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Presentation Transcript
True Spirituality 08 – Loving Self
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We're currently working on a series on *True Spirituality*, and today's installment is the eighth. Now we've already talked in six and seven about loving God and loving others. And today we're going to talk about loving ourselves. That's the eighth one.

Now, this is a confusing subject to a lot of people. They think that it's Godly to love others and a sin to love themselves. But I think they're confusing self-love with self-centeredness. In fact, a lot of people, when you say self-love, they think that's what it means – to just be self-centered. So I'm going to try to clarify the difference in the two. And you know, it is really important, because we are self-aware, and if we're going to be successful with God, we need to know how He wants us to think about ourselves, don't we? So, this is a very important topic.

What is self-love? Well, let's start out in Romans, the 13th chapter, and verse 8.

Rom. 13:8 – Paul said, *Owe no one anything, except to love one another. For he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and if there's any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.* So, love doesn't do harm to neighbors. That's what the Ten Commandments teach us. Now, the positive side of that statement is that love is doing good to your neighbor – taking care of them, helping them when they need help. If that's true – if that is the definition of love – then the love of self would be taking care of ourselves, wouldn't it? That's what it means. And if we apply that idea to self, then self-love is maintaining ourselves – just like we would take care of others, and would hope others would take care of us, if we couldn't take care of ourselves. When you think about it that way, then it kind of becomes a little bit more clear, doesn't it?

I run into people all the time who don't think they are worth taking care of, though. I run into children that are that way. And a lot of times their parents are that way. That's how the kids got the way they are. There are so many scriptures that we could quote to show

that we are worth taking care of – not because *we* have decided that, but because God tells us that.

First of all, we know that we bare the image of our Maker, don't we? That has to say something about what we're worth. We know, that in creating us and putting us through this experience called life, that God's goal is to bring many sons to glory. That's what David said. So we're worth being glorified by God at some point. David said that he knew that he was the apple of God's eye – special. We know that God removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. We know that God – and we heard this already today in the Psalms – exercises lovingkindness towards us. Some people think that God exercises unconditional love. I think there definitely are expectations that God holds out to us. But He does exercise something even better! Lovingkindness. That would be a good sermon sometime, wouldn't it?

Let's go to Leviticus 19, and verse 2. I want to go through a section of the Law here with you. We talk about the Bible a lot, but sometimes it's just really good to actually read what it says – and read a fairly lengthy section of it.

Lev. 19:2 – *Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel* – and that means to all of them, and it means to each of them, doesn't it? To each individual. Leviticus 19:2 – *Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy."*

"I'm going to teach you how to be like Me." Every one of you shall revere his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths. I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods. I am the LORD your God.

So here's God, right away – He begins right off the bat – trying to teach them how to be holy, and about their relationship with Him. We're supposed to revere our parents, because in doing that we learn that we're special. The people that brought us into the world are worthy of respect, and consequently, what comes from them is to be respected as well. *Don't turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gold. I am the LORD your God.* Let's go to verse 9.

V-9 – *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the LORD your God.* "I'm taking care of the poor by telling you to do this. And as you do as I have instructed, you will learn to take care of others as you would like to be taken care of if you were a stranger, or an orphan, or a poor person."

I didn't hear but about one or two complaints the whole time I was at Camp Outreach. I didn't learn of anybody getting mad at anybody else. Nobody griped about the food. Nobody complained about the lodging. Nobody complained about the hours. And I think a lot of that was because we were all out there – we all set aside our time of doing the stuff we wanted – to help somebody else. And it makes you feel really good. It makes

you put things in perspective and realize it's not always just about us. In fact, somebody even said that at one of our Bible studies. When we do that, we get on the same page with God. Here's God telling us to do these things so that we can be holy and be like Him.

V-11 – *You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another, and you shall not swear by my name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.*

“There is a way to talk *about* Me. And there is a way to talk *to* Me. And there is a way to talk to and about others. And there is a way that others should talk about you, because you're all worthy of respect. And as I tell you talk to Me and others, in this loving way, I'm also telling others to treat you the same, because you're worthy of being treated like that.”

V-13 – *You shall not cheat neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.*

There are some people that are always going to be so poor that if you don't pay them everyday, they won't have anything to eat that night. They live from hand to mouth. And there's all kinds of reasons why that happens, but they're still people, and they're to be respected. And we should be respectful of their needs. And we should take care of them.

V-14 – *You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shall fear your God. I am the LORD.*

Who would curse the deaf? I used to wonder who would do that until I had this experience. I have a blind friend. We did our masters together. And in one of our classes we had a project we all had to do. His project was to make a video of himself trying to cross a busy street in Albuquerque as a blind person. And you just can't imagine what people said and did to him while he was out there trying to do that. They curse at him. They made fun of him. They ignored him. He almost got run over once. It was astounding. He was treated badly because he was in their way. It was inconvenient to slow down for him. I mean, he couldn't tell when the light was red or green, and he asked people to tell him, and they laughed at him and walked off. Blind people are not to be treated that way, because they're to be taken care of. They're worthy of that – worthy of respect.

V-15 – *You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. Everybody gets treated the same – no favoritism. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. Don't favor anybody. We're all one family. Everybody gets treated the same.*

V-16 – *You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people, nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor. I am the LORD. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him.*

We *are* our brother's keeper. And when people are doing things that aren't right, we should try to help them.

V-18 – *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. You shall keep My statutes, and you shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You might make a quick buck doing that, but in the long run, this kind of breeding is going to ruin the stock of the nation, and you'll be ruined financially. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Same principle. Nor shall a garment of linen and wool come upon you. Don't sell inferior quality clothing to others, because it isn't good for them or for you, because of your reputation in the long run.*

V-20 – *Whoever lies carnally with a woman, who is betrothed to a man, as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed or given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging. But they shall not be put to death because she was not free. So God regulated male and female relationships to protect men and women.*

V-27 – *You shall not shave around the sides of your head, verse 27, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you. I am the LORD.*

These have to do with the religious practices of the nations around them – the things that could be seen.

V-29 – *Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness. “Your children are better than that. Have respect for them. Love them. Don't defile them sexually, and don't let other people do it.”*

V-30 – *You shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary. I am the LORD. “Don't forget to treat Me with respect, as I've been teaching you,” He's telling us.*

V-31 – *Give no regard to mediums or familiar spirits. Do not seek after them, to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. “Don't be gullible. You're worth too much to lower yourself to that.”*

V-32 – *You shall rise before the gray head, and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God. I am the LORD.*

Now, elderly people can be slower and weaker, so take care of them, instead of making fun of them, or being impatient with them. How would you like it if you were the object of everyone's frustration?

V-33 – *And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself. For you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your*

God. “No excuse for mistreating foreigners,” He tells them, “because you were foreigners yourselves. You were in Egypt.”

V-35 – *You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weight, and honest ephah, and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt – where you were treated unfairly and with disdain.*

V-36 – *Therefore you shall observe all my statutes, and all my judgements, and perform them. I am the LORD.*

“I love you all. I want you all to learn to love each other. We are all one family.” Right? It’s pretty easy to get this, isn’t it? What’s He driving at? The point He’s trying to make? Here’s the point: loving self, loving God, and loving your neighbor is all the same thing, because we are all one family. And it’s all about taking care of people. Not taking care of people that can take care of themselves, but taking care of people when they can’t, or helping people when they *need* help.

So that’s what love is. It’s primarily about care. When we take care of ourselves, then we’re exercising self-love. You know, that’s really loving other people, too, because a lot of times we don’t take care of ourselves, and other people are burdened with taking care of us. I mean, that’s what’s happened to the people in the Rescue Mission that we served. For whatever reason, they can’t take care of themselves, and so other people will take care of them. Jesus said that there would always be people like that. There’s always some people that can make their own way and take care of others. And there are some people that can just take care of themselves. And then there are others that *can’t* take care of themselves and have to be the ones carried by other people.

I guess sometimes we’re all in that situation, aren’t we? Because we all need help sometime. That’s another good reason why we should think about taking care of others isn’t it?

Let’s talk about selfishness then. The selfish person is interested in himself ahead of other people – *ahead* of other people. He doesn’t enjoy giving or taking care of others. The work was hard that we did at Camp Outreach. But, that we were making a difference for other people was enjoyable. It was beneficial to us to do that.

The selfish person judges everybody and everything by how useful they or it might be. They use people, instead of loving them. If they do something for somebody, it’s because they think they are going to benefit from it in the long run.

So, what makes people this way, as opposed to the way that God wants us to be? Usually, from my experience in the ministry and in my counseling practice, people that have this attitude were not loved as children – or didn’t perceive that they were loved as children. They never learned that they were worth taking care of, because they didn’t get the care they needed. And the message that they received from that is, “I’m not worth taking care

of.” So it causes a distortion in their thinking. And they wind up applying the same attitude toward others that they apply to themselves. In the long run, it has to do with trust or faith.

You know, we talked about the thing an infant learns about God in the first year of life is, they learn to trust. And that comes from having mother and father take care of them. So that’s really what we’re talking about. A lot of times, people that have this attitude of “I have to get mine first,” they think everybody’s against them and out to get them. So they have to be out for themselves to balance everything out, because nobody else is going to take care of them or care for them.

So, to them, life is all about getting, instead of giving and receiving. It’s mainly focused on getting. It’s a distorted view of reality. They never got the message that we’re all worth loving, and that we’re all worth being taken care of, and that we should take care of others, but that none of us are worthy of respect, but only worthy to be used for our own benefit.

So there’s quite a difference there, isn’t there, between being self-centered – or as we call it in the business, narcissistic – and loving ourselves – or taking care of ourselves or maintaining ourselves – along with the other people that we know.

Now, let’s talk about how to apply this personally to ourselves. We said, when we talked about loving others, that – and I don’t know if we had that up here – I think we might have done this in Albuquerque.... But we talked about – when we did the sermon on *Loving Others* – active, outgoing, mature love can be thought of in four elements. I did this just so that we’d have a way to talk about it and bring out the things that are important. Those four things are care, responsibility, respect and knowledge. So let’s look at loving ourselves through that same prism that we used to look at other people.

Let’s talk about *care* first. We said the royal law of love could be applied by taking care of others. Paul said that. So it follows that self-love means taking care of ourselves as well as other people.

1 Cor. 6:13 – Paul said, *Food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food.* That’s what food is for. It’s to put in your stomach. And that’s what stomachs are for – to digest food, right? The two of them just go together. *But God will destroy both it and them.* It’s all just going to pass away. *Now the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.* See, some people think that the body is for sexual immorality, and sexual immorality for their body – just like our stomachs and food. That’s the comparison he’s making. But he said, “No. Our body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.” Once we surrender our lives to Christ, our body doesn’t belong to us. We give it to God, who’s also dedicated to *us*. He’s going to take care of us – take care of our bodies. And we are to give our bodies to Him.

He says in verse 14:

V-14 – *And God both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by His power.* That’s what’s going to happen to us. That’s the good thing that’s going to happen.

V-15 – *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!* What in the world is he talking about here? Well, he explains it next. *Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, He says, shall become one flesh.* That’s what sex is for. It’s to make people feel close together. So, when people who aren’t married have sex, it makes them feel close. They become, to use the Biblical term, one flesh. But he says, *He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. So flee sexual immorality. Even sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.* Oh, so he’s talking about taking care of ourselves here. Having illicit sex is self-destructive. It’s not self-love. It’s hurting yourself. There are lots of things we can do with our bodies that aren’t good for them, including illicit sex – sleeping too much, not sleeping enough, eating too much, not eating enough, on and on and on. There’s different ways.

V-19 – He says, *Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price.* Oh, we’re worth something. God paid something for us, didn’t He? What did He pay? He paid Christ’s life! How valuable is that? We’re worth a lot! So we’re supposed to take care of ourselves, because we’re worth it. *Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.* So we’re supposed to take care of ourselves, because God loves us and because He wants us to love Him. And we’re supposed to love others, because God made them and loves them, too. And they’re supposed to love us, because we’re worth loving.

It’s the same attitude all around. Love is love. Did you catch in there the part that the Holy Spirit plays in all this? It’s not that this kind of love is something that’s never been seen in the world before – it’s only special to God’s people. It’s just the way people love each other, but we’re motivated more to do this *because* we’ve been bought with a price. So the Holy Spirit is the thing that *drives* us and *motivates* us to express this kind of love toward ourself, toward others and toward God.

There are just so many things you can think about here. We should learn to exercise so we can live longer and feel good while we’re alive.

I was listening to Larry King interview George Bush, and he mentioned one of the ways he relieves stress is exercising. And Larry King said, “How do you find time to exercise? You’re the president!” He said, “You have to *make* time.” I just felt so bad, because I’d been saying for months, “I don’t have time to exercise.” Well, if *he* can, *I* can. So that kind of kicked me back into exercising again.

Have you ever seen how trim he and Mrs. Bush look? They don’t eat immoderately. Of course, exercising probably helps a lot with that, too. But if we *are* going to take care of

ourselves, if we *are* going to exercise self-love, then we can learn to eat more moderately so we won't be overweight and damage our health.

What are some other ways that people express self-love? This is kind of a long-range thing, but it certainly fits. Some of us have taken the time and trouble to learn how to do something productive in the world, so that we can make a contribution to it. We can produce something valuable that people need. We provide a service that they need. So that makes us happier people, and we can be financially independent, and not have to be supported by others.

We can learn how to relate openly and honestly with other people. Why is that self-love? Well, it sounds like loving other people? Well, you know, when we do that, we have close transparent relationships, and that makes us happier. And when we're happier, we accomplish more and we're better Christians. So, all the things we do to help others, really it's all the same things. It all comes back around.

We can learn to do things as they come up, rather than procrastinating them, so that we won't be overwhelmed and stressed. Never fun to be around somebody that's stressed, is it?

It's all the same thing. Love is love. When we take care of ourselves, it's also good for other people. It all kind of fits together.

I think about, in my work – and I'm sure you do, too – but there are more people to take care of than I can. And this was especially true when I was working in school. And there were children whom I couldn't help, because I didn't have the training necessary. They were so troubled that it was beyond my ability to help them. And there are people who won't let me help them, because they don't want, or know, that they need help. So what do I do? Do I work night and day trying to meet everybody's needs? Do I skip lunch and dinner and just.... How long could you go if you worked twenty-four/seven? Well, you do that long enough and you're not able to help anybody. We have to maintain ourselves, don't we, to be of use to others.

The way the psychologists say this is, loving others starts with self. The people that I see that take care of themselves also are able to take care of other people and have an inclination to do that. So, self-love *does* produce love of others.

One of the things I've had to do is, to tell myself – remind myself – that I'm only a person and not God. You know that person that thinks he can fix everybody's problems? No, that's God. God is the One that does that. We don't. And to think that we can – that we're the *only* one....

I remember when I went into my first crisis counseling class. The instructor walked in and put up a large picture of the Lone Ranger up on the bulletin board. And he said, "If you only learn one thing from this class this year, this is it." He said, "When it comes to helping people who are in crisis, there are *no* Lone Rangers." You can't, by yourself, help

somebody who is deep in crisis – who is suicidal, who is whatever. It takes more than one person. You're just a part of a team. You're just playing a role. You play your role, you've done your job. We're not God. We're just one person.

I get to play a role of helping some people for a while, then it's somebody else's turn. To think that it all depends on me is sort of like thinking I'm God. So that's delusional, isn't it? It's not true.

So what else can I do to take care of myself? I don't work through lunch. I try to quit at six. I go four-wheeling. I go backpacking. I read books. I work on my ministry. I spend time talking to friends. I take Mrs. J to Starbucks on Sunday morning. And as I take care of myself, then I'm going to be more likely to be a help to other people. I have to love myself if I'm going to take care of others, because I'm just a fallible person. That's why God tells us to take care of ourselves – so that we can take care of other people.

So, care. That was the first one, right? The second one is *responsibility*. We said that this item is the ability to respond. Response-ability, right? We think of it as burdensome, or a weight that's put on us that we have to bear – responsibilities. But we're talking about it in a different sense – in an ability to *respond* to the needs of others.

In James 2, and verse 15, he said:

Jm. 2:15 – *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "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?* That's a person who sees the need, but does not respond to it in an appropriate way.

How would we apply this to ourselves? Responding to our own needs? There's a lady I worked with for some time who, when she was younger, she used to dress up and fix her hair and her nails, and stay trim. She said, when she came to see me, that she'd stay in bed all day if she didn't have to take care of her son. She'd gained a lot of weight. She didn't fix her hair anymore. She didn't care to dress up. She was underemployed. In high school she got straight A's and never took any homework home. She was brilliant – brilliant – huge vocabulary – some kind of professional, but she drives a delivery truck and doesn't make enough money to support herself or her son. As she put it, she's a wreck. Guess how she grew up? She was taught by her perfectionistic mother that she could never please her and never do anything right. And she doesn't think that she's worth taking care of. And she treats her son the same way. She's sending him the same message. Here's somebody that's not responding to her own needs. There's something that's not working there. She's saying, "Be warmed and filled," to herself, but not giving herself the things that she needs – that she can do for herself.

The third thing is *respect*. This has to do with seeing others for their potential and wanting to help, or let them unfold as is natural to them. We need to apply that and think about what *we* need. Everybody else has an idea about how we should behave, about what we should do, and about what we should think important, and what skills we should

develop and all that. But since *we* are the ones that are going to be living with ourselves, and know ourselves better than anybody else, we should think about those things.

I mean, this lady I was talking to you about.... She's forty-years-old, and she said, "I could have gone to college. I could have done anything or been anything I wanted to be. But I didn't think about it." And she's just getting around – just becoming mature enough – now to start thinking about that. So she's just beginning – at forty-years-old – to get an inkling that she needs to start responding to some of these impulses that she has to develop herself – which is a good thing – better late than never! And I don't have any doubt that she's going to be able to do it if she really wants to.

I love to do play therapy with kids, because it's all about helping them discover and respect themselves. And it's so funny, because the parents always bring this problem child, and they want me to fix them. And they get really frustrated when week after week after week, they ask me, "Well, did you talk to him about this?" or "Would you please talk to my son about that." And I say, "Well, if it comes up, I will." And of course, it never comes up, because that's not what we're doing. Usually the children that come – that are problem children – have been stifled and overcontrolled, or else they've been ignored and they're angry. Which ever way it is, they have the freedom to act the way they to in the office with the toys that are there. And they are toys that are designed to help them learn to express themselves. To have self-respect is what they learn in there. When they learn that, then they're not angry anymore, or stifled. They know how to handle that.

I had my favorite client, who came in at seven, and his idea of problem solution was to heave the chair across the classroom. And he stuttered so badly that nobody could understand him. And his five-year-old sister was taller than he was. He had a lot of neurological deficits when he was little and still was carrying that. His mother was a family law attorney, but when she talked to me once, her arm went like that (demonstration). He came by it honestly. And she used to stutter, but she learned her way around it. And they couldn't figure out why he was so upset all the time. Well, she should have known, I thought. But after about seven or eight months of what started out as very meager, impoverished play, ended up with him stacking up all of my furniture in the office and climbing up on top of it to feel powerful. All his presenting problems had gone away. And there was only one thing that I actually had to work with his mother on to get that to stop. So he grew his way out of his problem. And when he left there, he swaggered down the hall on his way out the door, knowing that was the end of it, and he had a sense of himself that he didn't have when walked in there. And that's what helped him not be a problem child.

So everybody would like to put us in a box of their making and make us be the way they want us to be, but God has a different plan for each one of us. There's no one box that fits everybody. And we have to find out – we have to have enough respect for ourselves – to find out where we belong and what we can do. Can you think of a really big box that a lot of us were in for a long time? The church box! Right? Of course, that's really scary –

when we think about people actually being *free* – to have freedom in Christ – to spy out other people’s liberty in Christ. Isn’t that what Paul said?

Do you have that kind of respect for yourself? Or are you playing a role to please other people all the time.

And the last one is *knowledge*. The lady I was telling you about would come into my office and *rage* at her mother and at her son. If that’s all that I had known about her, then I really wouldn’t know how to help her. She would ask me repeatedly, “Why am I so angry?” And as her story unfolded, I began to see her as a suffering person, not an angry one. She was very anxious, because of the way she’d been treated all her life. My job was to be really curious so that she could figure out for herself why she was angry – having to answer all of my nosey questions about what life was like. As she came to understand that she was not only angry, but also anxious and suffering, then she gained *knowledge* of herself that was helpful to her. Once she understood those things about herself, then she began to figure out how to manage the problem and to think differently about herself. That knowledge that she gained helped her understand how to take *care* of herself better. Oh! That’s love, isn’t it? ...how to take care of herself better and to *respond* to her own needs. That’s love, too, isn’t it? ...and to see what she needed to do to relieve her suffering.

So we can always know more about ourselves, and understand what we’re like and what we need. And when we do, then we know what to do better. We know how to take care of ourselves better.

So let’s sum this up. We’ve talked about loving God, others and self. And we’ve seen it’s all the same thing. So, when we love self, we are loving others. And when we love others, we are loving ourselves. And when we do both, we’re loving God. And God tells us the way to love Him is to love others and to love ourselves. So it’s all the same thing. Because people who love their friends and hate their enemies, well, they don’t really know how to love their friends either. Because love is love. It’s an attitude that’s applied all around to everybody. And as we learn that attitude, then we approach true spirituality and take on what Paul called the divine nature.