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MATURING TOWARD WHOLENESS IN THE INNER LIFE

Chapter Eighteen

Loving Your Neighbor (Personal Relationships)

*Above all these put on love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14)*

- 1 - In considering the five components of a person in Mark 12:29-31, we come to our social self—how we relate with our neighbors. This too must be re-formed.
- 2 - God is social. He is One, and yet he is not alone. God is relational, a community of three loving Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 3 - I am social. I am an individual, yet I am not made to be alone. I am relational, created with the capacity and desire for loving personal relationships.
- 4 - Where do I start in seeking to become more like Jesus? The process begins and ends with love. In love all ingredients of Christlikeness converge (Colossians 3:14).
- 5 - As I am gradually transformed into Christlikeness, I increasingly become the kind of person who loves. To love competently requires emotional maturity.
- 6 - “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man [adult] I gave up childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11).
- 7 - God is love. He both loves and is loved. Each person of the Trinity loves, and is loved by, the other two. God is a community of all-competent love.
- 8 - God created me to be like him—to receive love, and then extend love to others. My need to be loved is so great that only God can fully meet the need.
- 9 - As I receive the love I need, greater capacity grows within me to love others. Being fully and sufficiently loved gives me the resources to love my neighbor.
- 10 - My need to be loved is so great that initially my capacity to love others is quite limited. I have been inadequately loved. We all have.
- 11 - Inadequately loved? Whose fault is that? It's mine! I turned away from the all-competent Lover. God never stopped loving me; I stopped loving him.
- 12 - When we distanced ourselves from God, we became un-coupled from the only Source who is able fully to satisfy our deepest longing to be loved.
- 13 - Love my neighbor? I know people I could never love! The answer: Go deep with God. Experience his love. Watch love grow inside you.

14 - What is love?

- Love is choosing to desire my neighbor's highest good.
- Love is readiness to take appropriate action to achieve that end.

15 - Love is more than emotion, though emotion will surely follow. Authentic love requires discernment—what is really my neighbor's highest good?

16 - Love for our children does not always translate into giving them what they want. They cannot yet fully discern what their own highest good really is.

17 - I too cannot always discern what my highest good really is. So my Father protects me. It is grace that he does not always give me what I ask for.

18 - Since love is about my highest good rather than my present wants, I can be angry and bitter toward Someone who is actually loving me competently.

19 - When emotional wounds incurred in childhood remain unhealed, we can enter adulthood in the grip of unresolved pain and immature coping behaviors.

20 - Thoughts may be held captive by hurt. Unhealed pain may have left us self-absorbed—unable to recognize and access the Love that heals.

21 - Harboring feelings of being unloved fosters resentment, anger, blame. Such emotional baggage can energize behaviors harmful to soul and body.

22 - Driven by a deep need to be loved (common to us all, though we are often unaware or in denial of it) we try to find love in ways that don't work.

23 - Our need to be loved can only be satisfied in the intimacy with God for which we were created. This is the most fundamental human need.

24 - Access to this love was severed when we broke with God and went our own way. Christ came to reconcile—heal and restore—the relationship.

25 - Our need for love cannot be adequately met by other people. Our need is too great and they have the same need. When we look to others, needs collide.

26 - Tragically, this is often the case in marriage. A relationship begins romantically (not rooted in reality). After a while, needs surface. Then needs collide.

27 - Expecting others to meet my need to be loved easily degenerates into clinging and demanding. This frightens others away.

28 - Many who feel lonely and abandoned are unaware that their own actions may well have contributed. Demanding that others love me is not the answer.

29 - Of course I need the love of other people—we all do. How do I get it? I rely on God. I look to him alone. He brings other loving people into my life.

30 - To relate well with others, I must understand the distinction between "demanding" and "requesting." The way of love is the "request."

31 - Making demands of others dishonors them. It does not respect their freedom to make their own decisions. It is not kind.

32 - Making a request of another honors that person. I accept his or her response without disapproval or blame. I trust God to work through it.

33 - God's love for me develops my capacity to love my neighbor. Loving my neighbor develops my neighbor's capacity to love his neighbors.

34 - God's love is the source of all love. Here is how he designed human life:

- God loves me—I know his love experientially.
- God's love expands my capacity to love God.
- God's love expands my capacity to love my neighbor.
- My love for my neighbor expands his capacity to love me and others.

35 - I learn to relate to others—even spouses and family members—as if Christ were standing between us. I relate to Christ first; then through him to others.

36 - When you and I relate directly, issues in you ultimately arise that irritate me. But I have only my own love-deprived resources with which to respond.

37 - When Christ stands between us, his Presence, teachings, cross and love shape my responses. They generate patience, kindness, understanding, mercy.

38 - This is crucial in understanding Christian community. Each member's primary relationship must be Christ. Christ then unites the members as one.

39 - When community members look primarily to others to meet their need to be loved, relationships remain immature, man-centered, soulless, vulnerable.

40 - We learn how to love others by experiencing the ways in which Christ loves us. God's love is more than a theology. It becomes my daily reality.

41 - Love leads to joy, peace and fulfillment. Non-love (anger, contempt, evil speaking, lust, greed, self-love) leads to wounding, chaos and emptiness.

42 - "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:9). Can Jesus possibly love us that much?

43 - His love teaches us how to love our neighbors. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

44 - To become like Jesus I focus on learning how to become the kind of person who loves. All components of Christlikeness flow together in love.

45 - Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other. Love binds these together (see Colossians 3:12-14).

46 - Love is patient, kind; does not envy, boast; is not proud, rude; does not demand its own way; is not irritable, resentful (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

47 - Love does not rejoice in evil but rejoices in truth. It bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. Love never ends (see 1 Corinthians 13:6-8).

48 - Hypocrisy is not of love. Love hates evil. It clings to what is good. Love has no desire to outdo someone; it wants to honor him (see Romans 12:9-10).

49 - Love is patient when things are hard, quick to pray for others, oriented toward giving to the needy, ready to offer hospitality (see Romans 12:12-13).

50 - Love blesses those who persecute us; it does not curse them. It rejoices with the rejoicing and sorrows with the sorrowing (see Romans 12:14-15).

51 - Love knows how to live in harmony with others. It doesn't put on airs. It befriends the lowly. It doesn't boast in its own wisdom (see Romans 12:16).

52 - Love never repays evil with evil. In every matter for which it is responsible, it seeks peace with all. Pay-back is left to God (see Romans 12:17-19).

53 - Love tries to meet the genuine needs of its enemy. It rejects evil as a response. It overcomes evil with good (see Romans 12:20-21).

54 - Love does these things; we don't do them by straining for more will-power. They become default settings as love (Christ) forms within.

55 - We "hang out" with Jesus. We see how he responds to us. His responses seep into our thoughts, emotions, choices. They shape the person we are becoming.

56 - As we mature toward Christlikeness, we may find times when progress seems blocked. This may point to areas where inner healing is needed.

57 - A common spiritual attack against a work of God is an attack on the love among the members. Be forewarned! Not to love is never an option.