

Our world is full of pain and joy, violence and creativity, cruelty and kindness. How should we live? What should our actions be? We make decisions about who to be and what to do, minute by minute, day by day, lifetime by lifetime. What wisdom, what hope, what courage should guide those decisions? How shall we respond to the good we encounter? To the evil? These are ethical, moral questions, some of the most important questions we can ask given the unspeakable good and the terrifying evil around us—and of which we ourselves are capable.

One answer might be that we should respond with love, but that answer only raises more questions. What does love look like in our day and time? How can we love ourselves, other people and the God of our understanding in ways that make a positive difference in a magnificent and struggling world? How can those of us who seek to follow Jesus do so in a way that embodies and brings to life his dream of a world of peace and joy in which everyone has what they need?

In this book, I attempt to answer both sets of questions—the classic ethical questions about how to live a moral life and the urgent contemporary questions about how we can embody and enact love in a world desperately in need of it. My answer to both sets of questions is the same:

We should commit ourselves to living out an ethic of flourishing in which our values, actions, and social institutions are centered on helping all people to have good lives and on minimizing the avoidable suffering that makes people's lives harder.

This answer is neither simple nor obvious, and I will spend the [rest of this book] clarifying what I mean and indicating how we might move toward living out this commitment.