

## ***Session 2: Defining Wholehearted Love Four Spheres and Four Stages***

### **THE SHEMA: A BRIEF REVIEW**

Let's go to Matthew 22 and follow along. We are going to read the passage in which Jesus declared the great commandment, the first commandment. Tonight we're going to cover our second session on the first commandment course. It's a twelve-part series on loving the Lord our God with all of our heart.

The Holy Spirit is going to restore the first commandment to first place before Jesus returns. The first commandment was in first place in the early church for a short season; it will be a global reality before the Lord returns.

Just a short review from last week: in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (paraphrased), Moses said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your strength." This is traditionally called the Shema Israel. The reason they call it "Shema": the first word, "hear," in Hebrew is "shema." So it starts with, "Shema, Israel"—"Hear, Israel"—and because of those first two words, they call it that.

For almost 4,000 years, the Jewish people have recited the Shema Israel for twice a day in synagogues, or wherever they have gathered around the world, and they have quoted this verse. It is the command to hear, because the Lord has something to say. He is saying, "Hear. I want you to know, Israel, that I want you to love Me with all of your heart, your soul, and your strength" (Dt. 6:4–5, paraphrased). Jesus comes 1,500 years after Moses and He fills in the blank as to what it was that God wanted them to hear. Obviously, He wanted them to hear the basic command to love God, but in Matthew 22:38, Jesus adds His own commentary. He says (paraphrased), "This command, the Shema Israel, is the first and the great commandment." That was a new piece of information. Jesus was saying, "This is what you need to hear."

### **GOD'S FIRST PRIORITY NEEDS TO BE OUR FIRST PRIORITY**

The Church of Jesus needs to hear this, for to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our strength is the first priority to the Holy Spirit. It is not currently the first priority in the Church, but it is the first priority to God, and He says, "Hear, O Church of Jesus Christ." Jesus added His exegesis, so to speak. He says, "This is the first commandment on God's heart, and it is the great commandment to God" (Mt. 22:38). The greatest lifestyle that you could embrace is the lifestyle to love God with all of your heart.

Surprisingly, over the years I have had many believers rise up in resistance and complain about too much focus on loving God: “What about everything else?” And the list is vast. Let me tell you, there is a lot to do about a lot of things, because a lot of things in the Bible, we’re to do. The greatest thing in God’s economy—the thing that moves God’s heart the greatest, the thing that He will reward the greatest, the thing that will move you the greatest, and the thing that will impact people you touch the greatest—is if you do the great commandment. This is what Jesus wanted them to hear.

In the session tonight, we are going to be focusing on the four spheres and the four stages of wholehearted love for God. The four spheres of life from the lips of God Himself: we are to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength, as we find from the record of the gospels. The four stages from which love develops or grows in our life: in the first stage, we receive love from God; in the second, we give love back to God; the third is surprising—we love ourselves in the grace of God; and fourth, in the overflow of an energized heart we love one another. We love other people far more effectively if we do it according to the stages that the Word of God teaches. We don’t wait until we perfect stages one, two, and three until we get to four. We do all four of them simultaneously, but we understand that the fourth stage will be far more effective if the first three are in place and they are healthy.

### **STAGE ONE: INCREASED REVELATION OF GOD’S SUPERNATURAL LOVE**

Let’s look at them. Growing in love: the four stages of love in terms of human experience. Stage number one: we receive increased revelation of God’s love for us. Beloved, you cannot focus on this subject too much. Again, over the years I have heard people say, “Well, if you focus too much on that, what about the others?” Here is the answer from Scripture: the more red-hot people get in revelation that God loves them and their response to love God back, they will become far more fervent and far more consistent with a deeper quality of love for other people. It begins with the revelation that God loves us. John said it.

Of course, John the Apostle was the theologian of love. He gave more of the biblical principals on understanding love in all four stages—precise theology in the gospel of John, the epistles of John, and the book of Revelation as well. As the great teacher—this ancient man in his nineties—John says here, “We love Jesus because He first loved us.”

When God wants to awaken love in us, He reveals a Lover to us. Let me say that again. When God wants to awaken love in you back to Jesus, and when God wants to awaken love in you for other people, He reveals Himself as a God of love. The way that He awakens love in you is by revealing Himself as the great Lover of the human heart. We cannot skip this stage, because if

we put all of our energy outward in loving, we end up burned out and bruised, and we have no supply from which to love other people.

Our supply is not our good will and our self-determination; our supply is supernatural overflow that comes from encounter. The encounter is a minimal encounter, but it is a regular day-in and day-out. It's in small increments; you don't always feel it. Sometimes you do—a little bit, occasionally—but it's steady, ongoing. I don't mean steady as in every minute of every day, but day by day, we feel the inspiration of God loving us and a little bit of inspiration of loving Him back—a little bit of gratitude as to who God made us in His own sight. That is the energy from which we can love other people.

### **THE FALSE LOVE MOVEMENT**

When men become humanistic, meaning when they get focused on love for man in a way that cuts them off from the essential supernatural supply of encountering the love of God, then they have confidence in their own love—and their love will come up short. They will end up burned out and it will turn into something other than love. It will just become a masquerading of our own image of being loving, but it will not be genuine love at the end.

The reason I'm saying this is, there's a real movement around the earth today, and it is becoming strong in the Church. It is a movement of darkness and it has the words "love" and "man" and "goodwill" in it. The reason it is dark, the reason it is broken, is because it is promoting a love that originates from man without reference to encountering the love of God, as though man's love is sufficient. It is a statement of pride. God will prove it to be a false boast before it is over.

It is sweeping the Church because the language is confusing. The language is the same as the biblical language: "Love people." But we love people in an overflow of encounter of loving Him, because we don't have confidence that we can love sufficiently without regular encounter. It is a statement of humility on our part. It is a statement of need. When I see people minimizing the need to connect with God, it seems as though they are loving, but at the end of the day, in the court of heaven, they are arrogant about their abilities and their virtue. I have no confidence we can pull this thing off without regular, even small increments—that is not the right phrase. Inspirations of the Holy Spirit in our daily life are critical if we are going to love well.

### **THE SOURCE OF LOVING WELL**

Well, it begins with encountering His love. The foundational truth that equips us to love God is the revelation of His passion and His feeling for us. You cannot say this truth enough. Jesus said it: "The way the Father loves Me, in the same way I love you" (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased). Beloved, this is almost indescribable, except that Jesus described it. I look at that and I say, "What?"

He said, “In the same intensity which My Father feels about Me, this is how I feel about you” (paraphrased). Beloved, this is the fountain from which compassion and love of mankind flows. There is no other fountain that love will stay steady in. That is the only fountain. Jesus has the same intensity for us that the Father has for Him. This statement, in John 15:9, is the ultimate revelation of our worth. This is the statement that gives us the right—every one of us, a billion believers across the earth—confidence to claim that we are God’s favorite. I am God’s favorite. There is not a question about it. So are you.

Why? Because God loves me in the way that God loves God, and that cannot ever, in any way, be increased. I am His favorite. For me to be His favorite and you to be His favorite, we lose nothing, because nothing is diminished in God by loving more people. Beloved, He loves me and you the way that God loves God. It cannot increase.

I am number one. I love it. Here is the difference between me and some of you. Some of us are in unity on this. I am running with this. This is not a joke. This is real to me. This is not just a cute little sermon point. In the privacy of my life, if I come before the Lord, I say, “Lord, behold Your beloved, Your favorite one, the one whom You love.” I love to say that. I have said this for probably twenty-plus years. I love the feeling of saying that. I take it very personally. I think the Lord says, “Oh, I take it personally, too, because you are starting to line up with what I say.”

### **AFFECTION-BASED, DUTY-BASED, AND FEAR-BASED OBEDIENCE**

There are several types of obedience in the Word of God, but affection-based obedience is obedience that flows out of experiencing Jesus’ affection and feeling a little bit of that affection back for Him. Beloved, that affection is powerful. Affection-based obedience comes out of the revelation that Jesus loves us the way that the Father loves Him. It is the strongest; it is the deepest; it is the most consistent type of obedience. You tap into that level of obedience and you will have the strongest, most consistent obedience. It will take you to the deepest places. Why? Because the lovesick person will endure anything for love. Even in the early stirrings of lovesickness in your heart, your heart is wounded with desire. You must have more. That is what you live for. Beloved, that will carry you far in the race to a life of full obedience, the race that Paul talks about (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

The next type of obedience I will call duty-based obedience. Duty-based obedience is biblical, by the way. All three of these are biblical. They have a varying impact and effectiveness. Duty-based obedience is where we are required to obey when we don’t feel any inspiration. We have a duty to obey the Word of God when we don’t feel anything. I have done that many times. A few times I didn’t feel it and I didn’t obey. How many of you know about that, too? I have done it

both ways, but in duty-based obedience I don't feel like it at all. "I say in my heart, 'Bah, humbug,' but I'm going to do it anyway. I'm just going to obey You. I don't mean just staying out of something wrong. I mean even the positive commands: sitting before You, reading the Word, obeying You, serving; I'm going to do it with no inspiration. Because there's a duty in the kingdom to do this." It's not the most powerful, but it's still valid.

Then there's the third type of obedience that I talk about, which is totally biblical, by the way. It might sound at first like it is not. It's fear-based obedience, motivated by the fear of negative consequences. Beloved, there are really negative consequences for disobedience. They are real. This is not a figment of the imagination. It is real. We will really be disciplined by the Lord and we will be more severely attacked by the devil. I don't know if the attack is more severe, but our armor is less protective. We are more vulnerable to the attack, is a better way to say it. The Bible appeals to fear and shame. It is not the highest motivation, but it does motivate us. It certainly has motivated me many times. The fear of consequences, the shame of getting caught—that is a biblical motivation. It's not the highest one, because you will get caught and it will bring shame. It will be horrible. Now the most powerful is affection-based, but when we get into this issue of God loving us and feeding our spirit, our obedience will be the strongest. The reason we sin, all of us, is because our hearts are unsatisfied with God. The reason we look for other pleasures is because the inferior pleasure of sin seems more powerful than the superior pleasures in the grace of God when God touches our spirit. When I feel drawn to a sin, it's a signal that my heart is not satisfied with God, and because I understand that I say, "Wait a second, something is wrong here," and the Holy Spirit is saying, "Yes, that's right. Come near; come near."

## **STAGE TWO: SUPERNATURAL IMPARTATION OF HUMAN LOVE FOR GOD**

Let's go to the second stage of the four stages of love. The first stage is the revelation that God loves us. The second stage is the impartation or the receiving the impartation of the Father's love for Jesus by the Holy Spirit. It's a supernatural impartation. My favorite verse—this has been my life verse. You can take it; anybody can have it. You don't have to have a life verse, but I decided to have one about twenty-five years ago, and I have stuck with it. If you are looking for one, I recommend it. Jesus is praying in John 17:26 and says, "Father, I am declaring Your name to them" (paraphrased).

Here's why: "Because when I reveal Your name"—in other words, "what You are like, Your heart"; God's name and God's heart are synonymous—"when I reveal Your heart to them, the love with which You love Me is supernaturally awakened and imparted in them" (v. 26, paraphrased). Beloved, can you imagine loving Jesus in the supernatural ability of the Father's love for Jesus? I mean, there is nothing higher. How could I love Jesus more than the Father? Whose love for Jesus would I want more than the Father's? I'm telling you, it's a great life verse.

Jesus said, “I will reveal the Father’s heart to you. I will declare the Father’s heart. I will tell you what His heart is like, and when you encounter His heart”—which, by the way, is stage one—“stage two happens. You will love Me with a supernatural ability” (v. 26, paraphrased). That love is progressive. It’s not as though one day it’s gone; the next day it’s mature. It’s little by little, and we only feel it a little bit along the way. It’s progressive, but it is real.

It takes God to love God. It takes the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Here is why it matters that you know this: because a lot of folks don’t really lock in on this point, they’re just waiting to show up in love one day, and they’re not pursuing it in faith. I lock into this. I say, “Father, I want to love Jesus like You love Him.” He said I could. I pray this verse many times. I ask God for impartation. I wait on the Lord. I am not going to receive a lifestyle of less than this. It’s a point of focus, because I know that loving Jesus is a supernatural impartation. It’s not as though if I just hang in there in the Church, I will one day wake up in love. No. It’s a supernatural anointing that I pursue, meaning it is not natural and it is not automatic. It is supernatural. It is beyond my ability, and I will get more of it if I go after it.

### **LOVING JESUS IS NOT ROOTED IN PERSONALITY**

I don’t have it in myself. I hope this doesn’t sound egotistical, but I have had many people through the years say, “Man, you are really zealous. You’re really going for it. I wish I had your personality.”

I say, “Well, I don’t know.” My personality isn’t that great, actually. It causes me a lot of troubles, and they assume that whatever measure of love I have for Jesus is somehow rooted in my personality. Beloved, you could talk fast and talk loudly and do all kinds of strange things. That has nothing to do with supernatural movement of the heart. It doesn’t matter what your personality is. I don’t love Jesus nearly as much as I would like, but whatever measure I have increased in it is not because of personality. You don’t get this by being an extroverted personality. You get it by identifying it as a supernatural reality that you get more of as you pursue it. So I say, “Lord, if it is supernatural, I need help. It isn’t natural. Would you give me more of it?” The answer would be, “If you keep asking Me, I will.”

So don’t look at Lou Engle with his energy and think, “Wow, I wish I had as much energy as Lou.” His energy or anybody else’s is not what gives the stirring of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, and you get more if you go after it. Lock into it and say, “I am not going to live without it” in your heart. “I am not going to live without more of this supernatural love.”

### **GOD’S GRACE GIVES US POWER TO LOVE**

We were created with longing to be wholehearted. Beloved, you were created to be abandoned. If you are not passionate, if you don't have something to die for, you have nothing to live for. Now, a lot of the political movements of history have picked up on that reality. I am talking about some of the great changes of history, of political movements, of revolutions. These were led by young people who were willing to die for the cause, a political cause, and it overthrows nations. When it comes to the kingdom, people end up with this perverse view of grace: that grace means being half-hearted, going half-way; getting around to it, if you do get around to it, and somehow it's grace—a laid-back, chilled-out approach to God. Beloved, that idea will keep you barren and bored spiritually for decades. I have watched it for thirty years of pastoring. You want to go hard after God. When I say "hard," I don't mean "loud," and I don't mean you have to have my personality. I mean being focused, staying with it. You can have the softest, quietest personality.

The greatest love affair in all of history is God with the human heart. Beloved, go after this thing. It is yours for the taking. The grace of God empowers us to get hold of it. The grace of God does not give us license to ignore it. The grace of God gives us power to seize it in an unrelenting way.

Don't buy into the perverse doctrine of grace that is filling the land today. It's the doctrine that tells us, "Chill out, go with the flow, whatever happens, happens," that makes us feel comfortable with compromise, and comfortable with passivity, and comfortable with neglecting the love of God. But the true grace of God makes us ravenous in our desire and our focus. We refuse to be denied. We will not be stopped, because the grace of God is moving on our hearts. That is the true grace of God. I see this thing emerging in the land; it's getting worse over the decades. It was happening thirty, thirty-five years ago when I first started preaching. Well, it's really growing. It's really cool to be in "grace." It is a perversion. It is a deception. I don't care how many Bible verses people use, it is not from the Holy Spirit, that approach to Jesus.

### **CREATED TO BE ABANDONED**

He is worthy of abandonment. He loves us with all of His heart. He wants us to love Him, because there is dynamic life in the exchange between our hearts when they are wholehearted. We were created to be wholehearted. We were created to be abandoned. If you have nothing to die for, you really have nothing to live for. That, to me, is one of the clear statements of description: not of everybody, but a broad-strokes description of the Body of Christ in our nation. They have nothing to live for. More money and more honor, beloved, is not a cause to live for—"I might get a little more honor and a little more money; I'm going to use the blessing of God to get more money and more honor."

I want to get more on fire, more connected, and have more encounter, more passion, and be more lost in God. That is how we want to use the grace of God. If He gives me more money and more honor, He's going to give me a whole lot of that, plus persecution and maybe martyrdom. They all go together, by the way.

“I will give you more honor.”

“Thank You, Lord. I have read the book. I know what that means.”

“Okay. You may end up in prison.”

“Okay. I just want you to know I have read the book. I know what honor means, but it is good enough for me, if You will give me the anointing to love You in a greater way.”

Beloved, you were created to be abandoned. If you are not abandoned—if you are not going red-hot—you end up spiritually bored and vulnerable to darkness, and your heart is continually prone to emotional brokenness, being repeated over and over and over again. The heart is far more vulnerable to the devil's tactics and to being smashed, bruised, and broken with disappointment because we are not engaged, or going hard after the One who created us.

### **THE POWER OF BEING ABANDONED**

We were never created to be half-hearted. There is nothing more satisfying than the power of feeling abandoned. Oh, it's a satisfying feeling, the power of being abandoned. I love to be loved by God; by people, too. I love to be loved, but you know what else? I love to love. I am never more alive than when I am full-scale in love. I am never more alive than in love. Neither are you. You love to love and you love to be loved, because you were created that way by God. You will never be more alive, more red-hot abandoned, at the cutting edge—at the very edge of your understanding and strength of dedication and abandonment.

They have told me for thirty years, “You're going to burn out if you don't slow down.” You don't burn out from going hard after God. You get burned out because you are bored spiritually, and you're motivated by the wrong things. That is what burns you out. You get burned out because you're trying to do the work of the kingdom with a heart disconnected from God, and you're wrongly motivated, so you're perpetually disappointed by not getting more money and more honor. But if you throw away the money and honor thing—if you still want it for the kingdom but it isn't personal to you; it's the kingdom—then if you get it or don't get it, it's not the big deal. Your heart is not bored and you're not perpetually disappointed because the money and honor keeps getting delayed, or somebody else keeps getting it. They keep getting your spot:



“Well, somebody else got my spot. Now what am I going to do?” The devil has plenty of ideas of what you should do then. You lay that thing aside and you go red-hot, and you won’t burn out, I assure you. You won’t burn out if you go full-blast.

Our nation is obsessed with playing and resting: playing and resting, but never rested and never satisfied. Forget the “play and rest” thing. Go abandoned for God. Live for eternity. Throw yourself into His heart the way He threw Himself into your heart. You will never be more alive. You will never be more satisfied. We were made to love God with all of our heart.

### **STAGE THREE: LOVING OURSELVES IN THE GRACE OF GOD**

Stage number three: loving ourselves. Jesus said, “You will love your neighbor as you love yourself—in the overflow, or in like manner. You will love your neighbor in the way you love yourself. If you don’t love yourself, you won’t love your neighbor” (Mt. 22:39, paraphrased).

I used the same analogy for years: the woman prayed, “Lord, I want to love my neighbor like myself.”

The Lord spoke back, “That’s the problem; you do. You hate your neighbor because you hate yourself.”

Now, there are two approaches, or two completely different discussions to be had on this subject of loving yourself. There is loving ourselves in the flesh and loving ourselves in the grace of God—entirely different realities, completely different. We will never love our neighbor more than we love ourselves in the grace of God. What I mean by loving ourselves is, number one, we know what we look like to God. We know who we are in Christ. We know what we look like to God. Now, the devil and religion tells us that God wrote us off. That isn’t the truth. God is lovesick over you.

### **GOD BECAME A MAN OUT OF LOVESICKNESS**

I mean this for real. His heart was sick in a human sense. Those are human terms. His heart was in turmoil in Him to come after us, and He became a man. Beloved, that was not casual. His heart was turning within Him for us. That is what I call heartsick—lovesick. He said, “I cannot endure it without her at My side. I will pay the price. I will win her for Myself. Father, I will win her for You.” The Father’s heart was churning and the Son’s was churning. Churning in love is what I am talking about, and Jesus became man. He will be a man forever. Beloved, for God to become human forever—He didn’t become a human to put on the robes of humanity for thirty-three years, go to the cross, then get back up to heaven and say, “Boy, that was a wild run,” and lay humanity aside.

He will be human for billions and billions and billions of years, like you will. It is a huge decision. Not only will He be human, He will be a Jewish human for years and years and years. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He always will be. He will always be a man from the tribe of Judah, always. It's amazing. His heart is churning. He is heartsick. He is lovesick. He had to have us. Beloved, I want to be lovesick back. I want to say, "I have to have You fully."

### **SEEING OURSELVES AS HE SEES US**

He loves us. It isn't just who we are in Christ. That is a great subject, a vast subject. That's not my point tonight, to break that down, but beloved, when we see ourselves like God sees us, it is fantastic. It is more than that. We also value whom He made us in the physical—whom He made us in our personality. I am not talking about the flaws, the marks of sin in our personality or in our body. He made you strategically, and it is a great pressure in the Western culture of the people who hate their bodies. There's a lot of focus on women who hate their bodies, but men do, too. There are all these eating disorders and all of this massive pressure, because people hate what they look like; they hate it. They are completely disconnected from what God thinks about what they look like.

Look what it says on our personality and our giftings. Here is what David said: "You formed my inward parts in my mother's womb. I thank You for it" (Ps. 139:14, paraphrased). David doesn't say, "I wish I was taller; I wish I was faster; I wish my hair color was different." He says (paraphrased), "I thank You. I take it as a marvelous stroke of genius that only You have the full insight into why You made me this way. I praise You. Why? I am fearfully and wonderfully made. It is marvelous and my soul lays hold of this. I know this well."

Beloved, when your soul believes well that God created you fearfully and wonderfully—I don't even mean you particularly like the color, the size, the hair, the eyes, whatever; that's not the point. You go up a step. You trust the sovereignty of God. He knew what He was doing and He had billions of years of insight thinking of you. He knew.

David said, "I know this well. This thing has got hold of me" (Ps. 139:14, paraphrased). I don't think it's an accident that David had this free spirit of abandonment to God, and he was at peace. More than at peace, he rejoiced with who he was as a person. You say, "Well, does the Bible not say he was handsome?" Yes, but the most beautiful women in the world are among the most insecure women in the world. I have met a few beauty queens in my day. They were celebrated, famous ones. I had heard it, but I was struck by my personal encounters with them how profoundly insecure and preoccupied they were with being ugly. It was remarkable. I'm talking about people who have been on covers of lots of magazines. I've met a number of them, and

there were not a lot, but a few, who struck me each time with how profoundly preoccupied they were with the fear of being ugly and how bad they look. I thought, “Is there any end to this? Well, it’s the rich guys who always want more money. I guess that’s how it is.”

### **LOVING WHO WE ARE BY THE SPIRIT OF REVELATION AND OF GRACE**

My point is that David was operating by revelation. You never have enough money. You are never pretty enough, strong enough, fast enough, thin enough, tall enough, short enough, whatever enough. You are never enough, because there is somebody more in a minute. David wasn’t talking about looking in a mirror. He was talking about a spirit of revelation when he said, “My soul knows this well. My frame wasn’t hidden from you” (Ps. 139:14, paraphrased). In other words, it wasn’t an accident. “When I was made in secret, I was skillfully wrought. I was strategically and skillfully made by Your hand. How precious are these thoughts to You and these thoughts to me” (Ps. 139:15, 17, paraphrased). The thoughts of what? The thoughts of who I am in my physical man, in my personality, in my gifts and in my limitations. Beloved, we need to begin to rejoice in who God made us, who we are in Christ, and who we are even in our physical person. I don’t mean who I am in my character. I want my character to be better, but who I am in all my limitations. The Lord says, “Don’t charge Me with error. Don’t charge Me with making a mistake in your life. I didn’t. That’s the voice of the devil.”

We need to love who we are in the grace of God. We need to come into agreement with God. To come into agreement with God is a dimension of holiness. We think that if you go to a prayer meeting, and witness to somebody, and pray for the sick, and feed the poor, that is loving God. Beloved, loving yourself in the grace of God is an act of worship of how brilliant, how wise, and how skillful God is. It’s an act of worship.

So, the next time you look in the mirror, say, “Lord, I don’t see the whole picture right now, but we have billions of years. You are radically committed to me. Thanks! Let’s do it. Let’s go for it. This is the day the Lord has made. Let me be glad and rejoice.” Yes. David said, “I praise You.” Beloved, this issue of loving ourselves in the grace of God, of who we are in Christ to answer our failures and who we are in our imperfect humanity and our imperfect personalities—I’m not talking about our moral parts of our failure of character; I’m talking about our gifts and passions, our mental abilities and our physical abilities. I’m not talking about the moral/virtue parts of our character right now, because we always want to improve those. We say by faith, “I worship You; I love who You made me. I don’t see it, but I trust You. That is good enough for me.” I tell you, it will awaken your heart in love in a surprising way for God and for others as well.

### **DO NOT ENVY OTHERS**

We must not secretly wish we were someone else, whether physically or spiritually. I am talking about somebody else's gifting.

"If I could only sing like Justin Rizzo . . ."

Now, I would like to sing like Justin Rizzo; I actually would.

"If I could only lead; if I could only make money; if I could only preach; if I could only teach; if I could only pastor; if I could only prophesy, spiritually . . ."

Why are you going there? Do you know what that will do? It will just short-circuit your ability to connect with God in the present tense. Don't secretly wish you were someone else, physically or spiritually.

"Now in virtue, in character, I wish I was more humble..."

That is good to be aspire to be like somebody in character, but not in physical or in spiritual giftings. There is a disconnect at the heart level. There is a serious disconnect. If you'll let me use a secular concept, that disconnect short-circuits an ability to flow in love and to stay sustained in loving, because all four of these stages work together.

I have it in number three; I'm going to say it again: we charge God with error when we want to be somebody else, have somebody else's gifting, or somebody else's physical features, or somebody else's personality. We are charging God with error. Again, I'm not talking about character virtue. We always want more of that. Get your eyes off of others. That is called envy. I know that's a mean word, but that's what it is. It grieves the Spirit and it disconnects us from love. Get your eyes off your failure. Wanting to be somebody else and despising yourself is a guaranteed way to short-circuit the grace of God in your life. Beloved, we have this incredible invitation to love. We have got to get on with love.

### **STAGE FOUR: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS AS WE LOVE OURSELVES**

Stage four: to love others. Now this is the glory, this is the capstone. This is the greatest expression outwardly, when imperfect people, by the love of God, love imperfect people.

It's easy to love God who is perfect and invisible. But to love a physical person who's imperfect, who's next to us, that's a challenge. That takes supernatural power. That is more than religious

sentiment. That is the power of God, and what Jesus said in John 13:35 is that if you love one another, by this the unbelievers will know there is a supernatural operation of grace in your midst. They will know something supernatural is happening because it is very unnatural to love.

It is natural for a mother to love her child in that sense. It is natural to have sentiment. I am not talking about sentiment. It is natural to hear someone's story and tear up. It is natural to be moved at a testimony and give one hundred dollars. That is natural. That is not what I am talking about, although those are tokens of love. I'm talking about interfacing with somebody on a regular basis and walking out 1 Corinthians 13: patience, longsuffering—that is supernatural. That is not natural. I am not talking about sentiment; I am talking about the power of God. "By this all will know" (Jn. 13:35), meaning the unbelievers. I remember I did this a couple of times, but then I quit doing it. It was not very effective. But as a pastor, I would always have the guy or the gal come from the other church and say, "Hey, we want to join your church."

"Cool!" I was always a little ornery. I would ask them a question, knowing they were going to say one of three things, because that's what they always say, the same two or three things. "Why?"

"Well, because our church doesn't have love in it."

I jumped out there a few times. I said, "It doesn't have love in it? Well, of course it doesn't have love in it. That is the ultimate, supernatural manifestation. That is the capstone. That is the top of the mountain."

"What are you talking about?"

"That is the supernatural power of God."

They say, "Whoa. Whoa. Whoa."

I backed off of that after a few years. What they mostly meant is, "People didn't give me what I wanted on my time frame." That's almost always what people mean when a group didn't have love. "They don't give me the money or the honor that I need on my time frame." It has to do with sentiment. You go in there and the room isn't friendly.

I said, "Let's bring love up to a whole other level besides this sentimental low standard that anybody measures up to if you're in a good mood with them, and by the same standard they fail." It's a moody standard that isn't real. They don't have love. It's the ultimate accusation.

## **REAL LOVE IS CONSISTENT**

Beloved, love is substantial manifestations. It is consistent love in close relationships where there is true patience and humility and bridling of the tongue, and only blessing. It is an unusual work of grace if a thousand people have that. It happens, but it's like, "Wow." Not, "How dare you that you don't." You bow down and worship when you see that happen. It's because the definition of love is so low, but it typically means sentiment.

But I want to call us to something far more than the definition of people giving you money and honor or friendship based on your time frame. Love is way more than that. Over my years of pastoring, most people evaluate love based on those two criteria. They give them the hundred dollars or a thousand; they give them the embrace; the whole group is loving. If a person doesn't, the whole group is not loving. It is really out of sync with truth. My point is not to try to correct the whole world on that. The point is, I want to lift the standard of reality as to what love is to a supernatural level, so that we're going for something that isn't just sentiment. It takes the power of God. So when we talk about needing to love Jesus, being loved by Him, loving Him, and loving ourselves, it makes sense because we're aiming at the right definition of love that can only happen by the power of God.

I'm talking about a sustained valuing and serving of close relationships that blesses, that honors consistently. There is that around the Body of Christ, but I tell you that it is remarkable when hundreds of people do it together. It is not a given. It is awesome; it is wonderful. I want to live like that.

Loving Jesus has to end in loving people like that, or it is not loving Jesus. Our foundational premise: people who love Jesus will love each other far, far more. You get people focused on receiving the love of Jesus and focused on going there, and those people over time will love themselves. The entire emotional atmosphere of a company of people will change, and then they will begin to love one another at a whole other level of consistency and depth that transcends sentiment. Sentiment doesn't get the job done. Sentiment is nice, but that isn't a high enough standard. I want the kind of love that's supernatural, that's the overflow and the outworking of encountering a supernatural man. He's fully God and fully man. It's impossible to love Jesus and not love people.

I've had people over the years say, "Well, this group was in the first commandment, and this group is in the second commandment."

I say, “That is absolutely the most illogical thing I’ve ever heard. You can no more separate your heart, liver, kidney, and brain in separate places of the room. You can’t do the first commandment without it resulting in the second. You can’t do the second unless you have done the first. I’m talking about the biblical definition of the second commandment, not the sentimental, humanistic definition. I’m talking about staying steady in the 1 Corinthians 13 level. The greatest anointing we can operate in is the anointing to walk in the two great commandments.”

There are four stages. They go together. We don’t do one and then we do the other. We do all four of them simultaneously.

Amen. Let’s stand.

### **MINISTRY TIME**

I want to focus in on this issue of loving ourselves. Undoubtedly all of us have an issue of some sort in this. We wish we were somebody else physically, or we wish we had somebody else’s gifting spiritually, or their personality. If you’re saying, “This is something the Lord is putting His finger on in my life”—it’s all of us; it’s all of us. But as time goes by—this may sound egotistical, but you just heard how I mean it—I really like me more and more. I mean, I’m dorkier than ever. I look at other things and say, “Oh, man; you’ve got to quit doing this and this.” I see all kinds of need for change. But on another, completely different level, I say, “Lord, I really like being me. Thank You.”

Beloved, that is a revelation, and I am not there yet, but I am on a journey. When that touches you a little, you actually have emotional resource to love other people. If the Lord is putting His finger on that in any way in your life—it might even be that you don’t feel the Lord loves you, so therefore you don’t love yourself through that lens—I would like you to come up here, and we’re going to stand before the Lord, and we’re going to ask the Lord to break the power of this in our life. Come up and stand on these lines. Everybody has got this issue. Maybe He’s touching You with another issue right now. I have gone in and out of this through the years at various levels.

This will help you love God with all of your heart. It really will. I’m going to lead you in prayer. We’re going to come before the Lord.

You’re right before Him. You’re on the sea of glass like crystal, standing before the Lord (Rev. 4). There is the Father, the Son at the right hand. We don’t see it really clearly, but that’s a mental picture. You’re saying, “Father, forgive me.” (Say this in your own words, in your own time; we’re going to do this slowly). “Forgive me for charging You with lacking skill when You

created me, because Your Word says I'm skillfully made, but I've charged You with lacking skill. My body, my personality, my mind, my gifting in the grace of God in the kingdom—I'm not happy with it. I have charged You. I ask You to forgive me. You are thinking of the big picture. You are thinking of my heart. Thank You that You know what I don't know."

Let's take a minute here. We're now going to go to the other extreme from repenting to the other way: "Thank You." It's going to be hard for some of you. "Thank You for my body, for what You gave me in my mother's womb. Thank You. Thank You for the family I was born in." It's going to be hard for some of you. You know what you're doing, even though there might be a lot of pain there. "Thank You for the color of my hair, eyes, skin, and everything. Thank You for what I look like. Thank You for my mental abilities, my personality, what You gave me to work with. Thank You. Thank You for the grace of God on my life. I want more, but thank You for the gifting. I don't want to be somebody else. Holy Spirit, I ask You right now to release Your presence. Release Your presence even now."





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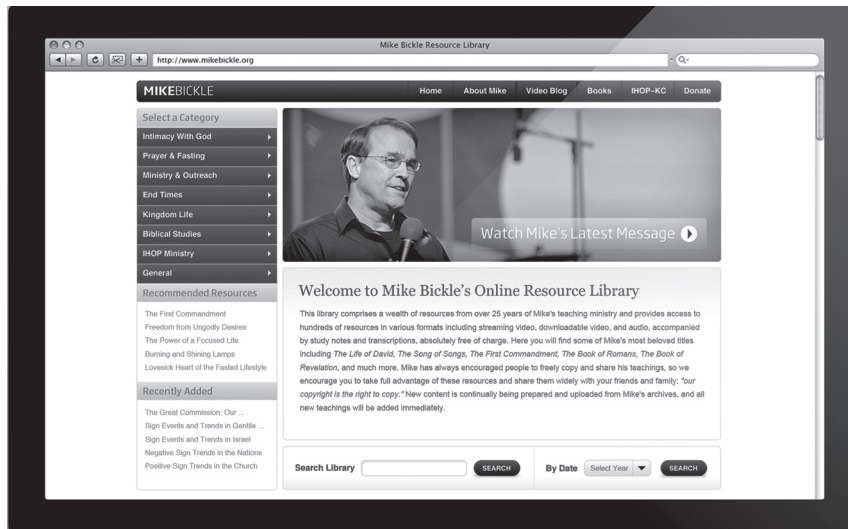
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