



# Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity

## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- It is possible to have profound spiritual experiences, a “faith that can move mountains,” and still lack a deeply present love for people.
- A person may be chronologically thirty-five or fifty-five or seventy-five but still function as an emotional infant or child in his or her relationships.
- Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It is impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.
- Love—not ministry activities or spiritual practices—is the measure of spiritual maturity.
- Martin Buber described two kinds of relationships: I-It and I-Thou. When we relate to a person as an object or means to an end, we treat them as an “It.” When we relate to people as sacred or holy, we treat them as a “Thou.”
- Five qualities of I-It and I-Thou relationships:

I-It Relationship	I-Thou Relationship
Distracted, goal-oriented	Fully attentive, listening-oriented
Others are objects or extensions of oneself	Others are persons, unique and separate
Judgmental, conditional acceptance	Nonjudgmental, radical acceptance
Monologue, debate, make my point	Dialogue, exploration, curiosity
Withhold myself, limited sharing	Offer myself, vulnerable self-disclosure
Closed, unwilling to learn or change	Open, willing to learn and change

- We must refuse to accept that people are growing in love for God in ways that do not translate into growing in love for people.
- Discipling people in how to love others, especially those with whom we disagree or who drive us crazy, needs the same time and energy we give to equipping them to love God. The two loves are, as Jesus said, inseparable.

## DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity”?
2. The demands of Christian leadership can make it difficult to distinguish between loving people for who they are versus using them for how they contribute to the mission. Complete the following sentences:

*In leadership, I know I'm loving people for who they are when . . .*

*In leadership, I know I'm using people for how they contribute to the mission when . . .*

3. Scazzero describes the painful realization that the quality of love expressed inside the church is not really different from the way people relate outside the church. In the book, briefly review the bullet list of examples (page 138).
  - Of the seven examples, how many would you say characterize your ministry or organization?
  - Which of the seven examples is most evident or most problematic right now?
4. In the book, briefly review the five key qualities that distinguish I-It and I-Thou relationships, as well as the bullet list of I-It examples (pages 141).
  - Which of these qualities (in either column on the chart) did you become aware of as you observed your routine interactions recently?
  - Using this list of examples as a reference, what I-It behaviors have you observed in yourself recently in the context of your leadership or ministry?
  - Which of the I-Thou characteristics have you noticed recently in how someone else related to you? How, specifically, did they treat you as a “Thou”?
5. One way to practice the presence of people in everyday life is to ask three questions: *Am I fully present or distracted? Am I loving or judging? Am I open or closed to being changed?*
  - To judge people is to turn our differences into virtues of moral superiority, which diminishes their humanity by reducing them to objects (I-It). The alternative is to be open and curious. What makes judgment easy and curiosity difficult, especially in the context of leadership? What does curiosity require of you?

- How do you respond to the statement, “We need to be open to being changed because it’s a requirement for dialogue”? In what ways does it challenge you? In what ways does it encourage you?
- 6.** As portrayed in the film *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean provides an extreme example of what it means to love by living in the tension between two worlds.
- Based on her example, how would you characterize the “death to self” required for her to love incarnationally? What did it cost her?
  - In what relationships or circumstances do you sense God may be inviting you live in two worlds—to listen deeply even though you may not fully agree with what the other person is saying—and to do so without reacting, growing impatient, or becoming defensive? What death to self might be required?

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 8, “Break the Power of the Past.” Between now and then, consider setting aside time to reflect on this question, “What one or two unhealthy patterns from my family of origin have most impacted who I am today?”

## GOING DEEPER

- Learn and integrate one of the Emotionally Healthy Relationship Skills—Take Your Community Temperature Reading—accessible as part of the free Team Transformation Videos provided by Emotionally Healthy Discipleship. Go to: [www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team)
- Listen to one or more of the following episodes of the Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast:
  - ▣ “Seeing God in the Eyes of Your Enemies,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Seeing-God-in-the-Eyes-of-Your-Enemies/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - ▣ “The Explosive Power of Listening,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/The-Explosive-Power-of-Listening/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.