

TURN LOVE INSIDE OUT

TURN LOVE INSIDE OUT Q & A WITH JIM PALMER

Jim, first, why Turn Love Inside Out?

As I was writing Wide Open Spaces I began noticing how every chapter seemed to wind up being about Love in one way or another. There's been a few times in my life when Truth unveiled itself in such a clear and powerful way that it radically altered or awakened me deep inside. It was one of those experiences, and the Truth that presented itself to me is Love. Until then, I assumed I more or less knew what there was to know about Love. Oops! I see now I'm just scratching the surface in terms of accepting Love, giving Love, and being Love. It become pretty simple for me, is there anything more significant than unpacking the reality of Love? Turn Love Inside Out is simply an invitation to anyone and everyone who desires Love.

Okay, then the million-dollar question is: What is "love"?

You can't define it. Go ahead and try but then at the end of your definition you must footnote an acknowledgement that Love is deeper and wider than whatever you came up with. In that sense Love is like God. In fact, the Bible says, "God is Love." Love is the Ultimate Reality. You can't define God or Love but if you could, you would be bumping into the same thing. Though Jesus Christ has been central to my relationship with God for many years, only recently have I realized that Christ seeks to awaken me and make me aware of God's Love within myself, and free me to express this Love to all people everywhere. For me, to "be like Christ" is to accept that God Loves me as he Loves Jesus Christ, and to be this Love in every moment as Jesus was. These days I am discovering great peace, joy, and freedom as I apprentice myself to Christ in the way of Love.

Jim, typically religious people seek to persuade others to their religion. For example, Christians seek to convert others to Christianity. It sounds like you however, want to convert people to love. Is that fair?

I capitalize the word 'Love,' because I view it as Ultimate Reality or God. Love is not some flighty, sentimental, self-focused human emotion. Love is the Creator and Source of all that is real. Humans were made in the image of Love, and so Love is the ground of our being, and our natural inheritance. When someone is awakened to Love, they are awakened to the most transformative reality there is. Its power heals, sets people free, makes whole, and puts one at deep peace and joy. Love is a spiritual reality within ourselves we can turn to in any moment. One way I experience it is a deep knowing that in every moment I am held in unconditional acceptance. When I allow myself to dwell there, all sense of separation from God is extinguished and I experience oneness with God. Free at last! Jesus prayed we would "experience" this oneness, and I am finding that Love is the doorway to it. I enjoy hiking, and often trails are marked by various color streaks on trees – red, blue, green, whatever. Likewise, the trail to God, in God, with God is marked by Love. As I convert the inner experience of Love into a life of being Love, I am one of those trees showing people the path to God, Ultimate Reality, and the only power on earth capable of transforming our inner being.

What would you say to people who feel they can't or don't experience Love? For example, a very beaten-down individual or a person who is a victim of hate and abuse?

Honestly, one reason my co-partner Anne and I began Turn Love Inside Out, is because we realized if we can know, experience, and be changed by Love, any human being can! We are both nobodies, and we've had plenty of life circumstances that have created resistance to Love inside us. Speaking for myself, I grew up in an abusive home and have a list of life failures a mile long. If there had been a "most likely to fail" honor in high school, I would have easily won it. OCD, Tourette's, depression, self-hatred (to name a few) have been things I have had to contend with over the course of my life. Love is no respecter of persons. Whatever resistance to Love we have nurtured inside it is no match for the power of Love. Love does not need any particular set of circumstances in order to exist because it is an internal spiritual reality. Love is available in abundance to every person in every moment inside of them; this is our natural inheritance as people created in the image of God. All that's left is to remove the blocks that hinder our awareness of Love's presence. As mentioned previously, Christ has helped remove my blocks. We are to help each other. The best way to do this is to simply Love each other.

Jim, some people may think you are putting too much emphasis on love. What about people who say that the problem of sin and God's holiness are just as important?

A lot changed for me once I began interpreting spiritual things through God's Love. I went to seminary and had classes on "hermeneutics," which is about identifying a methodology for interpreting spiritual writings like the Bible. Now I see that "Love" is the best "hermeneutic." In other words, see all things as an expression of God as Love. As Love, God desires every person to experience all that he wants to freely give. When we "fall short" (sin) of experiencing this, God is grieved. God doesn't look at humankind through eyes of disgust, but eyes of Love. God "hates sin," because he seeks our best. God passionately resists anything less than this because he Love us. What is God's best? It is himself! Knowing God and being one with God, as Jesus prayed we would experience, is the key to our fulfillment and freedom. This is what God desires for all humankind.

For me, Jesus Christ has been central for my working through this because I have learned from Christ there is no separation between myself and God. I realize there are ways I "fall short" of embracing and experiencing God's best for me, and I am prone to make this fact a barrier between myself and God. The cross tells me all is forgiven, and the empty tomb tells me I am free to live in the present reality of God's kingdom.

There are an infinite number of ways a person is drawn to the Truth. Experiencing God's unconditional acceptance was huge for me. Turn Love Inside Out is not about pushing some new formula for changing the world or the latest bandwagon everyone should jump on in order to be spiritually hip. A few of us compared notes and discovered that Love has been instrumental in waking us up to what God makes available to us in every moment. The power of Love as I've experienced and witnessed its impact in other's lives, is that it meets every person where they are, and has a way of dislodging a person from whatever is holding them back or hindering them.

Give me some examples of "being love."

For me, it began as a radical shift in how I view people. The tendency is to see and interact with people based on our sensory perceptions – what they look like, the attitude or behavior they are expressing, and our human stereotypes and prejudices. The Bible says "I have the mind of Christ," which means I am capable of discerning the spiritual identity of other human beings. Sure we might not Love at times, but our behavior and attitudes don't create our identity; rather, our identity creates our behavior and attitudes. Whoever a man thinks he is, determines what he says and does. If God is Love and I am his creation, then I am Love. What does that mean? Doesn't it at least have to mean that we are capable of experiencing and expressing Love?

What if we started telling people they are Love, as images of God? How do we tell them? We Love them! We express Love, which stimulates their awareness of

Love. I can't make a person experience Love. I don't need to; the capacity to know Love is already within them. What I can do, however, through the expression of Love is stimulate their awareness of Love's presence inside them. So you ask, "Okay, how do you express Love?" Well, that's sort of like asking how you breathe. Breathing is simply what we are physiologically wired up to do. Likewise, Loving is what we are spiritually wired up to do. In other words, when we Love we are most being like God. When we are living from our essential nature as creations of God, we Love.

Loving thoughts, spoken words, body language, physical touch, momentary interactions with others, acts of mercy and kindness, creating and sharing images of Love through song, art, photography and all creative forms, giving others attention, being fully present and listening to others, affirming the spiritual identity of others, are all expressions of Love. Any and every expression motivated by Love or in Love matters! No expression of Love is wasted.

Jim, why should people listen to you about love?

I start each day as a beginner. Anything I say about Love on this site is likely just scratching the surface. A Buddhist friend recently cautioned me that when I point to the moon, not to confuse my finger for the moon. In other words, whatever I say about God or Love is a finger pointing to these realities but not the realities themselves. Truly knowing God or Love is something deeply personal and spiritual; it's not simply a matter of passing along information and concepts.

So, I am just a nobody sharing my own life journey and what I'm discovering and experiencing. I hope anything I say will encourage others to desire Truth and be open to Love. Any Truth I've discovered or been awakened to is not original to me, and I take no credit for it. Truth has been presenting itself since the beginning of humankind; no Truth is really "new" Truth. If it's Truth today, it has always been so. For me, the more I have grown in Love – understanding Love as God's identity, accepting Love as my identity created in God's image, discovering the source of Love within myself where Love's presence dwells, abiding in Love, and allowing myself to be and give Love without condition – the more motivated I've been to open myself to God.

Has Christianity been a help or hindrance for you in receiving, embracing, and being Love?

I write a lot about this in upcoming Wide Open Spaces. On the one hand, I could easily say that the "Christianity" I bought into was mostly a hindrance to my receiving, embracing, and being Love, and I share several examples of this in the book. And yet, it was the dissatisfaction and suffering this "Christianity" produced inside me that led to my discovering Truth, which as Jesus said, "sets us free." My journey in and through counterfeit Christianity is all part of my story of freedom, and so I don't regret or judge it. As you can see, I put "Christianity" in quotes because much of what I once passed off as "Christianity" didn't seem to line up too well with the life and message of Jesus Christ.

Jesus once said, "I am the way." Let me just give you one small example of how the "Christ-way" has become a significant aspect of my life. Jesus' way of life was one of dependency on the Father. In other words, the Christ-way is an abiding way. In every moment, I have a choice. If I want to, I can go out into the world and strive to get acceptance, worth, peace, joy, love, life, purpose, and freedom. Or, I can receive these from God's presence within me, which is available unconditionally and all the time. To know or experience God's presence inside is to be at peace, to be free, to be joy, to be love, to be whole and lacking nothing. Why would I go out into the world and scratch and claw for pseudo versions of these, when I can have the real deal by simply abiding in God's presence within me? Jesus demonstrated this kind of abiding life with every breath.

Jim, is unconditional love and acceptance a license for people to not change?

The heartache and suffering of our world stems from our alienation from the deepest truth and the springs of spiritual life within us, and our estrangement from God. Paul wrote in Titus 2:11, "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It (the grace of God) teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." So what transforms a person to no longer live according to worldly passions of greed, lust, pride, and hate? According to Paul, the answer is "the grace of God"—the unconditional love and acceptance of God.

How people change is a paradox. Human logic says if we love and accept people unconditionally, it will encourage them to continue destructive behaviors. According to Paul, it's actually what enables or empowers them to say no to these behaviors. Withholding unconditional love from others deprives people access to the only power, the only force, the only reality, the only possibility that can transform their lives and the central truth that gives meaning to all of existence. When I am consciously aware of and dependent upon God's unconditional love and acceptance of me, it is much easier for me to extend this love and acceptance to others. This is another principle of the abiding way: you can't bear love if you yourself are not abiding in Love. Love isn't something you create; it's something that when you plug into it, it overflows from you.

Even as overflow, it's not always a human bed of roses. True love has a certain grit and staying power to it. Despite his disciples being stubborn and slow to learn, Jesus patiently stuck with them to the very end. People of his ethnic and religious roots rejected him, his closest friends betrayed him, but Jesus continued choosing love. His last words to humanity before his death, spoken after they nailed him to a cross of their making were words of love, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Many of the first Christians met the same fate as a result of living the abiding way, and died as martyrs.

Let's just assume for a moment hypothetically, that the "turn love inside out" idea catches on . . . what changes?

What if more and more people had no need to seek identity, worth, acceptance, and value in the world? What if all fear was banished? What if people lived in peace and contentment regardless of their present life situation or circumstances? What if the wounded were healed, and the prisoner set free? What if we became aware of and lived in and from the spiritual abundance within us? What if humankind was awakened to the Presence of Love? What if our eyes were opened to see all people as reflections of God? What if we truly felt a deep bond with all living things, a bond that desires and seeks the wellbeing of all?

Maybe Love finally quiets and stills us all and we *know* God. Maybe this is the kingdom Jesus was talking about.

My friend Andrew Peterson was alluding to something like this in his song,
After the Last Tear Falls:

*After the last tear falls
After the last secret's told
After the last bullet tears through flesh and bone
After the last child starves
And the last girl walks the boulevard
After the last year that's just too hard*

*There is love
Love, love, love
There is love
Love, love, love
There is love*

*After the last disgrace
After the last lie to save some face
After the last brutal jab from a poison tongue
After the last dirty politician
After the last meal down at the mission
After the last lonely night in prison*

*There is love
Love, love, love
There is love
Love, love, love
There is love*

*And in the end, the end is
Oceans and oceans
Of love and love again
We'll see how the tears that have fallen*

*Were caught in the palms
Of the Giver of love and the Lover of all
And we'll look back on these tears as old tales
'Cause after the last plan fails
After the last siren wails
After the last young husband sails off to join the war
After the last "this marriage is over"
After the last young girl's innocence is stolen
After the last years of silence that won't let a heart open*

*There is love
Love, love, love
There is love*

*And in the end, the end is
Oceans and oceans
Of love and love again
We'll see how the tears that have fallen
Were caught in the palms
Of the Giver of love and the Lover of all
And we'll look back on these tears as old tales*

*'Cause after the last tear falls
There is love*

Jim, how would you encourage people to grow in Love?

On the site, we encourage people to consider forming a "Be Love Circle," which is essentially people supporting one another in living a life of Love. Expressing Love is foundational because it reinforces the truth of our identity as Love. I have a Masters of Divinity degree, and spent many years studying the life of Jesus, but the turning point for me was realizing that knowing *about* Christ wasn't the deal but instead living as Christ or *being* Christ – sharing in and expressing the Christ life. This is something any nobody like me can experience. It has nothing to do with how smart you are or how much you know. Intellectual knowledge doesn't necessarily translate into spiritual living. Some of the people I personally know who truly live as Christ and embody the "turn love inside out" message are a waitress, tattoo artist, single mom, tire salesman, photographer, computer geek, and plumber. I wish I could convince everyone that: God is Love; Every person, beginning with yourself, is worthy of receiving Love; Your true identity is Love; The greatest gift you can give anyone is Love; and every thought, word, act, and expression motivated by Love matters.

Jim, do you have concerns or cautions about the message of “turn love inside out”?

Is it possible to be legalistic about Love? I know it's an odd question, and probably hard to imagine. And yet I'd have to say, yes. Yes, it is possible to be legalistic about Love. For example, I could mechanically use the word 'Love' in every conversation about God or spiritual things, and attempt to manipulate every discussion back to the topic of Love. Or I could judge people who I felt didn't exhibit Love to the degree or in the way I thought they should. Or I could mechanically do good deeds and call it Love. Or I could try to create an identity for myself and seek worth and identity by being the person always talking about Love. In all these ways and many others, I believe it is possible to become legalistic about Love. Of course you might say, that's not really "Love" and you would be right, but I think you get my point.

This brings me to something I recently realized about Love and my own journey. Love has not as much been a landing strip as a launching pad in knowing God. Discovering God is Love, awakening to my identity as Love, locating the Source of Love within me, abiding in or depending upon Love, and living a life of Love have all enabled me to experience all sorts of other spiritual realities such as peace, contentment, joy and freedom. Love has helped open my eyes to see the divine significance of every human being, and to embrace all of life as the journey of knowing God. I hope each person who comes to this site experiences Love as a starting point, or a new and fresh place to begin, or a launching pad, or a wake-up call, which stimulates your awareness of God's presence within you, and the freedom to follow the stirrings of God deep inside you.

