

Quotations about Love, Compassion, Community, Solidarity and Service

Those who have created the evil are those who have made possible the hideous social injustice our people live in. Thus, the poor have shown the church the true way to go. A church that does not join the poor in order to speak out from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them is not the true church of Jesus Christ. – Oscar A. Romero, The Violence of Love

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The world is overcome not through destruction, but through reconciliation. Not ideals, nor programs, nor conscience, nor duty, nor responsibility, nor virtue, but only God's perfect love can encounter reality and overcome it. Nor is it some universal idea of love, but rather the love of God in Jesus Christ, a love genuinely lived, that does this. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Meditations on the Cross

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It is so important not to let ourselves off the hook or to become apathetic or cynical by telling ourselves that nothing works or makes a difference. Every day, light your small candle The inaction and actions of many human beings over a long time contributed to the crises our children face, and it is the action and struggle of many human beings over time that will solve them – with God's help. So every day, light your small candle. – Marian Wright Edelman, Guide My Feet

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Because the church is not an elite body separated from a doomed world, but a community placed in the midst of the cosmic community of creation, its task is not merely to win souls but to bear the burdens of creation to which it not only belongs, but to which it must also bear witness. – J. Christian Beker, Paul, the Apostle

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[W]e see that our poverty is as absolute as that of the poorest of nations. We have attempted to deny the human condition in our quest for power after power. It would be well for us to rejoin the human race, to accept our essential poverty as a gift, and share our material wealth with those in need.
– Robert N. Bellah, et al, Habits of the Heart

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Every time you sacrifice something at great cost – every time you renounce something that appeals to you for the sake of the poor – you are feeding a hungry Christ. – Mother Teresa

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Our faithfulness will depend on our willingness to go where there is brokenness, loneliness, and human need. If the church has a future it is a future with the poor in whatever form. – Henri J.M. Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey

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If being involved in others' failures through love and caring brings us personal suffering, so be it. We follow a crucified God, who truly suffered for love rather than retreat to the power of unmoved self-sufficiency and detachment. – Sidney Callahan, With All Our Heart and Mind

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This love of God for the world does not withdraw from a reality into noble souls detached from the world, but experiences and suffers the reality of the world in the harshest possible fashion. The world takes out its rage on the body of Jesus Christ. But he, tormented, forgives the world its sins. Thus does reconciliation come about. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Meditations on the Cross

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That is why I must try to live a good and faithful life to my last breath; so that those who come after me do not have to start all over again. – Etty Hillesum

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Today, the same Christ is in people who are unwanted, unemployed, uncared for, hungry, naked, and homeless. They seem useless to the state and to society; nobody has time for them. It is you and I as Christians, worthy of the love of Christ if our love is true, who must find them, and help them; they are there for the finding. – Mother Teresa

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We who are rich are often demanding and difficult. We shut ourselves up in our apartments and may even use a watchdog to defend our property. Poor people, of course, have nothing to defend and often share the little they have. When people have all the material things they need, they seem not to need each other. They are self-sufficient. There is no interdependence. There is no love. In a poor community, however, there is often a lot of mutual help and sharing of goods, as well as help from outside. Poverty can even become a cement of unity. – Jean Vanier

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I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person and learns from the other. Most of us have a lot to learn from other people. – Eduardo Galeano

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Loving your neighbor means living in voluntary poverty, stripping yourself, putting off the old Adam, denying yourself, etc. It also means non-participation in those comforts and luxuries which have been manufactured by the exploitation of others. While our brothers and sisters suffer, we must be compassionate with them, suffer with them. While they suffer from lack of necessities, we will refuse to enjoy comforts.

These resolutions, no matter how hard they are to live up to, no matter how often we fail and have to begin over again, are part of the Vision. And

we must keep this vision in mind, recognize the truth of it, the necessity for it, even though we do not, cannot, live up to it ... though in our execution we may fall short of the mark over and over. St. Paul says it is by little and by little that we proceed. – Dorothy Day

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Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important, wonderful. If you want to be recognized, wonderful. If you want to be great, wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's your new definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it, by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great. Because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermo-dynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. And you can be that servant. – Martin Luther King, Jr.

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If you love Jesus Christ more than you fear human judgment, then you will not only speak of compassion, but act with it. Compassion means seeing your friend and your enemy in equal need, and helping both equally. It demands that you seek and find the stranger, the broken, the prisoner, and comfort him and offer him your help. Herein lies the holy compassion of God that causes the devil much distress. – Mechthild of Magdeburg

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[Those] courageous in disposition and strong in will, live with the weak and share their lives in their desire to save them. And, to be sure, they are censured by people on the outside and mocked by those who see them spending their lives with people less disciplined. [Their behavior] is like the Lord's for the Lord ate with tax collectors and sinners. Their attitude is characterized by brotherly love rather than self-love for they regard those who sin as houses on fire; giving no thought to their own interests, they apply their efforts to save what belongs to others. ... Good people have

placed their own possessions second to the salvation of others. This is the sign of genuine love. These people are the custodians of pure love. – Life of Syncletica, in Hugh Feiss, Essential Monastic Wisdom: Writings on the Contemplative Life

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We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee. – Marian Wright Edelman

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If we want to serve the true God, we must break out of the circle of self-absorption and pay heed to the bloodied faces of our fellow human beings. If we do not share life with the oppressed, we do not share life with God. – Leonardo Boff

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Because I see so many weak souls trampled underfoot, I am reluctant to believe in the truth of much that is called progress and education. I do believe in education, but only in the kind that is based on a genuine love of humankind. – Vincent van Gogh

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Forgiveness creates an obligation for which there are no exceptions allowed. Love is a fire which goes out if it does not kindle others. Thou hast burned with joy; kindle him who comes near you if thou wilt not become like stone, smoky but cold. He who has received must give; it is better to give much, but it is essential to give a part at least. – Giovanni Papini

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God has identified himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the homeless; hunger, not only for bread, but for love, for care, to be somebody to someone; nakedness, not of clothing only, but nakedness of that compassion that very few people give to the unknown; homelessness, not

only just from a shelter made of stone, but that homelessness that comes from having no one to call your own. – Mother Teresa

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Christian piety has all too often meant withdrawal from the world and from men – it has led to a sort of transcendent egoism and an unwillingness to share suffering. It has lacked human warmth. But the world has risen in protest against this form of piety, this arrogance, this indifference to the world's sorrow. And only the living faith of the reborn can withstand this protest. Care for the needs of another human being, even bodily care: that is the essence of true piety. Bread for myself is a material question; but bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one. – Jacques Maritain

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The world is upside down because there is so very little love in the home. We have no time for our children; we have no time for each other; and there is no time to enjoy each other. That is why there is so much suffering and so much unhappiness in the world today. Everybody seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for what is bigger and better and greater, and mothers and fathers often do not have time for each other, let alone their children. In the home begins the disruption of the peace of the world. – Mother Teresa

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We cannot love God unless we love each other. We know him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet, and life is a banquet too – even with a crust – where there is companionship. We have all known loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community. – Dorothy Day

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Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others who do not belong, who are rejected by power, because they are

regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. – Thomas Merton

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Let everyone understand that the real love of God does not consist in tear-shedding, nor in that sweetness and tenderness for which we often long, just because they console us, but in serving God by serving those around us, in justice, fortitude of soul, and humility. – Teresa of Avila

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We hunger to be known and understood. We hunger to be loved. We hunger to be at peace inside our own skins. We hunger not just to be fed these things but, often without realizing it, we hunger to feed others these things because they too are starving for them. We hunger not just to be loved but to love, not just to be forgiven but to forgive, not just to be known and understood for all the good times and bad times that for better for worse have made us who we are, but to know and understand each other to the same point of seeing that, in the last analysis, we all have the same good times, the same bad times, and that for that very reason there is no such thing in all the world as anyone who is really a stranger. – Frederick Buechner, Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons

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The more I love humanity in general the less I love man in particular. In my dreams, I often make plans for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually face crucifixion if it were suddenly necessary. Yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together. I know from experience. As soon as anyone is near me, his personality disturbs me and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men: one because he's too long over his dinner, another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I hate men individually the more I love humanity. – Fyodor Dostoevsky

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At some thoughts one stands perplexed – especially at the sight of men’s sin – and wonders whether one should use force or humble love. Always decide to use humble love. If you resolve on that, once and for all, you may subdue the whole world. Loving humility is marvelously strong, the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.

Every day and every hour, every minute, walk around yourself and watch yourself, and see that your image is a seemly one. If you pass by a little child, and pass by spitefully, with ugly words or wrathful heart, you may not notice the child, but he will see you, and your image, unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenseless heart. You may not know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him, and it may grow, all because you were not careful before the child, because you did not foster in yourself an active, benevolent love.

Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire; it is dearly bought; it is won by slow, long labor. We must love not only occasionally, or for a moment, but for ever. Everyone, even the wicked can love occasionally ... – Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

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If you live alone, whose feet will you wash? – Saint Basil, quoted in Joan Chittister, How Shall We Live

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Anticipate charity by preventing poverty; assist the reduced fellowman, either by a considerable gift, or a sum of money, or by teaching him a trade, or by putting him in the way of business, so that he may earn an honest livelihood, and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity. This is the highest step and the summit of charity’s golden ladder. – Maimonides

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The ‘great’ commitment all too easily obscures the ‘little’ one. But without the humility and warmth which you have to develop in your relations to the

few with whom you are personally involved, you will never be able to do anything for the many. Without them, you will live in a world of abstractions. ... It is better for the health of the soul to make one man good than to ‘sacrifice oneself for mankind.’ – Dag Hammarskjöld, quoted in John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love

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I will smile at friend and foe alike and make every effort to find, in him or her, a quality to praise, now that I realize the deepest yearning of human nature is the craving to be appreciated. – Og Mandino

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If we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for their sakes rather than for our own. – Charlotte Bronte

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Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing;
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and a silence.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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Everywhere in these days people have, in their mockery, ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible state of affairs must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand how unnaturally they are separated from one another. It will be the spirit of the time, and people will marvel that they have sat so long in darkness without seeing the light. ... But, until then, we must keep the banner flying. Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw other souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die. – Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

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Our lives as we live them seem like lives that anticipate questions that never will be asked. It seems as if we are getting ourselves ready for the question “How much did you earn during your lifetime?” or “How many friends did you make?” or “How much progress did you make in your career?” or “How much influence did you have on people?” or “How many conversions did you make?”

Were any of these to be the question Christ will ask when he comes again in glory, many of us could approach the judgment day with great confidence. But nobody is going to hear any of these questions. The question we all are going to face is the question we are least prepared for. It is: “What have you done for the least of mine?” As long as there are strangers; hungry, naked, and sick people; prisoners, refugees, and slaves; people who are handicapped physically, mentally, or emotionally; people without work, a home, or a piece of land, there will be that haunting question from the throne of judgment: “What have you done for the least of mine?” – Henri Nouwen

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When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him.

In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it naturally misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one. – Karl A. Menninger

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The same abba [Xanthius] said, “A dog is better than I am, for he has love and he does not judge.” – Benedicta Ward, The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

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A friend knows the song in your heart

And can sing it back to you
When you have forgotten how it goes.

quoted in Robert J. Wicks, Living a Gentle, Passionate Life

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The whole person is on the one side open to God, and on the other side open to other people. The isolated individual is not a real person, for a real person lives in and for others. This idea ... could be summed up under the word love. We become truly personal by loving God and by loving other humans. By love, I don't mean merely an emotional feeling, but a fundamental attitude. In its deepest sense, love is the life, the energy, of the Creator in us. We are not truly human as long as we are turned in on ourselves. We become whole only insofar as we face others, and relate to them. – Kallistos Ware

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Whenever I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife which may, at any moment, become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself: What else is the world interested in? What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships? God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship to each other. – Dorothy Day

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How can you say, I have fulfilled the law and prophets, since it is written in the law: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself? Look, many of your brothers, sons of Abraham, are covered with filth and dying of hunger while your house is filled with many goods and not a thing goes out of it to them. – Origen

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Always say what you feel, and do what you think is good and right. If I knew that today would be the last time I'd see you, I would hug you tight and pray the Lord be the keeper of your soul. If I knew that this would be the last time you pass through this door, I'd embrace you, kiss you, and call you back for one more. If I knew that this would be the last time I would hear your voice, I'd take hold of each word to be able to hear it over and over again. If I knew this is the last time I see you, I'd tell you I love you, and would not just assume foolishly you know it already. – Gabriel Garcia Marquez

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In Your Enemy's Shoes

If we could read
the secret history of our enemies,
we would find in each person's life
sorrow and suffering enough
to disarm all hostility.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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Who has not, at some time, been lonely in the midst of a social event? The feeling of our separation from the rest of life is most acute when we are surrounded by it in noise and talk. We realize then much more than in moments of solitude how strange we are to each other, how estranged life is from life. ... The walls of distance, in time and space, have been removed by technical progress; but the walls of estrangement between heart and heart have been incredibly strengthened. – Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations

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We live today in a world of growing isolation, frantic activity, and desperate violence, where paradoxically, we find ourselves longing for both solitude and companionship, intimacy and community. Some of us may look back to times when life seemed to make sense and relationships were more certain. Whether or not such times ever existed, we nevertheless long today for relationships that acknowledge who we are and who we want to be. We want someone to hear us, to hear our hearts beating, to hear our deepest

longings – even longings of which we dare not speak. – Sondra Higgins
Matthaei, Faith Matters

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Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with another. We do not discover the secret of our lives merely by study and calculation in our own isolated meditations. The meaning of our life is a secret that has to be revealed to us in love, by the one we love. And if this love is unreal, the secret will not be found, the meaning will never reveal itself, the message will never be decoded. At best, we will receive a scrambled and partial message, one that will deceive and confuse us. We will never be fully real until we let ourselves fall in love – either with another human person or with God. – Thomas Merton

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Too many people come into community to find something, to belong to a dynamic group, to find a life which approaches the ideal. If we come into community without knowing that the reason we come is to discover the mystery of forgiveness, we will soon be disappointed. – Jean Vanier, Community and Growth

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What we call “church” is too often a gathering of strangers who see the church as yet another “helping institution” to gratify further their individual desires. One of the reasons some church members are so mean-spirited with their pastor, particularly when the pastor urges them to look at God, is that they feel deceived by such pastoral invitations to look beyond themselves. They have come to church for “strokes,” to have their personal needs met. What we call church is often a conspiracy of cordiality. Pastors learn to pacify rather than preach to their Ananiases and Sapphiras. We say we do it out of “love.” Usually, we do it as a means of keeping everyone as distant from everyone else as possible. You don’t get into my life and I will not get into yours. – Stanley Hauerwas

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If your neighbor sins, then you also sin. For if you had kept yourself as the Word demands, your neighbor would have been so ashamed on seeing how you live that he would not have sinned. – Clement of Alexandria

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It is in community that we come to see God in the other. It is in community that we see our own emptiness filled up. It is community that calls me beyond the pinched horizons of my own life, my own country, my own race, and gives me the gifts I do not have within me. – Joan Chittister

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Every Christian community must know that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of the community. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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When it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to the others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven by others. – Eduardo Galeano, The Book of Embraces

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The universe is made up of stories, not of atoms. – Muriel Rukeyser