

How Can I Practice Loving My Neighbor Spiritually?¹

In the chapter “Love Thy Neighbor” in *Practicing the Presence*, Joel emphasizes that to “love our neighbor,” we must understand our neighbor to be pure spiritual being, in and of God, God-governed, and neither good nor bad. This applies to all individuals, regardless of whether humanly we consider them friends or enemies. In concluding the chapter, he says,

"What is the principle? 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' In obeying this commandment we love friend and foe; we pray for our enemies; we forgive, though it be seventy times seven; we bear not false witness against our neighbor by holding him in condemnation; we judge not as to good or evil, but see through every appearance to the Christ-identity—the one Self which is your Self and my Self."

Scripture tells us that if we “are bringing a gift to the altar” (going into prayer), and we remember that we are not at peace with someone, we must first reconcile, or make peace with that person. Joel says that the peace we must make is to ask forgiveness for making the mistake of sitting in judgment on any individual, because every individual is God in expression. God constitutes the life, the mind, and the Soul of every individual. There are not good and evil human beings; the Christ is the only identity. So even if we are simply holding our neighbor in humanhood, we are bearing false witness.

Joel explains that to bear false witness against our neighbor is to declare that he is human, finite, has failings, or is something less than the very Son of God, and that the only way to avoid bearing false witness against our neighbor is to realize that the Christ is our neighbor; that our neighbor is a spiritual being, the Son of God, just as we are. S/he may not know it, but it is the truth. To love our neighbor as our self is to hold him in *spiritual* identity.

As always, the question is “How can I do this?” In the 1964 Chicago Special Class, Joel gave the students a wonderful practice for discovering the Son of God in another and raising up the Christ. Initially, Joel speaks about doing this practice with members of your family, but he later says that we can effectively apply it to any other relationship to help ourselves discover, acknowledge, and appreciate the presence of the Christ in that individual.

An excerpt from this class follows, in which Joel explains the practice.

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Excerpt from Recording #556, Side 2, 1964 Chicago Special Class
"Raising the Son of God from the Tomb"

And that leads us now to this—peace on earth. Why should we not have peace in our own households with husbands and wives and children and parents and aunts and uncles and cousins? And why should we not at first have peace with the neighbors on our street and in our community? And the answer is that there is no reason why we shouldn't, and there is no power to prevent us having it. But here is where the Master comes in with his *"The way is straight and narrow, and few there be that are going to listen to you."*² This is the way:

- Take a five-minute period every day for a different member of your family. Start with your husband or your wife or one of your children or one of your parents, but take one member of your family each day, a different one each day, for just five or six or seven minutes. Wait until you're completely free and clear, so that you can go off into a room by yourself, and do not answer the telephone.
- And now you have this person in mind and see if you cannot see *I* standing at the door of their consciousness and knocking—the Spirit of God. And realize that actually, that Spirit of God is already within them, whether or not they are aware of it. Standing at the door and knocking does not mean that the Christ is outside of them, but at some door within them. And so now see that Son of God, that Christ, knocking at the door of their consciousness for recognition, and **you** be the one first to recognize it:

"Now I see. Now I see the Son of God, the Spirit of God, is within thee. I'm paying no attention now to your humanhood, to what degree of goodness or badness you show forth, or what degree of sickness or health you show forth, or what degree of wisdom or ignorance you show forth. I'm ignoring all that for this minute, because now I have beheld something new. I have beheld the Spirit of God in you. I have beheld the Christ of God in you. I am lifting up the Christ of God in you. I'm raising It out of the tomb of your humanhood. I'm raising up the Son of God in you. I'm lifting that Christ up out of that tomb of flesh. I'm lifting up that Christ in you, and beholding It, and I do behold the Spirit of God in you."

Then, go about your business.

The next day take another member of your family, or if you have time [do it] that afternoon or evening. And so go through the entire family—near, and if you like, far. Take in some of your friends or all of them if you like. But please remember, you are not going to know peace on earth with **humans**, you are never going to experience peace on earth with **humans**, because

² See Matthew 7:14

each one has a selfhood that is trying to preserve itself even at your expense. You are only going to know peace when you tabernacle, when you commune with **the Spirit of God in man**.

When you discover the Son of God in your wife, in your husband, in your child, you are going to have a whole new relationship in your home. When you discover the Son of God in your business associates, professional or artistic associates; once you begin to raise up the Christ in them; the Christ will come back to greet you, and you will know we are one. What benefits me will benefit you. What harms you will harm me, for we are one. And then my interest is to see that no harm comes to you. Your interest is to see no harm comes to your neighbor. And you will now understand the most misunderstood passage in scripture: "*Love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

Now how can you do that when you know how perfect you are and how terrible your neighbor is? How can you do it? And you can't. Humanly, it's hard enough for us to love our own families, after we get to know them pretty well, but how different it is once we have beheld that spiritual identity, that divine Child of God, in them. How different it is! We still have differences of opinion, but remember, we're entitled to that. We have no right to make each other over in our own image and likeness.

Our only happiness can be in setting others free so that each may live their own life in accord with their own light. But I cannot set myself free from my responsibility, which is to raise up the Son of God in you and witness it and behold it and thereby make it possible for you to awaken to Its presence. You will be surprised how soon your relatives will awaken to something of a spiritual nature in them when you raise up the Son of God in them.

Now there is no limit to this practice. The only thing is that in the beginning, it is difficult because you have to practice it **consciously**. You have to spend five or six or ten minutes at a time to bring yourself to its completion, and you have to do it with each person, and there is a time element, and you may have to do it two, three, four, or five times before you really come in contact with the Christ of their being. But after that, life becomes a bed of roses with no thorns because there is no longer a personal effort attached to it. It has now become the normal, natural thing to see through the human.

And so when you go into a shop or market, hotel, train, plane, bus, it is the normal and natural thing not to see the human, but to see the divinity. And there's no effort to it anymore; it is now the natural way of life. Oh, those first few months can be very, very difficult, because it is a matter of self-discipline—to force yourself not to see humanhood, not to see good and evil ... You don't want to know the qualities of humanhood that are in front of you. All you want to know is the Christhood.