

JOURNAL PROMPTS

**Prompt 1:** Here are a few statements from this month’s *Monastic Way*. Choose one that is most helpful to you and journal with it.

- “Love is not always ecstasy. It is sometimes simply the surety that when things are dull someone will be watching us with a tender eye.”
- “The human being is made for love, is not self-sufficient, cannot exist alone. Therefore, learning how to love someone besides ourselves is essential to our own development as a human being.”
- “To love another is to come to understand the love of God for us.”

**Prompt 2:** Spend a few minutes with this photograph and journal about its relationship to this month’s *Monastic Way*. You can do that with prose or a poem or a song or....

PRAYER

Listen: If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your heart.  
Listen: If today you hear God’s voice, poison not your tongue.  
Listen: If today you hear God’s voice, close not your imagination.  
Listen: If today you hear God’s voice, judge not the speck in the neighbor’s eye.  
Listen: If today you hear God’s voice, kneel and kiss the earth, speak the truth, walk in beauty, love with extravagance.

—Mary Lou Kownacki

SCRIPTURE ECHO

*“If I, your teacher, have washed your feet, then you also should wash one another’s feet; I have given you an example, that so you also should do.”*  
—JOHN 13:14



KAREN BUKOWSKI

Joan Chittister

JUNE 2024

THE MONASTIC WAY

...daily insights to stir the heart and seed the soul.

WHAT IS LOVE?

There are times when it seems that so much has been written about love there is no more to be said about it. And, worse, sometimes it seems that so much that has been written about love that is pure drivel—unattained and unattainable. Or, pure theory of a theological kind talks about “loving” God when I have yet to understand human love, let alone the divine. But love is none of those things, alone and entirely. Love is far more meaningful than that.

Love is something learned only by the long, hard labor of life. It is sometimes over before we’ve even known we ever had it. We sometimes destroy it before we appreciate it. We often have it and simply take it for granted.

But sometimes, if we’re lucky, we live long enough to grow into it in such a way that because of it we come to recognize the value of life. As the years go by, we come to love flowers and cats and small infants and old ladies and life on the dock and the one person who knows how hot we like our coffee. We learn enough about love to allow things to slip away and ourselves to melt into the God whose love made all of it possible. Sometimes we even find a love deep enough, tender enough to detach us from the foam and frills of life, all of which hold us captive to things that cannot satisfy.

Sometimes we live long enough to see the face of God in another. Then, in that case, we have loved.



KAREN BUKOWSKI

The poets and storytellers across time have told us about the dimensions of love that last.

The poet Rumi wrote: “From myself I am copper, through You, friend, I am gold. From myself I’m a stone, but through You I am a gem!”

And in the course of World War I, the story was told that a young sergeant begged his commanding officer to allow him to go back onto the battlefield to rescue his fallen friend. “If you do that, we’ll lose you both” the officer said. But the sergeant begged and the officer relented. After the battle, when the battalion was finally able to retrieve

both bodies, the sergeant was still alive but losing ground rapidly. “Now do you see how useless it was to go out there?” the officer demanded. “Oh no, sir, it was all worth it,” the sergeant whispered as he breathed his last. “You see, when I finally got to him, he said to me, ‘Jack, I knew you’d come.’”

Real love enables everything we are. Real love knows no costs.



Joan Chittister

FUND FOR PRISONERS



**“Prisoners are the most forgotten people in society and the least served in Christianity. Help me change that.”**  
—Joan Chittister

We work with a network of prison chaplains and volunteers across the country to send thousands of free copies of *The Monastic Way* to women and men in prison. A donation of \$12.00 will send a one-year subscription to a prisoner that can:

- provide beauty to battered and bleak lives
- deliver daily positive reflective messages to stir the heart and seed the soul
- enable caring conversations that give people in prison something to believe in and a sense of the presence of God in themselves.

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**JOAN CHITTISTER** is an internationally known author and lecturer and a clear visionary voice across all religions. She has written more than 60 books and received numerous awards for her writings and work on behalf of peace and women in the church and in society.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Each month, join the staff of Benetvision on a free Zoom call to discuss the current issue of *The Monastic Way*. Several times each year, Sister Joan leads the Zoom session. Subscribers will receive invitations to register for these calls in their email inbox.

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**SATURDAY, JUNE 1:** To love another is to come to understand the love of God for us. The way we love another is one small glimpse of how much we ourselves are cared for.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 2:** “My love for you is the sole image/Of God a human is allowed,” Else Lasker-Schuler wrote. But if that is true, then not to love another is to risk not knowing the love of God, as well.

**MONDAY, JUNE 3:** Love smooths the way and fills the gaps that life without it can never manage.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 4:** Life without a soul-companion who loves us for what we are rather than for what we have acquired or accomplished is not life at all. It is at best a collection of days and things that add up in the end only to a collection of days and things.

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5:** To be loved is to enjoy together what cannot possibly be completely enjoyed alone.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 6:** The one who loves us insists that I love myself enough to become what I am meant to be.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 7:** The philosopher Simone Weil put it this way: “Love is not consolation,” she wrote, “it is light.” Love gives us strength for the dark places in life. If we are loved, we can, if we will, lose anything and survive the loss.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 8:** It is one thing to enable the person we love to become everything they are capable of being. It is another thing to nag them. Love allows a person to grow at a pace different than our own.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 9:** Love stands by. When there is nothing more that we can do for the person we love than to be there while they struggle, that is more than enough.

**MONDAY, JUNE 10:** Love is not always ecstasy. It is sometimes simply the surety that when things are dull someone will be watching us with a tender eye.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 11:** Love releases everything in us: all the energy, all the excitement, all the possibilities, all the self-protectiveness. “With love,” Hazrat Inayat Khan writes, “even the rocks will open.” Which means, of course, that a failure to cultivate love has, as well, a negative effect on us. Think about it.

*Love releases us  
to be more than  
what we must be  
but never less than  
we should be.*

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12:** Christianity is the only religion on earth that is about unconditional love of enemies. In that case, why is it, do you suppose, that the Christian world has gone to war so much?

**THURSDAY, JUNE 13:** To love someone other than the self is to become twice the person we thought we were because we add their strengths to our own. Love is not meant to take away from my development. It is meant to double it.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 14:** Clinging to another person is not loving, it is parasitical. It says that there is nothing in me of myself that is worth loving. To be really loving I must be a self-sustaining, developing individual who is interesting enough for someone to want to be with me for the rest of my life.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 15:** Intimacy and sex are not the same thing. That single understanding, if carefully considered, could help people to avoid a lot of bad marriages and could, at the same time, save a lot of good ones.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 16:** Intimacy is the joy of both knowing and being known by someone who knows exactly who you are and loves you, both despite it and for it. Chaucer says that “love is blind” but it might be closer to the real truth to say that love sees with clearer, kinder eyes.

**MONDAY, JUNE 17:** The Greek proverb teaches that “the heart that loves is always young.” Isn’t that lovely? It means exactly what it says: always “a little giddy,” always “a little more alive,” always “excited about what the future is about to bring.” But for that to be true, love cannot be taken for granted. It must be nurtured.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 18:** Every love, whatever happens to it in the long run, teaches us more about ourselves, our needs, our limitations, and our self-centeredness than anything else we can ever experience. If we cherish each one of them and learn from each one of them, someday we will be worth the love we finally find. Or, as Aldous Huxley wrote: “There isn’t any formula or method. You learn to love by loving.”

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19:** The human being is made for love, is not self-sufficient, cannot exist alone. Therefore, learning how to love someone besides ourselves is essential to our own development as a human being. The French are quite clear about it: “What!” they say, “No star, and you are going out to sea? Marching, and you have no music? Traveling, and you have no book? What! No love, and you are going out to live?”

**THURSDAY, JUNE 20:** Marriage is not the only way to love wholly. Love involves a mingling of the soul, not simply a giving of the body. “Love,” James Thurber wrote, “is what you have been through with somebody.”

**FRIDAY, JUNE 21:** Love drives us to the heights of our souls. When we

love children, we do something to protect them. When we love people, we do something to cultivate it. When we love, we take care of the world. Ah, yes, the truth is clear. As Igor Stravinsky reminds us, “There is no force more potent than love.”

**SATURDAY, JUNE 22:** Chemistry and commitment—physical attraction and commonness of heart—are two different things. Sometimes we have to wait through the first in order to determine whether the second really exists or not.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 23:** Trust what you feel about a person more than you depend on what you see. Society sets physical standards for beauty that have little or nothing to do with the soul. Or, as the Jewish proverb teaches, “The heart sees better than the eye.”

**MONDAY, JUNE 24:** It isn’t when we’re angry with a person that we can be sure that love is gone. On the contrary, anger may be the very measure of a genuine affection. It’s when we really don’t care one way or another that we can be sure that a relationship has died.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 25:** Love is the only thing that links us to heaven.

Rule-keeping won’t do it; self-righteousness won’t do it; perfectionism won’t do it, “Love,” Grace Aquilar writes, “is the voice of God.” It calls us beyond ourselves; it creates life; it gives a person a reason to get up in the morning. And, love has absolutely nothing to do with age.

*Love releases  
everything in us:  
all the energy,  
all the excitement,  
all the possibilities,  
all the self-  
protectiveness.*

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26:** There is no love that does not teach us something. The only problem is that we must ask ourselves consciously what it is. Otherwise, we will be likely either to learn nothing about ourselves or to blame the loss of it on everyone else but ourselves.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 27:** Amelia Barr wrote, “The fate of love is that it always seems too little or too much.” Take that as a warning.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 28:** To expect too much from the love of another is to require them to be the happiness that ought to come from within.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 29:** To find that we have gotten too little love from the other may mean that we have become less than the self we ourselves ought to be. Love releases us to be more than what we must be but never less than we should be.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 30:** Uncle George showed up on the doorstep one day and stayed for nine years. On the day he finally left, she said to her husband on the way back from depositing George at the airport, “You know Henry, I think it was a bit presumptuous of you to assume that I was going to take care of your Uncle George all those years without ever even discussing it with me!” Henry slammed down on the brakes. “My Uncle George?!” he said. “All these years I thought he was your Uncle George!” Point: Love talks about everything.



## LET’S SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

The following discussion questions, Scripture echo, journal prompts, and prayer are meant to help you reflect more deeply on *The Monastic Way*. Choose at least two suggestions and respond to them. You may do it as a personal practice or gather a group interested in sharing the spiritual journey.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sister Joan writes, “It is one thing to enable the person we love to become everything they are capable of being. It is another thing to nag them. Love allows a person to grow at a pace different than our own.” Has anyone enabled growth in you through patience? Have you enabled it in others? If you were asked what you have learned from loving others over long periods of time, over decades, how would you answer? What advice would you now give your younger self at the beginning of a relationship with partner or with a friend?
2. Which daily quote in *The Monastic Way* is most meaningful to you? Why? Do you agree with it? Disagree? Did it inspire you? Challenge you? Raise questions for you?

3. After reading *The Monastic Way* write one question that you would like to ask the author about this month’s topic.
4. Joan Chittister uses other literature to reinforce and expand her writing. Find another quote, poem, story, song, art piece, or novel that echoes the theme of this month’s *Monastic Way*.
5. Sister Joan writes of this month’s theme, What is Love: “Love drives us to the heights of our souls. When we love children, we do something to protect them. When we love people, we do something to cultivate it. When we love, we take care of the world.” Do you have an imagine or story that is a model for you of this love, this care of the world, in action? Have you seen it in your own life? Have you experienced this passion to protect? To cultivate? To care for the world? If so, how did you give it expression?