

# Love THY NEIGHBOR

Why is love so difficult? I ponder this question often, especially when considering why we (i.e., humans) try to resolve conflicts through cruelty and aggression. Easily, love is the most powerful and transformative force on earth. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love thy neighbor as thyself. These hallmarks of Christianity, as well as other religions, suggest that prioritizing the needs of others over our own is the surest path towards human growth and development. Prioritizing the needs of others does not come naturally, however. Infants are born self-centered and dependent on others to get their needs met. Only with growth, maturation, nurturance and education do children begin to consider the feelings of others, let alone prioritize them. Often I hear the phrase, "we all are born sinners", and I wonder how

that can apply to an infant. I've come to realize that this phrase is rooted in the fact that our natural tendency is to think of ourselves first before the welfare of the greater community. Occasionally, there are those who will prioritize "family" over their own personal needs, but rarely does this extend to larger social units.

Love is a feeling, for sure, but it involves so much more. Love is behavioral; it is prioritizing the needs of others before one's own. It is responding to the commonalities we share more than our differences. It involves sharing of resources, not competition for them. Evolution, the driving force of life, no longer is built on survival of the fittest, which feeds on differences that divide us and competition, most often resolved by conflict. Rather, life everlasting depends much more on sharing of resources fostered by cooperation and compromise as basic tools for building stronger communities. What strengthens the whole strengthens each of us individually, a principle that must be taken on faith. Sympathy for others is less important than empathy with others. Allegiance to any specific religious leader is not as powerful as commitment to the principles that promote the growth and development of life itself. Taking care of others before ourselves, surely, is one of those principles.

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