

All you need is love

After 10 years of intense study of the Bible and Christian theology, I think I've got things pretty well figured out, but the cost was an alienation from my evangelical Christian roots. While driving in my car today, I was feeling spiritually lonely, wishing that more people shared my beliefs. I was feeling somewhat ungrounded and lost.

Brilliant theologians cannot agree on most of the seemingly important points of Christian dogma. This being the case, what hope is there for most people, who have neither the time, nor the intellect, nor even the desire to figure these matters out for themselves? To make matters worse, these highly complex points of doctrine are used by many as a means of exclusion.

The major conclusion I reached, after all my hard work and study, was that God does not require theological correctness in order for each of us to fulfill our individual life missions. If theological uniformity were important to God, He would most certainly have achieved that, and we would not have thousands of different Christian denominations and world religions warring against one another, in some cases literally. If the theological particulars are not important to God, what remains is not a theological vacuum, but instead two very simple spiritual truths.

Here they are in a nutshell: God is love, and our purpose in life is to love ourselves and others as ourselves. This truth is built into us by our Creator God. When we love ourselves and others, we are loving God. Not all of us try very hard to live up this expectation, but almost all of us would agree that this ideal is the very highest expression of human goodness and potential. These are universal truths that God has clearly and unmistakably built into all of us.

While all this seems very true in the abstract, we don't benefit from it unless we put it to use. Today, I was feeling a little depressed while driving my car. I was reminiscing about the good feelings I experienced in various Church settings in the past, and I was missing all that. I have recently joined a new church, but haven't yet had time to get fully involved.

Then something happened that filled me with profound happiness and joy, more intense than what I have ever experienced in church. Recently, I began a small ministry in cooperation with a couple friends at church, handing out clothing and life essentials to the homeless population at pre-designated locations three days a week. It was Wednesday, my assigned day to visit the homeless in Placerville, and while driving my car on the way there I was feeling blue. When I arrived at my destination I was greeted by a group of homeless people, some of whom knew me and some who didn't. They were incredibly grateful for the help I was giving them. I was handing out pants, shirts, socks, tooth brushes, soap, toilet paper, shoes, hoodies, ponchos, and other bare essentials. They were so happy and grateful. They experienced greater happiness from these simple gifts than I have ever experienced when buying a new car or even a new house. I received in return copious amounts of love and hugs.

Sometimes I feel sorry for the homeless. Sometimes I feel great sorrow for disadvantaged people everywhere, many of whom suffer under nearly intolerable circumstances. Often I wonder why God allows this to happen. What is God's purpose in all of this? Today I was reminded that it's

all about contrast, and happiness is a very relative term, not at all dependent upon material comforts and possessions, as Jesus clearly taught.

Could it be that this group of homeless people were allowed to be in their circumstances in order that they might experience what it is like to be in need of help and love? Could it be that the love and gratitude that they experienced when receiving those humble gifts exceeded that which they would have experienced in more affluent circumstances? Could it be that they were there just as much for my benefit? Could it be that one of their purposes in life is to provide an opportunity for me, and people like me, to be on the receiving end of their love and gratitude? Needless to say, the cloud of depression that was over me, while driving, quickly lifted after I arrived at my destination. And I am looking forward to getting some more of that again soon.