

If we seek to follow Jesus today or even to simply live into his vision of God's kin-dom, we need to give love pride of place, both as a value and as a guide to action. What, however, does that mean practically? How are we to go about building our lives around love, both as individuals and as communities? Since Jesus invites us to love God, our neighbors, ourselves, and our enemies, how exactly should we do that? Moreover, since Jesus, his ancestors, and his followers seem to have thought that love had something to do with human well-being, how might we connect love more concretely to the ethic of flourishing I described in part 1 of this book?

We need to begin with a new definition of love. Psychiatrist Scott Peck...famously defined love as "the will to extend one's self for the purposes of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." This definition is helpful in moving beyond describing love as a feeling and is even more helpful in discerning the ways in which love has something to do with human flourishing, but it comes with its own limitations. First, Peck defines love as the will to extend ourselves but does not say anything about the actual work we must do to "extend" ourselves for our own well-being or for the well-being of others. We need a definition of love that includes both the desire for human well-being and the actions we take based on that desire. Second, Peck's definition focuses on immediate relationships rather than on society as a whole. We need a definition of love that includes our own flourishing and the flourishing of those we know personally while also incorporating the flourishing of our neighbors (broadly defined, per Luke 10:25-37) and our enemies. Finally, Peck's definition focuses on "spiritual growth." While spiritual flourishing is important, it is only part of a life of integrated well-being. We need a definition of love that addresses flourishing across the range of human attributes described in part 1 of this book.

My definition of love expands on Peck's version. I define love as the work we do to flourish in all aspects of our lives and to help all other people flourish in all aspects of their lives. Peck's "will to extend ourselves" is included here, but is subsumed under our actual efforts. His mention of self and personally known others is also included but, again, is subsumed under a broad commitment to the well-being of all humanity. Peck's mention of spiritual growth is similarly included but is subsumed under the larger list of human attributes through which we flourish.

Self-love becomes a way of understanding our commitment to our own well-being, including the actions we take to flourish. Our love of particular others becomes a way of understanding our commitment to their well-being, including the actions we take to support their flourishing. Our love of humanity is demonstrated in the work we do to help all people to flourish.