



As a mental health counsellor I have the privilege of joining with people in their deepest struggles. I hear harrowing stories of neglect, abuse, self-loathing, loneliness. At the heart of these varying stories there is a common tragedy: the profoundly painful experience of not being loved.

The current cultural antidote to this is simple - love yourself. Self love, as Miley Cyrus's song "Flowers" exemplifies, has become our collective catch cry in response to the heartbreak of life.

As the lyrics go:

*I can buy myself flowers
Write my name in the sand
Talk to myself for hours, yeah
Say things you don't understand
I can take myself dancing, yeah
I can hold my own hand
Yeah, I can love me better than you can.*

There is good in this sentiment. An individual has value despite how terribly they have been treated by others. It is good for hurt people to take time to heal and be kind to themselves.

However the Bible teaches that we are intrinsically relational beings and deep down I think we all feel that a life alone without the love of any other human is a terrifying idea. Miley Cyrus herself has said the original lyrics were "But I can't love me better than you can" and the final version has a "fake til you make it" vibe.

Insert Jesus' radical teaching to "love your neighbour as yourself." I marvel at the perfect balance of this call. Self-love is necessary and good but human flourishing can only occur when our love for self becomes the measure of our care for others.

Can you imagine what the world would look like if everyone of us actually lived out this calling? Think about your last week - the times you've been offended or hurt by others. What distress would have been avoided if others had treated you with the same love they have for themselves? Inversely, are there times you've disregarded others feelings and needs and acted only with your own concerns in mind? How would it have been different if you'd loved others as you love yourself?

To love your neighbour as yourself is truly a revolutionary, world changing idea. But how can we do it? The world with its violence, oppression, corruption, greed... seems a perpetual reminder that we can't. Closer to home my own family with squabbles over the best seat or the biggest piece of cake also reveal the difficulty of Jesus's radical call to love others as ourselves.

Thanks be to God, Jesus who calls us to this revolutionary love also fulfils it. This is the Christian message - Jesus Christ loved us as himself when he died on our behalf.

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Do you want to know and follow this wise and loving Jesus? You can. Why not read his words in the Bible and speak to him in prayer today?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, You are wise. Your ways are perfect. What you call me to do in loving others as myself is life changing and life giving. Yet I keep failing. Please forgive me. Thank you that you have loved me by giving your life to pay for my sins. Help me to know and follow you. Amen.