

The Purpose of Love

Romans 12:9e

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We have been studying a verse in the Bible that says, "Let love be genuine," and the word for genuine in the Greek is un-hypocritical. It's a word that means without dissimulation, without pretending. We have been talking about how our Creator said to us, "Look, the most important thing in your life is let your love be real. Don't put on a show. Don't be play-acting at loving. Be real about your love." I think for most of us, as we thought this over the past few weeks, we have begun to realize that our own marriages here -- and I think many of us here are married -- our own marriages, and our own friendships -- because many of us have dear friends that we live with who are roommates, or friends at work -- but our own marriages and our friendships and our personal relationships and our family relationships are so shaky at times and so shallow, not actually because we are hypocritical in our love, not because we are deliberately pretending to love these people and we don't really love them, we hate them. I think many of us have begun to realize that is actually not our problem.

Our problem, as we have begun to discuss what genuine love is, is that many of us here in this room simply don't know what genuine love is. It is not that we know what it is and we are determined not to express it; it is not that we know what it is but we really hate our wives or husbands, or we really hate our roommates or our children, our fathers or our mothers. It is that many of us are beginning to sense, boy if that's what genuine love is then I don't know what it is and I have never known what it is. I think that's the place many of us have come to. I think it is a tragedy that somehow or other our educational system or our contemporary philosophy has resulted in a group of human beings like ourselves who are almost inhuman. Loved ones honestly, some of the things that I know you are going through when you talk to me about your marriages or about your friendships, some of those things come because we have virtually forgotten how to be human to each other. It is because we have absorbed all kinds of ridiculous ideas about what love is, and it is not love at all. So that is why this study I think is important to us. What is genuine love?

For instance, the husband or the wife who says they are not getting what they need in bed or the friends who say they are not getting what they want out of the relationship have got the wrong end of the stick completely. Love has nothing to do with getting, nothing at all to do with getting. The basis of a good marriage or the basis of a good friendship is not getting at all. Love is not getting. Love is giving. If a marriage is wrong, it is wrong not because you are not getting what you want in bed, but because you are not giving. Love is giving. If you have a friendship with some guy or some girl or some man or some woman at work and the friendship is not good, it's not right -- it is not because you are not getting what you want. If that is your attitude, there is no relationship, there is no friendship, there is no love. Love is not getting; love is giving. That is the whole basis of the universe. The famous verse that probably anybody in this room could quote is John 3:16 and it is the basis of our very existence here together. It runs exactly this way: "For God so loved the world that he got..."? No. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Loving is giving.

Loved ones, the most basic of the three characteristics of genuine love is that it is concerned with giving, not with getting. I think a lot of us err there. We say, "Listen, I love. There is plenty of love in our marriage. There is plenty of love in this friendship that I have, but I am just not

getting what I want out of it." Well, you are just contradicting yourself. Love is not getting; love is giving. The problem is with you, if that is your attitude. The problem isn't with them. The problem isn't that they aren't free enough physically or that they are tied up or that they are frigid or that they are not giving in their friendship what they ought to give. That is not it. The problem is with you, right down deep in there. When you are preoccupied with getting you haven't the first clue about what love is, and you had better get yourself organized because you are going to become a little animal that nobody can deal with. I think that is why a lot of us have troubles. We have almost lost the idea of what being just an ordinary human being is, let alone being a child of God. Loving is giving. Of course a lot of us say, "Well, I give. I sure give, boy she has a lovely house and you should see the well-equipped kitchen I've given her. I've given her everything a woman could want and all I want is just a little enjoyment with my business friends. And sure I give." That is not love. You might call it kindness or generosity or human decency, but it is not love. Love is not giving things.

Philanthropists can give things; do-gooders can give things, but people who love give themselves. Love is giving yourself to the other person. It is opening yourself up to them. It's sharing with them your deepest thoughts and your insights and laying at their disposal your intellect, your understanding, your aptitudes and your talents. It is giving yourself to them; it is opening yourself to them and letting them see what you really are inside. Genuine love is giving yourself to them; it is being real. It is not hiding yourself behind your reservations or your inhibitions, it's giving yourself to them.

I think we are all in the same boat. I think marriage is just intense neighborliness, isn't it? After all is said and done, it is intense neighborliness. Marriage is really another kind of friendship. So what happens in marriage is usually the same kind of thing that happens in our friendships. Loved ones, there isn't one married couple here this morning who will not say, "The difficult thing is that sometimes I don't know what he is really thinking," or "Sometimes I don't know what she is really feeling. When I look back on the troubles we have had, they have been there because I haven't really understood what they were thinking and they haven't really been able to tell me." We are so reluctant to realize that we haven't really been terribly interested either in hearing what they were saying or in understanding what they were thinking.

So loved ones, to give yourself takes some effort. I mean you really have to work at it with the other person and try to think, "Now what could they be thinking?", and show that you are interested in what they are thinking. You can't just come home at night and say, "OK, give me your deepest thoughts. You have five minutes before the next program." A loved one knows whether you are giving yourself to them or whether you are not, and they are not going to open up their deepest thoughts to you unless they're really convinced that you are really giving yourself to them. So it does take time. Whether it's marriage, that is why I say marriage is like a friendship, because it's the same with roommates, you can't live with another person - it's the same with business colleagues, really is - it runs the whole gamut. There is no such thing as controlled friendship, as restrained friendship. That isn't friendship at all. There is no love in that. There are only friendships where people are absolutely open and honest with each other. That is why we talk about love costing. That is why we talk about love being a dangerous enterprise.

So loved ones, what we are sharing this morning does not just concern marriages or even roommate friendships. It concerns our business relationships, our colleagues, the people we work with day by day. Of course so many of us say, "Well, boy I tell you, I do my share of giving. I do. I sure do my share of giving. After all, that is all you can ask, isn't it? It is a fifty-fifty relationship. I

mean there is giving and there is getting." Well, show me; now I'm willing even to look at the Greek if you want me to, but just show me in John 3:16, the fifty-fifty. Just show me the fifty-fifty in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should give him money? No. That is where the fifty should come in, but it doesn't seem to be there. "Whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life." But, "That's ridiculous! That is one hundred percent one way! Well that just shows God doesn't really know what He is about, because love is really fifty-fifty". Well you see love isn't fifty-fifty and it never works if you have that attitude, because she always wants her fifty percent of the car when you want your fifty percent of the car. He always wants his fifty percent of the desk when you want your fifty percent of the desk. It never works that way. Love is not fifty-fifty giving. Love is giving your self all the time, giving yourself all the time without reservation.

So genuine love is giving your self all the time without reservation to another person, that's it. Of course our misunderstandings are so massive they just boggle the mind. I'm sure some of you will be sitting here this morning saying, "That's right, Pastor, that's right. Boy it is giving yourself all of the time without reservation. That is what it is. After all, if you don't give you don't get." We have it built into us. We have all these flashy little sayings to justify our misconceptions. We have this idea, that's right, boy you have to give in order to get. That's the key. Give in order to get. You know that it is widespread. How many of us, I think it's good when we volunteer in hospitals you know and all that kind of thing but you know that the idea is widespread that there comes certain times in our life, with you dear ladies, it's when the children grow up, isn't it? I don't know what it is with us men but then with us younger men and women it's a certain time when we come to either after college or before college when we reckon, "Well what we need in our personalities is some giving. That's what we really need. I had better start giving a little. It will be good for me." And so many of us volunteer for work in hospitals, many of us join churches and join organizations with the idea in our minds that's what we need. We feel that it will be good for us. So we give in order to get. We actually give because we think it will be good for us. It will do us good. It will open up our personalities. It'll make us freer, more interacting human beings. The idea is widespread that a little bit of philanthropic work never did anybody any harm, and everybody needs a little bit of giving themselves in order to be healthy human beings. Loved ones, that is not genuine love. Genuine love is not only concerned with the giving of yourself all the time without reservation; it is also concerned with the reason you give yourself. It is concerned with motive.

You know fine well the problem with welfare-statism. The basic problem deep, deep down is that it destroys love completely the way we operate. In other words there are countless loved ones who are receiving ministrations from social workers and they don't for one minute think that those social workers really love them. They don't for one minute think that the state really loves them. Now I want to point out I am not attacking the welfare state, I am attacking the attitude that it tends to have brought about. I think we should take care of those of us who are not as fortunate, I think we should be generous and we should be kind. Probably I, as an old Britisher, would go further that way than most of you would go. But the fact is, inside that welfare-state attitude there has developed a distrust of other people because they appear to be loving you, but yet you are in no doubt why they are doing it. They are doing it because it is their job.

You see it is the same in bed. If you caress to be caressed, the other wee soul knows it. If you touch to be touched they know it. In other words, if you do it in order to get, if the motive is to get, if the motive is selfish, it isn't genuine love. You remember it was one of the most offensive things in the Watergate scandal wasn't it? It was a phrase that maybe you all knew in America, it

was new to us, maybe it was one of the phrases you learned at school but it was new to us and it was a repulsive phrase: "stroking". It is just repulsive! The idea was that you would stroke people; you would be nice to them in order to get them to do what you wanted them to do. You would compliment them. You would show interest in them, you would make them think that you thought a lot of them in order simply to use them later on. Well, loved ones, you see that isn't genuine love. A boss or a colleague or a secretary who "strokes" a colleague at work or pretends to show an interest in a person in their business this coming week simply to get them on their side or to get them to do something is only involved in destroying humanity and in destroying genuine love. They are not at all involved in genuine love. They are simply involved in manipulation.

So loved ones, genuine love is concerned with the other person. It is doing and giving for the sake of the other person, not for your sake. In fact, genuine love is absolute self-forgetfulness. It is putting their rights in place of your rights. It is putting their interests in place of your interests. It is treating them as if they were really you. Genuine love is giving yourself all the time to people for their sake, for their benefit. You are always thinking, "What would they like? What would be good for them? What would help them? The motive is for their sake, not for your sake.

That is the heart of the best definition of love, the one that we all quote, the one that we quoted when the plane went down you remember in Washington, that definition that the greatest practitioner of genuine love in the world gave us: "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friend." Jesus said, "Nobody has greater love than that that a man lay down his life for his friends." Now you can see that laying down your life is the very height of self-forgetfulness. It is the very height of putting them in your place. It is loving them -- not as much as you love yourself, because if that is all you did then they would be dead, too. I don't want to keep referring to it, but it is such an obvious example - the dear guy in Washington who gave the life ring to the other three after the crash. He obviously loved them more than he loved himself, because he drowned. Loving another person is giving your self to them for their sake and forgetting yourself. It's actually loving them better than you love yourself. If you loved them just as much as you loved yourself then they'd be dead too. Because greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. But that proves that loving another person with genuine love is putting them before yourself.

A few weeks ago a brother came up and said what I think probably hundreds of us here would say too. We have all absorbed this -- I was going to say, almost with our mother's milk, but I don't think we did. I don't think our moms did this to us, I think our schools did this to us -- but he expressed what many of us here would express: "Wait a minute. Doesn't the Bible say 'Love your neighbor as yourself?'" Now; this is the tricky little twist that has become part of the folklore of America: "love your neighbor as yourself - now you can't love your neighbor unless you first love yourself." Now you know we all could quote that.

"Now you can't love your neighbor as yourself unless you first love yourself. So don't you think that what you are sharing these Sundays about putting the other person in place of yourself and even regarding yourself as unimportant, don't you think for somebody who has a problem with self-image, this may cause them real difficulty?" Loved ones, the Bible does say, "Love your neighbor as yourself" and down through the centuries since the Bible was written the normal interpretation of that by theologians and exegetes has been "Treat your neighbor the way you would want yourself to be treated." Love your neighbor as yourself. The way you tend to think of yourself, now think that way of your neighbor. That is what it means. It is elaborated a little more plainly by Jesus in Matthew 7:12. "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."

That is what we have normally thought is the meaning of "Love your neighbor as yourself." Whatever you wish that men would do to you, you do that to them. Not so that they would do it to you. It doesn't say that. The way you would like to be loved yourself, you love them that way. In other words, the Greek word "hos" for "as your neighbor as yourself" describes the manner in which you are to love your neighbor. You are to love your neighbor the way you would want them to love you. It is not concerned with self-image; it is not concerned with what you think of yourself. It is concerned with the degree and extent to which you are to love other people. And you see that what it says is you are to love them endlessly, without any limitation. You are to think, what way would I like people to love me, and you are to love them that way. That's loving your neighbor as yourself.

Now if you say to me, "Well, what about self-image?" Loved ones, self-image is not solved by the way you treat yourself. That is the old behavioral psychology that is just not authentic here in this situation. You certainly ought to be happy and content with yourself, but you become that not because you give yourself enough chocolates every day or because you give yourself a holiday or because you are kind to yourself. You are no dummy! You know that is all bluff. You don't kind of say "Oh what a good guy I am." You know you're not dumb. You know it's my hand that's doing it. So maybe I'm not a good guy after all. Self-concept does not depend on the way you treat yourself. Self-concept depends on your faith in God's goodness in making you a unique design that he is pleased with. Self-concept comes from your belief in God's goodness and his faith and love in making you what you are. Is this the best nose in the world? No, I don't think it is, but I've never thought of it too much. But it is the nose God gave me and my God doeth all things well, so I don't care too much what you think of this nose. My God gave it to me and I know that he is good and I know that he has given me everything that I need to fulfill the purpose that he has for me in this world.

So my self-concept is not good because I treat myself well each day, or because I pat myself on the head each day or because I determine "Now I'm going to love my wife today, but boy first of all I'd better love myself a little." I don't. I just believe that my dear God loves me and that he has made me this way. I'm unique; there is nobody else like me. I'm not the best, I'm not the greatest, but I'm unique, I'm different. I'm what he planned me to be, so I dare not look down on his work and say, "What a mess you have made." That is where self-concept is settled. It is not settled in this other bluff idea of trying to love yourself as much as everybody else. Loved ones, genuine love is giving yourself wholly to the other person without reservation, for their sake, for their benefit. That is what Bonhoeffer meant, you remember, when he said, "You ought to be a man for others." You ought to be a person who forgets himself completely, forgets herself completely and lives for other people. That is all you care about and that delivers you into a new realm of liberty in your life that nothing else can bring you into.

Now is that what genuine love is -- giving yourself all the time to other people without reservation so that they can be what you would most like to be yourself? Well no, that is not complete, you can see that. Because different ones of us have different ideas of what we would most like to be. So love would take on as many different meanings and as many different expressions as there are ideals, and likes and dislikes of human beings. Love is giving yourself all the time without reservation to other people, so that they can be treated the way you would most like to be treated, so that they can be the very best that it is possible to be in this world. In other words, you want the very best for them. Genuine love is wanting the very best for the other person. What is the very best? It is Romans 8:29.

Genuine love has a lot of moral content in it. It is not just laying yourself at everybody's disposal for them to use you as they wish. It is laying yourself at their disposal for one chief purpose -- and it's Romans 8:29. The whole purpose of our creation: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." That is what genuine love is. It is wanting that loved one who lies beside you in bed at night or wanting that dear one that sits beside you in school or that dear guy that works at the bench -- it's wanting that person to be like God and to be like Jesus. It is being prepared to do everything you can to help them to be like that. That's it.

Do you realize how fleeting this all is, loved ones? Those of you who have just started college remember how fast the years went at high school. Those of us who are out of college remember how fast that college time went. Those of you who are in your thirties now remember the years seem to be flying faster all the time. So it is soon all going to be past, and the only one lasting thing that we can do for each other is to get each other ready for the life that goes on forever. That means helping each other to want to be like Jesus, to want to be like God, so that we will be at home in that family.

Loved ones, that is what genuine love is. It is not nagging, not bossing, not ordering, and not criticizing the other person. It is not always preaching at the other person, but wooing them, forgiving them, forbearing with them, being kind to them, being like Jesus to them, with one constant desire in your heart: that they will be more like Jesus tomorrow than they were today. So that when that moment goes when their breath goes from their body, they will slide right into a joyful, bright presence of the Savior. That is what genuine love is. And that's what husbands and wives are about and that is what friends at work are about and friends at school. When the other person begins to sense that you love them like that, there is a power that is released in their lives that begins to change them from the inside and begins to enable them to experience heaven here on earth.

So brothers and sisters, I would ask you, let's go home today and forget this damning, destroying selfishness that we have called love, and let's start rising out of our own selves, and forgetting ourselves, and let's start loving each other. Let's start loving each other with genuine love. Let's start laying ourselves at each other's disposal, with one thought in mind: how to enable this dear friend of mine to become more like Jesus and to trust our Father more. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we see how you have loved us without reservation -- giving us certainly all these trees and oceans and rivers but most of all giving us your very own self, your dear Son. Father we see that's the heart and the key to life for us, to stop protecting ourselves and defending ourselves and wanting, wanting, wanting like little kids; and to forget ourselves and to begin to give for a change. To give ourselves wholly to each other, to lay all our abilities at the other's disposal, thinking of them and what they would like and what they're feeling and what they're thinking, in order to bring them into the place where they want to be like you. Lord, we would give ourselves to you, to be like that to each other this day and this coming week to our friends and our colleagues. And dear Holy Spirit we know we need strength and power to do that and we would ask you to waken us up whenever we slip from this and raise us again to the height of love that is genuine. I ask this for the sake of your own dear heart that has made this the meaning of the universe. Lord we want to be right there in the center with you for your glory. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore.