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**Presentation Transcript**  
**True Spirituality 12 – Faith**  
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(This presentation is the twelfth in the series on *True Spirituality*. The subject is *Faith*. It was given at the Family Winter Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky, in 2006.)

I want to talk to you today about faith. And I imagine, with this group here, that we've all heard *lots* of sermons about faith. But is there anything *new* that we can learn about it?

When it comes to faith we have traditionally applied it to a number of areas – faith that God exists, for example, or that the Bible is God's infallible Word, faith that God will bless us when we tithe, faith to be healed. But are there any areas where we ought to apply faith that we don't think that much about? I'm going to leave that for you to decide, but I have a couple areas that I'd like to talk about today.

We have a large number of young people here. It's a Family Weekend. So, I'd like to talk to those who are younger today, for at least part of the sermon, about an area of faith that pertains to you – one that you might not have considered before.

I was talking to a young adult some time ago. I think he was probably in his late twenties, maybe. I don't think he was thirty years old. And he said, "I don't know if I can measure up." He'd grown up in the Church of God. He was suffering what could be called *spiritual arrest*. He was stuck. Here he was, approaching thirty years old, and he was still binge drinking like he was an eighteen-year-old college freshman. He hung out with other stuck young people rather than the ones who had moved past that. He only prayed when he was in trouble. Sometimes he worked on the Sabbath. He told me he skipped the Feast once to work. He'd had sex with a number of church girls, who I think were probably as equally stuck in their spiritual development. He was turned off by the hypocrisy among some of the older people that he had seen in the church as he grew up. But he found that he wasn't able to live up to the standard either. So he had serious doubts that he could *ever* measure up. He couldn't find a *want to* to do all the things that he'd been taught that he ought to do as a good Church of God member. You know, we're all supposed to sit in straight rows and wear our ties when we come to church. And we're supposed to come

every week. There's all these things that we do. He had this deep fear that he would never find that *want to*. It wasn't there.

And yet, at the same time, he was *convicted* that the way his parents had lived their Christianity, it was the best way. So, he had a dilemma. And that dilemma filled him with ambivalence and anxiety. And I think, as I listened to him talk, it seemed to me, more than anything else, he was *discouraged* to the bone. And that discouragement, I think, is what caused him to be so stuck.

Now, my friend actually, I think, is a strange contradiction. He understands one thing much more clearly than many people that are a lot older than he is. He *accurately* understands that he can *never* live up to the standard. I think his fears are accurate. I think they're right on target. But I think that he also *misunderstands* something.

Let's go to Hebrews 2, and verse 9.

**Heb. 2:9** – *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family, so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*

Did you notice it? See, my friend, along with all the rest of us, does have to be holy. But he isn't the one who is going to accomplish that in his own life. Jesus Christ is going to do that. That's what it just said. It says, in verse 11:

**V-11** - *Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.* So Jesus Christ is going to do that in our lives. Once we make that commitment that leads to baptism, then we are justified by Christ's sacrifice. And after that begins a process of sanctification. You know, if you read that last verse – 11 – in the New King James, it says, *For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one.* So the biblical teaching is: once we repent and are baptized, and then forgiven – justified – then begins the lifelong process of justification.

Let's go to Hebrews 7. Put a marker in that, because we're going to read the rest of this, but we're going to look somewhere else for a minute. Mark Hebrews 2 and let's go to Hebrews 7, verse 24.

**Heb. 7:24** – *But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood – talking about Christ. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.* So Paul shows us here that Jesus Christ is very good at sanctifying people. He *knows* how to save people to the uttermost.

So I think that my friend has it backwards a little bit. He rightly thinks that he needs to repent. He knows that he needs to commit to Jesus Christ. He knows that Christ is going to forgive his past sins. And he also thinks that he has to live by the Law. And that's where he says, "I can't measure up. I just can't do this. I can't find the *want to* to obey God." See, what he's doing is, he thinks that his justification flows out from his own efforts to follow the standard of the Law. But that isn't really how it works. The Bible tells us that following God's Law is loving God. And John told us that we love God because He *first* loved us! We want to follow God because we love God. And we love God because we know that He loves us. That's how it works.

So I think my friend's problem really is that he doesn't realize how loved he is! I think he feels real guilty. I think he feels real discouraged. And I don't think that he realizes what's been done for him, and what his status is. It said that we are *being sanctified*. That would include him. He's baptized. That would include him. He's *being* sanctified. To him it feels like really stuck – can't seem to make any progress at all.

How do you get unstuck? If you're stuck, how do you get unstuck? Well, here's what I'd like to suggest to you. I'd like those who feel stuck to start noticing *how* God is taking care of you. Become aware of how He is causing things to happen in your life. Keep a journal, if you need to, so that you can remember.

I was talking to my daughter on the phone the other night, and where she lives they've had some really high wind lately. One of her friends in the church who's about...I think she might be twenty-five or thirty years old. She's single. She is a really dedicated person to God, but she feels lonely a lot and needs a lot of encouragement, because she's just a very relational person and doesn't have anybody. She went to visit some people while this high wind was going on. She was standing at their front door, looking at the door, waiting for them to answer the doorbell, and she realized that the street was lined with trees. The wind was blowing really hard and she thought, "I should pray that God will protect my car while I'm here." And she said, "God, please protect my car from this wind." And she turned around to look and saw the tree that was in front of her car fall on the one next to hers. So that's good and that's bad. But it's more good than it is bad. Right?

Have you ever had things like that happen in your life? I think they happen so much we forget to keep track and sometimes we lose sight of what's going on with us.

So, what would be the point of that? Well, the point of that is to understand that God is already in relationship with all of us and that He's taking care of us. He does that because He *loves* us. And if we love Him because He loves us, that's the solution to *stuck*. That's the solution to stuck.

You know, we saw this amazing skit this afternoon, and we learned that Israel was in the wilderness to learn lessons. They were stuck. They were way stuck, weren't they? And yet, while they were stuck, God was working with them. Stuck doesn't mean God isn't with you. It just means you're stuck. Sometimes stuck is good. Some people need stuck.

The point is that God has a plan for everybody. And some of us...you know, we *have* to go through the wilderness to learn some lessons before we can get to the promised land.

So, as we sit here today, we can realize that Jesus Christ *is* at work sanctifying us. He *is* the captain of our salvation. He's the architect of it. Believe it! Have faith that Jesus Christ is sanctifying *you*.

Okay, that's the first area I wanted to talk to you about. The second one is – since we have a lot of parents here.... When you have a Family Weekend, you have young people and you have parents. So, I want to talk to parents for awhile. As a parent, how can you apply faith in a *new* way to your relationship with your children – either young or adult?

I'm going to tell you a little story about something that I witnessed recently. I work in a mental health clinic and we have a contract with the city of Albuquerque Public Schools to do suicide assessments. So I walked into a room one day and there was a little nine-year-old who had crutches on his arms. And there was his mother and the intake specialist was there. This little boy – nine years old – had thrown himself up against the wall, and said, "I wish I were dead." So the counselor who witnessed this took the safe road and sent him for an assessment. So that's how I wound up working with him. This little boy has spina bifida. He had fifteen surgeries in the first couple years of his life. He needs crutches to walk. He can't feel his legs below his knees. He has to be catheterized every three hours to urinate. Otherwise he leaks urine all over and it can back up into his kidneys, causing kidney infections. His parents are divorced.

I have to tell you one other thing about him before I go on with the hard life he has. From the waist up this kid is one of the most amazing kids you'll ever see in your life. He has a beautiful complexion – clear skin – bright, pearly-white teeth, big brown eyes, and really shiny, glossy, black, wavy hair. He's just a beautiful child. He's very intelligent.

His father talks all kind of trash to him about his mother. Every time he goes to spend time with his father he comes home angry, but he's angry at his mother, even though his father won't bathe him or catheterize him as he needs to be. His mother tells me that she hasn't seen him cry since he was about three years old. And he won't let her hug him or kiss him. And he has *never* said, "I love you," to her that she can remember.

Now let's think about mom. What is it like to watch your infant child go through fifteen surgeries in two years? What's it like to not be able to hold him for the first month of their life? What's it like to have your ex-husband trash you constantly in the face of your own child? What's it like to never be told by your child, "I love you"? She feels like a defective parent. That's what she feels like. She tells me that it just seems so unfair that her ex-husband has turned her son against her and that she has to do all the disciplining – that all he does is have fun with him and then send him home uncared for. She's wondering if she's done something or omitted something to cause her son to be so hardened toward her. When I listen to her talk I can just *feel* the despair and the guilt and the anxiety that she feels.

So I began – I have a session with him and I have a session with her – and I began explaining to her that there is, in her mind and in her son’s mind, a blueprint – a blueprint. And that blueprint is called *family*. It’s built into every human being. In her son’s mind is a natural desire to *love* and to *be* loved by his mother and his father. And in *her* mind is a fierce, natural desire to love and protect her son and a desire to be loved by him, too. (Of course, I didn’t tell her that *God* did this, but *we* can talk about that, can’t we?) And I told her that her son was deeply angry with his father for abandoning him, for talking bad about *his* mother, for not taking care of him while they were together, and for not following through on any of the many promises he had made. And she said, “Well, if that’s true, why is he so mad at me?” And I said, “The reason he directs his anger toward you is because he knows he *can*. You’re the one who loves him. You’re the one who takes care of him. You’re the safe one. And he *knows* that.” Well, she was somewhat hard to convince. She just couldn’t believe it. And she just kept asking me why he was so resistant to her affection. And why wouldn’t he cry? I told her I thought there were a couple reasons. One was that he was a little *guy*, not a little girl. You know, it’s always easier for us to be mad than it is sad, right? I also told her that I thought there was a communication problem there – that there was a *kink* in their communication. (I like to use technical terms like that when I talk to people.)

So I said, “Tell me about a time when he’s been angry with you lately.” She said, “Yesterday. He told me I never listen to him.” And I said, “Well, there. He’s coming right out and telling you what the problem is.” And I said, “What did *you* say?” And she said, “I said, ‘I’m sorry and I’ll try to do better.’” And I said, “Okay. That’s really good that you said that, but there’s something I want you to say *first*. Every time he says anything to you that has any emotional content to it whatsoever, I always want you to first *atune* yourself to him and try to understand what are the feelings that are going on inside that little head and heart, and what he’s thinking about. And then I want you to let him know what you’ve picked up.” And I said, “In this case, you could say to him, ‘You’ve been trying to tell me something for a long time and it’s really just frustrating the living daylights out of you that I’m not hearing it. And you really want me to listen to you and understand you. And I’m sorry that I’ve been this way and I’ll try to do better.’” And she’s nodding.

We spent the rest of that session and the one next, taking things that he had said and practicing this atuning and reflecting. They call it *contingent communication*, because what you say depends completely on what they just said. And so we spent two sessions practicing that. Sometimes I would play her son and she would practice atuning and reflecting. And sometimes we’d swap roles and I’d do the atuning so that she could see how to do it. Well, in the third week she came into the office, and she said, “I’ve been doing what you said.” And I said, “Oh, good. That’s a good thing. How’s it going?” And she said, “Yesterday he cried, told me he loved me, and gave me a hug.” The reason I do the work is for the smile I saw on her face. She was radiant!

So what she was doing – by atuning herself to her son – was creating a relational *field* in which real communication can take place. And that opened the way for her son to feel all the impulses that God has built into his mind toward his mother. He can love her, and

rely on her, and show his frustration to her, and also show her the weakness that he feels. And she can comfort him, and love him and care for him.

Most of the times when there are problems in families just a few simple things done consistently can make a huge difference. And that's true because family is *deeply* imprinted into our minds and hearts. Family is *natural*. All the good stuff is already in there in *all* of us.

I was watching *60 Minutes* this last week and Leslie Stahl was doing a segment on an organization that helps foster kids find their families. They interviewed a boy and a girl – a brother and sister – teenagers – who had never known their parents and didn't know each other existed, I guess – if I remember correctly. They had been reunited with each other and also with an uncle that they didn't know about, who was also a foster child when he was younger. They talked about what it was like to not have parents. And as they did, you could see pain on their faces. It hurts because it's *wrong!* It's unnatural.

The human mind is designed for parents and for children. Children and parents are like fish and water. So what does this have to do with the exercise of faith for parents? Well, let's go back to the scripture we read earlier back in Hebrews – the one that you put your ribbon in. Hebrews 2:9.

**Heb. 2:9** - *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family, so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

Parents, we can have faith that Jesus Christ is sufficiently strong to bring our children to Him – to sanctify them and bring them to eternal life. We can have faith that we don't have to do it ourselves, nor can we. We can have faith in the power of relationship that God gives us in families and in that *blueprint* that He's built into us. And we can have faith to *hold* the relationship and to *love* them while they are doing self-destructive things. We can't forget the story of the father and the son, can we? That lost son who got angry with his parents, demanded his half of the family fortune, and then left in a huff to go and practically destroy himself. Where did he go when he got in trouble? Well, he went *home*, of course! That's what we do! And who was the one who saw him first as he came down the road? Well, his father did. Why? Because he was the one that was thinking about his son and praying him home – praying him through – always looking – you know, working day-to-day and doing the chores – eye on the horizon at the road – hoping. His son was always on his mind. That ruptured relationship was a rupture in his heart, because family is *in* us. He never gave up on his son. And neither should we.

So, parents, we can have faith that God has built into us a blueprint of family. And just as difficulties are normal in families, so are reconciliations, because that family blueprint is

built into our hearts. Do you know another way to say that? Let's go to Luke 17, verse 20.

**Lk. 17:20** – *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with careful observation. Nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."* You know that blueprint of family that we've been talking about? You know what else that is? That's the blueprint of the Kingdom of God! That's what it's all about. It's a *family*. And all who are given eternal life will forever be in the family of God. Can you believe it?

Young people, can you believe that God is always working with you? Not only to give you the help you need to follow Him, but also the *desire* to do so? If you do, then you have faith for salvation.

Parents, can you believe that no matter how difficult your family relationships have become that the natural thing is to reconcile them? And that nature itself tends to go that direction? Because God made us like that! Well, if you do, then you have faith in the power of the Kingdom of God within you and within your children.