels of reciprocal elfishness and mutual support.

This is not a fight between being selfish and giving into the needs of others. It is not a war that demands it's either/or but it's both. Elfish behavior is not all-or-nothing; it's about giving, and it's about receiving, and both are essential to a life well lived. By understanding the costs of selfishness and taking the path to empathy and elfishness, we can change our minds and our lives.

I believe in two primary purposes of our lives: to learn how to truly give love, and to become a loveable person. It is a two-sided coin. You are here to transmit love and to receive love. Are

you making it possible for others to easily love you, or do your words and behaviors make it unbearable to be in your presence? Pause for a moment and truly be introspective about that question. Are you capable of receiving love? Take responsibility not to be a jerk. You will receive love in direct proportion to your ability to be loved. The balance of giving and receiving love is essential to the frequency of 528.

We are here to help each other along this journey of life. What will be said of you ten, twenty, thirty years from now? Will your selfish behavior fade as the setting sun, or will your selfish life make it easier for those who will follow you?

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

Once a king had a great highway built for the members his kingdom. After the highway was completed, but before it was opened to the public, the king decided to have a great contest. He invited as many in his kingdom that desired to participate. Their challenge was to see who could travel the new highway best.

On the day of the contest the entire kingdom came to participate. Some of men drove fine chariots, some wore fine clothing, some had new hairdos, some brought great food. Some young men even came in their track clothes and ran along the highway. People traveled the highway all day, but each one, when they arrived at the end, complained to the king that there was a large pile of rocks and debris left on the road at one spot, and this got in their way and hindered their travel.

At the end of the day, as the sun was setting, a lone traveler completed his journey on the new highway. The old man was tired and dirty; he wearily walked over to the king with profound respect and handed him a bag of gold.

The old man explained, "I was travelling down your new highway today and I was tripped up by a huge pile of rocks and

debris that was blocking the road and making it hard for others to travel. This bag of gold was under it all, and I want you to return it to its rightful owner.”

The king replied, “You are the rightful owner.”

The old man replied, “Oh no, this is not mine. I’ve never known such wealth.”

“Oh yes,” said the king, “You’ve earned this gold, for you won my contest. He who travels the road best is he who makes the road smoother for those who will follow.”

Being elfish is built on a healthy foundation of healthy self-love and then generously giving of our time, talents, and resources to make the road smoother for those who will follow us.

HE IS CHRISTMAS

With the first ember-colored rays of the sun shining over the hills of Galilee, a man appeared who would change the world. He walked among the people, not from a throne where homage was required, but as a friend, spreading his hand in welcome, Jesus of Nazareth. His life and preaching became emblematic of one word, one concept that would reverberate around the world: **love**.

This message is simple and profound, and the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John testify to it. The stories shared by the apostles that form the fabric of Christian teaching testify to the fact that Jesus’s central project was not a religion nor a church but a **radical and life-changing vision of love**. Every parable, every miracle, every moment was a stitch in a tapestry depicting divine love.

Take the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus redefined neighbor as a complete negation of the values that determine who should be a neighbor. According to the norms of society based on enmity and separation, the Samaritan, who for the

Jews was an alien and an enemy, became the model of love in the parable. Unlike the priest and the Levite, who, based on those values, passed by the wounded traveler, the Samaritan stopped to help, going against the prejudices and values rooted in the culture and religion. With those few simple words in a beautiful parable, Jesus taught that love is not determined by race, religion, or societal class. Amid a world often characterized by prejudices and hatred, He revealed that love is the answer.

Then there is the parable of the prodigal son, the child who squanders his inheritance but finds his father waiting to embrace him at home. Unconditional acceptance there, a reminder of the enormous resources of divine love that are available, regardless of what we might get ourselves into. It's a parable inviting us to recognize the sacred power of love in reconciliation, to offer to one another what God offers to us.

Even more shocking and subversive, however, is His teaching about loving one's enemies: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." (Matthew 5:44); in a world where so much resentment was fermenting, Jesus pointed the way to a **radicalism of love**. For Him, love was an act of will, a conscious choice on which one could reflect and resolve, and one that could remake the world in its wake. From this teaching sprang an ethic of love that gathers in force the more hostility increases. But as the centuries wore on, the message has gotten lost in the weeds of individualism, prosperity cults, and harsh moralism. Prosperity gospels promise wealth if only we have faith, but they are all too often built on a misunderstanding of the importance of the message, that everything including prosperity should depend on love. It is in love that we find true abundance, a truth which gets lost beneath layers of cultural accumulation and materialism.

Radical love can get lost in the jargon they preach from

pulpits where their theological critiques and socio-economic analysis have drowned out the simple, sincere, message: **love is the answer**. Many churches have become citadels, defending their dogma rather than the open table that Jesus set before the world, a circle of love in which we all dine, and no one is excluded. The focus is on being right, rather than on being right with one another. Rules add to the mixture that complicates instead of illuminates the gospel of love. It is not a gospel of checking boxes to look good and earn credits, but a way of living from the inside out that produces good fruits.

All the beauty of Jesus's teachings lies in their radical simplicity. Strip away the sanctimonious commentary and pious interpretation, and what you have left is the **radical message of love**; to serve the poor, to side with the oppressed, and to welcome the stranger. We don't do it out fear or duty, but because it is an expression of love for our fellow human beings.

Let us hear His message of love echo and reverberate in our hearts. Let us remember, in the echo of His words and in the reverberation of his actions, that—at all costs—**love should be at the center of it all**. It is up to each one of us to regain this central message, to tear down the walls that have grown and proliferated over the centuries. Let us not simply hear the words of Jesus but let them become our actions; the breaking, the healing, the opening of the heart.

Love is the frame that alters the very fabric of the world around us. It opens our eyes to see the neighbor we have never truly noticed before, and suddenly they become a whole person, a reflection of our own deepest selves. They become companions on our journey, walking alongside us through life's trials and triumphs. And with love as the frame, even the face of a stranger reveals a familiar piece of ourselves. We realize that everyone is searching for something, just like us. Love transforms not only

our individual relationships, but also our communities and humanity. Its power knows no boundaries and its reach extends far beyond what we can comprehend.

Let's return to the origin of Jesus's one word that which we sometimes take for granted: **love**. It is this redeeming love that has the power to fill a world desperate for the purest form of divine affection and compassion, setting it ablaze with hope and light. Every person you meet is battling their own struggles, unknown to you. Be kind. Love is not just an emotion, but acts you do every day. And healthy self-love is not selfish, but essential. Love is a promise; one made from the depths of the soul and bound by compassion and understanding. It is where we find our true home. Love is my religion, patience and kindness are its pillars. It does not envy or boast, nor does it take pleasure in dishonoring others or seeking only personal gain. It is not easily angered and doesn't hold any grudges. We do not keep score in life. Love delights in truth and righteousness, always protecting, trusting, hoping, and persevering. And most importantly: love never fails. So, as we continue our journey, let us always return to its source: **pure, unconditional love**.

As a child, I grew up in a home steeped in conditional love. Affection and acceptance were granted with strings attached. I lived in fear to conform to the strict beliefs of my family's orthodoxy, excel in academics, and avoid standing out in any way. But true unconditional love is not synonymous with reckless abandon or lack of boundaries. It is pure and elfish love that carries with it sacred boundaries, designed to protect the hearts and lives of all involved. As parents, we can love our children unconditionally, no matter what mistakes they may make. And in a loving relationship, loyalty and fidelity are deeply cherished values. But if one partner chooses to betray that trust through infidelity or deception, we must make the difficult decision to keep them at

a distance. This does not mean we stop loving them; rather, we choose to love from afar for the sake of our own well-being and the integrity of the relationship. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome strangers we do it unconditionally, but it must have healthy boundaries. It does not make you selfish to have clear boundaries. Setting up these boundaries well in advance will reduce the amount of heartache we suffer.

Someone once wrote, “I hate when people say, if you love me, you’ll accept me as I am. Loving you doesn’t mean tolerating your refusal to develop emotional intelligence and heal your dysfunction. If you loved you, you would do the work so people who love you don’t feel forced to walk away.”

A.R. Lucas wrote, “We’ve been infected with this idea that love is an emotion only felt between two people. But love is universal—an energy—a contagious force. It’s a gift. To offer money to a homeless person is love. To save a worm from the sun is to love. To smile at a stranger is love. To be grateful, to be hopeful, to be brave, to be forgiving. To be proud, is to love.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF LOVE

A common insight arising from studying the world’s faiths is the extent to which love permeates all of them, even though they arose in diverse times, cultures, and places. Notwithstanding these differences in context, culture and period, their key messages all converge on **love—of God, self and neighbor**. Despite the wars and conflicts that have troubled human history—frequently on the grounds of differing beliefs, the same source of goodness lies in love. We can use love to heal our societies, cultures, and economies. Some of the world’s most influential religions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism—all share a common code of ethics that implores believers to cultivate love and compassion for others.

Christianity: The core of Christianity is the command to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:31). Jesus’ teachings stress love as the supreme virtue, and calls upon us to forgive, empathize and make sacrifices.

Islam: The Islamic injunction is rooted in notions of unconditional love and concern for all of creation, based on Rahma (mercy) and Tawhid (the unity of God, and humanity). The Quran exhorts believers to be just and fair to one another and to love one another, in the words: “None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself” (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Hinduism: Similarly, the concept of Ahimsa, not to cause injury or to kill, is a fundamental principle in Hinduism, which “has reverence for all life” and resulting in “love and respect for all living things.” The teaching of compassion and duty to one another “run through the Hindu texts” like a thread through a tapestry.

Buddhism: Buddhism emphasizes a practice of loving-kindness, the Pali word Metta, as a crucial aspect of spiritual transformation. The Eightfold Path exhorts practitioners to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings.

Judaism: The second of the great commandments: “That you should love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18); this is the basis of Jewish ethics toward each other and our commitment to each other.

So, to you my friends of every faith, you may or not believe Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be. The word Christmas originates from the phrase “Cristes Maesse,” first recorded in 1038, which means the Mass of Christ or Christ’s Mass. Let’s be

united in the theme of Christmas. We may have different belief systems, but as a minimum, may we be better people because of His example and teachings.

The Golden Rule, “do unto others as you would have done to you,” resonates in harmony with the various teachings I just outlined. May I suggest an even higher rule that is the essence of being elfish? It is called the “**Platinum Rule.**” It says, “do unto others as they would have done to them.” It means you put aside your own self-interests, listen with your ears and your heart, and truly “walk a mile in their shoes.” It means speaking their language and tuning into what is important to them. The Platinum Law can transform businesses with a customer-centered value and heal nations, communities, families, and individual hearts.

When we look back through history, we find that humanity has frequently been fearful, ignorant, and intolerant, fighting wars in the name of religion, embracing passion over tolerance, and enforcing dogma in all its facets. But the reality of these situations often results from a misinterpretation of scripture or a tendency to overemphasize the differences between the societies, cultures, and beliefs of different religions, leading to divisiveness instead of a united joining of the many different values found within them.

Through the power of love and understanding, healing can take place both at an individual and collective level. When society’s foundation is built on these principles instead of hatred and division, we can truly thrive. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of all beings, we can come together as a tightly woven community with a shared determination to collaborate and create positive change.

Community Building: Love fosters more open, inclusive, tolerant, and committed communities. Other things being equal, those living in love-drenched communities learn to cooperate, care for one another, and settle conflicts peacefully.

Peaceful Nations: The same dynamics hold true on the world stage; nations that focus on love and mutual understanding tend to be more peaceful and stable, and attacks on one group are less likely if other groups are less divisive and more focused on common goals.

Cultural Benefits: Love enhances cultural richness through expression and acceptance. Art, music, dance, and literature thrive when people feel safe and supported as contributing to society. This same sense of cultural vibrancy leads to increased social wealth.

Economic Benefit: Business leaders that encourage collaboration and empathy foster a positive working environment that yields higher employee morale, retention, and productivity. Here's a radical statement for some in the business community who don't believe in loving your employees and your customers; yes, culture matters! Businesses that practice ethically based love and respect for their employees and customers often enjoy increased productivity, achieve greater profitability, and benefit from customer loyalty. You can tell a lot about the character of leadership by the way they treat their employees. Your employees will only treat your customers to the degree they are treated with your organization. If you want better customer service, teach goodness and kindness in your organization. I shared the message, "Be More Elfish" with my friend, Brian Tracy. He instantly gave the theme a term for business. He now calls it **the "Elfish**

Factor” and gave me numerous examples of how companies become great when they adopt the “Elfish Factor,” putting love as a central value in their organizations.

Love has long been the common thread that ties together the world’s great religions. As we navigate through an increasingly interconnected and complex world, it is crucial to keep this truth at the forefront of our lives. By embracing human solidarity, love, and compassion, we can bridge the gaps and misunderstandings that have fractured our human relationships. Only then can we move towards a future of unity, peace, and harmony. When individuals, communities, and nations embody love in their thoughts and actions, the rewards are immeasurable. The power of love knows no bounds and can heal all aspects of human experience.

Love is the universal language, a powerful force that transcends borders, cultures, and generations. It can take many forms: there is romantic love, the deep bond we share with our friends and family, and even the unexpected affection we may feel for those we once saw as enemies. But in being Elfish there is also a unique understanding of self-love, which is a delicate balance. It is a pure and healthy love that recognizes our innate worth, without tipping into arrogance or narcissism. This kind of self-love allows us to embrace our strengths and acknowledge our flaws, while still treating ourselves with compassion and respect. And by doing so, we are better equipped to navigate the external world and build meaningful connections. We can confidently set boundaries, cut ties with toxic individuals, and seek out those who bring joy and positivity into our lives. But for many of us, loving ourselves is a challenge. Societal pressures, past traumas, addictions, and internalized self-loathing can all slowly erode a healthy sense of self-love. In turn, shame, guilt, and self-criticism emerge, along

with self-sabotaging behavior that actively erodes our capacity to love. It is in this space that the interconnectedness of love, forgiveness, and grace becomes vital.

It is impossible to love another person with greater intensity than the love we have for ourselves. For love cannot be given to someone if it does not first reside within us. Like a precious and scarce commodity, we can only love ourselves in direct proportion to how much we cherish, value, and honor ourselves. Just as you cannot give a \$100 bill unless you possess one to give, you cannot give another person true and unconditional love unless you first possess it within yourself.

From Alice in Wonderland:

“Do you love Me?” Alice asked.

“No, I don’t love you!” replied the White Rabbit.

Alice frowned and clasped her hands together as she did whenever she felt hurt.

“See?” replied the White Rabbit. “Now you’re going to start asking yourself what makes you so imperfect and what did you do wrong so that I can’t love you at least a little. You know, that’s why I can’t love you. You will not always be loved Alice, there will be days when others will be tired and bored with life, will have their heads in the clouds, and will hurt you. Because people are like that, they somehow always end up hurting each other’s feelings, whether through carelessness, misunderstanding, or conflicts with themselves. If you don’t love yourself, at least a little, if you don’t create an armor of self-love and happiness around your heart, the feeble annoyances caused by others will become lethal and will destroy you. The

first time I saw you I made a pact with myself: I will avoid loving you until you learn to love yourself.”

Remember, love is a frequency—528 Hz. Imagine listening to your favorite radio station as a kid (now I’m showing my age) and tune into the frequency in your local broadcast area, like say 98.7 FM. That means there is a “transmitter” somewhere sending their programming out into the ether that is then received by a “receiver,” the radio. Here’s the challenge: you are both a transmitter and receiver of love. If you are transmitting at 630 AM, you will never resonate with someone at 100.7 FM. It’s impossible. It’s an immutable, natural law.

Regrettably, too many of us are our own worst enemies. We are held prisoners in a cell of self-doubt, self-criticism, and self-hatred, unable to fully embrace and appreciate ourselves for who we truly are. We are taught to love our neighbors with the same intensity and compassion as we love ourselves. This means that genuine love for others can only come from first learning to love and accept ourselves unconditionally. When we have a healthy sense of self-love, we become less affected by the opinions and judgments of others on social media and within our social circles. In fact, when we have reached a level of true freedom from caring about what others think or say about us, we have achieved an incredible state of personal liberation. Self-love and self-forgiveness generate from within a calmness that helps us to cope better with conflict and adversity. Because we know we are worthwhile and valuable, we are less likely to be sensitive to criticism, and better able to engage in conversations about the problem. This helps to create a more respectful relationship but also one that is better able to cooperate and support others and the wider society because it is more compassionate and empathetic.

FORGIVE FREELY

To fully embrace our divine worth and behave with love, we must learn to forgive ourselves for every brainless, wicked, or stupid word said or action we have ever committed. Self-forgiveness is not easy, but it is a crucial aspect of love. All forgiveness begins with self-forgiveness. Just as forgiving others requires us to let go of resentment, anger, and the desire for revenge, self-forgiveness entails releasing these negative emotions towards ourselves first. It is a recognition of our own humanity and imperfections. It's an act of grace that leads to healing and reconciliation within us. Only when we have learned to extend compassion and forgiveness towards ourselves can we offer the same to those around us with genuine sincerity and unconditional love.

Being willing to turn toward your mistakes, to face your shortcomings and failures, to open and allow yourself to be painfully aware of them, this is the basis of self-forgiveness. It says that you are willing to look at your faults, vulnerable and painful as it might be, and allow yourself to let go of the past. It is a foundational aspect of healing and growth, the most foundational asset of all. Self-forgiveness helps us to release the toxic emotional hooks that prevent us from loving ourselves and moving forward in life. Without self-forgiveness, you are stuck. You have damned yourself from progress. To self-forgive is not to pretend things did not happen or to deny or justify one's transgressions—it requires acceptance of our fallible human nature that makes us error-prone and forges our identity. It calls forth releasing the negative self-judgment that often accompanies failure and acknowledging one's worthiness of compassion, just like we would for others. We remain crippled emotionally if we don't take steps to release our baggage. Self-forgiveness is

a key element of emotional and psychological wellbeing: forgiving ourselves for mistakes and missteps frees us to move on, to learn from the past, to be present in the here and now. When we forgive ourselves, we no longer remain in a self-imposed prison of regret; instead, we are liberated by our ability to transform and grow.

Next, forgive your parents for any mistakes or shortcomings they may have had while raising you. Remember that they were doing the best they could with the knowledge, skills, and resources available to them at the time. They were still learning and growing themselves while also trying to raise you. It is rare to find someone who had a perfect childhood with perfect parents. Allow yourself to let go of any negative feelings or resentment from the past and instead choose to freely forgive your parents. This act of forgiveness will bring increased compassion and love into your life as you move forward on your journey.

Finally, release the burden of grudges and forgive everyone else who has wronged you. Holding onto anger and resentment is like taking a toxic poison and hoping the other person dies. Beyond the emotional toll, holding onto negative emotions can also manifest in physical and spiritual consequences. Forgiveness is misunderstood as simply absolving someone of their actions or character, but it is a powerful act of self-liberation that allows us to let go of the heavy weight of bitterness and rage. You can tell a great deal about a person's character by their ability to quickly forgive themselves and others. They may not necessarily forget, but they learn lessons from experience to create healthy boundaries. Healthy, mature people do not hold grudges, nor do they seek revenge. It is not about excusing the other person; it is an essential step towards our own self-love, healing, and growth.

Once we forgive ourselves and everyone else, we must

practice grace. This powerful concept is often synonymous with undeserved favor or a “gift” like that of God’s grace. It allows us to find redemption and live without the burden of past mistakes. Failure is inevitable in life, but grace reminds us that it does not define us.

Receiving grace from God is truly divine, and we should learn to give it to ourselves. This can be difficult as we are often our own harshest critics. By granting ourselves grace and shifting into a more self-compassionate mindset, we can quiet negative self-talk and become more open-hearted and empathic towards others. Choose to extend grace to those around you. This simple act has the power to revolutionize our society, where vulnerability and growth are often met with judgment and criticism. By offering grace to others, we contribute to a culture of healing and potential. This practice radiates love and positivity, inspiring others to embrace their imperfections and spread grace throughout the world. When we walk in grace, we attract people and our communities become agents of change. It is a gift that can unleash our potential and spread love and light where it’s needed most. It’s like installing a new operating system in our souls that guides us towards reconciliation and renewal.

Here’s a bold and true statement: **you are worthy**. You are worthy of life’s greatest blessings regardless of what some human being tells you. It is your birthright. You were born with the seeds of greatness. No person, and I mean no person, can deem you worthy. That’s a gift directly from God. When you are in harmony with God’s or Divine’s frequency, you are given what I call “Divine Whispers.” It is that still, small voice deep down inside of you. It’s sometimes called “your gut,” intuition, or the Holy Spirit. Every human being can receive “divine whispers”—if you are on the same frequency. It’s not religious; again, it’s natural law.

Be grateful for who you are and what you have been blessed with. Remember, the more you give thanks for, the more you'll have to give thanks for. How can you ask for more if you're not a good steward of those things you already have? As we develop an attitude of gratitude, we attract more of what we want. Studies show that individuals who practice gratitude tend to report better mental health and stronger relationships, as well as greater resilience in the face of end-of-life concerns, serious illness, trauma, and major loss. Gratitude helps to promote an abundance mindset as opposed to a scarcity mindset.

There are many benefits to being grateful. From an emotional perspective, gratitude is associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, and higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction. It also serves to reframe our experience so that we are more apt to notice good things even in painful situations. From a physical perspective, gratitude is associated with lower blood pressure and better sleep. You can practice gratitude simply by writing down some things you feel grateful for each day and train your brain to notice the bright spots. Mindfulness practices, including meditation but also simply noticing the gifts in your life, also allow you to cultivate gratitude. Gratitude toward others includes expressing gratitude for their gifts by saying thank you. Two of the most powerful words in any language are “please” and “thank you.”

The way we bear the fruit of our love is by serving others in an elfish way. The warm, deep feeling of love coming up from our core is all very well, but as love grows in our hearts, it stirs and motivates us to serve those around us. Service to others is a profound, generous action: not a matter of obligation, but as an expression of being engaged with the needs of other human beings—an expression of compassion, of empathy, and of respect for the human spirit. Serving others enhances both the

giver and the receiver; it is a basic tenet of human community. Serving others helps people feel they belong, that they are part of something bigger than themselves. When we serve others, we create connections that bring us together. This can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Serving others fosters gratitude and humility; it broadens our perspectives, showing us the hardships and victories of others, and reminding us of the things we can be thankful for. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Service is one of the most potent ways to find our true selves and unleash our potential. Your service can motivate others. When others see you serve, it can inspire them to be more elfish. Our tendency to help others is strongly influenced by witnessing acts of service. Serving others can help us step out of our own comfort zones, diversify our understanding, and improve our perspectives. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. noted, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, “What are you doing for others?” Service to others is truly a “win-win” for our communities—for those who give and for those who receive. Random acts of kindness don’t have to be random if we express ourselves through loving service to others every day.

Dr. Suess wrote, “Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.” It’s impossible to connect with every person on this planet. As you become more elfish, you may find it difficult to explain your thoughts and beliefs to those who are not on the same frequency and vibration. It can be frustrating; let go and accept that they may never understand you. The frequency gap between you is too wide and that is perfectly fine. Our time on earth is simply a classroom to teach us how to love and to be loved. People come into our lives for a reason, season, or a lifetime. Your vibe will attract your tribe. Live your life with

radical love and people may think you are different, love people anyway. One of my favorite poems is written by Mother Teresa:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered,

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.

Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.

Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten.

Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.

Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway.

I close this book with a challenge: say the words “**I love you**” more often and mean it. Tell those close to you that you love them. There is no guarantee you’ll be here tomorrow. Then, demonstrate the words with action. As the great prophet Nike once said, “Just Do It.” Everything a prelude to action. Yes, men can say, “I love you” to other men. No, you do not have to turn in your man card for saying it. I love you! I may have never met you. But I love you because you are a member of our human family. We may look different; we may have different beliefs and speak a different language. Love is universal—a frequency—we are a part of the great whole. We are here to learn how to love and how to be loved.

My dear friend, we have barely scratched the surface of the concept of love. For love is not just a feeling, it is a divine force that has the power to change hearts, move mountains, transform lives, and shape the world around us. I am eternally grateful for the thousands of beautiful experiences I have seen “through Santa’s eyes” since that first Christmas season of 1999. I have only shared a few of them with you here in this book. I am forever changed, motivated, and inspired by the thousands of lives that have touched my soul while wearing the sacred, red suit. It is a sacred duty to represent Santa Claus and all of us that share his message of love and kindness.

Let us journey together on this path of understanding and embrace all that love has to offer. Keep shining brightly because someone out there needs to be guided by your light.

To be continued. . .

