

A photograph of a stone archway leading to a courtyard with a fountain and classical architecture. The archway is made of light-colored stone and frames a view of a courtyard. In the courtyard, there is a fountain with water cascading down a wall. In the background, there are classical buildings with arches and columns. The sky is clear and blue.

Farsighted
Love

Carlos Valleperas

"Onward, with compassion and serenity"

Pope Francis

FARSIGHTED LOVE

INDIVIDUAL DESIRE IS INFERIOR TO THE HIGHER IDEAL

JOHN CONNOLLY

"THE WOMAN IN THE WOODS"

Be a saint. Not be saint-like. Not try to live a saintly life. The message was simple and direct. It said live life with the purpose, with the ambition of becoming a saint.

The first time I heard this message I dismissed it without further thought. This simple suggestion of becoming a saint was in the introduction to an hour long video revealing the lives – and origins—of our modern day saints. Though the video series, this episode being one of ten, was religious in content, the "be a saint" message seemed to reach beyond faith or religion.

Twice I watched the series. Twice I rejected the idea of even living like a saint, never mind becoming one. Not for me. I am not worthy. I may have too many skeletons in my closet. Nowhere near enough discipline in my character. Not the right social background. Not enough knowledge of scripture. Not enough Faith. Not. Never. Can't.

The list of reasons even the idea of striving towards sainthood was beyond me kept growing as I watched the lives of these saints unfold in the video. The many reasons are not unique to me. The video addressed this. The four featured people were stripped of their well-earned hallows of sainthood and exposed as the mere humans they were. Still, my reaction held as "not me."

Why not me? Actually, why are there not more saints in the world today? I know my many failings, faults, and limitations. I am far from a religious scholar. My Faith is anchored on shifting sands. My reasoning suggests to me that no amount of repentance will absolve me of all my sins –the many sinful thoughts to numerous sinful acts.

Yet something stirred within me as I learned about these four people. On the surface, their plights pulled at my emotions. Their origins tickled at my buried and hardened compassion. Each of these people carried heavy loads. They knew pain. They saw cruelty. They felt doubt. They saw their own limitations and struggled with them on a regular basis. They were every bit ordinary humans. Humans with all the human failings I see in me –and more.

What made them special? What set them apart? What was it about them over so many other influential, knowledgeable, and good people that lifted them beyond and set them aside to be called Saints?

The answer for me did not resolve itself like in some modern works of literature, coming out in plain sight in the last chapter. It was not revealed in a montage of images and explanations in the last five minutes of the video. When does life ever actually work that way?

The revelation for me came slowly. It was gradual. It was not some religious epiphany. In my mind calling it an epiphany would be limiting, perhaps also too superficial. It was also not a soul awakening, burning bush of Faith type thing. Faith has been an elusive, phantom thing for me. So the revelation was something both more complex yet simple.

Though each of the four featured Saints appear similar on the surface, they were distinct and different people. Most obvious is that they came from different backgrounds --from wealthy and connected to poor and isolated. Beyond that, they each struggled through different social conflicts and challenges. They each also fought with different personal shortcomings. And they each approached living out their lives in specific, different ways.

With all their differences, however, there seems to be one common factor. One aspect of each of the people highlighted in the video series revealed that a greater purpose made them so special.

In all the good each of these special people did, they strove for a purpose beyond themselves. Through all their struggles, toil, pain, and uncertainty, they chose to live for a greater purpose than themselves. Where many allow doubts to cloud purpose, these four saw the drive to serve beyond the self with greater clarity.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT NO MATTER WHAT RELIGION YOU SUBSCRIBE TO, ACTS OF KINDNESS ARE THE STEPPINGSTONES TO MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE—BECAUSE WE BECOME BETTER PEOPLE IN IT.

JODI PICOULT
"CHANGE OF HEART"

A lack of strong Faith is not enough to diminish the need of many to have something to eat or have medical care. The choice of which religion would best serve the soul or get one closer to salvation is not more important than giving to someone in need. And personal troubles are not greater than a purpose in living beyond the self.

That these four individuals left their personal wants, their doubts, their faults to serve others is a saint-like existence. More than that. Their purpose was never to BE a Saint—or even to live saint-like lives. They each just sought to better the lives of others.

To do better. That is what Saints do. They do better than they did the day before. Their purpose in living is outward and beyond. Their cause is outside of the self. They rose to Sainthood, not by trying to live like a Saint, not by building a strong foundation of faith, not by becoming a great scripture scholar, not by offering moving and powerful testimonies and sermons, but by simply doing better each new day, for another.

ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT JESUS DIDN'T SET UP AN OFFICE IN THE TEMPLE AND WAIT FOR PEOPLE TO COME TO HIM FOR COUNSELING?

CHARLES COLSON
"LOVING GOD"

In seeking to become a better person or to overcome some hardship or to manage a myriad of other issues in life and living, religion can be a powerful force. Step back and look. Religion invades almost every aspect of our lives. It reaches virtually every corner of the world. It defines billions of people. It is the foundation of many governments. Many nations are defined by it; some have been built upon religion.

To the individual, religion liberates and restricts. It provides the why's and how's of living so sought by humans since humans became. It liberates by providing purpose. There are standards, doctrines, dogmas of purpose in religion. It also explains why we ARE, leaving us to experience living. (Or it tries to explain.) It takes the burden of why we came to be and sets paths and guidelines for living. Religion is the map to living that guides many.

THE BIBLE DOESN'T TEACH YOU TO FOLLOW RULES. IT IS A PICTURE OF JESUS.

Wm. PAUL YOUNG
"THE SHACK"

The restrictive aspects of religion are the often familiar 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not's.' These help us free-willed creatures to focus on purpose. The general structure of religion defines the expected. It highlights the good against the bad. Religion can leave no doubt what is seen as right and what has been ordained wrong. The "rules" give the follower, the believer, a delineated course to follow. It provides incentive along with rewards and consequences.

No great insight or revelations so far. Religion is everywhere. It rules. Even the life of an atheist—or an agnostic—is touched by and often governed in some way by religion. Many modern governments and rules of law derive from religious values, most commonly Christianity. One can hardly live in a modern society religion free. In the confines of an isolated, private environment, one might truly be untouched by religion, but it is nearby, ready to encroach.

It feels safe to make the statement that religion is a powerful thing. It's power can draw people together. Having attended church services (Mass) outside the United States, I have seen the power of religion draw some amazingly diverse crowds. The United States, despite its dwindling numbers of religiously affiliated, has large numbers of diverse and devoted religious citizens. The devoted shown to any given religion denomination is astonishing. There is great power there.

Religion also has great power of control. It sets rules. It MAKES rules. It rules over nations, organizations, and down to individuals. That broad control is not always a good thing. The power of that control, at the hands of fallible, corruptible, short-sighted, prideful people is dangerous. History (and current events) says this better than anything I will write.

If religion is so good, how can it go so wrong? Of course the fact that people are stewards of religion and people are fallible, corruptible, etc. is good reason. Any analysis of the human malady that can corrupt even the purest of things could fill volumes—and, lucky thing, is beyond me and the scope of this. Better to focus on fundamentals.

That odd saying about something like forsaking the forest for the trees comes to mind. (It is odd to me.) The fundamentals of religion tend to get lost under mounds of heavy doctrine,

rules, explanations, and so much more nothingness. The why's of the origins of religion get lost under all we build on top. If not lost, at least convoluted.

THAT'S WHAT RELIGION DOES. IT POINTS A FINGER. IT CAUSES WARS. IT BREAKS APART COUNTRIES. IT'S A PETRI DISH FOR STEREO TYPES TO GROW IN. RELIGION'S NOT ABOUT BEING HOLY,... JUST HOLIER-THAN-THOU.

JODI PICOULT
"CHANGE OF HEART"

Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad all had one fundamental desire. They each brought something special to the world. They led. They taught. They inspired. They set goals. They set standards. They gave hope. They offered purpose. They gave themselves over to the people. Above all, they cared. They did what they did, gave up all they could, sacrificing so much because they had compassion for the people. What they brought, shared, and hoped to perpetuate throughout all humanity was love.

To put a twist to a familiar literary phrase, what is the hope for all humanity is "one love to rule them all." Though presented in different ways, through different paths of attainment, the Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad all yearned to have love rule.

THIS IS MY SIMPLE RELIGION. THERE IS NO NEED FOR TEMPLES; NO NEED FOR COMPLICATED PHILOSOPHY. OUR OWN BRAIN, OUR OWN HEART IS OUR TEMPLE; THE PHILOSOPHY IS KINDNESS.

14TH DALAI LAMA

The world is a busy, frenetic place. Our eyes are drawn to and see so many distractions. Our minds are pulled in so many different directions, mesmerized and desensitized. Everything is fast and fleet. The message of love, a basis of religions, has been trampled underfoot, beaten into obscurity, perverted into things nothing like the original, or just simply lost. Love has become like a quote from my past: "I used to be lost in the shuffle, now I shuffle along with the lost." (B.L. Etchison, *Catholic Digest*. Vol 51, February 1987, page 41) Love, not the love that has taken on a different meaning in our modern times, but the love of that incorruptible, unwavering caring, has been lost in our modern shuffle.

Jesus spoke over and over of love. He lived it. Jesus shared it without exception or hesitation. The Buddha and Confucius, in their own ways, also advocated and taught love. And in their unique, personal ways, the many who rose to Sainthood taught, lived, and exemplified true love.

**LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. (13:4-5)
...FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.
(13:13)**

FIRST CORINTHIANS
HOLY BIBLE, NIV

Talking. Jesus did a lot of it. Everywhere he walked, he talked. He spoke to any who would listen. None was too high nor too low. He shared with all. He spoke in ways his audience could understand and remember. In his short life he made communication paramount. His parables are the life of many modern day scholars and theologians. His words are full of meaning and knowledge.

Others did similarly. They spoke of what they felt. They shared through speaking what they believed was most important in living. Their talk, their words were as diverse as their audience. Whether through wisdom-laden parables, memorable phrases, or stories born of unique experiences, there was talk. They communicated.

Not at the forefront of their talk were demands, rules, or threats to comply or else. Expectations were shared, explained, and outlined, but they were not put forth as rigid orders.

Orders are often so much harder to embrace than suggestions. Our gift of free will tends to get in the way. Sure, out of a sense of duty or out of fear one accepts and follows orders. If told to do something, we do. Not always, but often enough, we do. We may not like it though. A suggestion given through something like compassion and caring rather than stern, controlling communication is more likely to not just be followed and embraced but propagated.

JESUS DOES NOT NEED OUR WORK, ONLY OUR LOVE, SINCE GOD HIMSELF IS NOT AFRAID TO REQUEST SOME WATER OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN.

MOTHER TERESA

There is reason it is written that the meek will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5) The meek listen. They are less likely to demand, order, or try to subjugate. Their world is not driven by pride. Instead of force, it will be words—kind, compassionate, loving words—that become their champion.

And as with Jesus, words and the communication of feelings will work for each of us to become better, greater, and closer to that Sainthood purpose. Communicating our feelings, speaking our thoughts, sharing our knowledge and doubts, gets us closer to caring about others, thus reaching beyond ourselves.

THUS, OUT OF LOVE, DO HUMAN FORCE THEMSELVES TO LOVE EVEN THE BARNACLES AND PARASITES THAT ATTACH THEMSELVES TO THEIR BELOVED.

ORSON SCOTT CARD
"LOVELOCK"

Those were a lot of words to say that simple communication is important. When too much is said, a lot is lost. Jesus lived his words and still could not reach all who heard and saw. It comes from that free will of ours. We want to do what we want to do even over better sense and example. Those who did listen to Jesus, those he reached were touched in a profound way.

Another quote comes to mind. This one is from a pop music song by George Michael. "Charity is a coat you wear twice a year." As we seek to do more of what we want, we pull further inward. Our words become more about what we want and what we dislike. And our world becomes even more prideful and superficial.

That coat of charity has become a common garment in our society, for many different occasions. We wear a coat of love when we seek to win someone over. Or we wear it to find, achieve, and hold on to carnal pleasures and physical connections.

There is the coat of religion fervor. Churches are full of them on Sundays. People set this day aside—and sometimes more—to display and express their coats of religious affiliation and belief. For some, the coat gets a lot of use. It becomes worn and haggard. It shield and it lends warmth and security.

Yet as another saying reflects, there is too often "all motion with no devotion." The coats only cover. Coats conceal. The soul underneath a coat goes on grappling at shallow causes and superficial beliefs. Under the coats, life is still only about the individual. Under the coat, pride, lust, and hate grow.

Causes, beliefs, and commitments are commendable. They bring unity and a sense of purpose. A good cause can bring a sense of accomplishment. It can give meaning and fulfillment. A strong religious or dogmatic belief or ideology can appear as a realization of one's calling. These can all seem to ground a person.

But if you consider all the fervent, even obsessively devoted church goers who have not achieved Sainthood, perhaps it suggests that something is still lacking in their lives. It can't simply be they have chosen the wrong religion or religious denomination. It does not say "the meek Baptist will inherit the earth." If they have the knowledge of scripture, if every step of their life is taken according to law, and if there is adherence to religious tenets, yet at the end Sainthood is not achieved, perhaps there is more to it. Perhaps something is still missing.

ANY ROAD FOLLOWED PRECISELY TO ITS END LEADS PRECISELY NOWHERE. CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN JUST A LITTLE BIT TO TEST THAT IT'S A MOUNTAIN. FROM THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, YOU CANNOT SEE THE MOUNTAIN.

FRANK HERBERT
"DUNE"

So many people, especially in today's fast pace, superficial society, wear coats of charity, righteousness, and religious fervor yet find only shallow and hollow peace, happiness, and fulfillment. Some greater, unknown or unexplained thing remains beyond reach. For some, it is to

the point of exhaustion. Some burn out through numerous acts, devotions, and gambits that at best give fleeting, superficial results.

One need only look at today's modern society with its many toys and technology and wonder where we are going. There is so much innovation, so much wealth, and so much knowledge. Yet there is still so much misery, discontent, and despair. Nothing seems lasting. Passions and purposes are short-lived. Our numbers grow, yet many of us feel more and more alone.

THE UNIVERSE IS NOT HERE FOR OUR CONVENIENCE ALONE. IF WE ASSUME IT IS SIMPLY LARDER, WE SHALL STARVE.

KAREN TRAVISS
"CITY OF PEARL"

Religions continue, some growing in numbers, others splintering to grow into new entities, yet the unity, love, and fellowship that were cornerstones dissolve further and further into nothingness. The unity, love, and fellowship hardly reach beyond the confines of the congregation's building's walls. The love that Jesus advocated, and the love the Bible calls for, sees ever more elusive and unobtainable.

Whether cause or effect, selfishness flourishes. While unity and compassion fade into myth and fable, the importance of the self, of personal gratification, grows. It grows as a monster of fiction grows: feeding on this shallow, hollow, superficial, selfish, and ever more miserable world.

It seems a cyclical malady, too. Those perceptive enough of the growing shallowness of society dive head first into religion. There is the answer, the salvation. Some go on to invest all their life in religion, devoted to it heart and soul, only to get lost themselves in the selfish, shallow malady. Their personal search for something better, a search for an understanding, for a greater purpose, hardens their hearts, closes them off to others—others not like them or their religion—and impedes reaching outward, communicating, and loving.

COLD SILENCE HAS THE TENDENCY TO ATROPHY ANY SENSE OF COMPASSION.

MUSIC GROUP TOOL
"SCHISM"

This breakdown is made worse by their growing indifference; a sense of defeat, of why bother? Where religion once gave order, reason, purpose, and hope, it now falters, only giving shelter to likewise miserable flocks, feeding them empty words of hope for personal redemption. Once, a few came along and spoke of hope and led many towards a better way. Some, including Saints, led by word and example. They inspired. They showed a better way. They exemplified an outwardly life of service and compassion.

Human nature directs us toward avoiding pain. The easy road calls to that nature. When some sort of gratification can be had through shortcuts and compromises, that is the road taken. And from there come coats of superficial reality. It conceals the selfish, corrupted soul within.

It is not always that people seek to be indifferent to others or self-serving. Much of what religion once taught has been convoluted, diluted, or just plain forgotten. When the modern world offers so many pleasurable things, so many shiny, pretty things, that is so much easier. That the pleasure and perceived satisfaction is so short-lived does not matter much because the pretty, shiny keep coming.

...WE SHOULD READ GOD'S WORD NOT FOR WHAT WE CAN GET OUT OF IT, NOT FOR WHAT IT WILL DO FOR US, BUT FOR WHAT IT WILL TEACH US TO DO FOR OUR GOD.

CHARLES COLSON
"LOVING GOD"

Perhaps the greatest corrupter of religion is pride. Many hide pride and self-serving behavior under that coat of religious fervor and righteousness. Some simply become consumed in the Word, the doctrine, the general idea of religion. They often lead lives that appear true to the Word and pure. Every aspect of their lives follows their religious tenet. That righteousness clouds and corrupts.

Going back to the idea of forsaking the forest for the trees, when the doctrine, the Word alone is put above all else, much is lost. The religion—the Word—begins to become more important than its message. It begins to separate and isolate rather than unite and love. The religion devotee frightens and alienates rather than inspires and leads.

AT TIMES THE CHURCH SEEMS SCHIZOPHRENIC: PIOUS AND RIGHTEOUSLY AROUSED IN THE SAFETY OF PEWS AND PRAYER GROUPS, BUT INDIFFERENT IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE.

CHARLES COLSON
"LOVING GOD"

The religious grow more certain they are right and true and worthy, in a vicious, cyclical existence that leads to even greater inward, selfish, hostile feelings. Because not all see what they see, feel how they feel, worship as they do, then the other is wrong, evil, and not worthy of love or grace—or communication at all. Religion becomes a me against them thing. It has become that.

Religion has become one of our many distractions. Where Christ sought to unite, Christianity has divided, ostracized, and polarized. And Christianity does not hold a monopoly in this. Religious fragmentation is in every religion. How many Christian denominations are there today? What about the differing—and bickering—Muslim sects? Judaism has separation. All are fragmented.

YOU KNOW WHAT RELIGION DOES? IT DRAWS A BIG FAT LINE IN THE SAND. IT SAYS, 'IF YOU DON'T DO IT MY WAY, YOU'RE OUT.'

JODI PICOULT
"CHANGE OF HEART"

It isn't that the particular religion has been corrupted. The tenets of the Catholic Church have changed very little over the decades. The people—the worshipers—have changed. In becoming a follower, a devoted, passionate follower, something has been lost. The focus has shifted. Our attention has been drawn to something different.

In the promise of salvation, a promise of something better beyond the empty, shallow, miserable, evil-riddled world, our world has been forsaken. The churchgoer will trample another churchgoer to get into the church first. A follower of church A will attack a member of church B over doctrine interpretation. Nuances in translation of Greek split families. The history of religion is replete with atrocities committed in the name of religion.

(Non-believers, heathens, atheists, agnostics, wackos, and "other" have their own history trail of hate and blood over mere differences in opinion.)

Where did Christ go wrong? What happened to his love? What happened to the Buddha's teachings? Where are his students? Was Confucius too confusing? How did so many forget his words? It would be easy to cast blame in many directions, or to point to shortcomings of Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, or Confucius. That shows part of the problem. In our ever increasing internal hunger for quick, easy answers to our questions, in our hunger for personal peace, happiness, and fulfillment, we forget we are one in many.

...EACH ONE OF US IS CALLED, NOT TO DO WHAT MOTHER TERESA DID, RATHER TO ACT LIKE HER, TO LOVE LIKE SHE LOVED IN THE CALCUTTA OF OUR OWN LIVES.

JOSEPH LANGFORD
"MOTHER TERESA'S SECRET FIRE"

Our purpose cannot be just about ourselves. Happiness cannot be just for one. Fulfillment cannot be true if it serves only the self. Religion, devotion, Faith cannot grow and flourish and become something substantial if it is limited to a few; if it excludes. If the religion, devotion, or Faith becomes more important to the believer than the message, it fails.

Why has Jesus Christ's church failed to be embraced by all of humanity? It certainly has reached many. It has influenced the world. Yet as it has grown, followers have also grown more inward. God found champions for his message. Followers devoted their life for His message. The Word has been spread. Great things have come to many through the Word. But the greatness of the message, the message of love and unity, has been diffused, twisted, set aside for easy and personal, or just lost.

People will attack brothers, shed blood, and kill for God's message, in contradiction to the message. The message does not need champions. It does not need interpreters. It does not need worshipers. What it needs and has always called for are followers and living examples. God does not need protectors or sellers of His words. What this world needs, what God's message calls for are billions of living saints. Be a saint. Live the Word for the Word's sake.

Life should not be a game of accruing favor towards salvation. To live with reaching Heaven in mind forfeits any portrayed devotion to any chosen religion. Life should be about a greater good. It should be about causes and actions outside the self. When told to love God, it is not with indifference or hate towards all else. When His words say to love your neighbor, it does so as an absolute, without exclusions or stipulations. There is no asterisk (or hot link) leading you to a list of exceptions. The love called for is to be universal.

The idea of love has been soiled and twisted. That is part of the problem. Consider love to mean not to like or agree or believe but to value enough, to have enough compassion to care for any other person's existence. In caring for another's life, their existence, then surely you can voice differences and listen with equal care. If you care, you communicate. If you love, you talk.

LET US LOVE NOT IN WORD OR SPEECH BUT IN DEED AND TRUTH.

FIRST JOHN 3:18

HOLY BIBLE, NIV

Be a saint through love. Seek whatever fulfills you. Follow your unique talent or passion. If asked what you want, answer peace and love for all. Become a doctor, dancer, stockbroker, surfer, evangelist, fast-food cashier. Whatever. Whatever you do, however, do it with the ultimate goal of becoming a saint through love. Live an ordinary life, do ordinary things, but always in an extraordinary way that is for the benefit of others—ordinary things with extraordinary love.

I want to become a saint. The path I will follow will be rough and tough. I will not reach some high earthly position. No glamorous, glitzy life for me. Along every step, stumble, set-back, and accomplishment, I hope to have love flow from my soul and to share that love with all who cross my path.

Before I devote my life to memorizing scripture, before delving into strictly theological studies, before seeking to attain any accolades or high esteem, before all these things and more, I have to learn to become humble and love. I have to learn to love even—or especially—the lepers, the rejected, my enemies, the unlovable, and the lesser of all these. Maybe then I will have progressed enough towards fulfilling a worthy role in this world. Maybe then I will be closer to deserving this gift of life.

Take the gift of life down whatever road you wish. Be that lawyer you believe you are gifted to be. Be that doctor who saves lives or makes people beautiful. Run your humble household or Fortune 500 Company. Lead nations or that one anonymous wayward sheep who happens to cross your modest path. Be a beacon of light for many or that one who doesn't know. Live out your dreams. Or just be a grain of sand on a vast sandy beach, unseen and unheralded, yet part of this greater thing. Whatever road you take, however good or bad it goes for you, strive to always serve a greater good, always with love in your heart. Live to be a Saint.

IF I SPEAK IN THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I AM A RESOUNDING GONG OR A CLANGING CYMBAL. IF I HAVE THE GIFT OR PROPHECY AND CAN FATHOM ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE, AND IF I HAVE FAITH THAT CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I AM NOTHING. IF I GIVE ALL I POSSESS TO THE POOR AND SURRENDER MY BODY TO THE FLAMES, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I GAIN NOTHING.

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

HOLY BIBLE, NIV