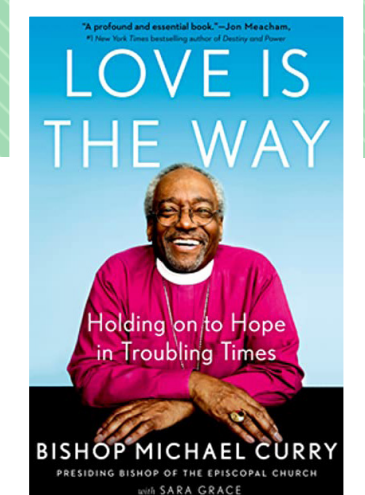




CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Alicia Porterfield



Love Is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times By Bishop Michael Curry, with Sara Grace

About the Author

Many of us were introduced to Bishop Michael Curry through his sermon delivered at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018. The sermon, *The Power of Love*, quickly went viral as people around the globe marveled at his wisdom and warmth.

Yet, this sermon centered not on romantic love or the challenges of modern marriage, but on the grander vision of God's love, *agape* in Greek, that undergirds and shapes human love. Living into that kind of love, he preached, has the power to remake our world.

About the Book

Rejecting both sentimentality and cynicism, Bishop Curry's *Love Is the Way* expands his sermon's theme of the transformative power of God's love. Weaving together personal experiences, historical and biblical examples, and the realities of our hurting world, Bishop Curry unfolds the power of *agape* love to change the globe—first by

changing our lives. Over 12 chapters, he recenters the Greatest Commandment, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself,” as Christianity's touchstone and moral guide, calling us out of chaos and toward community (5).

Bishop Curry carefully draws the reader into his own story as a Black man whose grandparents fled the South, who grew up as the son of an Episcopal priest in New York state, and who lost his mother as a child. His theology centers on Jesus' love for all people, as he insists that in a world that trumpets scarcity, there is plenty of love and room for everyone. Yet he is abundantly clear that living out a love that thinks of “we” instead of just “me” in a world that trains us for the opposite is no easy task. Knowing our human frailty well, Bishop Curry is careful to remind us that only by living into God's great love for each of us and all of us that can we even begin to love one another sacrificially. We are able to love one another only through God's empowering love and through a community where we empower each other. It may be no easy task, but it is the only way forward. And it is possible—with God.

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Book Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: What Is This Thing Called Love?

1. Curry explores agape, love centered on the other, through his experience with Josie Robbins, who took care of his family when his mother became seriously ill. What are your stories and experiences of agape love? Where do you see this kind of love at work now?
2. How do you resonate with the image of love as “God’s GPS” and the guiding question “is this just about me or is it about we?” (26) How could you imagine putting this GPS to work in your own life, family or work life and church life?

Chapter 2: Looking for God

1. Curry is clear that love is an action we both do and receive, most powerfully experienced in community, where we are conduits of God’s love. Where are the communities of love in your life and in our world? Do you agree that wherever true love is, God is?
2. What are the “rituals of comfort” and “habits of grace” that speak to you? Curry refers to these intentional spiritual practices as “the scaffolding” that makes community and love even stronger (43). How have you experienced this to be true? How are we teaching that scaffolding to our children/youth or newcomers to the faith?

Chapter 3: Making Do and Making New

1. Why do you think food and stories go together in so many cultures? How does the creativity in “making do” with food apply to creativity in “making do” with life’s realities? What are your family/community’s food and life stories of “making garbage gourmet” and “overcoming evil with good” (56)?
2. When have you seen people tapping into tradition, imagination and God to rise above visible circumstances and imagine a new possibility? Where do you feel stuck now in your life or notice stuck

places in your community that could do with some new possibilities?

3. What does it say to you about the Gospel that slaves could hear the white preacher’s sermon on “how God would want you to be a better slave” and yet believe in and survive on the slave preacher’s sermon that proclaimed, “You are not slaves, you are the children of God” (70)?

Chapter 4: What Desmond Tutu and Dolly Parton Have in Common

1. “Dreaming gave us the very real civil rights movement ... dreams are love’s visions—the boundless faith that the world can be remade to look more like what God hoped for his creation” (73). What are your dreams for your community, congregation, our country and our world? How can you live now toward the dream you would like to see become reality?
2. What is your response to the description of Jesus as a “strategist” of love in action (89-90)? How might the Ten Commandments of Non-Violence help us strategize how to live out love in the conflicts and injustices we face right now (91-94)?

Chapter 5: Love’s Call—and Love’s Calling

1. “Unselfish, sacrificial living isn’t about ignoring or denying or destroying yourself. It’s about discovering your true self—the self that looks like God—and loving from that grounding” (96). How does this reflect what you have been taught about love? How does this understanding impact how you hear “love your neighbor as yourself”?
2. “When you know, nurture, and ultimately share your true self, you breathe God’s love into every space you inhabit” (115). When do you feel most like your true self? What helps you feel that way? Who do you know who seems to be his/her “true self”?

3. How might loving ourselves affect how we interact in the world? How we deal with conflict, confront problems, or accept criticism?

through challenging concerns in relationships and communities? What does this approach require?

3. In what areas of your life and beliefs have you experienced significant growth? How did others respond? How would you describe Curry's response to the intense anger he received after the vote to support Bishop Robinson (179-182), especially his assertion, "a sense of safety, not anxiety, is what puts people in a space to open their hearts to change" (182)?

Chapter 6: It's Not Easy

1. "If there is no struggle there is no progress," Frederick Douglass wrote, describing the slow, arduous work for change for the good (121). How does this reality challenge our modern desire for quick results? What are ways we can celebrate small steps toward a bigger goal?
2. How do we accept "our place in the struggle" and focus on our part without, trying to be God (123)? In what ways do you identify with long, slow work Curry experienced as St. Cyrene's work to love their community? How might his assertion that "the first step was relational" inform our own work and life?

Chapter 9: The Real E Pluribus Unum

1. How do you resonate with Curry's statement that the "greater challenge" facing the church is "How do we make e pluribus unum—out of many, one—real without obliterating anybody?" In what ways has the pandemic, racial reckoning and political struggles intensified this challenge? Where have you seen division and also agape love at work?
2. How did the design (location, schedule of prayer, foot washing) of the Anglican Communion meeting help center the participants in love? How might we apply this to our situations when facing difficult conversations together?
3. What do you make of Curry's reminder, "Jesus didn't say 'like your enemies.' Because you don't have to like them—you only have to love them"? And of his suggestion, "Let's all stop worrying about whether we like each other and choose to believe instead that we are capable of doing good together" (205)?

Chapter 7: Leave No One Behind

1. Where do you see Buber's "I-Thou" and "I-It" frameworks playing out in our world/nation/society today? How is relationship the key to creating "I-Thou" connections? How did Eddie coming to be a part of St. James impact the church (155-160)?
2. What is your reaction to William Temple's assertion, "The church is the only society that doesn't exist for the good of its members" (145)? Where do you see people being treated at "Its" in your community? Can you imagine ways your congregation might serve these as "Thous"?
3. "All human communities have demons, or unhealthy spiritual realities with which they must deal" (149). What are the unhealthy spiritual realities in the faith groups in your life? How did love overcome those issues at St. James in Baltimore? How might progress be made in your faith groups?

Chapter 10: The Great Relationship Revival

1. "Whatever the future is, it will be shared. We'll live together as family or perish as fools" (208). In the midst of racial, socioeconomic and political divisions in America, where are the "healing stories" you hear? Why do you think listening to one another's stories is vital to healing? How can we apply this to our own lives and our interaction with the divisions in our world?
2. What did Curry learn as he prepared for and then made his pastoral visit to Standing Rock? How often do we make assumptions about difficult situations without learning the history or listening to the people affected? What is the difference between being a "water protector" and an "agitator"—and why does the language matter (213)?

Chapter 8: When the Spirit Reworks You

1. When has God's GPS sent you in a direction that made you and/or others uncomfortable? What was that like? What centered you in that time?
2. Describe Curry's response to Robert about changing the church's stance on same-sex marriages: "'Brother, I'm not there yet,' I told him. I asked him to stay with me, give me some time, and keep talking with me. And he did" (172). How might this be a model for working

3. How were you taught about our role as stewards responsible for the rest of God's creation? How do you understand and live out that that role now? Do you believe God's creation is a "Thou" and not an 'It" (216)?

Chapter 11: The Still More Excellent Way

1. When have you seen people following "the way of love when it comes to politics" (227)? How is that different from engaging in politics "simply on its own terms" (230)? How can we practice shifting the conversation from the issues as presented to the "values and principles we share" (231)?
2. How do you resonate with Curry's framework of applying the Golden Rule to policy making (231ff)? Do you believe agape love can break through political deadlock? How might his practical steps (235) of building "on the positive and what can be done" be applied in your/our life?

Chapter 12: Hope, Help, and Healing

1. If we believe that "the way of love is a commitment to seeking the good and well-being of others" (242), how do we center ourselves in that love in our busy, noisy, fractious world?
2. What have been your "mountaintop" or "thin place" moments of experiencing God's love, especially with others, in a profound way? How might we help "the mountaintop" live in us (248)?

Appendix: Love in Action—a Daily Planner

1. Practice creating a rule of life that supports you in living in and living out God's love, using the steps Curry provides (251-253). How do obedience, silence and humility translate into your daily life?
2. Who are "soul companions" who will walk with you on this journey? Think about what kind of support you might need and ask for it specifically. Be loving to yourself as you engage in the work of love, honoring the slow process of change.



Next Steps and Further Reading

Be the Bridge is both a book by Latasha Morrison and a website for learning and organizing people committed to racial reconciliation. The work focuses on listening, values and common ground. <https://bethebridge.com/>

Help with creating habits of love: www.sacredordinarydays.com offers wisdom and practical planners to help with centering our lives on God's love. These habits explore the rule of life and encourage patterns of prayer, rest and study that bless.

Learning the larger story of current issues: Read books and article written by the people who are most affected by the issue itself. If you want to learn more about race in America, read works by Black or indigenous people. Immigration? Read the perspectives and histories of immigrants written by respected scholars. Creation care? Read indigenous accounts of Standing Rock and learn about the faith perspective of our role in caring for God's creation.

Some suggestions:

On Race:

The Color of Compromise by Jemar Tisby

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent by Isabelle Wilkerson

I'm Still Here by Austin Channing Brown

On Asian American immigration and experience:

<https://www.pbs.org/weta/asian-americans/>

On Mental illness and the Church:

Blessed are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness, Family, and Church by Sarah Lund

On Human Sexuality

Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate by Justin Lee