

What Is Love?

Before I ask a question about what something means, I always dig into the root of the word — thread its etymology.

*Love comes from the ancient root **leubh-**, meaning “to care, desire, love.”
It’s the same root behind **believe** — “to hold dear.”*

So the word *love* is ancient — rooted in desire, care, and connection. Not just romantic or sexual, but spiritual, familial, and communal.

And so when we look at the ancient word, *love* itself — to desire, care, and connect — I think a bit more on a transcendental level, beyond this notion of physical desire.

The City of Brotherly Love

This morning, I’m walking along Logan Square. Beautiful fountain with sculptures and water that’s flowing throughout the summer. During the summer months, children play in the fountain — swimming, full of energy and vibrant love. When I see children playing, this to me feels like the purest and most authentic expression of love itself. Why?

When I see communities coming together — different families, children, and people gathered in a communal space, expressing the pure forms of joy through play — it evokes love at the deepest and most profound level to me as an observer of life. Philadelphia is known as the City of Brotherly Love.

***Philadelphia** comes from the Greek:
philos — loving or dear
adelphos — brother*

Put together, Philadelphia literally means “**brotherly love.**” It was named by William Penn in 1682 as a reflection of his Quaker ideals — a place of religious tolerance, peace, and equality.

Treat Thy Neighbor Like Thyself

The ethos of Philadelphia is rooted in this philosophy of brotherly love and genuine care for your neighbor. The teachings of Jesus replace all laws of the Old Testament with one simple idea: **Treat thy neighbor like thyself.**

This one law rules over all laws and is very profound at a very simple level. If everybody is treating their neighbors with the utmost respect — like they would like to be treated — there really isn’t any need for any other rules or laws or regulations in society in general.

This becomes a very radical idea, almost rebellious in a way. It replaces the need for all the different systems in place that we have in modern life — laws, statutes, government, bureaucracy — with this very simple and foundational idea: that through love, everything else falls into place in harmony in society.

Communal Love

As a Peace Corps volunteer, I lived in a rural village in Zambia, Africa. What’s fascinating about these villages is that they are very self-contained and self-governed. There are no police officers, and there is no need for hierarchies. It is simple — there is God, tribe, and land.

In the center of the community, there is a well, where people go to draw nourishment for their physical bodies. Without this well, there is no community. The well is very difficult to construct. It requires proper placement, digging deep into

the ground through physical effort — tapping into a source that provides an endless flow of water.

Once the well is connected to the source with abundance, the water is always flowing — providing the entire community with this vital substance that every human being needs to survive. Alongside the well is the church. In the center of the church is an altar where a sacrifice is made, reminding the people within the community of the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

Every individual within the community has a role to play. Mothers are coming home in the mornings with babies on their back and firewood on their heads. The men are building churches and homes. The boys are building bricks with sand and mud. The girls are sweeping the floors and preparing food for the day.

Everybody in the community, in the tribe, in the family, is making an individual sacrifice for something greater than themselves. With the church and the well in the center of the community, not only do the individuals receive physical nourishment — there is also spiritual nourishment.

Through this spiritual nourishment, through tapping into the source — the top of the hierarchy that is responsible for a functioning society, God — each individual within the community embodies love.

God Is Love

“God is love.” — 1 John 4:8

“Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” — 1 John 4:16

In the original Greek, the word used for “love” is **agápē**, which refers to the highest, selfless, unconditional love — distinct from *eros* (romantic love), *philia* (friendship), or *storgē* (familial love).

I recently read *Plato's Symposium*, and found it to be a very intriguing book on love, and found great wisdom through reading about Plato's Ladder of Love. Essentially, it's a transcendental experience — from desire to spiritual enlightenment.

Being physically attracted to the beauty of a body is *eros*, desire — the base level of love itself. You then climb the ladder to recognize beauty has many forms, appreciating the universality of beauty. The next stage is recognizing the soul of an individual — finding beauty in their mind and their kindness.

Then there is the love of virtue, the love of knowledge, the truth, philosophy, and wisdom. And then finally, you find yourself loving the **form of beauty itself**.

- physical beauty of one body
- beauty of many bodies
- beauty of the soul
- beauty of virtues
- beauty of knowledge and truth
- love of the divine form of beauty itself

Personally, I found I've climbed this Ladder of Love. How? In solitude — and specifically, spending time in nature — I've become inspired. When you look at the word *inspired*, it means “to breathe into.” And by spending time under trees, in fresh air, among God's most divine and perfect creations, I quite literally have this fresh air being breathed into me — almost like the spirit of God has been breathed into my soul.

Despite not feeling love from the external world — in terms of somebody physically desiring me, or even sharing with me love and kindness and affection — I have this abundance of love within my soul. And the source has been connected. Through isolation and deep contemplation, and finding love for the sake of beauty itself — recognizing the patterns in nature and human behavior, and finding infinite wonder and curiosity in the mundane world around me — I have a deep sense of love and appreciation for all beautiful things.

The Fountain and the Well

And so, when you think of the well, and the construction of these fountains — like the one that I'm watching right now outside of Logan Square, roaring behind me as I write this essay — I remind myself how difficult it is to construct these structures. Like the well, to get to the source, we too must undergo this transformation — digging deeply, physically, mentally, and spiritually — to connect to the source of God.

This can look very different for others, but for me, it looks like fasting, contemplation, prayer, and even a transformative trip to Rome that completely revitalized my connection to my roots. I was born and raised Roman Catholic, and I have essentially, for the past three years, put Christ at the forefront of my life.

During my time in Rome, I spent time praying in the church every single day and reciting the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel outside of the castle walls of the Vatican. I started to memorize this prayer very naturally, and simply with childlike curiosity. I never learned it when I was a little boy, so I simply wanted to.

I had no idea who Saint Michael the Archangel was, other than the fact that he was the leader of God's army — and that sounded pretty cool — and I felt empowered with this sort of warrior spirit mentality.

I made a day trip to Paris for 48 hours. When I went to bed that night — in this little shoebox bunker hotel room I was sleeping in, after eating pounds of cheap meat I bought from the Asian market — I had a profound dream. A clouded dragon was chasing me, and then, as it became closer, transformed into a rainbow that emanated from the sky.

The next day, as I walked around Paris, I stumbled across a sculpture of Saint Michael the Archangel surrounded by two dragons. Revealed above the sculpture was a **real rainbow**. The synchronicity was divine — and honestly blew my mind.

This was the moment where everything changed for me, and I went from *belief* to *knowing* that God is real.

The Light of Christ Is Emanating Through My Eyes and Radiating From My Soul

The reason this happened is simple: I was just following my inner child. My inner conscience told me to quit my job — it was unfulfilling and dulling my spirit — and go to Rome. To go to the churches. To spend time connecting with my roots. To tap into the source.

And then, through tapping into the source and connecting with God — seeking the Kingdom first and foremost — everything just *magically* fell into place. But I don't think it's magic. It's divine. It's real. It's pure love.

My childlike innocence and ignorance to this prayer to Saint Michael — and what he represents, even with the dragons and all this stuff from *Revelation* — wasn't even on my mind or of concern. I was just trying to figure things out.

And very naturally, through being this big kid, stumbling through life and trying to transform, I've had a genuine divine revelation and spiritual enlightenment.

Pure Love Is Untethered

There's something in the Bible that says: *Seek the Kingdom of God first, and everything else will fall into place.*

I can tell you with 100% certainty that this eternal wisdom is **absolute truth**.

Through embodying the way and life of Jesus — through his moral teachings, virtues, etc. — and connecting to the source, God, I have this intense and insatiable love for life that I've only found through Christ. It feels like my soul is on fire every morning when I wake up. And I seriously don't know how to describe it otherwise.

The way that this feeling of love manifests in reality is that you start to look at everyone around you as a neighbor, a brother, with this deep sense of care and love — where you simply want to give and share love with others, without expecting anything in return.

And so now that I walk around with the light of Christ emanating through my eyes and radiating from my soul, I feel whole, complete, and have this abundance flowing through me — like I'm a fountain or a well that's endlessly flowing, that just wants to share love with other people to drink from.

I'm untethered, unbothered, unattached to the outcome of whether or not somebody reciprocates this love — but simply embody it.

So now when I go through the streets of Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, I simply treat my neighbors like myself. I smile, I wave, I spread joy and kindness. If there isn't love in the room, I'll bring it to the table. If there's darkness, don't worry — I'll be the light.

This, to me, is what it means to embody the teachings of Christ.
It's to embody love itself.