

The Best Medicine Is Love

by Desmond Ford

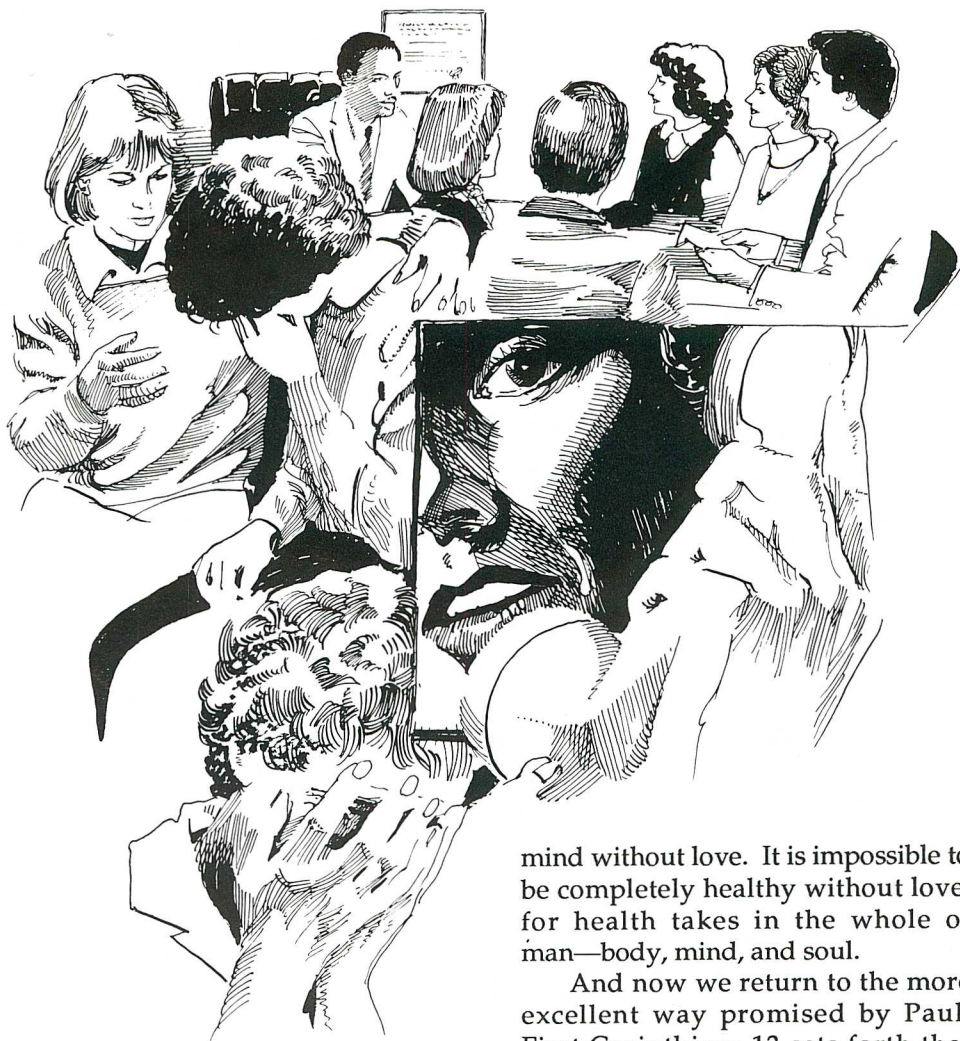


Life need not be complicated. Living is only messy and intricate when we ignore Christ's way, the way of faith, hope, and love—and "the greatest of these is love."

Well begun is half-done. We know this to be true in many practical areas of life. When traveling, and we have a specific destination in

mind, half the battle is getting the directions straight, particularly the matter of a starting place. We must never confuse activity with achievement.

The further we go in the wrong direction, the further we will have to travel back when we discover our mistake.



What then is the way we shall go? How should we live? The New Testament answers, "I will show you a more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31). The truth of all things revolves around the central truth of the nature of God, and Scripture declares to us that "God is love." If those three words were believed, the world would become a paradise. War and crime would be no more, depression in the workplace and antagonisms in the home would cease.

Consider the richness of the promise in 2 Timothy 1:7, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Look at the gifts of God—power, love, and a sound mind. Observe the central one is love—Colossians, chapter 3, calls it "the bond of perfectness." Dante said it is love that spins the universe. Certain it is that Scripture teaches that only love can spin each human life aright. There's no power, and no sound

mind without love. It is impossible to be completely healthy without love, for health takes in the whole of man—body, mind, and soul.

And now we return to the more excellent way promised by Paul. First Corinthians 13 sets forth that way. Notice its description of love:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; ... (1 Cor 13:4-8)

The Description of a Person

You will recognize that this is not only the description of a virtue, but of a person. The apostle had Jesus before his mind's eye as he wrote about love. Wherever you see the word "love" put "Jesus" there. Jesus suffered long and was kind. Jesus envied not, vaunted not himself, was not puffed up. He did not behave

himself unseemly, and sought not his own. Anything that is selfish is not love, and ultimately brings only pain and loss, but Jesus by his selfless love brought us life everlasting.

God, in the manner of our arrival on this planet, was teaching us about the more excellent way—the only way that really works. When a human being is born, it is the most helpless of all animals. Usually there are two mature beings who love us, who care for us, whose main task is to teach us to love. Mother love best represents the love of God, for it is unconditional love. She loves the child no matter what he or she does and will continue so to love even if he or she goes to the electric chair. Father love is disciplined love. He represents the reality outside the home where conflict and pain, sweat and tears are inevitable. Father love teaches that unless our love be disciplined and all our life by that love, we will never be able to rightly interact with the outside world. So father and mother love combined teach us the realities of law and grace, of trust and obedience. The person who learns these lessons is equipped for life.

A child brought up in a Christian home and nourished on the Scriptures and taken to a church where faith, hope, and love are paramount, has everything going for him for mental and spiritual health. Because he knows he is loved, he will value his body too much to abuse it. He will be disciplined for the Savior's sake. Because he knows all others are loved and are the purchase of the blood of Christ, he will love too much to hurt others.

All the fruits of the spiritual life proceed from love. Love begets them. We are all familiar with the list given by Paul in Galatians, chapter 5. Here we read: "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; ..." (Gal 5:22,23). Observe that all of these virtues are actually love in one form or another. Joy is love exulting, peace is love reposing, long-suffering is love enduring, gentleness is love refined, meekness is love with bowed head, goodness is love in action, temper-

ance is true self-love, and faith is love confiding, so that the whole of Christian living is just loving.

One Drop of Love—Better Than a Sea of Knowledge

When we come to understand this, we will see also that one drop of love is worth more than a sea of knowledge. The person who learns to live unselfishly knows more about health than he who has done a whole course of medical training. The law of the universe is giving. The sky has dropped down the rain, and the sun its beams of light. The trees yield fruit, purify the air and add the oxygen so necessary for life. The animals give us joy, food, and companionship. Even the birds give us songs. Nothing except the selfish heart of man lives to itself. For the person who lives to himself is preparing himself for disease. Look at the cross of Christ. His heart is there at the center, but his arms are stretched outward. The cross radiates outwards. It is the opposite of a circle that constrains all things within. The cross represents the outflowing life, the unselfish life, the giving life, the loving life. It is really the only life worth living. It is the only truly healthy life.

So many human maladies are the result of not having learned to love. A greedy, ambitious, grasping man is under the delusion that if he accumulates a lot of things and a lot of wealth, he will become the object of love. He thinks that if he climbs the ladder of success, he will be admired and loved. Of course he is wrong on both counts. But to be a sinner is to be a fool, and we are all fools.

A kleptomaniac cannot help but

take things. He is so hungry for love he thinks this is how his need will be met. Here is a child who at a very young age is caught stealing. Why so? He has just lost his mother. His heart has been torn, for the love of his life is gone. He is trying to fill the

der in what happens to young people when they fall in love. When one young person finds another who accepts him or her despite his or her faults, then life becomes transfigured and radiant. That is just a pointer to the greater experience of falling in

love with God. But no one loves God until he discovers that God loves him. This is the meaning of the cross. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). God's unconditional love accepts us just as we are. We don't try to make ourselves better before we come. God will care for that after we have come. We don't try to make our peace with God. We can't do it, we never could do it. Christ has already done it. Christ is our peace. With Christ is God and peace. "For he is our peace" (Eph 2:14).

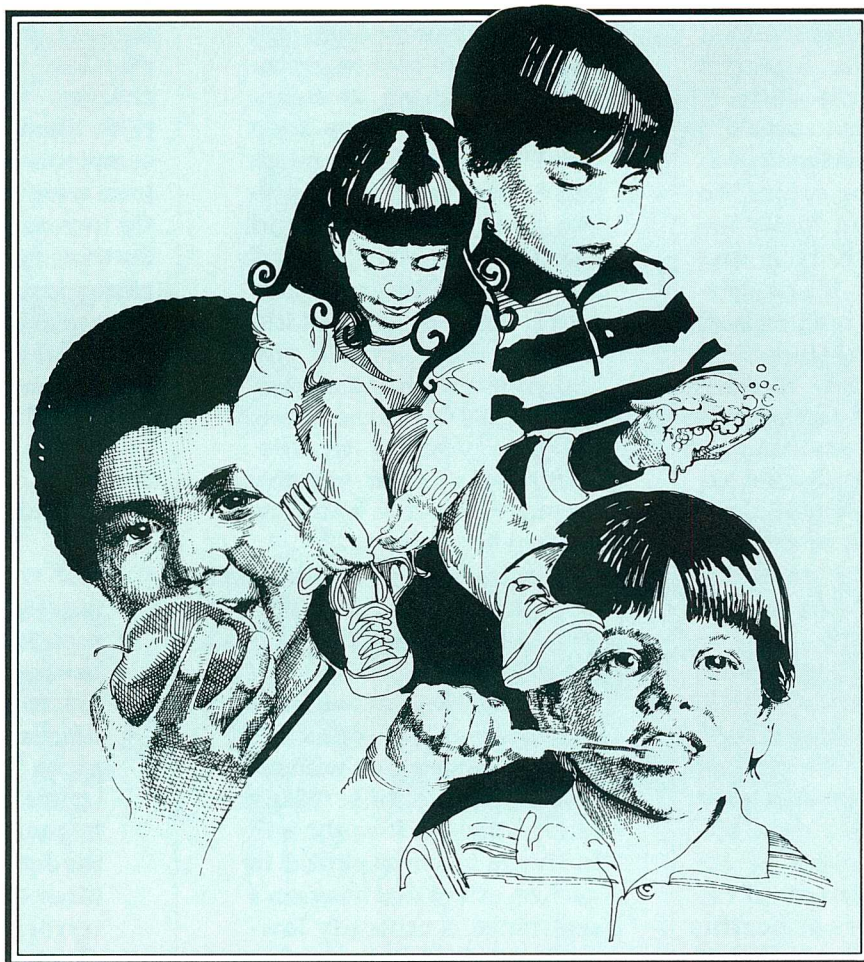
Only Love Brings Perfect Rest

vacuum. That's why he steals. Here are angry, violent people wreaking their hatred on all in their path. Why are they like that? They are frustrated people because they were not loved as children. Only those who have been loved can love. The only hope for a man or a woman who has not known the unselfish love of parents is to discover the love that surpasses—the love of God. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (Ps 27:10).

The people who know that they are loved no longer have to prove anything. They have arrived. They have satisfaction. They are of value to themselves, because they are of value to God. We see an image of this won-

There can be no health except when the mind is at rest. The mind can only be fully at rest when it rests in the love of God. Others may seem to have physical well-being for a season, but as the storms and tempests of life blow upon them, that health will keep waning unless they are sustained by the knowledge of the love of God. Seventy to ninety percent of our diseases arise from the faulty use of our imagination and our emotions, according to most students of psychosomatic medicine. Most of the people who come to doctors' offices day after day do not have organic disease. They have functional disease, and that is quite different.

Functional disease is usually the result of emotional disturbance, of



fear, anxiety, worry, and the emotional farrago that accompanies these. The troubled mind casts a shadow over all the physiological functions of the body. Digestion becomes imperfect, and the heart rate also. Intestinal and bladder function are disturbed. There's not one cell of the body that is not marked by the influence of mind. Many are the daily experiences that prove this to be the case. A person receives a fright and turns white. A man or a woman is about to speak in public, and they feel a sudden urge to visit a restroom. Passion causes the heart to beat. Fear can make the hands clammy. Breathing is disturbed by our emotions. It's dangerous to eat when sad or mad or bad, because the digestion is disturbed by the ill-functioning mind. A child sucking mother's milk can be poisoned if the mother is emotionally disturbed at the time. Much colic has its origin here. The inability to sleep is frequently the result of either a troubled mind or an overworked one. Many skin diseases spring from a disturbed mental equilibrium.

Those who take Scripture as their guide will have a different approach to preventive medicine than those who do not acknowledge the Word of God. Yet it must be confessed that in recent years many students of the human psyche have come to acknowledge the predominance of the human spirit in matters of health. Carl Jung, for example, has confessed that for over thirty years the thousands he has counseled had only one major need—that of religious faith. He declared their mental and physical ills could be healed only in that way.

Yet, when in the 1920s one medical researcher told an assembled crowd of physicians that the real problem of most of their patients was mental and spiritual rather than physical, he was laughed off the stage. We have learned a lot since then, and every year new volumes come off the press stressing the intimate relationship between mind, body, and spirit. Take, for example, the words of C.S. Lewis:

"You are always dragging me down," said I to my Body. "Dragging you down!"

replied my Body. "Well, I like that! Who taught me to like tobacco and alcohol? You, of course, with your idiotic adolescent idea of being 'grown-up.' My palate loathed both at first: but you would have your way. Who put an end to all those angry and revengeful thoughts last night? Me, of course, by insisting on going to sleep. Who does his best to keep you from talking too much and eating too much by giving you dry throats and headaches and indigestion? Eh?" "And what about sex?" said I. "Yes, what about it?" retorted the Body. "If you and your wretched imagination would leave me alone, I'd give you no trouble. That's Soul all over; you give me orders and then blame me for carrying them out."¹

Dr. Smiley Blanton has an excellent book entitled *Love or Perish*. Just prior to his introduction, he has a little note that says:

To say that one will perish without love does not mean that everyone without adequate love dies. Many do, for without love the will to live is often impaired to such an extent that a person's resistance is critically lowered and death follows. But most of the time, lack of love makes people depressed, anxious and without zest for life. They remain lonely and unhappy, without friends or work they care for, their life a barren treadmill, stripped of all creative action and joy.²

Lovelessness Brings Intolerable Stress

There is a striking illustration given by Dr. Blanton, drawn from a documentary film of an American foundling home. The film tells the story of ninety-seven babies, ranging from three months to three years of age who "sickened and died for lack of love." These children were neither neglected nor abused in the ordinary

sense of those terms. They received normal routine care, being adequately fed and clothed and given medical attention. There were competent nurses at the institution. What then was the problem? The foundling home was understaffed, and each nurse had to care for at least ten of the orphaned children. This being the case, nurses could do little more than feed and clothe and bathe their charges. They had not time to play with them, to love them. The first symptoms in the children deprived of love were demanding attitudes and the increased tendency to cry. But after three months the symptoms were more grave. The infants lost appetite, were unable to sleep, and there was a mournful vacancy of expression. After five months,

"deterioration had set in with accelerated swiftness. Most of the babies became shrunken beyond recognition. They lay whimpering and trembling, their faces twisted into grotesque expressions. The film has one harrowing sequence in which the doctor tries to comfort a fifteen-month-old girl. He picks her up gently and smiles. But the child screams in panic. One hand clutches the doctor for protection. The other beats wildly at him in terror. In the child's agonized countenance one recognizes the horrifying features of a person driven insane by loneliness and fear."

Many are the researchers that tell the same story. The books of Dr. Hans Selye have demonstrated the influence of stress on the body's hormonal output. When the hypothalamus is disturbed by emotion, the pituitary is immediately influenced and in turn influences the adrenal and other glands. If the alarm reaction becomes chronic, the glands are ultimately exhausted. At that point resistance to diseases is lowered and almost anything can happen within the physical organism. According to Dr. Selye, illnesses developing from emotional stress cover the gamut from hypertension and arthritis to

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ever wrote. We shall never get further than barren admiration of a beautiful piece of writing, unless our love to men has the source and root to which Paul points us.

2. Love and the Future Life

Again, let us take this great thought of the permanence of faith, hope, and love as being the highest conception that we can form of our future condition. It is very easy to bewilder ourselves with speculations and theories of another life. I do not care much about them. The great gates keep their secret well. Few stray beams of light find their way through their crevices. The less we say the less likely we are to err. It is easy to let ourselves be led away, by turning rhetoric into revelation, and accepting the symbols of the New Testament as if they carried anything more than images of the realities. But far beyond golden pavements, and harps, and crowns, and white robes, lies this one great thought that the elements of the imperfect, Christlike life of earth are the essence of the perfect, Godlike life in heaven. 'Now abide these three, faith, hope, love.'

3. Living Love

Last of all, let us shape our lives in accordance with these certainties. The dropping away of the transient things is no argument for neglecting or despising them; for our handling of them makes our characters, and our characters abide. But it is a very excellent argument for shaping our lives so as to seek first the first things, and to secure the permanent qualities, and so to use the transient as that it shall all help us towards that which does not pass.

What will a Manchester man that knows nothing except goods and office work, and knows these only in their superficial aspect, and not as related to God, what, in the name of common-sense, will he do with himself when he gets into a world where there is not a single ledger, nor a desk, nor a yard of cloth of any sort? What will some of us do when, in like manner, we are stripped of all the things that we have cared about, and worked for, and have made our aims down here? Suppose that you knew that you were under sailing orders to go somewhere or other, and that at any moment a breathless messenger might appear and say, 'Come along! we are all waiting for you'; and suppose that you never did a single thing

towards getting your outfit ready, or preparing yourself in any way for that which might come at any moment, and could not but come before very long. Would you be a wise man? But that is what a great many of us are doing; doing every day, and all day long, and doing that only. 'He shall leave them in the midst of his days,' says a grim text, 'and at his latter end shall be a fool.'

What will drop? Modes of apprehension, modes of utterance, occupations, duties, relationships, loves; and we shall be left standing naked, stripped, as it were, to the very quick, and only as much left as will keep our souls alive. But if we are clothed with faith, hope, love, we shall not be found naked. Cultivate the high things, the permanent things; then death will not wrench you violently from all that you have been and cared for; but it will usher you into the perfect form of all that you have been and done upon earth. All these things will pass, but faith, hope, love, 'stay not behind nor in the grave are trod,' but will last as long as Christ, their Object, lives, and as long as we in Him live also. ❖

MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Volume 9, art. "What Lasts" pp. 189-195, *passim*.

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rheumatic fever and heart disease.

Where shall we start in our search for health? Remember how the Bible starts—"In the beginning God." That God who is our maker and preserver is love. His love is just as infinite as his wisdom and his power. It is a love that forbears and forgives. He invites the worst as well as the so-called best, saying, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "All that the Father gives Me shall come to me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." "All sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men." "And it shall be, that every one who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Whoever believes these promises and takes hold of Christ thereby receives love. The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given unto us (see Rom 5:5). Now the sky above is a richer blue, and the grass around a deeper green. Now we see in all those around us the purchase of the blood of Christ. Now we know that despite our imperfections we are loved and accepted. "Ye are complete in him" and "accepted in the beloved" and "without condemnation" (Col 2:10; Eph 1:6; Rom 8:1). "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7).

Those who learn to live, not according to outward circumstances or inward feelings, but according to the facts set forth in the Word of God will find their whole lives transformed.

Their mind and spirit will foster well-being throughout the whole system. Blood circulation will be better, digestion improved, and a host of pressures removed from the physical organism itself. No wonder in his third epistle John can say, "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." We are on the way to that prosperity of health when we make God first and last and best in our lives and believe that he is love, and that therefore all things work together for good to them who love him and their fellowmen. ❖

Taken from *Worth More Than a Million*, chapter 53, pp. 679-687.

Footnotes

1. *God in the Dock*, pp. 216-217.
2. Smiley Blanton, *Love or Perish*, p. 2.