



FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE

“One of my new housemates, Stacy, wants to write a story about an astronaut. In his story the astronaut is wearing a suit that keeps him alive by recycling his fluids. In the story the astronaut is working on a space station when an accident takes place, and he is cast into space to orbit the earth, to spend the rest of his life circling the globe. Stacy says this story is how he imagines hell, a place where a person is completely alone, without others and without God. After Stacy told me about his story, I kept seeing it in my mind. I thought about it before I went to sleep at night. I imagined myself looking out of my little bubble helmet at Blue Earth, reaching toward it, closing it between my puffy white space-suit fingers, wondering if my friends were still there. In my imagination I would call to them, yell for them, but the sound would only come back loud within my helmet. Through the years my hair would grow long in my helmet and gather around my forehead and fall across my eyes. Because of my helmet I would not be able to touch my face with my hands to move my hair out of my eyes, so my view of earth, slowly, over the first two years, would dim to only a thin light through a curtain of thatch and beard.”

–Donald Miller²⁸

Donald Miller evokes the terror of being truly and permanently **alone**. We feel such terror because we know that we are made for **love**. We were not meant to do life without it.

Paul tells us what really matters shortly before going into his description of the fruit of the Spirit: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6 ESV). It’s not ritual practices like circumcision that ultimately count; the **only** thing that counts is faith working through love.

If this is true, then all the different parts of the fruit of the Spirit must fall under the banner of “faith working through love.” How does that work?

We’re included in God’s covenant through our faith in Jesus, and then that faith naturally leads to what we **do**. If we believe a doctor’s diagnosis and prescription, we’ll take our medicine. If we believe Jesus, that naturally leads us to doing what Jesus says.

Paul is saying, if we put our faith in Jesus, that will lead to us becoming the kind of person who is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

Love is the first virtue on the list for a reason; it’s the virtue that contains all the other virtues. Paul writes that love “binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14 NIV).

IT IS GOOD TO BE NEAR GOD

“Virtue is ordered to the good. . . . The ultimate and principal good of man is the enjoyment of God. . . . to this good man is ordered by charity.”

–Thomas Aquinas²⁹

“Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever. . . .
But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.”

–Psalm 73:25–26,28 NIV

28. Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 171.

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 23, a7, co, Benziger Bros. edition (1947); Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/SS/SS023.html#SSQ23OUTP1>.



Aquinas cites this Psalm to explain how the ultimate good of humankind is the enjoyment of God. God is what's good for us. And it's love that positions us toward God. So if we don't have love, all the other virtues get out of whack. When we do have love as our motive, it makes all our other virtues become what they're meant to be

WORK AS LOVE

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

-Romans 5:5 NIV

It's the Holy Spirit that gives us the love that we need.

In the workplace, this means that our whole day can be saturated and interwoven with the purposes of God. As we do our work to seek the good and well-being of others, God uses that to mature our hearts. That's faith working through love.

This also gives us a clear guide for ethical discernment. If you're ever asked to do something at work and you just don't feel right about it, just ask, Is there a way that this can be faith working through love? If the answer is no, don't do it.

When we see our work as faith working through love, it wraps our work into our life with God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does Don Miller's story of the stranded astronaut strike you? What would it be like to be truly and permanently alone?
- What does it mean that the only thing that counts is "faith working through love"?
- Take another look at Thomas Aquinas's quote about virtue and charity (love); how would you put these ideas in your own words?
- Why is it good to be near God?
- How can your work become faith working through love?