



Unity Church of Christianity
Our Spiritual Advancement
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I want to begin by telling you a story. It starts with recognizing that we all live in the computer age and that we're all in the process of growing along with technology. Some of us understand more than others, and some of us need a lot of help.

There is a story about a middle-aged guy who was having trouble with his computer. He remembered Richard, the neighborhood kid who was 11 years old and was a whiz; his bedroom looked like Mission Control. He asked him to come over and help him with his computer. Richard sat down, hit a few buttons, and solved the problem. As the kid was leaving, the guy said, "What was wrong?" Richard says, "It was an ID-10-T error." The guy didn't want to appear stupid, but he said, "What's that, in case it happens again? Maybe I can fix it." Richard grinned and said, "Haven't you ever heard of the ID-10-T error before? Write it down, and I think you'll figure it out." He wrote down ID-10-T and saw that the word means "idiot." He said, "I used to like that little kid."

Today I want to talk to you about love. The point is that sometimes it's not easy to love the other person. Sometimes it's not easy to love what the other person may say or do or how they show up—labels they place on us, like "idiot."

My title today is "Our Spiritual Advance." I came across a wonderful quote. It's about becoming more of a loving being, because that's our true nature and purpose; it's what we're here for. I

came across a wonderful saying by Ernest Holmes, a great metaphysician. He said, “Our spiritual advance is the devotion to a deeper awareness, a higher perception, a greater realization of spiritual truth, and devotion to the reality of a Divine presence whose impulsion is love.” Impulsion is a big word and it means: a driving, moving, forward force. That’s what love is meant to be, as the Divine seeks to be given freedom in you. It’s a moving, driving, forward force. It’s expansive.

Jesus said all of that—in a different way. He simply said that the most important thing for you to know is to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Paul came along behind Him and essentially said, “God is love and love is God. As you seek to love, you are seeking God. If you are being love, you are being God.” We spiritually advance when we begin to devote ourselves to those things which Jesus said, which deepen our oneness with the Divine. It’s a greater realization of the truths Jesus was speaking about—that God is love, that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and that we are to seek love with all of our heart, mind, and soul.

Our purpose in coming together as a group like this—or those who may be watching on TV—is to discover the truth. On some level you’re trying to discover the truth. The reason is that truth frees us into being more of that which we’re already held to be in the mind of God. It clears the way. It also frees us of error thinking and limited thinking. It enables us to see ourselves, life, and others in a new way. If we begin to see and hold the truth in a new way—with new realizations—things begin to fall away, and we feel much richer and happier. That’s what the truth is about.

We’ve always taught that there is no new truth to discover. The fullness of truth is already there. God is not changing the truth from day to day. It is already in place, and we discover that truth. We integrate it and live from it. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” He was saying that the way, truth, and life are actually love. The “I am” is love. He modeled that. Everything He was about was love, demonstrated through all humanity and creation and life. That’s what we are to be about. The way is to discover the truth that there is a unity of all life.

I don’t know how many of you saw the Super Bowl commercials, but there was one that I really liked. It was about a beaver that has a branch in its mouth and is crossing the road. There’s a driver coming up to a bridge. He sees the beaver, swerves to avoid him, and almost loses control. He gains control just as he’s coming to the bridge. He looks in the mirror and sees the careless beaver making a gesture like, “Wow that was close.” The driver says, “That was interesting. I’ve never seen a beaver do that.” It fast forwards a couple of days later, and the same guy is driving down the same highway in a rainstorm. He’s coming up to the same bridge, going full speed, when all of a sudden a tree falls down right in the middle of the road. He slams on his breaks and screeches up to the edge of the tree. He looks beyond and is able to see that the bridge is out and that if he had continued on, he would have been swept away and drowned. He looks around and sees the beaver who had just chewed down the tree. The beaver goes (pounds chest.)

I’ve been to India a number of times, and they teach that there is a oneness with all life. True bliss is being able to look at anything and everything and see it pulsating with the very life, love,

and vibration of the Divine. We are all connected. That story took me right there. It was a beautiful thing.

The Unity teaching is a pathway to truth. It's not the only pathway to truth. No one has a corner on truth. Truth is constantly being revealed through many spiritual paths and practices—not just one path. Many paths lead to God. You can't say it's just the Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics—these are all different paths. Everyone has a bit of the truth that they are seeking, and many of them are similar. Love is something that is there in them all. Love is the nature of spirit and is something that we're all called to be. Each person has to decide for themselves the path that leads them to a true experience of this Divine presence. Where is it that you will actually experience the presence of God more fully, leading you to the truth and teachings that open you up to that?

Nothing is more important than knowing that we are love and that that is our purpose for being. There are two important truths that we are to learn and be aware of. One is that all is love—everything is love. The other is that all is law. Because there's a law, sometimes things may not always look loving. The way that Dr. Holmes states it is, “Behind all form is law—the law of cause and effect.” As you're putting something in motion, it's going to get back. You are steered by your energies so that you learn. All is love, and you're being loved at all times, but at the same time, there is a law at work that is trying to help guide you to the highest choices and vibrations that are inherent in your true nature as a child of God.

Holmes says, “Behind all form is law—law of cause and effect. Behind all law is thought. Behind all thought is consciousness. Behind all consciousness is intelligence. That intelligence is loving.” It is a loving intelligence that fills all space. So all is love, yet all is law. What that means is that happiness and misery come from the same power and energy. One is connection to that source of energy—in alignment and harmony with it. One is disconnected from it and separate. You have to experience what it's like to live from what is not the truth, and that's the law—in the midst of being loved all along the way of your journey.

For many, love seems scary and sometimes painful. Yet for others, it is something that is very powerful and beautiful. It is not attachment to someone or something outside of yourself to make you complete. It's not attachment to another or others, having to be a certain way in order for you to be okay. That's conditional love, and the goal is unconditional love. Love will make you vulnerable. To love may mean that your heart will be tested and maybe even broken.

C.S. Lewis says, “If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give your heart to no one. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell.” What he means is that if you live your life only protecting yourself from entering into love, not wanting to be hurt or vulnerable, that's hell. He speaks of hell and heaven as states of mind, as we teach.

Relationships can be difficult, but it's where we learn. Love has been talked about, written about, and sung about more than any other subject. Love is out there everywhere, yet Charlie Brown even has a quote that he's known for. He said, “I love all humanity—it's people I can't stand.”

We know the Beatles' song *All You Need is Love*. We know the words to the country song *Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places*.

We've heard that time heals. Don't believe it. If you've been hurt by love, don't think that time is going to heal. If that were true, then the equation would be that in life, the deeper the loss—the greater the hurt—the longer it will take for you to get over and beyond it and get on with your life. Time is not what heals; truth is what heals. Consciousness is what heals. Truth frees. The sooner that a person begins to embrace truth around the loss or the pain that they have experienced, the sooner they begin to integrate the truth that is there, and the sooner they're going to unhook from whatever yesterday was and move on into wonderful new energies.

We grow incrementally, and we heal incrementally. It's an evolving awareness of where we're headed. Never is the healing agency time. That's an illusion—we tell ourselves that. The true method in which there is healing and transformation is by being filled with life-giving ideas, with healthy thoughts and feelings—embracing ourselves with ideas that feed us. Those are of the nature of truth, which is how you know it's truth. It doesn't pull away. You don't stay with that which is continually draining you. You have to embrace the truth that takes you forward.

Many people fall into the pattern of wishing and hoping for change in their lives. Everyone has to realize that they are the vehicle by which change happens. It's not something that can be wished and hoped for. It's something that you are moving and activating within you. Our spiritual advance comes when we are devoted to deeper awareness, a higher perception, and a greater realization of spiritual truth and the reality of the Divine presence that is loving us onward into the truth of our being.

The order of love—the one-two-three step of love—is that we first start with the love of God, meaning you create a conscious connection and bond with God. You do what you need to do in your spiritual work to create that bond. As a result, you will begin to discover your true self, because God is found within you. When you go deep within God, you find yourself and the nature of love. From that connection with the love of God, one begins to realize total acceptance as they are. Nothing else matters. You move into a realization that you are totally accepted and embraced by the love of God as you are.

Having found yourself as unconditional love, you are now able to love your neighbor in the same way as yourself. That's the dynamic that has to happen. This love of self is not the ego-self. It's not the separate self. It is the sacred self. It is finding that part in you that you know is created of the Divine and is of the image and likeness of the Divine. You're doing the best you can, but wherever you are, you're going to love yourself because God does. No longer are you going to get into self-condemnation and self-loathing. All you do when you're there is send out self-condemnation to the rest of the world and the people around you. When we can't accept ourselves, we're firing it out at everyone and everything around us. When you really love and accept yourself, you're going to be doing that for others as well. That's what Jesus was teaching. It starts there.

If you visualize yourself being a wealthy person, and you have total freedom in life—money is not a problem, you have a 100-room mansion, you have luxury cars for every day of the week, you have a body that's fit, beautiful, and healthy, you have an intellect that puts you at the genius level, you have the best of everything on the planet—but you're the only living person on the planet. How does that feel? Does that give any of that meaning? I don't wish to demean any of that, but it heightens the fact that relationships are what make life worth living. We all came here to be in relationships with significant others, partners, family, friends, work associates, the clerk at the store, the stranger on the street. The truth is we need each other in order to do what we came here to do. I need you; you need me. You may not always do everything that makes it easy for me to love, but God put you there just so I would be challenged—so that I could have the opportunity to choose love and learn that. God has one desire and that is to experience more of Himself-- Herself--Itself through us—Its creation. It wants to experience Itself. It wants to feel love loving Itself, loving Its creation. It's by means of our relationship that God deepens Its own experience. God created us with free will, and God wants nothing more than to experience His true nature of love happening through us.

There is that within each of us that knows that is true on some level, that that's what we have been called here to do. That's why we long for these connections and love, but often in all the wrong places. It's all together one family of love. It's loving oneself. It's loving others. It's loving God. But first, it starts with learning to authentically love oneself.

A great teacher, Swami Muktananda, said, "If you want to experience love, you have to start by loving yourself. First you have to love your body, then those who are related to your body, then the master of the body—the inner-self. The truth is that God has no physical body. The only body He has is the body of love. If the love you experience in your daily life—for friends, relatives, pets, possessions—if that could be turned toward the inner-self, that would be enough to bring you to liberation."

A key truth to remember is God is love, and God is the highest form of vibration of love. It's the purest form of love. God created us, and so we are creations of love. Love is what we are, so let us enter into every relationship with the realization that it is God loving Itself. Jesus said, "Does it not say in your Scriptures, 'Ye are Gods?' Does it not say you are all expressions of God—creations of God?" And therefore, I loving you and you loving me is God loving God. That is the truth at its deepest level. When you get that, it's a very powerful thing.

The question to ask ourselves is, "Can I love myself fully and authentically?" The way to discover our lovability is an exercise. When you go home today, get by yourself in front of a mirror, and look into your own eyes. Ask yourself if you can see a sacred being looking back at you. If you can't, keep looking. Keep doing that exercise until you do see a sacred being looking back at you. As you stand there and look, think of the idea that you are peeling away every layer of self-criticism and judgment, until finally you see only the face of love looking back. No more judgment, no more criticism, no more condemnation. Who would you be if you really saw yourself as that sacred being? How would you treat yourself? How would you treat others, knowing they are sacred beings too, having found the sacred, authentic being in you?

We cannot afford to judge ourselves and others. We spiritually advance when we are devoted to awareness and perception and the realization of spiritual truth. We all have the power to respond, too.

Bayard Rustin was an African American who died in 1987. He was riding in an elevator in Spokane, Washington, years ago. A man ordered Rustin to lace up his shoes, and so he did. The man handed Rustin a tip. Rustin refused it, saying, "Oh, I didn't do that for money. I assumed you really needed help." The man was embarrassed that the guy was helping from that loving place. He apologized to him. They talked a bit. He invited Rustin to his room. They talked for hours about how to heal prejudice in the consciousness of the world. He refused to personalize the insult. He went further.

When we change old patterns of thinking that cause hurt feelings, we actually change the world. Every day, with every relationship you step into, you have the possibility of changing the world. The world is still healing those prejudices regarding race, but there is another strong prejudice that needs to be healed, that around gays and lesbians. I really want to see humanity get to the place where everyone is seen as a child of God. Everyone is loved and accepted. Everyone is seen as a sacred being. There is a willingness to learn to fully love. Any kind of judgments, criticisms, or labels come back at us, it's the law. It keeps us shut down from total unconditional love. The next step is to love all. There are things we don't understand, and we should pray for understanding. We have never been in another's shoes. We're in our own shoes, and we need to come from love.

There's a Buddhist monk who was speaking at a church and he said, "Envision every criticism as an arrow that lands at your feet. That's a moment of choice. You have the opportunity to either pick up the arrow and stab your heart, or leave it lie at your feet." That idea is that we all have the option and power to let the arrow lie when anything comes at us and look beyond what is being said or done around us and simply come from the sacredness of the self that God has placed within us.

Go home today, look in the mirror, and see who you really are—who God has created you to be—and it will emerge. God sees you to be the true nature He created. Look in the mirror, and you'll see a face of love—God.

God bless you.