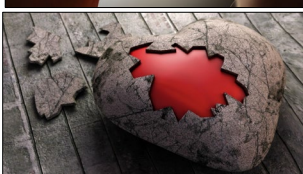
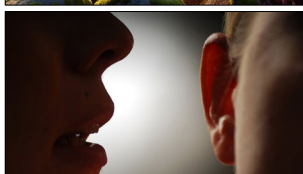
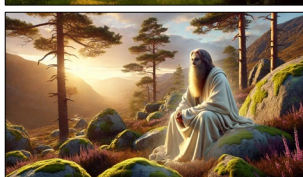
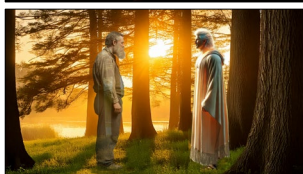


Get on the Bus

The Great Divorce Part 4: Loving

November 17, 2024



Today we're back on our trip through C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* because this fictional story is full of vivid *metaphors* that help us *relate* to the *reality* of an *actual* Heaven and Hell. So the book *follows* a group from "Grey Town" as they struggle to leave the *hollow comfort* of their *old* lives in Hell to embrace the *harsh reality* of a new life in *Heaven*. But, to help them adjust to the *higher reality*, each Grey Town Ghost is met by one of *Heaven's* Solid Spirits who tries to *enlighten* and *encourage* them by explaining the life that *awaits* if they'd just *let go* of the *attachments* to their *old ways*. And in our story, *Lewis* listens to a series of *these encounters* before *his* Solid Spirit guide, Christian poet and author, George MacDonald, shows up to help *him* unpack what *he* hears. So as they walk from *Ghost* to *Ghost*, MacDonald walks *Lewis* – and *us* – through *their* relatable spiritual struggles to explain how *each* illustrated *heart condition* could hold *us* back from *choosing* Heaven. And along the way **we learn what it takes to empty our hearts of these self-centered sins – so that we can be filled with God's life-saving and loving truth.**

And *that's* where we pick up the story, **learning about love.** Cuz hearing whose words *have filled* our hearts is only *half* the battle; now we need to know *how* they *got* there. And that comes down to *value*, cuz

Where your *treasure* is, there your *heart* will be also. – Matthew 6:21 NIV

And there may be a million ways to *define* love, but in its *simplest* form, **love is the emotional recognition of something's value.** Because we *love* the things that make life "*better*." So, the question is, **why do you love what you love?** That is, how does it bring "*better*" into your life? And how do you *know*? Cuz it *can't* just be a *feeling* – or else everyone would choose *sex, drugs, and rock n' roll* over *friends, family, and 401ks!*

No, deep down we all *know* that **true love doesn't make us feel better, it makes us better.** And it's *why* we learn to *love* cooking for our *family*, donating to *charity*, or rubbing our wives' *feet*. Because **we're at our best when we're making things better for others.** And that means the biggest hallmark of *true* love is its *aim*; true love is aimed *outward* while *tainted* love is aimed *inward*. **True love is selfless, while tainted love is selfish.** And that's why our *instructions* for *higher living* are to:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in *humility* value *others* above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the *others*. - Philippians 2:3-4 NIV

And even though we know *that's* easier said than done – **we get to see how subtle and stealthy selfishness can be** as we pick up our *story* in Chapter 10 and overhear a *new* conversation between a female *Ghost* and a Solid Spirit named *Hilda*. Cuz *here* we see a *seemingly selfless wife* demanding *Hilda* return her *husband* from Heaven because *she* believes *she* knows what's "*best*" for him. And the *entire* chapter is one uninterrupted *rant* about her *right* to run her husband's *life*:



'You always thought Robert could do no wrong. I know you haven't the faintest conception of what I went through with your dear Robert. The ingratitude! It was I who made a man of him! Sacrificed my whole life to him! And what was my reward? Absolute, utter selfishness ... Put me in charge of him. I know him better than you do. I want Robert. What right have you to keep him from me? I hate you.' *SNAP*

And like *that* – she "flamed out". She *treated* Robert like a *possession* that gave *her* life *value* – so *without him*, she completely *lost* who *she* was. *Sound familiar*? Our *fixation* on something *external* can *feel* like our love *is* aimed *outward*, but until it meets *more* criteria, **it may still be aimed inward.**

[Because if love is aimed outward, then] Love is *patient*, love is *kind*. It does not *envy*, it does not *boast*, it is not *proud*. It does not dishonor others, it is not *self-seeking*, it is not easily *angered*, it keeps no record of wrongs. – 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NIV

Y'see, the problem with the "**I only want what's best for you**" approach is that it still comes down to what "**I only want.**" It's a *subtle* way for us to project *our own ego* – cuz though *she* talks about how *selflessly* she worked to get *him* all the things for a "*better*" life – in *reality*, she was chasing the desires of *her own heart*. And when *Robert* became an *obstruction* to her *selfish* pursuits, she offered *false forgiveness* – not to make *him* feel better, but to *feel better* about *herself*. But,

The commandments ... are summed up in *this* one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Not love your neighbor *FOR* yourself.] – Romans 13:9 NIV

Forgiving without forgetting is not love; it's *keeping a record of wrongs* to *gain* a sense of superiority *over* our offender. And only **tainted love uses an offense as an advantage** – because **tainted love focuses on getting** while **true love focuses on giving**. Love *cannot* be about *possessing*. And *that's* what *Lewis* learns as he and *MacDonald* overhear *two more talks* in the next chapter. Cuz chapter 11 kicks off with an irritated Motherly Ghost named *Pam* making demands to see her *son Michael* while her Solid Spirit, *Reginald*, explains how *she* must become more *solid* first:



'Well. When am I going to be allowed to see him?' 'As soon as it's possible for him to see you ... You need to be thickened up a bit.' 'How?' 'You will become solid enough for *Michael* to perceive you when you learn to *want* Someone Else *besides* Michael. ... It's only the little *germ* of a desire for *God* that we need to *start* the process.' 'Oh, you mean *religion* and all that sort of thing? ... Come on. The sooner I *begin* it, the sooner *they'll* let me see *my boy*. I'm quite ready.' 'But, *Pam*, *do think!* Don't you see you are *not* beginning at all as long as you are in *that* state of mind? You're treating *God* only as a *means* to *Michael*. But the thickening consists in learning to want *God* for His *own* sake.'

And Reginald continues *trying* to make Pam see that because her *natural motherly* love has become so *possessive*, it's *consumed* her *attention* and *eclipsed* the love of God. And that's a problem because **true love must be guided by God** – otherwise it can be *tainted* by our near-sighted *flesh* and its *flawed* sense of value. Loving God *first* keeps all our *other* loves aimed in the *right* direction:

[Which is why Jesus, Himself, is *not* being *selfish* when *He* tells us] Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. – Matthew 10:37 NIV

[So:] Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is *not* in them. For everything in the *world*—the *lust* of the *flesh*, the *lust* of the *eyes*, and the pride of *life*—comes not from the Father but from the world. – 1 John 2:15-16 NIV

You get that? As, MacDonald explains to Lewis, **“There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him.”** So, we gotta be *on guard* cuz it's *easy* to *confuse* **Godly love with Earthly lust**. And when we allow *misguided love* to *turn* to *lust*, **we're not only distracted by what we possess, we're directed by what we possess**. And in the end, our *possessions* possess us! Which is *immediately* illustrated when an *Oily Ghost* enters the scene and encounters an even *brighter-than-normal* Spirit who turns out to be an *Angel*. And as they come *closer*, we see they're *discussing* what to do with a *Lust Lizard* on the Ghost's shoulder:



‘May I kill it?’ ‘Well, there’s time to discuss that later’ ‘There is no time, may I kill it?’ ‘I never meant to be a nuisance, ... don’t bother’ ‘May I kill it?’ ‘I’m not feeling well today, some other day perhaps.’ ‘There is no other day...’ ‘You’d kill me if you [killed it]’ ‘It is not so.’ ‘You’re hurting me now...’ ‘I never said it *wouldn’t* hurt... I cannot kill it against your will, have I your permission?’ ‘I know it *will* kill me!’

And as the Ghost keeps making *excuses* for the Lizard and its *lust*, it tries to *save* itself by *whispering* its words of powerful *influence* – when *suddenly*, the Ghost has a moment of *clarity* and *confidence* and says **“God help me – get it over!”** And *instantly*, the Angel snatches the lizard, *breaks* its back, and *throws* it to the ground – causing the Ghost to *scream* in agony and *fall* to the ground. But *then*, both Ghost and Lizard are *transformed*; the Ghost into one of the *Solid Spirits* and the Lizard a great stallion. And the *new* Spirit then *thanks* the Angel, *mounts* the horse and *tears off* toward Heaven!

[Cuz,] If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell – Mark 9:47 NIV

Ouch! Just think about all the ungodly influences you need to cut out to give God's love complete control. There's a *zillion* little Lizards on our shoulders that lust after earthly *people*, *profit*, *comfort*, and *control*, and *each* time they convince us to pursue *those* possessions, we *surrender* a piece of ourself for *lust* to possess. And once it has control, we become too *weak* to break *free* – which is why we *must* do what this Ghost *does* and *cry out*, **“God help me.”** Cuz God promises He *will* respond ...when we ask! Our *request* just has to be for *His will*, without the influence of *any* Lizards! Which is why the *Lust Lizard's* attachment to Oily Ghost, like Pam's attachment to her son became a *barrier* to God's *true* love; because **tainted love drives us to possess or be possessed** while **true love puts all things in God's hands**. The problem is, our *flesh* has a hard time believing *less* of us means *more* love – because that *doesn't* add up using *earthly* math!

Instead, **our flesh focuses more and more on what we get out of love by trying make ourselves the focus of others' love.** And *that's* what we see in *chapter 12* when Lewis and MacDonald come across an *angelic procession* honoring a *Heavenly* woman named Sarah Smith, who evidently *saved many souls* while she was on Earth. And while this *saintly Spirit* is passing through the woods she encounters her former *husband*, a small Dwarf Ghost named *Frank*, holding a *chain* connected to a tall *Tragedian* (*think Shakespearean dramatic actor*). And as she tells him how *happy* she is to see him, Frank's *Actor* responds with *dramatic* words of *self-pity* – even when she says she *loves* him:



'Love! Do you know the meaning of the word?' 'How should I not? I am in Love.' 'You mean—you did not love me truly in the old days.' 'Only in a poor sort of way ... what we called love down there was mostly the craving to be loved ... I loved you for my own sake: because I needed you.' 'And now, you need me no more?' 'But of course not! What needs could I have, now that I have all? I am full now!' 'Oh!

And as the conversation continues, we start to *understand* that the *Dwarf* is the *real* Frank, but he's become less and less of *himself* the *more* he's let his alter ego, *the Tragedian*, speak for him and project *his self-pity* to gain *attention* and *sympathy*. Which just *proves* Sarah's point: the big reason *why* we love what we love down here is **"mostly the craving to be loved."**

Cuz, *down here*, we live in a *material* world and it's *hard* to see how the love we *give* profits us *more* than the love we *get*. And **when we see love as an asset, we focus on getting over giving** which can make us *addicted* to *sympathy* as a way to get *that love* from others. But, **tainted love relies on emotional manipulation** while **true love relies on emotional inspiration**. Because *manipulating* others benefits *us* while *inspiring* others benefits *them*. And we see the stark *difference* in each *consequence* illustrated in Frank and Sarah, with Frank's *selfish* plea *shrinking* his *Heavenly presence* and Sarah's *selfless* compassion *growing* her *Heavenly glory*. And that makes it easy to picture the *actual* effect of *outward* love that John describes when *he* says:

We know that we have passed from *death* to *life*, because we love each other. – 1 John 3:14 NIV



But until *that's* our aim, love *won't* make things *"better."* Because when we focus our love *inward*, all our efforts are *limited* to *one* life. But **focusing love outward allows us to "better" every other soul we come across!** And even with *earthly* math – it's easy to see how *that* love has infinitely *more value*. So, does *Frank* get the picture? *We'll see next week!*

But for now, once again we've learned 3 more lessons from the story we've witnessed so far:

- 1. True love must be aimed at God.** To love anything *best*, love for God must always come *first*. All things can only get *"better"* when *He's* involved, cuz *apart* from Him, *love* can turn into *lust*, because
- 2. True love requires surrendering all possessing.** Love must be focused on what we *give*, not what we *get*; and that means *letting go* of all the *earthly people, power, and profit* we *think* we want, cuz
- 3. Only true love gives us real value.** Because *true* love means *God's* love has replaced *tainted* love. And when *He alone* guides our *heart*, *He alone* provides our *treasure!* And only *His riches* have the power to *inspire* every single soul's perpetual *purpose*, unending *satisfaction*, and eternal *life!*