

“In a world of complexity and competing values, Chris Cipollone calibrates our spiritual compass, adjusting it to the true north, to what matters most—love. Chris speaks with clarity and wisdom while remaining refreshingly accessible and practical. *Here to Love* doesn’t just theorise about love; it helps us live it, with real-world examples and thoughtful reflection questions. Truth can be uncomfortable, and Chris doesn’t shy away from naming it. Yet he does so as a fellow disciple, with humility and a heart of service. *Here to Love* will convict, encourage and equip you to love God and neighbour more faithfully—not in grand gestures but in the unseen, quiet moments of daily life, right where it really matters.”

REV. DR MICHAEL BRÄUTIGAM,
Vice Principal, Melbourne School of Theology

“The modern phrase ‘Love is love’ has reduced love to a philosophical Mobius strip: an abstract concept that loops around on itself. Chris Cipollone breaks this loop by landing on a biblical understanding of love, one that is rooted in sacrificial service of others. He helpfully unpacks how Jesus fulfils the law of love in himself, culminating at the cross, and then empowers *us* to love. The final section is a cracker: filled with up-to-date examples of what love looks like in action in our messy modern West, replete as it is with misdirected love, self-love and tribalism. Expect to be challenged—but expect to come away saying, ‘Love is now not only something that I know I *should* do, and not merely something that I *want* to do, but something that, by the power of the Spirit through the risen Jesus, I am *able* to do!’ Love it!”

STEPHEN MCALPINE,
Author, *Futureproof* and *Being the Bad Guys*

CHRIS
CIPOLLONE

Recapturing
the Centrality of
Jesus' Greatest
Command

here
to
love

"Moves our view
of love from *should*
to *want* to *can*."

STEPHEN
McALPINE

the goodbook
COMPANY

*To my family—I hope you will always know me
as a man of love.*

Here to Love

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*Truly he taught us to love one another;
His law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name, all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his holy name.
Christ is the Lord; O praise his name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim!*

—“O Holy Night”

Introduction

What is the meaning of life?
It's the question that sits at the very heart of our existence.

Most of us have asked it.

Some of us have tried, unsuccessfully, to answer it.

And then there are those select few—the arrogant ones who claim they've cracked the code.

Guess what? I'm one of the arrogant ones. The worst kind, in fact—the guy who writes a book and says, "You can discover the secret, too". A motivational-speaking, pyramid-selling, self-exalting guru.

Hopefully not. But I am, with hand on heart, telling you I do believe I've found the answer to this question. Not with a sense of arrogance—it's got nothing to do with any supreme intellect I may possess. Rather, it's a confident boast in a promise which comes not from within but from God himself.

As a Christian, it's so easy to lose the forest among the trees. I've observed it within myself and I've seen it within others. We can get so caught up in social dilemmas, theological battles, church disputes and pastoral needs that we begin to forget what captured us

about Jesus in the first place. When we lose our focus, we risk forgetting the collective purpose he's asking us to join in with. Sometimes, first principles remain the best principles.

How should you spend your money? Choose a church? Select a career or pursue a partner? Those questions might seem difficult and disconnected—but I'm more certain than ever that there is a single umbrella principle which sits above these, and every other, facet of life.

A principle that would help governments focus on policies rather than political turf wars. A principle that would push companies to pursue unique solutions rather than insecure attempts at ego-building. Or—perhaps more relevant to you, the person who's picked up this book—a principle that allows you to live out your God-given call each and every day.

Welcome to the world of the select few. The ones who've worked out the meaning of life. Welcome to a life of supreme ~~arrogance~~ clarity.



PART 1

all you
need
is love



CHAPTER 1

The Teaching of Teachings

Life is complex. Whether it's career, relationships, finances or faith, there seem to be endless ways to structure our purpose.

Vegetarianism. Minimalism. Capitalism. Nationalism. Feminism. Environmentalism. Pessimism. Optimism!

Which will you choose? You're not short on options—these eight “isms” alone can be combined to make over 40,000 different possibilities. Maybe you could be a vegetarian environmentalist. Or a minimalistic feminist. Or... how about a capitalistic nationalist? A pessimistic optimist? Sounds like a tortured existence to me.

And when we overlay these “isms” with Christian ones, the possibilities become exponential.

Throw in capitalism with a side of Anglicanism.

Feminism with a dose of Calvinism.

A vegetarian complementarian.

An environmentalist credo-baptist.

You get the point. It's confusing!

WHY AM I HERE?

These identities, and the many others like them, exist for a very good reason. Behind each is a longing deep within us—a desperate craving for answers to those most fundamental human questions.

Why are we here?

Is it even possible to discover the meaning of life?

Or more personally: What is it that I've been placed on this earth to do? Who am I, and what is my life about? Should I prioritise this or that? Do I go there or stay here? *Which "isms" should I choose?*

This is us. Multifaceted, complicated, nuanced human beings, trying to find our place in the world any way we can.

Now hear me clearly—my point is not that we shouldn't care about the environment, or baptism, or any of those other issues. We *should* care. What I'm trying to show you is that life can become very complex very quickly. (And we can get into arguments about it very quickly.) In order to navigate these complexities, we need a greater way of thinking that stands above it all.

We need a bigger vision.

THE KEY TO IT ALL

Life is messy. And God is infinite. But inside the treasures of Scripture, plain to see for those who are willing to look, is the key we desperately need in order to unlock everything else in our lives. A key that helps us see God properly and ourselves rightly, and that therefore is able to inform every single decision we make.

Just as a successful company needs a vision statement, so too do we need a place to begin. An

aspiration for life that can trickle from the highest-level thoughts right down to our everyday actions. Without it, we drown in possibilities.

So what is this apparently magic key that God has revealed to us? The key to unlock the mysteries of life itself?

Here it is.

Are you ready?

Of course you are—I told you what it was in the title. No drumrolls required.

It's love.

All you need is love.

Love is all you need.

I'm not the first to discover this key (and neither were the Beatles). It isn't a special revelation for the select few. It's a truth that God has laid out for all of us, if we would just pause on it for long enough.

Pausing is hard. Really hard. To pause on anything means you have decided it is worthy of your precious time and energy. Pausing on one thing means forsaking something else you could be doing.

But this is a pause worth taking. In fact it's *because* of our finiteness that we must take it. There's only one of you, but millions of possibilities for how you could live. Spend the time now to discover what God's bigger plan is, and it will allow you to live with more focus, clarity and purpose in all the other parts of your life.

When I first discovered this way of love, I was hesitant to accept it. It felt naïve—even arrogant—to reduce God and his purpose for our lives down to a

single idea. It seemed more like a quick Instagram post than a piece of robust theology to base life upon. It was almost too simple.

But since then, I've learned that simple doesn't have to mean simplistic. The more I've tested it, both through the lens of the Bible and through lived experience, the more certain I am of its wisdom. I've discovered that it is easy, at least in concept. Perhaps not so much in practice.

It's tempting to think that the reason you're here on earth is to be the best Calvinistic minimalist you can be. But I think Jesus would say your core purpose is something much deeper and richer. Believe in those things—sure. But God is telling you there's something far more important that stands above all else.

Maybe you *know* that already. But how are you going at *living* it?

THE TEACHING

It was in a simple, unassuming moment of reading the Bible that I discovered this way of love. I can't even remember if it was in a personal quiet time, group Bible study or sermon preparation slot. What I do remember was the jolt of the Holy Spirit when the words leaped out on the page in a new and enriched way.

I'd been a Christian for a long time and even had a theological degree under my belt. But as I was reading a passage that I was familiar with (or so I thought), God's Spirit revealed a tiny phrase that I had previously overlooked. It stopped me completely in my tracks.

The passage was Matthew 22. For a bit of context, we're at a point in Jesus' life where he's nearing the end.

He's just entered Jerusalem in what looks like triumph, being hailed by the crowds as a king. But he knows it won't last.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Matthew 21:45-46

The crowds love Jesus—but the religious elite can't stand him. And as his ministry begins to reach a climax, so too does the tension between Christ and the religious leaders. It's within this tension that we see some of the most famous moments in the entire Bible. The turning over of the tables in the temple. The parable of the two sons. The parable of the tenants. "Rend to Caesar what is Caesar's."

But for all its famous moments, it's not until the end of chapter 22 that we see the teaching that became the key to my understanding of life itself.

In Matthew 22:34, we read that the Pharisees come together in an effort to test Jesus. Their plan is to make him look like a fool—or preferably, a heretic. He's put them offside, and now they want to show the adoring crowds that he's just a peasant from Nazareth and nothing more.

Their fellow elite religious group, the Sadducees, have just left with their tails between their legs. Jesus, in his perfect wisdom, has exposed the flaws in their doctrine right in front of everyone. So, what will the Pharisees do about this problem individual? Like the

Sadducees, they decide they will try to trap Jesus with an impossible question.

Poor Pharisees. They don't know what's about to hit them.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Matthew 22:34-36

We read explicitly that the intention of the question is to test Jesus. So why does this seem like the perfect trap—to ask for a greatest commandment? Let's slow down to consider Jesus' options.

One possibility is that he does choose a single greatest commandment. But there's a problem if Jesus does this. If he chooses one, they can accuse him of not caring about the rest. They can say he's choosing one part of God's word above the others—a kind of theological favourite child. You can imagine the smug faces as they ask their next question: *Why doesn't the rest of the Law matter to you, Jesus?*

The other possibility is that he doesn't choose any commandment. But there's a problem here as well. If he doesn't choose one, then he looks like an ignorant fool who doesn't know what he's talking about. *How can you be the Son of God if you don't even know the Bible, Jesus?*

You can see the problem: he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. The Pharisees have trapped Jesus into a corner.

Or so it seems.

THE TRUMP CARD

What the Pharisees haven't accounted for is that there may, in fact, be a third option. An option which does indeed choose a commandment while still showing a full knowledge and love of the rest of the Scriptures.

For this third option to work, it can't just be a better commandment than all the rest. It has to be a commandment that encompasses all the rest.

I'll say that again: This can't just be a *better* commandment than all the rest. It has to be a commandment that *encompasses* all the rest.

Jesus, in his perfect wisdom, delivers that commandment:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Matthew 22:37-39

It's the perfect response from the perfect man.

Not one commandment, but two. Or, perhaps more accurately, commandment 1a and commandment 1b. Both relate to and build on each other.

If you love God you will also love your neighbour. And when you're loving your neighbour, you're also loving the God who created that person. Multiple expressions of love, each bound up in the other.

It sounds like a great answer, but if it's true, it requires a lot of unpacking. This is the journey we'll go on together for the rest of this book.

But for now, as we focus back in on Jesus and the Pharisees, we need to realise that the Son of God isn't

off the hook just yet. Why not? Because he could still be accused of playing theological favourites. We're back to the problem of option one. As beautiful as the idea of love is, couldn't Jesus be accused of dismissing or undermining the importance of the rest of the Law? What about the rest of the Scriptures?

With these questions at the forefront of our thoughts, we hit the words that are unlike any other I had ever encountered.

A LIFE-CHANGING THREE-LETTER WORD

It's the verse of verses. The teaching of teachings. Different from all the rest.

Many of us will be able to recall these two great commandments of verses 37-39. But like I had always done, it's easy to end there. When we do that, we miss something extraordinary. We miss verse 40.

Jesus has just given us the "what". Now he will give us the "why".

Why does he choose these two commandments, and how can he do this while still showing a knowledge and a love for the rest of the Law? How can he give a social-media-length theological statement and still silence the most learned religious experts?

Here it comes. Here was the part I had glossed over for so many years.

He can do this because...

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Matthew 22:40

All.

All the Law.

And even though the Pharisees are only interested in hearing about the Law, Jesus goes a step further.

All the Prophets as well.

All.

“The Law and the Prophets” is a phrase that means the entire Old Testament—everything God had said up to that point. So, this response is the only way Jesus can answer the Pharisees’ question while still showing his perfect knowledge of God’s word. He is able to answer simply and yet comprehensively.

He isn’t saying that these two commandments are the best because they’re *more important* than the rest. No. He’s saying that these two commandments are the best because they *are* all the rest.

Do you see the difference? Not better, but all-encompassing.

It is a mind-blowing, universe-shaking, life-changing verse.

Jesus is saying that you could read the Bible every day for the rest of your life, but if you do it without a love for God or don’t apply what you’ve learned by loving people, then you’ve wasted your time. A timely warning for the Pharisees, and a warning for those of us who have been Christians for any length of time.

Conversely, you could be brand-new to faith and not feel like you know enough about the Bible yet—but Jesus is saying that if you understand the centrality of love, then you have what you need to go out into the rest of your life with meaning and purpose. A timely

encouragement for those considering Christianity.

Two testaments. 66 books. 1,189 chapters. 31,102 verses. And Jesus is able to boil it *all* down for us into one key statement. It's his vision statement for life—and when properly understood, it should be ours as well.

Love really is the key to unlock everything else you need to understand about life. Why? Because...

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Matthew 22:40