

## *All the world's a stage*

*And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts. . . .*

William Shakespeare

Truer words were never spoken. Our entrances and exits occur not only during a single lifetime, as in Shakespeare's sonnet, but also across many lifetimes. In God, we all "*live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). At some point in time, or perhaps before time began, our eternal souls were birthed by God, created from God's own essence and in God's spiritual image. As any loving parent would do, God pushed us out of the nest, so to speak, in order that we might make our own way in life and find true love. The highest form of love, which is Godly (*agape*) love, is characterized by patience, kindness, endurance, unselfishness, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice. These qualities cannot be learned and experienced second-hand in a classroom. They can only be learned in the crucible of life on earth.

The most extreme forms of love can only be expressed in the most extreme of negative circumstances. This is counterintuitive, I know, but it is true, nevertheless. Take a moment to think about the many unselfish acts of love you have personally experienced or have learned about second hand. What types of circumstances resulted in those expressions of love. My parents loved me very much. I know this because they told me so, but I especially know it because they sacrificed much in order that I might live a happy life. I know that Jesus loves me because he died on the Cross of Calvary for my benefit. One of the highest expressions of love I have ever read about was the story of Corrie ten Boom, who forgave the concentration camp guards who were particularly cruel to her sister Betsie.

Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is love. All the do's and don'ts of moral and ethical behavior are summed up in the two commandments that we love God and one another. In order to truly experience love, you must first find yourself in need of it. Only then, can you experience first-hand the wonderful feeling of being loved and forgiven when you least deserve it. The Bible has a word for undeserved love. That word is Grace. The Apostle Paul taught us that "*by Grace we are saved, and not by doing good deeds and obeying the rules of the Law*" (Ephesians 2:8). Being loved unconditionally by God (ie. by Grace, not works) helps us to love others unconditionally, no matter what the cost.

Learning how to love others unconditionally cannot be accomplished in a single lesson. It takes time, lots of time, perhaps many lifetimes. Each time we fall and are loved and helped by another person, we learn more fully what it is like to be loved. Each time we experience hatred and cruelty and respond with love, we become more like Jesus Christ, our Savior. He doesn't "save" us by doing everything for us. Instead he demonstrated to us the way of love. The way of love is not something Jesus travels on our behalf. Instead, it is the way each of us must travel on our own with his help and guidance.

Take time to listen to this beautiful song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nllfVcVdwCI>

Richard Goyette