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Presentation Transcript
True Spiritual 07 – Loving Others
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This presentation is the seventh in a series on *True Spirituality*. Last time we talked about *Loving God*, and today we're going to talk about *Loving Others*. This is an important piece in our picture of what's important to God. And it may be the most difficult of all the things that we talk about in this series. You'll remember that we began the series talking about what God thinks, and we talked about that in terms of *God Knows Best*. We're going to talk about this subject the same way.

Let's go to Matthew 22, verse 34, and read one of our keynote scriptures for this series.

Mt. 22:34 – *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment of the law?" And Jesus said to him, "You shall love Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* So like I said, last week we talked about *Loving God*, and this week, we're going to talk about the second great commandment, *Loving Others*.

Let's notice that we're supposed to take care of other people the same way we take care of ourselves. We're supposed to love other people the same way we love ourselves. That's sort of the baseline as to how we take care of self. Same care for others. Why? Why does God want us to do this? Well, I think He wants us to understand that we're all connected. We're all *one* human family. We all have the same needs. If we take care of other people, and meet their needs the way we try to meet our own, then we'll be happy. And everyone will be happy. Love is not something that is directed toward a few people. It is a way to look at life and everybody in it. So, when we talk about that, and we talk about loving others, it should be understood that we're talking about an attitude that we have expressed toward everyone all our lives. And it's something that we get better at all our lives.

Now, to do what God is telling us is really important to Him, we have to have a measure of empathy. That's the ability to walk in other people's shoes, and to understand what they're experiencing and what they need. You can't take care of other people if you don't know what they need, can you? So we have to have the ability to understand their experience. That's called empathy.

There are a lot of laws in the Bible. And this law is the foundation of all of them. So, that's our foundation for this presentation. The reason for all the rules that we have is to show us how to love God, and how to love and take care of everyone else.

We read this scripture in our Bible study this morning, but let's look at it again. It's in James 1, verse 27. No, I'm sorry. We didn't. We read one that follows.

Jm. 1:27 – *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

I was talking to a minister some years ago, (we had talked in the past about the importance of relating on a personal level to the kids in our congregations) and he told me about a conversation that he had with another minister, who disagreed with him as he expressed this opinion. This other minister said, "No, what was really important to God is adherence to the law." And I think he meant by that, coming to church – making sure your kids come to church – tithing, and wearing a suit, and all that sort of thing – all our oral tradition. He didn't understand that the point of all the laws – all the rules – is to show us *how* to love each other and how to love God. That's the point of it all. We both knew this man, and that helped me understand more about why he was the way he was. His religion is rather mechanistic – sort of a mechanical approach to God, rather than a relationally warm and loving one.

We gave a series recently called *Reclaiming Lost Children*. Well, I got a letter from one of those lost children recently. She's an adult now. She said in her letter, "About six years ago I started to attend a non-denominational church in the community where I live. The pastor was great. The music spoke to my heart. And I found a community that didn't judge me and loved me the way I was. I'd found grace – something I was rarely taught about when I was a child. But something was still missing – knowledge. I found the depth of understanding was missing. It was okay for people to keep on sinning. Or they would talk about sin and not have it defined, because they didn't believe in the law. That didn't make sense to me. I mean, it's so logical that sin is the transgression of the law, right?" And then she says, "And I think facetiously, 'No, not right – at least to them.' It was all grace focused – and without knowledge of what the Bible really says." We talked this morning about the grace and the truth of Jesus Christ. Right? You have to have *both*. And she said, "I kind of see like an analogy between overeating without exercise. The church I grew up in was *fat* with knowledge, but lacking in the application – or the exercise – of that knowledge. There was so little feeding the poor and loving the stranger. It was so much about being right, and having the corner on the market of knowing the truth." So, she's pointing out that she came from a church organization at one extreme, and that she went to one that was on the other. And that neither one of them really had everything they

needed. Some people make a religion out of focusing on the rules. And other people make a religion out of focusing on grace. You really have to have both. God shows us that grace – the favor of God lavished graciously upon us, though we don't deserve it – is to inspire us to treat other people the way God has treated us. And He shows us through the Law how to go about doing that. And He says that that can all be summed up by loving others the way we love ourselves – taking care of other people – our neighbor – just like we would want to be taken care of – like we try to take care of ourselves.

So, the Law shows how to relate effectively to God and to others, if we know that's what it's for. Now, we mentioned earlier that the Law points us toward empathy – that is, understanding the experience of others. I want to delve into that a little bit. I want to go back to James 1:27, where we were just reading.

Jm. 1: 27 – *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.* If we have empathy, we can understand that being an orphan or a widow is troublesome. Some people don't. You know, they just have that warmed and filled approach, and they don't *do* anything to help them, because they don't really realize that there's any problem with being an orphan or a widow.

In our society today, we have another category that might well be added to that list, and that is the single mom category. I worked with a woman at school for about three years. She was divorced. She was supporting three teenage children on a school social worker's salary. After we got to know each other, she would ask me questions about her car, about house maintenance issues, financial questions, how to deal with the men she encountered even. I surmised from all that that she had a lot of things to deal with I didn't – at least that she couldn't take care of in the same way that I could. Her life was hard. Most of her friends, of course, were women, so didn't have any male input on those two rambunctious teenage boys of hers. And yet, in spite of all the problems she had in trying to house, and clothe, and feed and transport four people on a very minimal salary – in spite of all that – she had a career. She was making a difference in the lives of other people. She was social. She was resilient enough that she could reach out both to help others and to be helped by them in a non-demanding way. She mentioned to me one time, when we were talking about money, that she spent ten percent of her income helping people who were less fortunate than she. She tithed. She didn't give it all to church, but she spent ten percent of her income on helping others. I think I know a lot of people in the Church of God that make a lot more money than she does that deeply resent having to tithe – kind of resent God for requiring that of them. Yet, here's this lady, who had relatively little, happily and graciously doling out a tenth of her income to help others. In my interactions with her, as I got to know her, I had a choice. I could take the “warm and filled” approach, or I could take the “visit her in her trouble” approach. Because we worked together in a professional setting, we had to hold boundaries to some degree. And she was probably more cautious with that than I was. But I would occasionally look at her car, and listen to the strange sounds it made, and tell her what I thought it might be, and direct her toward somebody who might be able to help her fix that. I remember I took her four kids four-wheeling one time, because she told me that her boys seemed to be lacking male influence. We would talk about her finances and what to do with her kids. I

suppose that the empathy that I had for her came from two sources. One from just listening to her talk, comparing her life to mine, and also from working with a lot of other single moms over the years in the ministry.

Let's look in Philippians 2, verse 1, and think about something else when we think about empathy.

Philp. 2:1 – *Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy (and there is supposed to be all of those things), fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. And let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit. But in lowliness of mind, esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out, not only his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

We naturally think about what we need – what is important to us. We just do. It's wired into us. There are some people that don't, but that's because they have so lactic, faulty strategies for living, or have been deeply wounded in some way. But most of us, we just naturally look out for number one, and we're always thinking about what's good for us. But God directs us to also think about what others need, and what's important to them. This is very hard for us because we're not naturally inclined that way.

Let's skip to verse 18.

V-18 – He said, *“For this same reason, you also be glad and rejoice with me. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Jesus Christ.”* So, not only are we to think about *our* needs and those around us, but also we have to empathize with God as well. What does *He* need us to do? What does *He* want?

You'll notice from this passage that this is hard for ministers to do. He's talking about all the other ministers that are all involved in their own state, and that he didn't have anybody else that he could send except for Timothy – and that he was somebody that would *care* for them – like he would take care of himself. Timothy was completely dedicated.

We shouldn't be embittered or surprised when ministers act like other people, because they just *are*. It comes along with being human. Let's look in 2 Timothy 1:2 and see what Paul says about Timothy – to him – about this ability to take care of other people.

2 Tim. 1:2 – *To Timothy, a beloved son, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears that I may be filled with joy when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.* So here's a minister

who has genuine faith – who really takes seriously what God tells him to do. And he’s out there taking care of other people like he’d like to be taken care of. He’s involved in taking care of God and doing God’s things the way God wants. And he calls that *genuine faith*. That’s how we’re to be. It’s just as hard for ministers to have genuine faith as it is for other people. It’s just as hard for them to exhibit true spirituality.

I’ve talked to a lot of people that are really angry toward their parents, toward the police, toward the courts, toward their ministers, toward their church organization, toward their employers. Holding grudges against authority figures is a sickness. And we need to work through that – move past it – so we can get on unstuck and go on to take care of ourselves and others, and put the things of God first in our life. Because if we get stuck on hating somebody, then we are never going to be able to move on to do those things. We’ve got to get past that. Until we do that, we just add to the pool of unspiritually-minded people who make our congregations toxic and turn off our kids. I meet so many people that struggle with that. I’d just like to say, “If you have a problem, it’s good to talk about it.” You can talk to me. I’ll help you start on the road out of that. There’s a way to *do* that. If you’re embittered over church – or family – inflicted hurts from your past, you need to spend some effort to take care of yourself first so that you *can* take care of other people more effectively and serve God’s people.

God has graciously covered all of us with a protective bubble of gracious love and favor. And He wants us to spread that to others. If we’re deeply embittered toward somebody, we can’t do that. It’s a roadblock. So we have to get past those things.

So that’s what I wanted to say about empathy. And I want to move on next to what love really is. I was talking to a young woman I know, who just graduated from university, and she has a pretty good sense of humor. She was telling me a story about her spacey roommate, who would always say, “I love love.” (in a sing-song voice) She’s just sort of one of these “twitterpated with everything” kind of people. What *is* love? What is it really? Can we examine it, and break it down, and understand what it is? Well, we *can*, actually. There’s a lot of ways to do that. There’s one, over the years, that I’ve found particularly helpful, so I’m going to pass it on to you.

You can think about love as having four important elements to it. The first one is *care*. No exclamations of love are believable if we don’t care for those we profess to love. I think I told you recently about that sixteen-year-old who said he was going to shoot himself because his family didn’t care about him. And we were busy trying to convince him that they *did* love him. I mean, they *said* they loved him when we talked to them. But I noticed when he was readmitted to the hospital, because of the suicidal thinking, they took off on a vacation and left him there alone. So do we believe they really loved him? No, we don’t, do we? So, caring about and *for* those we love – or profess to love – is in part what determines whether we love them or not. So, love is an *active concern* for the growth and well-being of the people that we love. Let me say that again. Love is an active concern for the *growth* and *well-being* of those that we profess to love.

You know, all you folks who are busy tearing your congregations apart over picky doctrinal issues, do you really care about the people you've known for so long? Your behavior would say, "No." Especially the children, who need a stable, spiritual environment. What *is* really important to you? Do your priorities match God's? Are you a spiritually-minded person? Where the rubber meets the road, spirituality isn't that hard to define.

There was this man named Jonah. He was a prophet of God, and God told him to go to Ninevah, the capital of Assyria, and warn them to repent, or He was going to punish them. So that's God taking care of His kids, right? You always give them a warning before you administer the punishment. Otherwise, it's not discipline. Well, Jonah's afraid that the people of Ninevah will repent once he warns them, and that God will forgive them, and all his prophecies then will not come true, and he'll look bad. So this is a guy who has a strong sense of law and order, but not much love. I mean, we're talking about pretty serious punishment here, and a lot of people dying and being severely chastised. So, he buys a ticket on a ship and attempts to run away from God. And I'd just like to add a note here to those who want to run away from God. *Do not* try it by ship! (Chuckles) And I'm leaving out some details, but he wound up in the belly of a really, really big fish! And isn't that always the way it happens to those who are rigid about the rules, but have no love? They wind up isolated, alone, in the dark, being digested by the rigors of life. And fortunately for God, and God's mercy, Jonah, after three days of digestion, was vomited up on the beach. Then he goes to Ninevah, as he should have done to begin with, and preaches to the people. And, as he feared, they repented. And as he feared, God forgave them. And as he feared, they were *not* punished.

So he gets *really* angry that all these people repented and were spared from tribulation, and gets really depressed. Anger and depression, the Bible shows us, are a lot the same things. He wanted justice and not mercy. Right? That's what he wanted. So then something really instructive happens to Jonah. Let's read it in Jonah 4, and verse 5.

Jonah 4:5 – *So Jonah went out of the city* – this is after all his worst fears came true – everybody was spared because they repented, and now they're obeying God, and they're going to be blessed, and he's really hacked about it – so he went out of the city *and sat on the east side of the city. And there he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade that he might see what would become of the city.* They had a very hot climate there, so he put up a little sunshade for himself. *And the LORD God prepared a plant, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might shade his head* – deliver him from his misery. *So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as the morning dawned the next day, God also prepared a worm so that it damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint* – really dehydrated. You know how it is here in the southwest when the wind blows and it's hot and dry. It just really takes the moisture out of your system. It says that he grew faint. *And then he wished for death for himself, and said, "It's better for me to die than to live."* "I mean, I'm getting dehydrated. I'm hot. All these people repented, and now it looks like all the things I told them are not going to come true, so I look like a fool." *And then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the*

plant?” And he said, “It’s right for me to be angry even to death!” But the LORD said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in the night and perished in the night. And should I not pity Ninevah, that great city in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right and their left, and much livestock?” You know, “they don’t know right from wrong. When it comes to obedience to me, when it comes to knowing right from wrong, these people’s elevators don’t go to the top floor. They can’t tell their left hand from their right. So I had mercy on them. I sent you to tell them what’s right and wrong, so that they could repent and not suffer the consequences of disobeying.”

So, here’s a guy, you know. He’s really upset that the plant died. He loved that plant because it was keeping him shaded, but he didn’t really care whether Ninevah lived or died. God is telling him that He cared about the people of Ninevah the way he cared about that plant. He loved them. And He was working to save them. And He was happy they repented. His labor to develop them for His Kingdom and the love that He has for them really is the same thing – His investment. He was taking care of Ninevah.

We’ve always said that God is only working with some now and calling them for the first resurrection. Well, that’s probably true – it is true – that He’s only going to call some for the first resurrection – but that doesn’t mean that He’s not working with everybody. For years we were told – and I believe it’s true – that everything that happens to us in life prepares us for what’s to come. Sometimes that just means we have to go through a lot of bad stuff, so that we learn that God’s way is the only way that works. But He *was* working with Ninevah. So He was showing Jonah that he was more concerned for his reputation than he was for the people, and that wasn’t the way God thinks about people. He was showing Jonah that he didn’t *love* them, because he didn’t *care* about what happened to them.

James 2:15 – *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and you say, “Depart in peace. Be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

I’ve been thinking about this for some time. A young person taught me this, actually. When you boil it all down, and you don’t talk about it in theological terms, but you just talk about it in everyday life terms, true spirituality has very much to do with taking care of others when they can’t take care of themselves. I received an email some time ago from a young woman who was a teenager in one of my congregations. She sent me a picture of her three-year-old son and her husband. She’s obviously doing very well. But there was a time when she wasn’t. When she was a kid I noticed she was having a problem, and there wasn’t much I could do to fix that problem, so I did what I could. We all would like to be God and fix all the problems, but we can’t. So, all I could really do to help her was just be present with her as best I could. In this more recent email, she told me that she remembered that I was there to help her when she needed it most. That made me feel good. It made me realize that she considered the time that I spent with her helpful. It made a difference in her life.

So care and concern imply another aspect of love. What is that? Well, let's move on to the second one. They imply a *responsibility*. Now, the word *responsibility* today usually denotes duty. You know, "I'm *responsible* to do this" – something that's imposed on us from the outside. But I'm using it in a different way. I'm using it to mean the ability and the willingness to respond to the needs of somebody else – your *response* ability – your ability to respond.

Think about Jonah. He did not feel like he needed to respond to the inhabitants of Ninevah, did he? He didn't really care. He cared more about what was going to happen to him, and how people would look at him, than he cared about what was going to happen to these people. So he didn't love them.

You know, God asked Cain where his brother was, knowing that he had killed him. And Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He didn't have any sense that he should respond to Abel and take care of him. He didn't have a sense of responsibility for his brother. The life of his brother was *not* his responsibility in his mind. But in *God's* mind, it was his brother's responsibility and it was Cain's also.

I know several young people who have had some personal problems of late. One of them was telling me how hard everything is for her right now. I commented that, at least she could detect the people who loved her, and was willing to let those people take care of her. And that's such a good thing. She has a good instinct to find and confide in those she knows will respond – who have the ability and the willingness to respond to her. Once we care for people – or *if* we care for people – we have to be able to respond to them.

I was talking to another young person a while back that needed help with a project, and I asked her if she was getting the help she needed. This is what she said, "The people who always come through for me have come through for me again." So, she had asked a number of people to help her, but it was always the same few that helped her. What that implies is – and I think she knows this – that some people naturally have an ability to respond to the needs of others, and others don't. Some people have love, and some don't. We're talking, of course, of taking care of physical needs, but also the emotional and spiritual needs of others as well.

This kind of responsibility could easily deteriorate into control or domination, except for a third element of what love really is. And that is *respect*. What do I mean by that? Well, if you look at the root of the word *respect*, it means *to look at* – the ability to see a person as he or she is, and to be aware of that person's uniqueness. This kind of respect wants the other person to grow and unfold as is natural to them.

I recall that when I was eighteen, I decided I would go to a church college that my parents had never heard of. I'm sure that my parents thought that I had gone off the deep end. And I think they thought I was joining a cult. They never said that much about it to me. They expressed a good deal of curiosity about it. I know they asked a lot of questions. And I can remember thinking while they were...day after day...it wasn't every day of the week, but most days of the week they would ask me some question. I think

they had developed a strategy to try to find out what I was doing, because I certainly wouldn't tell them. And I remember thinking that I needed to talk more about it to them to keep them in the loop so they wouldn't worry about me. I don't think I was very good at that though. But I remember my mother asking me if I felt called to go to this college. And I remember my father telling me that he wasn't sure about my choice, but I was old enough to make my own choices. And I know that after I went to this college – after I'd been there a semester – they came to visit. That was not only to see me, but to see if I had made a good choice – if I was safe. They were showing that they cared. The facility and the people there made a good impression on them, and they began to relax a bit. I know that they just wanted me to be safe and make good choices, but they also loved me in a way that *allowed* me to be the person I was going to be. They weren't trying to *make* me go to the school *they* wanted me to go to.

I was talking with an eighteen-year-old boy recently, and his parents have told him that he can either go to TVI or he can get out. He has a career lined up for himself, and he has ideas about what he wants to accomplish in life. And they don't coincide with his parents. And they are trying to force him down the road they want him to go, because they think they know better than he does what he should do. And they *may*. I don't know whether they do or not. But I *do* know that he's not going to get much out of his TVI experience, because he doesn't want to go there.

When I say that knowing somebody and hoping that they will blossom, and trying to help them grow to become the best they can be, and to grow in their own way, that kind of respect – or looking at someone – implies an absence of exploitation or control. We're not trying to control people for our own benefit, but it's because we want them to grow for their own sake, because we love them. People who have this kind of respect don't use others as objects of their own use. Their involvement with people is to help them grow – not to keep control of them or to hold them down. Of course, to do this – this is hard to do for a lot of people – we have to be independent ourselves, and not needy.

Sometimes it's really hard for parents when their children are going to college – I'm thinking about my mother – to let us be independent, because she loved me and my brother, and she wanted us to be close. We were a good support for her. She got a lot from us, although I think, looking back, she could have had a lot more. She wanted more for my development, so she graciously allowed me to think for myself and do what I wanted to do. As my parents got older, we were living clear across the country – both I and my brother. And they missed us. They would tell us that frequently. They used to come to visit us as money and their health permitted. But as they got older they couldn't do that anymore. They wanted to see us and the grandkids more, but they knew that we were struggling to find the *time* to come visit because it took three days to get there and three days to get back. So that eats up the better part of your vacation. They knew that we had lives, and responsibilities to work, and families to take care of. So they didn't let their needs dictate the way they related to us. They didn't try to manipulate us into coming to visit – never had “guilt trip” laid on me. I've talked to a lot of people that get a lot of that from their parents. They didn't let their needs dictate the way they related to

us. Their attitude was, “We are adults and we can take care of ourselves. Yes, we’d like to see you, but we’re not going to resort to manipulation to get you to come.”

Now, thinking about us as Christians, we know that we are all needy, aren’t we? We don’t have enough to complete the tasks. So we have to rely on God to take care of us. And we have to allow other people to take care of us, too. But those people that God sends to take care of us, we don’t manipulate them. They’re taking care of us because they *want* to. Don’t we all have times when we’re more needy than others. Hopefully, when that happens, we have some “go to” people. But then there are those people we know who suck the life out of everybody. They try to manipulate us into doing what they want rather than trying to help us grow into ourselves. So it becomes difficult. We just become an object of their weakness, rather than their love.

Where does that lead us? Well, if we’re going to respect somebody – if the word respect means *to know* or *see someone*, then the fourth element of true love has to be *knowledge*. To respect somebody enough to help them become who they are means that we have to have knowledge of what that person needs to become the way they can be. Care and responsibility are also blind without knowledge. So, if we don’t *know* people, we don’t know what they need. So we can’t take care of them, can we?

It’s so hard to do that – especially with some people. You can’t find out enough about what they’re like, because they are so closed – sometimes from hurt – usually from that. I’m working with a mother, teaching her how to better parent her child. I didn’t see it at first, but as I got to know her, she let me see that she had allowed her child to get *completely* out of control – to the point that telling this woman to take privileges away from her child didn’t work because the child wouldn’t give up the things the mother wanted to take away from her. “I can’t get her cell phone away from her. She won’t give it to me.” She was so embarrassed about this that she wouldn’t divulge it for quite a while. I was thinking about how important it was for me to know that in order to be able to help her. I was spouting off all this stuff, and she wasn’t doing any of it, because she couldn’t do it. And she didn’t tell me she couldn’t do it because she was embarrassed that she’d lost control of her kid. But once it was out on the table we could begin working on that. But she first had to be open enough to show me what she needed. And I had to be patient to build a relationship of trust, so that I could learn what she needed. So that goes back to empathy, doesn’t it? Unless we understand the experience of other people.... That’s what empathy is – understanding the experience of others. And what’s that? Well, that’s knowledge, isn’t it? ...then we don’t know what to do for them, do we, if we don’t understand them.

Now how is it we learn about other people? Well, it’s not by talking to them. It’s by *listening* to them, right? Sometimes we can learn about people by watching them because we can see the body language they have, but mostly it’s by listening to them. It’s only by watching and listening that we can attune ourselves to their inner state and what they need.

The mom comes home from work, where she's met by her three-year-old son, who after a day with the babysitter wants to reconnect with her. And she's hot and tired, and wants to go change out of her business suit and high heels into something comfortable so she can be a good mom. So she gives him a quick, distracted hug, and then hurries down the hall to change clothes. And her son is not satisfied with that quick, distracted hug she's given him, so he follows her down the hall whining and kicking. And she interprets his anger as a lack of cooperation, and angrily tells him to be patient. Had she taken the time to make eye contact, and talk with him, sit down and look him in the eye, and hug him, and talk with him for just a few minutes – attune herself to his internal state – “Oh, he misses me!” – become one with him a little bit – the whole evening probably would have gone a lot differently. But she didn't *know* that he was missing her, because she didn't attune herself to him. She didn't listen. She didn't watch. She didn't take time to connect. Because she didn't, she didn't realize he just needed to reconnect with her. It wasn't that he was trying to hog her whole evening from the get-go, and have her sit there with him the whole evening. He just wanted to make a connection.

So that's an example of what I mean. How a lot of times we *miss* knowing people – knowing what they need, because we don't take the time to *listen*. We don't take the time to attune to them. We don't have the knowledge that we need. God always knows everything we need, because He can just see right through us. He sees all of our inclinations, all of our longings, everything about us. He's perfectly empathic, because He has full knowledge. But we have to struggle for that. Why do we struggle for that? We do that when we love people. And you can also say, that's how we show love to people. There are people we love that we haven't done that with, so we can say, “Oh, I need to start listening to this person more and talking less. I need to start paying attention to what they need in their body language. I need to *understand* them so that I *can* take care of them, and so that I can respect them.”

I like those four elements as a way to talk about what love really is, instead of just saying (in a sing-songy voice), “I love love.” We can get all mushy about it, and all ethereal, and all very general, but if you start thinking about it in specific ways, it becomes a lot more helpful very quickly. You can also understand, as we think about this, that these four elements of love are sort of the syndrome of attitudes that we take with us. They go with us everywhere we go – if we have them – or they're absent from us everywhere we go. So they are a very good way, I think, to talk about what mature love really is. And they embody the *spirit* of the last six commandments, which teach us how to love our neighbor as ourselves.