

# DAYSRING DAYBOOK

Monthly Newsletter of Dayspring Presbyterian Church, 11445-40 Ave, Edmonton, AB, CAN, T6J 0R4

September 2018

## Nurturing Our Faith: Practical Actions for Holistic Spirituality

by The Rev. Dr. Heather J. Vais - originally published in *Glad Tidings*, May/June 2018 and re-published here with the permission of the author (who is co-pastor of Thornhill Presbyterian Church, Toronto) and of the editor of *Glad Tidings*.

God be in my head and in my understanding.  
God be in mine eyes and in my looking.  
God be in my mouth and in my speaking.  
God be in mine heart and in my thinking.  
God be at mine end and in my departing.

(Old English Prayer)

In a world that is increasingly fast paced, chaotic and stress-filled, many of us are longing for a deepening of our faith. Let's face it, the challenges of day to day life can chip away at our spiritual foundation. Sometimes we feel that God is very far away and we're not sure what we believe anymore. We long for renewal, reconnection, rebirth and revival.

One day a teacher of the law approached Jesus and asked him of all the commandments which one was the most important. Jesus responded: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Mark 12:30) Here Jesus, the great Physician, gives us the first prescription for nurturing our faith! Jesus' approach to loving and honouring God is holistic. Love God with your heart (emotional), your soul (spiritual), your mind (mental) your strength (physical); and love your neighbour (social), as (you love) yourself (personal). God wants every part of us. Faith permeates every aspect of our lives and so nurturing it should involve a holistic approach too. Here are some practical actions that you can use today to begin the process of holistic faith renewal.

### Recommended Books

Johnson, Ben Campbell and Paul H. Lang. *Time Away: A Guide for Personal Retreat*

Geoffrion, Timothy C. *One Step at a Time: A Pilgrim's Guide to Spirit-led Living*

Law, Eric H. F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Inner Voice of Love: A journey from anguish to freedom*

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*

Editors' Note: This is an unusual issue of the *DayBook*. It consists in its entirety, of the article - presented in segments. Enjoy!



### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence.

No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now.

- Henri Nouwen

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## Heart/Emotional

Are you a person who can wear your heart on your sleeve or do you keep your feelings private? So many of us these days don't want to get in touch with our emotions, so we keep ourselves occupied with other things instead of listening to what our hearts are saying. But God created us with emotion for a reason. Our emotions are like release valves for the heart and God wants to hear what we are feeling. King David is a great example for us. David was one who took the broad spectrum of his emotions directly into his relationship with God. He rejoiced, cried, danced, sang and even expressed anger before the Lord. David dared to bare his soul to God; and through the process of his venting to God he found that God was working in his life to bring him peace (See Psalm 13:1-6). Some of us only think to bring the good stuff to God. We turn off our negative emotions and thoughts and try only to focus on the good. But remember what David knew: Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. (Ps. 139:4)

Do you bring only "safe" emotions to God? Nurturing our faith means being willing to tread into the dark places; to face our fears, inadequacies, doubts and weaknesses. It means getting in touch with our heart and expressing all our feelings to God.

**Action:** Pray a Psalm as if you were praying those words from your own heart; or write a psalm reflecting your own feelings. Read Henri Nouwen's book *The Inner Voice of Love* and reflect on each of Nouwen's short journal entries. Examine your own feelings, thoughts and emotions through the lens he provides.

## Soul/Spiritual

How do we love God with all our soul, and how do we nurture our faith from a spiritual perspective? If we understand the soul to be the essence of who we are, the very core of our being, then we can understand Jesus' words to love God with our soul to be a deeply personal kind of love. There are many ways to nurture our faith through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines include prayer, fasting, worship, meditation, fellowship, hospitality, journaling, stewardship, silence, confession, self-reflection, and many others. The purpose of practicing spiritual disciplines is to strengthen a deeper

and richer inner spiritual life. Spiritual disciplines also help us to become more disciplined in our own lives. The apostle Paul told the Philippian church and tells us: *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Phil 4:8)

**Action:** Choose one spiritual discipline you would like to explore. Set aside time to make room for that discipline in your life. I discovered a great on-line resource that can be **very helpful** to you: <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/introduction-spiritual-disciplines/>

If you prefer a book try: *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* by Marjorie Thompson. In this book, Thompson provides insight and practical approaches to spiritual discipline and inner faith growth.

## Mind/Mental

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Romans 12:2).

If you are like me your mind is always running. Thoughts flit through our minds at an alarming rate each day and can even keep us up at night. Our racing thoughts can create inner turmoil, anxiety, and even depression. With busy minds we have little time to think of holy things. But we need time to slow our minds down to make room for God and replenish our faith. During a particularly dry period in my life someone taught me the importance of the practice of being present or mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability to be present to the moment at hand and not let other thoughts (anxieties, regrets, anticipation which can cause distress) dominate your mind. Being present is a form of meditation where we take time to still our minds, breathe, pray and listen for God.

**Action:** One method for nurturing our faith is through an ancient Christian prayer practice call "breath prayer." Breath prayer involves repeating a mantra to the rhythm of your breathing. You can begin with simply repeating God's name Yahweh. Breathe in to Yah and breathe out saying weh. Other mantras include: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"; "Be still and know that I am God" or you can always create your own prayer to suit your needs.

## FROM OUR MINISTER:

Nurturing gratitude

In our spiritual disciplines of self-care, as highlighted in this month's edition, there is one aspect that I am going to single out. It is the act of being grateful, truly and sincerely grateful in one's whole being.

When the weather becomes a little less than pleasant, actually foul, how about nurturing a sense of deep gratitude that, for example, "the moisture helps soften the soil that has become parched and dry?" There just are so many ways in which we can cultivate gratitude. It can start in our early morning prayers. It can spill over into a deep sense of thanks that reaches out into so many areas of our lives.

In her book *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, Diana Butler Bass (published 2018) points out "When gratitude becomes a habit of being, our capacity to see time—past, present, and future—actually changes. Not only does gratitude open hearts; it also gives us new perspectives on our own lives. It stretches through our experiences—past, present, and future—creating a fabric of appreciation and awareness that forms the story of our lives. When we are thankful for the blessings of what was and see the goodness of what is, what can be comes into view with greater hope and possibility" (62-63).

What I learn, slowly but surely—and I'm not naturally good at it, is that gratitude isn't something we are naturally born with. Gratefulness requires a will within us to cultivate it. Sometimes circumstances, such as illness and a subsequent recovery thrust us into being thankful. Other times we need to pull ourselves together in order to encourage one another towards gratitude.

As we approach our Canadian Thanks-

giving, let's allow the Lord our God to fill us with a kind of gratitude that may well be heartfelt and genuine.



*Heinrich*

## Strength/Physical

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*

I am not a person who sits still easily. I like to be active and on the go. Interestingly, I find some of my closest moments with God when I am exercising. As a cyclist I can go out for hours on my bike and do nothing but think, meditate, and pray. I can have the same experience when I am walking. It is uninterrupted time to focus. There are several reasons why physical activity can help nurture our faith. Physical activity releases endorphins in the brain which promote the feeling of well-being; it can help regulate our breathing to a rhythm which can bring calm; and exercise helps distract us from outside stimuli and focus our minds. The Bible tells us that our bodies are the temple of God. Physical activity improves our overall health so that we can serve God to the best of our abilities.

**Action:** Make a point of engaging in some sort of physical activity for 30 minutes a day or three 10-minute periods per day (walking, gardening, mowing the lawn, vacuuming, yoga). Use that time to give thanks to God for the abilities you have been given.

## Neighbour/Communal

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing... (Heb. 10:24-25a)

Healthy spirituality and faith development involves reaching beyond the self. God made us for community. The church is the centre of Christian community. In his book *One Step at a Time: A Pilgrim's Guide to Spirit-led Living*, Timothy Geoffrion writes: "...without Christian community we simply cannot experience the fullness of life God intends for us, and we will limit our spiritual growth and miss out on important aspects of Spirit-led living. We are inseparably linked to each other. None of us is so wise or enlightened that we cannot learn from others" (223-224).

**Action:** Think of a time when you were not a part of a community. How did it feel? Think of a time when you felt like you belonged. What are the differences? How can you welcome the stranger and make your community open to others? How does your faith grow in community? How can you be a part of making your church community welcome to the stranger? Make a conscious effort to extend hospitality a few times a month.

## Self/Personal

*We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

When Jesus said “love your neighbour as yourself” what he meant was love your neighbour as you love yourself. So many people today do not show self-love in the way they live; but this goes against God’s plan for us. The bible tells us “We love because (God) first loved us” (1 John 4:19). How does self-love nurture our faith? First, self-love allows us to see ourselves as God sees us. We come to accept that despite our weaknesses God sees us as His beloved creation. Secondly, loving ourselves unconditionally helps us to see others through a similar lens. We become less critical and more understanding. Thirdly, loving ourselves helps motivate us toward healthy growth and change.

**Action:** Morning Prayer:

Loving God,

Help me to see that I am your beloved;  
to know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
created in your image and likeness.

Remind me every day that I have been made for a purpose.

Your Spirit resides in me.

You have planted goodness in my heart.

Help me to accept your unconditional love

and love myself so I can be free to love others. Amen

### What is your response to this special issue?

The co-editors have invited several people to provide a written response. Those responses will be published in the next issue.



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