

## Wednesday Night Study Series – “The Gifts of Imperfection”

**Prayer of Surrender:** Spirit of Truth, CARRY ME where you will; BRING TO ME what You will; TAKE FROM ME what You will; AWAKEN IN ME what You will. The Christ MAN is around me. The Christ MIND is in me. The Christ POWER flows through me. And, the Christ MYSTERY exists as me. I believe it. I perceive it. And, now I receive it! I am surrendered. Amen. And, so it is!

### Can We Love Others More than We Love Ourselves?

While I have personally and professionally agonized over the definitions of love and belonging, I have to admit that they have fundamentally changed the way I live and parent. When I’m tired or stressed, I can be mean and blaming – especially toward my husband, Steve. If I truly love Steve, then how I behave every day is as important, if not more important, than saying “I love you” every day. When we don’t practice love with the people we claim to love, it takes a lot out of us. Incongruent living is exhausting. It’s also pushed me to think about the differences between professing love and practicing love.

In addition to helping me understand what love looks like between people, these definitions also forced me to acknowledge that cultivating self-love and self-acceptance is not optional. They aren’t endeavors that I can look into if and when I have some spare time. They are priorities.

The idea of self-love and self-acceptance was, and still is, revolutionary thinking for me. In early 2009, I asked my blog readers what they thought about the importance of self-love and the idea that we can’t love others more than we love ourselves. Well, there was quite the emotional debate in the comments section.

Several folks passionately disagreed with the notion of self-love being a requirement for loving others. Others argued that we can actually learn how to love ourselves more by loving others. Some folks just left comments like, “Thanks for ruining my day – I don’t want to think about this.”

There were two comments that addressed the complexity of these ideas in very straightforward terms. I’d like to share these with you: Justina Valentin, a mental health professional, writer, and photographer, wrote:

*Through my children I have learned to really love unconditionally, to be compassionate at times when I am feeling horrible, and to be so much more giving. When I look at one of my daughters who look so much like me, I can see myself as a little girl. This reminds me to be kinder to the little girl that lives inside me and to love and accept her as my own. It is the love*

*for my girls that makes me want to be a better person and to work on loving and accepting myself. However, with that being said, it is still so much easier to love my daughters. . .*

*Perhaps thinking about it this way makes more sense: Many of my patients are mothers who struggle with drug addiction. They love their children more than themselves. They destroy their lives, hate themselves, and often damage their bodies beyond repair. They say they hate themselves but they love their children. They believe their children are lovable, but they are not. On the surface, one might say, yes, some of them love their children more than themselves. However, doesn't loving your children mean not intentionally poisoning them emotionally by letting them be exposed to the way you poison yourself? Perhaps our issues are like secondhand smoke. At first, it was thought to be not so dangerous and by smoking we were only hurting ourselves. Yet, we have come to find out, years later, that secondhand smoke can be very deadly.*

Renaë Cobb, a therapist-in-training by day and an undercover writer and occasional blog contributor by night wrote:

*Certainly, the people we love inspire us to heights of love and compassion that we might have never achieved otherwise, but to really scale those heights, we often have to go to the depths of who we are, light/shadow, good/evil, loving/destructive, and figure out our own stuff in order to love them better. So I'm not sure it's an either/or, but a both/and. We love others fiercely, maybe more than we think we love ourselves, but that fierce love should drive us to the depths of ourselves so that we can learn to be compassionate with ourselves.*

I agree with Justina and Renaë. Loving and accepting ourselves are the ultimate acts of courage. In a society that says, "Put yourself last," self-love and self-acceptance are almost revolutionary.

If we want to take part in this revolution, we have to understand the anatomy of love and belonging; we need to understand when and why we hustle for worthiness rather than claim it; and we have to understand the things that get in the way. We encounter obstacles on every journey we make. The Wholehearted journey is no different.

**Affirmation:** I am ready to bravely own my story. I accept myself, my imperfections and my uniqueness. I will find the courage to be vulnerable, honest and open. Amen.