

All you need is...

By [Kelvin Wright](#)

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Human beings bond in a number of ways. We have all manner of instinctual drives inherited from our evolutionary past; we have needs (for intimacy, pleasure, friendship, affirmation and a thousand more besides) which we depend on other people to fulfill. We have hidden parts of ourselves which we project on others so that we can, in relationship with those others, work out our inner conflicts by proxy. We have our inner cravings for power or esteem or security which we imagine that others can satisfy for us.

Of course we usually don't, unless we are powerfully self-aware, identify in ourselves these and all the other complicated dynamics by which we are bound to others. Instead we feel that great, overwhelming sense of dependence on and attachment to, which we label "Love." This cocktail of emotions and feelings and, occasionally, thoughts we have for and about the other is concocted according to a variety of recipes, depending on the individuals involved, and although our focus is compulsively on the beloved, actually, it is all about us.

The love which Jesus commands his disciples to have for one another; the love that is the very nature of God; the love which I have written of [elsewhere](#), is a very different thing, although it is not necessarily incompatible with the attachment I have just been speaking of. Scott Peck uses a definition of love which seems accurate to me:

The will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing ones own or another's spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth means, in this instance, the development of potential. It is becoming formed in the image of God. It is becoming whole. When I love someone I willingly extend myself in order that this might happen. Now of course it is easier for me to do that reaching out to the other and exerting myself for their ultimate good if I am kindly disposed towards them, and I will be very kindly disposed towards them, well, most of the time, if I am emotionally attached to them. It will be easier, but it's not

necessary. I can in fact work for the good of all manner of people, even those I don't much like and for whom I feel repugnance rather than attachment. (and repugnance usually has more to do with me than with them, but let's leave that one for another day.)

Working for someone's spiritual growth does not necessarily mean doing things they will particularly like. And of course we all have mixed motives; in most relationships the extending yourself for the other gets hopelessly muddled up with the stuff I talked about in the first couple of paragraphs. It's not easy to know whether I am extending myself for another's spiritual growth. Nor is it easy to tell if they are extending themselves for mine. We can tell by looking back over very lengthy relationships, and there is one point in all relationships where it is apparent, namely its end. All relationships end, one way or another, and at their ending a question can be asked: "What has been the effect of this relationship on the other?" Are they bigger, better, wholer people for having been in relationship with me? Have their life's possibilities opened and multiplied? Are they more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kindly, good, faithful, gentle and self controlled (Gal 5:22-23) for my knowing them? If this is true to any degree then it is likely that I have loved them.

But correspondingly, I can ask "Are they smaller, diminished people for having been in relationship with me?" Have their life's possibilities closed and shattered? Is there less of the fruit of the spirit and more of the fruit's corresponding shadows (Gal. 5:19) for my knowing them? If this is true to any degree then whatever it was that bound us together wasn't love.

And of course variations of these questions will accurately tell me whether or not the other has loved me. Careful analysis and fretting over their feelings and thoughts about me might illuminate the nature of their attachment to me, but the extent to which s/he has been instrumental in my wholeness and growth is the extent to which s/he has loved me.

I have been very aware lately of those I love and those who love me. And I know that whatever there is in me that is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable; if there is any trace of anything excellent or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8) it is because of these people who have extended themselves for my spiritual growth. Who have, in other words, given me the gift of their love; that gift which is as enriching to give as it is to receive.

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