



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Love

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As that 1955 film title declared: “Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing.” It is a complex and multi-faceted feeling that can and does take countless forms. At its essence, love is about connection, about relationship. It can be romantic or platonic. It can simply be the affection we feel for ourselves, and it can extend to the care and concern we have for people half a world away—even if we’ve never met. We express love through our words and deeds, and we typically experience it through what others say or do. It moves us to do unthinkable things we would never undertake were it not for love’s power. Love, then, is a force. And while its meanings are many, and references to its presence at seemingly every turn, love is worthy of deeper, intentional reflection.

For the coming four weeks, we invite you to reflect on the nature of love—in your life and in the wider world. In this month, when Valentine’s Day celebrates a certain kind of love—almost to the exclusion of all other forms—we hope you’ll give thought to love in a broader way. For the twenty-eight days of February, consider the role that love plays in your day-to-day. Reflect on how love gives shape to who you are and how you move through the world. And ponder whether love is calling you to take some action or pursue a new or different path.

In doing this, as a community, may we work toward building a more compassionate and just world.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



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1. What are the most meaningful things you've done in your life that you've only done because of love?
2. How do you know when you love someone or something?
3. What do you love most about life? Has this changed over time and, if so, how?
4. If you could keep only one possession, what would it be? And what does that object say to you about love?
5. In what ways do you feel most loving? And in what ways would you like to be more loving?
6. If not one of these questions, what is your question about love for this month?

For Inspiration

Nobody has ever measured, not even poets,
how much the human heart can hold.

- Zelda Fitzgerald

Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it
has to be made, like bread; remade all the
time, made new.

- Ursula K. Le Guin

We are not the same persons this year as
last; nor are those we love. It is a happy
chance if we, changing, continue to love a
changed person.

- William Somerset Maugham

I think William Blake was right about the
purpose of humanity; we are here to learn to
bear the beams of love. There are three
meanings of bearing love: to endure it, to
carry it, and to bring it forth. In the first, we
are meant to grow in our capacity to endure
love's beauty and pain. In the second, we
are meant to carry love and spread it
around, as children carry laughter and
measles. And in the third we are meant to
bring new love into the world, to be birthers
of love.

- Gerald G. May

“Variations on the word love” - Margaret Atwood

This is a word we use to plug holes with. It's the right size for those warm blanks in speech, for those red heart-shaped vacancies on the page that look nothing like real hearts. Add lace and you can sell it. We insert it also in the one empty space on the printed form that comes with no instructions. There are whole magazines with not much in them but the word love, you can rub it all over your body and you can cook with it too. How do we know it isn't what goes on at the cool debaucheries of slugs under damp pieces of cardboard? As for the weed-seedlings nosing their tough snouts up among the lettuces, they shout it. Love! Love! sing the soldiers, raising their glittering knives in salute.

Then there's the two of us. This word is far too short for us, it has only four letters, too sparse to fill those deep bare vacuums between the stars that press on us with their deafness. It's not love we don't wish to fall into, but that fear. this word is not enough but it will have to do. It's a single vowel in this metallic silence, a mouth that says O again and again in wonder and pain, a breath, a finger grip on a cliffside. You can hold on or let go.

To live our lives based on the principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous. Learning how to face our fears is one way we embrace love. Our fear may not go away, but it will not stand in the way. Those of us who have already chosen to embrace a love ethic, allowing it to govern and inform how we think and act, know that when we let our light shine, we draw to us and are drawn to other bearers of light. We are not alone.

- bell hooks

You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

- Anne Lamont



Photo by Josue Escoto on Unsplash

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling, not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being “drawn toward.” Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one’s friends and enemies. Love creates righteousness, or justice, here on earth... For this reason, loving involves commitment. We are not automatic lovers of self, others, world, or God. Love does not just happen. We’re not love machines, puppets on the strings of a deity called “love.” Love is a choice—not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love is a conversion to humanity—a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives.

- Carter Hayward



Photo from Policy Options: When will Canada say enough is enough when it comes to femicide?



Photo by John Wisnikeski, on Flickr

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

From the age of six to fourteen I took violin lessons but had no luck with my teachers, for whom music did not transcend mechanical practicing. I really began to learn only after I had fallen in love with Mozart's sonatas. The attempt to reproduce their singular grace compelled me to improve my technique. I believe, on the whole, that love is a better teacher than sense of duty.

- Albert Einstein

I like not only to be loved, but also to be told that I am loved. I am not sure that you are of the same mind. But the realm of silence is large enough beyond the grave. This is the world of light and speech, and I shall take leave to tell you that you are very dear.

- George Eliot/Mary Ann Evans Cross

It is love that fashions us into the fullness of our being—not our looks, not our work, not our wants, not our achievements, not our parents, not our status, not our dreams. These are the fodder and the filler, the navigating fuels of our lives; but it is love: who we love, how we love, why we love, and that we love which ultimately shapes us.

- *Daphne Rose Kingma*

It is common to say that we are doing something out of love when we are actually doing it out of fear. Love and fear are complete opposites. So be honest with yourself, are you doing it out of love or are you doing it out of fear?

- Teal Swan

To love someone fiercely, to believe in something with your whole heart, to celebrate a fleeting moment in time, to fully engage in a life that doesn't come with guarantees—these are risks that involve vulnerability and often pain. But, I'm learning that recognizing and leaning into the discomfort of vulnerability teaches us how to live with joy, gratitude, and grace.

- Brené Brown

There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love. When we are afraid, we pull back from life. When we are in love, we open to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance. We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and our imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life.

- John Lennon

“The More Loving One” – W. H. Auden

Looking up at the stars, I know quite well
That, for all they care, I can go to hell,
But on earth indifference is the least
We have to dread from man or beast.

How should we like it were stars to burn
With a passion for us we could not return?
If equal affection cannot be,
Let the more loving one be me.

Admirer as I think I am
Of stars that do not give a damn,
I cannot, now I see them, say
I missed one terribly all day.

Were all stars to disappear or die,
I should learn to look at an empty sky
And feel its total dark sublime,
Though this might take me a little time.



In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed, whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more
strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere
long.

- William Shakespeare

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on earth.
- Raymond Carver



Photo by Matheus Ferrero on Unsplash

Optional Spiritual Exercise

This month's spiritual exercise is an opportunity to reflect on your own definitions and categories of love. For the coming weeks, notice the people, places, things, and experiences that are part of your life. Which of these do you genuinely love? Why? And how? What categories emerge to describe them? And how would you define the different types of love you experience?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

March – Anger | April – Welcome | May – Freedom

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

February 5 | “Love and Art”
Rev. Lynn Harrison

February 19 | “Love is our Centre”
Nic Da Silva, Seminarian

February 12 | “All Kinds of Love”
Rev. Lynn Harrison

February 26 | “Solitude and Loneliness”
Rev. Shawn Newton

The Journey Team

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