

## **Love is the Way: Hope for Ourselves and Others – Bishop Michael B. Curry with Dave Asprey – #764**

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today, because it's the week of Thanksgiving, the topic of the show is love. It's giving and receiving love because it's one of the ways that we can become better humans. Even in a wild year like this one, I thought it'd be a good time to just bring things back to center and talk about love and community with the guy who's an expert on those things. We're talking about the Most Reverend Michael B. Curry, who's been presiding bishop in ...

Bishop Michael Curry:

Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church is just fine.

Dave:

There you go. Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church since 2015 and the first African American who's led the denomination. He's a huge advocate for human rights, author of five books, including a new one that is the main topic for today called Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times. Welcome to the show, Bishop.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Thank you. Thank you, brother. Good to be with you.

Dave:

Did you write Love is the Way knowing there was a pandemic coming or in the midst of that, or it was already there, and you just happened to hit the timing just right?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yes, I saw into the future. No, I have no idea. I literally had no idea. A pandemic was about the last thing on my mind. I mean, I saw the movie Contagion, but that was about the extent of my knowledge, and so, no. I have to admit I was aware of the divisions in American society and to some extent, global community. I mean, some of what's going on here is going on around the globe. There's something in the air. There's just something in the atmosphere and in the times.

So, I was aware of that, but I had no idea of a pandemic, or that the depth of racial divisions would get revealed and unearthed in just new ways. But like the pandemic, the virus had been around before we knew it, and the reality, our divisions have been around, whether we've paid attention to them or not but the added stress ... I mean, this is like a perfect storm. The added stress and everything that goes on when you have a biological pandemic and basically, we have a whole culture, a whole society, and a global community now impacted by this.

There's no escaping. There's no out. This is Sartre's No Exit on this one. We're all in it. Some affected more, some less, but we're all in it, and that I hadn't even remotely seen.

Dave:

So, it was just ordained good timing, I think.

Bishop Michael Curry:

I guess so, yeah. And the funny thing is, I hesitated initially in writing the book, one, because it's a memoir reflection on love and it really did come out of conversations with my publishers after I had done a book of sermons that ... I mean, they noticed, and others noticed there is a consistent theme of love that comes through that was in the sermons. That's not anything new for me.

Now, I have to admit, I didn't invent it. Moses was talking about it a long time ago. Jesus was talking about it, and even Cicero was talking about it. So, I didn't invent this. I mean, it's been around a while, but they asked me where is that emphasis on the power of love as a pragmatic reality in our lives as well as a value for living them, where does that come from for me?

We know it comes from religious tradition, but where does that come from for Michael Curry? And that's what led to a set of memoir reflections on how I actually have experienced the power of love and how it's affected my life, hopefully shaped it for the good, and how on my good days, I try to live that out, and on the other days, I know I haven't, but at least I got a standard to live by. I know where I'm trying to go.

Dave:

You've got a directional compass there.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah.

Dave:

I think about love from a religious perspective. You've got the love of God. You've got love for your fellow man. You've got love for yourself. You've got love for your direct family members, and your parents, and your significant others, and whatever else. Is there some way of understanding which love we're dealing with, or even what love is when you have all these different ways of using the word?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Part of it is the frustration of the limitation of the English language. We have one word for love, and that's it. I mean, love and you have to use the same word on a soap opera that you do when the pope is speaking, or the Dalai Lama is speaking. I mean, we just have one word. Both Hebrew has multiple words and Greek has multiple words for love. The New Testament in particular used three of those words: eros, agape and philia.

Philia, Philadelphia, city of brotherly love, kind of paternal love. Eros is romantic love. So, if you're talking about romantic love, that's eros. And then agape, which is probably the highest form, if you will, of love, that's unselfish, sacrificial love that really does seek the well-being of the other.

They are all related. They all have the same source. At least in the biblical tradition, it says all love ultimately has its source in the God who the Bible says is love, which is a stunning declaration that religious tradition often overlooks. But the Bible actually says God is love, which means the love that we know, authentic love that we know, in any context ultimately has its source in God. That doesn't mean God's making us love, but the capacity to love, the flow of love, the energies of love, those are the energies that come from the creator of everything that is, including every one of us.

That is a game-changing realization. And to learn ways of living in that flow of energy, which is the energy of God, the energy of love, that has the capacity to help us even through pandemic times when at Thanksgiving, we probably can't be with our loved ones and family and eat the turkey and all the stuff that we normally do. Because we love them so much, we're going to have to abstain from doing a lot of the stuff we normally do. I mean, that kind of love energy has the capacity to help us even through that time.

Dave:

That taxonomy is so important. I never thought about the fact we only have one word for it, but it's a bit awkward some time. I have some beautiful women friends and I will say, "I love you" but it's so easy for someone to misconstrue that, right? I'm happily married. I don't mess around and all that, but I still say it because they're my close friends and they know the meaning of that word.

Bishop Michael Curry:

They know.

Dave:

If you hear that, you're like, "Oh, what does that mean?" Then the same thing, you tell a guy, "Hey, I love you," it's clearly brotherly love but I can't say, "I brotherly love you" because we don't have a word for that. I mean, have you thought of promoting three words for love in the English language? I mean, you think you can do that? You're a powerful guy.

Bishop Michael Curry:

I don't think I'm that powerful. I've got to fill in the language. It is what it is, but there are differences. I have to admit that when I tell other guys, "Love you," I'll say, "Love you. Love you, brother."

Dave:

I say that too because you don't want to imply the amorous thing, because that's not where you're going with it, right?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, so your inflection ... There are ways to ... We don't have other words, but there are ... I mean, and I'll say that if a female, and to be clear that I'm not saying, "I love you" in a romantic, this isn't eros but, "Love you. Love you." It does give it a little different nuance, but unfortunately, we don't have ... A branch has ... There are multiple. We just have the one word, love.

Dave:

I had one of the people who used to work for me, and she'd send me a black heart on text. I'm like, "What is that?" And she said, "Black is like a business suit, so that's business love." She's like, "I love what you're doing, but I don't want to use the red heart because that would imply things that would be inappropriate." I'm like, "Okay, so you can use the black heart."

Bishop Michael Curry:

That's fair enough. I don't know that that would universally communicate, but okay.

Dave:

Once she told me, I was like, "Oh, I get it." So, I'd say, "Hey, well, why don't we do this in the business?" She's like, "Black heart." Okay, that's cool and it's so funny, because love has so many nuances to it.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, and it's contextual. I mean, I used to tell folks ... To show you how context changes and affects everything, I mean, if we're in church or in a religious service and I say, "I love you," well, that means one thing. But if we're having dinner, and there's a violinist playing in the background, and we're having wine and there's candlelight and I say, "I love you," that's a whole different ... You see what I mean? Even the context can shape the nuance of love.

When you tell your grandmother, "I love you," your mother, "I love you," your father or family members, that's a little easier because the context of your relationship defines what you mean by love. But when it's friends and colleagues, it's different. The context doesn't help to shape it, unless you're in church or some religious involvement, or if something has happened where saying, "I love you" is a way of support and they know that. You know what I mean? The context can shape it, but you're right, it's ...

Dave:

There's a lot of times I'd like to say that I'm feeling love, but I don't really say it, especially because I'm a CEO. You can get sued if you're like, "Hey." I'm like, "There's nothing here," but you don't want to make anyone uncomfortable and all that. So, that's probably an area where you can work on not going over a boundary there, but I could probably say it more often than I do to my friends.

Bishop Michael Curry:

I very often will say, "God love you."

Dave:

That's a good one.

Bishop Michael Curry:

That's kind of, okay, you're talking about God. It's kind of a blessing on the way. You know what I mean? God love you. That doesn't have any connotation, no anything except it invokes love, concern for the other, a way of blessing but doesn't imply anything else except that.

Dave:

You focused mostly in your book, as you'd expect, because you're a religious leader but you're focusing on this idea of love that looks outward, the agape. What is the sensation of that love? Like okay, when you love someone romantically, there's a feeling in your heart and all that stuff but when you're at your highest state of agape, what does it feel like?

Bishop Michael Curry:

I mean, it's ironic. One of the passages in the New Testament, the love passage from Paul, "Although I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I'm a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal." And I remember being in high school, that was in our Book of Great Poetry. It was there along with Shakespearean sonnets and stuff, and there was 1st Corinthians 13.

Well, the interesting thing about that and I talk about it in the book is that Paul actually wrote it. He wasn't thinking about a wedding, although it applies to relationships. He was dealing with a church that was dividing itself into factions, and some of those were sociological. The rich were putting down the poor. I mean, it was a church that was in a mess, and it was operating out of self-interest.

The principle of love, he says at one point, "Now, I will show you a still more excellent way." And then he goes into what is the poetry of love, that he sees love as the unselfish way that makes human community possible because apart from the unselfish way, human community is not possible. Selfishness does not build community. I don't care how you cut it. It doesn't do it. It destroys community.

And it applies to a marriage and a relationship because if you're in a relationship, if you and I are in a relationship and it's all about either one of us, then it's not going to be about the two of us. Do you see what I'm getting at? So that, on some level, I've got to be concerned with not just myself but with you. And if you do that, or concerned not just with yourself but with me, if we do that, then something new begins to emerge. That relationship between the two of us in giving ourselves to each other, creates a new actual reality.

That's what we're getting at in marriages. It ain't about a license. I mean, it's not about ... You know what I mean? It is about a new relationship that's actually creating. We use words like family. We don't have a lot of good words, but something new is created where there is space for two to dwell in one relationship. That's powerful stuff. Now, if you apply ... Then that's then romantic love. What has happened there is what begins as eros, over time if it's real, grows into agape.

Dave:

Interesting in a relationship.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, in a relationship and I mean, I've seen it. I was a pastor, a parish pastor for years before I become a bishop, which is a slightly different job in terms of what you do day to day, but I walked with a lot of folks through a lot of sickness and a lot of hardship and a lot of death.

And I've got to tell you, man, when I've seen couples, people who had been married for 50 years, these folk, and one of them goes on to glory, it is like the other one has lost part of their body. And that's because they've moved beyond just mere romantic attraction, which has its place. I mean, that's how the human species perpetuates. If there was no such thing as romantic attraction, I don't think we would be perpetuating ourselves. It's just [crosstalk 00:15:03].

I mean, the Lord knew what he was doing with the biology. So, that part's there, but there's a point at which you grow on top of that. You build on that and a relationship emerges, and it's a pretty awesome thing to behold when you see it. And that's where you have a self-giving love that's not about the obliteration of the self. It's actually a heightening of the self.

The truth is when I'm concerned about we, that includes me but if all I'm concerned about me, that does not include you necessarily. That we embraces me and you. Me is just all about me, and that doesn't create a relationship.

Dave:

One of the benefits of having had your own parish for so long is you see co-dependent relationships. You see every kind of bad relationship when you're working with people, right? How do people know when

they've taken the sacrificial aspect of agape love and gone too far and become co-dependent? It just seems like that's a real common problem these days.

Bishop Michael Curry:

It is, and that's a human ... Because it's just so easy to slop into it. The question is, and I believe this is true with any relationship including a relationship with God, is it loving? Is it liberating? Is it life-giving? If it's missing one of those things, then something could be out of kilter. Is it loving? Does it set you free to be, so to speak? Is it liberating? Is it life-giving? Does it make you better or at least ... You see what I'm saying? Is it loving, liberating?

Dave:

That's a great checklist. I mean, if your relationship is working, you get those. If it's not, you need to work on the relationship some more.

Bishop Michael Curry:

You need to work on those. Right, yes.

Dave:

And that's some wisdom right there.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, yeah and that's true of a relationship with God. If a faith relationship isn't loving, liberating and life-giving, then you've got to work on that because there's some things missing. That's how religion can go off and go wrong.

Dave:

You get that God-fearing idea because if you're fearful of God and God is love, that might not be liberating in a certain way. Right?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, yeah and the irony. This is another classic example where our language, English, all we have is the word "fear." Even in Hebrew, there's nuance on that word. It actually means respect. I mean, there's a nuance, an article you add on it and it means fear because I'm scared you're going to kill me, but there's another way. It's fear that is honor. I honor you. I respect you. You see what I mean?

Dave:

What a difference. God-respecting, no one rejects that, but God-fearing, a lot of people are like, "I don't really want that." So, there's a mistranslation, basically.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, yeah. English is wonderful in Shakespeare's hands but in common, everyday language, it's pretty basic.

Dave:

I've got to ask you this. Do they have like a special voice training to be a bishop? Because you have this resonant, amazing voice.

Bishop Michael Curry:  
Are you kidding me?

Dave:  
Did you always have that, or did you grow that?

Bishop Michael Curry:  
I didn't know I had it. I have no idea.

Dave:  
You speak with weight. I'm taking voice lessons from Roger Love who was just on the show, and I listen to how people talk now because of that. I see you talking, and you've got it. It's interesting. It might just be practice.

Bishop Michael Curry:  
I guess, it's all those years of preaching in the parish. I guess.

Dave:  
That must be what it is.

Bishop Michael Curry:  
But I have no idea. No one's ever said that to me. Thank you, gosh. Well, I hope it helps.

Dave:  
There might be some sort of training class that they, "Okay, here's how you stand in front of a group of thousands of people and just move them. You've got to hold your breath or something." I was going to ask you the secrets.

Bishop Michael Curry:  
But there is an old joke, old preacher joke about somebody who found a preacher's manuscript in the pulpit and saw in the notes that the preacher had written weak point, shout louder. So, sometimes, there's ...

Dave:  
I love that. Did you see this happening when you were a young man? Did you always know that you'd be a man of the church?

Bishop Michael Curry:  
No, no. I mean, again, my father was an ordained minister. He was an ordained priest. His daddy had been a Baptist preacher, going back. That was in the mix, but no. When I went off to school, I wasn't really thinking about being ordained. I mean, my father, he was really good with us in a lot of respects

because he didn't have any expectations about ... We didn't have to do anything specific. We just had to do whatever. He used to say, "Whatever you do, make sure you help somebody along the way. Whatever you do, that's your job."

Dave:

Wow.

Bishop Michael Curry:

And whatever field you enter into, make sure the world's better because you did that. That's your job." So, the service in some ... There was no question I was going to do something that was ... When I was in high school, I like to say I volunteered for Bobby Kennedy, but that's a little bit more exalted. I licked envelopes and knocked on doors both for his senate campaign and for his presidential. So, it wasn't quite an exalted position.

But I really thought of entering public service in some way and early in school, was thinking about do I go to law school to do that and then getting government and that kind of stuff like you do when you're in college. You play around with all sorts of possibilities. I took a course that among a number of readings, we actually read Martin Luther King, some of his writings, which led me to do an honors thesis and I got to go to Boston College and read some of his theological papers.

That's when I started realizing, "Wait a minute, there's a variety of ways to make an impact for the good and maybe, this is in your heritage and maybe this is your way." That was where it began to take shape for me, and that was what, 50 years ago or something like that. It was a long time ago and like Maya Angelou says, "It wouldn't take nothing from my journey now."

It's not always been easy, but I really do believe that authentic religious faith has the capacity to help us like the old spiritual says, "Climb Jacob's ladder. Every rung goes higher, higher." That religion or anything else that pulls you down, uh-uh, that's not the God way. The God way is that Jacob's ladder. You know that spiritual, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder. Every rung goes higher and higher." And I really believe that. Our religious traditions at their best if they are loving, liberating, and life-giving, then that smells of God to me. When they're not, then I'm not sure.

Dave:

When I was a young man, I was very science and engineering motivated, and I actually was raised by an atheist family. At some point along the way, I said, "Hey, dad, I can't really prove or not prove it. So, I think I'm just going to be a bit more agnostic because I see some weird stuff out there that I can't explain, and rather than saying it didn't exist because I can't explain it, I'm just going to say there must be some reason people pray even though I've never really tried it."

I was a teenager and stuff like that. I meditate and I have my own spiritual practice and all that now because I find it works regardless of-

Bishop Michael Curry:

It does, yeah. It's been debated, tested for centuries. It works.

Dave:

Yeah, exactly. It was a bone of contention for a long time in my own family about that where, "How dare you? It's not scientific." I'm like, "Hey, I don't worship at the altar of science although I believe in science. I'll worship at the altar of whatever that's going to work, and I'd like to study why it works."

Do you see that we're studying more and more neuroscience and we're looking at love and when someone's in a state of love, we know how their heartbeat changes. We actually know how the field around the heart is shaped like a donut, almost like a halo, but how it turns and it's measurable to a certain point. You can spot two people in love with numbers and all that stuff.

Do you think we're ever going to quantify our self just to be able to look at someone's heart or their brain or something like this is a person who's got agape? This is a person who's connected to God?

Bishop Michael Curry:

I don't know. Or will we get a pill that once you take the pill, after about 15 minutes, you'll love. You'll be in love. There's nothing ...

Dave:

I think that's MDMA. Isn't it?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Dave:

I think that's MDMA. Isn't it?

Bishop Michael Curry:

MDMA, yeah.

Dave:

In a therapeutic setting. I don't mean in illegal.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Therapeutic setting, right. In a clinical setting, but yeah. I mean, part of that, what that tells me about us, that it's not an accident. Again, I'm not making a scientific statement now. I'm going one step beyond where science can go, but the science is pointing us in the direction. There's a reason that human beings are more functional the more they are loved. There's a reason that children grow and develop, and I don't mean mushy love. Sometimes, love sets boundaries and all that stuff, but there's a reason.

There's a reason. Just on a simple level, it feels good when you know you're loved and you're being loved, whether it's romantic or your mother, whatever it is. I mean, there's a reason it feels good and there's a reason it feels lousy. We were made that way. That's not just accidental biology.

Now, I've got to go from biology to theology. I want to suggest that God, who the Bible says is love made human beings in His image, which means the God who is love made us as creatures of love, to be loved, to love, and that we are at our best when we live out of the very energies of love because we are actually reflecting the DNA of our creator. That's why all the chemical stuff, why whatever it is in the brain, that's why.

It's not rocket science. I mean, it is science and ones that people have been experiencing this as long as they've been people. I don't know what Neanderthals were. I'm not quite sure about that. I have no idea what their emotional life was, but you see that on some level even in the animal world, people would ...

I mean, my wife and daughters, they are serious cat people and so, our Facebook thing, we get all these cat ... If you start looking at stuff, the algorithms then, so we got tons of cat ... And I have to admit, I like looking at them sometimes. I don't tell them that, but I do actually sometimes, because they have these wonderful ... I mean, horrible stories of these poor kittens who have been abandoned on the side of the road and they're afraid of dogs, they're afraid of everything.

And that these people take them in and it doesn't work all the time, but a lot of the times if you feed them, show them love, even an animal that's been abused, sometimes they're afraid to trust you, but they will. Now, I wouldn't try that with a lion out in the forest or anything like that, but the truth is, you can see the hand. There's a poet. I can't remember the poet who said the hand that made us in divine, and that is true, which is why the chemicals go off and start fires in the brain.

When you're in love and when you know you are loved or ... Respect is not the right word. That's not strong enough. When you're being honored as a human being. I mean, one of the most horrible things we can do to anybody is to demean them as a human being and to put them down. That is one of the most ... Because that is crushing, that is trying to crush the spirit within them and if you ever crush that completely, you take away hope. And if you take away hope, then it's all gone.

But as long as there's even a sprig of hope, just a sprig of it, the spirit in them, because we were made by love, to love and to be loved and we are at our best when we live in love.

Dave:

How do you turn love back on when someone has attempted to crush your hope?

Bishop Michael Curry:

It takes work and sometimes, you can't do it by yourself. And sometimes, you need to get what the religious tradition has called soul friends.

Dave:

What a great word.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Soul friends and a soul friend can be a therapist. I'm not saying it has to be a religious person, but the point is someone or a group, community support, whatever, who can walk with you and help you give voice to the inner journey and inner struggles, and whatever the inner pain, and maybe begin to help and coach you to find the healing that's within yourself to coach you and do it. Not telling you what to do, it's coaching you to almost mentoring you. Coaching, mentoring, midwifing.

Dave:

There you go.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, that's it. It's midwifing to help the energies of love that are there in you, even if they've been suppressed, the spirit is there, to help that to rise out and to come up, and more and more begin to be the dominant spirit in your life. And that takes habit. It has to become habit and eventually, habit becomes a way of life.

And you run into moments when it gets buffeted and pushed back, but the point is if you can unleash that spirit that's within, that's what a soul friend does. That's what a good therapist does. That's

what a good counselor does. They help to coach you, midwife the child of love that's in you and release it, and let it live.

Dave:

Wow.

Bishop Michael Curry:

And man, I mean, it's real. It's there. It's like the Plato thing, "All learning is remembering." You already know. Now, I mean, I don't want to push that too far, but I do believe this, within us, the hand that made us is divine. It's there in us.

Howard Thurman, he's a remarkable guy, kind of a mystic, a black guy, mystic, born around turn of the last century. In his adult life, he had been head of the chapel at Howard University, and then later Boston, and then later was the pastor and one of the founders of ... It's an interfaith church, oh, Lord, I forget the name of the church, anyway in San Francisco. But he's got a lot of writings on meditation and he really was a mystic, growing up in the rural south on Jim Crow and all that.

Anyway, he talked ... He was King's mentor. Dr. King carried Thurman's book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, with him wherever he went. In one of his books, I can't remember which one, he talks about it. He's talking about his grandmother, who used to tell him about the old slave preachers during slavery.

One of the sermon ... He said this one preacher, he always had ... Whatever the sermon was about, that was about it, but he always had the same ending at the end of the sermon. And he looked at the folk who were all slaves at the time and he said, "You are not slaves. You are not what this world calls you. You are the children of God."

Dave:

Wow.

Bishop Michael Curry:

It is unleashing the child of God. That's where the energy of love in life actually is, and we've all got it, man.

Dave:

Wow, that's so powerful. I want to ask you a tough question. If the way a person can deal with this, someone tried to take away your hope, and you develop some soul friends, and you work as a community to heal and certainly, I've done that myself. I think most people who've had any kind of tough patches in their life end up having help from wherever it comes from.

When you're dealing with systemic oppression and clearly, we have racial issues in the US, but we've also seen it all over the planet. There's a government or a people really doing they're very best to take away hope in a whole and other culture, and we're talking about war crimes. We're talking about just horrible stuff. How do you bring hope and love back to a people when they've been in a situation like that?

Bishop Michael Curry:

In a parallel way to an individual, parallel. Let me go back to my own story. I grew up with a father who was a civil rights worker. He was a pastor who was doing civil rights stuff. So, I always grew up assuming if your church is supposed to do ... You do spiritually and social justice all wrapped up-

Dave:

They come together.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah. It was like that's what Jesus did, that's what we do. So, okay. That was the world in which ... I grew up in the old black communities in the late '50s and through the '60s and then I went off to college. And there was an evolution because when I was younger, the reality of slavery still lingered through segregation in the consciousness of the community. It really did.

People like Frantz Fanon who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* and a lot of the people looked at the dynamics of oppression. Psychologists talk about internalizing the oppression where the oppressed actually internalized the systems and the dynamics of oppression into themselves. And so, you get these patterns of self-hatred and self-loathing, and it comes out in ways that eventually you try to mimic the wider system or culture or whatever it is, and then it's your own.

So, by the late '60s when civil rights movement got really going, in the early days, it didn't deal with this. It didn't deal with it directly, but as time went on, there was a realization that, yeah, some laws have to be changed. Yeah, economic arrangements have to be changed. All that stuff has to happen, but there was a spiritual awakening that happened in the late '60s when it was the young church who were saying, "Wait a minute. Just getting our civil rights isn't enough. What about our humanity?"

And that's where you get the black is beautiful kind of stuff beginning to and went into ... There was a period of that. What that tells me is it's a very similar kind of thing to how you overcome negativity in your own life. You've got to deal with it. You've got to cope. One, you can't ignore the outward circumstances that created it. You've got to do something about that, but that's not enough. You've got to engage the inner spirit and you've got to because ultimately, it's going to be that inner spirit that's going to give you the capacity to make it over the long haul. If you just deal with the outer circumstances, that's not enough.

So, I saw, and I think about it, growing up in a black community where all of a sudden ... When I was growing up, the darker you were was considered not great. You needed ... The lighter you were ... I mean, black people come in all hues and complexions, but light skin was considered beauty. That was where the beauty, which again is taking the cue from the wider culture. And so, eventually, the black is beautiful went overboard. Of course, these things go a little bit overboard, but eventually, it norms out where you realize beauty is beauty where you don't fall for the color game.

I was at a friend from Rwanda who said the same pattern of internalized oppression played out in Rwanda where one group was more favored because they were light skin, one tribe because they were of lighter complexion. Facial features were more ... They weren't European but at least pointed in that direction, where the other were clearly more African, even looking more West African than East African, if you will.

And he said some of that was behind the struggle between Tutsi and Hutu that led to genocide when the Hutu, the more dark skin, more [Africanesque 00:37:53] tribe rose up against the Tutsi, who had tended towards a little bit more light skin or more chiseled features, more East African. He said that internalized oppression led into what became genocide.

Dave:

Wow.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* talks about this and he was talking about it from the perspective of Algeria and the Algerian revo- ... He was a psychiatrist. He was talking about it from that perspective. That's why the inner self must be engaged as well as the outer self. It's not enough just to change the outward laws. You've got to change laws of the heart. It's got a focus. Both have to have it. And I think that's true with racial justice and healing in our culture. It's got to be both. We've got to re-envision, reimagine policing.

I was in a conference and was talking to folk and they said, "Well, what's your vision for law enforcement and policing?" I said, "My vision for law enforcement is we want our police officers and our sheriffs, we want them to be the Good Samaritans of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the New ... That's their noble calling." You see what I mean? And many of them are that. You know what I mean?

Dave:

Absolutely.

Bishop Michael Curry:

I mean, when you see them, they are that. They are that Good Samaritan who helps somebody. That's what they are. Call them, help them to be that. That's what we want. That's what the community wants. That's re-imagining, but that is both a matter of outward changes in policies, procedures and all that stuff, and inward dispositions. We must pay attention to the spirit of people who deal with crime all the time, because sometimes when that's what you're constantly dealing with, it gets internalized into you. You see what I mean?

Dave:

It happens a lot.

Bishop Michael Curry:

And we don't pay attention to their spirits, their souls. I mean, these are people and so, you need both. Anyway, I'm going off on it, but you see where I'm getting at.

Dave:

It's interesting. It does take both and the more you deal with people who hate you, the easier it is to hate them back instead of to feel love. The police officers I've spoken with just in personal conversations, ones I know well enough, they're feeling beat down.

Bishop Michael Curry:

They are feeling beaten up, yeah. They're people. I mean, they're people and that's where our systems fail because our systems take solely an outward focus and do not pay attention to both the inward focus and outward of police, of the community. You see what I mean? And everybody gets stuck. It's like we turn into rats on a wheel, and we just keep running. We're stuck and we can't get off and we just keep ... I'm mixing metaphor, but playing old tapes and keep ...

And nothing changes until something has to break through. A new paradigm has to emerge. We have to stop and say, "Wait a minute. It isn't the system is controlling us. Our patterns of behavior are controlling us. We need to go back to first principles. What is law enforcement about at its core? What is it really about?" And I really would suggest, it is Good Samaritan.

Dave:

It's helping.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, it is. It's a helping profession. How do we help them do that, maintain law and order, appropriate law and order, but how do we help them do that? How do we give them the resources for when there's a mental health call that they have the support of mental health professionals so that you don't have just a mental health situation being dealt with as a law enforcement situation? You see what I'm saying?

Dave:

Nothing good is come of that. I mean, I've dealt with crazy people.

Bishop Michael Curry:

No, it's not going to work.

Dave:

You have to, and there's nothing you can do if you're trained to stop someone from doing something because ...

Bishop Michael Curry:

You can't.

Dave:

... it's not rational by definition. I always feel bad for both sides when there's a problem like that because a crazy person needs help and the law enforcement guy is standing there going, "What do you do?"

Bishop Michael Curry:

Exactly.

Dave:

And of course, they're always concerned whatever they do, either they're going to get heard, they're going to get thrown in jail for doing stuff. I don't see a good win the way it's set up.

Bishop Michael Curry:

The way it's set up, it's not a good win. You're right. So, we've got to change the ... It's got to be a holistic approach to changing the whole paradigm, so our law enforcement folk can do what they do so that the community can be in relationship with them, and it can be done.

Dave:

Now, you have a chapter in your book called *The Real E Pluribus Unum: Do I have to love my enemy?* Let's talk about that from the aspect of policing or anyone who's being oppressed in any of the situation we've talked about. Is it possible, and is there something that you should do to work towards love towards people that are doing bad things?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yes, yeah.

Dave:

How does that work?

Bishop Michael Curry:

That doesn't mean you're not working for change at the same time.

Dave:

That's a big asterisk there, but yeah, okay. How do you turn on love for someone who's punching you, for instance?

Bishop Michael Curry:

You may not start ... Well, I do think you have to pray your way through it, and you have to be part of a community that's committed to living that way. I mean, you have to-

Dave:

The community aspect is the key there.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah. I really do. I mean, that was true in the civil rights. You have to be part. Most of us can't do that on our own, by ourselves.

Dave:

You have to be a hell of a human being like MLK or someone.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Even they had their moments. I mean, even they. It's just sort of if you hit me, I'm going to think two alternatives, fight or flight. If I think I can take you, I'll fight. If I think you're going to take me, I'm going to run. That's sort of the, I don't know, almost the natural reaction.

Dave:

It is natural.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yeah, it's just kind of. And some of that is biological necessity. When we were in the woods or in the forest, that made sense. And yet, the nonviolent way, which is the way of love, that's a third way. And

that third way, if you move beyond thinking of love as eros and begin to think of love agape, seeking the good and the well-being of the other as well as yourself, not excluding yourself, not excluding the other, then the goal of love is to seek the greatest good that is possible in that situation.

That doesn't mean you turned it into the Kingdom of God on earth, but it means you get as close as you can. I may not be able to completely change this person's mind or whatever, but can I find some good that I can do in this situation, in this context, that might, and this is where King and Gandhi, both of them said it, that might prick the conscience of the person who's doing the wrong. It might prick their conscience and change their heart.

It might not because you don't have control over that, but you're seeking the good for them as well because they are victims of the system that they may be upholding, that may be oppressing or putting you down. They are victims. They just don't know it. Yeah and so, your goal is to do the change that needs to happen but to do the change in a way that it makes it possible for somebody to grow.

Congressman John Lewis in one of the Freedom Rides was beaten up in South Carolina. I think it was in Sharon just across the North Carolina border, and this would have been about late '50s, early '60s. He was beaten pretty bad, not as bad as he was later in the Edmund Pettus Bridge but pretty bad. Years later when he was in Congress, one of the men who participated in beating him on that Freedom Ride came to his office to apologize.

Dave:

Wow.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Ask his forgiveness. It actually did happen. I know that doesn't happen all the time. I know that. I mean, okay, but it can happen more than we think.

Dave:

In one lifetime too, which is remarkable for that guy who did it.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Exactly, exactly.

Dave:

Your study of love in your book is really profound because in order to facilitate the brotherly love, it requires a community. It's more than one person. I feel like, okay, eros, we got that. Okay, we can find a partner. That's what Tinder is for. Right? So, you get that. That's like the lowest hanging fruit.

But then you need like an operating system or a framework to have the community there, and that is a role that churches have long held. That veterans of foreign war or the various societies where people would go to do that are, heck, knitting circles for lack of a better word.

A lot of that has just evaporated and gone away, and I'm hopeful that having a profound lack of that for a brief period during the pandemic is going to make people come out and say, "You know what, I'm going to go whether it's join a church or just join a civic community thing, I'm going to go regularly and get to know the people there even if I don't know them that well."

You have that when you're in college. You have it when you're in high school. It's built in and then they toss you out in the real world. You get a partner and it's all about eros and maybe some

community at work. But I'm definitely seeing, now that I'm a little older and wiser, the wisdom of having churches and communities or just any of those organized multi-generational things out there.

Do you think it's going to happen when we finally come out of lockdown that people are going to be more civic minded just because they had to fill up their brotherly love cups?

Bishop Michael Curry:

I hope so. I think we'll grow and get there.

Dave:

I think it might.

Bishop Michael Curry:

I hope so because I think, like I said, I know I need ... I mean, I feel it in myself and I hear other ... I'm having conversations with people about it. We are not disembodied spirits. We are embodied spirit. You know what I mean? We are body and souls, so to speak, all mixed up together. And somehow, we need both to be at whole, and this has been an experience of the absence of the ways of community that we were used to, and finding alternatives, trying to be creative.

I mean, I've told church folk, I said, "Look, if you hide, stay in touch with each other. Stay in touch is the building block. It may only be the first building block, but it's the building block of human community. It's the one thing we can do. We may not get to the higher rungs of human community but stay in touch. If you're high tech, Zoom. If you're low tech, text. If you no text, call but whatever it is, stay in touch. Keep that human contact. Don't let anybody be alone. Don't let anybody ..."

I mean, there's wisdom in the Jewish tradition that when someone dies, someone always sits with the body. See, that's telling us something. That's ancient wisdom. Ancient folk figured something out. Nobody's supposed to be alone. It is not good that the human want to be alone. That's God talking in the Bible. I didn't make you all for that. I made you to be together.

I hope whenever this ends or evolves, slowly ends, however it ends with not a bang but a whimper, I suppose, I hope that there will be a re-energizing and a re-engaging of human community on some deeper levels because we have had an experience of it not working when we don't have that.

Dave:

Profound words and I think we will experience that. That's what I'm reading here. That there's a yearning that it was too quiet to hear because we were too busy and now that everyone's at home and not driving around and doing all that, that it's coming out and it'll be a different situation. I don't know what it's going to look like, but I think we are going to see a lot more people spending a little bit more quality time with people they don't know that well.

So, now, we've got eros hacked and then we've got brotherly love. Okay, we've got a community for that. But for people to make that transition into that love for all mankind, for the whole universe love for God, what's the mechanism to make that transition once I've, say, tackled those first two kinds of love? Is that an individual transformation? Is that groups of people do that at the same time? How does that work?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Well, I do think that ... And this is another realization from this time in pandemic for me, although it was there before. I mean, I'm not saying anything new. It's just it's crystallized for me that the three

intersecting dimensions of my life, dimension one, my relationship with God; dimension two, my relationship with others, that's community, human community; and three, my relationship with me, that those three intersecting worlds and realities, that if I'm intentional about each one, one thing I've learned is I can't live de facto nurturing a relationship with God. It's got to be intentional. I've got to do something.

I can't live de facto having a relationship and community with others and I can't live de facto in a relationship with me. There's that story in the Bible in the New Testament where the learned come to Jesus and says, "What's the greatest law in the law of Moses?" And Jesus preaches back and quotes Moses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. He says, "You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself."

Love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. It is in those three intersecting worlds of having to learn to be intentional, and I've adopted kind of an internal practical discipline each day. I do my morning prayers, stuff, and exercise. I get up early, so I'm an early morning person. I peter out as the day goes on, but early morning, I'm there. And so, I do my exercise, I do my prayer time, and then catch up on the news and all that kind of stuff between 5:00 and 7:00, 7:30 or so, and that's kind of my time.

And one of the things that I started doing in this pandemic time is saying, "Okay, how am I being intentional to nurture my relationship with God?" Well, prayer time and read scripture, like I said, that part of it. How am I going to do that today? That part's pretty easy because I have a routine.

How am I going to do that in human community for others, not just for myself, for others? What am I going to do today for human community? And that could be a variety of things, but just one thing even if it's just sending an email to somebody, or calling somebody, or it could be ... I mean, there's a soup kitchen here that I'm big on and doing something for them that particular day, whatever that is.

And then what am I going to do for Michael? Because Michael needs care too, community needs care, and I need to nurture that relationship with God. God, human community, self. I mean, that's not me. That's Jesus of Nazareth talking. Love God, love your neighbor, love yourself. Practice of that is a daily practice. Discipline, practice, whatever the right word is. Just to be intentional.

I used to when I was a bishop at North Carolina, a retired bishop who had been the bishop of Mississippi, just a wonderful guy, a guy named Chip Marble who was one of those moral voices in Mississippi as a white man for what was just and humane and decent, both in terms of race relations and in terms of LGBTQ rights and humanity, and he was doing this in Mississippi. Remarkable. Anyway, he retired and came and lived in North Carolina and was helping me out in the diocese here. And Chip used to say, "Nothing good ever changes or happens without intentionality."

I think about Dr. King and said, "You know, human progress doesn't happen on wheels of inevitability. It happens by intentionality." And so, for me to be intentional about ... Now, they can change because things are going to happen that I hadn't anticipated. That's okay. That's normal but say, "How am I going to nurture my relationship with God today, with others and with myself?" And that grid, you fill in the blanks.

Dave:

I've got to say great job on the bishoping because I'm 48 almost and that love God, love thyself, love others, never actually made that much sense until you just explained it the way you explained it. So, it makes a lot of sense. Those are the three. It's just a re-expression of the three kinds of love.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Yes, exactly.

Dave:

And being intentional about all three of those seems to be a really good daily practice when you spell it out that way. And it maybe loses a little bit in the translation into that simple three-word piece of advice, but the way you explained that, that works whether you're secular, whether you're religious or Christian, or whatever you are. Those practices are universal. All right, I think I learned a couple of things I can use here in my daily practice, which is really cool. Thank you.

Bishop Michael Curry:

That's awesome, brother. That's awesome.

Dave:

Do you have anything else about love that you think our listeners should know, something you haven't said?

Bishop Michael Curry:

It's not always easy, but it is worth the effort. If I must make a mistake, I hope and pray it will always be because I tried to be loving.

Dave:

What powerful words for the week of Thanksgiving. Bishop Michael, thank you for this time on Bulletproof Radio. You're a man of wisdom and I appreciate the work you're doing in the world.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Well, you are incredible. It has been an honor to talk to you. It really has, brother. Now, I see why you do what you do. You're good at it. Now, I get it.

Dave:

I get to learn every day. I mean, how can I not?

Bishop Michael Curry:

Well, you made a new fan out of me.

Dave:

Well, likewise. I will post your book on the website on social media and things like that. Guys, if it's Thanksgiving, if you got one thing out of this interview, look, yourself, others, and God, the universe, whatever, get those three things lined up. Do one thing every day for each of those things to make it just a little bit better, and I'm pretty sure things will change in your life in a positive way, and maybe things around you will change too. You've certainly started it for more years than I have, but man, you crystallized some stuff for me, and true gratitude for that.

Bishop Michael Curry:

Thank you, brother. God bless you, man. Happy Thanksgiving to you.

Dave:

Happy Thanksgiving.