

How the Way I Live Every Day Reflects My Christian Faith to Others

The Foundation of my faith is love. A phrase most deeply engraved upon my Sunday School memory is the line “We love because God first loved us.” What does this mean? Such a simple phrase carries so much meaning, the profundity of which I have only begun to grasp in the past few years. As these words indicate, we are able to love others, love ourselves, and love God because of God’s pre-existing love for us. God loved even before God made, and thus all of creation is imbued with this love. Because of God’s fundamental, unbounded, and transcendent love for us, we are able to experience God’s love among others, within ourselves, and back towards God. Three aspects of this love guide my life and how it reflects my faith to others: agape’s unity, Jesus’ selflessness, and God’s salvation.

Agape is a Greek word that expresses the presence of God’s transcendent love of creation in the world. In the process of agape, we see the presence of God in everything and everyone. God’s love lives inside each of us, and unifies us in the universality of its presence; we *all* love because God loves *all* of us. To use a familiar phrase, we are all “children of God.” As part of my experience of agape, I try to recognize the good that exists in everyone, though it is often difficult, and focus on that good when interacting with them. We are conditioned to see faults in ourselves and in others, but the presence of love in which we all participate calls us to something higher: to see God in everyone. Agape is a somewhat abstract concept, the implications of which are manifest in a mindset that is fundamental to the reflection of my faith to others. An aspect of God’s love that more concretely reflects my faith is that of Jesus’ selflessness.

Underlying the Ten Commandments is Jesus’ “Greatest Commandment” to love others as we love ourselves. Part of loving God is loving all that God has made, including those people with whom we vehemently disagree. We must accept love from God, recognize God’s presence in others, and act towards others in accordance with that presence. Jesus selflessly expressed his love for others not only in his life, but more importantly in his death. The crucifixion expresses God’s infinite love through Jesus’ selfless sacrifice. Every day, I try to treat others with the same love with which I want to be treated. When I hold a locked door open for the person behind me, when I ask how someone is doing and actually mean it, and when I *listen* to, not just hear, every word about a friend’s rough day, I am expressing the selfless love of Jesus. When I say hello to someone whom I do not know as we pass on the

sidewalk, I am sharing that love with another child of God. And as I smile at someone who quietly spends her days being invisible, my life is reflecting my faith. Love also involves forgiveness, which is powerfully expressed in our salvation through the love of God.

Forgiveness is more often than not the most difficult part of interpersonal relationships. When another person offends us, hurts us, or lives in a way contrary to our own, we tend to react with similar enmity and disdain. To forgive is to recognize the finitude of the wrong in relation to the infinitude of love. Love is infinite because it comes from the presence of God in the very air we breathe, and from God's extraordinary grace that heals our brokenness and inspires salvation. Through God's grace, we are awakened out of our separation from ourselves, from each other, and from God, and experience the reunification of God and creation. Salvation exemplifies what we know as forgiveness: God's love for us transcends the perpetual condition of sin within us and carries us to life in God. Because God's love contains nearly incomprehensible forgiveness, our love does also. This means that we must strive to forgive instead of hate, to embrace instead of separate. When a door locks behind someone who could have held it open for me, when someone asks how I am doing out of social routine and not genuine interest, and when a friend only hears my voice instead of listening to my words, I try to forgive. When I pass someone on the sidewalk who returns my smile with a scowl, I try to forgive. And when someone's impression of their own value makes my mine invisible, I try to forgive. And, in turn, I try to recognize God's presence within me and forgive myself for these very same wrongs.

My everyday life reflects my faith to others by expressing the incalculable love God has in all of us. Recognizing that every single person I encounter, even those whom I am not particularly fond of, possesses and participates in the presence of God is fundamental in shaping how I act towards others. From this mindset come specific behaviors and actions that demonstrate God's love. These actions lie along a continuum of depth, from lightening someone's day with a smile, to listening respectfully to a person's contradicting view, to being a supportive presence for a friend while his mother battles ovarian cancer. Every day, we wake to the challenge of expressing the love of God to others. In the midst of this call, it is important that we remember that surprisingly profound Sunday School line: We love because God first loved us.