

The Way of Love

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Neighbor as Mirror

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Jesus told a parable that unsettled his audience then and continues to unsettle today. A man asked: *"And who is my neighbor?"* Perhaps he expected an answer that would allow him to limit his responsibility. What he received was the story of the good Samaritan — a despised foreigner who showed mercy when the respectable religious leaders passed by.

At the end, Jesus turned the question around: *"Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"* It was not about defining who deserves our love. It was about becoming people who love. The neighbor is not a category we limit; it is anyone we encounter on the road.

The people God places in our lives are not there by accident. The coworker who irritates us. The family member who doesn't understand our faith. The neighbor with opposite opinions. The beggar on the corner. Each one is an opportunity to love — and each one reveals something about ourselves.

Jesus said it plainly: *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"* What bothers us in others often points to something unresolved in ourselves. The person who drives us crazy may be the instrument God uses to show us areas where we still need to grow.

Paul understood this when he wrote: *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* Life in community — with all its friction and difficulties — is the workshop where character is polished. We can read about love in solitude, but we only learn it in relationship. We can admire patience in theory, but we only develop it when someone tests us.

This is why the church matters. Not because we are perfect — we clearly are not — but because we need each other to grow. *"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another,"* says Proverbs. Spiritual growth is not an individual project. It is something that happens in community, in giving and receiving, in forgiving and being forgiven, in loving real people with real flaws.

Jesus set the bar very high: *"Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you."* He did not say it would be easy. He said that this is how we become children of our heavenly Father, *"who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."*

The love Jesus teaches does not discriminate. It does not calculate whether the other deserves it. It does not expect reciprocity. It simply loves — because that is the nature of God, and we are called to reflect that nature. Every person we meet is an opportunity to practice that radical love. Every interaction is a moment of decision: will I respond from wounded ego or from the love of Christ in me?

Your neighbor — today's, this hour's — is your teacher. In him or her you will find exactly the lessons you need to learn.