

LENT 2022

A Five-Week Study Guide

Including podcast reflections from:

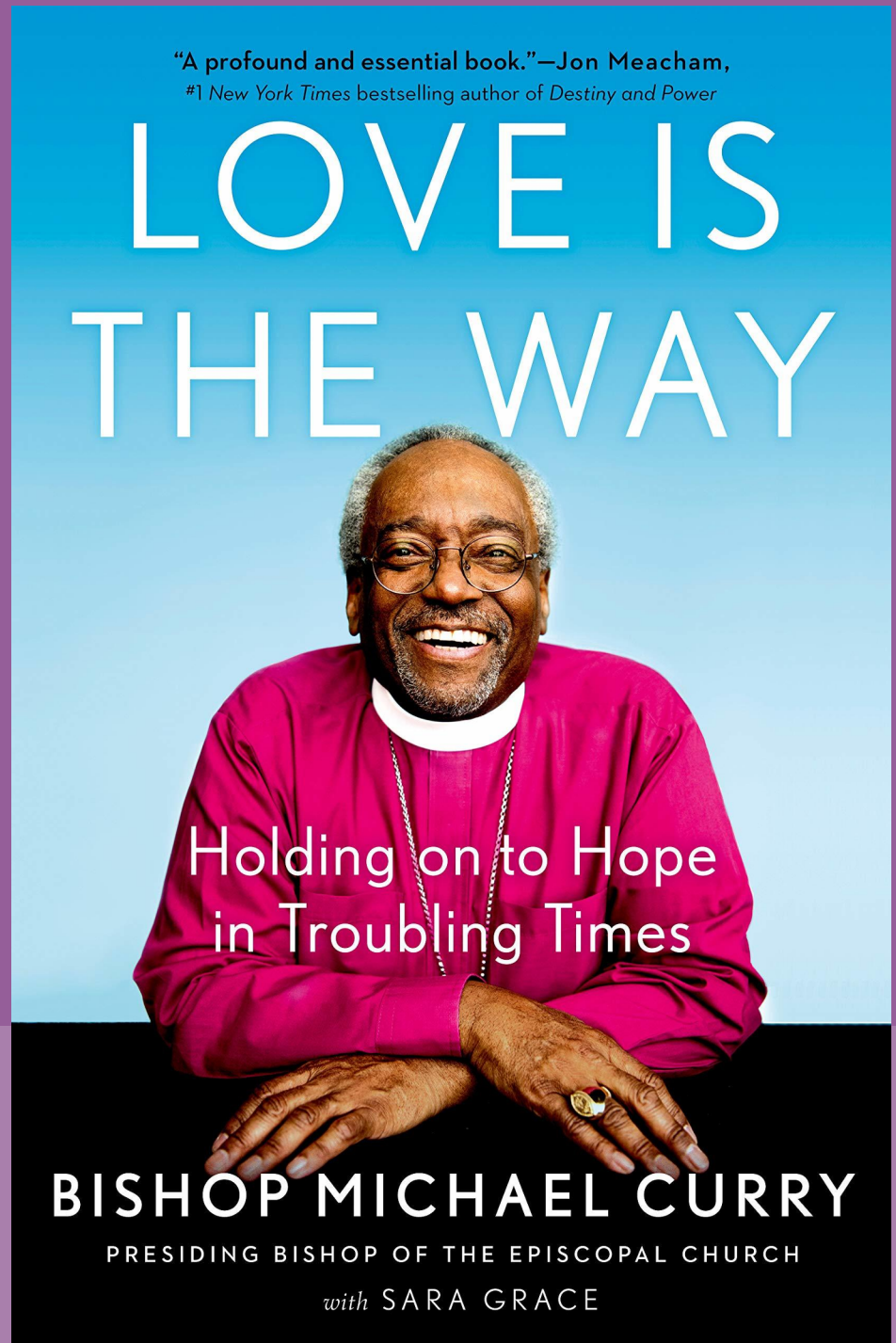
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"Love Is The Way"

Session One: Chapters 1 & 2

Listen to Canon Melissa McCarthy's Reflection on Session One [here](#).

Chapter 1 - What is this thing called love? Bishop Curry describes the different dimensions of love contained in our single English word and how agape – love that looks outward – is the foundational to how God created us and to how we are called to be in relationship with God and with each other. He tells the stories of Fannie Lou Hamer, Frances Perkins and Meghan Finn who lived out agape love in the world by serving others – and calls love “God’s GPS for living.”

Chapter 2 - Looking for God In Chapter 2 Bishop Curry starts by asking “How do I find God’s love?” He tells his own family story – a story of losing his mother at an early age and of how the love of his grandmother and the community that surrounded them supported and sustained them through their grief. He reminds the reader that “understanding that love never ends does not erase grief” and shares stories of how we can “do love” by building a community of love.

Story: Chapter 1 [pgs. 14 - 16]

Many languages have several words for love, to encompass all the different kinds and dimensions. The three most frequently used in Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament, are *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

Eros is romantic or sexual love. Our English word erotic comes from that. Eros is what Valentine’s Day is about.

Philia is fraternal or brotherly love, which is why the city of Philadelphia is called the City of Brotherly Love.

Agape. And finally there’s *agape*, which is love for the other – sacrificial love that seeks the good and well-being of others, of society, of the world.

Unfortunately, in English we have only the one word, love for everything from telenovelas to Mother Teresa. And so the different dimensions and nuances have been muddled together, which has obscured love’s true power to instigate a better world. Agape, love that looks outward, is the love that I’m most interested in.

You may not have heard the Greek word before, but you’ve experienced agape. Think about someone who impacted your life for the good. Someone who stood by you, pushed you, believed in you, maybe even sacrificed for you.

Odds are they weren't doing it because it served them. They were doing it because they cared about you. Because they wanted life's sweetness to open wide to you. Love is a firm commitment to at for the well-being of someone other than yourself. It can be personal or political, individual, or communal, intimate or public. Love will not be segregated to the private, personal precincts of life.

Love, as I read it in the Bible, is ubiquitous. It affects all aspects of life. An oft quoted passage in the New Testament says, "God so love the world that he gave his only son." The Greek word used by the New Testament writer for the word love is agape. And the Greek word used for world is kosmos, but what it really means is everything – "everything that is." Kosmos is what the spiritual is talking about when it says of God "He's got the whole world in his hands."

God so loved the world that he "gave". God gave. God did not take. God gave. That's agape. That's love. And love such at that is the way to the heart of God, the heart of each other, It is the way to a new world that looks something more like God's dream for us and all creation, what Dante spoke of as "the love that moves the sun and stars."

Reflection Questions: In group or individually:

- *In what way do you understand agape love?*
- *How do you recognize whether your actions are acts of love or acts of compromise?*
- *A former Presiding Bishop John Hines famously said that "Justice is the corporate face of God's love." How and where do you see love in action as acts of justice?*

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Session Two: Chapters 3 & 4

Listen to Rev. Antonio Gallardo's reflection on Session Two [here](#).

Chapter 3 – Making do and making new Bishop Curry tells how his grandma and ancestors “made do” with what they had, whether it be in the kitchen or in their faith. They took a little and made a lot, he says, “that’s a miracle. That’s taking something old and making something new.” Bishop Curry gives us the recipe for making do, the ingredients are tradition, imagination, and God.

Chapter 4 – What Desmond Tutu and Dolly Parton have in common Bishop Curry talks about people who dared to dream another reality and the power of dreams, especially in the darkest of times. He reminds us, “in the dark of midnight, many lost sight of love’s vision.” This is where faith matters, love is greater, and we are called to dream. Can it work? he asks and has been asked, yes, if we have courage, faith, and love.

Story 1 [page 51]

“For me, the answer begins in my grandmother's kitchen. I sat so many times at the Formica table, watching my grandma work, talking to her, listening to her, eating. In the eye of my mind and heart I can see her there now. Her favorite apron like a uniform that had been worn in many a battle, slipping off one shoulder. Gray hair pulled unto a neat bun. She’s rinsing the greens, dumping the grit. Chopping and chopping. She’s snapping the peas and, near new Year’s, rinsing the chitterlings. (If the truth to be told, at least in those days, if someone was cleaning chitterlings, you didn’t hang around too long). While she worked, whatever she was cooking or baking or preparing, she told us stories.”

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

When you hear this story, who comes to mind in your life as a person who hanging out with you set the foundation upon which you have built your spiritual life?

Bishop Curry says that when God is factored into the reality of life and living, through prayer, something changes for the good. How do your prayer practices bring God into the reality of your live and living? Is there anything that you would change, add or replace in your prayer life?

Story 2, page 90-91

"That's the million-dollar question: how do we keep our hearts and our actions loving, and our dreams vivid, as midnight approaches? We do it the same way our heroes did. People like Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, and Gandhi seem to be superhuman, born into their greatness. But Martin was mortal, fallible, and sinful, too. Gandhi was mortal, fallible and sinful. Desmond is mortal, fallible and sinful. What the word sin means is "selfishness." So, while we are all capable of love, we are equally capable of sin.

Given that these leaders were as human as the rest of us, maybe they weren't born differently, but lived differently. They worked harder, longer at their commitment to love. Courage, faith, love – these all must be cultivated! For love to survive when dreams are deferred, it must be practiced day in, day out. And in the end, living the way of love requires what King called "cosmic companionship." When it's dark on earth, God is the one who whispers, 'Say, let me tell you about this dream...'

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

Bishop Curry says, "Dreams are love's visions." We are called to dream another reality, the dream of God. How much dreaming have you been doing during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The late Senator Robert F. Kennedy said "Some see things as they are and ask, why. I dream things that never were and ask, why not?" Bishop Curry says that this is "the hard way of love." How easy, or difficult, is it for you to dream a better country, a better world? Why?

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Session Three: Chapters 5, 6 & 7

Listen to Dean Gary Hall's reflection on Session Three [here](#).

Chapter 5 – Love's Call – And Love's Calling

Bishop Curry focuses on how self-love, and being true to your own heart, can open the door of another's heart. Bishop Curry reflects on how becoming our true selves and deeply loving ourselves (seeing ourselves as made in the image of a loving God) is discovered in the process of making hard life choices. John Coltrane's decision to heal from a life of drug addiction, Bishop Harris's choice to radically be her true self in the face of rejection and oppression, and ultimately Bishop Curry's decision to be fully himself as priest, presiding bishop, and preacher at the royal wedding are all examples of people making the decision to live into their true selves, freeing them to truly love others.

Chapter 6 – It's Not Easy

Bishop Curry discusses that the work of love and the nature of progress is a struggle. Accepting that progress of loving and building the kingdom of God is a struggle, can be difficult. Bishop Curry reflects on how the struggle of systemic racism in Lincoln Heights, OH and his work there changed the way he understood progress and loving action. Collective action must be grounded in love, and community capacity building can increase our strength and resolve to do our part in the struggle. Hope, he says, comes from surprising places. We cannot do everything, but we can do our part and do it with our whole hearts.

Chapter 7 – Leave No One Behind

Bishop Curry introduces Martin Buber's principle of I-Thou, seeing every person as a sacred individual. When we see others in this way, acknowledging them fully, we can better become a church that exists primarily for those who are outside it.

Story 1: In Chapter 5, Bishop Curry tells the story of the night at college when he took a friend with a bad drug reaction to the infirmary. "By the next morning, my friend was clearly going to be OK, but something had changed for me. A night that began with me dancing on my feet at a party ended with me on my knees talking to God. . . . That night with my friend in the infirmary, my world was shaken by something I didn't see coming. I was cracked open, if you will. Vulnerable. . . . On my knees, I felt God, who the Bible says is love.

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

Loving yourself, Bishop Curry says, is a required balance in the commandment to love God, Neighbor and Self. (p.96) How do we know when we have struck the balance of self-love? What are ways you find love for yourself? How does your body feel, when you are in balance with love of God, Neighbor and Self.

Bishop Curry says when faced with difficult decisions, he realized, "if he felt the presence of God, it was more like a computer program running in the background. It's there and it has an effect, but it doesn't require your immediate attention." With so much requiring attention these days, how do you pay attention to God in your daily life? Does God require your immediate attention?

Story 2: In Chapter 6, Bishop Curry recounts his time as rector of St. Simon's in Lincoln Heights, Ohio, a poor Black suburb of Cincinnati with a host of urban problems. In concert with (White) clergy colleagues in surrounding suburbs, Bishop Curry had his first taste of collaboration with others: "That kicked off my first real experience of being part of the leadership team seeking to organize a community. As the African saying goes, 'Move fast alone, go far together.' We did not move fast. Getting the four religious communities and the Lincoln Heights community together was hard work. No one alone had solutions. Everyone had ideas and hopes. But to discover the needs that we together were being called to address took time—to listen, learn, share, and pray."

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

Bishop Curry says "the journey is always a struggle." When you hear this, how do you feel? What is your relationship to comfort, and how does accepting that the journey is always a struggle challenge the level of comfort in your life now?

Bishop Curry says, our job is to do our job ... we cannot take on every part of the struggle but we must do our part. When you consider systemic racism, and our call to build the kingdom of God, The Beloved Community, what is your part? Do you feel equipped to do your job?

Story 3: In Chapter 7, Bishop Curry describes his college experience of reading Martin Buber's I and Thou. "In college I read a book called I and Thou by the Jewish rabbi and existentialist Martin Buber. . . He wrote that there are two possible ways we can relate to the world around us: I-It and I-Thou. Relate to other people as Its and you make yourself the Supreme being. . . I-Thou is different. Thou recognizes the other as an active subject—a human spirit whose truth can be understood only through a relationship. You can't own a Thou. You can't stereotype a Thou. You can't ignore a Thou. You can't throw a Thou away. 'All real living is meeting,' wrote Buber."

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

Have you ever had the experience of considering someone as "I-It", and having that relationship transformed to "I-Thou"? What happened to help you see them differently?

How does your faith community live out William Temple's vision of an organization that exists for the sake of those outside it?

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Session Four: Chapters 8, 9 & 10

Listen to Gabriel Vasquez-Reyes' Reflection on Session Four [here](#).

Chapter 8 - When the Spirit Reworks You

There will be a time when God's GPS points you in a direction that makes people uncomfortable. It may make you uncomfortable. The evolution of long held beliefs can be a spiritual earthquake the ground beneath us shaking; the very fault-lines of our identity shifting and seeking to resettle. But if we can make it through, we find a reward: not an easy journey but a share of what the Bible calls "peace that passes all understanding" -- the peace of knowing we are living loves way without contradiction.

- *Are there "long held beliefs" you have had to question in your spiritual journey?*
- *"Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway" is a quote Bishop Curry lifts up. How does that resonate with you?*
- *"My only challenge was learning to receive anger and not give it back in return." Is that a challenge you experience? How are you doing with it?*

Chapter 9 - The Real E Pluribus Unum

Bishop Curry begins this chapter with the question: "Do I have to love even my enemy?" And "How do we make out of many one without obliterating anybody?" And then goes on to say: "That's not just the church's challenge. It is our nation's challenge. It is the world's challenge. How do we walk together as siblings united by some ancient and venerated values in hopes well we also have significant differences and disagreements?"

We need e pluribus unum now more than ever because if we don't work together will likely work against all of our interest. The large scale problems we face as humans will not be solved by isolation when we're busy wagging fingers at each other. We can't move away from the nightmare and closer to the dream. The planet is suffering, and if we don't heal her we're about to feel the blunt impact -- some more than others -- but eventually all of us. We are all in this together.

- *Bishop Curry wrote these words before we knew COVID19 was a thing. How do they resonate now as we struggle together to fight a global pandemic?*
- *What are the tools, skills or resources you've seen or used that have helped bridge differences that challenge us?*
- *What are steps we can take together away from the nightmare toward the dream?*

Chapter 10 - The Great Relationship Revival

Chapter 10 begins with another question: How can love overcome what divides us and move us forward together? Bishop Curry writes: "For all those who feel unheard, ignored, and under siege, these divisions are particularly painful and real. Powerful forces exploit that pain and here we are: Wrought by extremism. Mistrustful. Punching each other in the face in so many ways. And above all, doubting our shared future. That's one thing that we can all be sure of: whatever the future holds it will be shared. We will live together as family or perish as fools.

But God is not finished with us yet. Love has not left this land there are many of us who are ready to move forward with one voice that says "No more! We choose love. We choose community." But to get there, we have work to do. We need to heal. Without healing claims to unity feel disingenuous. We need healing stories -- but they need to be authentic. And that takes time.

- *What are the healing stories we need to hear and to tell: in our churches, our diocese, our communities, and our nation?*
- *How can we work together to be agents of change on the side of the kind of love Bishop Curry is calling us to?*

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Session Five: Chapters 11 & 12

Listen to Bishop John Taylor's Reflection on Session Five [here](#).

Chapter 11 - The Still More Excellent Way

Bishop Curry begins the chapter by describing his work with progressive evangelist Jim Wallis and others in launching the Reclaiming Jesus movement and concludes with an account of its famous prayer vigil in Washington in May 2018 -- [described in this E. J. Dionne Washington Post column](#).

He poses this challenge: "How do we follow the way of love when it comes to politics?" Challenged by his staff to say something about the 2016 election without being partisan, he returned to first principles: The golden rule and All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten by Robert Fulghum. He offers these steps for constructive political dialogue: Identify shared values, describe how your personal narrative led you to them, apply them to current challenges, and craft a way forward.

Story #1

As bishop of North Carolina, Michael and other church leaders lobbied against state legislation that would have scaled back protections for migrant workers. "The results weren't perfect, but they were an improvement over what might have been....There was one delegate in particular who had, over time, moderated some of his views on immigration."

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

If you were part of a group of five people who believed the 2020 election was honest, how would you apply Bishop Curry's principles to a conversation with five people who believed the election was rigged?

Have you experienced what family systems experts call emotional cutoff because of politics? Has anyone cut you off? Have you cut someone off? Looking back, would Bishop Curry's principles and practices have helped, especially deep listening to others' personal narratives?

How would the story of the drug dealer whom Michael baptized, which we read about in chapter seven, fit in chapter 11? 4. When is incremental change not enough? When is love not enough?

Chapter 12 - Hope, Help, and Healing

Bishop Curry closes by taking us to the mountaintop – literally at first, as he describes a glimpse of Mount Kilimanjaro from an airplane. He describes several other mountaintop experiences, including a Kanuga retreat with folks suffering from HIV-AIDS and an encounter with a man who was shepherded away from a toxic expression of Christianity by a welcoming Episcopal parish.

Story #2

“Sickness and suffering had occasioned our gathering at Kanuga. But it was love that lifted us up and brought us together. At the healing service where I gave [my] sermon, the warmth radiated from and to every person there. We could feel an energy not our own, the very spirit of God filling the place. For a moment, our egos fell away, and with them, our differences. We experienced ourselves as friendly souls, free and whole and beloved. We were on the mountaintop.”

Reflection Questions -- In group or individually:

If you like, share a mountaintop moment. How would you describe the source of power and peace that you experienced?

Our mountaintop moments are so precious, the warm of fellowship and mutually supportive community so enjoyable, that we may wonder why people often work so hard to not to experience them. What stumbling blocks does the world put in our way? What stumbling blocks may we be putting in others' way?

Bishop Curry writes, “I believe that most of us are capable of kindness and inclined toward altruism if given a chance.” Do you agree?